



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM



The Pacific Security Outlook Report 2022-2023

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Foreword by the PIF Secretary General

The Forum's vision is for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives.

To achieve this vision, we need regional security mechanisms that help us to work together to address traditional and non-traditional security issues in the Pacific region.

Such vision, and unity, is needed now more than ever before. Our environment is changing, and with it, so too is the security landscape for the peoples of the Blue Pacific Continent.

This Regional Security Outlook Report casts light on the wide array of regional security threats facing the Pacific in the coming two years. In addition to the strategy focus areas outlined by Leaders in the 2019 Boe Declaration Action Plan (Climate Security, Human Security and Humanitarian Assistance, Environment and Resource Security, Transnational Crime and Cyber-enabled Crime and Cybersecurity), we have experienced new and varied threats over the past few years.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused untold damage to our region, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has threatened the rules-based global order, and geopolitical posturing in our region is consuming a great deal of public attention.

As Leaders reaffirmed when they launched the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and as this report highlights, climate change remains the region's single greatest security threat.

We must not allow new issues to distract us from action to address the most pressing threats to the peace and security of Pacific peoples.

Moreover, our vision and our ambitions under the 2050 Strategy, particularly to ensure that we are a prosperous region, will be based on ensuring that we remain secure against both traditional and non-traditional security threats.

Let us work together to defend ourselves from our security threats and chart a course that takes us closer to our vision of a peaceful, harmonious, secure and prosperous Blue Pacific Continent.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henry Puna'.

Henry Puna

Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum



Executive Summary

This Regional Security Outlook Report draws on specialist analysis from across the region to provide stakeholders with an overview of a broad range of current regional security issues and trends.

By comparing the challenges and projections outlined in this report, regional decision makers can then consider which issues require most attention and prioritisation, both regionally and in their own national context.

Two Year Projections for Boe Declaration Action Plan Key Focus Areas

Climate change is highly likely to continue to be a challenging threat multiplier across all regional security priority areas. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirms that sea-level rise and increased extreme weather events will continue due to climate change.

Natural disasters are highly likely to be more frequent, concurrent and complex, as disparate disaster events compound, requiring strong national and regional disaster relief capabilities.

Previous gains in reducing **gender-based violence** have been tested though the COVID-19 pandemic, and negative trends in other areas of security such as cybercrime, illicit drug trade and use and the worsening effects of climate change have disproportionately affected women and girls across the region.

While tuna stocks are assessed as remaining within sustainable limits, **IUU fishing** continues to undermine the benefits of resource exploitation for PICs. Mining operations, though a valuable current and potential revenue source for many Members, have often been a catalyst of local unrest and conflict. With widespread economic decline across the region, governments are likely to look to mining to fund development, thus increasing exposure to associated risks.

Cybercrime has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as more Pacific islanders venture online for entertainment, education and business activities. While initiatives to support PICs to safely navigate cyberspace are increasingly available, a capability gap remains, posing dangers to unwary individuals and institutions. Cyberattacks have had significant social and economic consequences at all levels of the community. Successful attacks have disrupted critical services, impeded economic activity and resulted in financial losses.

Transnational organised crime groups have been able to adapt to operational challenges posed by widespread border closures, resulting in increased channels and platforms for illicit activity. With borders reopening across the region, experts expect a surge in transnational criminal activity.

New trends

Shifting global and regional geopolitics, the COVID-19 pandemic and the second and third order effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have added complexity to the regional security landscape in the past few years.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the Pacific's health system vulnerabilities, which are long standing, and difficult to overcome, and highlighted the importance of a continued efforts to strengthen border and health security.



Given the rise in global energy and food demand and prices, COVID-related supply chain disruptions, as well as natural disasters such as flooding in Fiji and the volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga, inflationary pressure is already taking a firm hold on some Pacific economies, threatening economic security.

The increased interest and engagement of new partners in security-related development initiatives in the region has prompted increased discussion on regionalism, and a related increased focus on regional security architecture., prompting Forum Leaders to call for a ‘flexible and responsive regional security mechanism’ in July 2022.

The spill over effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine includes supply chain disruptions and inflation across the Pacific, especially in fuel and food. This exacerbates pressures on cost of living for all Pacific peoples. These effects are felt acutely by all, especially the poor and marginalised, increasing inequality and the risk of social disorder.

Overall assessment

Since Leaders endorsed the Boe Declaration in 2018, the regional security landscape has become even more complex.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and increasing geopolitical competition have all added to the security challenges faced by Pacific peoples.

These new challenges exacerbate existing vulnerabilities that are inherent in the small, isolated and climate-exposed lands and economies of the Blue Pacific continent.

The security risks outlined as key focus areas of the Boe Declaration Action Plan remain (climate, human security and humanitarian, cybersecurity, environmental and resource security, transnational crime, regional enabling environment and coordination). Efforts to mitigate those risks require ongoing prioritisation and resourcing.

While geopolitical competition could draw much-needed attention and resources to the Pacific, it could also distract the region and its partners from efforts to address its existing security priorities – addressing climate security, supporting human security and disrupting criminal activity.



Overview

The Pacific regional security policy context

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent represents the ongoing commitment of the region to work together as one in order to develop long-term approaches to critical challenges such as climate change, sustainable development and security.

The Peace and Security thematic area of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent highlights the central role that peace and security play in underpinning stability and prosperity across the region.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent reiterates that the Pacific region recognises the expanded concept of security as outlined in the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, that includes human security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security, cyber security and transnational crime, and regional cooperation to build resilience to disasters and climate change.

The 2019 Boe Declaration Action Plan concentrates that expanded concept into focuses areas of Climate Security; Human Security; Environmental and Resources Security; Cyber Security; Transnational Crime; and Creating an Enabling Environment for implementation including an appropriate coordination mechanism.

The development of the 2022-23 Pacific Regional Security Roadmap, which will further articulate the link between the Boe Declaration Action Plan and the Implementation Plan of the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent, remains ongoing. In the interim, the Boe Declaration Action Plan continues to provide a strategic tool that details the Blue Pacific's regional security priorities, strategies to address these priorities and suggested national efforts which can be undertaken by Forum Members and supported by the region's partner in support of these regional priorities.

This Pacific Security Outlook Report 2022-2023 provides a snapshot of these security focus areas across the Blue Pacific Continent in the past three years, and shares an overview of other major security trends that have emerged across the region.

In conclusion, this report provides the context for further discussion on the regional security environment and to guide the regional response to Leaders' call for a flexible and responsive regional security mechanism, a priority from the 51st meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting in July 2022.

Regional security events

Since the development of the Boe Declaration Action Plan, the Pacific region has seen several significant security threats materialise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive disruption across the region, resulting in untold human suffering and economic turmoil. In addition to causing over 2500 deaths in Pacific Islands Countries by July 2022,¹ the pandemic eroded traditional revenue bases in tourism-dependent countries, increased dependencies on already-stretched sectors such as fisheries, led countries to take on greater debt and increased community reliance on remittances.

But it has not been all bad news. The pandemic has also forced Pacific peoples to innovate and has highlighted the value of traditional Pacific ways of working together in the face of challenges.

1. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update-on-covid-19---6-july-2022>



Many Pacific peoples have increased their usage of modern technologies to communicate socially and transact business, significantly advancing previous digital transformation efforts. Communities have banded together to care for the sick and protect their loved ones, including with self-imposed lockdowns, and the region has stood side-by-side to help each other through the creation and implementation of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C).

While riots threatened unity in Solomon Islands in November 2021, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, with the support of Forum members, enabled the return of peace to Honiara quickly and effectively. Forum members also joined together to observe the 2021 New Caledonia Referendum on Independence, and welcomed the peaceful processes undertaken, in line with the region's commitment to embrace good governance and the full observance of democratic principles and values. Similarly, despite a challenging post-election period in Samoa in 2021, Forum values as enshrined in the 2000 Biketawa Declaration such as upholding democratic processes and institutions, the peaceful transfer of power, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary were reaffirmed through the actions of political leaders and the Samoan community more broadly.

In January 2022, following the devastating Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai volcano eruption and tsunami, Forum members and international partners worked together to deliver assistance in a COVID-safe manner to reinforce national efforts and limit the fallout from the tragic, unexpected disaster. Shortly afterwards, in June 2022, the Kiribati Government declared a State of Disaster due to drought which effected the entire Kiribati population. The country faced water contamination, brackish water, and threats to water accessibility and availability, and partners from across the region provided drought relief support.

2022 has also seen renewed interest in the Pacific region from partners around the globe, with China and the United States in particular announcing their intentions to work with the Pacific Islands Forum and its Members to support development across the region. In February 2022, some Forum Members had expressed concerns on a leaked security agreement between the Solomon Islands and the People's Republic of China. This prompted the Secretariat to use the Good Offices of the Secretary General to bring the region together, in the Pacific way, to tok stori and for the Government of the Solomon Islands to provide more clarity around its reasons for signing the agreement.

Over the past three years, interest in Pacific maritime security and maritime domain awareness across the Blue Pacific Continent has increased. Many members, individually and sub-regionally, have received offers of assistance by external parties (at least 5 states and 11 commercial) to develop marine special planning systems to help combat IUU fishing, disrupt transnational crime or improve maritime trade. In considering these offers, Forum members are having to assess the possibility of external intrusion on nationally and regionally sensitive information, and balance geo-political connotations of accepting offers from any one party.

Reaffirmed commitment to work together

In launching the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, Pacific Leaders again recognised the value of regional cooperation and their shared commitment to work together, as an important platform for achieving the greatest benefits for Pacific people.

This Pacific Security Outlook Report 2022-2023 is designed to support the efforts of regional policymakers, security practitioners and community peacebuilders to harness that value in their respective endeavours to support a more peaceful, secure and prosperous Pacific region.



Central role of the Pacific Islands Forum in coordinating regional security

Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have long recognised that security and stability underpin sustainable development and economic growth in the Pacific. Under the 1992 Honiara Declaration, Forum Leaders noted that balanced economic and social development, a central goal of all the countries of the region, could not be achieved without the assurance of safety and security.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent further outlines the region's vision of a peaceful, safe and secure Blue Pacific region which respects national sovereignty, and where people can realise their full potential as individuals, communities and nations, and where the region delivers Pacific coordinated responses to security challenges and contributes to building global peace and security.



Security at the National Level

Threats playing out

Security at the national level across the region over the past two years has been highly influenced by COVID-19 related public order measures, humanitarian disasters including floods, cyclones and volcanic eruptions, and civil unrest related to political events. The following provides a snapshot of some of the many recent security events across the region, highlighting the greatly varied nature of security issues which the Blue Pacific Continent regularly confronts.

Fiji and Vanuatu were again significantly affected by climate-related natural disasters, with Tropical Cyclone Yasa making landfall in Fiji in December 2020, with 260kmh winds destroying schools, ruining hospitals and ripping apart roads. This followed just eight months after Tropical Cyclone Harold caused widespread destruction in Solomon Islands (including 27 deaths as a result of the sinking of MV Taimareho), Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga, the recovery efforts for which were severely hindered by the concurrent threat of COVID-19 incursion into the region.

In May 2021 in Samoa, a months-long period of post-polling instability culminated with more than one thousand protesters gathered in front of the Government building in Apia to protest against judicial rulings. While the protests drew a large police presence, Samoa's democratic institutions and rule of law were maintained and the situation remained largely peaceful.

Small but vocal opposition to lockdowns, vaccination and mask mandates aimed at curbing the incursion and spread of COVID-19, materialised across the region. In Australia, violent protests triggered policing responses in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney in 2021, with violent and destructive protests in Melbourne in September 2021 resulting in hundreds of arrests by State Police. Similarly in Wellington in February 2022, an anti-vaccine mandate protest involving an encampment outside parliament disrupted the capital for the three weeks, ending with dozens of arrests.

In one of the region's largest ever cyber-attacks, Papua New Guinea's Ministry of Finance government pay system was targeted by a ransomware cyberattack in October 2021. Criminals attacked the Department of Finance's Integrated Financial Management System, seeking payment in bitcoin for restoration of services. Similarly, in March 2022 the Republic of Marshall Islands' National Telecommunications Authority experienced a major distributed denial of service (DDoS) cyber-attack that disrupted internet services for about 10 days. RMI officials suggested the unattributed attack may have been linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and noted the Government's ICT firewall had not been breached.²

In Honiara in November 2021, an initially peaceful protest against the government's decision to recognise China over Taiwan, turned violent as disgruntled public motivated largely by economic inequality attempted to storm Parliament demanding the Prime Minister's resignation. Business houses across the capital were damaged and looted, Kukum Police Station and much of Chinatown was burned down, with three deaths resulted. While the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, reinforced by disciplined forces from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji regained control of the situation within days, over SBD600m in damage had already been sustained across the capital.

The January 2022 eruption of the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai Volcano- the world's largest volcanic eruption since 1883, caused widespread destruction across Tonga. Volcanic ashfall and the subsequent tsunami negatively affected around 85,000 Tongans, with over 600 structures damaged or destroyed, and a

2. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/464125/marshall-islands-telecom-service-hit-by-cyber-attack>



damage bill of around 18% of GDP.³ International broadband connectivity was severely affected after Tonga's sole submarine cable was severed, taking six weeks to repair.

The February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has affected Pacific Island countries mostly due to increased fuel and fertilizer (and therefore food) prices, putting pressure on families and communities budgets that were already stretched by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within two weeks of the invasion, retail prices of fuel and LPG increased by approximately six per cent in Fiji, Tonga announced significant price increases in petrol and diesel, and Vanuatu announced an increase in electricity tariffs and diesel prices. Record-high fertilizer prices in Australia have flowed into the Pacific, translating to higher production costs higher food prices and to lower yields.

In June 2022, Kiribati Government declared a State of Disaster due to drought which effected the entire Kiribati population. The country faced water contamination, brackish water, and threats to water accessibility and availability. In the early days of the drought 75% of water assessments covering 1,875 households in Betio showed presence of water contaminants.⁴

The July 2022 national election in Papua New Guinea was plagued by election-related violence, with reports through the campaign period of 28 election-related deaths, an attempted assassination of a candidate, the shooting of election officials and destruction of vehicles and property including schools. Such violence is not new in Papua New Guinea, but again highlights the challenges of arms-control and related policing initiatives across the country.

Security officials in Guam announced large seizures of counterfeit trademark goods imported from China in early 2022, in a reminder of substantial organised crime networks remaining active in the region. In July 2020, more than 500 kilograms of cocaine worth AUD160 million was seized by the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary after a twin-engine Cessna crash-landed en route to Queensland at a makeshift airfield on the outskirts of Port Moresby. But the Pacific is no longer just a transit point for illicit drugs either. In 2018, Fiji police made almost 1400 drug-related arrests, and annual methamphetamine cases had risen from two in 2009 to 113 by 2019.

Through these examples we see that from Wewak to Wellington, and Townsville to Tarawa, a broad range of issues continue to affect peace and security for Pacific peoples, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and stifling development efforts.

3. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/b69af83e486aa652d4232276ad698c7b-0070062022/original/GRADE-Report-Tonga-Volcanic-Eruption.pdf>

4. <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2002-000244-kir>



We recognise that national security impacts on regional security, and therefore commit to strengthening our respective national security approaches by:

1. developing our national security strategies; and,
2. strengthening national security capacity including through training.

In line with commitments under the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, several Pacific Island countries have recently developed, and are implementing, national security strategies aligned to Boe Declaration Action Plan priority focus areas.

Palau released its National Security Strategy in June 2022, following the theme ‘Oterkekkel a tekoi er a klekerngel ma sebecheklele a beluu ma rechad: Ensuring our Security and Safety’. The NSS outlines six pillars, including: Economic Security, Secure Our Exclusive Economic Zone, Cyber Security, Resilience To Natural And Technological Disasters, Transnational Crime and National Intelligence Activities.

Solomon Islands launched its national security strategy in October 2020, built around five pillars on sovereignty, government, economy, society and people, and environment. The NSS recognises an evolving range of traditional and non-traditional security issues threaten Solomon Islands’ sovereignty, peace and stability.

Vanuatu also released its national security strategy in 2020, containing ten pillars of national security including; national security forces, border security, justice and human rights, disasters and climate change resilience, cyber security, human security, political stability and good governance, foreign relations – external engagement, economy, and government machinery. Vanuatu built further on its NSS in 2021, with the launch of its National Cyber Security Strategy, to strengthen national security and address cyber-threats in Vanuatu.

Samoa, through its 2018 National Security Policy, outlines the strengths of the cohesion of its Christian values and traditional ways, while recognising vulnerabilities to climate change, cyber attacks, and transnational crime. It focusses on border security, natural disasters and climate change, cyber security and human security (with sub-focus areas of gender based violence and health security).

Australia and New Zealand have, over the past decade, variously developed overarching security policies and national security statements, and both use sub-strategies or white-papers on defence and foreign affairs to outline key focus areas for national security. Australia’s 2020 Defence Strategic Update notes that ‘Australia’s region, the Indo-Pacific, is in the midst of the most consequential strategic realignment since World War II, with strategic competition, primarily between the United States and China, the principal driver of strategic dynamics in the Indo-Pacific’. Further, it notes that ‘threats to human security, such as the Coronavirus pandemic and natural disasters, mean disaster response and resilience measures demand a higher priority in Defence planning.’

New Zealand’s National Security Intelligence Priorities released in December 2021 considers ‘a range of threats and risks to New Zealand including; foreign interference and espionage, climate change and environmental issues, malicious cyber activity, terrorism and violent extremism.’



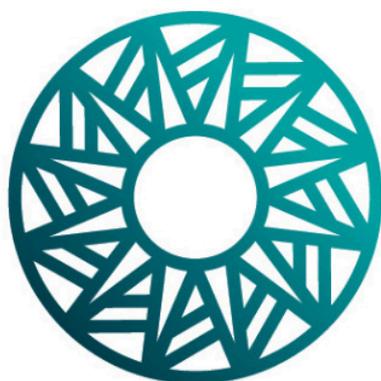
Fiji, Cook Islands and Tonga continue to develop national security strategies, and Papua New Guinea's 2013 National Security Policy, which focuses on law and order, graft and corruption, human rights abuses and gender based violence, national disasters and climate change, border control, drug abuse, pandemics and resource protection, continues to provide strategic guidance to Papua New Guinea's national security efforts.

Regional Security in Action: Based in Port Vila, and with a Charter approved by the FSRS, the Pacific Fusion Centre enhances information sharing, cooperation and analysis of security issues across the Blue Pacific Continent.

The Centre is Pacific-led, with a Director from a Forum Island Country responsible for the strategic vision, policy direction and functions of the Centre, and seconded analysts from PIF member states contributing to the Centre's assessments.

By enhancing regional domain awareness, the Centre is supporting decision making on important security issues at the national, sub-regional and regional level across the Blue Pacific Continent.

Forum members can access the full suite of the Centre's assessments and domain awareness tools through its online portal www.pacificfusioncentre.org.



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The Effects of Strategic Uncertainty on the Pacific

Broadly speaking, the international system is undergoing a process of transformation. Alongside increasing strategic competition between the United States and China, a more multi-polar system is emerging; middle powers are asserting their own interests and increasingly shaping the global environment.

Within this context, the Pacific region is increasingly contested with the US and its allies setting out their strategic intent through respective Indo-Pacific Strategies; while China continues to advance its own strategic agenda through initiatives such as the China-Pacific Poverty Reduction Cooperation Centre, and economic, development and security-based programming both bilaterally and sub-regionally in the Pacific.

At the same time, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has further complicated global political and economic stability. Since the conflict intensified with the deeper invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces on 24 February 2022, the global stock market lost nearly 1 trillion US dollars with commodity markets (including in particular oil and wheat) being hit the hardest.

Pacific economies, already hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, are now dealing with the added impacts of this conflict, particularly on the cost of living.⁵ Given the rise in global energy and food demand and prices, COVID-related supply chain disruptions, as well as natural disasters such as flooding in Fiji and the volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga, inflationary pressure is already taking a firm hold on some Pacific countries.⁶

The fluidity of the international geopolitical environment and instability in the global economy as described above is likely to challenge the 'friends to all' approach taken by a number of Forum member countries in coming years.

Increased partner engagement in the security sector in the region could challenge many countries' capacity to effectively coordinate support and prioritise efforts. In resource-constrained security sectors, aligning support from partners to priority focus areas and avoiding duplication will become increasingly important.

Two Year Projection: Shifts in global trade, rapid technological development and the fraying rules-based global order are likely to negatively impact peace and stability in the region.

Geopolitical tension is likely to increase, and major powers are likely to continue to compete for influence in the region to protect and promote their own interests.

In an already resource-constrained environment, coordination of support from competing partners is likely to be difficult. Non-aligned, duplicative support offers might ultimately overwhelm the small security sector in the region, and subsequently undermine some peace and security efforts.

5. <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14894.doc.htm>

6. *ibid*



Climate Security

Pacific leaders recognised in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security that climate change is the “single greatest threat” to the security of the people of the Pacific.

Despite some progress at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (commonly known as COP26), there is still a huge gap in the level of ambition required to safeguard the future of the Blue Pacific Continent. The recent reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change⁷ and the World Meteorological Organisation⁸ confirm that we are in ‘climate code red’ and the window to act to keep 1.5 degrees within reach is closing. Indeed, even with containing temperature increases to 1.5 degrees, we face unavoidable multiple climate hazards with some severe impacts likely to be irreversible. In May 2022, the World Meteorological Organisation released the ‘The State of the Global Climate 2021 Report’ which further confirms that four key climate change indicators (greenhouse gas (GHG) concentration, sea level rise, ocean heat & ocean acidification) broke new records in 2021.⁹

The Pacific region is uniquely vulnerable to worsening climate risks, which threaten to cause irreversible economic, social, cultural, and environmental damage. Some Pacific Island countries experience up to four times greater sea-level rise than the global average.¹⁰ For low-lying atoll nations, such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, these risks are existential.

Some of the most pressing climate change impacts in the Pacific is expected to include increased annual surface temperatures; sea level rise; saltwater intrusion; coastal erosion; and increased intensity of extreme weather events.

Collectively, these impacts are expected to increase water, land and food insecurity and undermine livelihoods and economic growth by hitting key sectors, such as tourism, aquaculture, and agriculture, as well as straining infrastructure.

Mobility pressures (both internal and external) are expected to grow, risking a shift in mobility from a force of resilience to one which exacerbates risks in certain localities.

Rising sea levels are threatening to change maritime boundaries and the scope of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), with potential knock-on effects on revenue from oceanic fisheries, territorial integrity and potentially statehood.

These effects seriously impact the security of all Pacific peoples and are putting increasing pressure on social, traditional and government institutions at the community, national, and regional level.

Two Year Projection: We assess that global warming, reaching 1.5°C in the near-term, would cause unavoidable increases in multiple climate hazards and present multiple risks to ecosystems and humans. While near-term actions that limit global warming to close to 1.5°C would substantially reduce projected losses and damages related to climate change in human systems and ecosystems, compared to higher warming levels, such actions cannot eliminate them all risks.

These now unavoidable risks will highly likely negatively impact the security of Pacific peoples.

7. <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>

8. https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=11178#:~:text=The global mean temperature in,seven warmest years on record.

9. *ibid*

10. 1 PACCSAP fact sheet sea level rise ENGLISH 06-13 (pacificclimatechangescience.org)



Despite concerted national and regional climate change adaptation efforts, insufficient resourcing will mean slow-onset climate change impacts are likely to test social cohesion, economic and political stability and human security in the region.

Regional Security in Action:

Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (FRDP): 2017 - 2030

The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2016 endorsed the FRDP- a global first where the Pacific seeks to reduce their exposure to climate and disaster risk, support low carbon development and improve disaster response and reconstruction.

The FRDP provides high level voluntary strategic guidance to different stakeholder groups on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters in ways that contribute to and are embedded in sustainable development.

The Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) is the umbrella implementation mechanism for the FRDP and was established in 2017.

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Sea-level rise, which is a growing issue for the international community, is particularly concerning for Forum members. The ocean is at the heart of Pacific geography and is inextricably linked to our identity.

In August 2021, Forum Leaders issued the **Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise**. The Leaders' Declaration sets out our region's collective position on how the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea's rules on maritime zones should apply in the situation of climate change-related sea-level rise. It makes clear our intention to maintain our zones, without reduction.

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The Pacific Islands Forum, in partnership with ILO, ESCAP, IOM, PDD UNOHCHR is developing a **Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility**, that aims to guide governments in addressing legal, policy and practical issues that arise in respect to the four main types of climate mobility: displacement, migration, evacuations and planned relocation.

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The **Pacific Climate Change Finance Assessment Framework (PCCFAF)** was developed in response to the need to approach climate change financing in an informed way, commensurate with the specific circumstances and challenges of Forum Island Countries. The Framework is recognized in the Standing Committee on Finance's report (UNFCCC process) as a 'good practice' tool which demonstrates that in order to achieve an economy-wide transformation, climate actions need to be integrated into development policy and budget planning processes. 10 PICs have been assessed under this Framework thus far.



Human Security

The United Nations defines human security as an approach that assists Member States to identify and address widespread and crosscutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people. The concept of human security emerged from a recognition that the security of the nation–state does not necessarily ensure the security of individuals or groups within that state.

The security narrative at the Pacific regional level has remained relatively consistent since the 1970s in recognizing non– traditional security threats such as human security.¹¹ Human security in the Pacific has been articulated at regional level through the Pacific Human Security Framework 2012–2015). The Pacific has well defined architecture both at regional and national level in relation to addressing the broader requirements of achieving human security through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals. All Forum Members have developed national sustainable development plans aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Forum Members have agreed to the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development which includes 132 agreed indicators of development to assist the region in tracking and reporting on SDGs.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster response

The Pacific is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world, and Pacific Islands countries, separated by vast expanses of ocean, experience frequent and intense disasters with disproportionately high economic, social and environmental consequences.

The 2021 World Risk Report¹² highlights the strong relationship of disaster risk, geographic location, and social aspects such as poverty, inequality, and their consequences. It ranks Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tonga as the three most disaster risk-affected countries in the world. Papua New Guinea (9th), Fiji (14th) and Kiribati (19th) all rank within the top 20.

In 2015, Tropical Cyclone Pam cause an estimated VT 48.6 billion (US\$449.4 million) of damage, equivalent to 64.1% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in Vanuatu¹³. For comparison, 64.1% of US GDP in 2015 was USD11.7 trillion.¹⁴ The combined value of destroyed assets and disruptions in the production of goods and services in Fiji due to the 2014 TC Winston was equivalent to approximately 20% of GDP¹⁵, and the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption, tsunami and ashfall caused an estimated US\$90.4 million of damage which is an equivalent of approximately 18.5% of Tonga's GDP in 2022.¹⁶

In 2021, the region was faced with several disasters, including Tropical Cyclones Yasa and Ana, Typhoon Surigae, King Tides in the Federated States of Micronesia, a minor volcanic eruption in Vanuatu. In 2022,

11. <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/DB82-final-manuscript-23-02-21.pdf>

12. https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1481/files/appeal/documents/2021-world-risk-report_0.pdf

13. <https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/pda-2015-vanuatu.pdf>

14. https://datacommons.org/place/country/USA?utm_medium=explore&mprop=amount&popt=EconomicActivity&cpv=activitySource%2CGrossDomesticProduction&hl=en

15. [https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/Post%20Disaster%20Needs%20Assessments%20CYCLONE%20WINSTON%20Fiji%202016%20\(Online%20Version\).pdf](https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/Post%20Disaster%20Needs%20Assessments%20CYCLONE%20WINSTON%20Fiji%202016%20(Online%20Version).pdf)

16. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/b69af83e486aa652d4232276ad698c7b-0070062022/original/GRADE-Report-Tonga-Volcanic-Eruption.pdf>



Kiribati Government declared a State of Disaster due to drought which effected the entire Kiribati population.¹⁷

Throughout the past two years, COVID-19 pandemic-related travel restrictions have made humanitarian partner access to many Member countries nearly impossible, placing greater emphasis and responsibility on national authorities¹⁸ and locally-based partners to manage effective responses.¹⁹

Two Year Projection: More frequent and more severe extreme weather events will highly likely pose direct security risks to Pacific individuals and communities, and resultant economic shocks will test state capacity to respond, recover, or prosper. While increased preparedness and greater coordination of response efforts will reduce the impacts for some, vulnerability of peoples in rural and remote parts of the region is likely to increase.

Violence against Women and Children

As outlined in the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (GLGED)²⁰, gender inequality is imposing a high personal, social and economic cost on Pacific people and nations. This is not new in the region. Indeed, since the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security, in 2000, there has been increasing recognition that sexual and gender-based violence is a security threat in the Pacific.

Despite previous progress being made across the region on gender equality and addressing sexual and gender-based violence, recent reports indicate that all forms of violence against women, girls and children are now becoming more prevalent. Additional security threats such as use of illicit drugs, cyber-related violence and harassment and higher incidences of violence in stressful situations as a result of climate change contribute to high rates of gender based violence.

Leaders' linkage: As reaffirmed by Forum Women Leaders at their inaugural meeting in June 2022, and reflected in the Pacific Leaders Communique at their meeting in July, addressing the role that gender plays in shaping approaches and decisions in support of human security (including the role and expectations of men and women) will be critical to the success of the implementation of the Boe Declaration Action Plan and the Pacific Human Security Framework.

The Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2012-2015 is situated in the context of the implementation of Pacific Platform of Action for Gender Equality, the Biketawa Declaration, the Boe Declaration on Regional Security and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and is coordinated by the Forum Officials Committee Subcommittee on Regional Security.¹

17. <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2002-000244-kir>

18. https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TC-Harold-Practice-Paper_final-electronic.pdf

19. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cook-islands/pacific-humanitarian-team-annual-report-2021>

20. <https://www.forumsec.org/2012/08/30/plged/>



Two Year Projection: Limited baseline data across the region makes trend analysis of violence against women difficult to undertake with a high degree of confidence. Notwithstanding, rates of violence against women are high in the Pacific, and have been for a long time. With the risk multipliers outlined above, despite ongoing advocacy and increased resourcing of ending violence against women initiatives, it is likely that on balance violence against women and children will remain a significant regional security challenge for some time to come.

Food Systems and Security

Across the Pacific, most people live in rural areas and depend on farming and fishing as sources of food, employment and income. As Pacific Island countries work to manage the impacts of COVID-19, farming and fishing have emerged as vital industries underpinning food and income security.

Traditional food systems are, however, under threat from the effects of climate change, poor governance and management, damage from invasive pests, loss of biodiversity, decreasing ecosystem health, adoption of unsustainable farming and fishing practices, and societal and lifestyle changes. These factors are increasingly distorting market forces in favour of cheap, energy-dense imported foods. These rapidly transitioning food systems in the Pacific have led to high rates of diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs), childhood obesity and micronutrient deficiencies. Indeed, NCDs remain the leading cause of death in many Pacific countries, accounting for 60-75 percent of premature morbidity.

Common problems in Pacific agriculture include a lack of political will and resourcing, insufficient research, low technical and financial capacity in many areas and the difficulty of attracting people to work in agriculture. Ongoing and increasing threats from plant and animal pests and diseases, biodiversity loss, loss of soil health as well as the need to address human resource capacity including for animal health and production services are further common priorities. Many Members face food security challenges due to remoteness, geography and poorer soils, such as in the atoll nations.

Invigorating Pacific food systems can generate significant local income and employment, boosting economic opportunities for rural communities and providing effective, sustainable pathways to assist with COVID-19 recovery.

Regional governance has been used to address multiple shared and inter-related challenges related to food systems, improve coordination across silos, and facilitate constructive engagement on policy issues between international, regional and national actors. However, poor food system outcomes continue, as do challenges to policy coordination and effectiveness at both the regional and national levels.

The Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services have called for greater investment in the agriculture and forestry sectors to increase food and nutrition security; build resilience to the impacts of climate change; enhance biosecurity measures; promote value-adding and downstream processing; improve livelihoods and contribute to economic growth in the Pacific islands region.²¹ Two Year Projection: It is likely that Pacific communities will remain vulnerable to risks that influence availability of and access to sufficient nutritious food, including in particular the increasing impacts of climate change such as drought and inundation. This will effect some groups, particularly rural and remote and marginalised groups, more than others, and contribute to a rise in inequality within and across Member countries. As inequality rises, so too will the likelihood of tension and conflict.

21. https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitalibrary-docs/files/Of/0ffd152d4bdc08f62360cbb85344c3ea.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=Cce3a1C8VB5UjQxdT2IE6P4R7EtIEEaKwwzChZa28o%3D&se=2023-01-17T03%3A41%3A42Z&sp=r&rsc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsct=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22PHO_AFS_Recommendations.pdf%22

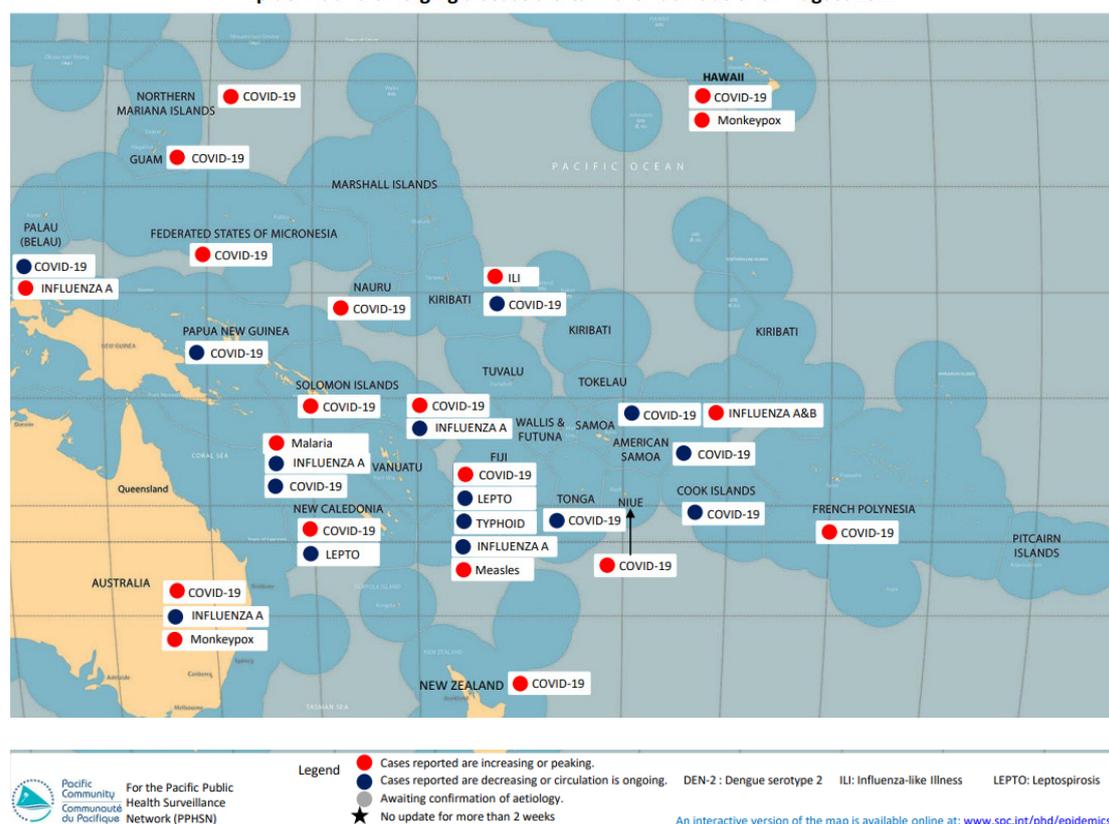


Health security

All Pacific Island countries are vulnerable to emerging infectious diseases, including pandemics, along with NCDs, as outlined above. These hazards threaten national and regional health security and can cause lasting social, political, and economic vulnerability.

Over two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as of 31 July 2022, almost all Pacific Island countries and territories except for Tokelau had reported either imported cases or community transmission. As recently as August 2022, Fiji, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, FSM, Niue, Guam, CNMI, Solomon Islands and Wallis and Futuna were experiencing rises in cases as indicated by a red alert on the map below. Following a long period of struggle to obtain vaccines from constrained global supply markets, all countries have recorded high rates of COVID-19 vaccination for the first and second doses whilst uptake of booster doses is variable. Roll-out of vaccination of 5–11-year-olds has started in several countries. The current wave of infections has been fuelled by the highly transmissible Omicron subvariants, lifting of travel restrictions and loosening of COVID-safe public health measures.

Epidemic and emerging disease alerts in the Pacific as of 02 August 2022



Source: SPC Regional Epidemic Intelligence System

The COVID-19 pandemic has reiterated the interdependence of health security and health systems, and the need for resilient health systems to prevent large-scale impacts of infectious disease outbreaks and other acute public health events.²²

22. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/strengthening-health-security-in-the-pacific-islands>



Additionally it has underscored the fact that health security is at the heart of national or regional security because when health is affected every else is affected, and that by working together, and with close partners, the region was able to enhance its purchasing power for vaccines at a time of great need and competition.

As a result of growing human population and growing interaction with wildlife, zoonotic diseases are projected to increase. The likelihood of another pandemic in the medium to long term is high.

Partnerships between traditional health and security sectors are not uncommon across a whole range of important areas, from responding to road trauma and countering domestic violence through to disaster response and containing biological threats.

Two Year Projection: The WHO has indicated that the end of the COVID-19 pandemic is within reach. Having managed the pandemic for two and a half years the region is better placed than ever before to deal with infectious diseases and pandemics than ever before. Notwithstanding this progress, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the Pacific's health system vulnerabilities, which are long standing, and difficult to overcome. Given the persistent lack of resources for health system strengthening efforts, and the increasing likelihood of zoonotic diseases worldwide, it is likely that the region will remain highly vulnerable to pandemics over the coming years.



Regional Security in Action: The Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19

In April 2020, to collectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as one Blue Pacific family, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders invoked the emergency response mechanism under the *Biketawa Declaration* and established the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C), a Pacific-led emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific.

Since its inception, the PHP-C enabled the movement of medical and humanitarian supplies across the region, including distribution of COVID-19 testing supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE).

A total of 61 flights have been undertaken under the auspices of the PHP-C, moving 153 technical health and humanitarian personnel and delivering almost 310 tons of health and humanitarian supplies to 14 Member countries.

The PHP-C has created a political space for dialogue, to ensure Member countries' request for assistance are effectively responded to, and led the development of 5 common protocols. The PHP-C protocols were endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers to allow for special cooperation and support to Members affected by COVID-19 related border restrictions. The protocols relate; Deployment of Technical Personnel to and between Forum nations; Immigration; Repatriation of Forum Nationals; Customs and Biosecurity; Clearances for Aircraft and Ships Transporting Medical and Humanitarian Assistance, Technical Personnel, and Repatriating Nationals.

The PHP-C is overseen by Forum Foreign Ministers, supported by a Regional Taskforce of Forum Members, the Pacific Community (SPC), the Forum Secretariat and relevant CROP agencies, the World Health Organisation and other relevant UN agencies, and regional law enforcement and legal agencies.

Noting the ongoing difficulties of regional cross-border travel as a result of COVID-19, the PHP-C continues to work with Members to support the development of a Harmonised Regional Vaccination Certificate for Cross-Border Travel, including a 6th common protocol of the PHP-C.²³

Environmental and Resources Security

Fisheries

In the Pacific, ocean fisheries are essential to economies, cultures and communities. All four main Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) tuna stocks (south Pacific albacore, bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin) are deemed to be “biologically healthy”, in that they are not overfished nor is overfishing occurring.

Pre-COVID, the annual value of tuna fishery catch in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean was estimated at USD5.3 billion. For some countries this is their only commercial resource. The tuna fishing industry provided 24,145 jobs for Pacific Islanders in 2020²⁴. This includes fishing, processing, training, and officials

23. <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/04/08/pacific-islands-forum-foreign-ministers-agree-to-establish-a-pacific-humanitarian-pathway-on-covid-19/>

24. Draft Tuna Fishery Report Card 2022- final version scheduled for release circa November 2022



and observers who monitor the sustainability of the fish stocks. The Pacific region has significant marine biodiversity, with many species found only in the region, and a large number of migratory species. Fish make up around 70 percent of the protein in Pacific Island diets. People in the Pacific eat around four times as much fish per capita as the global average.

Fisheries and COVID-19 fast fact: Employment in the tuna harvest sector fell by over 10% due to the impact of COVID-19 mitigation measures on domestic longline operations and associated supply chains. With many employees facing reduced hours and/or periodic layoffs the actual impact on earnings by workers in this sector would likely be greater than indicated by the change in these employment numbers.

However, due to climate change and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, these resources, and their benefits for PICs, are under threat.²⁵ The annual volume of catch thought to be taken by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the tuna fisheries of the Western and Central Pacific has reduced over the past decade.²⁶ Notwithstanding this success, IUU tuna fishing has a substantial impact on Member economies, depriving Pacific nations of economic rent that is crucial for supporting essential services such as schools, hospitals and roads.

The total annual volume of tuna product harvested or transhipped in the Pacific involving IUU activity during 2017-19 is estimated to be 192,186 tonnes, worth USD333 million (ex-vessel value). This compares with a similar study conducted between 2010-15 where IUU was estimated at 306,440 tonnes, worth about USD616 million.

This result shows that through strong regional cooperation between FFA members on monitoring, control and surveillance, IUU fishing is being constrained. This trend differs from some other parts of the world, and reflects strategies in the Pacific like obliging 100% observer coverage on purse-seine fishing vessels, FFA's Regional Vessel Register and Vessel Monitoring System, and coordinated regional surveillance operations.

In the latest study (2017-19), misreporting of catch and harvest of tuna contributed an estimated 89% of the volume of IUU fishing.²⁷ Only 5% of the total IUU volume was estimated to be due to various forms of unlicensed fishing.

While the purse seine fishery is subject to strong monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) arrangements, including 100% observer coverage and a requirement to tranship catch in port, equivalent measures are not in place for the longline fishery. A higher proportion of longline fishing occurs on the high seas, where vessels can tranship catch, often with very limited monitoring in place. Further strategies for validating the volume and species of tuna taken in longline fisheries include; strengthening the effectiveness of the transhipment observer program; wider use of electronic reporting and monitoring (cameras on vessels); and developing a catch documentation scheme.

25. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-021-00745-z>

26. <https://www.ffa.int/node/2636>

27. Most of this misreporting is 'inaccuracies' in species composition of catch, which is ameliorated through comparisons with the results of observer species catch sampling.



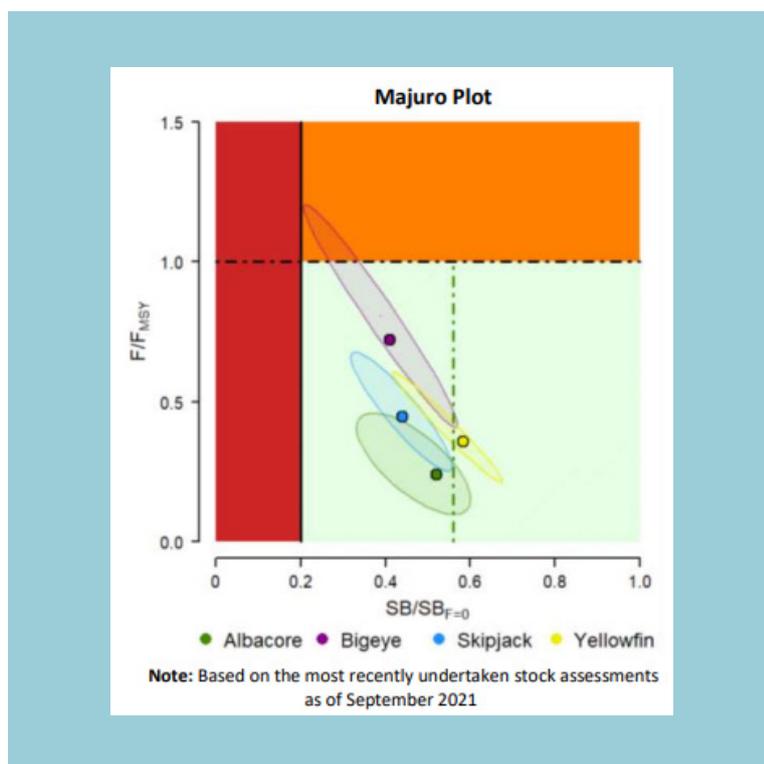


Figure 1 Future of Fisheries Report Card 2022

Members are implementing stronger MCS measures for their domestic longline vessels, including a 10-fold increase in monitoring of longline fishing vessels unloading at FFA ports. They are strongly advocating through the WCPFC for more effective monitoring of all longline fishing in the Convention Area, including on the high seas.

Two Year Projection: As the global population increases, demand for fisheries resources including Pacific tuna will likely continue to rise. Technological advancements and increased information sharing provide the region with great opportunity to enhance MCS activities and disincentivise IUU fishing. The successes in preventing IUU fishing to date are promising, though while the value of these resources continues to rise, so to will attempts by fishing enterprises to sidestep regulations, to the continued detriment of resource security in the Pacific.

Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture

The region has extensive coral reefs, consisting of at least 70 coral genera, over 4,000 fish/invertebrate species and 30 mangrove species.

Coastal fisheries are fundamental to food security and livelihoods across the region, representing significant economic, social and cultural benefits for communities. This has been increasingly the case following the COVID-19 pandemic, which catalysed a significant shift to utilising coastal fisheries resources for both food security and livelihoods.

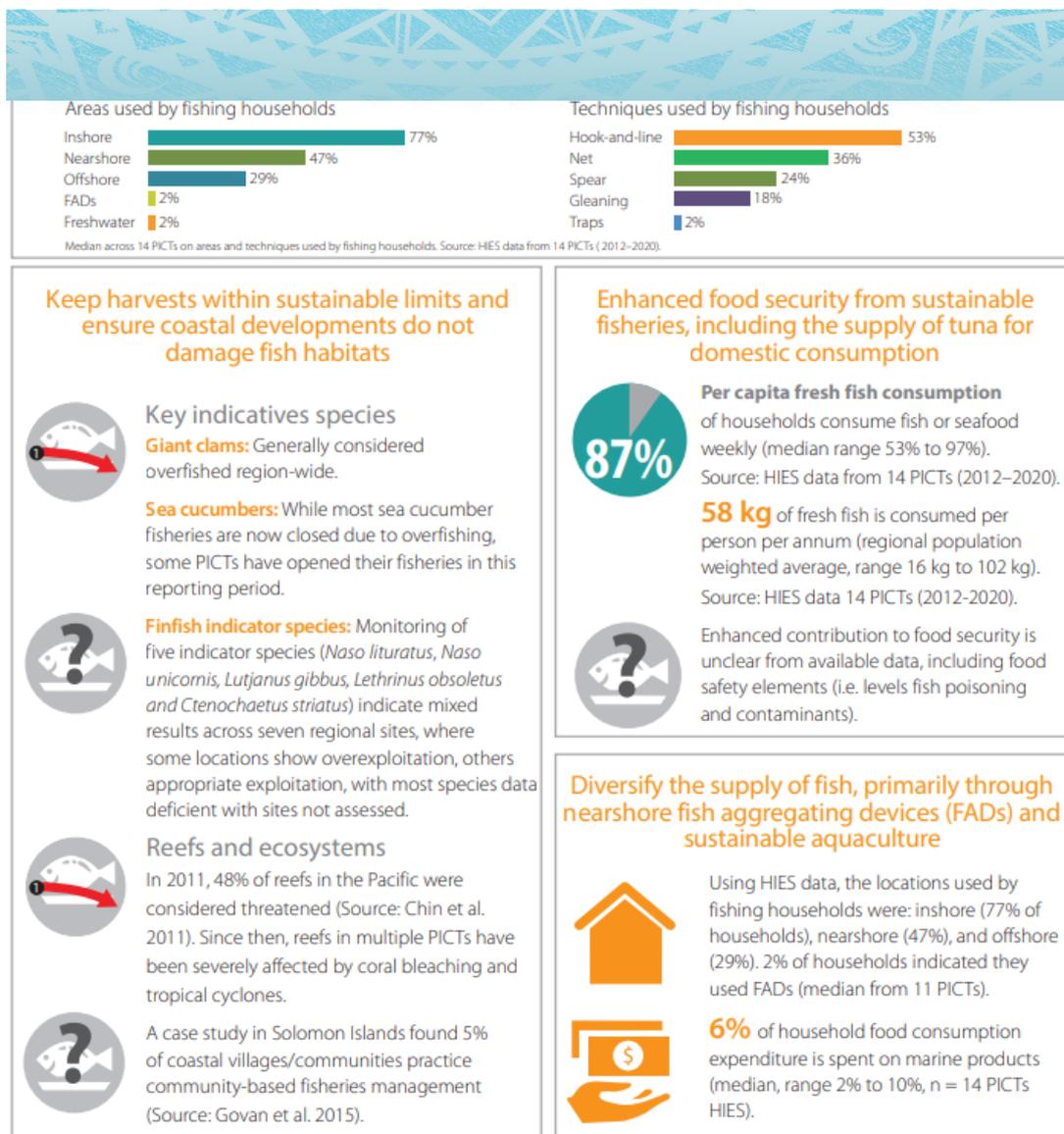
These coastal resources are under increasing threat and in many places are either fully- or over-exploited. IUU is an issue for coastal fisheries too, and requires a significant increase in coastal fisheries monitoring control and surveillance (MCS) – an under-recognised need.



Through the ‘Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021-2025’²⁸ and the related Policy Brief, ‘Scaling up community-based fisheries management: A regional commitment supporting Pacific Island communities in sustaining coastal fisheries’²⁹ regional Heads of Fisheries have set out a plan for meeting these needs.

Pacific governments’ financial commitment to coastal fisheries as a proportion of the total national budget increased* from 0.2% in 2017 from 5 PICTs to 0.27% in 2022 from 17 PICTs (range 0.05% to 2.6%, n = 17 PICTs). The proportion of fisheries budgets allocated to coastal fisheries increased from 34% in 2017 to 36% in 2022 (range 0.6% to 74%, n = 17). The proportion of fisheries staff working in coastal fisheries is 42% (range 10% to 91%, n = 17)³⁰

Two Year Projection: pressure on coastal fisheries and aquaculture is likely to increase, over and above the ability of Pacific governments to adequately protect the sector. Reduced availability of coastal fisheries and aquaculture resources will likely increase food insecurity and negatively effect livelihoods across the region.



28. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/yr5yv>

29. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/z2csz>

30. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/y4tzx>



Invasive Species and Pathogens

Invasive species pose a major threat to the global economy and the environment, costing billions of dollars to control each year. With increasing trade, and movement of people globally, opportunities for plant pests and diseases to move around the world have increased dramatically. This has allowed new pests and diseases to appear in territories where they had never been found, with negative consequences on local ecosystems, agriculture, and food security.

According to FAO, pests and diseases are responsible for losses of between 20 per cent and 40 per cent of global food production and for trade losses in agricultural products exceeding USD220 billion every year.

For example, taro leaf blight devastated the taro industry in American Samoa and Samoa in the early 1990's. The Asian Development Bank estimated that Samoa lost an export industry worth US\$10 million over a six-month period due to the spread of the disease. The continued spread of the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle is devastating one of Pacific's most important crops, the coconut, and the Giant African Snail has caused enormous damage to crops across the region since first introduced in the 1930s.³¹

The need for robust biosecurity extends beyond the low tide mark as well, with an under-recognised but highly important challenges effecting aquatic biosecurity across the region.³²

These events increase the vulnerability of Pacific farmers. With communities now grappling with frequent and ongoing devastating effects of climate change, prevention, building robust biosecurity systems and capacity across the region becomes more important than ever. Such efforts should be supported with solutions such as bio-controls that are replicable and resilient without moving toward the use of harmful pesticides and chemicals.

Two Year Projection: The region is likely to experience new plant and livestock pests and diseases which could cause extensive damage to ecosystems, agriculture and livelihoods. With limited resources to mitigate these risks, insecurity in these areas is likely to remain the same, or worsen as trade increases.

31. <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/blog/2022/05/addressing-pests-and-diseases-remains-vital-for-pacific-communities-as>

32. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/ptmbq>



Cyber Security

While faster and better internet access continues to open up greater economic and social (including health and educational) possibilities for the Pacific, it also enables cybercriminals to reach across the globe to commit new crimes, or old crimes in new ways. The borderless nature of cybercrime means it can occur anywhere, making international cooperation, investigative assistance, and common substantive and procedural legislative provisions of paramount importance.

Pacific leaders have acknowledged that cybersecurity is a rapidly growing threat to the region and, in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, have called for an increasing emphasis on regional cooperation to address it. Cybercrime and cyber-enabled crime are key areas of strategic focus in the Boe Declaration Action Plan and regional partners such as the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON), the CROP ICT Working Group, and the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON) are supporting efforts to make cyberspace safer for Pacific peoples.

At the March 2021 launch of **Vanuatu's National Cyber Security Strategy** (NCSS) Prime Minister Bob Loughman highlighted that "ICT should be used to connect people, expand education and health services, connect remote areas and grow businesses and the economy. The ICT environment must be safe and secure for businesses to thrive. Efforts are needed to safeguard our cyber space from cyber threats."

The Pacific region has been experiencing an increase in ransomware events, such as the attack on the Papua New Guinea Department of Finance's Payment System in October 2021. Similarly, in March 2022 the Republic of Marshall Islands' National Telecommunications Authority experienced a major distributed denial of service (DDoS) cyber-attack that disrupted internet services for about 10 days.³³ In 2021, Australia was affected by a ransomware attack on a regional hospital, and the **Australian Cyber Security Centre** (ACSC) has previously issued warnings to Australian health-care providers that it had observed increases in cyber incidents targeting the sector.

Such attacks seem to be aimed at infiltrating networks and burrowing deep into their infrastructure before deploying further attacks. The hospital ransomware attack in early 2021 disrupted delivery of critical emergency, surgical and other healthcare services. A business continuity plan was implemented and offline backups restored full capacity for patient care.

These such ransomware events have varied in severity, but a commonality is that these events seek to financially benefit cybercriminals and reduce operability of the victim's network or system.

Two Year Projection: Pacific peoples and entities are increasingly reliant on cyberspace for personal engagements and institutional operations. As connectivity across the region increases thanks for investments in information and communications technology, so too will the online security risks to Pacific peoples. Efforts to mitigate these risks are likely to be outstripped by the incentives for nefarious actors to propagate the risks, and as such the Pacific is likely to experience a net decrease in cybersecurity in the coming years.

33. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/464125/marshall-islands-telecom-service-hit-by-cyber-attack>



Spotlight: Regional Security in Action

The **Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON)** is an operational cyber security network, consisting of regional working-level cyber security experts and technical experts from eligible governments across the Pacific. Governments of the Pacific play an important role in informing their constituents about cyber threats. Establishing a robust cybersecurity posture will assist to deter future events, as will participating in information sharing practices through multilateral forums.

The Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON) is contributing to regional efforts to address this issue through the promotion of accession by PILON Member countries to the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (**'Budapest Convention'**). This Convention provides a framework for regional cooperation and collaboration on investigating and prosecuting cybercrime, such as information sharing and mutual legal assistance (providing evidence across international borders). The **PILON Cybercrime Working Group** has focused its efforts on building the awareness of member countries of the urgent need to address cybercrime to protect Pacific communities and economies.

The **United Nations Ad-Hoc Committee towards an international convention to counter the misuse of information communications technology for criminal purposes** (AHC negotiations) is important for the Pacific region. The AHC negotiations present an opportunity for the global community to develop an effective international instrument to combat cybercrime. The first round of negotiations took place in February 2022 and resulted in an agreed negotiation timeline and a basic outline of the convention. The second round of negotiations will take place from 30 May to 10 June 2022 in Vienna, and focussed on three aspects of the convention: Criminalisation, General provisions, and Law enforcement and procedural provisions. New Zealand has engaged closely with the process to date, including through a submission focussed on developing provisions targeting cybercrime within the proposed convention, particularly cyber dependent crimes and a limited range of cyber enabled crimes.

In April 2022, Fiji delivered a well-received statement in New York on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum at the Open Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security. The OEWG will now focus on cyber security issues, including the implementation of the agreed norms of state behaviour in cyberspace.

The **Oceania Cyber Security Centre** was established in Melbourne in 2016 between eight Victorian universities and the State Government of Victoria. At the invitation of governments, the OCSC conducts multi-stakeholder national cybersecurity capacity assessments using the University of Oxford's Cybersecurity Capacity Maturity Model for Nations (CMM).

In the Federated States of Micronesia, the OCSC completed an assessment in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity in 2020. After the assessment, OCSCS worked with FSM to co-develop a National Cybersecurity Roadmap. The roadmap sets a path to build local capacity and sovereign capability to protect the country's national interests and citizens who are most at risk from cyber harms.

OCSCS conducted a similar assessment in Vanuatu in 2019, which underpinned Vanuatu's subsequent cybersecurity efforts, in several ways, including through the development of cybersecurity awareness resources and campaigns, by providing cyber risk management and best practice guidance for businesses, establishing the Cybercrime Act 2021 and garnering an invitation to accede to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime.



Transnational Organised Crime

Prevalent TNOC activities

The importation, trans-shipment, precursor trafficking, peddling and usage of **illicit drugs** is the most prevalent transnational criminal activity in the region. The Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (PTCCC) reports that large scale batches of cocaine and methamphetamine continue to be moved through the Pacific region.

Reports of **cybercrime** and cyber-enabled crimes are increasing, with Australia, Kiribati and New Zealand highlighting cybercrime as prevalent domestically in recent feedback to the Forum's Transnational Organised Crime Working Group. Indeed, the PTCCC and PICP note that cybercrime and cyber-enabled crimes are under reported in the region, largely due to the low level of cyber security maturity³⁴ across the region. PTCCC notes that the region suffers from an absence of national legislation and mechanisms to detect and apprehend criminals committing these types of crimes.³⁵

Australian reports indicate that criminal hackers have switched their focus to people working remotely online during the COVID-19 period, and used fear created by the pandemic to actively target vulnerable people and health services to conduct espionage, and steal money and sensitive data. To illustrate how busy these criminal elements have been, the Australian Cyber Security Centre received one cybercrime report every eight minutes between June 2020 and June 2021.

Members have also identified **financial crimes** (including fraud, tax evasion and money laundering) as a major security risk/enabler, and noted that **Environmental crime** (IUU fishing, flora and fauna trafficking, wildlife and cultural property trafficking), **illegal movement and exploitation of people** (human trafficking, migrant exploitation) and **child exploitation** continue to negatively impact peace and security across the region.

The impacts of TNOC in the Pacific

The impacts of TNOC in the region vary dependent on the type of crime being committed, though the absence of data to support Member feedback makes it difficult to ascertain the true extent of the impact of TNOC in the region.

Illicit drugs use, and trade is estimated to be worth AUD11.3 billion³⁶ in Australia and up to an estimated AUD1.86 billion per annum³⁷ in New Zealand. While in the past, PICs have largely been linked to transnational organised crime activities as transit points for movement of illicit substances to big markets such as New Zealand and Australia, niche domestic illicit drug markets have grown across the region over the past decade. This has led to increases in addiction, mental health issues and in some countries in the region, has led to increases in crimes such as burglary, violence, intimidation, extortion, and in bigger countries like New Zealand, increasing the use of firearms.

34. https://theprif.org/sites/default/files/documents/policy_brief_cyber_security_low_res_rev4.pdf

35. <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/tandi308.pdf>

36. <https://www.acic.gov.au/publications/national-wastewater-drug-monitoring-program-reports>.

37. <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/New-Zealands-response-to-Organised-Crime.pdf>



For countries such as New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji and Kiribati, illicit drug use has been observed to harm families, with an increased risk of family harm, sexual violence, child neglect, poor health outcomes, and poor educational and employment outcomes. For Kiribati, a causal relationship between illicit drug use and child labour has been identified. For some countries therefore, illicit drug use is seen as a threat to the wellbeing of children, young people, family and communities, leading to inter-generational harm and social deprivation.

Palau has highlighted that while drug markets in Palau are fairly limited, they continue to operate counter to Palauan laws, culture and values. As outlined in Palau's National Security Strategy, the negative health effects of illicit drug abuse are a drain on Palau's healthcare system, with Methamphetamine in particular highlighted for its tremendous negative socio-economic impacts.

Quantifying the economic impact of **cybercrime** in the region is difficult. No estimated economic cost of cybercrime on national economies was received from Members during recent regional consultation processes. To understand the impact cybercrime is having in the wider Asia-Pacific region, a study undertaken by global research giants Frost & Sullivan in 2018, commissioned by Microsoft, revealed that the potential economic loss across Asia Pacific in 2017 due to cybersecurity incidents was approximately US\$1.745 trillion.³⁸ The same report estimated that Australia's economic loss as a result of cybercrime could be as much as \$29 billion per year, the equivalent of 1.9% of the Australia's GDP.³⁹ For a region that constitutes developing countries with ambitious connectivity targets and underdeveloped cybersecurity measures, the impact could be devastating to national economies.

Tax evasion and other illicit financial activities continue to play a significant role in loss of income for Government and loss of revenue for businesses and Pacific islanders. The UNODC assumes that approximately 2% of GDP⁴⁰ is money laundered in the region. In New Zealand, the value of money laundered each year is estimated at NZD1.35 billion, or approximately 0.6% of its GDP.

Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing by foreign vessels continues to affect the region. As outlined earlier in this report, the total annual volume of tuna product harvested or transhipped in the Pacific involving IUU activity during 2017-19 is estimated to be 192,186 tonnes, worth USD333 million (ex-vessel value). The associated loss of employment and food insecurity that results (when considering that the fishing industry provided 23,000 jobs for PICs (based on 2018 estimates) and that 70% of the regions protein intake comes from fish)⁴¹ adds to the negative consequences of IUU fishing in the Pacific.

The illegal movement and exploitation of people including children is a devastating crime that exploits the most vulnerable in the communities and robs them of their rights. In 2022, the Federated States of Micronesia reported several ongoing cases of human trafficking while New Zealand highlighted that it experienced a 300% increase in referrals of immigration crimes, of which more than one third related to exploited migrants. Australia has also highlighted an increase in the risk of online child exploitation and exploitation of workers or trafficking of vulnerable persons in the community following restrictions on travel.

38. <https://news.microsoft.com/apac/2018/05/18/cybersecurity-threats-to-cost-organizations-in-asia-pacific-us1-75-trillion-in-economic-losses/>

39. Ibid

40. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/money-laundering/overview.html#:~:text=The%20estimated%20amount%20of%20money,goes%20through%20the%20laundering%20cycle.>

41. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/kr/aid-and-development/our-aid-partnerships-in-the-pacific/case-studies/fishing-in-the-blue-pacific/>



Impact of COVID-19 and border closures on TNOC in the Pacific

The impact of contextual changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic varies for the types of crimes prevalent in the region. For example, border closures have resulted in a decrease in the number of cases involving illegal movement and exploitation of people, while domestic exploitation of workers or domestic trafficking of vulnerable persons increased. In New Zealand and Australia significant increases in cases of online sexual exploitation were reported, as lockdowns, isolation and quarantine situations increased the risk of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation online, especially as home-schooling increases the time children and young people may be online and unsupervised.

Cybercrime increased as criminal organisations and individuals exploited the opportunities provided through increased reliance on technology for work and business as a result of the pandemic. Online fraud also increased as criminals targeted vulnerable financial systems such as government assistance programs, and informal online shopping platforms through fraudulent applications and phishing scams.

Regarding illicit drugs trafficking TNOC groups adapted to non-passenger transport streams such as cargo and mail. In Australia and New Zealand, availability of supplies was not affected during the initial border closure period as existing illicit supplies were able to meet market demand. As border closures continued, a sharp decline in seizures and usage were observed. This resulted in transnational organised groups having to look for more innovative ways to move illicit drugs across borders.

Two Year Projection: As borders continue to reopen, it is anticipated that transnational organised criminal groups will return to business as usual, utilising flights between countries to move illicit substances and facilitate illegal movement and exploitation of people. PTCCC expects a surge in TNOC activities following the reopening of borders.



Creating an Enabling Environment

Forum-led coordination

Despite threats to regional unity throughout 2021 and 2022, through the Suva Agreement, and 2022 Suva Communique, Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to a strong, unified Pacific region, with the Pacific Islands Forum at its centre. Aligned to this, the Boe Declaration on Regional Security outlined Members' commitments to strengthening the existing regional security architecture inclusive of regional law enforcement secretariats and regional organisations to;

- account for the expanded concept of security;
- identify and address emerging security challenges;
- improve coordination among existing security mechanisms;
- facilitate open dialogue and strengthened information sharing; further develop early warning mechanisms;
- support implementation;
- promote regional security analysis, assessment and advice; and
- engage and cooperate, where appropriate, with international organisations, partners and other relevant stakeholders.

The Forum Officials Committee (FOC) Subcommittee on Regional Security (FSRS) was established in 2019 by Forum Leaders. The FSRS is the principle advisory body for the FOC on regional security matters, and is responsible for coordinating the implementation of all Forum regional security declarations and commitments.

In line with the Aitutaki Declaration and the Biketawa Declaration, the Forum Secretary General continues to play an important convening role in times of crisis, as recently witnessed the convening of the Ministerial Action Group that endorsed the establishment of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 under the Biketawa Declaration, and the facilitation of a regional security discussion in May 2022 under the auspices of the Secretary General's Good Offices.

Subsequently, to ensure the effective implementation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, Leaders, through their communique at the 51st Forum Meeting, highlighted the need for a flexible and responsive regional security mechanism to address traditional and non-traditional security issues in the Pacific region.

While reaffirming the concept of regionalism and a family first approach to peace and security, Leaders noted ongoing work, including the development of a Security Policy Roadmap and this Pacific Security Outlook Report, was required to support the alignment of the Boe Declaration on Regional Security with the thematic area for Peace and Security in the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent.



Regional security in Action: Commitments to work together.

In addition to the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, key Forum Leaders' declarations that guide the region's security work include:

- **1992 Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation:** recognises that an adverse law enforcement environment could threaten the sovereignty, security and economic integrity of Forum members and jeopardise economic and social development.
- **1997 Aitutaki Declaration on Regional Security Cooperation:** provides principles governing security cooperation in the region.
- **2000 Biketawa Declaration:** sets the framework for regional crisis management and conflict resolution initiatives.
- **2002 Nasonini Declaration on Regional Security:** recognises the need for immediate and sustained regional action in response to the current regional security environment.
- **The 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security:** recognises an expanded concept of security that includes human security, economic security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security, cyber security and transnational crime, and regional cooperation to build resilience to disasters and climate change.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, as the region's preeminent political body, fosters coordination between Members and partners to enhance the region's ability to protect Pacific peoples from its priority security threats, and take advantage of emerging security opportunities.

To help the Secretariat with this role, the Forum Officials Committee (FOC) Subcommittee on Regional Security (FSRS) was established in 2019 by Forum Leaders. The FSRS is the principle advisory body for the FOC on regional security matters and is responsible for coordinating the implementation of all Forum regional security declarations and commitments.



Conclusion

This Regional Security Outlook Report casts light on the evolving nature of regional security dynamics and brings to attention some of the most pressing security threats facing the Pacific.

The report highlights evolving threats in climate, human, environmental, cyber, and transnational security sectors – key focus areas identified by forum members in the Boe Declaration Action Plan. The report finds that none of the key security risks outlined in the strategic focus areas of the 2019 Boe Declaration Action Plan have been fully mitigated. While the region must maintain focus in each of those areas, doing so is made more difficult by the emergence of other pressing concerns.

The report further outlines new threats that have grown in the interceding period since the release of the Boe Declaration Action Plan, including in particular geo-political dynamics (including major-power competition and the Russian invasion of Ukraine), health security (including the COVID-19 pandemic), political instability (including election related tensions and violence across the region) and humanitarian disasters (such as the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai volcanic eruption).

The COVID-19 pandemic required significant re-prioritisation of effort, and while the end is within reach, it is likely that the region will remain highly vulnerable to this, and other pandemics over the coming years. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is not directly threatening lives in the Pacific, though it is making lives in the Pacific more difficult. While geopolitical competition could draw much-needed attention and resources to the Pacific, it could also distract the region and its partners from the Pacific's most pressing priorities.

Finally, the report highlights actions taken across the region to mitigate security risks, including the development of National Security Strategies by several Forum Members, increased cooperation on cyber security, and the region working together in the aftermath of local violence and disasters.

The Pacific Islands Forum plays a central role in coordinating regional security efforts, including through the establishment of the FOC Subcommittee on Regional Security, and under the guidance and political leadership of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.



Annex 1: The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent: Thematic Area on Peace and Security

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent⁴² (full text available at www.forumsec.org) represents the ongoing commitment of the region to work together as one, to develop long-term approaches to critical challenges such as climate change, sustainable development and security.

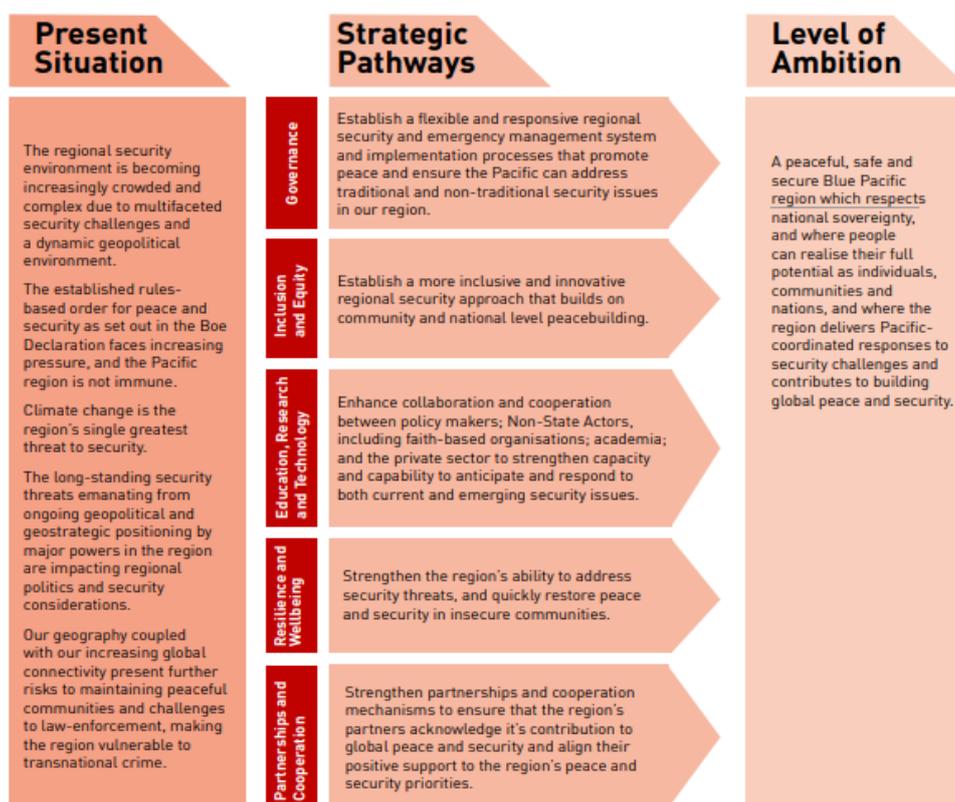
The Peace and Security thematic area of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent highlights the central role that peace and security play in underpinning stability and prosperity across the region.



Thematic Area – Peace And Security

This thematic area highlights the central role that peace and security play in ensuring that our countries and territories are able to realise a safe, secure and prosperous region. While recognising the importance to Member countries of collective threats to their peace and security, the Blue Pacific Continent remains committed to principles of democracy, good governance, and non-interference in national affairs.

The region continues to make valuable contributions to the advancement of global peace and security. In doing so, it recognises the expanded concept of security that includes human security, economic security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security, cyber security and transnational crime, and regional cooperation to build resilience to disasters and climate change. Peacebuilding that ensures safety and security at the community level is supported by faith-based and non-governmental organisations. Forum Members continue to work cooperatively to uphold regional peace and security, and support international peace and security efforts, in the face of complex global challenges and relationships.



42. <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/PIFS-2050-Strategy-WEB-11July2022.pdf>







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