

# PROTECTION OF CHILDREN YOUTH & PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

## Fact Sheet

### BACKGROUND

The protection of children, youth and people with disabilities is critical in ensuring Fiji's sustainable future development, given the significance of multi-faceted issues that are currently affecting them which will require a more coordinated response across the whole-of-Government. To ensure the inclusive and holistic progress of the nation, it is paramount that consideration be made to all Fijians regardless of race, age, social background and physical capabilities. Moreover, it is also vital to mention the role that past political upheavals as well the impact of COVID-19 have played in hindering Fiji's progress towards full economic growth and development.

### CURRENT STATUS

#### *Children*

The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP), \$100,000 has been budgeted to cater as preparatory costs to the establishment of the Department of Children, aimed at strengthening child protection systems nationally and to streamline and improve the delivery of child services in Fiji. The Ministry is currently addressing the issues of street dwellers and as of December 2023, it was found that there are 293 street dwellers in Fiji. The Education Summit "2023 Denarau Declaration" encapsulates the goal and vision to establish a strong and flexible educational system that develops resilient and capable Fijians. Through the support of UNICEF reviewed the Juveniles Act and Adoption Act in 2012 to ensure compliance to the UNCRC. Two bills derived from the Juveniles Act are still pending. These are Child Justice Bill and Child Care and Protection Bill awaiting alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### *Youth*

The Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) is the regulatory arm of Government that facilitates and

promotes the full development of young people's potential through the provision of strategic supportive networks and initiatives for character development, entrepreneurship activities, sports and community based civic initiatives. The Ministry of Youth and Sports offers empowerment programs and accredited courses in our five Youth Training Centers. The Ministry also offers grants for individual youths and youth groups for their various income generating business/projects. Some policies include the following: National Youth Policy 2023 – 2027; National Sports, Recreation and Physical Activity Policy, National Anti-Doping Policy; and National Non-Formal Education Policy.

#### *People with Disabilities*

Fiji was among the Pacific Island nations that pioneered in tackling disability-related concerns and achieving the rights of individuals with disabilities, prior to being signatory to the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of Person with Disabilities. The national census found that there were 13,595 persons above the age of five years old with some degree of disability or 14.3% of the national population. This was ascertained using the Washington Short set of Questions, which are universally recognized as reliable. The *National Disability Policy* is pending clearance and endorsement from the National Councils for Persons with Disabilities prior to further submission to MWCSP. This reinforces government's intent to ensure existing services in the health, education, sports and accessible housing sector are adequately supported in order to better address the needs of children, women and men with disabilities.

### CHALLENGES

1. *Violence against children, youths and people with disabilities:* Violence against children are on the rise in Fiji, as seen by the startling increase in recorded cases of child abuse from 2018 (838 children), 2019 (1452), 2020 (1719 children), 2021 (1519 children), and 2022 (1968 children).
2. *Street Dwellers:* MWCSP is currently working towards addressing the issue of street dwellers and as of December 2023, it was found that there are 293 street dwellers in Fiji.

3. *Chronic Shortage of Data:* With available data often outdated and disaggregated into different age that do not necessarily meet the countries definition of youth.
4. *Social Dislocation:* The Pacific-Australia Labour Mobility scheme has introduced various employment opportunities. It has also raised significant concerns about the direct impact existing seasonal workers migration policy.
5. *Youth Competency:* in the workforce is a challenge as many apply for job but do not hold the necessary skill and knowledge for the job.
6. *Discrimination against people with disabilities:* people with disabilities and their families must deal with prejudice, discrimination, and rejection on a daily basis due to a lack of awareness and understanding in the larger community.
7. Lack of support services available for people with disabilities and lack of community-based inclusive development approaches.
8. Inaccessibility to government services and public infrastructure.

### OPPORTUNITIES

1. *Legislative Reform:* Review of laws and regulations to reflect evolving children, youth and people with disabilities.
2. *Empowering Carers/parents:* Provide parenting programmes to enable families to improve child safety and family functioning so that children do not need to be placed in others care.
3. *Early Childhood Education:* Increase provision of early identification and intervention for children with development delays, disability, congenital impairments or other needs.
4. *Youth Employment:* Develop services and mechanism that foster employability of youth through cross sector cooperation. Develop and implement programmes and projects that benefit youth for self-employment, wealth creation and for the labour opportunities.

5. *Establish Disability Resource Hubs:* Decentralize services, preposition assistive devices and help provide people with disabilities with skills that prepare them for workforce and industry.

### FUTURE POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

- **Review of legislation related to the protection of children:**
  - ✓ Review and amend the Current Child Protection Legislation.
- **Safeguard safety, care and protection of Children:**
  - ✓ Enhance the delivery of family planning and sexual education services.
- **Prevent child abuse and child neglect, and intervene effectively:**
  - ✓ Develop a parent/carer and community education strategy to build parent/carers awareness and capability.
- **Promote the education and training of youths to secure decent employment:**
  - ✓ Provide youth scholarships for higher education and strengthen the practical skills through careers guidance
- **Review and strengthen the involvement of people with disabilities in policy decision-making:**
  - ✓ Increase investment to the Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) institutions.
- **Ensure the Human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities are encouraged:**
  - ✓ Promote and advocate for accessibility in all facets of human diversity specifically accessibility to public infrastructure.