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Research Report

Pacific peoples' wellbeing: Background paper to Te Tai Waiora: Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022

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TE TAI ŌHANGA
THE TREASURY

Pacific peoples' wellbeing

Background Paper to Te Tai Waiora: Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022

Analytical Paper 23/01

April 2023

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**ANALYTICAL PAPER 23/01
BACKGROUND PAPER TO
TE TAI WAIORA: WELLBEING IN
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND 2022**

Pacific peoples' wellbeing

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Executive summary

This paper is part of a series of detailed background papers designed to support *Te Tai Waiora*, the Treasury's first Wellbeing Report, which was published in November 2022.

New Zealand is home to the world's largest Pacific population. About one in 12 New Zealanders identifies as having a Pacific ethnicity or ethnicities, and the Pacific population is much younger and faster growing than the general population.

As the Pacific population continues to grow, so too does their influence and importance to wellbeing in New Zealand. Pacific New Zealanders have a significant potential to materially contribute to the country's social and economic prosperity. Equally, risks to the wellbeing of Pacific New Zealanders are increasingly risks to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

Culture and identity

Pacific New Zealanders encompass a range of backgrounds and experiences as well as ethnic, spiritual, religious and gender identities. However, most Pacific peoples in New Zealand are Polynesian and thus share many similarities, including in their perspectives on the world, their environment and their wellbeing.

Pacific New Zealanders' cultural identity is closely related to wellbeing, and the two constructs are commonly considered together by Pacific peoples. The key values, beliefs and practices, which shape Pacific New Zealanders' experience of wellbeing, frequently include:

- a strong emphasis on cultural identity and the role of families and communities
- the central role of spirituality and religion in communal and family life
- a focus on collective consensus, practices, needs and outcomes
- clear expectations about respect, reciprocity and love and a sense of responsibility to self, others, environment and cultural protocols and practices.

New Zealand's understanding of the wellbeing aspirations of Pacific New Zealanders has deepened over time. However, there are persistent challenges that must be addressed for their aspirations to be realised.

Opportunities and challenges

Family and community relationships remain strong within Pacific communities. The impact of the pandemic throughout the last three years has highlighted the strength and resilience of Pacific communities and families. Pacific women play a significant role in maintaining social connections across Pacific communities and in promoting cultural practices that build families and community resilience and wellbeing.

While educational achievement and participation rates by Pacific peoples have improved in almost all areas, these rates are still lower than those of the rest of the population. Tertiary completion rates remain low, and young Pacific peoples identified as NEET (not in employment, education or training) are significantly higher than for other population groups except for Māori.

Pacific peoples have continued to earn lower wages than other ethnic groups. Labour market outcomes in part reflect differences in skills and qualifications but more importantly job characteristics and the industries that Pacific peoples work in. Micro-analysis suggests that the pandemic had disproportionate labour market impacts for some Pacific subgroups, particularly the young, those living in Auckland and women. Pre-pandemic disparities also continue such as persistent pay gap disparities between Pacific men and women and other New Zealanders.

Pacific peoples also experience health challenges, especially in low rates of childhood immunisations and cervical and breast cancer screening. These challenges are ongoing and risk compounding pre-pandemic disparities in access to health services and health outcomes. Coupled with increased experiences of discrimination, these factors impact on future physical and mental wellbeing.

The quality, affordability and suitability of housing typically occupied by Pacific peoples are persistent challenges negatively impacting their health and wellbeing outcomes. Health inequities start at young ages and are stark. Pacific children (aged 5–14 years) are 50 times more likely to be hospitalised from developing acute rheumatic fever (ARF) compared to non-Pacific, non-Māori children. Life expectancy for Pacific New Zealanders is 5 years lower for males and 4.5 years lower for females compared to the rest of population.

Looking to the future

Data gaps continue to pose a challenge to our ability to undertake comprehensive and coherent quantitative and qualitative analysis relevant to Pacific wellbeing. Future research reflecting the diversity and complexity of Pacific communities is needed to better understand future opportunities and challenges.

We are not aware of New Zealand research that methodically considers different elements of Pacific culture (values, beliefs, practices, institutions) as forms of value-creating intangible capital and attempts to assess their contribution to our collective social, human, natural or physical capital stocks. Such research would provide valuable insights into our understanding of Pacific peoples' contribution to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

The young age structure of Pacific New Zealanders has implications for the future workforce and economic growth. Addressing education and health issues of Pacific youth is a critical strategic opportunity for New Zealand.

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1 Introduction

1.1 About this report

This paper is part of a series of detailed background papers designed to support *Te Tai Waiora*, the Treasury's first Wellbeing Report, which was published in November 2022 (The Treasury, 2022a). The background paper provides insight into the wellbeing status of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand and, like other background papers to *Te Tai Waiora*, is not a policy paper.

New Zealand is home to the world's largest Pacific population. About one in 12 New Zealanders identify as having a Pacific ethnicity or ethnicities, and the Pacific population is much younger and faster growing than the general population.

Young Pacific peoples make up a growing proportion of the New Zealand workforce, and their wellbeing outcomes and contributions matter greatly to New Zealand's future success. As the Pacific population in New Zealand continues to grow, its potential to contribute materially to the country's economic and living standards also grows. Equally, risks to the wellbeing of Pacific New Zealanders are increasingly risks to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

This report aims to provide a range of qualitative and quantitative data to answer the question, "What does Pacific wellbeing look like in New Zealand?" To answer this, it first needs to explore what matters for Pacific peoples' wellbeing. This is covered in sections 2 and 3, after providing historical context and basic demographic data in sections 1.2 and 1.3. Sections 4–7 then provide data about Pacific wellbeing according to each of the four goals of the All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Outcomes Framework.

1.2 The historical context

"Māori and Pacific peoples have shared histories as navigators, explorers, and innovators who traversed te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa in search of new lands ... Their customs, values, beliefs, and languages point to paths that have crossed many times."
(Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022a, p.16)

Māori and Pacific communities in New Zealand share genealogy as tāngata o te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (people of the Pacific Ocean). While it is common from a Western viewpoint to view different Pacific island groups as discrete settlements separated by sea, to Pacific peoples, the sea is a connecting rather than separating force. Despite variation, a strong shared Pacific identity exists.

New Zealand governmental colonial engagement with the Pacific dates back to 1901 when the Cook Islands and Niue became colonial territories of New Zealand (Thomsen et al., 2018).

From the 1950s to the 1970s, successive New Zealand governments encouraged significant migration from the Pacific region to New Zealand from the realm countries (Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau), Samoa, Tonga and Fiji to meet domestic labour shortages in manufacturing and primary industries.

Since that time, generations of Pacific peoples have travelled to New Zealand. Pacific immigrants have continued to come to New Zealand to take up opportunities for a better life for themselves and their families. Immigrants, in general, contribute to New Zealand's productivity and economic growth, primarily through "raising the long-term levels and diversity of human capabilities" (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022, p. 10). Immigration also brings greater cultural diversity and vibrancy to New Zealand communities and can "promote wellbeing by supporting the achievement of other social and economic objectives (for example, supporting focused innovation ecosystems, expanding public infrastructure, and international relations)" (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022, p.10).

Today, New Zealand is widely considered a Pacific nation comprised of diverse communities. It is home to the largest population of Pacific peoples in the world (Marlowe et al., 2018).

The home islands hold a special and unique place in the preservation of culture, language and identity for these communities, and personal relationships between Pacific peoples in New Zealand and in the Pacific region are strong. However, after more than a century of migration, there are now two to three generations (in some cases, more) of Pacific peoples in New Zealand. The 2018 Census found that 60% of New Zealanders identifying as having a Pacific ethnicity were born in New Zealand. Many retain strong ties to their ancestral countries or villages of origin while contributing significantly to the political, social and cultural fabric of New Zealand society. As the Pacific Employment Action Plan puts it, "[t]he migration story of Pacific communities is interwoven with the fabric of Aotearoa New Zealand's economic and social history" (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022b, p. 6).

As the following demographic information highlights, this contribution will only grow as the non-Pacific population ages and the young, growing Pacific population comprises an increasing proportion of our society and workforce.

1.3 Current demographics

The 2018 Census recorded a total of 381,642 people, or 8.1% of the total population, from over 30 distinct Pacific groups living in New Zealand.

Pacific New Zealanders are a culturally diverse population

The New Zealand Pacific community is made of Polynesians, Melanesians and Micronesians. A significant proportion (over 90%) of Pacific New Zealanders are Polynesian¹ and thus share many similarities with one another and with Māori (see Table 1). However, as noted by Anae et al. (2001), there is no homogeneous 'Pacific community' as such but rather Pacific peoples who align themselves variously and at different times along ethnic, geographic, church, family, school, age, gender, island born, New Zealand born, occupational lines or a mix of these. Section 2.1 says more about the core shared elements of the Pacific worldview.

¹ Authors' calculations using 2018 Census data (ethnic group tables).

Table 1: Major Pacific populations in New Zealand, 2018

	Population	Percentage of Pacific population
Samoan	182,721	47.9
Tongan	82,389	21.6
Cook Islands Māori	80,532	21.1
Niuean	30,867	8.1
Fijian	19,722	5.2
Tokelauan	8,676	2.3
Tuvaluan	4,653	1.2

Source: Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2020b) using 2018 Census data.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as many individuals identify with more than one Pacific identity.

The Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2020b) notes that the population of all 17 distinct Pacific groups in New Zealand increased between the 2013 and 2018 Censuses. The seven major ethnicities (Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan and Tuvaluan) have grown between 21% and 37%.

A growing cohort of Pacific New Zealanders identifies with more than one ethnicity. Just over 40% of Pacific peoples identified with more than one ethnicity in 2018 compared to 34.3% in 2006.² Of those who identify with two ethnicities, most identify as Pacific and European (13%) followed by Pacific and Māori (9%), Pacific and Asian (2%) and Pacific and other (0.2%) (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020b).

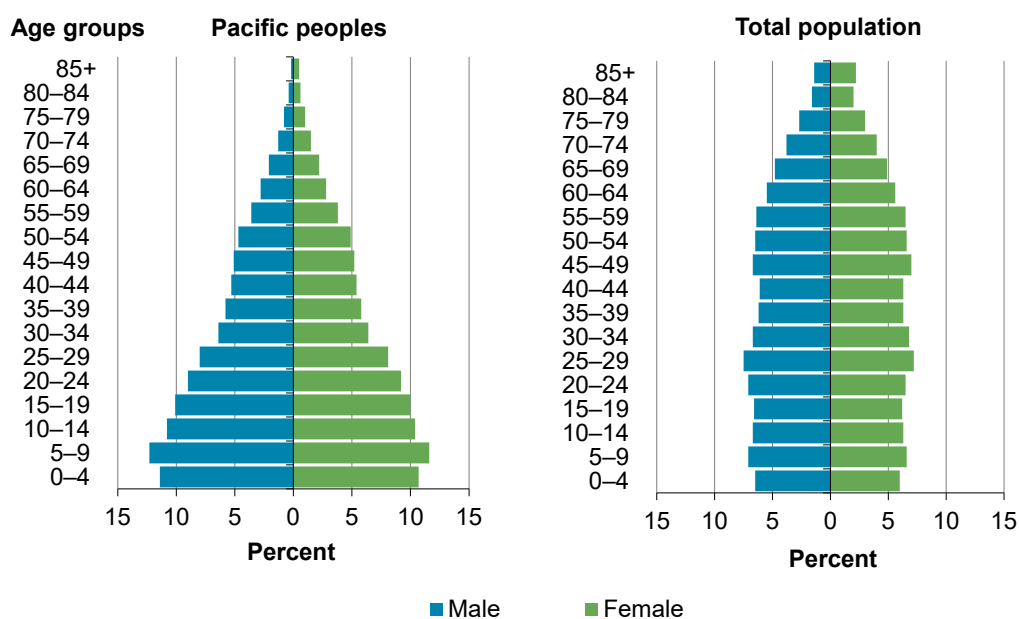
“The number of people who identify as Pacific and Māori has had the greatest increase over the last five years. Whilst other ethnic combinations have increased by 0.1 or 0.2%, those who identify as Pacific and Māori has increased by 1.3%. About half of the 9% of Pacific and Māori are aged under 15 years.” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020b, p. 30)

Pacific New Zealanders are overall a youthful, growing population

With a median age of 23.7 years, compared to an overall New Zealand median age of 37.2 years, Pacific peoples are a young and growing demographic (see Figure 1). 2018 Census data showed that young Pacific peoples (aged 0–29 years) made up 60.8% of the total Pacific population (compared to 40.2% for the total population) and 12.3% of the total New Zealand population aged 0–29 years.

² Data from 2018 Census (Stats NZ).

Figure 1: Pacific peoples are a youthful population



Source: 2018 Census (Stats NZ).

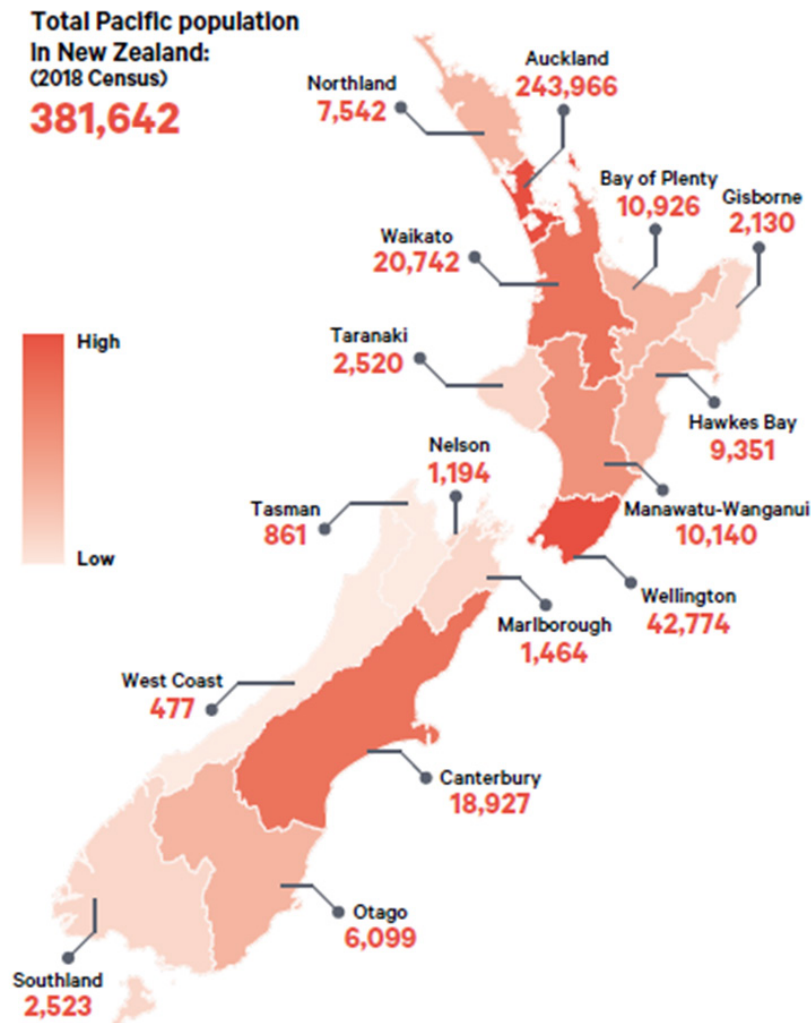
The young age structure of Pacific New Zealanders presents an opportunity. Current demographic trends indicate that, in 20 years, almost one in five New Zealand children aged 0–14 years (18%) and one in eight workers under 39 years will be Pacific (Stats NZ, 2021a; Pasefika Proud, 2017). The Pacific working-age population will increase from 250,000 people in 2018 to almost 300,000 in 2023 and will reach 420,000 by 2043 (Stats NZ, 2021a). The total Pacific population will increase to approximately 11% of the New Zealand population by 2043 (Stats NZ, 2022b). A thriving Pacific population would materially benefit New Zealand as a whole – more and more so as time passes.

Pacific peoples tend to live in Auckland and other urban centres

The current geographical location of the Pacific population reflects the early settlement patterns of Pacific migrants centred primarily around industries where labour was in high demand during the early 1950s and 1960s. The growth of South Auckland was, however, fuelled mainly by the internal movements of Pacific peoples from central Auckland in the 1970s. Pacific peoples are highly urbanised. In 2018, 87% were living in major or large urban areas (Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand, n.d.).

Two out of three Pacific peoples live in Auckland (mostly in South Auckland). Figure 2 shows that, outside of Auckland, Wellington and the Waikato are the other two regions with the highest number of Pacific peoples (Stats NZ, 2020a).

Figure 2: Pacific New Zealanders live across New Zealand



Source: Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2020b, p. 12).

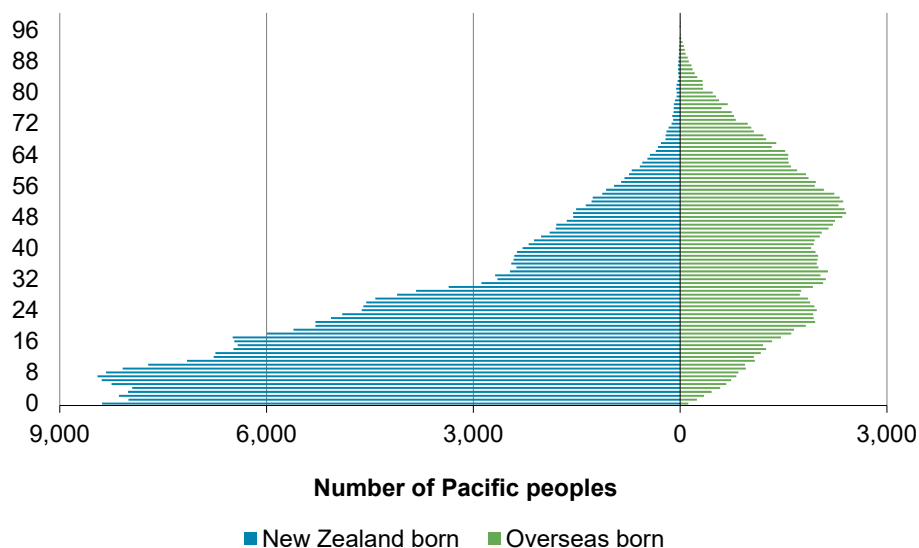
The Pacific population has changed from a mainly migrant group to a largely New Zealand-born population

2018 Census data indicates that 66% of the Pacific population were born in New Zealand.³ Almost 77% of New Zealand-born Pacific peoples are aged under 30. This ratio is just under 30% for overseas-born Pacific peoples (see Figure 3). Compared to those born in the islands, Pacific peoples born or raised in New Zealand have significant differences in the ways they perceive themselves, their social and material experiences and the importance they place on their Pacific identity (Macpherson, 2001).

³ See more: www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples

Figure 3: New Zealand-born Pacific peoples are younger

Age of Pacific population, by birthplace, in 2018



Source: Stats NZ (2023, p. 15).

Pacific New Zealanders have diverse identities and experiences

Beyond consideration of general demographic dimensions such as place of birth, ethnicity, age or locality, the Pacific New Zealand population includes many other diverse identities that affect their overall wellbeing. These include:

- spirituality
- multiethnicity
- being monolingual or multilingual
- gender identity
- sexual orientation
- disabilities
- chronic health conditions.

“We carry lots of identities now.” – Pacific youth leader, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022

These different identity dynamics influence individual and collective experiences and play a role in aspirations for education, work and life. The Pacific Employment Action Plan notes that the above identities:

“... contribute to differences in the availability, relevance, and effectiveness of employment and training support available to Pacific people and their families. This is because people can be treated differently due to existence of ethnic-based and other forms of conscious and unconscious bias, or because support is based on specific criteria, or because of barriers that make services otherwise inaccessible like cultural and language barriers.” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022b, p. 9)

Technological and digital capabilities have also been identified as barriers that make access to opportunities challenging (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022e).

Sections 4–7 explore how these differences affect Pacific peoples’ wellbeing across various domains.

2 Pacific worldviews, community structures and aspirations

To achieve higher living standards and wellbeing for all New Zealanders, we need to understand the core values and beliefs shared by many Pacific peoples and how they can be reflected in practice. In this way, communities can contribute to their full potential while maintaining their unique identities and cultural diversity. This section outlines important elements of Pacific worldviews, community structures and shared aspirations. Section 3 explores the implications of these for wellbeing frameworks used in developing policy. Understanding these worldviews and community structures will enable more-effective policy interventions.

Culture is a problem-solving process, evolved and refined over long periods of time to allow groups to survive and thrive (Thomsen et al., 2018). As such, it can be an important form of intangible capital and can generate significant value when applied in the right context.

We are not aware of any New Zealand research that methodically considers different elements of Pacific culture (values, beliefs, practices, institutions) as forms of value-creating intangible capital and attempts to assess their contribution to our collective social, human, natural or physical capital stocks. Such research would be a valuable contribution to our understanding of Pacific peoples' contribution to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders

It would build on existing research that looks at specific examples of this value and contribution such as how the Pacific church network supported Pacific community effective responses to COVID-19 (see section 6.1).

2.1 Pacific worldviews

Like Māori, Pacific New Zealanders' view of the world and the environment they live in incorporates and reflects social, physical and meta-physical perspectives and realities. This includes important genealogies, community and family dynamics and other cultural protocols.

Pacific peoples in New Zealand encompass a range of backgrounds and experiences as well as ethnic, spiritual, religious and gender identities. However, as discussed in section 1, the majority of Pacific peoples in New Zealand are Polynesian and thus share many similarities, including in their perspectives on the world, their environment and their wellbeing.

Pacific peoples' culture is closely related to their wellbeing, and the two constructs are commonly considered together by Pacific peoples (Manuela & Sibley, 2014). The key values, beliefs and practices that shape their experience of wellbeing frequently include:

- a strong emphasis on cultural identity and the role of families and communities
- the central role of spirituality and religion in communal and family life and wellbeing
- a focus on collective consensus, practices, needs and outcomes

- clear expectations about respect, reciprocity and love and a sense of responsibility to self, others, environment and cultural protocols and practices (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022c).

“Pacific peoples are communal orientated, and this is why programmes should be inclusive of the wider family as well as the children.” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018, p. 36)

The value of these elements was apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Denston et al. (2022) describe how culture, language and identity are fundamental to the wellbeing of indigenous people and note the privilege of Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies during crises. They concluded that “culture, language, and identity ... should be at the fore of frameworks for socio-emotional learning, which should be localised within Indigenous understandings of wellbeing” (Denston et al. 2022, p. 385).

Pacific academics, community leaders and researchers have consistently referenced the role of culture and language in enabling the effective application of the Living Standards Framework (see section 3.1). Culture and cultural identity have been accepted in New Zealand as a key component of wellbeing since the first attempts were made to establish wellbeing measures through the Social Report in 2001. That early work identified the following outcomes:

“Cultural diversity is fostered. People have the right to express different cultural values and practices and to pass cultural traditions on to future generations. Our national identity reflects the values and aspirations of Māori, European/Pākehā, Pacific peoples and other groups and communities.” (Ministry of Social Development, 2001, p. 62).

“In Pacific cultures words cannot capture wellbeing, it’s in our stories, songs, our va/relationships etc. Difficult to distil into one word.” – Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022

2.2 Pacific community structures

Governance and community structures that were strong in the islands accompanied Pacific peoples to New Zealand. For many Pacific New Zealanders, these structures – “institutions” in the language of the Living Standards Framework – are still very relevant to their relationships, priorities and aspirations. New Zealand-born generations have developed contemporary representations of traditional approaches, reflecting their new physical, social and economic environment.

The church has replaced the predominance of village leadership and community life

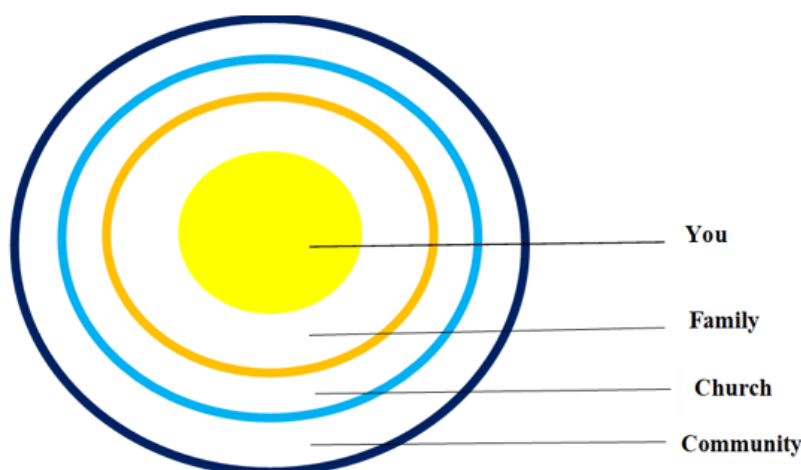
Pacific churches in New Zealand bring together people from diverse island communities and villages. They are places where social connections and networks are fostered and maintained, cultural practices and language are encouraged and reinforced and community cohesion and identity are created, reinforced and sustained.

As Thomsen et al. (2018) have previously noted, for the first wave of immigrants and for many New Zealand-born Pacific people, the church has replaced the predominance of village leadership and community life and has become the centre of their Pacific community in New Zealand (see Figure 4).

For first-wave migrants, ethnic-specific churches are a key community asset, allowing Pacific peoples to speak their native languages and practise cultural traditions freely. Churches have been a safe place for Pacific communities to continue to grow and nourish their cultures for subsequent generations. Many among current generations of Pacific peoples are more comfortable in religious institutions and enjoy the freedom to practise cultural customs and speak their native or parents' language in different forums.

Community consultation by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples on the All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy found that a significant majority of Pacific New Zealanders wanted to see religious faith and the role of churches amongst Pacific communities recognised as a valuable resource in cultural, social and economic terms.

Figure 4: Pacific community structures



Source: Thomsen et al. (2018).

Pacific New Zealanders send high levels of remittances to their home countries

Remittances in this context refers to the practice of sending money earned in New Zealand back to one's community of origin in the Pacific islands. It can be seen as a modern expression of the economic reciprocity and community care obligations common among traditional Pacific communities. Gifting often refers to donations made to churches (tithing) to fulfil religious obligations.

Pacific peoples in New Zealand (whether migrant or born here) give high levels of remittances, and these form a significant part of the income of some Pacific nations. The World Bank estimated that New Zealand sent \$2.4 billion to foreign countries in remittances in 2017. Of this, \$55 million was sent to Tonga, \$65 million was sent to Samoa and \$22 million was sent to Fiji (The Treasury, 2018). As of May 2021, data from the World Bank suggested remittances as a share of GDP for Tonga is 38%, while for Samoa it is 19%.⁴

⁴ See more: www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data

Remittances to the Pacific, mostly from New Zealand, Australia and the United States, remained steady through the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Howes & Surandiran, 2020).

Gifting is a reflection of reciprocity and obligation and is commonly practised in New Zealand as a means of strengthening relationships. While no formal data exists on the levels of gifting, consultations with community groups and leaders highlight the role that gifting plays in strengthening social cohesion and reinforcing family relationships both in New Zealand and in the homelands.

Remitting and gifting is an important obligation for Pacific peoples and economically important for the receiving countries and institutions. It also reduces the private financial wealth of Pacific peoples in New Zealand, many of whom already experience significant financial stress. As such and like many cultural obligations, it can be a cause of tension between older and younger community members. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 explore trends in Pacific incomes and wealth.

Community discussions with Pacific commentators and leaders in the development of this paper point to growing differences between cultural and family traditions and the more progressive expectations by young Pacific peoples growing up in New Zealand. This reflects the different perspectives between first-generation parents and their New Zealand-born children in areas such as gifting, remittances and family obligations beyond extended family relationships.

2.3 Pacific aspirations

The vision statement of the 2018 Pacific Aotearoa Lalanga Fou report,⁵ carried forward into the new All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy (see section 3.2) as a call to action, is “We are confident in our endeavours, we are a thriving, resilient and prosperous Pacific Aotearoa” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022c, p. 9).

Pacific communities have consistently expressed strong aspirations to actively design and lead their own innovative solutions and to reaffirm their commitment to prosperous families and communities (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018).

*“The things we want aren’t secret, but still the same things we wanted 20, 30 years ago.”
– Pacific parent, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022*

New Zealand’s understanding of the wellbeing aspirations of Pacific New Zealanders has deepened over time, with distinct strides in the last several years. Pacific cultural models in New Zealand affirm the importance of cultural practices in enabling Pacific communities to respond to new ideas and challenges in an ever-changing global context (Pasefika Proud, 2012). It is crucial that policy makers understand the deeper meanings of Pacific cultural practices and the implications for wellbeing. Not only does this add value and diversity in our broader thinking, but it also allows us to understand the diversity of Pacific cultures and recognise its contribution to New Zealand society.

⁵ Lalanga Fou describes a new policy approach akin to the traditional art of weaving (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018).

The visibility of Pacific role models and the use of Pacific languages are a part of these aspirations (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022a). The visibility of the Pacific contribution has noticeably increased over the last decade as more Pacific New Zealanders are appearing in parliamentary representation, the arts and drama, sports, mainstream media, governance and academia.

The number of Pacific New Zealanders nominated and awarded honours such as Queen's Service Medals across a range of sectors highlights and reflects the across-the-board contribution that Pacific New Zealanders continue to make to New Zealand society. Since 2013, there have been seven Knighthoods and Damehoods bestowed and 140 recipients across a range of other honours (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, personal communication, 15 February 2023).

2.4 Pacific youth's perceptions of wellbeing

Research with Pacific youth confirms that their views of wellbeing and their aspirations are similar to those of Pacific adults. While there are areas of difference, as discussed above with respect to tithing and remittances, Pacific young people report that they highly value their cultural and ethnic identity and want to see it reflected, championed and celebrated around them. A recent study commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development found that:

"All young people in the study were proud to identify as their specific ethnicity(ies) (e.g. Samoan, Tongan etc) and as Pacific peoples more broadly. Their culture, identity and sense of belonging were tightly enmeshed ... Young people felt connected to their culture and identity through relationships with family, their peers, and communities. Importance was placed on cultural values, collective wellbeing, and customary practices inherent in Pacific cultures." (Malatest International, 2021, p. 5)

Consultations undertaken by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples focusing on the wellbeing of Pacific youth⁶ reveal that youth are looking for action-oriented work that highlights the importance to them of inclusion and impact – "if we're not supporting everyone, we're failing". Consultations reinforced the importance of strong connections to and within Pacific communities and how critical a sense of belonging can be for this population.

Youth reported that their ethnic languages, cultures and identities are critically important to them and that places/spaces where these are valued and celebrated can make a big difference to their sense of self-worth and wellbeing.

Cultural competency and capability in Pacific models and priorities are important elements in improving the experience and active participation of Pacific peoples in the education, health and other government-led or government-funded systems and services.

Participants shared their concerns for disadvantaged groups, adding that these must be prioritised so their perspectives, experiences and needs are reflected in planning and delivery of services and interventions. Pacific youth highlighted the importance of inclusiveness as reflected in their concern for the participation and engagement of smaller Pacific ethnic communities (particularly non-Polynesian communities), those who whakapapa both Māori and Pacific, low-income families, domestic violence survivors and older Pacific community members.

⁶ Wellbeing Framework community consultations (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, personal communication, 2022).

Concerns around equity and inclusivity were emphasised with the expectation that these values must be embedded and recognised across New Zealand to ensure that disadvantaged groups within the wider Pacific umbrella are identified and supported.

The desire for greater representation and inclusion by Pacific youth in the decision-making processes that impact them and their future is critical as young people have solutions – “if we aren’t asked, then the idea just stays as an idea”. This is in line with the general view that today’s young people are highly motivated to generate positive social change.

“Social entrepreneurship may have great potential to mobilize youth to engage in efforts to achieve major social objectives, including employment creation, poverty reduction, inclusion and integration.” (United Nations, 2020, p. 65)

2.5 Natural environment and climate change

“Pacific New Zealanders hold great value and respect for the natural environment as part of their cultural connection to the natural environment. The Pacific New Zealand diaspora population have strong and traditional interest in regional issues such as the threats posed by climate change to the natural resources of the region.” (Thomsen et al., 2018, p. 21)

The close connection between land and identity is a key component of Pacific New Zealanders’ relationship with Pacific island countries. The potential loss or degradation of lands in the islands as a result of climate change is causing anxiety especially for first-generation New Zealanders and Pacific youth. There is also a growing concern by Pacific and other New Zealand youth about the impacts of climate change on New Zealand.

“The advances in virtual and social networks have meant that the connections between communities in New Zealand and in the Pacific are close and almost instantaneous and the exchange of information is highly active and robust especially in the areas of natural resource management [and the wellbeing of home nations].” (Thomsen et al., 2018, p. 21)

This was evident in the issues raised at the New Zealand Pacific Youth Leaders conference undertaken in 2022.⁷ The regional agenda for meetings of Pacific Island Leaders in the Pacific Forum and subsequent declarations from the Pacific Island Leaders Forum⁸ throughout the last 15 years have highlighted the significant concerns shared by Pacific leaders on the impacts of climate change and its implications for the stability and security of the region.

⁷ Read more: www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/477841/pacific-youth-leaders-gather-in-nz-to-discuss-global-issues

⁸ See for example: Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise (2021); Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Action Now (2020); 2019 Communique: Boe Declaration on Regional Security 2017; Waiheke Declaration on Sustainable Development (2011); Biketawa Declaration (1997).

3 Pacific wellbeing frameworks

3.1 Cultural models for wellbeing

The Living Standards Framework is increasingly compatible with wellbeing as understood by Pacific New Zealanders

The Treasury's Living Standards Framework (LSF) was developed in 2011 to prompt thinking about policy impacts across different dimensions of wellbeing, as well as long-term and distributional issues. It has evolved over the past decade, most recently to recognise the role of institutions in wellbeing and to better reflect culture and child wellbeing.⁹

The LSF considers what is important for the wellbeing of New Zealanders as a whole. The new LSF released in 2021 was evolved to better reflect child wellbeing and culture, including being more compatible with wellbeing as understood in te ao Māori and by Pacific peoples. This includes the more visible inclusion of culture and institutions into the framework. However, the LSF does not attempt to comprehensively incorporate everything that is important for te ao Māori and Pacific perspectives. While it includes some of the most important concepts at a high level, the intention is that the LSF should be used alongside in-depth frameworks such as He Ara Waiora for a Māori perspective on wellbeing or Lalanga Fou All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy for a Pacific perspective on wellbeing (The Treasury, 2021).

As discussed in section 2.1, spirituality, relationships with family and community, and culture are paramount to the wellbeing of Pacific New Zealanders. The significant priority placed by Pacific communities on the maintenance of Pacific values and belief above the pursuit of material comforts and aspirations is a defining characteristic of the Pacific community. The emphasis is in large part shared by Māori and is reflected in the Māori wellbeing framework He Ara Waiora, a companion to the LSF.¹⁰

Fonofale model is a useful framework for considering Pacific epistemology

There are a range of research and delivery models that have been developed to meet the needs of agencies across the public sector. The Treasury uses the Fonofale model to express concepts of Pacific wellbeing (rather than other models in use in the Pacific research community for similar purposes) partly because it is well aligned with the LSF especially with the inclusion of te ao Māori concepts.¹¹

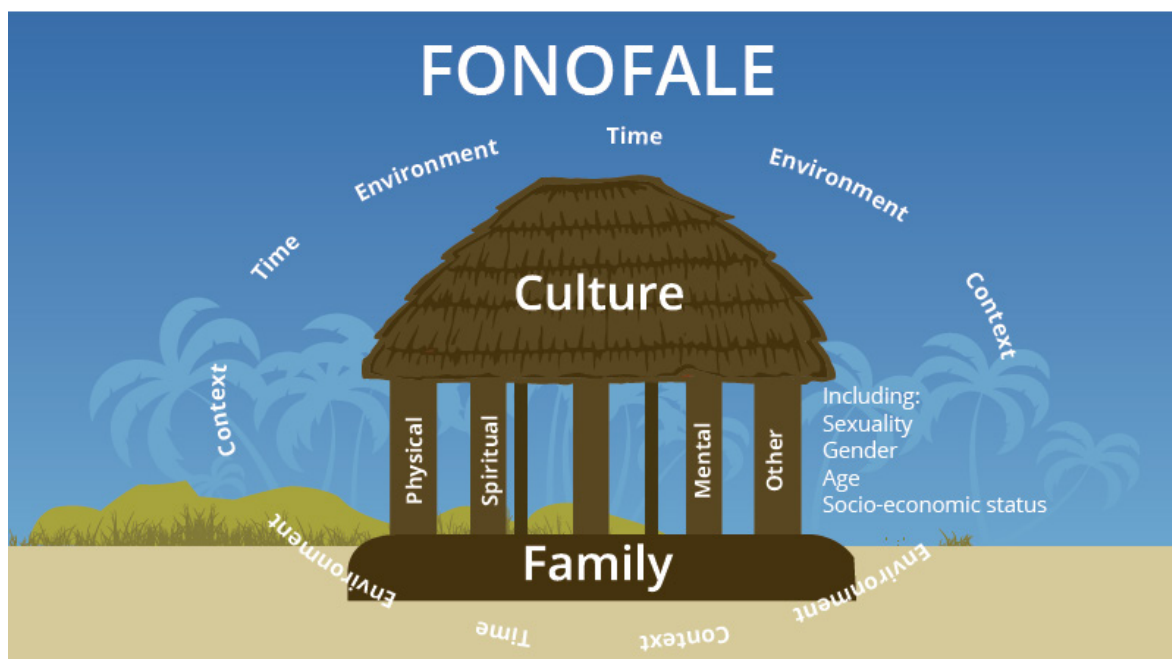
The Fonofale model expresses the Pacific concepts of wellbeing and “wellness” (see Figure 5). This model is a pan-Pacific model and has relevance and applicability across diverse Pacific communities in New Zealand.

⁹ Read more: www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/our-living-standards-framework

¹⁰ Read more: www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/he-ara-waiora

¹¹ Fonofale means a meeting house. Other Pacific models include Nga Vaka o Kāiga Tapu, Tiavaevae and Kakala.

Figure 5: The Fonofale model



Source: New Zealand Human Rights Commission (2020, p. 5), based on Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann's model.

The model was originally constructed to meet the needs of Pacific epistemology and originally focused on the delivery of health initiatives to Pacific New Zealanders.¹² The model is based on a typical Pacific fale/bure/house with each of the walls, the floor and roof making up a key component of wellbeing (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001). The circular shape represents the continuity and holistic nature of Pacific epistemology.

The Fonofale model recognises Pacific peoples' unique relationship with the environment, the time and the context in which they exist. The model expresses that, while Pacific peoples are continuing to maintain their own cultural norms, they are also adapting, evolving and responding to the environment and the context they live in.

The model highlights family as the foundation for all Pacific peoples. It suggests any framework for understanding and describing Pacific peoples' wellbeing must highlight family as the dominant relationship that Pacific peoples acquire from the cradle to the grave. It considers culture as the overarching element under which all important aspects to Pacific peoples are created and maintained, including values and belief systems. It highlights the key influence that culture plays across Pacific peoples' social cohesion, human capabilities and financial and physical capital (Thomsen et al., 2018).

The four pou (posts) holding the house up are representations of the continuous interactions between family and culture and its contribution to the stability and resilience of the structure. The pou of the fale can be described as follows:

- The Physical wellbeing pou represents the physical self, affected by organic and inorganic substances.

¹² Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann, a community health specialist, co-designed the original model to assist the delivery of services to Pacific communities in the health sector in 1970.

- The Spiritual wellbeing pou involves the Pacific conception of creation and the meaning and purpose of life, often reflecting the values and beliefs of Christian principles and practices.
- The Mental wellbeing pou recognises the importance of mental and emotional health and wellbeing.
- The Other pou acknowledges that there are various other crucial aspects that contribute to Pacific peoples' wellbeing such as sexuality and gender, age and socio-economic status.

The Fonofale's four pou dimensions of wellbeing are closely linked with one another. Working together, they stabilise the fale where a loss or gain in one area has an impact on all other parts of the structure. Wellbeing is a holistic and emergent property of the whole and is a collective as well as an individual asset. When we discuss or measure wellbeing and living standards for Pacific peoples, we must consider the impact of actions holistically on the relationships among the four critical dimensions in Pacific life – people, the environment, culture and spirituality (Tamasese & Parsons, 2019) – and we must think about the impact on the collective as well as on the individuals within it.

The Fonofale model also highlights the role of culture as an enabler, a connector and a safety net in which innovation and risk taking across all dimensions of the framework can be encouraged.¹³ Research on innovation and risk taking and its contribution to entrepreneurship and social enterprise within Pacific communities is being undertaken by Pacific non-government academics in collaboration with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples and the Ministry of Social Development (Moana Research, 2020).

3.2 All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy and Outcomes Framework

From September 2018 to February 2021, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples consulted with Pacific communities across New Zealand to establish Pacific aspirations for life in Aotearoa. In total, over 2,500 Pacific peoples were included in the talanoa.¹⁴

The Pacific Aotearoa Lalanga Fou presents four Pacific wellbeing goals developed based on those Pacific aspirations (see Figure 6).

¹³ Culture in this sense can be considered as an intangible asset. See Corrado et al. (2022).

¹⁴ A cultural term for communication and consultation that is interactive and reflective.

Figure 6: The four Lalanga Fou Pacific aspirations



Source: Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2018, p. 9).

Drawing on this knowledge base, in 2022, the government approved the All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy, which sets out its strategic priorities and implementation intentions for improving Pacific wellbeing outcomes (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022c). The strategy seeks to respond to the need for better coordination and alignment of wellbeing activities and programmes across government and to continue to deliver on the vision of the earlier Pacific Aotearoa Lalanga Fou report (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018).

The Ministry for Pacific Peoples is working with the Treasury and other stakeholders to identify appropriate wellbeing indicators and measures based on the four Lalanga Fou aspirations and associated desired outcomes, based on its consultation with Pacific communities. These will be used in further developing the Pacific Wellbeing Outcomes Framework (see Figure 7) and a Pacific wellbeing reporting dashboard.

Figure 7: Lalanga Fou outcomes for Pacific communities



Source: Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2022c, p. 30).

We have used the Pacific wellbeing aspirations and a selection of the outcomes in the Ministry for Pacific Peoples framework to structure the remainder of this report:

- Thriving Pacific languages, cultures and identities – section 4.
- Prosperous Pacific communities – section 5.
- Resilient and healthy Pacific peoples – section 6.
- Confident, thriving and resilient Pacific young people – section 7.

3.3 Data limitations

Data gaps continue to pose a challenge to our ability to undertake comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis relevant to Pacific wellbeing. This paper acknowledges the gaps in the data available about Pacific New Zealanders across a range of wellbeing domains.

Analysing large sets of administrative and survey data from Stats NZ's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) can help fill in some of the data gaps. The IDI allows authorised researchers to link anonymised data of individuals, households, businesses and organisations across different sources. It enables researchers to study the wellbeing of Pacific peoples with different cultures and identities. For example, IDI researchers might be able to shed more light on the wellbeing of disabled Pacific peoples or dive deeper into various aspects of Pacific women's wellbeing.

Coordination and alignment of agency data with official data sets is a particular challenge. The All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy aims to address this throughout its implementation with the support of key government agencies.

Another challenge is that surveys designed by non-Pacific peoples to collect information from or about Pacific communities may lack important cultural context. Cultural assumptions embedded in the survey design or research questions may lead to inaccurate or misleading analysis and conclusions. For example, a survey may implicitly assume that wellbeing is an individual rather than a group characteristic or that seeking individual material wellbeing is a universal goal.

Awareness of this issue and related issues of data sovereignty has substantially increased in recent decades, thanks in large part to the work of Māori academics examining similar issues for Māori.¹⁵ In August 2022, Stats NZ signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples and the Pacific Data Sovereignty Network to ensure that future data collection will “acknowledge the value of the Pacific voice in the data system”.¹⁶

Last, but not least, the evidence on the influential role of family and community connections in the health and wellbeing of Pacific communities is growing. Frieling et al. (2018) note the “need to better understand and quantify the effect these relationships have in New Zealand and how they could be supported to increase their effectiveness”.

¹⁵ For example, Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 1999 book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Zed Books).

¹⁶ Read more: www.stats.govt.nz/news/relationship-agreements-will-unleash-the-potential-of-data-for-pacific-peoples/

4 Thriving Pacific languages, cultures and identities

4.1 Pacific languages

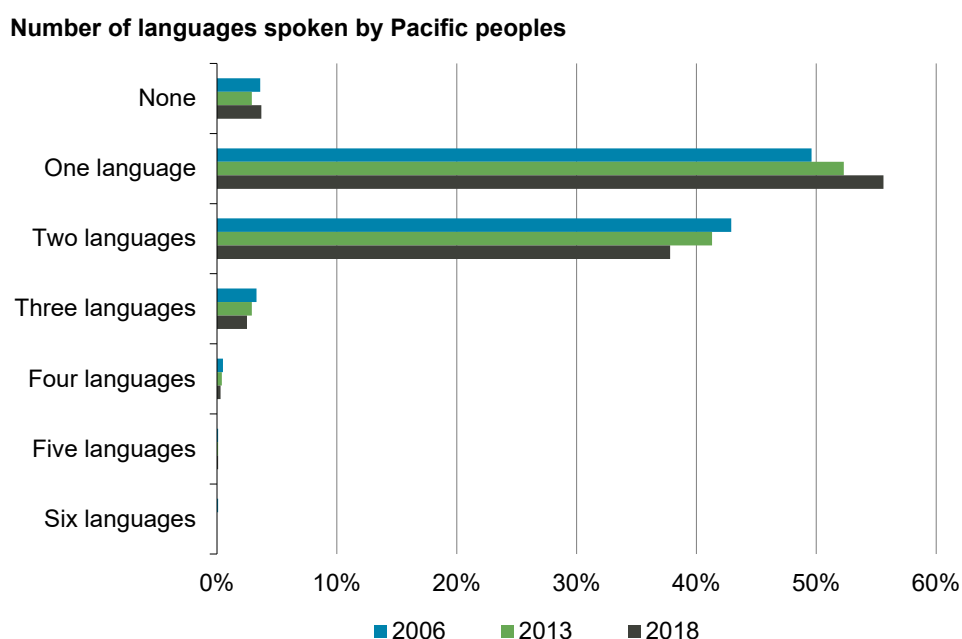
Pacific languages are inseparable from Pacific cultures and identities. Participants in Pacific community consultations wanted to see that “Pacific languages and cultures are valued and recognised as an asset in Aotearoa” and “more Pacific peoples speaking their own languages” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018, p. 12).

Pacific languages are declining in New Zealand

The proportion of ethnic speakers in New Zealand is, however, declining across almost all Pacific languages according to the Pacific Languages Strategy 2022.¹⁷ Over the last two decades, the significant decline in most Pacific language speakers has been driven by the lack of next-generation speakers. The strategy notes that, across all Pacific languages, only 16% of those aged under 15 years speak their heritage language. This ratio is as low as 7% in some languages. The languages most at risk of disappearing from New Zealand are those of New Zealand realm countries: Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau. (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022a).

Data from the 2018 Census shows that 95% of New Zealanders speak English and 78% are monolingual. While the proportion of New Zealanders who speak more than one language is increasing over time (from 17.5% in 2006 to just over 20% in 2018), the proportion of multilingual Pacific peoples is decreasing (see Figure 8). Monolingualism is more common in young Pacific peoples (see Table 2).

Figure 8: The proportion of multilingual Pacific peoples is decreasing



Source: 2006–18 Censuses (Stats NZ).

¹⁷ Rotuman, the language of the Fijian island group Rotuma, is the only exception.

Table 2: Number of languages spoken, Pacific peoples, 2018

	Under 15 years (%)	15–29 years (%)	30–64 years (%)	65 years and over (%)
None	10.7	0.1	0.1	0.1
One language	63.0	58.9	47.9	40.8
Two languages	24.4	38.5	47.9	54.5
Three languages	1.6	2.2	3.4	3.8
Four languages	0.1	0.3	0.6	0.7
Five languages	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Six languages	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: 2018 Census (Stats NZ).

Declines in Pacific languages have a negative impact on wellbeing

The Pacific Languages Strategy highlights the negative impact of monolingualism:

“Pacific languages have come under increasing pressure from public monolingualism in Aotearoa, and English is becoming more prominent in spaces that have traditionally been bastions of Pacific language use, such as homes and churches. While the use of Pacific languages in Aotearoa New Zealand has continued, it has often been confined to these private domains.

The limited perceived value of Pacific languages outside of these domains has contributed to a decline in the number of Pacific language speakers across generations and languages. This decline carries with it a loss of Pacific knowledge, histories, and genealogical connections.” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022a, p. 17).

4.2 Social connections and support

Section 3 emphasises the importance of family and community networks and how social connectedness and support drives wellbeing and resilience of Pacific communities. Frieling et al. (2018) reviewed the literature and growing evidence on the role of social and community connections and support networks and commented (without specific reference to Pacific communities) that:

“Social connections play an important role across many aspects of peoples’ lives, from finding employment and getting advice on important decisions, to receiving support during difficult times and having someone to enjoy life and relax with.” (Frieling et al., 2018, p. 5)

This is particularly relevant to the wellbeing of Pacific peoples as they live their lives communally.

“For Pacific peoples, wellbeing is holistic, and in times of crisis, the needs of others are just as important as one’s own needs: when every person is well, the entire community thrives.” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2021, p. 20)

This perspective is also highlighted by independent researchers and Pacific academics – for example, see Tamasese and Parsons (2019).

“If we’re not supporting everyone, we’re failing.” – Pacific youth leader, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022

The Pacific community’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent example of this. The Ministry for Pacific Peoples surveyed 2,500 Pacific peoples in 2021 to learn about volunteering in Pacific communities during the pandemic. It found that:

- over half of the survey participants reported providing increased social support during the COVID-19 lockdown
- nearly 40% of participants reported increased caregiving for the elderly, providing administrative support or serving as a cultural leader
- participants echoed that the lockdown confirmed the importance of family, the *vā*¹⁸ (their relationships with each other) and being part of a collective
- Pacific peoples quickly moved community, church and social events to online platforms to stay connected (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2021, p. 20).¹⁹

Pacific peoples’ relationships remain strong with family but not with friends

The LSF Dashboard illustrates the relative strength of social connections among Pacific peoples. The multidimensional wellbeing analysis shows that, compared to the rest of the population, Pacific peoples have lower average wellbeing across all but one wellbeing domain: the *family and friends* domain (see Figure 9). However, this overall number masks differences in contact between family and friends.

Pacific peoples’ contact with family has been relatively stable over time. The General Social Survey (GSS) found that 73% of Pacific peoples had face-to-face contact with family at least once a week in 2021 compared to 74% in 2016.²⁰ This is much higher than the average for the total population (63% in 2021). However, the proportion of Pacific peoples having contact with friends has dropped significantly in the last few years. In 2016, 87% of Pacific peoples had face-to-face contact with friends at least once a week. This dropped to 81% in 2018 (before the pandemic) and 70% in 2021. This is a sharper decline than across the total population (from 77% in 2016 to 70% in 2021). Pacific peoples’ contact with friends is still as frequent as the rest of the population, but it used to be much more frequent.

¹⁸ *Vā* is a Pacific concept that refers to the space that exists between people and in which exists flows of relationality, including love, respect and reciprocity.

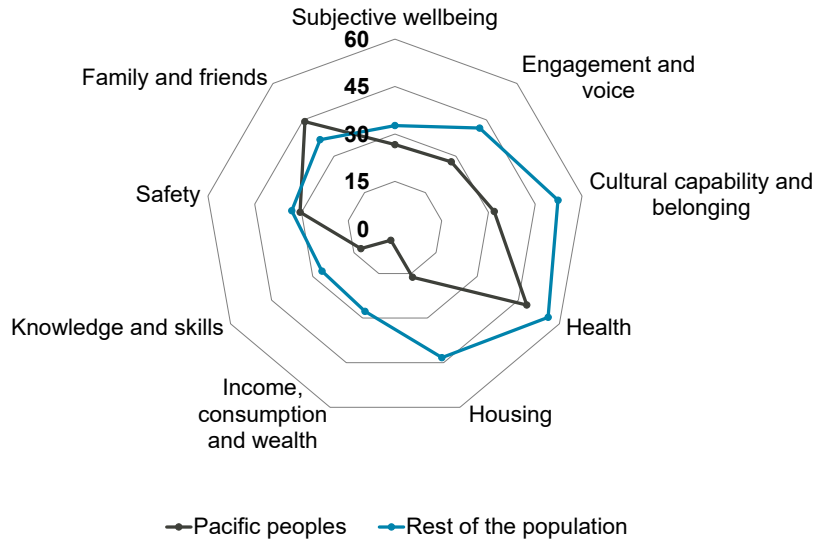
¹⁹ Section 6.1 provides more information about the resilience of Pacific communities in the face of COVID-19 and highlights the important role Pacific community leaders played in delivering and facilitating support to the most vulnerable within their communities.

²⁰ Caution is advised when comparing 2021 GSS data with previous iterations. Data collection for the GSS 2021 was disrupted by the second nationwide lockdown, which began in August 2021 during the Delta variant outbreak. This meant the sample size for the GSS 2021 was significantly smaller than for previous collections. For more information, see <https://datainfoplus.stats.govt.nz/Item/nz.govt.stats/2ed50ad6-8ab8-47df-883d-210a51b50043>

The GSS also found that the proportions of Pacific peoples reporting feeling lonely some or a lot of the time has also gradually increased (from 14% in 2014 to 19% in 2021), in line with the trend across the population (from 14% to 18%).²¹

Figure 9: Pacific peoples are less likely to report high wellbeing, except in the family and friends domain (LSF Dashboard indicator)

(% reported high wellbeing, 2018)



Source: The Treasury's calculations using Stats NZ's GSS 2018.

Pacific women play an important role in maintaining social connections

Like other indigenous cultures, Pacific women are influential in determining wellbeing outcomes for their families and communities. They create strong networks and support structures and work to keep Pacific traditions alive with strong family and church networks. Their wellbeing is critical to the wellbeing of their communities, within each generation and intergenerationally. The contribution of Pacific women during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the essential workers category, was significant. Information on the impact of COVID-19 on Pacific women can be found in section 6.1. The ongoing challenges facing Pacific women in the labour market and in education are covered in sections 5.1 and 7.3.

²¹ Ethnic data from the GSS may have a large margin of error due to small sample size (especially in 2021) and should be used with caution. Social connections data was downloaded from Stats NZ's Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand dashboard in December 2022 – see https://statisticsnz.shinyapps.io/wellbeingindicators/_w_b38fa4c7/_w_0889e6e1/_w_690e245b/?page=indicators&class=Social&type=Social%20connections

4.3 Rainbow communities

Pre-colonial Pacific culture celebrated a diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations. The Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2022d) has found that many Pacific New Zealanders want to see diversity recognised and celebrated within contemporary Pacific communities. This is reflected in the All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy, which presents supporting rainbow communities as one of its goals.

As the Pacific community grows and evolves, so do the terms it uses to describe its rainbow population. The Government's Pacific Employment Action Plan notes that Pacific peoples do not always resonate with LGBTQIA+ identities and may better identify with the term MVPFAFF+ (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022b) – a term coined by Phylesha Acton-Brown, a prominent member of the Pacific rainbow community, that refers to “mahu, vakasalewa, palopa, fa’afafine, akava’ine, fakaleiti (leiti) and fakafifine” – encompassing many indigenous identities from Hawai’i, Tahiti, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga and Niue (Le Va, n.d.). Note that the cultural terms that comprise this definition do not encompass lesbian Pacific women, who are now accepted as part of the rainbow community.

“We are not all the same, [we are] not starting from the same place – we need to nail who we are in totality.” – Pacific rainbow person, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022

Data on outcomes for rainbow members of Pacific communities is particularly limited. The standard surveys include few Pacific rainbow people, which makes it difficult to make statistically significant findings.

Stats NZ Household Economic Survey data for rainbow communities (regardless of their ethnicity) highlights lower rates of employment and income (despite greater levels of education) and higher rates of housing insecurity and feelings of anxiety, nervousness and worry. Members of rainbow communities are also more likely to suffer from a disability (Stats NZ, 2021c).

Rainbow Pacific New Zealanders can face multifaceted discrimination

Discrimination against rainbow communities in New Zealand is visible in education and employment outcomes, including seeking employment as well as treatment at work. Difficulty accessing education and workplaces places significant additional wellbeing barriers for rainbow communities and creates and exacerbates mental health and other challenges. In more recent times, employers have been making efforts to address workplace gender discrimination particularly in the public service, acknowledging that more work needs to be done in this area.²²

²² Human Rights Act 1993 (Parts 1 and 2) and Employment Relations Act 2020 (sections 117 and 118).

People's economic and wellbeing outcomes are influenced by intersecting factors that comprise their identity such as their ethnicity, disability status, citizenship, family wealth or body size, along with gender identity and sexual orientation. Pacific peoples are already discriminated against in the labour market, and so are many (although not all) groups of rainbow people. The intersectionality of the two can bring particular disadvantage to Pacific rainbow people. They can face multiple sources of disadvantage in the labour market and in accessing health and social services.

Pacific rainbow youth have many challenges

Pacific rainbow students have more challenges compared to other year 9–13 students,²³ according to a large-scale youth wellbeing survey conducted jointly by several New Zealand universities in 2019.²⁴

Most Pacific rainbow young people who participated in this survey reported positive family and school environments, high levels of volunteering and moderate or good health. However, only 52% of them reported good wellbeing. Close to half reported clinically significant symptoms of depression and more than two in five reported serious thoughts of suicide in the last year (Tiatia-Seath et al., 2021).

²³ Other student groups include Pacific and non-rainbow, Pākehā and rainbow, and Pākehā and non-rainbow.

²⁴ Aotearoa New Zealand Youth2000 series of health and wellbeing surveys began in 2001 and involved a total of over 36,000 students. See www.youth19.ac.nz for all data. Reported survey information is based on A Youth19 Brief: Pacific Rainbow Young People (Tiatia-Seath et al., 2021).

5 Prosperous Pacific communities

5.1 Employment and income

Pacific peoples are more likely than other New Zealanders to experience unemployment, low employment and low income due to lower skills and qualifications, lower fluency and proficiency in English, field of study and the industries they work in, preferences for non-wage components of the job, discrimination and inequality.

Turning the tide on these labour market outcomes would not only improve the wellbeing of Pacific peoples but also strengthen their contribution to the economy, which is significant at present but not yet fully utilised (The Treasury, 2018). The demographics presented in section 1.3 emphasise the importance of Pacific peoples to New Zealand's future labour force and economy.

Pacific peoples have higher rates of economic inactivity and underutilisation

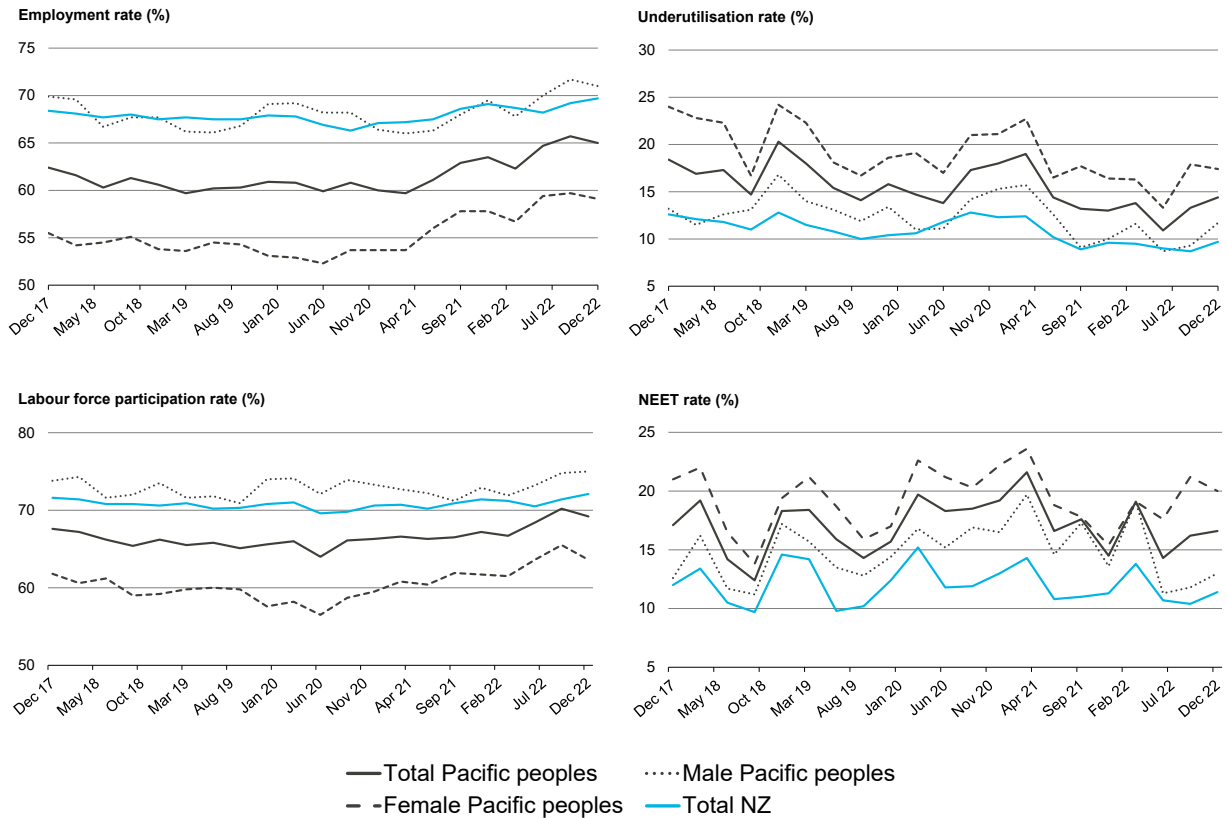
Pacific peoples on average have poorer outcomes in a range of labour market areas, including lower employment, higher unemployment, more older people having to upskill and work, higher underutilisation (people in work who want to work more hours) and lower labour market participation than the general population (see Table 3 and Figures 10 and 11).

Table 3: Labour market statistics, Pacific peoples and total population, 2022

	Pacific peoples (%)	Total population (%)
Labour force participation rate	69.2	71.7
Employment rate	65.0	69.3
Male	71.0	74.0
Female	59.1	64.8
Unemployment rate	6.1	3.4
Male	5.2	3.3
Female	7.0	3.5
Underutilisation rate	14.4	9.4

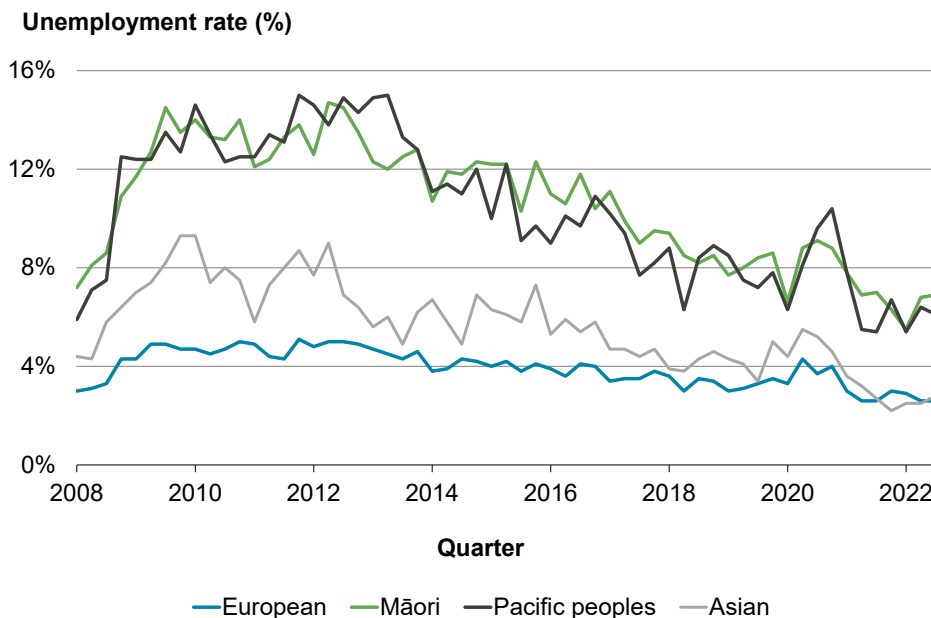
Source: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2022).

Figure 10: Pacific peoples' employment trends



Source: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2022), based on Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) (Stats NZ).

Figure 11: A higher proportion of Māori and Pacific peoples are not employed



Source: HLFS (Stats NZ).

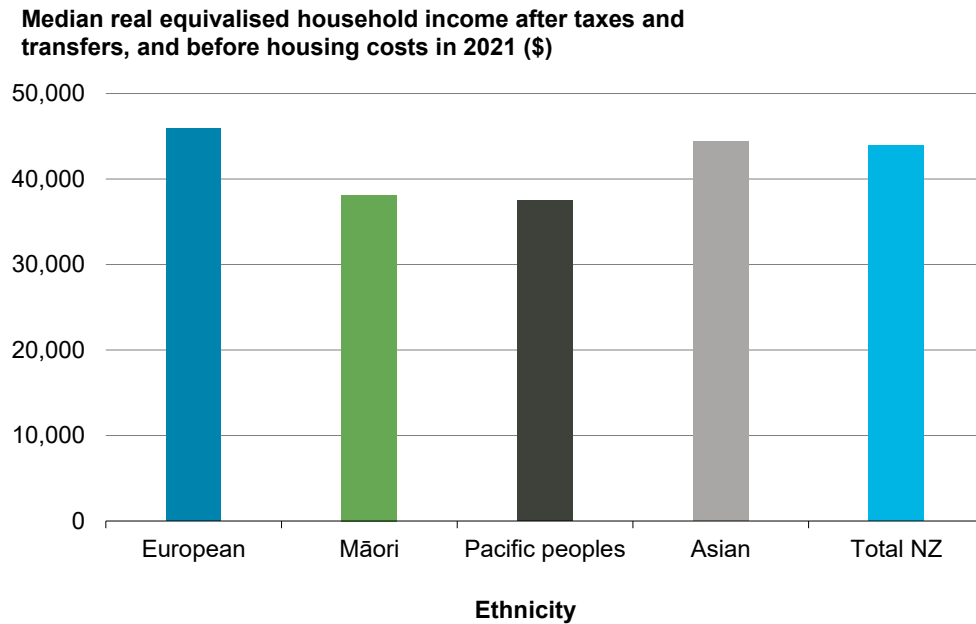
New Zealand and international evidence shows that unemployment has one of the strongest relationships to self-reported wellbeing – for example, see El-Jahel et al. (2023). Unemployment tends to have lasting costs to the health and mental wellbeing of individuals and families. It can also reduce their prospects as skills degrade and have

wider flow-on impacts to financial stability and demand in the economy, which can be amplified when there are concentrations of unemployment in specific communities or across regions. This is particularly relevant for Pacific communities given their age profile and concentration in particular geographic areas of New Zealand (Pacheco et al., 2022).

Pacific peoples earn lower incomes

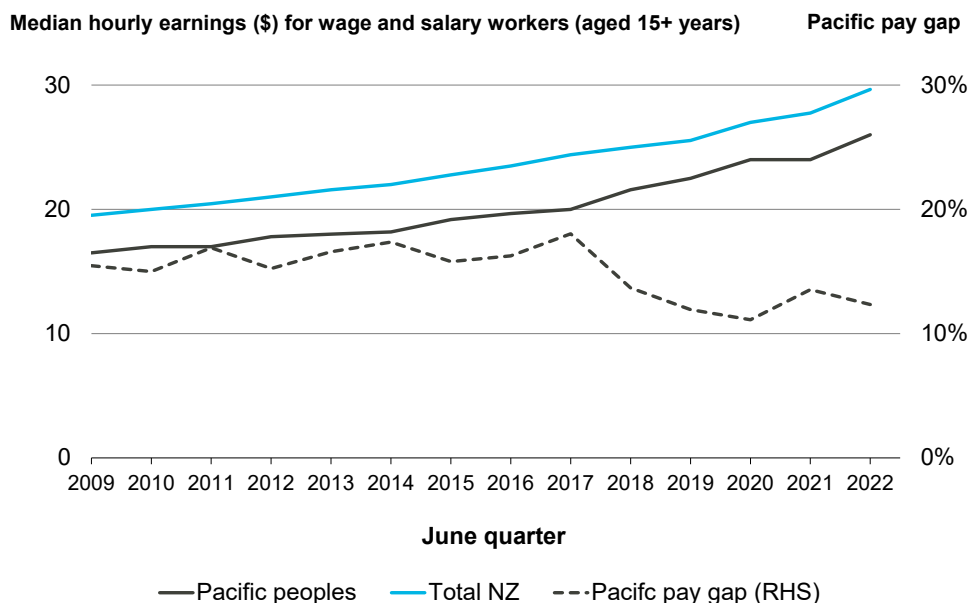
Pacific peoples continue to earn lower wages than other ethnic groups (see Figure 12). Figure 13 demonstrates that the Pacific pay gap remains significant.

Figure 12: Pacific peoples earn the lowest annual disposable income compared to other ethnicities (LSF Dashboard indicator)



Source: HLFS (Stats NZ).

Figure 13: Pacific pay gap remains significant



Source: Authors' calculations using Stats NZ's Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand data.

Note: Pacific pay gap is the difference between median earnings of Pacific peoples relative to median earnings of total population.

Pacific peoples are more likely to be in low-paying jobs and sectors

Labour market outcomes reflect a combination of factors. These include skills and qualifications, job characteristics and the industries that Pacific peoples work in (Cochrane and Pacheco, 2022). Pacific peoples also have low completion rates in tertiary education (see section 7.1) and high representation of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET). This has resulted in an over-representation of Pacific peoples in jobs that require fewer educational qualifications and are often low income and unstable.

The 2018 Census highlighted that half of employed Pacific men were machinery operators and drivers or labourers compared to 28% of European men. About every fifth Pacific woman was a labourer compared to one in every 12 for European women (Pacheco et al., 2022).²⁵

These jobs are often low paying and may be impacted most during financial crises and pandemics. In the 3 years prior to the pandemic (2017–19), Pacific men were concentrated in manufacturing (27%), construction (14%) and transport, postal and warehousing (10%). Pacific women were mostly employed in healthcare and social assistance (16%), manufacturing (13%) and administrative and support services (10%) (Pacheco et al., 2022).

Pacheco et al. (2022) also found that some of these industries (especially manufacturing, construction, and healthcare and social assistance) were hardest hit by COVID-19 restrictions (particularly in terms of lower wage growth). The COVID-19 restrictions also had a greater impact on Auckland residents (especially in South Auckland where many Pacific peoples live). Evidence on the pandemic's labour market impacts shows that generally young people, low-skilled workers and ethnic minorities were disproportionately impacted. Section 6.1 includes more about the impacts of COVID-19 on Pacific peoples.

*“Look at the kinds of industries we work in, trades. No one's telling us we can't do it, but no one's telling us we can. No one's telling us we can be doctors or astronauts.”
– Pacific school leaver, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022*

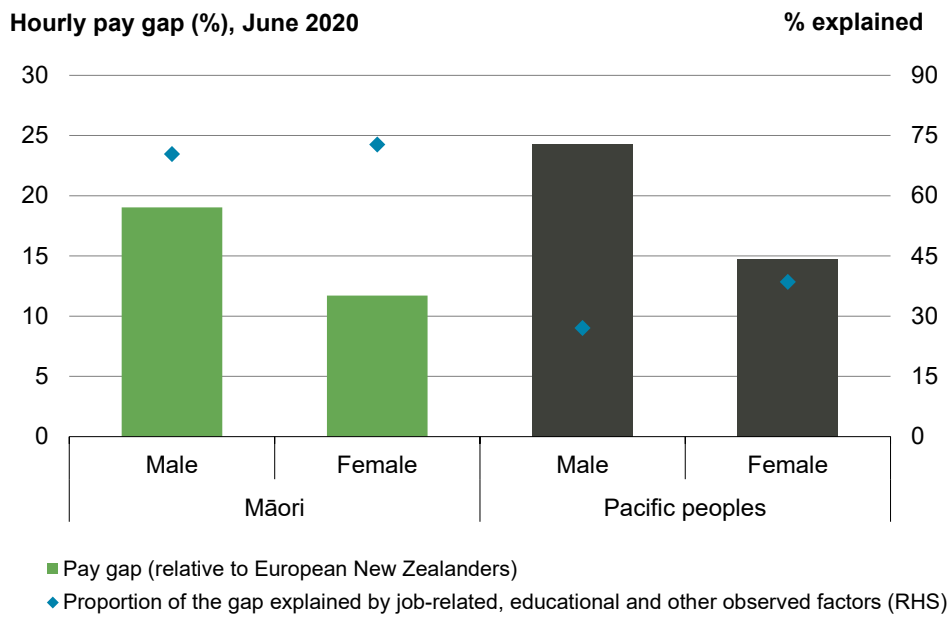
Not all of the Pacific wage gap can be explained by qualifications or jobs

However, most of the ethnicity pay gap can't be explained by qualifications or job-related and other factors observable in the data. After accounting for a wide variety of contributing factors and adjustments for sample biases, Cochrane and Pacheco (2022) found that only 27% of the pay gap for Pacific men, and 39% for Pacific women, could be explained (see Figure 14).

*“The remaining portion of the Pacific Pay Gap is likely to reflect a range of causes that cannot be quantified or disentangled in this analysis – such as not including other factors of importance as they weren't observed in the data (for example, literacy proficiency or field of study for qualification attained); ethnic differences in preferences for non-wage components of the job; unconscious bias; and discrimination.”
(Cochrane and Pacheco, 2022, p. 1)*

²⁵ About the same number of Pacific women were clerical and administrative workers or community and personal service workers. In comparison, 31% of European women were clerical and administrative workers and 16% were community and personal service workers.

Figure 14: Most of the ethnicity pay gap can't be explained by qualifications or job-related and other factors



Source: Cochrane and Pacheco (2022) using HLFS data.

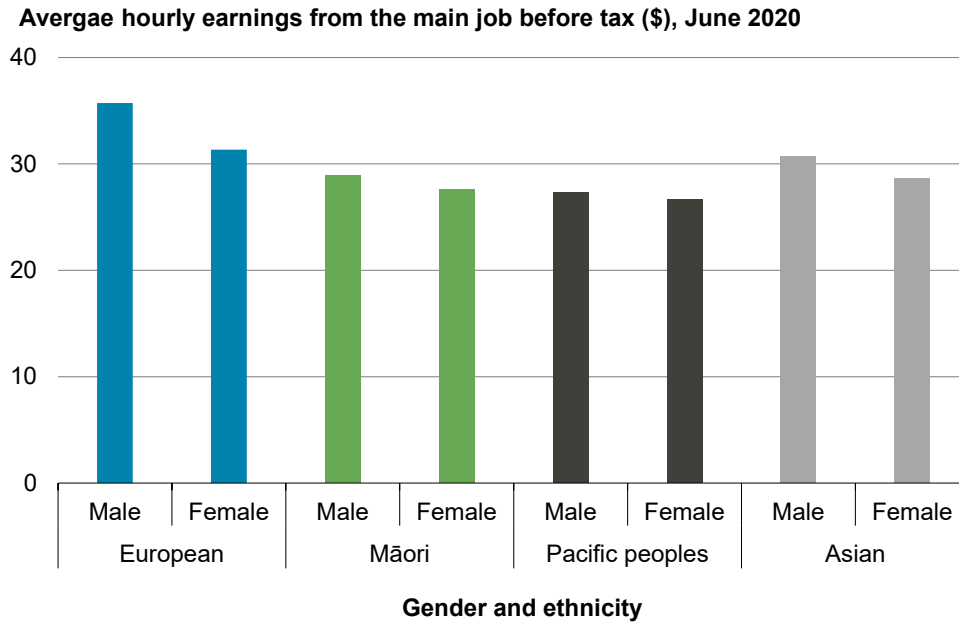
Pacific women earn less than others

Pacific men and women both earn less than other ethnic groups in the labour market. Cochrane and Pacheco (2022) estimated that Pacific women earned 15% less than European women and Pacific men earned 24% less than European men in 2020.

Pacific women are more concentrated in lower-paid occupations and in industries that are vulnerable to the economic downturn such as retail and tourism than other women and their Pacific male counterparts (Masselot and Hayes, 2020). Moreover, “Pacific women are less likely to return to work later after having a child and face more substantial earnings losses when returning to work” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022b, p. 11). This is in addition to the fact that women of any ethnicity are more likely to be employed part-time, have higher underutilisation rates and be penalised in the labour market for taking time out to care for children (Sin et al., 2018).

One result of this intersectionality is that, of all gender and ethnic pairings in the labour market, Pacific women earn the least (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Pacific women earn the least of all gender and ethnic pairings

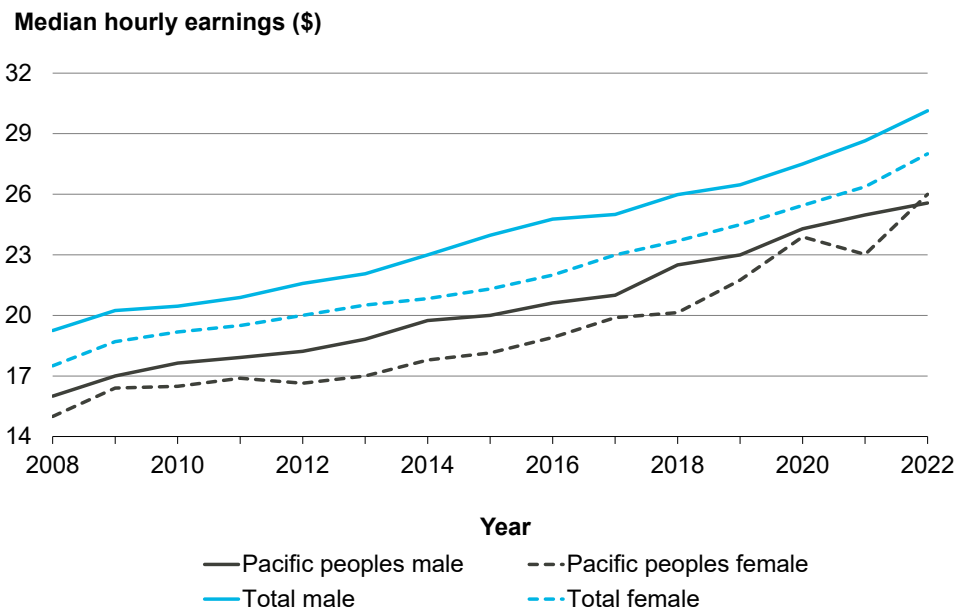


Source: Cochrane and Pacheco (2022), using HLFS data.

Note: The sample is limited to the working-age population (aged 16–64 years) and trimmed to remove the top and bottom 1% of hourly wage earnings. It also excludes the self-employed.

Looking at this gender pay gap over time shows that crises have had different impacts on Pacific men and women. For example, the global financial crisis (GFC), which began in late 2007, had a smaller initial impact on Pacific men compared to other men. Pacific women, however, did not do well for several years after the GFC and have continued to lag other women and men. See Figure 16 and section 6.1 for the impacts of COVID-19.

Figure 16: Pacific peoples’ earnings continue to be vulnerable to external shocks

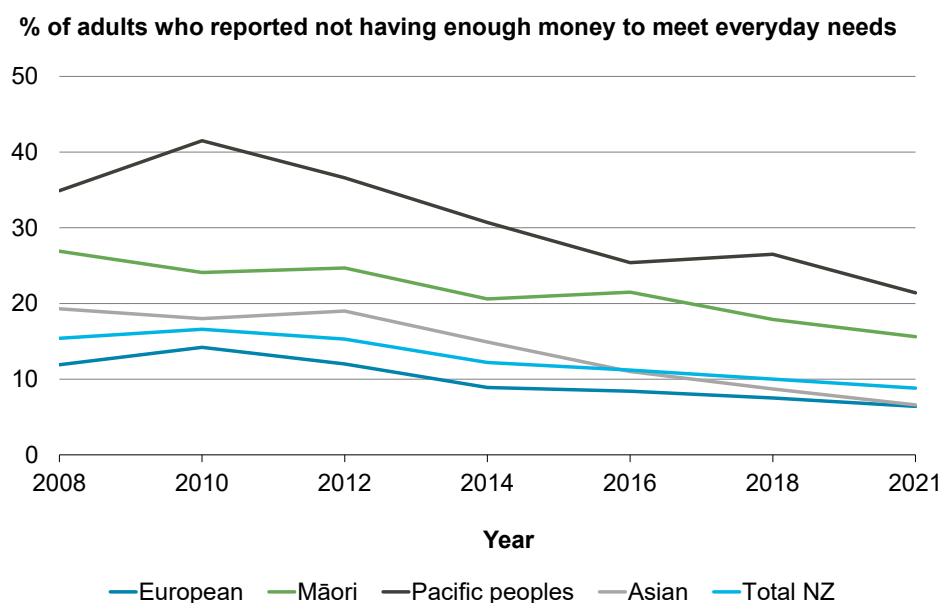


Source: HLFS (Stats NZ).

Lower Pacific incomes have negatively impacted Pacific children living at home

Despite recent improvements, Pacific adults are more likely than other ethnicities to report that they do not have enough money to meet their everyday needs. They have the lowest levels of disposable income of any ethnic group (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: More Pacific peoples struggle to meet their everyday needs compared to other ethnicities (LSF Dashboard indicator)



Source: GSS (Stats NZ).

Pacific children are more likely to experience poverty even when an adult in their household is working (see Table 4). This is likely due to the larger size of Pacific households with one low-income adult working to support the family.²⁶ Plum and Pacheco (2019) found that the rate of children living in a Pacific peoples in-work poor household (where at least one adult is employed but the family income remains below a poverty threshold) is 17.7%, which is 10.2 percentage points higher than children living in New Zealand European in-work poor households.

Table 4: In-work poverty rate, by gender and children, 2019

	Men		Women		Children	
NZ European	5.7%		6.8%		7.5%	
Māori	8.7%	+3.0 pp	10.2%	+3.4 pp	15.0%	+7.5 pp
Pacific peoples	10.1%	+4.4 pp	11.0%	+4.1 pp	17.7%	+10.2 pp
Asian	10.7%	+5.0 pp	11.2%	+4.4 pp	13.0%	+5.5 pp

Source: Plum & Pacheco (2019, p. 8).

Note: pp stands for percentage point (difference compared to NZ European).

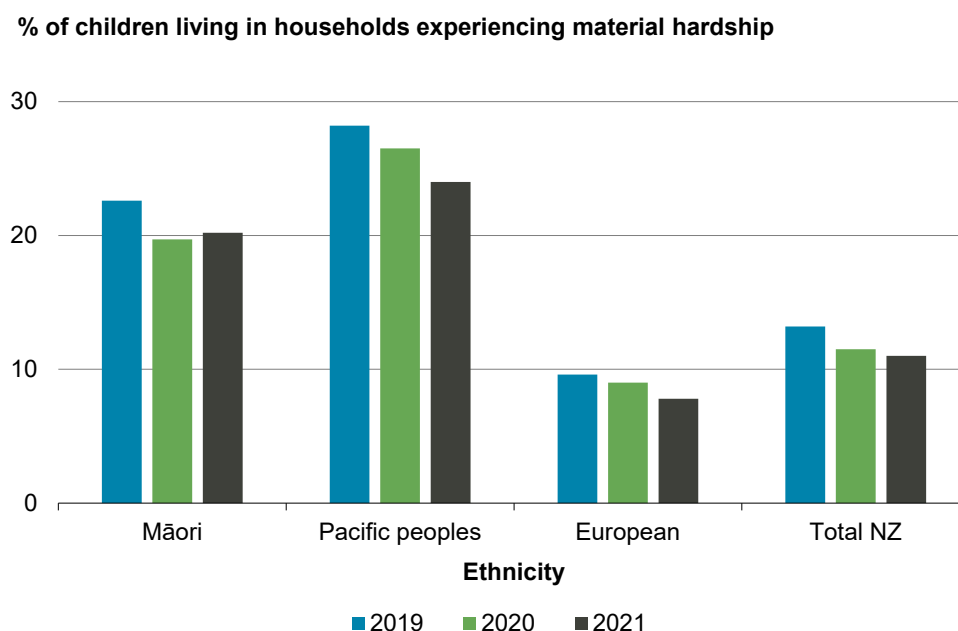
²⁶ On average, Pacific peoples in-work poor households have one member more compared to in-work non-poor households (Plum & Pacheco, 2019, p. 8).

Pacific children are also more likely than other ethnic groups to live in a household experiencing material hardship, food insecurity or housing issues:

- Although, a smaller proportion of Pacific children lived in households experiencing material hardship in 2021 (24%) compared to 2019 (28%), the ratio is still more than double the rate of 11% for the total population (see Figure 18).
- The same trend is true for children living in households where food sometimes or often runs out (see Figure 19).
- Pacific peoples are more likely to live in houses that are over-crowded and in need of repair (see section 5.3).

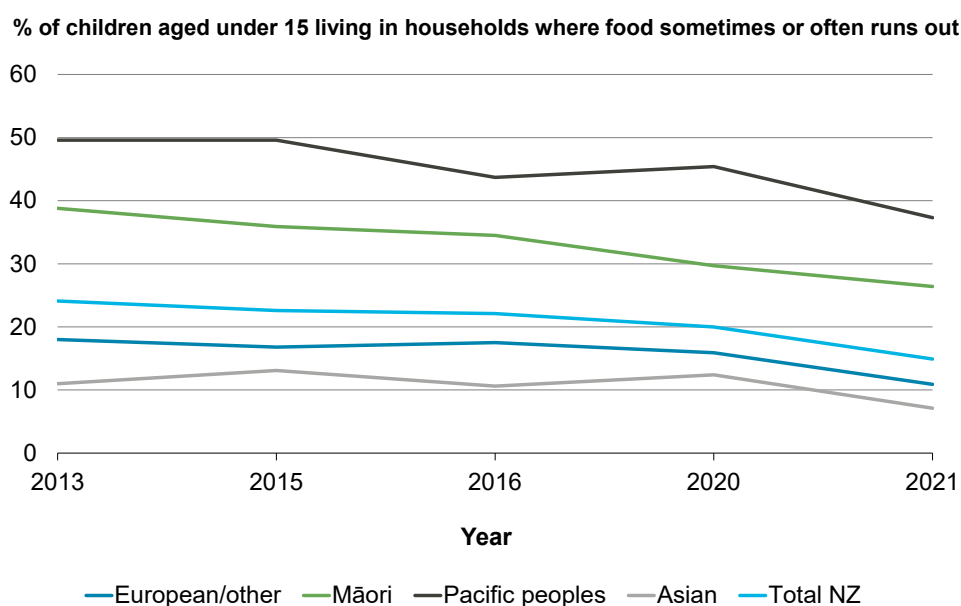
Income and housing deprivation has negatively impacted Pacific children’s health and education outcomes and aspirations.

Figure 18: One in four Pacific children live in poverty



Source: Household Economic Survey (Stats NZ).

Figure 19: More Pacific children suffer from food insecurity compared to children with other ethnicities (LSF Dashboard indicator)



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health).

5.2 Wealth and business ownership

Pacific participants in Treasury research in 2018 felt that factors such as happiness, health, education, connectedness with family and friends and faith were just as significant as financial success in defining “wealth” (The Treasury, 2018).

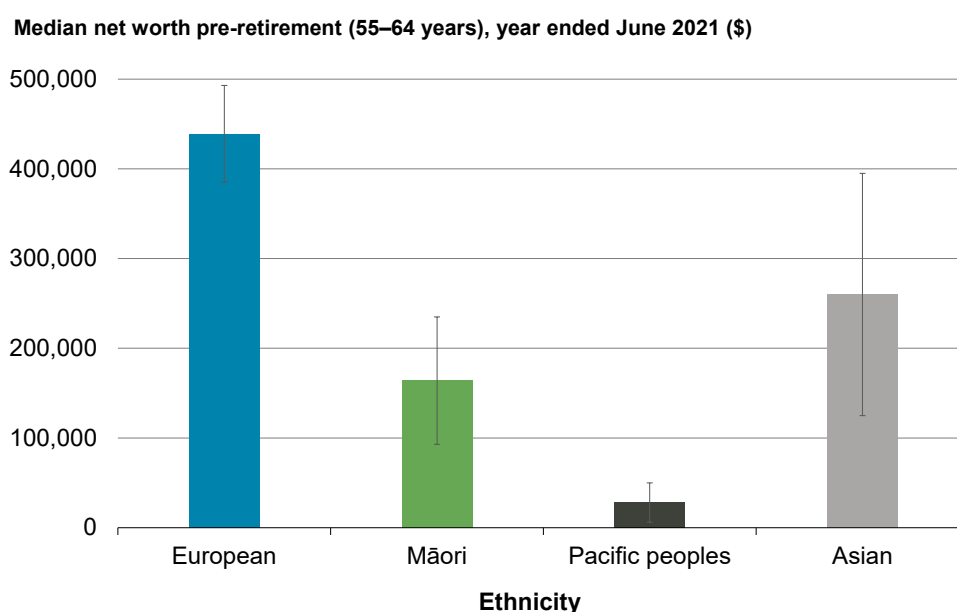
Pacific peoples have lower levels of wealth

However, in financial terms and despite a demonstrated commitment to education and hard work, there is a wide gap between the wealth of Pacific peoples and other New Zealand populations.

One may argue that this is partly due to their age structure (see section 1.3). As people get older, they build up community and individual capability and experience and thus are able to earn and contribute more, so a younger population will on average be a less wealthy one.

However, Pacific New Zealanders’ net worth, unlike the rest of population, does not increase significantly with age (Stats NZ, 2022a). Young people have the lowest median individual net worth (\$3,000), and older people have the highest. However, at age 55–64, the median private net worth of Pacific New Zealanders, at \$28,000, lags far behind that of other ethnic groups (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: The median net worth of Pacific New Zealanders pre-retirement is only \$28,000



Source: Stats NZ (2022a).

The limited net worth among Pacific peoples has multiple causes, including:

- lower skills and qualification attainments (see section 7.1) – education is key in raising knowledge and skills and has a significant impact on future income and saving, so a less-educated population will on average be a less wealthy one
- lower incomes (see section 5.1)
- remitting and gifting to meet cultural and religious obligations (see section 2.2).

Lower wealth is a barrier to entrepreneurship

Lack of net worth is a barrier to entrepreneurship and self-employment and to home ownership, which negatively impacts on efforts to raise Pacific living standards. In 2018, the Treasury estimated that there were approximately 1,500 Pacific employers in New Zealand and about 4,100 Pacific peoples were self-employed (The Treasury, 2018). Studies by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples and Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment have estimated that business ownership rates for Pasifika (at about 1.5–1.6%) are significantly lower than the general population at 8% (Ministry for Women and Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2021).

Some Pacific wealth is held collectively rather than individually. This is especially true for Pacific-owned institutions such as churches and community halls. The Treasury (2018) estimated that Pacific not-for-profit organisations (such as charities and churches) in New Zealand had a combined asset base of \$640 million.²⁷

²⁷ Work on updating the Pacific economic profile is being planned for 2023.

It is important to note that collaboration and cultural networks remain a key component of Pacific capability and innovation that lead to better economic and social outcomes for Pacific peoples (Moana Research, 2020).

5.3 Affordable and suitable housing

The quality, affordability, safety and suitability of housing are all important determinants of health and wellbeing. Crowded, cold, damp and unaffordable housing affects mental and physical health. Conversely, secure housing tenure and housing that is warm and dry and enables connection with the local community promotes and supports mental and physical wellbeing.

The Ministry for Pacific Peoples Fale mo Aiga initiative responds to the need for a culturally responsive, joined-up housing system, including a strong, capable Pacific housing sector. It promotes a deliberate housing system response to the disproportionate impact the current housing crisis has had on Pacific families across Aotearoa New Zealand.

For Pacific peoples, “housing is not only a physical space, but also a spiritual place that creates a sense of belonging; it is also a place where people gather and find ‘home’” (Tamasese & Parson, 2019, p. 64). As outlined in section 3, one’s home is a core element of identity for Pacific peoples and a critical element in family resilience and wellbeing.

“I am proud that Pacific communities always help each other out if there is a funeral or donations for church, I believe we could use that same thinking to get us our own homes, but I know this would be hard, where do we start ...” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018, p. 27)

Pacific peoples face a range of housing challenges

Pacific peoples are significantly at risk of experiencing poor outcomes relating to housing:

- **Severe housing deprivation:** Rates of severe housing deprivation are highest among Pacific and Māori young people (Stats NZ, 2020c). Table 5 demonstrates the prevalence of housing challenges facing Pacific peoples.
- **Overcrowding:** In the 2018 Census, almost two in five Pacific peoples (38.5%) were living in a crowded home compared to around one in five Māori and one in nine in the total population (see Figure 21). Crowding was highest for young people aged 15–24 years (around 46%). Over a quarter (27.4%) of Pacific peoples aged 70+ years lived in a crowded home compared to just 2.7% of this age group in the total population (Stats NZ, 2020c). Data from the 1986–2018 Censuses shows that household crowding has reduced, noting that the pandemic impact may have changed this trend. People in crowded households tend to experience lower wellbeing on measures such as life satisfaction and material wellbeing (Stats NZ, 2023).
- **Unhealthy homes:** 45.9% of Pacific peoples live in damp housing compared to 40.3% of Māori and 21.3% of European ethnicity (Stats NZ, 2020c). Over 7% of Pacific houses are always damp. Pacific peoples are also the most likely to live in homes with visible A4-sized mould at least some of the time – 41.8% compared to 33.0% of Māori and 16.7% of Europeans. Two in five Pacific peoples live in a home that is always or often cold in winter compared to one in five New Zealanders (Stats NZ, 2020c).

People living in damp, cold and mouldy houses have more-frequent colds and flu and are more likely to suffer from asthma. They also tend to have poorer mental wellbeing than people who live in homes without these problems (Stats NZ, 2020c, 2023).

- *Need for major repairs:* Figure 22 shows one out of 10 Pacific houses need major repairs compared to fewer than one in 20 for the total population (GSS, Stats NZ).
- *Low home-ownership rate:* The Pacific home-ownership rate is 35% compared to 64% for the total population (see Figure 23). This is largely a result of lower Pacific income rates coupled with high costs of housing. Between 1986 and 2018, the proportion of Pacific peoples living in an owner-occupied dwelling fell at a faster rate than for the total population – down 16% for Pacific peoples compared to 11% for the total population (Stats NZ, 2023). As Pacific peoples are less likely to own a house, they were more likely to be affected by the rise in rents across the country in 2020 and 2021, increasing the difficulty of accessing the housing market (Cardona & Bollinger, 2022; Hughes et al., 2022).
- *High numbers in social housing:* With housing costs rising faster than income, Pacific peoples are finding a safety net in social (public) housing. Pacific peoples make up 23% of all social housing tenants.²⁸ The government housing dashboard²⁹ shows that over 4,000 eligible Pacific peoples were on the social housing waiting list in June 2022, up from 948 people in September 2017. This is a slightly slower increase than the surge in the general population waiting list during the same period (from 5,800 applicants to 26,700 applicants). Hence, the proportion of Pacific peoples on the waiting list has slightly decreased sitting at 16% – down from its June 2018 peak of 19%³⁰ – but it is still twice as high as would be representative given the size of the Pacific population.

Table 5: Severe housing deprivation in New Zealand, 2018

	Pacific peoples		Total New Zealand	
	Number of people	Prevalence rate per 10,000	Number of people	Prevalence rate per 10,000
Without shelter	222	5.8	3,624	7.7
Temporary accommodation	521	13.7	7,929	16.9
Sharing accommodation	8,625	226.0	30,171	64.2
Uninhabitable housing	12,690	332.5	60,399	128.5
Total	22,058	578.0	102,123	217.3

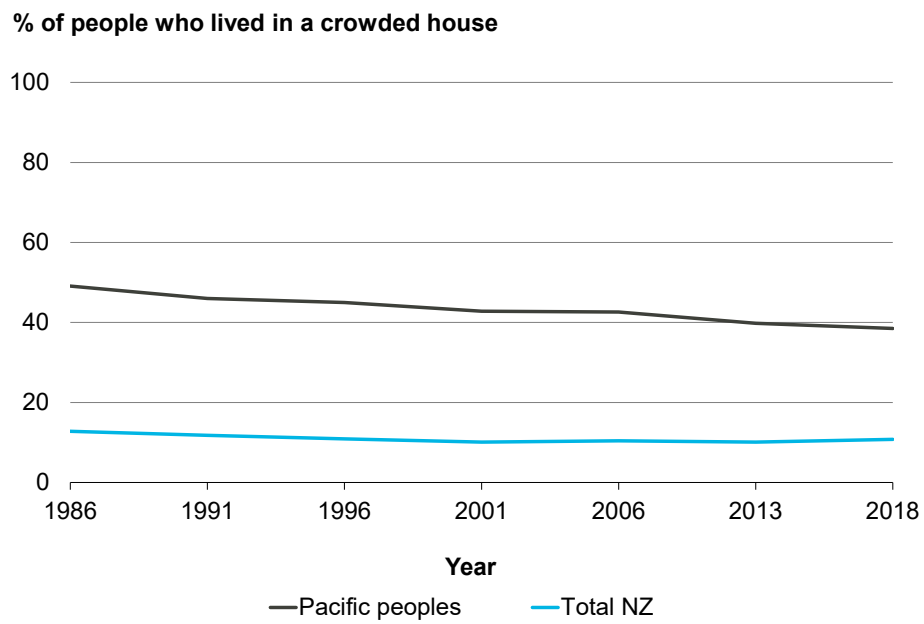
Source: Stats NZ (2023).

²⁸ See more: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/official-information-responses/2020/july/r-20200701-request-for-statistics-on-the-number-of-people-in-social-housing-in-nz-and-their-demographics.pdf

²⁹ See more: www.hud.govt.nz/stats-and-insights/the-government-housing-dashboard/housing-dashboard-at-a-glance/

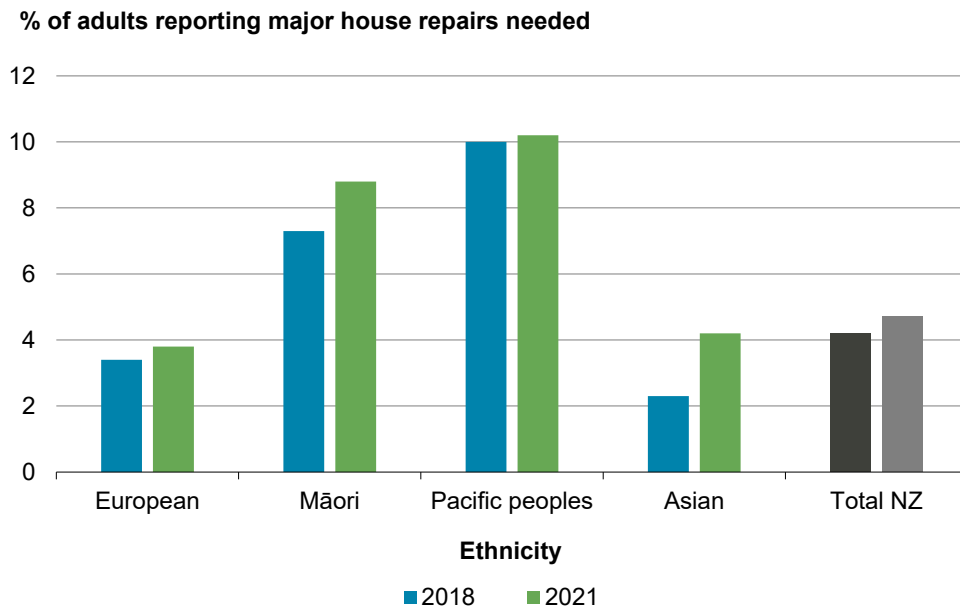
³⁰ The Housing Register provides the number of applicants assessed as eligible for social/public housing who are ready to be matched to a suitable property. The proportions of Pacific peoples on the list are calculated by dividing the number of main applicants who identify themselves with Pacific ethnicity by the total unique number of main applicants with a reported ethnicity.

Figure 21: Two in five Pacific peoples live in a crowded home (LSF Dashboard indicator)



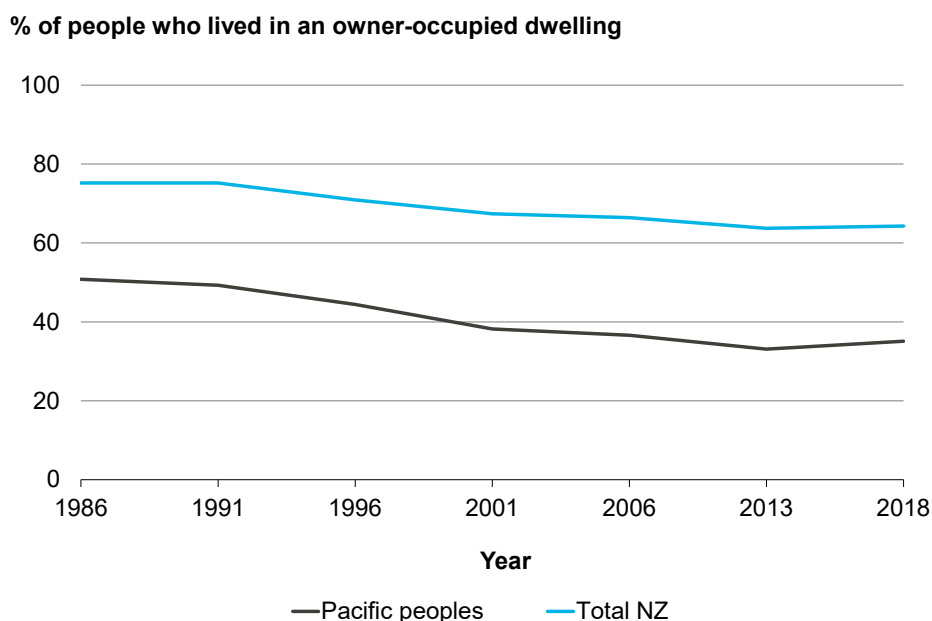
Source: 1986–2018 Censuses (Stats NZ).

Figure 22: One in 10 Pacific peoples live in a house that needs major repairs (LSF Dashboard indicator)



Source: GSS (Stats NZ).

Figure 23: Home ownership has fallen more for Pacific peoples



Source: Stats NZ (2023), based on 1986–2018 Censuses.

5.4 The wellbeing of recent Pacific migrants

Pacific New Zealanders include those from realm countries whose residents are New Zealand citizens and migrants from New Zealand’s close neighbours in the region. Agreements and policies impacting on Pacific migration to New Zealand include the Treaty of Friendship with Samoa, the Samoan Quota, the Pacific Access Category, the Family Visa Stream and the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (see subsection below).

Like other migrants, Pacific peoples typically migrated to New Zealand to pursue higher living standards for themselves and their families. They wanted better education opportunities for their children. They also wanted to increase their families’ wealth while not compromising their cultural and ethnic identity (The Treasury, 2022b).

Pacific migrants, like other migrants, have helped fill local skill shortages and contributed to the provision of public services. Younger, more highly skilled and educated immigrants, on average, make a larger contribution to the public purse than local-born residents. This is not only because they pay more in taxes compared to their use of public services but also because their activities generate more government revenue (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2021a; 2021b).

Pacific immigration has not always met the expectations and aspirations of early Pacific migrants. The New Zealand Government ‘Dawn Raids’ response to Pacific immigration during an economic downturn in the mid-1970s has continued to scar the memory of Pacific peoples to the present. The New Zealand Government formally apologised for the Dawn Raids on 1 August 2021, acknowledging that Pacific communities “at the time felt targeted and terrorised and there is clear evidence the raids were discriminatory and have had a lasting negative impact”.³¹

³¹ Read more: www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-apologise-dawn-raids

Most Pacific migrants consider New Zealand home

Pacific migrants tend to be absorbed into family and communities on arrival. Their initial settlement outcomes are reflective of family and community supports and networks.

Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Survey New Zealand (LISNZ) found that Pacific migrants:

“... faced a number of challenges and issues to becoming successful and settled in New Zealand, including limited English and low education, which may have caught many in low-paying or part-time work and made them particularly vulnerable to economic conditions. Although most reported good health and generally positive non-economic outcomes in New Zealand, a number of their outcomes on these dimensions grew worse over their first three years after residence approval. The reasons for these declines are not wholly clear and could be investigated in future research.” (Sin & Ormsby, 2018, page ix).

The Pacific Migrants Trends and Settlement Outcomes report (New Zealand Immigration, 2018) using the LISNZ found that the overall outcomes of Pacific migrants (excluding those from realm countries) are similar or better than other recent migrants. Recent migrants from the Pacific are more likely to report that they feel that New Zealand is their home ‘completely’ or ‘a lot’ (94%) compared to recent migrants overall (82%). High levels of English language confidence and competence is key to successful settlement (New Zealand Immigration, 2018). Pacific migrants are also less likely to report feeling discriminated against (13%) than non-Pacific migrants (26%) (Sin & Ormsby, 2018, p. iv).

“Pacific migrants are well connected socially – 66 percent reported they belonged to at least one social group or club compared with 59 percent for recent migrants overall. The most common social group or club Pacific migrants belong to are religious groups (higher compared with recent migrants overall) followed by sports clubs or groups.” (New Zealand Immigration, 2018, p. 10)

The Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme benefits New Zealand and Pacific countries

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme is an annually capped scheme that enables New Zealand employers in the horticulture and viticulture industries to employ workers from the Pacific islands, meeting seasonal labour shortages. The workers employed under this scheme contribute to the growth and success of New Zealand’s horticulture and viticulture industry while providing significant economic support to Pacific island economies. The number of RSE workers has gradually increased from 8,000 in 2009 to 16,000 in 2021/22.³²

The impact of the pandemic was significant in the horticulture and viticulture industries. In response, in September 2022, the government announced an extra 3,000 RSE workers as an additional support to assist the horticultural sector, bringing the total to 19,000 RSE workers in New Zealand.³³

³² Read more: www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/research-reports/recognised-seasonal-employer-rse-scheme

³³ Read more: [3000 more RSE workers to ease workforce pressures | Beehive.govt.nz](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/news/3000-more-rse-workers-to-ease-workforce-pressure)

Due to COVID-19 impacts, some RSE temporary migrants had to stay in New Zealand during the pandemic well beyond the usual 7 months of the RSE visa. During the 2021 industry-led RSE Conference, the stakeholders noted that exhaustion was taking its toll on these seasonal workers and on pastoral care hosts and others involved in providing support in their daily lives.

“Worker wellbeing issues are becoming more complex, as workers cope with longer than anticipated absences from partners, children and extended families and, in some cases, the establishment of permanent relationships in New Zealand. Mental health, sexual health and pregnancies are particular areas of concern.” (Bedford, 2021)

A recent investigation undertaken by the Human Rights Commission on the living conditions of RSE workers found further evidence of “blatant exploitation of migrant workers”, which amounted in some cases to human rights abuses by employers (Johnston, 2022). In response, the government announced that a full review of the RSE will be undertaken in 2023.

6 Resilient and healthy Pacific peoples

6.1 Community resilience

Consistent with their values and beliefs, resilience is perceived by Pacific peoples as a community rather than an individual outcome. Resilience in the Pacific community could also be described as the ability for those communities inured to hardship as “doing without” or “simply hanging on”.³⁴

The impact of the pandemic throughout the last three years has highlighted the strength and resilience of Pacific communities and families. The ability of the Pacific community to consistently utilise local resources to respond to external threats, such as that posed by the pandemic, demonstrated a high degree of resilience, innovation and responsiveness across all communities at both regional and national levels.

The Ministry for Pacific Peoples researched the impact of the first COVID-19 lockdown and found that churches and their leaders were key partners in ensuring community resilience and recovery – and remain a key mechanism for developing public policy and delivering services (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020a). A rapid evidence review undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development and Martin Jenkins post pandemic highlighted community resilience as a key factor in the ability of the Pacific community to withstand and mitigate the threats posed by the pandemic (Chen et al., 2021). These capabilities have now been redeployed to assist the rebuilding and recovery (Pacheco et al., 2022).

The literature and research show that what counts for Pacific New Zealanders is the strength of social and cultural connections and the different ways connections and relationships are shaped and maintained (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020a). Research on unpaid work and volunteering (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2021) also found that Pacific New Zealanders spent a considerable amount of time on unpaid work and volunteering, equating to an average of 33 hours per week per person. This contribution is across all areas of community and family life and is a key component of Pacific resilience and social capital.

Pacific peoples faced challenges but demonstrated a high degree of resilience during the pandemic

Pacific peoples were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, especially in the south and west of Auckland. By 12 March 2023, Pacific peoples had higher rates of infections, hospitalisation and ICU care due to COVID-19 than Māori, European and Asian New Zealanders.³⁵ Many of these families and communities were experiencing significant challenges and financial stress pre-COVID. Also, as vaccines were initially prioritised to older people, the Pacific population – with its younger age structure – had to wait longer on average for access (Sibley et al., 2021).

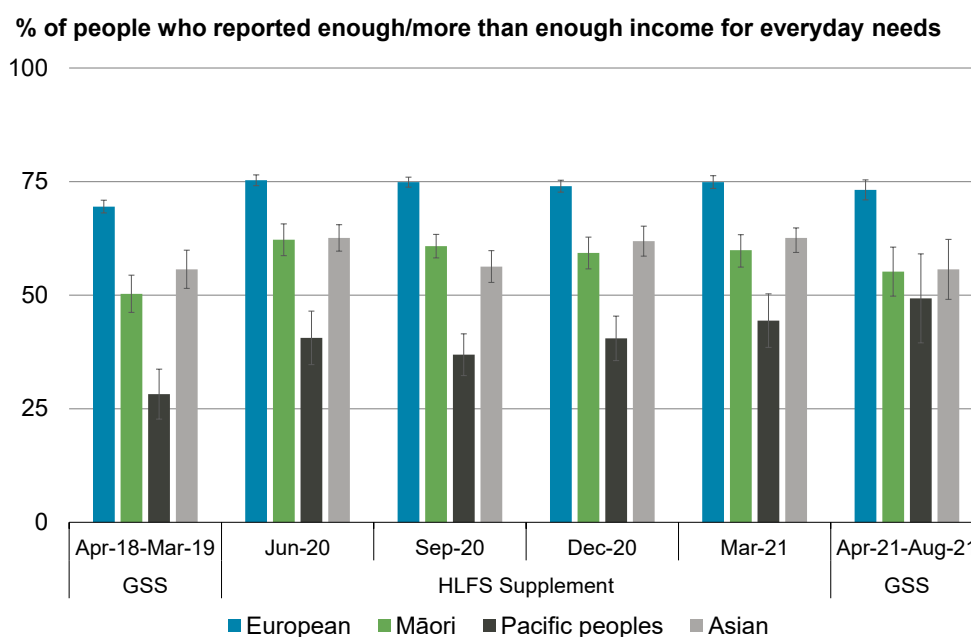
³⁴ Dr Margaret Southwick's review of the background paper (16 March 2023).

³⁵ Authors' calculations based on data from Ministry of Health (2023).

While aggregate measures might not provide statistically significant evidence that ethnic disparities have widened during the pandemic, emerging studies reveal a more nuanced story (Sibley et al., 2021; Pacheco et al., 2022; Webber et al., 2022).

On the positive side and in contrast to the impact of previous external shocks, such as the GFC, the proportion of Pacific peoples who reported having enough/more than enough income to meet everyday needs actually increased over the first year of the pandemic (see Figure 24). Pacific peoples' trust in the public service also did not erode after the 2020 peak, contrary to the experience of other ethnicities (Cardona & Bollinger, 2022).

Figure 24: The proportion of people with enough or more than enough money was generally stable during the pandemic



Source: GSS and HLFS supplement data (Stats NZ).

On many fronts, pre-pandemic disparities remain.³⁶ For example, by December 2022, Pacific peoples continued to experience higher unemployment, underutilisation and NEET rates and earned less than other ethnic groups (section 5.1).

Some groups of Pacific peoples, however, faced particular challenges during the pandemic. Pacheco et al. (2022) found evidence of increased labour market disparities particularly in terms of job entry wages following a period of unemployment (i.e. wage scarring) and also lower wage progression for Pacific peoples aged under 30, Pacific peoples living in Auckland and Pacific women.

As a young population, Pacific peoples were also disproportionately impacted by disruptions to the education system and were also more likely to experience higher levels of psychological distress (Cardona & Bollinger, 2022). This included younger people reporting greater psychological distress during Alert Levels 3 and 2 in April to June 2020.

³⁶ For example, aggregate unemployment levels fell after the first year for all ethnicities, genders and age groups.

Pacific peoples, Asian peoples and other non-Māori ethnic minorities also reported more perceived ethnic-based discrimination during higher alert levels (Sibley et al., 2021).

In New Zealand, women reported more gender-based discrimination and psychological distress during the first Alert Level 3 and 2 stages of COVID-19 in April–July 2020 (Sibley et al., 2021). GSS data showed a statistically significant increase in the proportion of women who reported experiences of discrimination in the last 12 months by mid-2021 compared to pre-pandemic levels (Cardona & Bollinger, 2022).

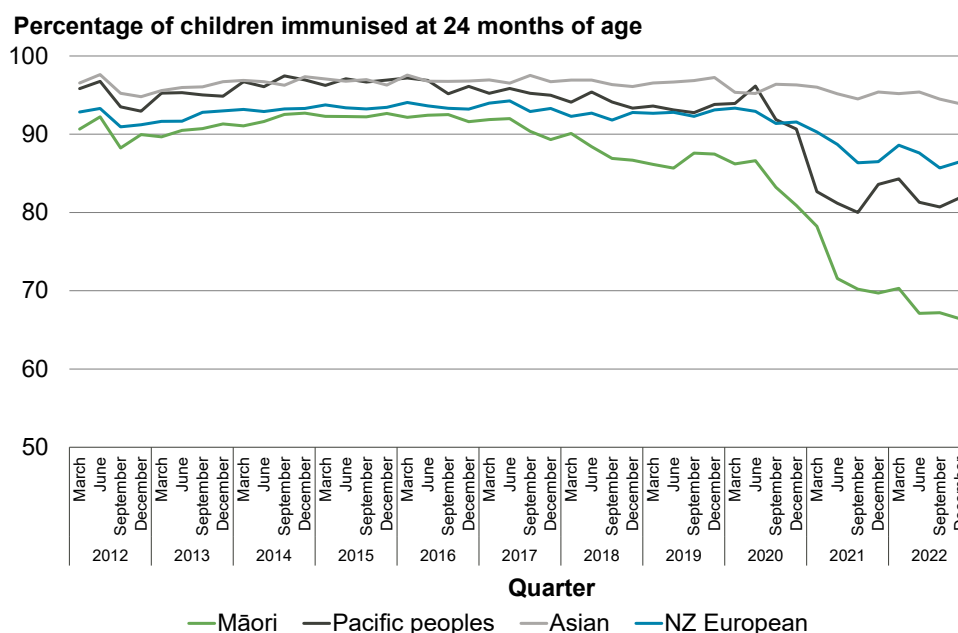
Pacific women are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 in terms of economic and broader social impacts such as increased exposure to family violence and increased family care responsibilities and through their efforts to support others against the impact of the pandemic as frontline social service and health workers (see section 4.2 and 6.2).

While COVID-19 accelerated workplace flexibility for many workers in New Zealand, alternative working arrangements were less available to Pacific women employed as carers, cleaners and retail workers (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2022b).

COVID-19-related disruptions also affected breast and cervical screening coverage, particularly impacting Pacific women and wāhine Māori (Cardona & Bollinger, 2022).

The pandemic may continue to have an impact on the health of Pacific peoples in the future. While the percentage of 2-year-old babies receiving the full schedule of immunisations has been declining since 2017, this negative trend accelerated following the 2020 lockdowns, particularly among Māori and Pacific 2-year-olds (see Figure 25). Immunisation coverage for Pacific children has dropped by 15% since mid-2020.

Figure 25: Immunisation coverage dropped particularly among Māori and Pacific children



Source: Personal communication with the Health Quality & Safety Commission (13 September 2022 and 20 March 2023); National and regional immunisation data (Ministry of health, 2023).

Social connections, local networks and support were particularly evident in the response of Pacific families and communities to the ongoing effect of the pandemic. Media platforms and direct telephone contacts amongst neighbours and friends and families during the height of the pandemic enabled support services to target families and people most in need of support and assistance. As a result of Pacific networks and connections, non-government agencies and community providers were quick to capitalise and direct support and assistance efforts to those who needed it the most (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020a).

Pacific leaders play a critical role in Pacific communities' resilience

The last four years have highlighted the role Pacific leaders play within their various communities. Pacific leaders represent a diverse range of interests from across Pacific communities. These leaders include Pacific leaders from religious communities, non-government organisations, youth groups, sporting bodies and rainbow communities.

Many Pacific peoples, particularly those with the highest health needs, rely on the services provided by Pacific health and disability service providers. These organisations provide Pacific leadership in social service delivery, ensuring crucial support to Pacific peoples through their family-oriented models of care, which are effective in overcoming health system barriers to accessing quality services.

The strength of Pacific health and disability community providers is that they build and maintain social capital and trust by working as part of the communities they serve and are thereby able to respond rapidly to community priorities.

During early lockdowns in Auckland, health concerns within South Auckland and among Pacific communities were relatively well managed through well-respected Pacific-led health and social services providers. Communications and support were delivered through church leaders and community organisations in tailored, culturally grounded ways, which ensured that community health concerns were communicated and where possible addressed (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020a). Pacific church leaders acted as role models by stepping up and getting vaccinated first and actively encouraged their members to get vaccinated too. Churches were useful sources of information for the community and provided space for vaccinations and testing, facilitated vaccination days and connected health providers to families. Churches, supported by health providers, were also able to provide access to face masks, hand sanitiser and kai and care packages (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, personal communication, 25 October 2022).

Pacific leaders, aided by their exposure and visibility in national and social media networks and platforms, encouraged and supported government messages on the importance of preventive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 within their communities. Pacific youth leaders were also highly active and visible throughout the pandemic, reflecting the increasing role that Pacific youth play in the wider Pacific community in New Zealand.

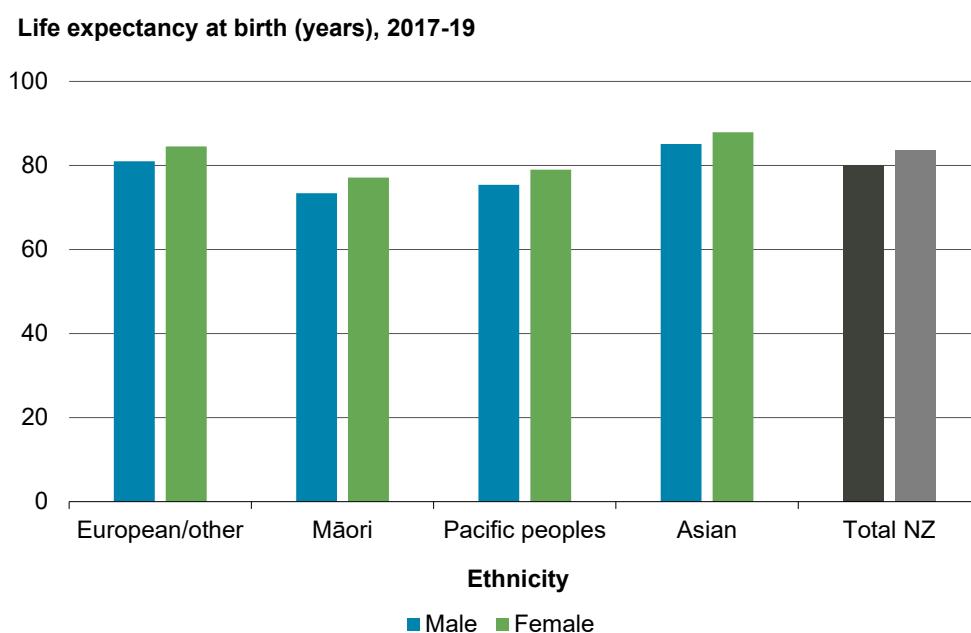
6.2 Physical and mental health and safety

This section explores the health of Pacific peoples in general. Section 7.2 complements this section by presenting Pacific youth mental health challenges and opportunities.

Pacific New Zealanders live shorter lives with more health issues

Pacific peoples in New Zealand experience significant inequities and have poorer health outcomes than the overall population. According to the Health Quality and Safety Commission's *Bula Sautu* report (2021), there is also increasing prevalence of multimorbidity (the occurrence of more than one long-term condition) among Pacific peoples. This highlights the importance of coordinated approaches that manage and address multiple risk factors and associated long-term conditions. These outcomes, similar to Māori, have led to Pacific peoples living several years less than the rest of New Zealand's population. The gap in life expectancy slightly decreased during the 10 years before the pandemic (as death rates decreased at almost all ages). However, a significant ethnic gap remains. Pacific peoples' life expectancy at birth in 2017–19 increased to 75.4 years for males (up 2.2 years) and 79.0 years for females (up 1.6 years). For comparison, the total population life expectancy reached 80.0 years for males (up 2.0 years) and 83.5 years for females (up 1.3 years) (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: Pacific peoples live several years less than other New Zealanders (LSF Dashboard indicator)



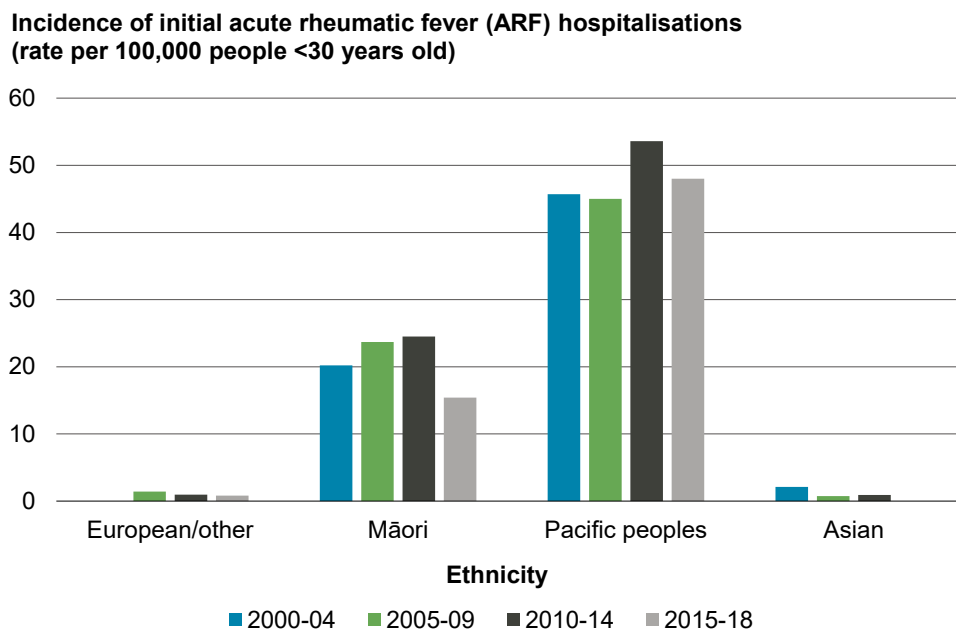
Source: Stats NZ (2021b).

“The health system must treat us with more understanding and equity ... Disease doesn't discriminate. Just treat us the same as everyone else. An urgent Pacific case is urgent.” – Pacific school leaver, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022

Health inequities start at young ages and are stark. Pacific children (aged 5–14 years) are 50 times more likely to be hospitalised from developing acute rheumatic fever (ARF) compared to non-Pacific non-Māori children. ARF is a preventable multisystem inflammatory disease and can lead to rheumatic heart disease, which causes cardiac failure, stroke and early death. Initial ARF hospitalisation rates peaked in 2010–14 at

79.6 cases per 100,000 children for Pacific peoples. By comparison, Figure 27 shows that the rates for Māori and European/other children peaked at 35.9 and 1.6 cases per 100,000 children (Bennett et al., 2021).

Figure 27: Māori and Pacific peoples in New Zealand comprised 92.6% of acute rheumatic fever cases below the age of 30 years



Source: Bennett et al. (2021).

Pacific peoples are also much more likely than other New Zealanders to suffer from gout, a painful and lifelong form of arthritis. Arnold et al. (2022) note that Pacific peoples develop gout earlier in life than other New Zealanders and experience it in more-severe forms.³⁷ Pacific peoples aged 20–44 are seven times more likely to experience gout than non-Māori, non-Pacific populations of the same age. Pacific men are most affected – males are three times more likely to experience gout than females (Arnold, et al., 2022).

“Poor health outcomes and inequities for Pacific peoples can largely be attributed to long-term conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. High rates of long-term conditions are experienced by Pacific peoples at a younger age and the prevalence of multimorbidity³⁸ is increasing. Pacific adults have disproportionate rates of risk factors, such as obesity, smoking, alcohol use, physical inactivity and psychological distress.” (Ministry of Health, 2020b, p. 13)

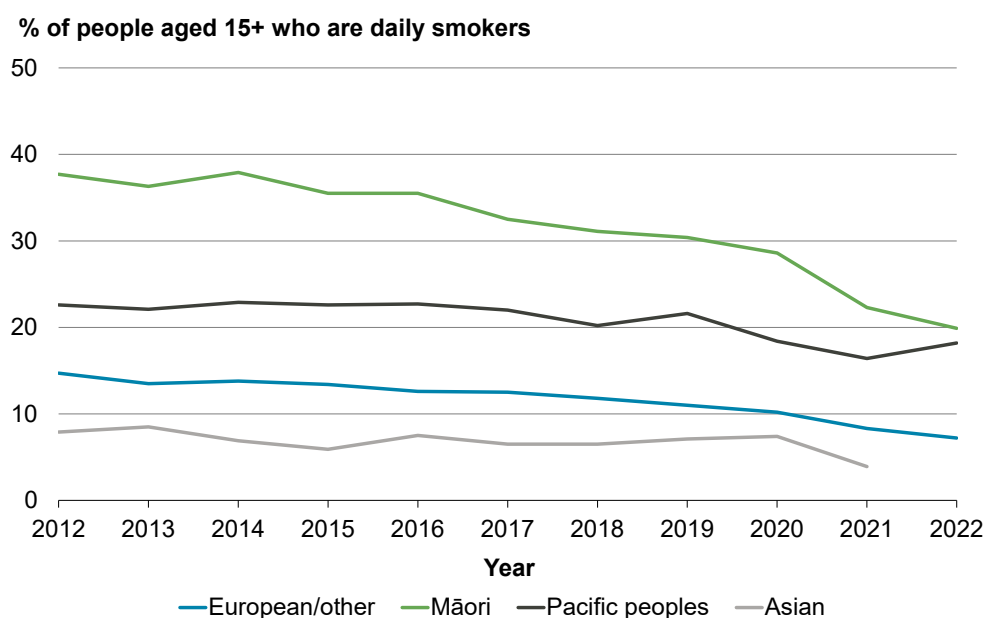
³⁷ Prevalence of gout among Pacific peoples is due partly to genetics and partly due to other biological factors, including higher levels of kidney disease and use of some medicines.

³⁸ Multimorbidity or multiple morbidity means a person having more than one disease occurring at a time, for example, one person could have the three diseases of diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure at the same time.

Many top causes of death and disability can be prevented to some extent through lifestyle factors:

- Smoking remains the risk factor associated with the greatest health loss in New Zealand (Global Burden of Disease Study, 2020). Data from the New Zealand Health Survey³⁹ shows that smoking rates have declined among all ethnicities but remain highest among Māori and Pacific peoples (see Figure 28).
- Second to smoking in the list of risk factors is obesity, which is increasing and is contributing to the growing health impacts of diabetes, with a particular impact on older Pacific and Indian people (Ministry of Health, 2020a).
- Results for the 2021/22 New Zealand Health Survey show that more than one in five Pacific adults (21.7%) have a hazardous drinking pattern compared to one in three Māori (33.2%), one in five European/other (20.1%) and one in 17 Asians (6.0%).⁴⁰

Figure 28: Smoking rates remain highest among Māori and Pacific peoples



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health).

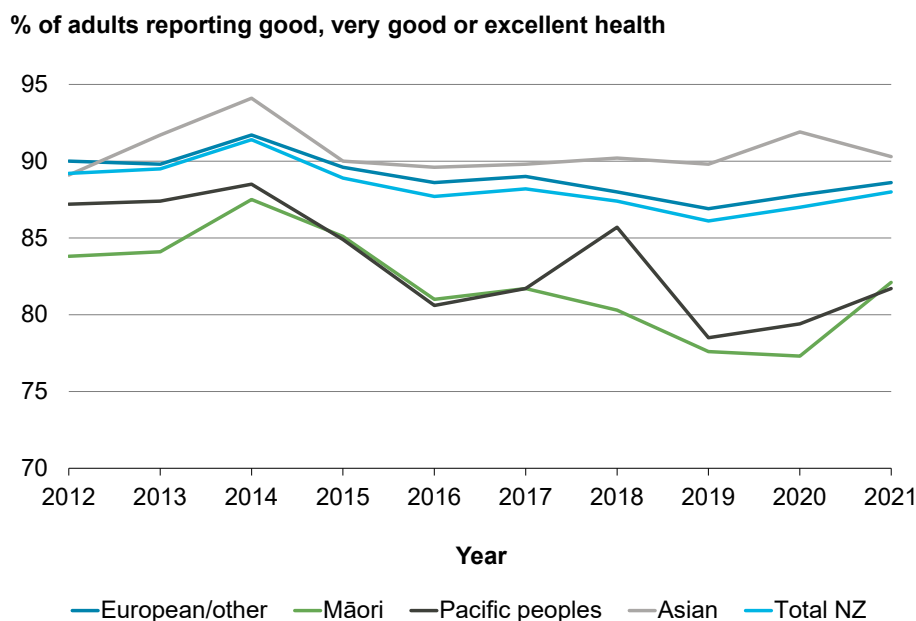
Self-reported health data may be less reliable for Pacific peoples

Both Figures 29 and 30 show poor mental and physical health conditions of Pacific respondents. In discussions with health officials, Pacific communities have suggested that the data may not fully reflect the cultural drivers that underpin self-reporting of health. Many Pacific New Zealanders will report good health despite experiencing a range of health issues. This is likely to affect the survey results. The actual numbers may be worse than reported.

³⁹ See more: www.health.govt.nz/nz-health-statistics/national-collections-and-surveys/surveys/new-zealand-health-survey#published

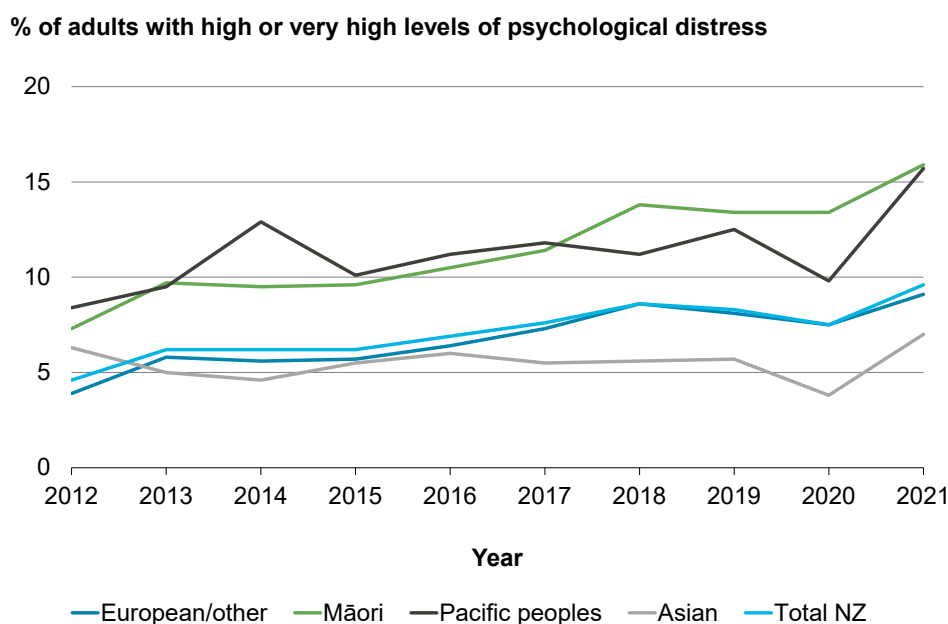
⁴⁰ See more: www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2021-22-new-zealand-health-survey

Figure 29: Self-reported health conditions have improved among Pacific adults (LSF Dashboard indicator)



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health).

Figure 30: Many more Pacific adults suffer from mental health issues (LSF Dashboard indicators)



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health).

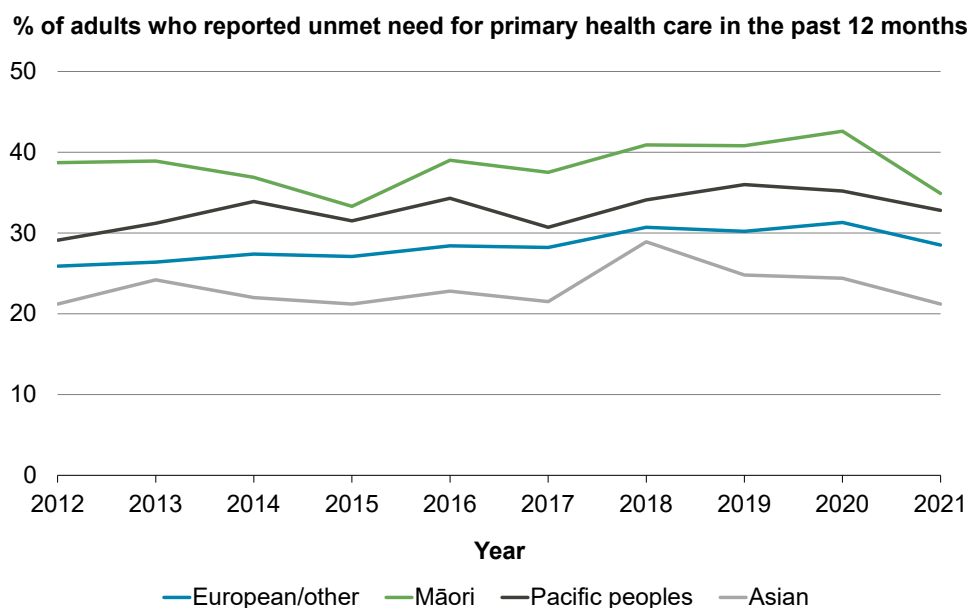
Inequities negatively impact on Pacific health outcomes

A meta-analysis of sector information reinforces the view that “socioeconomic inequities experienced by Pacific peoples in New Zealand, particularly financial and housing challenges, have significant negative impacts on their health and wellbeing” (Ministry of Health, 2020b, p. 12).

Pacific peoples are more likely than other ethnic groups, except Māori, to report that they wanted healthcare from a GP or nurse but could not get it or have not been involved in

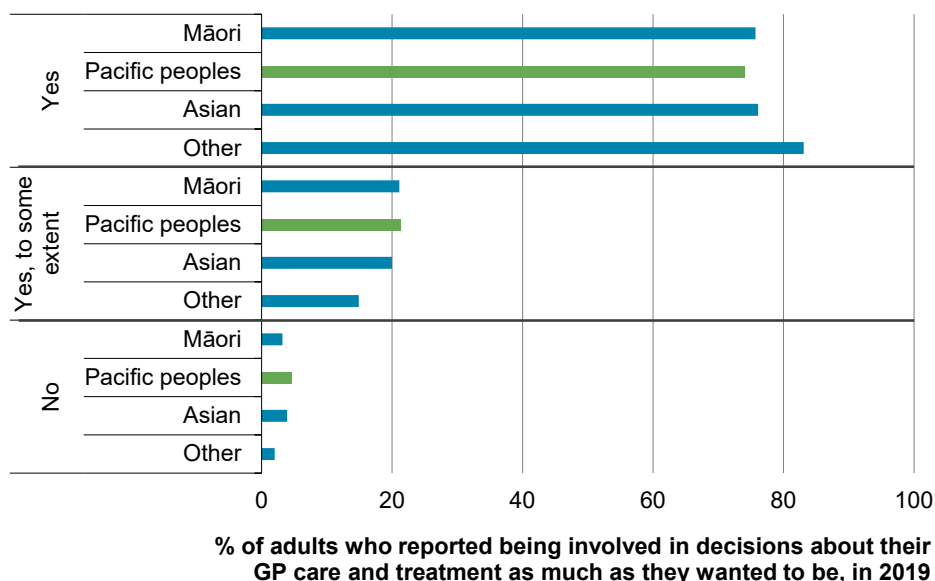
decisions about their GP care and treatment as much as they wanted to be (see Figures 31 and 32) and that they or their children had missed out on primary care because of cost (see Figures 33 and 34). The drivers of lack of access are likely to include the financial and housing issues covered earlier in this report. The Health and Disability System Review (2020) also found that self-reported experiences of racism, including by health professionals, is higher for Māori, Pacific peoples and Asians compared to European/other people.

Figure 31: One out of three Pacific adults report that they wanted primary healthcare but could not get it



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health).

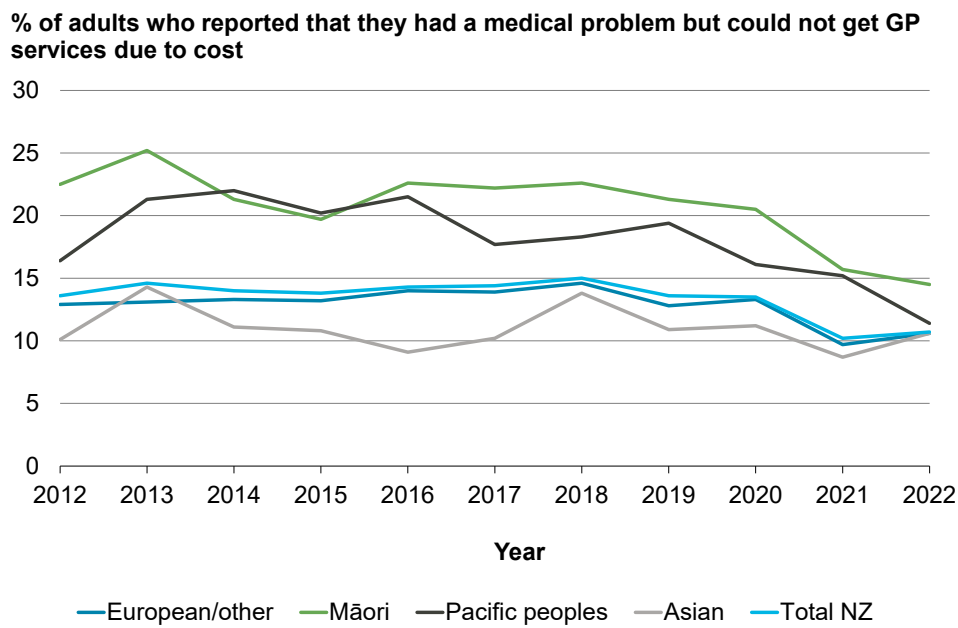
Figure 32: Pacific peoples are less involved in decisions about their GP care and treatment



Source: Atlas of Healthcare Variation | Health service access (Health Quality & Safety Commission).⁴¹

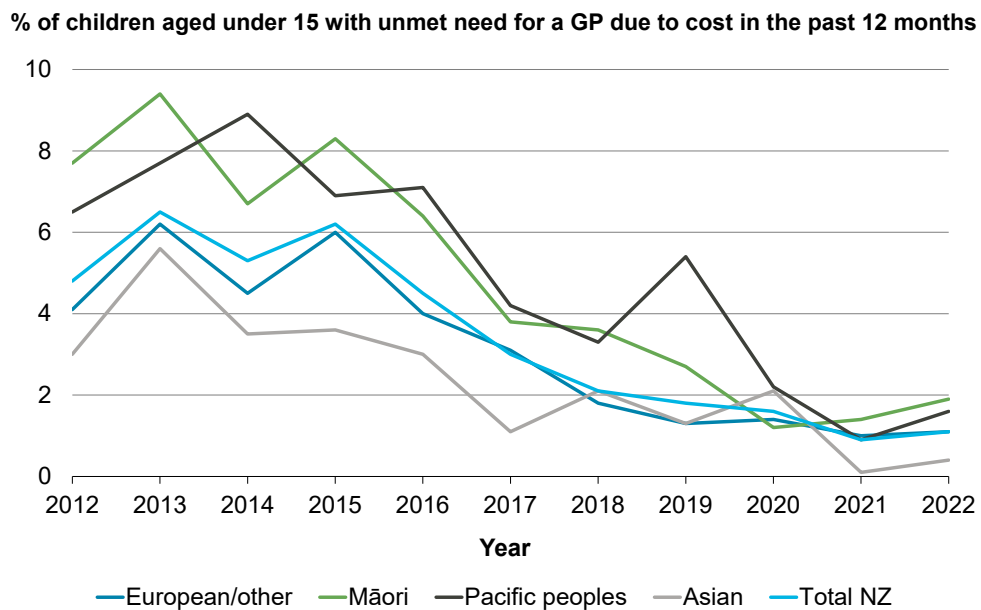
⁴¹ See more: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/hqi2803/viz/Healthserviceaccesssinglemap/AtlasofHealthcareVariationHealthserviceaccess>

Figure 33: Cost as a barrier is becoming less important in Pacific adults visiting or talking to a GP



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health).

Figure 34: Cost as a barrier is becoming less important in Pacific children visiting or talking to a GP



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health).

Recent events such as the pandemic appear to have reinforced the importance of the relationship between local health providers and families and communities. National consultations on the All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy reinforced the increasing recognition of the role of local health providers in Pacific peoples’ positive health outcomes.

Pacific peoples are more likely to be victims of certain types of crime, including family violence

The most recent cycle of the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey found that Pacific adults had the same likelihood as the New Zealand average of being a victim of crime across all types of offence (30%). However, Pacific adults were significantly more likely to experience offences towards their households (22%) compared to the New Zealand average (19%).⁴²

Pacific families are more likely than the general population to include both victims and perpetrators of family violence. Pasefika Proud (2016), drawing data from a range of surveys, notes that:

- Pacific peoples are twice as likely to be offenders who have committed a serious crime against a family member.
- Pacific school students are three times as likely as New Zealand European students to report witnessing adults hit children in their homes.
- Pacific children are five times more likely to die from child abuse or neglect.

The 2020 Te Aorerekura National Strategy to eliminate family and sexual violence has a particular focus on Pacific families and communities.⁴³ The strategy aims to reduce the impact of family and sexual violence on Pacific families and communities through a coordinated cross-government approach to increasing safety and wellbeing within families and communities.

6.3 Challenges of Pacific disabled people

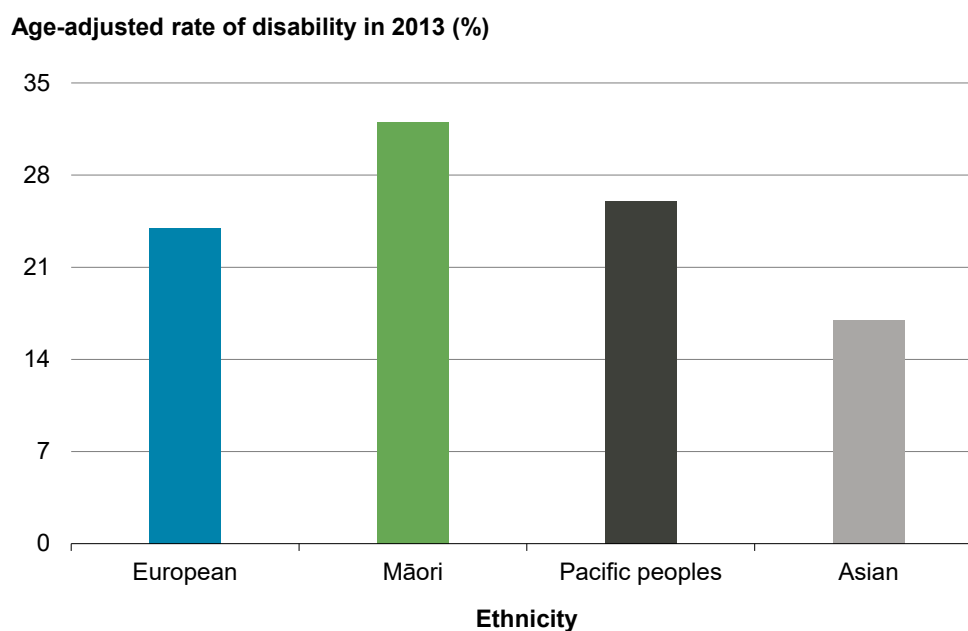
The most recent comprehensive survey on disabled New Zealanders was undertaken in 2013 (Stats NZ, 2014).⁴⁴ This survey found that just over 1 million New Zealanders were disabled. The raw data showed rates of disability for Pacific peoples below the national average, but this was an effect of the Pacific population being much more youthful (as young people are less likely to be disabled). The age-standardised rates give a truer picture, showing that around one in four Pacific peoples (26%) are disabled (see Figure 35).

⁴² Read more: www.justice.govt.nz/assets/NZCVS-Cycle-4-Core-Report-Section-4-Who-experiences-crime-fin.pdf

⁴³ Read more: <https://tepunaaonui.govt.nz/assets/National-strategy/Cohort-papers/Pacific-Peoples-Analysis-paper.pdf>

⁴⁴ This paper acknowledges that language matters and that not all members of the disability community identify with disability-focused language. While we have used this term for consistency and in alignment with other government agencies, we recognise this is an ongoing discussion for disabled people. Read more on the Office for Disability Issues website: www.odi.govt.nz/home/about-disability/disability-etiquette

Figure 35: One in four Pacific peoples (26%) are disabled



Source: Stats NZ (2014).

The 2013 survey found that most Pacific disabled people had sensory (hearing, vision) or physical (mobility) impairments at 7% and 10% respectively. About half of the Pacific disabled population had more than one impairment, similar to the rate for the total disabled population. The next Stats NZ's disability survey is planned for 2023.

More recent data on the Pacific disabled community and the status of wellbeing amongst them is minimal. A community that is experiencing significant inequities across some key areas is likely to feel the impact of disabilities more strongly compared to the general population.

Disabled people often face significant disparities in the accessibility of opportunities both due to the way services are designed and in the stigma and experiences of discrimination in the labour market and education system. Reliable data about Pacific disabled people in the labour market is not available, in part due to small sample sizes for the most regular surveys. However, evidence is clear that disabled New Zealanders in general experience worse outcomes than non-disabled New Zealanders across a range of labour market outcomes, including participation, unemployment and underutilisation (The Treasury 2022a; Stats NZ, 2020b). It would be surprising if Pacific disabled peoples fared better than the general disabled population on these metrics given Pacific peoples already face labour market discrimination. It is more likely that Pacific disabled peoples' disability status and ethnicity status intersect to create additional challenges.

A compounding factor for Pacific disabled peoples is their limited access to culturally appropriate services and avenues of support (Le Va, 2011). Limited quantitative data to understand their service needs is another influential factor.

“Nothing about us, without us.” – Pacific disabled person, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022

Direct talanoa by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples with those affected by disability and consultations with the disability sector and with disability representatives as part of national consultations on the All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy have repeatedly found that the wellbeing of Pacific disabled people is enhanced when:

- they are included in decision-making processes that affect them
- policy makers connect with them directly to understand their experience
- those providing services and supports have lived experiences of disability.

7 Confident, thriving and resilient Pacific young people

The wellbeing of the large and fast-growing young Pacific population matters to New Zealand's long-term wellbeing. Educated, healthy and resilient young Pacific peoples can fully contribute to and fully benefit from New Zealand's future labour market and economy. This is a critical strategic consideration for New Zealand's productivity, socioeconomic resilience and sustainability, and national wellbeing over the next few decades. Intergenerational challenges facing Pacific youth are a particular challenge.

7.1 Education

Education plays a vital role in developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that can open the door to higher-paying jobs, better health outcomes and wider wellbeing of children, young people and adults. A good education early in life helps bring advantages to the whole family over multiple decades, including through better career progression, more time and opportunity to accumulate wealth, higher living standards and a healthier and more comfortable retirement.

This section highlights that while Pacific peoples' educational participation and achievement have been improving at all levels, stark gaps remain that need focused attention.

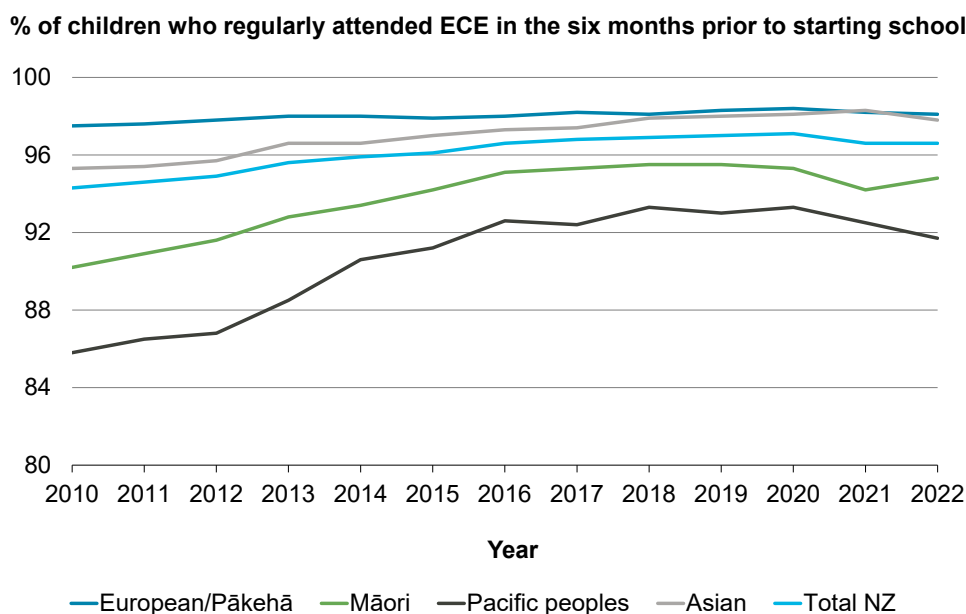
- *Early childhood education:* Despite pre-pandemic growth, Pacific children's participation in early childhood education is still slightly lower than the average rate – 92% versus 97% in June 2022.
- *Compulsory education:* Many more Pacific students are leaving school with at least an NCEA level 2 qualification compared to a decade ago. The proportion is now close to the overall average – 76% versus 79%. However, Pacific students are not an exception to the overall decline in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores in New Zealand, and their PISA scores continue to be significantly below the overall average. More than half of Pacific students do not regularly attend school.
- *Tertiary education:* Pacific students enrol in tertiary education at about the same rate as the total population, with particularly high participation by Pacific women. However, participation is not always converting into qualifications. Completion rates were 11 percentage points lower than the New Zealand average in 2021.

This section explores educational outcomes of Pacific peoples across these three levels before diving deeper into the importance of Pacific identity and culture in lifting Pacific peoples' educational outcomes.

Pacific children’s participation in early childhood education (ECE) is still lower than the average

Pacific children are less likely than children from other ethnic groups to participate in ECE before starting school, but the gap has closed significantly over the last decade. In June 2010, only 85.5% of Pacific children had participated in ECE before starting school. This increased to over 93% before the pandemic but dropped to 91.7% by 2022. Over the same period, participation increased from 90% to 95% for Māori children and from 94.3% to 96.6% for the overall population (see Figure 36).⁴⁵

Figure 36: Pacific children are less likely to attend early childhood education



Source: Education Counts (Ministry of Education).

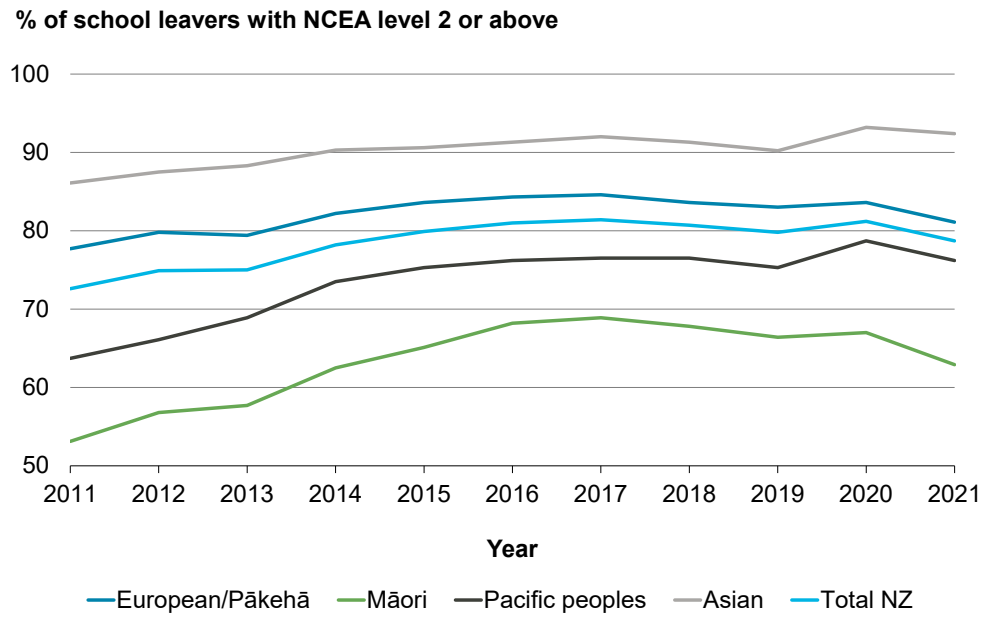
Pacific children who do participate in ECE are less likely than the total population (but more likely than Māori children) to attend for at least 10 hours per week on average (Education Counts, 2023a). This ‘participation intensity’ slightly increased for Pacific children from 2017 to 2019 but declined afterwards. This may be the impact of COVID-19 having a particularly large health effect on these populations (see section 6.1).

Many more Pacific students are leaving school with at least an NCEA level 2 qualification

Achievement of compulsory school qualifications for Pacific peoples has improved over the last decade although a gap remains compared to many other ethnic groups. The proportion of Pacific school leavers achieving NCEA level 2 or above in 2021 was 76.2%. While this was up from 63.7% in 2011 (see Figure 37), it is still lower than the 78.7% rate for the total population (Education Counts, 2023b).

⁴⁵ See more: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/participation

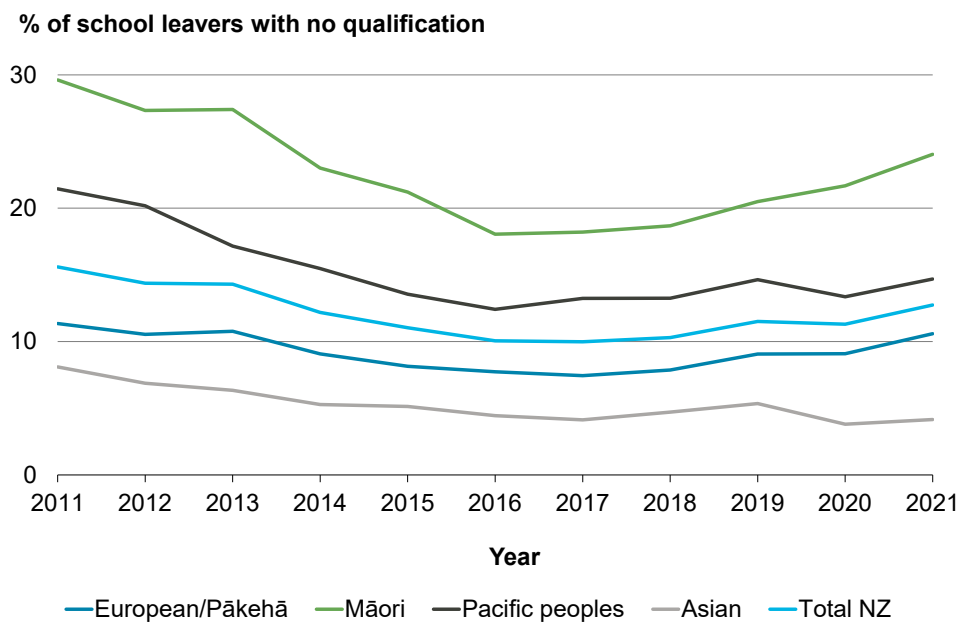
Figure 37: Many more Pacific students leave school with NCEA level 2 or above



Source: Education Counts (Ministry of Education).

However, many Pacific students leave school with no qualification (see Figure 38) (Education Counts, 2023b).

Figure 38: Many Pacific students leave school with no qualification

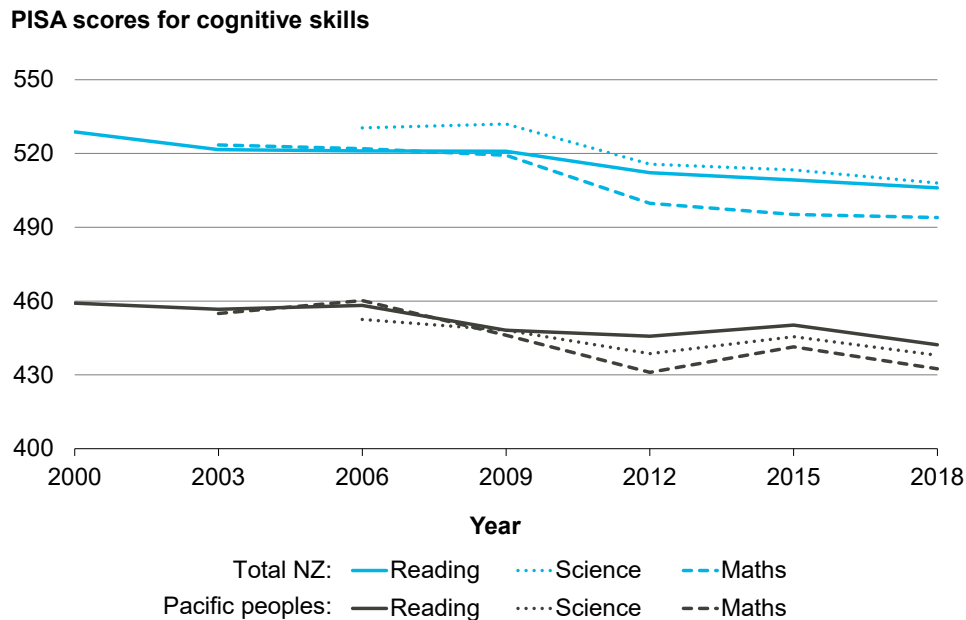


Source: Authors' calculations using Education Counts data (Ministry of Education).

Pacific students are not an exception to the overall decline in PISA

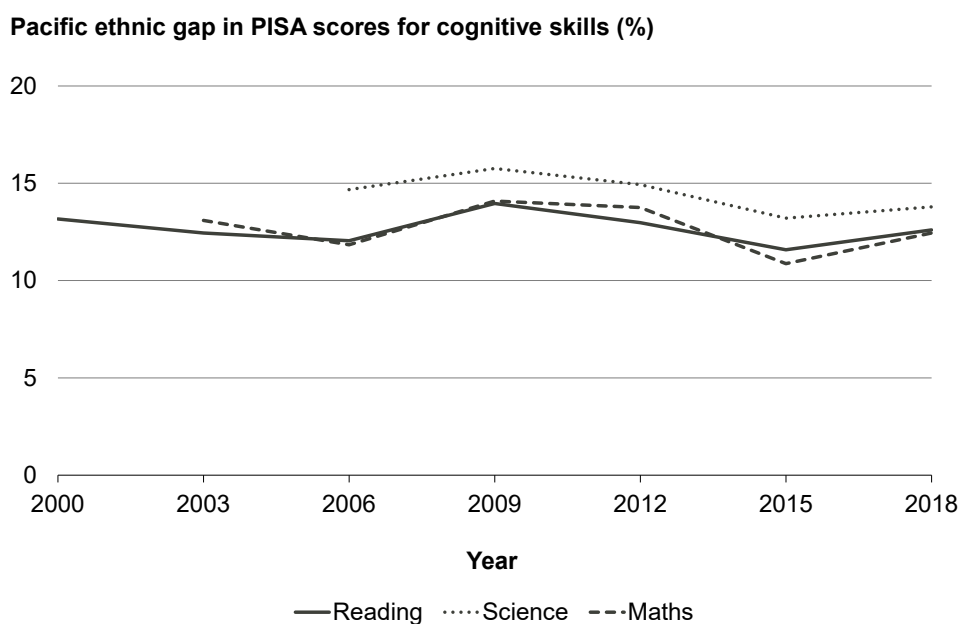
PISA results show that the cognitive skills (reading, mathematics, and science) of 15-year-old Pacific students continue to be significantly below the New Zealand average and are declining further, in line with the decline in the cognitive skills of other students (see Figures 39 and 40).⁴⁶

Figure 39: The cognitive skills of 15-year-old Pacific students continue to be significantly below the New Zealand average



Source: Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand dashboard (Stats NZ).

Figure 40: Pacific ethnic gap in cognitive skills is persistently high

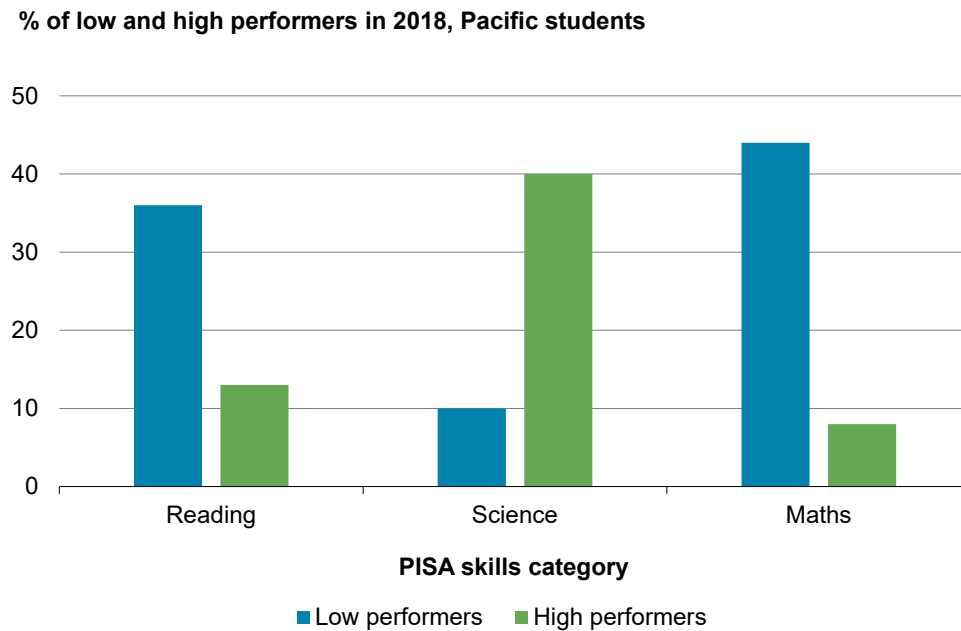


Source: Authors' calculations using Stats NZ's Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand data.

⁴⁶ Read more about the declining trend in school educational achievements and the possible causes in *Te Tai Waiora* (The Treasury, 2022a).

Averages, however, mask wide variation between Pacific students. Figure 41 shows that 8–13% of Pacific students are high performers (performing at level 4 or above of the PISA framework) (Ministry of Education, 2019).

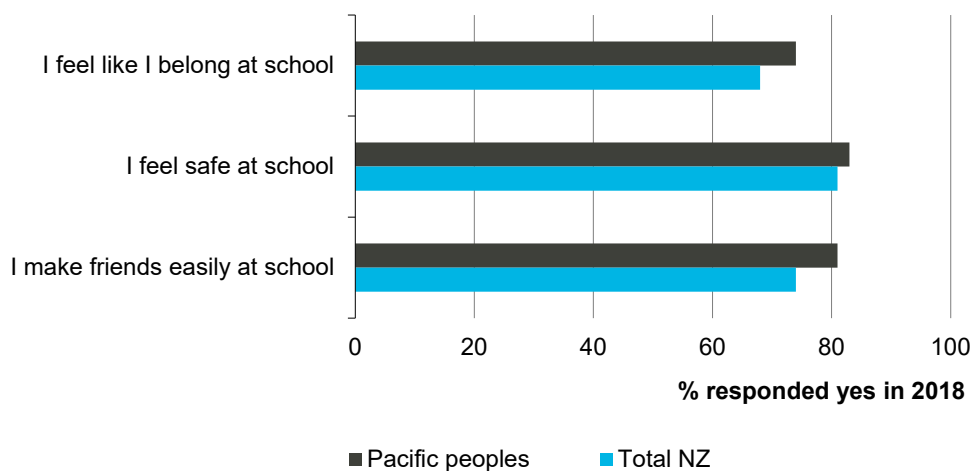
Figure 41: Some Pacific students are performing well, especially in science



Source: Ministry of Education (2019).

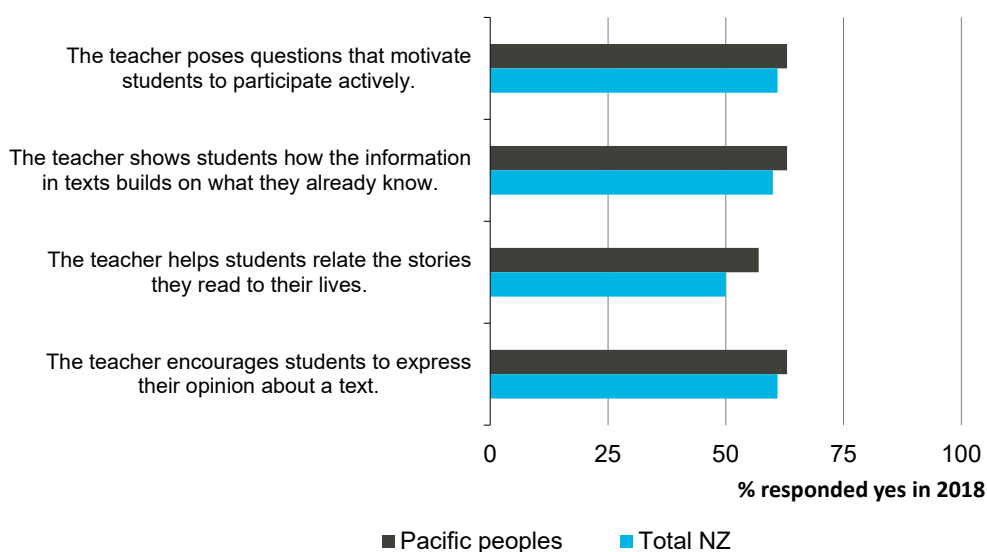
In the 2018 PISA study, Pacific students reported higher levels on some wellbeing indicators than the total New Zealand population (Ministry of Education, 2019). For example, Pacific students were more likely than the total population to report that they feel like they belong at school, that they felt safe at school and that they make friends easily at school (see Figure 42). They also reported high levels of encouragement and support from teachers (see Figure 43).

Figure 42: Most Pacific students had good peer relationships and felt safe



Source: Ministry of Education (2019).

Figure 43: Pacific students reported high levels of teacher support



Source: Ministry of Education (2019).

Most Pacific students also reported that their parents supported their efforts and achievements at school (93%) and encouraged them to be confident (93%). This is encouraging given the importance of parental and family involvement in Pacific students’ success, as discussed below.

On the other hand, the national youth health and wellbeing survey, called “What about me?”, found that worrying about basic needs (paying for one or more of food, electricity, rent/mortgage or petrol/transport) was more of a burden for Pacific students (Ministry of Social Development, 2022). Pacific students were also more likely to be physically hit or harmed and to experience discrimination because of their ethnicity (read more on youth mental health in section 7.2).

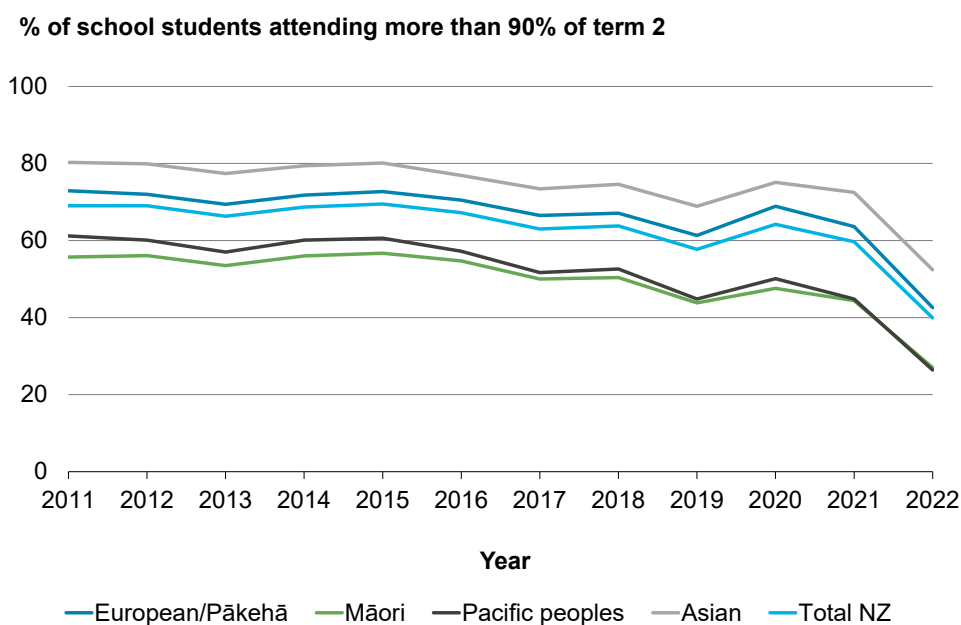
More than half of Pacific students do not regularly attend school

Figure 44 shows that regular school attendance has been declining since 2015. Even in 2019, the year before the pandemic, most Māori and Pacific children did not regularly attend school. Only 45% of Pacific students attended more than 90% of the term, and about half of the absences were due to unjustified reasons (Education Counts, 2023c).⁴⁷

Attendance declined sharply over 2021 and 2022, which is likely to be associated with the impacts of COVID-19. Concern was raised by Ministry of Education officials that children were not returning to school regularly post pandemic and instead likely choosing to continue to support their families through employment and other activities (Ministry of Health COVID-19 Pacific Interagency Group, online discussions with officials, 22 April 2022).

⁴⁷ Read more about the decline in school attendance rates and the possible causes in *Te Tai Waiora* (The Treasury, 2022a).

Figure 44: More than half of Māori and Pacific students do not regularly attend school (LSF Dashboard indicator)



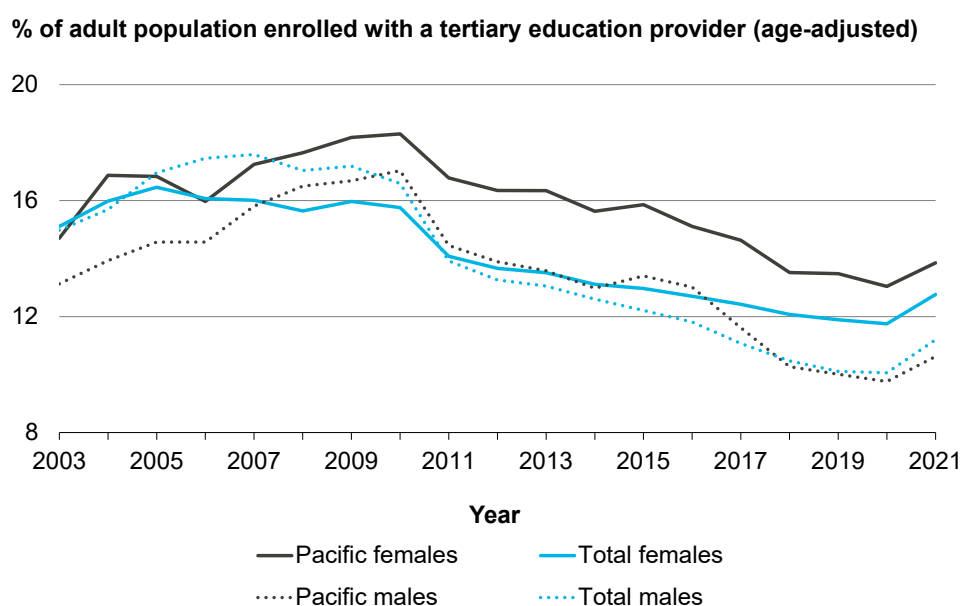
Source: Education Counts (Ministry of Education).

Pacific students' participation in tertiary education is not always converting into qualifications

Pacific students enrol in tertiary education at about the same rate overall as the total population. Data from the Ministry of Education⁴⁸ shows that, in 2021, 12.3% of the Pacific population aged 15 years and over were enrolled in tertiary education compared to 12% of the total population of the same age. However, this is largely because of high levels of participation by Pacific women (13.9%), which offsets low participation by Pacific men (10.6%) (see Figure 45).

⁴⁸ See more: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary-participation

Figure 45: Pacific males enrol less than Pacific females



Source: Education Counts (Ministry of Education).

Note: Data relates to students enrolled at any time during the year with a tertiary education provider in formal qualifications of greater than 0.03 equivalent full-time students (EFTS) (more than 1 week's full-time duration) and trainees within industry training.

Many Pacific students do not complete their tertiary education. As a result, tertiary participation for Pacific peoples is not converting into commensurate levels of attainment of qualifications. In 2021, course completion rates⁴⁹ for Pacific students were 71% compared to 82% for all students. Table 6 shows that Pacific peoples have the lowest completion rates compared to other ethnicities in all tertiary education levels (except for certificate level 4, in which they are just behind Māori).

There are many personal, community and tertiary system reasons for this, including lack of flexible and adaptable support systems, especially for Pacific women, and the complexities that Pacific students experience in enrolment and timetabling of courses that do not reflect the domestic pressures Pacific students face.

Pacific students also tend to study at lower levels of tertiary education. Between 2016 and 2020, almost half of the Pacific school leavers from the 25 schools with the highest Pacific rolls in Auckland enrolled on the lowest level of tertiary education (levels 1–3). This is sometimes due to undermatching processes by tertiary education organisations, which often encourage Pacific tertiary students to enrol into low-level, often bridging, courses to help them prepare for further study. These courses are sometimes at a lower level than what they achieved in secondary school (Tertiary Education Commission, personal communication, 13 March 2023).

⁴⁹ The course completion rate is the percentage of EFTS that were successful (or passed). The rate for a year relates to courses that end in that year, regardless of when the course started. The term 'course' refers to a distinct module, paper or unit of study that generally forms part of a larger programme of study that may or may not lead towards a recognised qualification.

Table 6: Pacific peoples have the lowest tertiary completion rates, 2021

	European	Māori	Pacific peoples	Asian	Total population
Certificate – level 1	74%	69%	62%	86%	73%
Certificate – level 2	71%	65%	59%	82%	69%
Certificate – level 3	75%	66%	66%	83%	73%
Certificate – level 4	77%	67%	68%	82%	74%
Certificate/diploma – levels 5–7	82%	72%	69%	80%	78%
Bachelor’s degree – level 7	88%	81%	74%	87%	86%
Graduate diploma or certificate – level 7	91%	86%	80%	92%	90%
Honours/postgraduate certificate or diploma – level 8	93%	86%	82%	93%	92%
Master’s degree – level 10	93%	86%	83%	93%	92%
All levels	85%	73%	71%	87%	82%

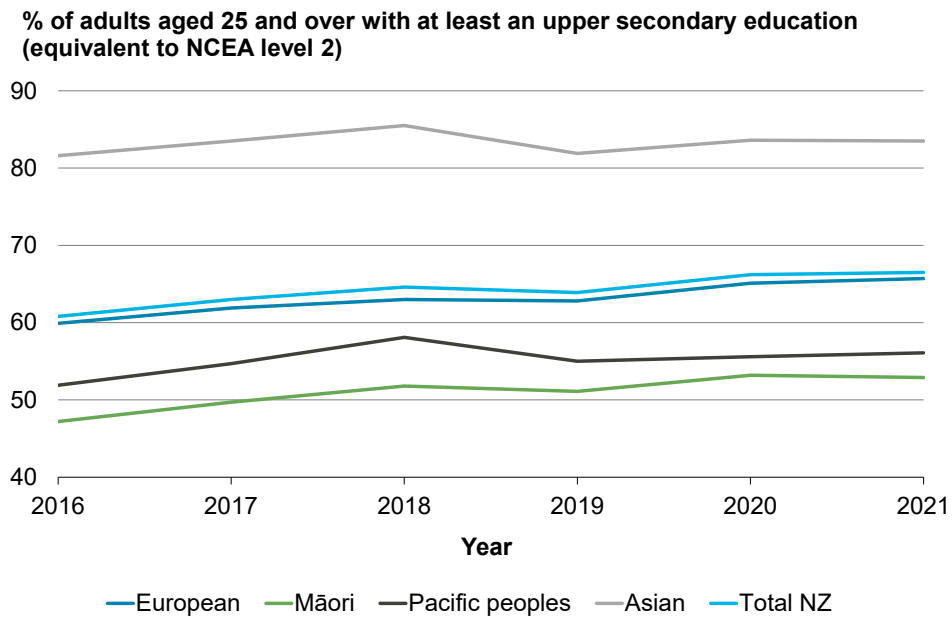
Source: Education Counts summary tables (Ministry of Education).⁵⁰

Pacific adult population continue to be less qualified

Qualifications lead to better jobs, which lead to more income and better wellbeing outcomes for families and communities. Despite recent improvements, the Pacific adult population continue to be less qualified than other ethnic groups particularly in tertiary qualifications (see Figures 46 and 47). Moreover, Pacific students do not always study the fields that are in line with their aspirations and will help them earn higher incomes in the future. Vocational education is often considered the second-best option to a university pathway. This perception assumes that university education is the safest path to a promising career and higher levels of wages (Tertiary Education Commission, personal communication, 13 March 2023).

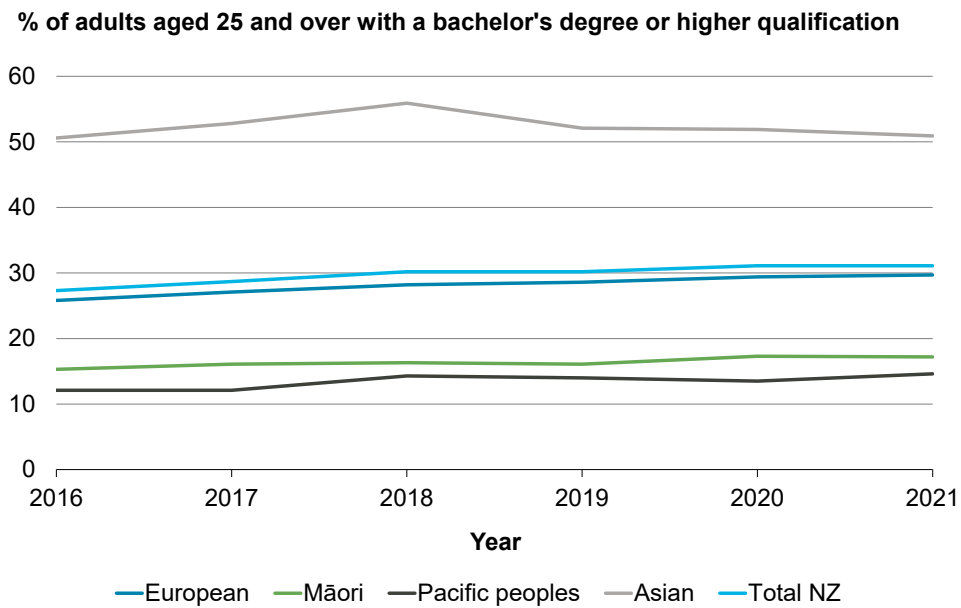
⁵⁰ See more: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/summary_tables

Figure 46: Māori and Pacific adults continue to have lower educational qualifications (upper secondary) (LSF Dashboard indicator)



Source: HLFS (Stats NZ).

Figure 47: Pacific adults continue to have lower tertiary qualifications (LSF Dashboard indicator)



Source: HLFS (Stats NZ).

Pacific identity and culture are important in lifting Pacific peoples' educational outcomes

Having a positive sense of Pacific identity, culture and values in the school is associated with better outcomes for Pacific learners.

“We just want to be understood and valued.” – Pacific school leaver, Pacific Wellbeing Strategy Talanoa Series, 2022

Mila-Schaaf and Robinson (2010) explored the first national secondary school student health and wellbeing survey to study the relationship between culture and educational outcomes of Pacific students using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. They found that “being proud of Pacific ethnic identity and placing importance on Pacific ethnic values was associated with being twice as likely to report doing well at school (either ‘about the middle’ or ‘above the middle’ at school)” (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010, p. 6).

More recently, Pacific learners and families shared their views about removing barriers to access education (including racism and discrimination) and promoting quality teaching and leadership through fono (community consultations) run by the Ministry of Education in 2018 and 2019.⁵¹ They reported that the two most influential aspects of quality teaching and leadership are:

- great educators who value and sustain the identities, languages and cultures of Pacific learners
- having more teachers and leaders of Pacific heritage working in partnership with families.

They also highlighted the importance of families in ensuring education is relevant to their aspirations for learning and work. This supports the previous Talanoa Ako research, which indicated that Pacific parents became more engaged with children’s education when the school showed that it valued and incorporated their identities, languages and cultures (Tongati’o et al., 2016). Research by Pacific academics further confirms the role of family and parental engagement in education.

“The formative role of family stories within the youths’ experiences of success provides opportunity to acknowledge the relational foundations of intergenerational stories.”
(Cunningham et al., 2022, p. 125)

Moreover, like many minority groups internationally, Pacific students in New Zealand can be subjected to unfavourable stereotypes such as being academically disengaged. A counter narrative using in-built strength-based perspectives will support Pacific students in the education system by emphasising the value of cultural knowledge and family practices. This approach helps lift educational outcomes of Pacific students (Cunningham et al., 2022).

⁵¹ Read more: www.education.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/R-289-292-Cabinet-Paper-Pack-Action-Plan-for-Pacific-Education-Redacted.pdf

7.2 Youth mental health

Youth mental health is a significant challenge facing New Zealand, especially for Pacific and Māori youth.⁵² The *Bula Sautu* report launched in December 2021 by the Health Quality and Safety Commission observed that recent surveys showed high levels of depressive symptoms amongst Pacific students, especially females. It also showed that living in areas of deprivation increases the percentage of depressive symptoms (25%) compared to young Pacific peoples living in less-deprived areas (15%). The report noticed a worsening trend between 2012 and 2019 for emotional and mental wellbeing.

Pacific youth face significant mental health challenges

Pacific youth had negative outcomes across a range of other survey results associated with mental wellbeing. The 2021 youth health and wellbeing survey found that:

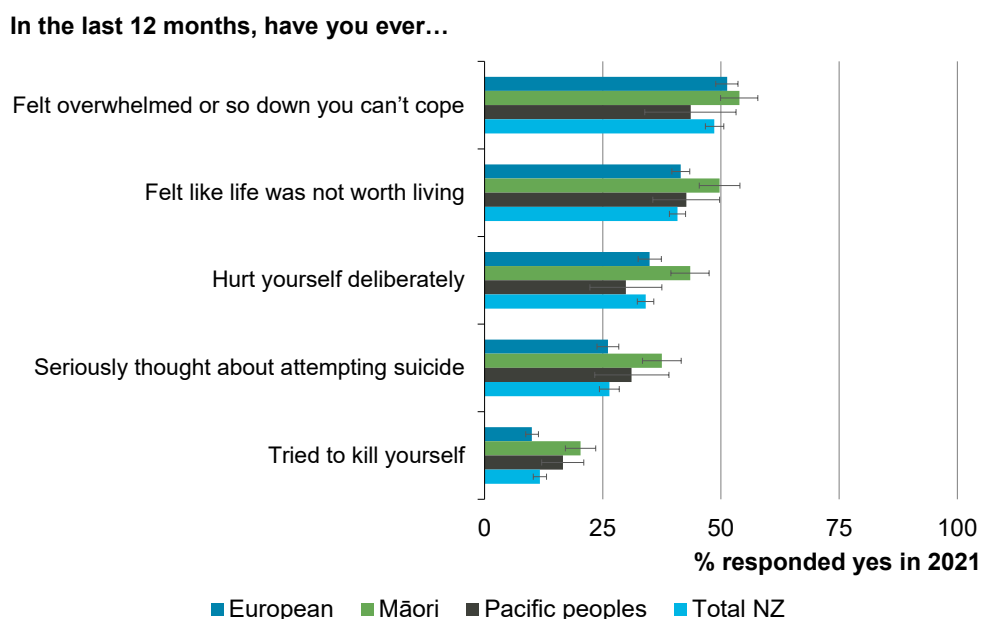
- Rangatahi Māori and young people from Pacific, Asian and Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (MELAA) ethnic groups were more likely to have experienced discrimination from others because of their ethnicity, and in terms of bullying, Pacific young people were more likely than other ethnic groups to have been physically hit or harmed in the last 12 months.
- Pacific young people (along with rangatahi Māori and disabled young people) were more likely to worry about basic items (paying for one or more of kai/food, power/electricity, rent/mortgage or petrol/transport).
- Rangatahi Māori and Pacific young people were less likely to feel inspired to achieve a university degree.

The survey also found that, in the last year:

- four out of 10 Pacific young people felt so overwhelmed they could not cope and that life was not worth living
- one-third had deliberately hurt themselves
- one-third had seriously thought about attempting suicide
- one in six had attempted suicide (see Figure 48).

⁵² Read more about the negative trends in youth mental health in *Te Tai Waiora* (The Treasury, 2022a).

Figure 48: Pacific youth reported significant mental health challenges



Source: Ministry of Social Development (2022).

While the youth population overall faces challenges with its mental health and wellbeing, the significant disparities experienced by Pacific youth in multiple areas make the impact and the challenge of improving their mental health more significant. At the same time, the Pacific population's young age structure and rapid growth mean that improving Pacific youth wellbeing has far-reaching implications for New Zealand.

Pacific youth's connections to culture, family and community provides opportunities for improving their mental health

The heightened sense of belonging to culture, family and community expressed by Pacific youth provides opportunities for improving their mental health. Self-reported surveys and community consultation undertaken by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples suggest that cultural factors can make a big difference to young Pacific peoples' sense of self-worth and wellbeing, including:

- valuing their cultures, identities and ethnicities
- providing them with access to multiple places/spaces where their culture and languages are valued
- providing them with acceptable and accessible health services (Health Quality and Safety Commission New Zealand, 2021).

Pacific young people report comparatively strong connections to their culture (see Table 7) and their religious and spiritual beliefs (see Figure 49) (Ministry of Social Development, 2022).

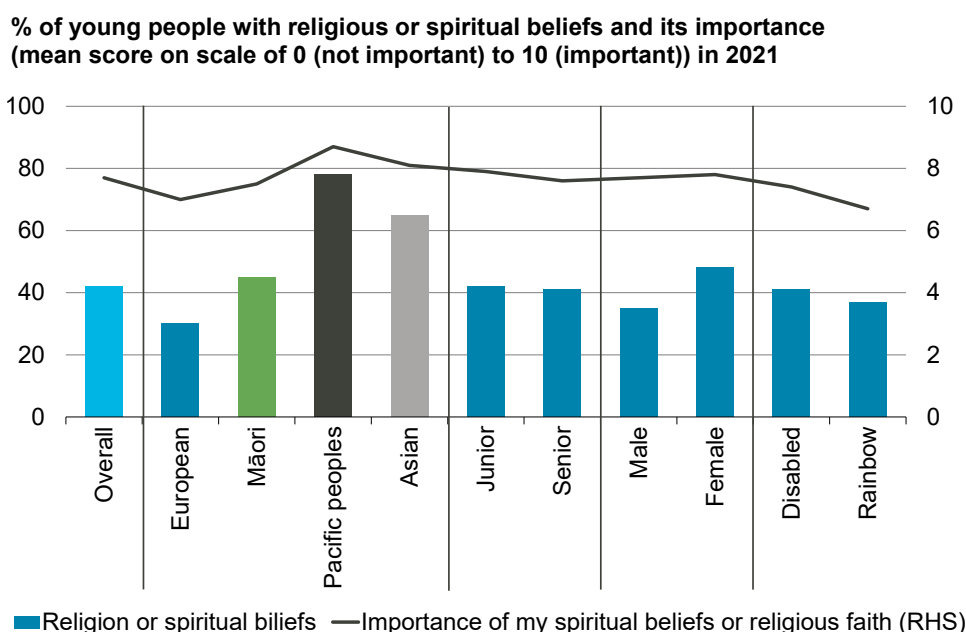
Table 7: Pacific young people overall had the strongest connections to their culture, 2021

	I know my whakapapa	The values of my ethnic group are important to me	I have someone to ask about my culture, whakapapa or ethnic group	It is important to me to maintain my family traditions and cultural heritage
Overall	6.7	7.0	7.7	6.6
European	6.4	6.4	7.2	6.0
Māori	7.4	8.0	8.4	7.6
Pacific	7.2	8.4	8.7	8.2
Asian	6.9	7.6	8.3	7.3
MELAA	6.5	7.2	8.2	7.0

Source: Ministry of Social Development (2022).

Note: The survey asked respondents “how much do you agree ...”. The table presents the mean score on a scale of 0 (disagree) to 10 (agree).

Figure 49: Pacific youth gave the highest ratings for the importance of their beliefs



Source: Ministry of Social Development (2022).

The 2021 youth health and wellbeing survey for years 9–13 students (ages 13–18) highlighted that, overall, rangatahi Māori and Pacific young people felt accepted by their friends (and whānau). The survey indicated that Pacific young people possess higher levels of pride in who they are and experience high feelings of security as they live within their communities (see Table 8).

Table 8: Sense of belonging and safety in the community, 2021

	I feel like I belong in the community I live in	I feel safe in the community where I live
Overall	7.2	7.9
European	7.1	7.9
Māori	1.0	7.6
Pacific	7.5	8.0
Asian	7.2	8.0
MELAA	6.3	7.4

Source: Ministry of Social Development (2022).

Note: The survey asked respondents “to what extent do you agree ...”. The table presents the mean score on a scale of 0 (disagree) to 10 (agree).

There are important additional factors that, together with those identified above, provide pathways to help address the challenges Pacific youth are currently experiencing. The 2021 *Bula Sautu* report highlighted the complexity of factors impacting poor mental health and wellbeing of Pacific youth (Health Quality & Safety Commission, 2021). The report recognises the variety of cultural, social and environmental settings and diverse concepts of identity, health, mental health and wellbeing that comprise Pacific youth mental health. Ethnic identity and levels of ‘deprivations’ have an impact, as do ethnic differences and language confidence. The proposition is that these factors when considered together are protective factors that mitigate and ensure that the impact of mental health harm on young Pacific peoples does not deteriorate further.

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