



STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 annual reports



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Table of Contents

ACRONYMS	3
CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD	4
1.0 COMMITTEE REMIT AND COMPOSITION	6
1.1 COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT TEAM.....	7
2.0 BACKGROUND AND TERMS OF REFERENCE	8
2.1 PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT	8
2.2 PROCEDURE AND PROGRAM.....	8
3.0 COMMITTEE DELIBERATION AND ANALYSIS	10
3.1 INTRODUCTION	10
3.2 COMMITTEE FINDINGS	12
3.3 SITE VISITS SUMMARY	17
4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS	21
5.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)	23
6.0 CONCLUSION	25
7.0 COMMITTEE MEMBERS’ SIGNATURES	26
8.0 ANNEXURE	27

ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ICT	Information Communication and Technology
IBMIS	Integrated Beneficiary Management Information System
MWCSP	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present this report on the review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection Annual Reports for the financial years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023.

The Committee recognises that the Ministry plays a central and indispensable role in Fiji's social protection system. Its mandate extends beyond the administration of welfare payments to the broader objectives of social inclusion, protection of vulnerable populations, gender equality, and national poverty reduction. During the period under review, the Ministry continued to deliver critical support to households experiencing hardship, children at risk, women facing socio-economic barriers, older persons without income security, and persons with disabilities. The Committee acknowledges these efforts, particularly in the context of increasing living costs, economic uncertainty, and ongoing social challenges.

In undertaking this review, the Committee adopted a comprehensive and evidence-based approach. This included a public hearing with Ministry officials, as well as an extensive programme of site visits across the country to divisional and district offices, residential care institutions, and community-based organisations. These visits were instrumental in enabling the Committee to assess the realities of service delivery at the frontline, engage directly with officers and beneficiaries, and compare reported achievements with actual conditions on the ground.

The Committee observed that, while the Ministry's Annual Reports present detailed accounts of programme outputs and coverage, they do not always fully capture the operational challenges faced by frontline officers. Across multiple locations, the Committee identified persistent constraints relating to staffing shortages, high caseloads, limited transport, outdated ICT systems, inadequate office facilities, and occupational health and safety risks. These issues are not isolated but systemic, and they significantly affect the Ministry's ability to deliver timely, effective, and equitable services.

The Committee was particularly concerned by the pressures placed on welfare officers, who are required to manage complex and often distressing cases under difficult conditions. Officers frequently operate with limited resources, undertake fieldwork in high-risk environments, and in some instances utilise personal funds to respond to urgent client needs. The absence of adequate safety measures, counselling support, and appropriate allowances, particularly for on-call child protection duties, raises important concerns regarding staff welfare and sustainability of service delivery.

Despite these challenges, the Committee commends the dedication and professionalism of the Ministry's staff, who continue to provide essential services to vulnerable communities. The Committee also acknowledges the Ministry's efforts to strengthen programme targeting, improve monitoring systems, and advance reforms such as the development of the Integrated Beneficiary Management

Information System. These initiatives demonstrate a commitment to improving efficiency, accountability, and long-term outcomes.

The Committee further notes the Ministry's alignment with the National Development Plan and international commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals. The Ministry's work contributes directly to poverty reduction, gender equality, reduced inequalities, and the protection of children and vulnerable populations. However, the Committee emphasises that future reporting should move beyond activity-based outputs to include measurable outcomes that demonstrate real improvements in the lives of beneficiaries, including sustained exits from welfare, enhanced resilience, and improved access to services.

This report therefore not only highlights achievements but also draws attention to critical gaps that require urgent policy and administrative action. The recommendations contained herein are intended to strengthen staffing capacity, improve infrastructure and transport, enhance occupational health and safety, expand counselling and support services, and address systemic governance and coordination challenges. Particular emphasis is placed on improving access for rural and remote populations, including the need for more flexible delivery mechanisms for social assistance.

In closing, the Committee reiterates that an effective social protection system is fundamental to national stability, social justice, and inclusive development. The work of the Ministry directly impacts the wellbeing and dignity of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. It is therefore imperative that the Ministry is adequately resourced, supported, and held accountable to deliver on its mandate.

I extend the Committee's appreciation to the Ministry officials and all stakeholders who assisted in this review process through their submissions, evidence, and cooperation. I also extend my appreciation to the Members of the Committee for compiling this bipartisan report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this report to Parliament.



Hon. Lenora QEREQERETABUA
Chairperson

1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Under Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (“the Committee”) is mandated to investigate matters related to Fiji’s relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military, and relations with multi-lateral organisations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson
*Deputy Speaker of Parliament Assistant
Minister for Foreign Affairs*



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member
Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts



Hon. Penioni Ravunawa
Member
Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member



Hon. Taito Rokomatu
Member

1.1 Committee Secretariat Team

The Committee is supported by Parliament officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

- Ms. Tirisiane Logavatu – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mrs. Katie Batikawai – Acting Deputy Committee Clerk

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2.0 Background and Terms of Reference

2.1 Presentation of the Annual Report

- 2.1.1 The Speaker of Parliament, on 8 August 2025, referred the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) 2021-2022 annual report to the Committee for review. Subsequently, on 29 September 2025, the Speaker further referred the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP) 2022-2023 annual report to the Committee for review. The referral was made pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), which mandates that all annual reports tabled in Parliament be referred to the relevant Standing Committee for examination and report back to Parliament.
- 2.1.2 The Committee is responsible for reviewing matters concerning Fiji's international relations, development assistance, foreign direct investment, national security oversight, and engagement with multilateral organisations.
- 2.1.3 The Ministry's annual reports fall outside the Committee's mandate, but the referral was made to assist in balancing the distribution of workload among the Standing Committees of Parliament.
- 2.1.4 The Committee notes that the Ministry was formerly known as the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) during the 2021–2022 period and was then renamed the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP), effective from 1 August 2023 following Cabinet approval.
- 2.1.5 The Committee notes that the renaming was intended to align the Ministry's mandate with international social protection frameworks, which encompass measures to prevent, manage, and mitigate circumstances that adversely affect people's wellbeing. The Committee further notes the Government's stated intention to strengthen assistance for vulnerable groups, including older persons, persons with disabilities, children at risk, and single mothers, and emphasizes that the effectiveness of the change should be measured through improved service delivery, programme coordination, and tangible outcomes for beneficiaries.

2.2 Procedure and Program

Public Submission

- 2.2.1 In relation to Standing Order 111(1), the Committee is committed to upholding public trust in Parliament, by ensuring that there is public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection representatives appeared before the Committee at a public hearing in Suva on 24 March 2026. The public submission was broadcast live on the Parliament Facebook page and aired on the Walesi Parliament Channel.
- 2.2.2 A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading 'Committee's Deliberation and Analysis'. Copies of the written submission can be obtained

from the online Appendices of the report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj

Site Visits

2.2.3 As part of its review of the MWCSP Annual Reports, the Committee undertook an extensive programme of site visits to the Ministry's divisional and district offices, residential care institutions, community centres, and partner organisations throughout the country between 30 March and 17 April 2026. These visits enabled the Committee to directly examine the Ministry's operations at the service-delivery level and to engage with officers, beneficiaries, and stakeholders on matters affecting programme implementation.

The locations visited were as follows:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Makoi (Women's) Vocational Centre | 12. Social Protection Office, Suva |
| 2. Ba Women's Forum | 13. MWCSP Valelevu Office |
| 3. Golden Age Home, Samabula | 14. MWCSP Nausori Office |
| 4. Golden Age Home, Lautoka | 15. MWCSP Vunidawa Office |
| 5. Golden Age Home, Labasa | 16. MWCSP Navua Office |
| 6. Senior Citizens Ba (Community Senior Centre, Ba) | 17. MWCSP Sigatoka Office |
| 7. Fiji National Council of Disabled Persons, Suva | 18. MWCSP Nadi Office |
| 8. St. Mina's Home, Nadi | 19. MWCSP Lautoka Office |
| 9. St. Tabitha's Home, Nadi | 20. MWCSP Ba Office |
| 10. Daulomani Home, Lautoka | 21. MWCSP Rakiraki Office |
| 11. Veilomani Boys' Home, Ba | 22. MWCSP Waiyevo Office |
| | 23. MWCSP Savusavu Office |
| | 24. MWCSP Lekutu Office |
| | 25. MWCSP Nabouwalu Office |
| | 26. MWCSP Labasa Office |

2.2.4 The purpose of the visits was to assess the Ministry's operational arrangements, service delivery systems, and resource capacity across different regions. The Committee also sought to gain a clearer understanding of the implementation of programmes on the ground, identify operational challenges faced by staff and stakeholders, and evaluate whether available infrastructure, staffing levels, and funding support were adequate to meet community needs.

2.2.5 Through these visits, the Committee was able to compare the information presented in the Annual Reports with actual conditions at the service-delivery level. This process provided valuable insights into regional disparities, infrastructure constraints, staffing pressures, and the effectiveness of partnerships with community-based organisations and residential care providers. The Committee notes that such direct engagement strengthened its oversight role and informed its recommendations for improved governance, accountability, and service accessibility.

3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This report provides a consolidated review of the MWCSP Annual Reports for the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 financial years, outlining the Committee’s findings on key achievements, challenges, and recommendations to strengthen the Ministry’s operations and service delivery.
- 3.1.2 During the period under review, the Ministry was responsible for national policies and programmes aimed at supporting Fiji’s most vulnerable groups through an inclusive social safety net.
- 3.1.3 During the 2021–2022 financial year, the Ministry comprised four key entities: the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Women, the Poverty Monitoring Unit, and the Corporate Services Division. The Department of Social Welfare included the Child Services Unit, the Family Services Unit, the Older Persons Unit, and the Disability Services Unit. In 2022–2023, the Child Services Unit was separated from the Department and transferred to the newly established Department of Children. As a result, the Ministry comprised five key entities in 2022–2023: the Department of Social Protection (formerly the Department of Social Welfare), the Department of Children, the Poverty Monitoring Unit, the Department of Women, and the Corporate Services Division.
- 3.1.5 The Department of Social Protection administered major assistance programmes, including the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Care and Protection Allowance, Disability Allowance, Rural Pregnant Mothers Food Voucher Programme, and the Social Pension Scheme. It was also responsible for providing grants to fire victims, NGOs, organisations for older persons, and organisations for persons with disabilities, as well as for overseeing the Golden Age Homes (state homes for older persons) and related national coordinating bodies. The Department further pursued welfare-to-work initiatives and reforms aimed at strengthening social protection systems, including the planned implementation of an adaptive management information system.
- 3.1.6 The Department of Children oversees the Ministry’s statutory responsibilities concerning the care and protection of children. Responsibilities include child protection programs, residential care services for children in Institutional Homes, and probation and juvenile justice programmes. The Department is also the secretariat to the National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC).
- 3.1.7 The Department of Women led the implementation of the National Gender Policy and the National Women’s Plan of Action, focusing on women’s economic empowerment, increasing women’s participation in decision-making, better access to services, protection from violence, and gender mainstreaming across Government policies and programmes.

- 3.1.8 The Poverty Monitoring Unit monitored and evaluated Government poverty-related programmes and provided policy advice to the Ministry and Cabinet to improve programme effectiveness, livelihoods, and poverty reduction outcomes.
- 3.1.9 The Corporate Services Division is responsible for the human resources management, operations and financial management. The Division is tasked with overseeing staffing and training, optimising operational processes and ensuring effective financial oversight to support the ministry's objectives.

3.2 Committee Findings

The Committee findings are outlined below:

- 3.2.1 The Ministry performs a central role in Fiji’s social protection architecture by supporting vulnerable households, women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Its mandate extends beyond welfare payments to social inclusion, protection, resilience-building, and national poverty reduction outcomes. Given increasing living costs, unemployment pressures, climate-related shocks, and demographic change, demand for the Ministry’s services is expected to remain high. This places sustained pressure on the Ministry’s policy, financial, and administrative capacity.
- 3.2.2 The Committee noted that the programmes administered by the **Department of Social Protection** recorded a fluctuation in payments over the two financial years including challenges in caring for social welfare recipients. The programmes include:

3.2.2.1 Poverty Benefit Scheme

The Scheme assisted 22,622 households in 2021–2022 with a fully utilised budget of \$32.2 million. In 2022–2023, beneficiary households increased to 24,312, supported by a revised budget of \$35.86 million, of which 84 percent was utilised. The variance in utilisation was mainly due to delays in beneficiary reviews, case processing, documentation, accounting adjustments, and late receipt of approved funds, and did not represent a loss of funds. The Committee notes that the Ministry is addressing these issues through Social Protection Reforms and the development of an Integrated Beneficiary Management Information System (IBMIS) to improve efficiency and resource utilisation.

3.2.2.2 Care and Protection Allowance

The allowance supported 9,060 households with children in 2021–2022 with a fully utilised budget of \$11.75 million. In 2022–2023, assistance increased to 10,789 households with a revised and fully utilised budget of \$14.84 million. Beneficiary reviews also rose from 922 to 1,689, indicating stronger eligibility monitoring, expanded programme reach, and continued demand for support.

3.2.2.3 Social Pension Scheme

The Scheme supported 47,461 senior citizens without pension coverage in 2021–2022, with a fully utilised budget of \$54.9 million. In 2022–2023, beneficiaries increased to 51,784 senior citizens, representing an additional 4,323 recipients, while the budget rose to \$57.4 million, of which 96 percent was utilised. The Ministry also strengthened compliance and targeting measures, with beneficiary reviews increasing from 3,251 in 2021–2022 to 4,320 in 2022–2023. This reflects growing demand for income support

among older persons and the Ministry's continued commitment to expanding coverage for vulnerable senior citizens.

The Committee notes serious evidence regarding older persons being displaced after transferring property titles to family members. This raises broader concerns around elder abuse, housing insecurity, coercion, and legal vulnerability. The Committee finds that social welfare responses alone are insufficient and that coordinated legal, policy, and guardianship protections are required.

3.2.2.4 Rural Pregnant Mothers Food Voucher Program

The food voucher program assisted 1,768 pregnant women in 2021–2022, with 46 percent utilisation of the allocated budget of \$1,046,100. In 2022–2023, the number of beneficiaries increased to 1,941, and the reduced budget of \$650,000 was fully utilised. This indicates improved reach and stronger budget execution in the second year; however, the significant reduction in funding may have impacted the level of support provided per beneficiary.

3.2.2.5 Disability Allowance Scheme

The disability assistance scheme supported 10,145 individuals in 2021–2022 with a budget of \$10.6 million (97% utilised), increasing to 11,832 beneficiaries in 2022–2023 with a \$12 million budget (92% utilised). This reflects improved service coverage and higher funding allocation, with only a slight decline in budget utilisation efficiency.

3.2.2.6 Bus Fare Subsidies

Bus fare assistance was provided to elderly individuals and persons with disabilities. In 2021–2022, a total of 52,179 beneficiaries accessed the scheme with a fully utilised budget of \$6.7 million. However, in 2022–2023, the number of beneficiaries declined significantly to 31,478 despite an increased and fully utilised budget of \$10 million, indicating potential access constraints or changes in programme coverage.

The Committee finds from the site visit that despite the full budget utilisation, the effectiveness of the assistance is undermined by high transport costs, particularly for recipients who are unable to use bus services. In some cases, beneficiaries incur substantial travel expenses to access relatively small allowances, reducing the net value of support. Furthermore, while restrictions on cash-based assistance are intended to minimise misuse, they inadvertently create access barriers for individuals in remote and rural communities, thereby limiting the scheme's overall reach and equity.

3.2.2.7 Grants to Organisations for Older Persons

Although grant allocations have remained consistent, during the site visits, the Committee was informed that delays in the disbursement of funds disrupts programme planning and implementation, affecting the timely delivery of services, and creates administrative challenges for recipient organisations.

3.2.2.8 Golden Age Homes (GAH)

The three State-owned GAH continue to provide institutional care for older persons in need. In 2022–2023, the Homes were allocated a total budget of \$1,608,062, of which \$1,439,868 (90%) was utilised. Notwithstanding this level of utilisation, the Committee finds that additional support is required to ensure the proper maintenance of facilities and the delivery of quality care to residents.

From the site visit, the Committee identifies several priority areas requiring attention, including the strengthening of security services; a review of staff remuneration, particularly wages and outstanding overtime for working during public holidays; and the upgrading of technology systems to support an integrated community care approach. The Committee further notes the need for essential resources such as assistive devices (including wheelchairs), staff uniforms and personal protective equipments (PPEs), and the approval of appropriate allowances, including a dirty allowance. Improvements to cleaning equipment, such as the provision of industrial washing machines, and adequate supplies for bedridden residents, including diapers, are also necessary. In addition, the provision of disability-friendly transport is required to support resident mobility, access to services, and participation in recreational activities.

The Committee also finds that occupational health and safety (OHS) concerns remain significant, particularly at the Samabula facility, which requires urgent renovation and repair works.

While residents are attended to by qualified caregivers, the Committee finds that there is limited capacity to manage individuals with psychosocial or psychiatric conditions.

- 3.2.3 The Committee acknowledges the critical and sensitive role of the **Department of Children**, considering the increasing number of child protection cases, including online abuse, cyberbullying, and sexual exploitation. The Committee notes that the most reported cases involve neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, typically identified through schools, community members, and other stakeholders. Responses are prioritised based on risk severity and are coordinated through established mechanisms, including helplines, law enforcement, and welfare services.

- 3.2.4 From the site visit, the Committee, however, identified the lack of confidentiality and child-friendly spaces at many offices, particularly in child protection matters where privacy and a supportive environment are critical. Additionally, the Committee noted that welfare officers undertake 24-hour on-call duties, for example child protection emergencies, without an on-call allowance, comparable to medical and emergency service personnel.
- 3.2.5 The Committee finds that residential care and juvenile justice programmes contribute positively to rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes. The Committee further notes that oversight mechanisms, including audits, case reviews, and compliance monitoring, are in place to ensure accountability in childcare institutions.
- 3.2.6 The Committee acknowledges the work of the **Department of Women** in advancing programmes to end violence against women and girls, promoting women's economic empowerment and increasing participation of women and girls at all levels.
- 3.2.7 The Committee notes that grants and support programmes for women groups and vocational institutions have been effective, with training in areas such as aged care, fashion, culinary arts, and computing playing a significant role in lifting women out of poverty and creating employment pathways, as reflected in strong outcomes including employment, entrepreneurship, and overseas placements. However, the long-term impact remains limited without complementary support such as access to markets, transport, finance, mentoring, and digital inclusion, particularly for rural and maritime women who face greater barriers.
- 3.2.8 From the site visit, the Committee found that delays in the disbursement and reductions in grant funding adversely affect programme administration, including the payment of instructors' allowances. These constraints have also contributed to decreased student enrolment and have limited the provision of transport assistance by the organisations, such as bus fare support, thereby affecting students' ability to attend classes consistently.
- 3.2.9 The Committee notes the Ministry's continued efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through nationwide awareness initiatives, including the observance of International Women's Day, which helped recognise the contribution of women in society. The Committee further notes progress under the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls, including improved government coordination, partnerships with civil society organisations, development of national shelter guidelines, and service delivery protocols for survivors of gender-based violence.
- 3.2.10 The Ministry outlined commitments linked to CEDAW implementation, gender-responsive budgeting, and outreach to rural women and women with disabilities. The Committee finds that

policy commitments should now be translated into measurable gains in women's safety, labour force participation, leadership representation, and access to services.

- 3.2.11 The Committee identified gaps in reporting and access to justice services for women and girls in rural and maritime communities, highlighting the need for a coordinated whole-of-government response. In addition, the Ministry emphasised the importance of increasing women's representation across sectors, promoting women's economic empowerment, and integrating gender considerations into climate change and disaster risk reduction initiatives.
- 3.2.12 The Committee further notes ongoing community-based programmes aimed at engaging men and boys, promoting shared household responsibilities, and supporting women's participation in training and development opportunities, particularly in rural communities.
- 3.2.13 The Committee notes that the Ministry measures programme impact beyond outputs by assessing improvements in household wellbeing, resilience, and long-term outcomes. Through its **Poverty Monitoring Unit**, the Ministry evaluates programmes using baseline data, field surveys, and stakeholder validation to identify effectiveness and gaps.
- 3.2.14 Findings indicate improvements in household income, living standards, food security, and social wellbeing, with a focus on whether beneficiaries transition from assistance to sustained independence. This approach is further strengthened through the Adaptive Social Protection Framework, which integrates resilience building and long-term outcomes into programme design.
- 3.2.15 The Committee notes that the Ministry has strengthened its monitoring and targeting systems to improve the accuracy of identifying vulnerable populations. Key mechanisms include the use of Standard Operating Procedures, a Proxy Means Test based on national household data, and categorical targeting supported by community validation to minimise errors.
- 3.2.16 The transition to digital data collection through the KOBO Tool application has improved efficiency in data gathering and reporting, while collaboration with communities, NGOs, and other government agencies enhances verification processes. The Committee further notes that the development of an integrated system (IBMIS) aims to enable data sharing across agencies and address current limitations in verifying applicant information, thereby improving targeting accuracy and reducing gaps in the system.
- 3.2.17 The Committee finds that staffing shortages, high caseloads, and training gaps directly affect the Ministry's ability to conduct assessments, monitor beneficiaries, investigate protection matters, and provide timely support. Frontline service delivery is highly dependent on capable personnel, and workforce constraints risk undermining otherwise well-designed programmes.

The Committee notes that 3,063 beneficiary reviews were undertaken during the reporting period. However, with approximately 108,000 beneficiaries across programmes, the Committee finds that existing staffing and operational capacity is insufficient to conduct timely and comprehensive reviews of all cases. This creates risks of outdated records, delayed exits, mistargeting, and reduced confidence in programme integrity.

- 3.2.18 The Committee notes that income support alone is insufficient if beneficiaries remain dependent on long-term assistance. The Committee notes the Ministry's intention to transition beneficiaries from dependency to self-reliance through the Welfare Graduation Programme, training, seed capital, and employment linkages. While the policy direction is sound, the Committee finds that future reporting should include measurable outcomes such as household income growth, employment retention, business survival rates, and successful exits from welfare. Activity-based reporting alone is insufficient.
- 3.2.19 The Committee finds that staffing constraints, particularly in frontline and technical roles, continue to impact service delivery. The Committee notes that succession planning, acting appointments, and recruitment processes are used to maintain institutional continuity.

3.3 Site Visits Summary

The Committee findings from the site visits are outlined below:

3.3.1 Geographic and Access Constraints

The Committee finds that service delivery is significantly constrained by geographic isolation, poor transport infrastructure, and limited logistical capacity, particularly in rural and remote areas.

3.3.2 Staffing and Workload Pressures

The Committee finds that staffing levels are inadequate relative to population needs, resulting in excessive workloads, delays in service delivery, and increased pressure on officers managing complex and high-risk cases. Furthermore, overtime payments owed to staff remain outstanding.

In addition, the Committee notes the absence of a dedicated safe house for girls and young female children in the region, particularly for after-hours and emergency placements. This gap has compelled officers to temporarily accommodate children in their own homes, exposing both staff and children to significant legal, ethical, and safety risks. While other regions, such as Labasa, benefit from NGO-supported safe placement options, similar arrangements are not available in the Western region.

3.3.3 Inadequate Infrastructure and Office Facilities

The Committee finds that some office facilities are overcrowded, substandard, and not fit for purpose, thereby compromising counselling privacy and the effective management of sensitive cases. This environment discourages clients, particularly children and women, from speaking openly about traumatic experiences.

The Committee further notes that poor office conditions, including malfunctioning air-conditioning units, leaking ceilings, inadequate lighting, and damaged flooring, pose significant safety and operational risks to both staff and service recipients. Additional concerns include the absence of disability access, ageing and inadequate furniture, accumulation of boarded items, inadequate amenities, insufficient storage space, and a lack of filing cabinets.

3.3.4 Transport and Resource Limitations

The Committee finds that limited and unreliable transport and the lack of essential operational resources, constrain field operations and timely service delivery. The Committee also noted that the Waiyevo office has not had a driver since October 2025. Furthermore, the Committee noted that the absence of petty cash has caused staff to use personal funds for tyre repairs and other minor expenses.

3.3.5 Occupational Health, Safety, and Staff Welfare Risks

The Committee finds that officers face significant safety risks during fieldwork, including harassment and hazardous conditions, with inadequate access to protective measures, counselling and mental health support, and consistent allowances, including on-call entitlements. The Committee also notes that inconsistent provision of PPEs across district offices exposes staff to potential health risks. Furthermore, welfare officers frequently utilise personal funds to respond to urgent client needs and are regularly exposed to harassment, threats, and occupational hazards. These challenges are compounded by limited access to protective equipment, inadequate incident reporting mechanisms, and insufficient occupational health and safety support.

3.3.6 ICT and Systems Inefficiencies

The Committee finds outdated and unreliable ICT systems and infrastructure, including the continued use of obsolete equipment due to delayed replacement, limited connectivity, and lack of dedicated technical support, undermines digitisation efforts and overall operational efficiency. At the time of the Committee's site visit, there was only one ICT officer serving all ministries and departments in the Western and Northern Divisions respectively. Consequently, some staff had to resort to internet shops for work purposes.

3.3.7 **Housing and Quarters Policy Challenges**

The Committee notes that staff housing remains a significant challenge, with government quarters available but underutilised due to rigid application of General Orders and Public Service Commission policies. As a result, officers are often required to share accommodation or incur high private rental costs. The Committee finds that the current policy framework does not adequately cater for the realities of rural hardship postings. In addition, many staff quarters are in poor condition, and officers resort to using personal funds to carry out urgent maintenance.

3.3.8 **Governance and Institutional Challenges**

The Committee finds that weak communication and feedback mechanisms, delays in decision-making, and external interventions undermine established processes. The continuation of these issues indicates broader systemic governance gaps within the Ministry.

3.3.9 **Counselling support**

The Committee notes that while counsellors have recently been appointed at the divisional level and counselling services are available for both clients and staff, access remains limited. Outreach services have not yet been implemented, and access requires multiple approval layers, resulting in delays. The Committee further finds that many staff, who are themselves trained counsellors, continue to manage traumatic cases without adequate dedicated psychosocial support for themselves.

3.3.10 **Residential Care**

The Committee's site visit to the residential homes for children found that the facilities continue to provide essential residential care and educational support to vulnerable girls and boys up to 18 years. Majority of residents are actively engaged in schooling or vocational training.

However, several homes operate under significant resource constraints, relying on small workforces that include retired and volunteer staff, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. While funding is sourced from government, faith-based organisations, and donors, delays and inconsistencies in grant disbursement adversely affect staff remuneration and daily operations. The Committee also identified key structural and policy gaps, including the discontinuation of government support when children turn 18 despite remaining in school, and unresolved land tenure issues in some cases, which pose risks to long-term security.

In addition, unresolved land tenure issues for Veilomani Boys Home pose long-term security risks, as the property has not been formally secured. While the Home undertakes small-scale income-generating activities to supplement funding, these are insufficient to address ongoing financial pressures.

The Committee further observed that community-based facilities such as Daulomani Home play a critical role in providing inclusive, holistic care to a broad range of vulnerable groups, supported by strong community ownership and innovative self-sustaining practices. However, these facilities face challenges including heavy reliance on volunteers, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to utilities, and increasing demand that exceeds capacity. Similarly, while institutions such as St Mina Orphanage and St. Tabitha demonstrate high standards of care, strong safeguarding, and individualised support, they face financial pressures due to high operating costs, reliance on unpredictable donor funding, and limited access to specialised services. Across all facilities, the Committee emphasised the need for strengthened and timely funding, improved infrastructure, enhanced access to specialist services, and more comprehensive transition and aftercare frameworks to ensure sustainability and better outcomes for children and vulnerable populations.

4.0 Recommendations

The Committee recommends the following:

- 4.1 That the Ministry undertake an urgent review of staffing levels at district and divisional offices, with a view to increasing frontline personnel to match population needs and caseloads. Priority should also be given to timely recruitment, succession planning, and the provision of specialised roles. (*reference 3.2.17, 3.2.19, 3.3.2*)
- 4.2 That additional vehicles and drives be allocated, particularly for rural and remote service areas, and that reliable transport arrangements be established to support field operations. Provision should also be made for operational funds, including petty cash, to enable timely responses to urgent cases, noting that reimbursement for the use of personal funds for official duties is often delayed. (*reference 3.3.1, 3.3.4*)
- 4.3 That office facilities should meet minimum operational and safety standards, including the provision of adequate space, private counselling rooms, and child-friendly environments. Urgent repairs and maintenance of existing infrastructure should be prioritised. (*reference 3.2.2.8, 3.2.4, 3.3.3*)
- 4.4 That the Ministry accelerate investment in modern ICT infrastructure, including replacement of obsolete equipment, improve connectivity in rural areas, and the full implementation of the Integrated Beneficiary Management Information System (IBMIS) to enable real-time data sharing and verification across agencies. (*reference 3.2.2.1, 3.2.16, 3.3.6*)
- 4.5 That the development and implementation of comprehensive occupational health and safety policies, including the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), the establishment of incident reporting mechanisms, and access to regular counselling for staff be given priority. The Ministry should also ensure consistent payment of overtime and introduce on-call allowances for officers performing emergency duties. (*reference 3.2.2.8, 3.3.5*)
- 4.6 That a review of existing housing policies to allow more flexible and equitable access to government quarters, particularly for officers posted to rural locations be prioritised. The maintenance of staff quarters should be prioritised to ensure safe and adequate living conditions. (*reference 3.3.7*)
- 4.7 Improving internal communication and feedback systems to ensure that operational concerns raised by frontline staff are escalated and addressed in a timely manner. Clear protocols should be established to minimise undue external interventions and reinforce adherence to standard procedures. (*reference 3.3.8*)
- 4.8 Strengthening counselling services through regular outreach programmes. In addition, structured psychosocial support programmes should be established for staff managing traumatic and high-risk cases. (*reference 3.3.9*)

- 4.9 The Committee recommends reviewing delivery mechanisms for social assistance to reduce access barriers for rural and remote beneficiaries, including transport-related challenges. This should include the provision of alternative support mechanisms, such as cash vouchers or direct cash transfers, for elderly persons and other vulnerable groups who do not have bus services. Strengthening targeting accuracy through integrated systems and enhanced data sharing should also be prioritised. (*reference 3.2.2.6*)
- 4.10 The Committee recommends the consideration of a dedicated facility or specialised care arrangements to adequately support residents living in the Golden Age Homes with psychosocial needs. (*reference 3.2.2.8*)
- 4.11 That the Government review and enhance funding arrangements for residential care homes to ensure timely and consistent disbursement of grants, aligned with the actual cost of care. (*reference 3.3.10*)
- 4.12 That relevant policies be amended to allow the continuation of government assistance for residents beyond 18 years where they remain in education or require additional support, and to strengthen transition and aftercare programmes. (*reference 3.3.10*)

5.0 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

5.1 The Committee finds that the Ministry's mandate and programme portfolio are closely aligned with the SDGs, particularly those relating to poverty reduction, gender equality, reduced inequalities, child protection, and inclusive institutions.

5.2 SDG 1 - No Poverty

The Ministry made a substantial contribution through its social protection programmes, including the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Social Pension Scheme, Care and Protection Allowance, Disability Allowance, Rural Pregnant Mothers Food Voucher Programme, and bus fare assistance. Across the two reporting years, beneficiary numbers increased in several major schemes, while the Poverty Monitoring Unit also evaluated government poverty alleviation programmes and reported findings to Cabinet, indicating that the Ministry's role extends beyond disbursement to impact monitoring and policy feedback.

5.3 SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being

The Ministry supports pregnant mothers, psychosocial protection for children, care for older persons, and assistance to persons with disabilities. The Rural Pregnant Mothers Food Voucher Programme, disability assistance, and residential care for older persons all contribute to household welfare and wellbeing. However, the Committee notes that weaknesses in counselling access, poor facilities, inadequate assistive devices, and limited capacity to support residents with psychosocial or psychiatric conditions reduce the quality and comprehensiveness of this contribution.

5.4 SDG 4 - Quality Education and SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth

The Ministry supports these SDGs through women's vocational training and empowerment initiatives. Training in areas such as aged care, fashion, culinary arts, and computing has supported employment, entrepreneurship, and overseas placement outcomes, indicating positive contributions to women's economic participation and skills development. Nevertheless, the Committee finds that delayed grant disbursement, reduced funding, transport barriers, and weak access to markets, finance, mentoring, and digital inclusion limit the long-term sustainability of these gains, especially for rural and maritime women.

5.5 SDG 5 - Gender Equality

The Ministry's Department of Women is responsible for promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls through implementation of the National Women's Plan of Action and gender mainstreaming across government. The annual reports and Committee findings indicate progress in programmes aimed at ending violence against women and girls, expanding

women's economic empowerment, strengthening partnerships with civil society, and promoting women's participation in training, employment, and leadership. These initiatives demonstrate meaningful alignment with SDG 5, although the Committee finds that stronger outcome reporting is still required to measure gains in women's safety, labour force participation, leadership representation, and access to services.

5.6 **SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities**

The Ministry targets assistance to groups at heightened risk of exclusion, including older persons, persons with disabilities, poor households, vulnerable children, and rural pregnant mothers. This is reinforced by the Ministry's stated objective of creating an inclusive social safety net and breaking down barriers linked to gender, age, disability, and economic standing. However, the Committee notes that persistent transport barriers, geographic isolation, and administrative delays continue to limit equitable access for some rural and remote beneficiaries, thereby constraining the full realisation of this goal.

5.7 **SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

The Ministry's child protection responsibilities strongly support SDG 16.2 on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children, as well as the broader objective of SDG 16. The Ministry recorded 1,780 child welfare cases in 2021–2022 and 1,800 cases in 2022–2023, with neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse among the most reported case types. The existence of child protection training, the National Child Helpline, residential audits, court reporting, and community-based corrections reflects an institutional framework aimed at protection, accountability, rehabilitation, and reintegration. At the same time, the Committee notes that increasing caseloads, lack of confidential child-friendly spaces, and absence of on-call allowances for emergency child protection work continue to weaken service responsiveness.

5.8 **SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals**

The Committee notes that the Poverty Monitoring Unit strengthens alignment with SDG 17 by working across ministries, engaging stakeholders, using field surveys and validation processes, and reporting findings for policy improvement. The Unit's monitoring of multiple poverty alleviation programmes implemented by other ministries, together with its use of consultations, Kobo-based survey tools, GIS mapping, and Cabinet reporting, reflects an increasingly integrated approach to measuring impact and improving coordination. This is further supported by ongoing efforts to develop IBMIS and related systems for better data sharing and targeting.

6.0 Conclusion

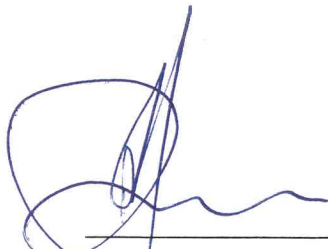
In conclusion, the Ministry plays a vital role in delivering social protection services to vulnerable populations and has demonstrated continued commitment through expanded programmes and improved monitoring. However, its effectiveness is constrained by staff shortages, limited resources, poor infrastructure, and access barriers, particularly in rural and maritime areas.

The Committee emphasises the need for stronger resource allocation, improved systems, and a shift towards outcome-based reporting to enhance service delivery. Implementing the recommendations will be essential to ensuring more effective, equitable, and sustainable support for vulnerable communities.


7.0 Committee Members' Signatures




Hon. Lenora QEREQERETABUA
Chairperson



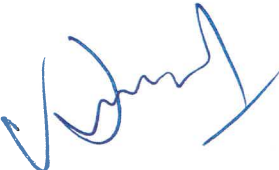
Hon. Rinesh SHARMA
Deputy Chairperson



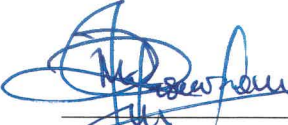
Hon. Isikeli TUIWAILEVU
Member



Hon. Penioni RAVUNAWA
Member



Hon. Virendra LAL
Member



Hon. Taito ROKOMATU
Member

8.0 Annexure

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-foreign-affairs-and-defence/>