

Understanding Pacific communities in Australia: gender gaps, part 2

by Huiyuan Liu

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Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme workers employed in the care sector

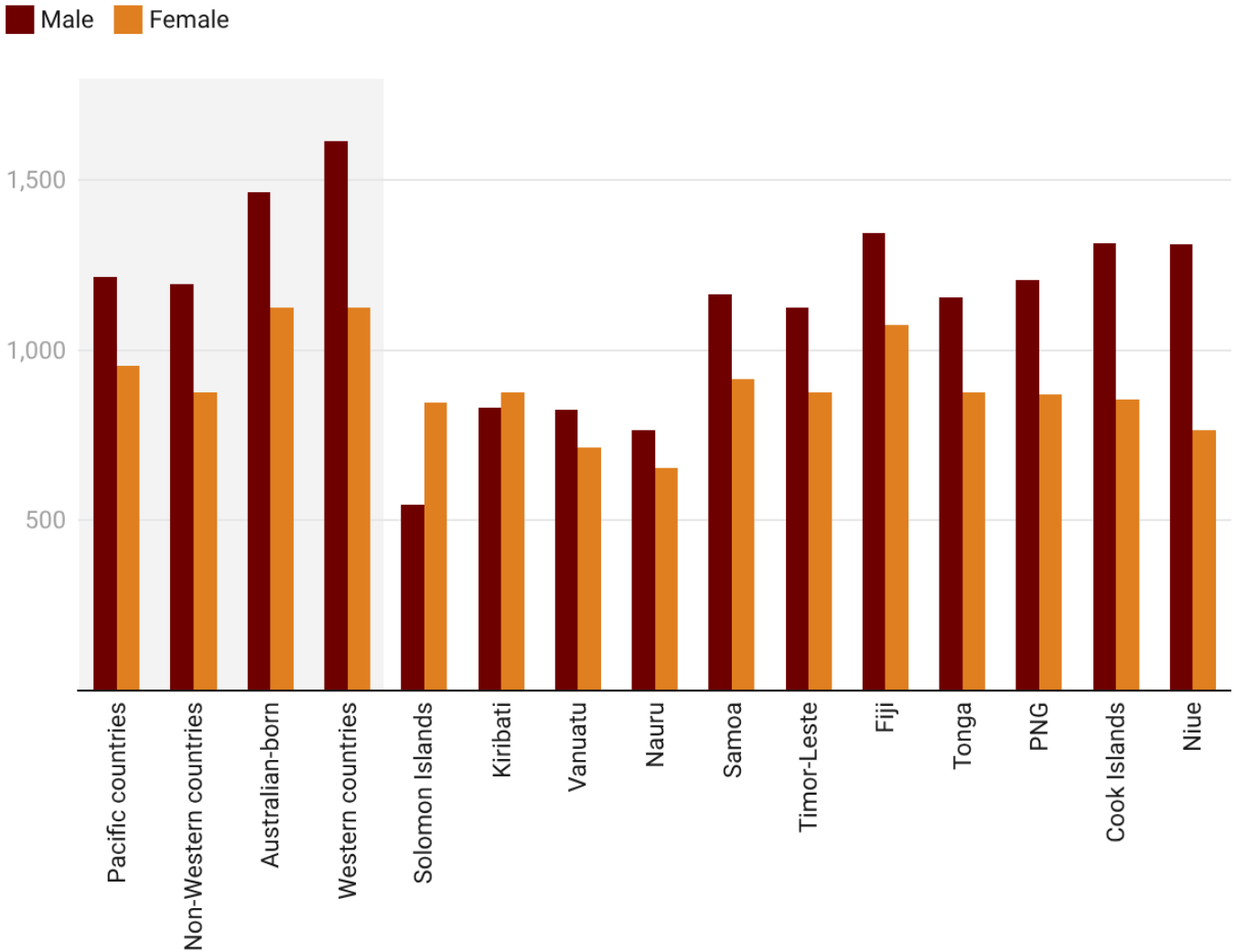
Photo Credit: [Facebook/PALMscheme](#)

Pacific women experience [well-documented inequalities](#) in labour market participation and wage outcomes, often stemming from limited access to assets, finance and services, as well as enduring social norms that ascribe caregiving duties primarily to women. These gender challenges persist despite strong progress toward gender parity in education. However, when Pacific migrants settle in a new social and cultural context, their established gender norms may be challenged and renegotiated. In this second article on [gender gaps](#), drawing on 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data, I examine whether gender disparities in labour market performance persist among Pacific communities in Australia following migration.

As shown in Figure 1, the median weekly income of male migrants from Pacific countries is 27% higher than that of female migrants. Although this is the smallest gender income gap among all population groups in Australia, it primarily reflects the substantially lower median income of Pacific males relative to Australian-born and male migrants from Western countries, combined with the moderately lower median income of Pacific females.

Income patterns vary across Pacific countries. In most cases, male migrants earn more than their female counterparts. The gender income gap is largest among migrants from Niue and the Cook Islands, where men have relatively high median incomes and women moderately lower incomes. Among migrants from Vanuatu and Nauru, gender differences are minimal, although both men and women earn comparatively less overall. Notably, migrants from Solomon Islands and Kiribati show a reversed income gap, with women earning more than men. However, this result should be interpreted with caution, as approximately 22% of migrants from the Solomon Islands lack administrative income data and are therefore excluded from the median income calculations, which may distort medians.

Figure 1: Median weekly income of people aged 25-59 by gender



Notes: Administrative data on total weekly personal income (including all sources of income, tax, and superannuation). Weekly income may be understated if a person works for only part of the year. 4% to 15% of the population (combining both males and females) in most groups do not have income data and are excluded from my calculations of medians. For Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and non-Western countries, the shares are particularly high, about 41%, 22%, and 23%.

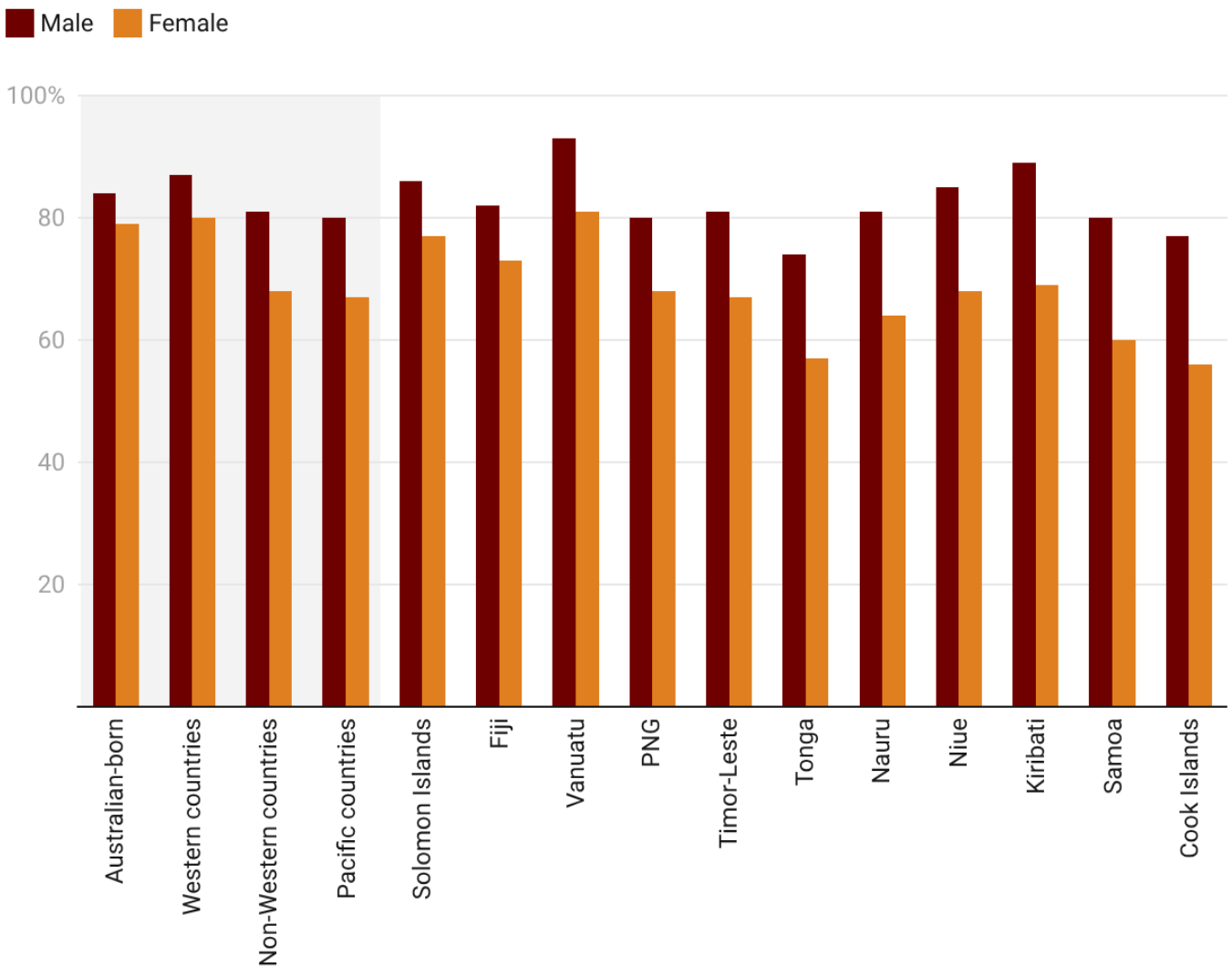
Source: 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data • Created with Datawrapper

A major contributor to the gender income gap is the gender difference in labour force participation. Figure 2 shows that, across all population groups, the share of employed women is lower than that of employed men. Among Pacific migrants, this difference is 14 percentage points, which is larger than that for the Australian-born and Western migrant populations but similar to that observed among non-Western migrants.

Labour force participation gaps exist across migrants from all Pacific countries, though they remain modest, ranging from 8% to 17%. Importantly, women’s participation remains relatively high in Australia, with the lowest rate at 57%. The situation stands in stark contrast to **that in many Pacific countries**, where few women are in formal employment in their home countries and the majority work in

the informal sector.

Figure 2: Percentage of employed people aged 25-59 by gender



Notes: Employment status includes “employed, worked full-time”, “employed, worked part-time”, and “employed, away from work”. 0-4% of the population (combining both males and females) in most groups fail to report labour force status and are excluded from our calculations of ratios. For non-western countries, 18% do not have data.

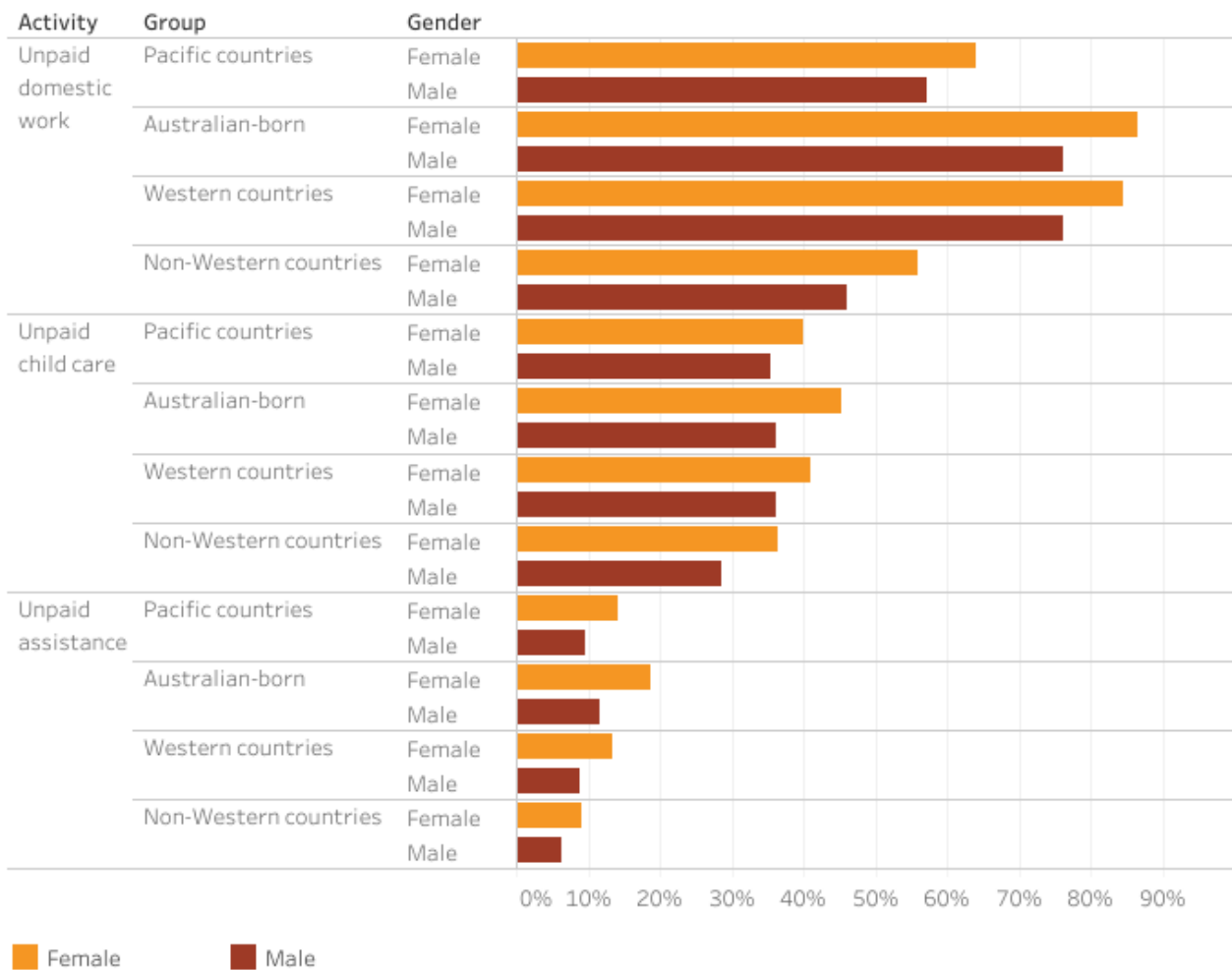
Source: 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data • Created with Datawrapper

Household responsibilities often play a major role in shaping women’s employment outcomes. These include domestic chores, childcare and caring for elderly family members or those with health conditions. As shown in Figure 3, women are more involved in all these activities than men across all population groups. However, the gender gaps are relatively small and generally consistent, and the overall shares of Pacific men and women participating in household duties are comparable to those of other groups.

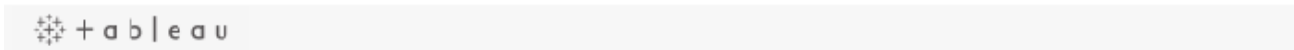
Time use tends to better describe the burden of domestic labour. Although both men and women contribute to domestic work, women typically spend substantially more time on it, limiting their ability to undertake paid employment. Census data

indicate that in Australia, 29% of Pacific women spend 15 hours or more per week on domestic tasks, compared with only 11% of Pacific men. While this gender difference is large, it aligns with the patterns observed in other populations. Strikingly, the share of Pacific women reporting 15 or more hours per week of domestic work is the lowest among all groups.

Figure 3: Percentage of people aged 25-59 who report performing unpaid domestic work or care



Source: [2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data](#). 0% to 4% of the population (combining both males and females) in most groups fail to report data and are excluded from our calculations of ratios for each activity. For non-western countries, 19% do not have data for domestic work, 18% for unpaid childcare, and 19% for unpaid assist..



Overall, gender gaps in employment outcomes do exist among Pacific communities in Australia, but they are considerably narrower than those in the Pacific region, owing mainly to the much-improved labour force participation of women. Income differences between men and women persist, not due to disparities in access to education — which have largely been addressed — but rather because women take on a greater share of household responsibilities. Even so, the level of domestic commitment among Pacific women is comparable to that of other populations in

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Australia. Living and working in Australia, therefore, seems to be associated with greater gender equity within the Pacific diaspora. Future research could further examine the casual relationship and the potential role of migration in shaping traditional Pacific gender norms.

Read *part 1* and the *Understanding Pacific communities in Australia blog series*.

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Link:

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