



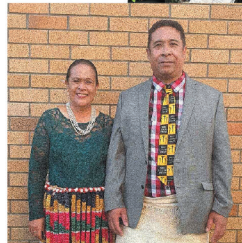
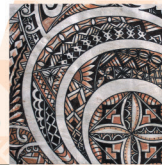
Te Ope Whakaora

Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit

Working for the eradication of poverty in New Zealand

STATE of PACIFIC PEOPLES

SUMMARY



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INTRODUCTION

The *State of Pacific Peoples* report provides a 10-year update on Pacific communities in New Zealand, building on previous reports *More Than Churches, Rugby, and Festivals* (2013) and *This Is Home* (2014). It highlights the significant contributions Pacific peoples make to New Zealand, while addressing ongoing disparities across five key areas: Children and Young People, Work and Income, Housing, Crime and Punishment, and Social Hazards. Despite being integral to the nation's identity, Pacific communities continue to face challenges that impact their overall wellbeing.

For children and young people, a key concern is the decline in school attendance among Pacific students, with only 32 percent attending regularly. Coupled with the fact that nearly 30 percent of Pacific children live in material hardship—three times the rate of their European peers—this poses a serious risk to educational achievement and future opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty for Pacific children.

Employment for Pacific peoples has nearly doubled in the past decade, with more individuals entering skilled and managerial roles. However, underemployment remains a major issue, with reliance on Jobseeker Support increasing since 2019. This financial instability makes it difficult for families to achieve housing security, compounding the broader challenges they face.

Homeownership among Pacific families has fallen to just 35 percent, while demand for social housing has surged dramatically. Rising rents and overcrowded conditions continue to place immense pressure on Pacific families, affecting not only their housing stability but also their health and education.

In the justice system, while the number of Pacific offenders has decreased and recidivism rates have improved, issues such as family violence persist. In addition, the disproportionate impact of alcohol, drug use, and gambling on Pacific communities, as highlighted in the Social Hazards chapter, exacerbates these challenges.

There are clear opportunities for positive change, including early educational interventions, better access to skilled employment, increased support for affordable housing and targeted efforts to address social hazards. By focusing on these areas, New Zealand has a pathway to create lasting and meaningful change for Pacific peoples.

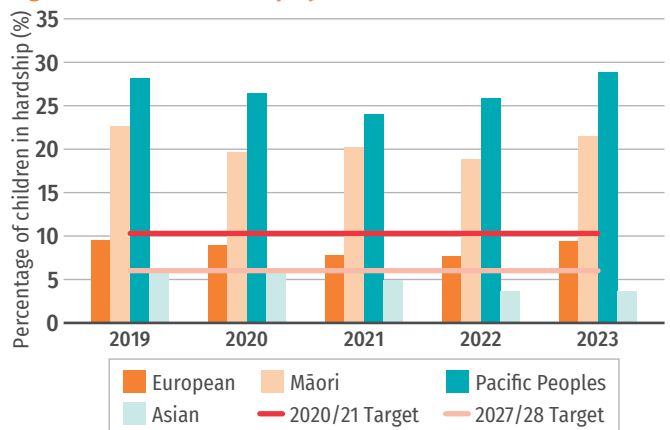
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

CHILD POVERTY

Pacific peoples make up 9 percent of New Zealand's population, yet Pacific children account for 14.5 percent of those aged 14 and under, a figure that has steadily increased. Persistent poverty negatively impacts children and weakens both the social fabric and economic performance of the country. Material hardship, a primary measure of child poverty as defined by the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018, occurs when households must forgo six or more essential items. This includes delays in medical visits, inability to pay utility bills and not repairing essential appliances.

In 2023, around 143,700 children lived in material hardship, a 3.8 percent decrease from 2019, benefiting over 5000 children. However, the number of Pacific children in hardship has risen by 5000, with 29 percent now affected—three times the rate for European children and seven times that for Asian children, as shown below in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1: Material Hardship by Ethnicities



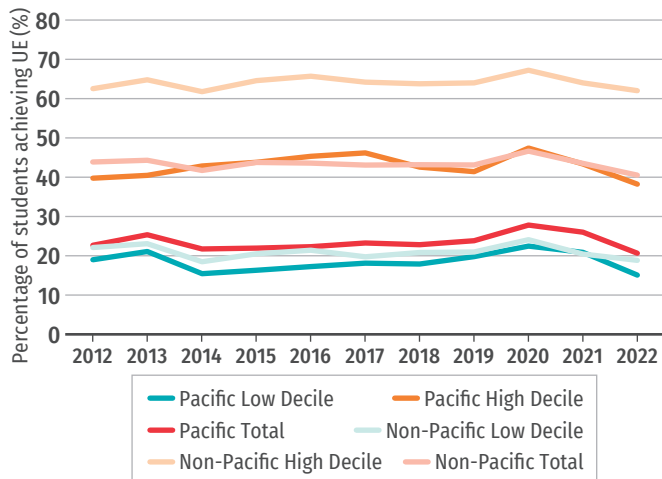
While European and Asian children met the 2021 target of reducing material hardship, Pacific and Māori children continue to face high rates of deprivation. The government's decision to raise the target from 9 percent to 11 percent in 2026/27 will leave approximately 23,000 children in hardship, disproportionately affecting Māori and Pacific children. The reasons behind this are complex, including factors such as a younger Pacific population, lower median incomes and employment in low-skilled jobs.

TERTIARY PARTICIPATION AND QUALIFICATION

Between 2012 and 2022, there was a consistent disparity in university entrance (UE) rates between Pacific and non-Pacific students, with non-Pacific students consistently achieving higher rates. Pacific students' UE rates ranged from 20.7 percent to 27.8

percent, while non-Pacific students ranged from 40.5 percent to 46.6 percent. **Figure 2** shows that Pacific students in high decile schools performed comparably to non-Pacific students overall, but non-Pacific students in high decile schools outperformed their Pacific peers. Both groups showed better outcomes in high decile schools, underscoring the influence of socio-economic status on education.

Figure 2: Achieving University Entrance by Decile for Pacific and non-Pacific—2012–2022

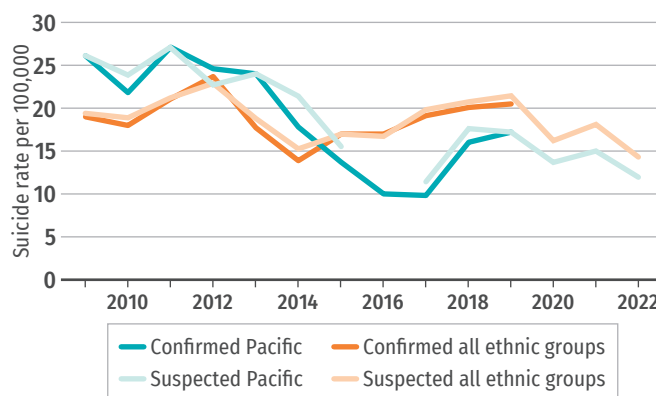


In 2020, UE rates peaked for both groups due to temporary modifications in UE requirements during the Covid-19 pandemic, allowing more students to qualify for UE with fewer credits and additional Learning Recognition Credits. A 2022 report found that 27.5 percent of Pacific students entered university with modified UE, compared to 16.9 percent of the general population, highlighting the benefits Pacific students gained from the modification. Moreover, 37 percent of Pacific students with modified UE improved their academic performance in university compared to 25 percent with unmodified UE, suggesting that the modification allowed more Pacific students to access university support and improve their grades. Modified UE was not a strong predictor of first-year GPA for Pacific students, but factors such as attending low-decile public schools negatively impacted GPA, while studying away from home was linked to improved academic performance.

YOUTH SUICIDES

Suicides among those under 25 declined for both Pacific and the general population. **Figure 3** shows confirmed and suspected suicides among 15- to 24-year-olds by Pacific and all ethnicities. In 2013, Pacific youth suicide rates dropped below the general population, influenced by initiatives like Le Va’s FLO: Pasifika for Life, offering culturally tailored support. However, rates rose again in 2017. The Youth19 survey showed an increase in serious suicide thoughts among Pacific students, from 18.8 percent in 2007 to 26.4 percent in 2019, highlighting a growing mental health crisis.

Figure 3: Youth (15–24) Suicide Rates (2009–2022)

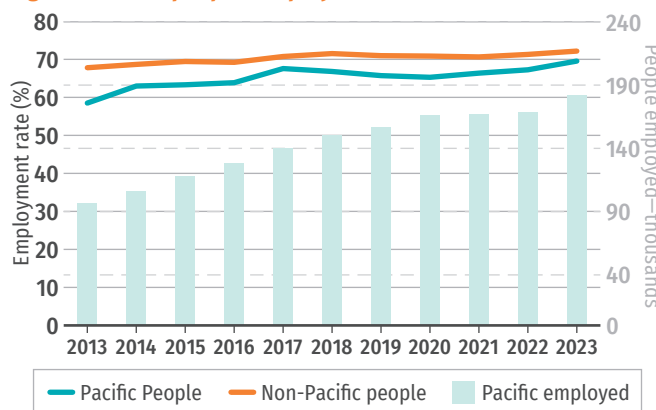


WORK AND INCOME

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES

Examining employment levels among Pacific peoples is important because they serve as a key indicator of financial and individual wellbeing, reflecting the availability of job opportunities and the capacity of Pacific communities to support themselves and their families, and contribute to society. **Figure 4** shows the number of people employed and the employment rate from 2013 to 2023. Over the past 10 years, the employment of Pacific peoples in New Zealand has shown a significant upward trend, with the number of people employed almost doubling from 96,600 to 182,400, and their employment rate increasing from 58 percent to 70 percent. Over this same period, the working-age population increased by 20 percent. The non-Pacific employment rate also rose steadily from 68 percent to 72 percent. Despite these improvements, the Pacific population’s employment rate remains lower than that of the non-Pacific population, indicating an ongoing disparity. However, the Pacific employment rate has risen faster than the overall population, and the gap in employment levels is closing.

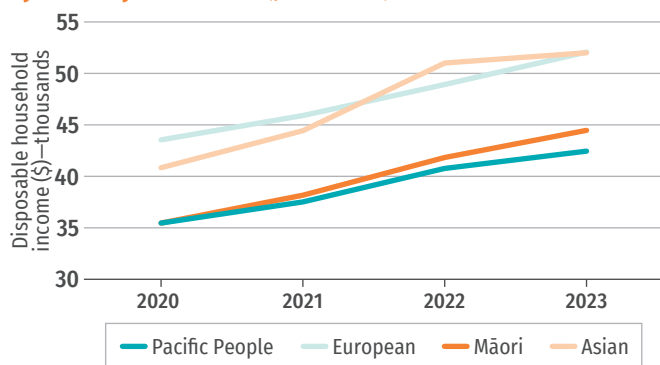
Figure 4: Pacific peoples Employed in Labour Force (March Years)



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD EQUIVALISED DISPOSABLE INCOME

Figure 5 shows median household equivalised disposable income by ethnicity from 2020 to 2023. Asian households experienced the largest growth, with an increase of \$11,165 and European households saw an increase of \$8531. Māori households saw an increase of \$9013, while Pacific households grew by \$6983 over the same period. Despite these increases, significant disparities persist, with Māori and Pacific households still earning less than their European and Asian counterparts. Pacific households continue to have the lowest median disposable income, reflecting ongoing financial challenges. These trends indicate that while household disposable incomes are rising, the gains are not evenly distributed.

Figure 5: Median Household Equivalised Disposable Income by ethnicity—2020–2023 (June Years)



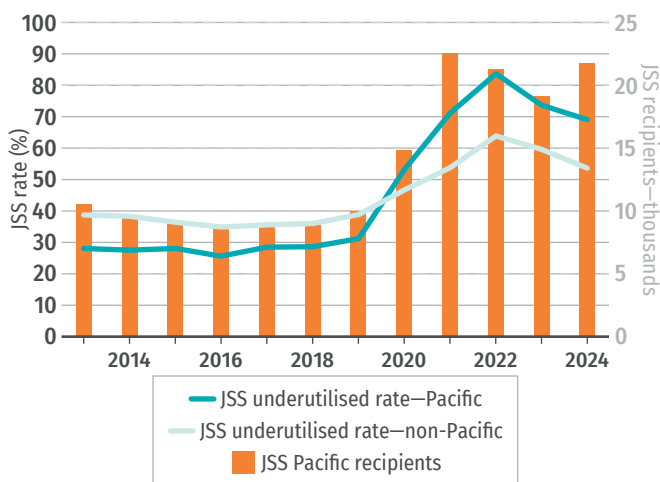
JOBSEEKER

Jobseeker Support (JSS) is a benefit to assist people who are actively looking for work but are currently unemployed or working fewer hours than they would like. It provides financial assistance to help cover living costs while individuals search for employment or increase their work hours. Figure 6 shows trends in the rate of JSS recipients that is part of the underutilised labour force for Pacific, non-Pacific and JSS Pacific recipients. Over the past decade, the underutilised Pacific workforce on JSS has seen a significant increase. Initially, the JSS rate for Pacific peoples was lower than that for non-Pacific. However, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly altered this dynamic, with the Pacific JSS rate surging past the non-Pacific rate, peaking at 84 percent in 2022. Meanwhile, the non-Pacific rate increased more modestly, peaking at 64 percent in 2022. The number of Pacific recipients on JSS also more than doubled from 9551 in 2014 to 21,757 in 2024, with a significant increase happening in the year 2020 and 2021, highlighting the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Pacific communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among Pacific peoples. Despite some recovery, the Pacific JSS rate has not returned to pre-Covid-19 levels, indicating ongoing financial

challenges. This prolonged disparity suggests that Pacific communities face more barriers to recovery, including difficulties in securing stable employment. The slower recovery may lead to prolonged financial hardship, impacting not only individuals but also their broader communities and future opportunities. Addressing these disparities is crucial for ensuring Pacific peoples are not left behind.

Figure 6: Jobseeker Support Rates and Recipients Among Pacific and Non-Pacific—2013–2023

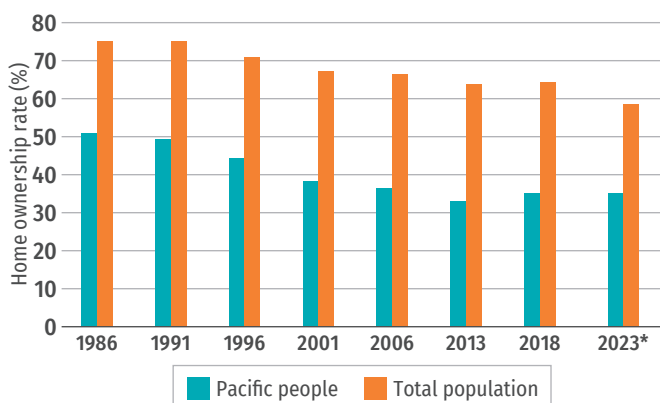


HOUSING

HOMEOWNERSHIP TODAY

From 1986 to 2023, the homeownership rate among Pacific peoples in New Zealand dropped significantly from 50.8 percent to 35 percent, as shown in Figure 7. During the same period, the overall population's homeownership rate also declined, from 75.2 percent to 58.7 percent. Several factors have contributed to this trend, including rising housing costs and land and building regulations, and an increase in property investment.

Figure 7: Percentage of People who Lived in an Owner-Occupied Dwelling—1986–2023



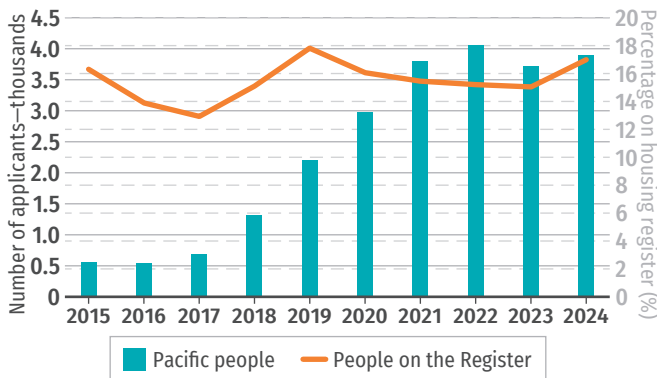
* The 2023 Census data for housing has not yet been released, so the 2023 figure is sourced from the Deloitte report titled 'Next Step Forward: Westpac NZ Shared Homeownership Report'. (Note: To account for the delay in the 2023 Census data, the Deloitte report has used homeownership rates calculated from a customized data request.)

SOCIAL HOUSING

Social housing, managed by Kāinga Ora and community housing providers, offers affordable, long-term housing for low-income individuals and families. These homes provide crucial stability and long-term security for Pacific families, many of whom have been living in Kāinga Ora homes for extended periods. About one-third (34%) of Pacific tenants in Kāinga Ora homes have lived in their homes for 10 years or more, compared to only 7.9 percent in private rentals. These homes are often seen as ‘homes for life’ due to their affordability.

People who want to access social housing must apply and, if eligible, are placed on the Housing Register, which serves as a waiting list for placement. As of June 2024, there are almost 23,000 applicants on the register, with a median waiting time of 219 days for placement. **Figure 8** illustrates the number of Pacific applicants on the Housing Register and their percentage of the total register over the past 10 years. Since 2015, the number of Pacific peoples on the register has risen from 547 to 3897 in 2024, marking a 612 percent increase compared to a 584 percent increase for the total register, but the proportion of Pacific peoples on the social Housing Register has remain relatively unchanged. It is important to note that the register only accounts for the applicants, but the actual impact is much greater, as each applicant often represents an entire family.

Figure 8: Pacific peoples on the Housing Register—2015–2024 (June Years)

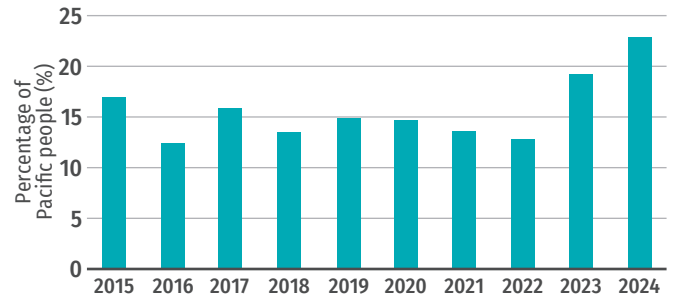


TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Transitional housing (TH) is funded by the government and provides temporary accommodation and comprehensive support to individuals and families as they work toward securing long-term, affordable housing. The Salvation Army’s TH services have seen fluctuations in the number of Pacific peoples over the years, as shown in **Figure 9**, with a significant increase to 23 percent of all TH clients in 2024, up from 17 percent in 2015, potentially due to greater investment in TH by the government and more TH offered in Auckland, where most Pacific peoples live. Over 80 percent of Pacific peoples we support are families with children.

Although the goal for TH is to secure long-term housing within 12 weeks, challenges in affordability and availability, and family or individual complexities often extend this period, with the average stay for The Salvation Army TH service at 20 weeks in June 2024.

Figure 9: Percentage of Pacific peoples in The Salvation Army’s Transitional Housing—2015–2024



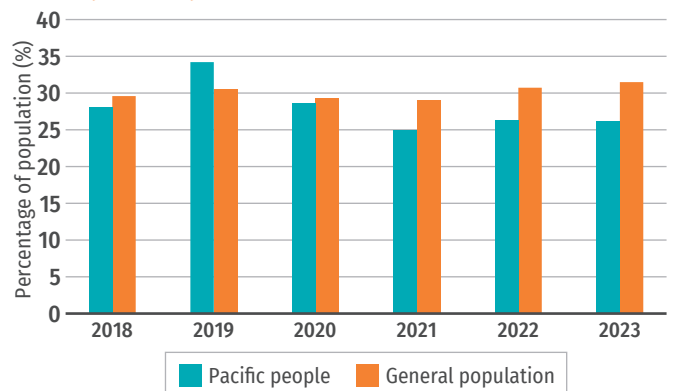
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

OVERALL CRIME

It is estimated that only 28 percent of crime experienced in the community is reported to police. The New Zealand Crime survey (NZCVS) provides a comprehensive source of crime reported and unreported. The NZCVS, currently in its sixth cycle, estimates that over a third of New Zealanders have experienced 1.34 million offences in the past year. Although all New Zealanders encounter crime, the prevalence varies among different populations.

Figure 10 below shows the prevalence of experiencing at least one offence for Pacific and the total population. Over the past six years, the prevalence of offences experienced by Pacific peoples has declined by 6.8 percentage points, now standing at 26.1 percent, the lowest among all ethnic groups.

Figure 10: All Offences Prevalence Rate—Who Experiences Crime by Ethnicity



FAMILY VIOLENCE

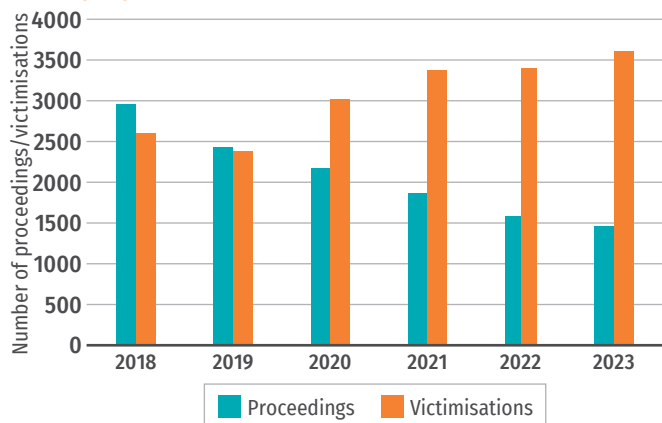
According to the Family Violence Act 2018, family violence refers to physical, sexual or psychological abuse inflicted on a person by someone with whom

they have a family relationship, including behaviours that are coercive, controlling or cause cumulative harm. Family violence remains a significant challenge in New Zealand, with police responding to incidents approximately every three minutes. The prevalence of family violence varies among different societal groups. Research indicates that Pacific and Māori communities experience higher rates of family violence compared to other groups.

Young people and children exposed to family violence tend to have poorer life outcomes. Pacific young people are more than twice as likely as European young people to witness adults engaging in child abuse, domestic violence and sexual abuse. This higher exposure is reflected in the elevated hospitalisation rates of Pacific youth for assault, neglect and maltreatment (24.36 per 100,000) compared to European youth (11.71 per 100,000). Therefore, protecting all communities, especially Pacific communities with their large youth populations, is crucial for the wellbeing of not only these communities but society.

In the past five years, proceedings for family harm for Pacific offenders have declined by 50.9 percent (37.4% for the general population) as shown in **Figure 11**, whilst the number of Pacific victims being victimised by family harm has increased by 38.6 percent (68.2% for the general population). The changes in these trends are noticeable not only among Pacific populations but also in the general population, across many justice-related indicators. The police have acknowledged that the justice system is not the ideal avenue for addressing family violence, and alternative approaches are needed. Redirecting those impacted by family violence to other social services may explain why police proceedings in this area have declined, despite an increase in victimisations.

Figure 11: Family Harm Proceedings and Victimisations for Pacific peoples—2018–2023

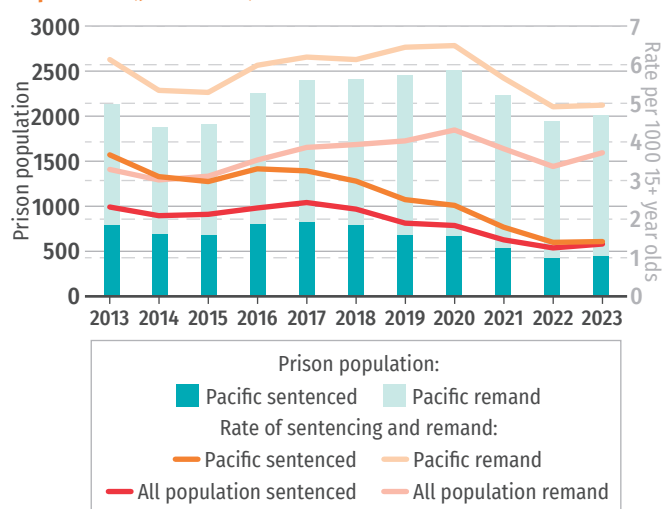


REMAND

Figure 12 shows the annual number of Pacific prisoners both remanded and sentenced. The proportion of Pacific peoples in prison who are remanded has continued to increase year by year, while the number of those being sentenced has continued to decline.

Remanding people in prison creates numerous challenges, such as prison overcrowding and disruption of employment and family life. In addition, there are limitations in programme options and resources whilst incarcerated for those remanded compared to those who are sentenced. In 2023, 1566 Pacific peoples were remanded in prison for a period of time whilst 447 were sentenced to prison. Since 2013 the number of Pacific peoples being sentenced annually has declined significantly by 44 percent whilst those being remanded has increased by 17 percent. Despite this increase it is important to note that there were only about 30 percent of people remanded in custody—the reasons are often due to the safety of victims and the community, potential flight risk or severity of offence.

Figure 12: Annual Remand and Sentenced Pacific Prison Population (June Years)



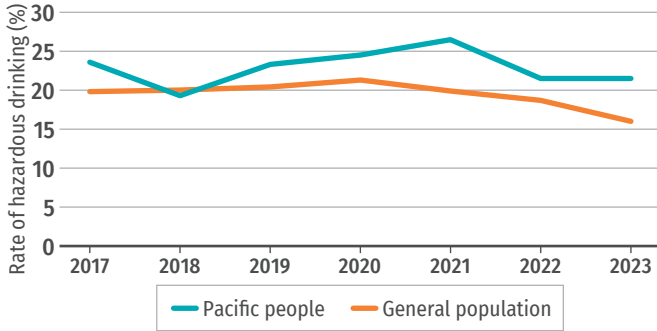
To account for the population differences between the general and Pacific populations, **Figure 12** shows the sentencing and remand rates per 1000 persons (15+ years old). The sentencing rates for both groups have significantly declined over the past 10 years and are now roughly the same. However, remand rates for Pacific peoples continue to remain higher than those for the general population, although they have gradually decreased over the past decade. Currently, the remand rate for the general population is three per 1000, while for Pacific peoples, it is five per 1000, indicating a higher likelihood of Pacific peoples being remanded compared to the general population.

SOCIAL HAZARDS

HAZARDOUS DRINKING

Hazardous drinking in New Zealand is defined as a pattern of alcohol consumption that increases the risk of harm, **Figure 13** below shows the hazardous drinking levels for Pacific compared to the general population.

Figure 13: Hazardous Drinking Rates for Pacific and General Population—2017–2023



Hazardous drinking rates among Pacific peoples have fluctuated over the years, with Pacific peoples consistently exhibiting higher rates compared to the general population. In 2023, 21.5 percent of Pacific individuals reported hazardous drinking, significantly higher than the 16 percent observed in the general population. Although there has been a decline in hazardous drinking levels since 2017, the reduction has been slower for Pacific peoples compared to the general population. This trend suggests that while overall hazardous drinking has decreased, Pacific communities have not experienced the same level of improvement.

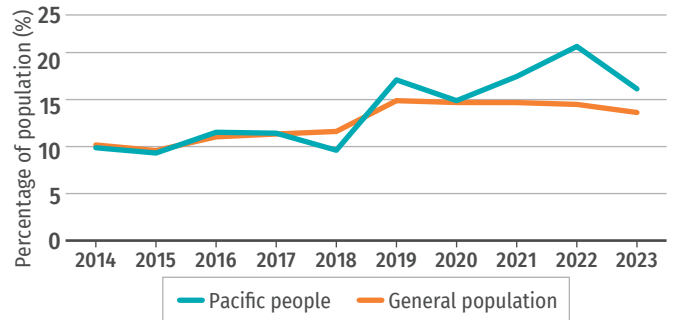
Notably, hazardous drinking levels are highest among men aged 25 to 34 years, a demographic where Pacific peoples have a larger proportion compared to the general population. Additionally, those living in the most deprived communities are more frequently impacted, and the concentration of bottle shops in these areas likely exacerbates the problem by making alcohol more accessible. The Covid-19 pandemic also likely played a role in these trends, particularly in the significant increase in hazardous drinking rates from 2019 to 2021.

ILLICIT DRUG USE

Illicit drug use among Pacific peoples in New Zealand is a growing concern, with increasing prevalence of substances like cannabis, synthetic cannabinoids and methamphetamine. The rise in drug use, which is not traditionally part of Pacific culture, is exacerbated by social inequities and the availability of synthetic drugs. **Figure 14** shows that Cannabis use among Pacific peoples started at 10 percent in 2014, and gradually increased, peaking at 21.5 percent in 2022 before declining to 16.8 percent in

2023. Overall, cannabis use among Pacific peoples has generally been higher compared to the total population, especially in recent years, where the usage rate significantly surpassed the general population's rate of 14.2 percent in 2023.

Figure 14: Cannabis Use in the Past 12 Months for Pacific peoples



PROBLEM GAMBLING

Problem gambling is defined as experiencing moderate to severe gambling-related harm, measured using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), which assesses issues like betting more than one can afford to lose. Household gambling harm refers to negative impacts within a household, such as arguments or financial strain caused by another person's gambling.

Figure 15 shows that both individual and household gambling-related harm have been consistently higher among Pacific peoples compared to the general population. Pacific individuals are more likely to experience severe gambling-related issues, with rates around twice as high as the general population. Similarly, household gambling harm is significantly more prevalent in Pacific households, with rates as high as 8.7 percent in 2020 compared to 4.5 percent in the general population. The persistent nature of these issues, despite some fluctuations over the years, highlights the need for ongoing, targeted interventions to address the unique challenges faced by Pacific peoples regarding gambling harm.

Figure 15: Trends in Problem Gambling and Household Gambling Harm Among Pacific peoples and the General Population—2010–2020





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We welcome your feedback

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Alternatively, scan the QR code

