



With population characteristics and processes both the drivers and results of social and economic development processes and outcomes, it is imperative to have a good understanding of a country's population dynamics, which provide the basis of informed decision-making, policy development and planning.

While population housing censuses provide most of the backbone of this information in most countries, the provision of a snapshot, and often only every 10 years, is clearly insufficient to inform policy and allow a regular monitoring of development progress.

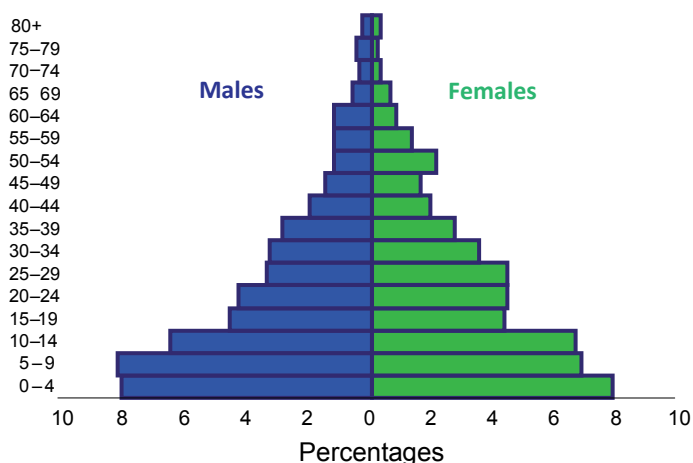
Regular household surveys, such as the 2007 Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey (SI DHS), assist in addressing this data and information gap, in providing high-quality and up-to-date statistics and information in their own right, as well as provide the basis for the calculation of important development indicators.

This survey provided many of these indicators of relevance to the Solomon Islands Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Health and other line ministries. It also provides valuable information for international development agencies and conventions such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to name but a few that are included in this development snapshot.

The population of Solomon Islands

With the latest census nearly 10 years old, the 2007 SI DHS provides a rich up-to-date account on how the country is progressing in key areas of social and human development.

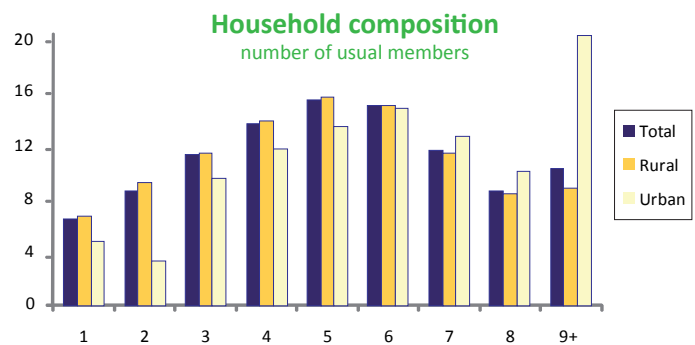
The broad base of the Solomon Islands population alludes to a young population, which is reflected in a median age of 19.6.



The older age groups are very small in comparison, as can be seen in the population pyramid. This type of age structure has a built in momentum for the growth of the country's population. When the young population eventually reaches reproductive age, the result will be a high population growth rate for many more years to come.

Household composition

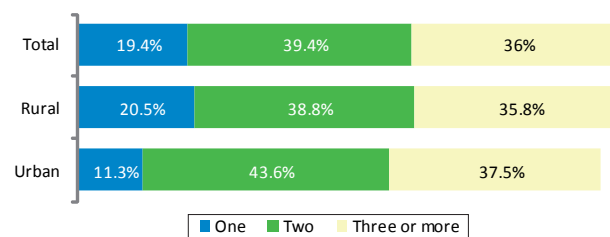
Reflecting a young and growing population, the average Solomon Islands household comprises of 5.3 persons, which is slightly lower than recorded in the 1999 census (6.3). Urban households (6.3) average one more member than rural households (5.2).



In urban areas, 20 percent of households have 9 or more members, compared with 9 percent in rural areas, indicating a need for housing in urban areas.

Large household size is not just a reflection of a growing population but also indicative of Solomon Islands cultural practices and availability of services. Fifteen percent of children less than 18 years old do not live with their biological parents, and this number increases with the age of the child. Thirty percent of households have an orphan or foster child staying with them.

Rooms used for sleeping



Large household sizes and limited land area makes for dense living conditions, with 60 percent of all households using only one or two rooms for sleeping.

Apart from basic population information, DHS also yields some key socio-economic background characteristics, which may help to explain similarities and contrasts in key demographic and health outcomes: education (levels of educational attainment) and economic well-being (such as expressed in wealth quintiles) are quite important, with access to safe water and sanitation of critical importance to physical well-being, particularly of infants and young children.





Education

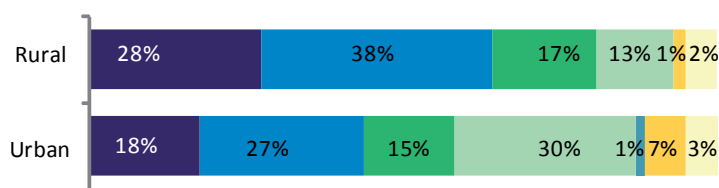
By age 8 or 9, the vast majority of Solomon Islands children attend school. Starting at age 13, attendance rates decline noticeably for all children.

Overall, primary school attendance is not universal, as reflected in a net attendance rate of 65.4 percent. In urban areas, 72.1 percent of children aged 6–12 attended primary school, compared with 64.5 percent in rural areas (with only 57.8% in Malaita attending primary school).

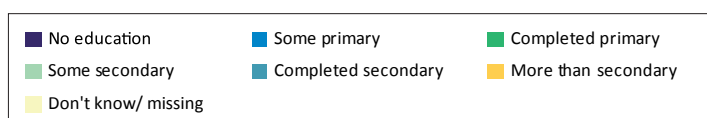
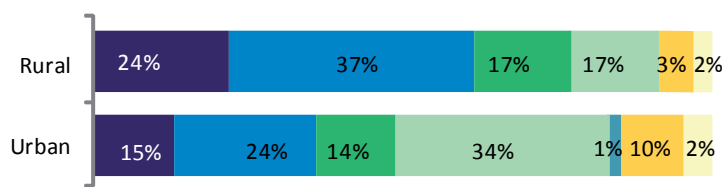
Results indicate that most children start school later than 6 years of age. Primary school is free but not compulsory in Solomon Islands, and it could be reasonably expected that all children aged 7 and 8 should have attended primary school during the 2007 school year. However, about 50 percent of children aged 7, and 28 percent of children aged 8, were not attending primary school.

The median number of years of schooling is higher in rural areas than urban areas (5 and 3, respectively).

Female educational attainment



Male educational attainment

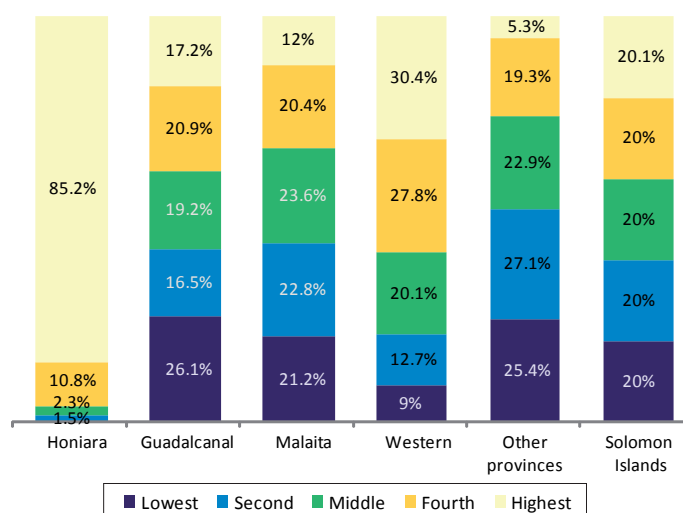


Economic well-being

Household information on assets allow the calculation of a wealth index, which provides a useful proxy measure describing the long-term standard of living of a household. It is not an absolute measure that can tell us if a household suffers hardship or lives in poverty. What it can tell us, however, is that a person living in a household in the second wealth quintile has a better socio-economic status than someone in lower quintiles.

Distributing the population across five equally sized wealth quintiles shows a rather uneven distribution of wealth in Solomon Islands, with 85 percent of the population in Honiara in the highest wealth quintile.

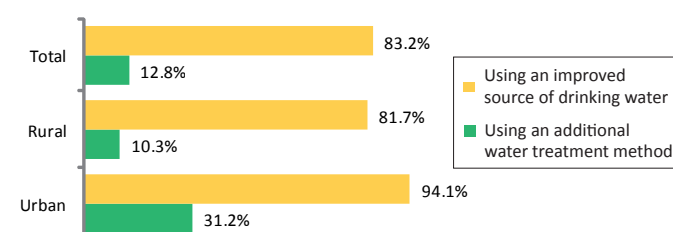
Wealth quintiles



Access to safe water and sanitation

Poor sanitation coupled with unsafe water sources can increase the risk of waterborne diseases and illnesses. Households without proper toilet facilities are more exposed to the risk of diseases like dysentery, diarrhoea, and typhoid fever than those with improved sanitation facilities.

Source of drinking water and treatment of water



In urban areas most households (94%) have access to an improved water source, while 81.7 percent of households have access to an improved water source in rural areas. Water can be contaminated at collection, during storage, or during transportation and can require additional treatment. Very few households reported using additional treatment methods (such as boiling the water) to ensure that their water was safe to drink.

Sanitation facilities

Six out of 10 households across the country do not have access to improved or non-shared sanitation facilities. The lack of sanitation facilities is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where less than 1 in 10 households have access to improved and not shared sanitation facilities.

