

Australian Volunteers Program in Tonga

In 2020-21 the Australian Volunteers Program in Tonga supported 11 volunteers and eight partner organisations, focusing on supporting COVID-19 response and recovery, human rights, disaster resilience, and food security.

'The volunteer is truly an inspiration and a great mentor. The assignment was an excellent learning experience for us all.'
 – Partner organisation spokesperson

In 2020-21 in Tonga, the program supported:

8
 partner organisations

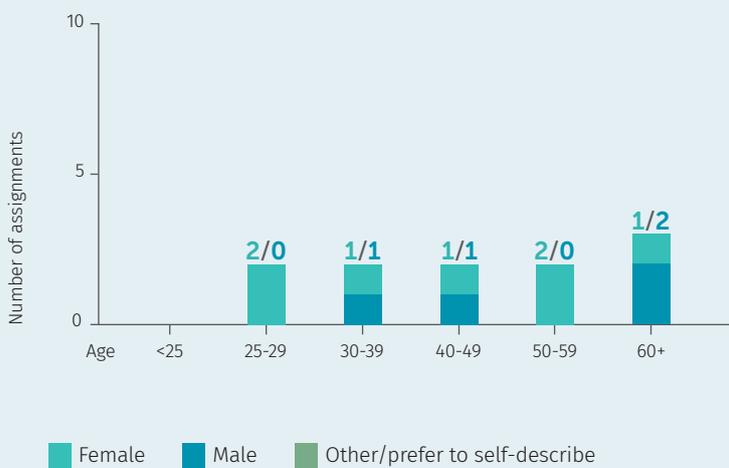
11
 volunteers

10
 remote assignments

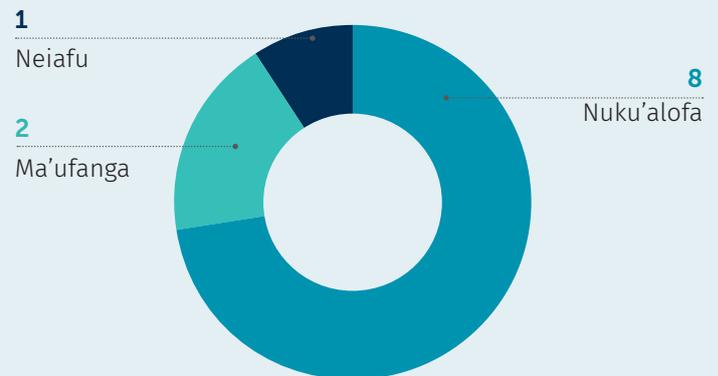
1
 in-country assignment

Gender and age of volunteers

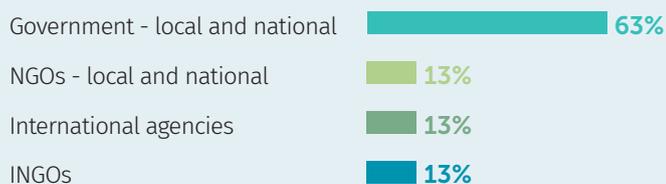
Women 64% Men 36%



Location of assignments



Most common types of partner organisations



Most common professions of volunteers



In 2020-21, in accordance with Australia's COVID-19 Development Response Plan, the Australian Volunteers Program supported partner organisations to implement their response and recovery efforts, aligned with Tonga's local and national priorities.

Most partner organisations were able to continue operating during this time with minimal disruptions. Partner organisations and the program focused on strengthening primary care, health promotion services, and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Other focus areas included improved support for Tonga's economic recovery, police and military, quarantine capability and natural disaster response.

The program continued to promote human rights, disaster resilience, and food security in Tonga, and assisted partner organisations with improving child protection policies and identifying funding opportunities to meet their development needs.

Program staff in Tonga supported one in-country volunteer and ten remote volunteers. Partner organisations who were initially unsure about working with remote volunteers went on to embrace the opportunity to secure specialised skills. To promote the benefits of remote volunteering, the program held workshops with partner organisations and developed a social media video about the benefits of remote volunteering.

As part of the program's innovation initiative, the program team in Tonga engaged with a new partner organisation to meet communities' development needs by focusing on environmental regeneration, agroforestry, fisheries, water, and waste management.

The majority of volunteer assignments were located in Tonga's capital city Nuku'alofa, with most partner organisations working within the energy policy or generation, government and civil society, and health sectors.



Australian volunteer Georgia Lack (left) with her colleague Sosefo Tai during the vaccine rollout. Georgia is an Australian volunteer Health Information Systems Support Officer and has played a key part in the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Tonga. Photo: not supplied.

Spotlight on MEIDECC

The Tongan Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communication (MEIDECC) raises disaster awareness within communities, responds to disasters, and assesses effects of disasters on communities.

From 2018 to 2020, Australian volunteers, Jacinda Bouly and Maureen Bolawaqatabu supported MEIDECC to build its capacity in climate change, disaster management and meteorology.

With support from Jacinda, Ministry staff were able to use better practice meteorology equipment and establish an internal climate change program to improve public awareness, program planning, implementation, and fundraising.

The Ministry's Disaster Management Officer improved their capacity to develop COVID-19 response action plans and village disaster risk response plans, with in-country and remote support from Maureen. She trained staff in the use of new software and systems to implement disaster risk and response methods, and develop and deliver outreach awareness programs to schools and community.

As a result, Ministry staff are now more confident to develop disaster risk response plans, deliver climate change programs and build rapport with communities. Disaster risk management plans are being implemented through community outreach programs that embrace diversity and inclusion.

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