International Labour Organization

Cook Islands

The Employment - Environment - Climate Nexus

Employment and environmental sustainability factsheet

November 2022

Key figures

The Employment-Environment-Climate Nexus Factsheets are a series produced for countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This Factsheet provides key features of labour market and environmental sustainability performance in the Cook Islands, as well as vulnerability to climate change and sectors with green jobs potential. Key figures from the brief are as followed:

- The Cook Islands has a working age population (aged 15+) of around 11.5 thousand people in 2019. Estimates for the total population suggest around of which 20.5 per cent are below 14 years old.
- Of 8 thousand employed in the country, approximately 3.4 per cent work in agriculture, 11.4 per cent in industry and 85.2 per cent in services.
- There are no estimates for the Cook Islands in the latest Environmental Performance Index (EPI), 2022. The EPI assesses countries on 40 different performance indicators and ranks them according to their national efforts towards environmental health, to enhance ecosystem vitality and mitigate climate change.
- There are no available estimates for PM2.5 (atmospheric particulate matter with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres) emissions for the Cook Islands.
- There is no data for the Cook Islands in the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index. This index considers vulnerability to climate change and related global challenges as well as resiliency and preparedness.
- Renewable energy sources produced 13 GWh in 2020, following annual average growth of 29.2 per cent since 2000.
- Solar accounted for the highest share of total renewable energy generation in 2020, accounting for 100 per cent of total renewable energy generation in the country.

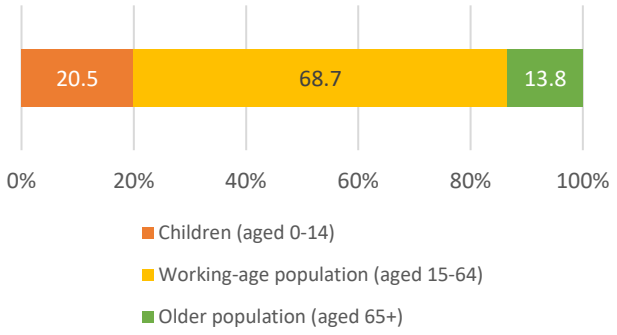
▶ Country overview

The Cook Islands is a country of around 236 km² located in the Pacific Islands (Figure 1). There are no available estimates for GNI per capita upon which to gauge the country income level classification, but as a proxy Gross Domestic Product (GNP) per capita was estimated at around US$16,700 per capita in 2016.[1]

▶ Figure 1. Map of Cook Islands

The working age population (aged 15+) is estimated at around 11.4 thousand in 209, according to the last labour force survey. Population growth is underpinned by a fertility rate of 2.1 births per woman in 2018 and life expectancy of 76.9 years in 2018.[2] In 2021, a total of 75.9 per cent lived in urban areas.[3]

▶ Figure 2. Composition of total population by age-group, 2021 (percentage)



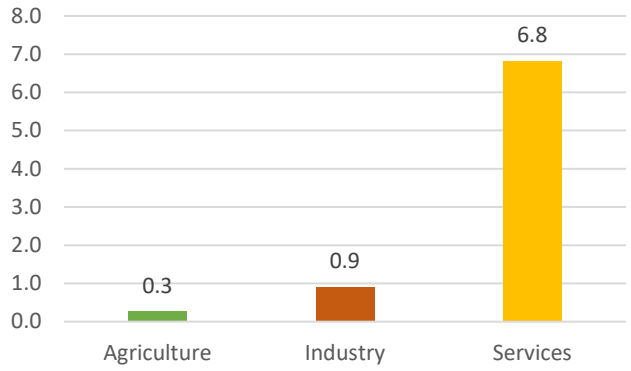
Source: CIA Factbook.

▶ Labour market

The total labour force (aged 15+) was estimated at 8,100 in 2019, corresponding to a labour force participation rate of 70.9 per cent.[4] Women had a labour force participation rate of 63.6 per cent, compared to 78.5 per cent for men.

Total employment (aged 15+) was estimated at 8,000 in 2019, representing an employment-to-population ratio of 70 per cent.[5] By broad sector group, agriculture accounted for 3.4 per cent of total employment, industry a further 11.4 per cent and services, 85.2 per cent in 9 (Figure 3).

▶ Figure 3. Composition of total employment by broad sector group, 2019 (thousands)

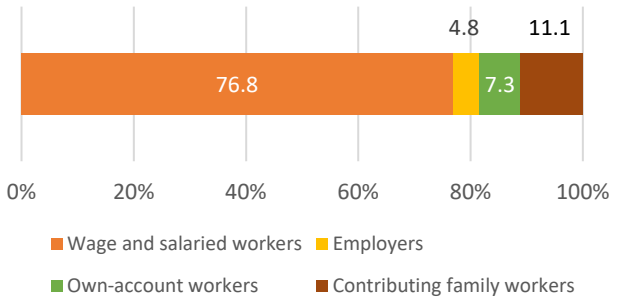


Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. [03 September 2022]

There were an estimated 100 unemployed persons in the country in 2019, corresponding to a total unemployment rate of 1.3 per cent.[6] The unemployment rate for women was estimated at 0.9 per cent, compared to men at 1.6 per cent. Youth were estimated to exhibit an unemployment rate of around 3.5 per cent.

Having a job does not, however, guarantee quality employment. A total of 76.8 per cent of the total employed population were in wage and salaried employment in 2019.[7] Wage and salaried employment is associated with more higher degrees of job security, more regular incomes as well as greater access and eligibility to social protection as well as coverage by employment regulation, than those in self-employment. Accordingly, the remaining 23.2 per cent of total employment, who are classified as being self-employed, encompass employers, own-account workers and contributing family workers (Figure 4).[8]

▶ Figure 4. Composition of total employment by status in employment, 2019 (thousands)



Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. [03 September 2022]

▶ Environment and vulnerability to climate change

The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) assesses countries on 40 different performance indicators and ranks them according to their national efforts towards environmental health, to enhance ecosystem vitality and mitigate climate change. 2022.[9] However, there is no data available for the EPI. Availability of such data is crucial for evidence-based environmental policy making. Action to improve environmental health, ecosystem vitality, climate change and resilience to weather disasters all have the potential to provide job creation, green economy growth and innovation in the country.

There is a lack of data available on access to basic services, but for what data is available, around 100 per cent of the population had access to at least basic drinking water services in 2017 and 97.6 per cent had access to basic sanitation services.[10] There is no available data for access to electricity or access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking.

There are no available estimates for forest area. Forest area in this context refers to land under natural or planted stands of trees of at least 5 meters in situ, whether productive or not, and excludes tree stands in agricultural production systems (for example, in fruit plantations and agroforestry systems) and trees in urban parks and gardens. Of the total land area, around 8.4 per cent is agricultural land. Agricultural land in this context refers to the share of land area that is arable, under permanent crops, and under permanent pastures.[11]

Protected areas are a crucial means of environmental preservation and conservation. In the Cook Islands there are no available estimates for protected areas. Terrestrial protected areas in this context are totally or partially protected areas of at least 1,000 hectares that are designated by national authorities as scientific reserves with limited public access, national parks, natural monuments, nature reserves or wildlife sanctuaries, protected landscapes, and areas managed mainly for sustainable use.

In addition, there are no estimates for marine protected areas in the Cook Islands. Marine protected areas in this context refer to areas of intertidal or subtidal terrain--and overlying water and associated flora and fauna and historical and cultural features--that have been reserved by law or other effective means to protect part or all of the enclosed environment.

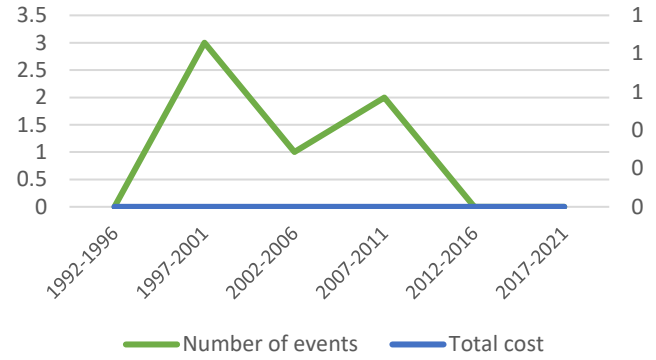
There will be greater prospects for employment opportunities if there is commitment to transition to a low carbon and resource-efficient economy, such as jobs in resource management and environmental services.

There are no available estimates for CO2 emissions for the Cook Islands, or the level of PM2.5 (atmospheric particulate matter with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres) emissions. The unweighted average across Asia-Pacific countries is 27.6 in 2017. Notably, the World Health Organization's Air Quality Guideline threshold level emission is stated at 10 micrograms per cubic metre. Measures of PM2.5 would allow for estimates of the percentage of the population exposed to ambient concentrations of PM2.5 that exceed the WHO guideline (the lower end of the range of concentrations over which adverse health effects due to PM2.5 exposure have been observed).

The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index considers vulnerability to climate change and related global challenges as well as resiliency and preparedness.[12] There are no estimates for the Cook Islands. The absence of such data inhibits the ability to assess climate change related changes over time and to compare these to global and regional trends.

Over the 2017-2021 period, there were no recorded natural disasters in the Cook Islands (natural disasters in this context includes floods, droughts, epidemics, storms, landslides, earthquakes and wildfires).[13] This compares to 6 natural disasters in total since 1997. There are substantial costs to these events but no available estimates for the Cook Islands.

▶ Figure 5. Number of natural disasters (LHS) and total cost of natural disasters (RHS – US$ million) per 5-year period, 1992-2021

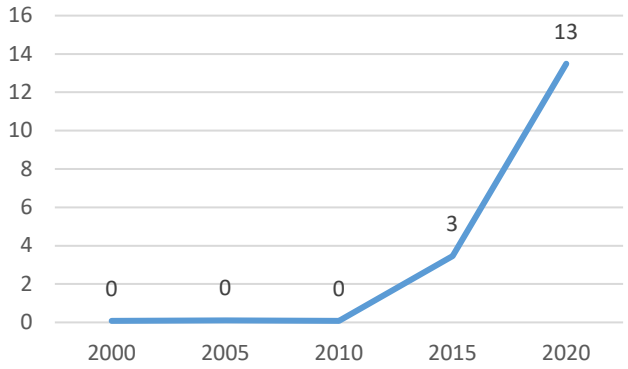


Source: ILO compilation using EM-DAT. Available at: https://www.emdat.be [06 August 2022]

▶ Sectors with green jobs potential

There are no available estimates for renewable energy production as a share of total energy production, but there are estimates that show renewable energy production in the Cook Islands. Renewable energy sources produced 13 GWh in 2020 (Figure 6).[14] With total renewable energy sources producing 0 GWh in 2000, it represents annual average growth of 29.2 per cent between 2000-2020.

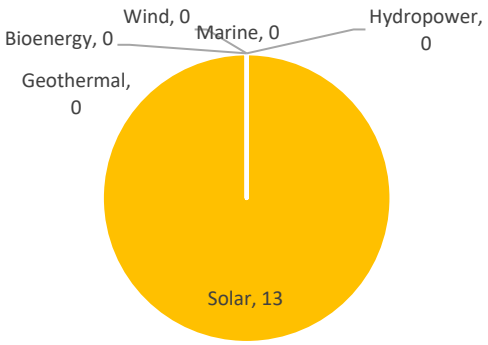
▶ Figure 6. Total renewable energy generation (GWh), 2000-2020



Source: ILO compilation using IRENA Renewable Energy Statistics 2022

Renewable hydropower accounted for the highest share of total renewable energy generation in 2020, at 13 GWh, equivalent to 100 per cent of total renewable energy generation in the country (Figure 7).[15]

▶ Figure 7. Renewable energy generation (GWh) by technology, 2020



Source: ILO compilation using IRENA Renewable Energy Statistics 2022

According to estimates by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), there are no available estimates for jobs in renewable energy in the Cook Islands.[16] Better data collection relating to the green economy and the environmental sector would be valuable for policymakers in the Cook Islands and Asia-Pacific countries. Better data on green and decent jobs is particularly needed to assess the impact of climate change and climate-related policies on social inclusion. Without better data, it will be difficult to determine what policy changes are needed to assure a just transition to environmental sustainability and to monitor progress going forward.

References and technical information

[1] Source: CIA Factbook.
[2] Source: CIA Factbook
[3] Source: CIA Factbook
[4] Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. The data was retrieved on September 3, 2022.
[5] Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. The data was retrieved on September 3, 2022.
[6] Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. The data was retrieved on September 3, 2022.
[7] Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. The data was retrieved on September 3, 2022.
[8] Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. The data was retrieved on September 3, 2022.
[9] The 2022 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) provides a data-driven summary of the state of sustainability around the world. Using 40 performance indicators across 11 issue categories, the EPI ranks 180 countries on climate change performance, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality. These indicators provide a gauge at a national scale of how close countries are to established environmental policy targets. The EPI offers a scorecard that highlights leaders and laggards in environmental performance and provides practical guidance for countries that aspire to move toward a sustainable future. Source: EPI Raw Data, available at: https://epi.yale.edu [06 August 2022]
[10] Source: CIA Factbook
[11] Source: Food and Agriculture Organization, electronic files and web site. Accessed via World Development Indicators [06 August 2022].
[12] The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Country Index is a measurement tool that helps governments, businesses and communities examine risks exacerbated by climate change, such as over-crowding, food insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and civil conflicts. The Country Index uses 20 years of data across 45 indicators to rank over 180 countries annually based on their level of vulnerability, and their readiness to successfully implement adaptation solutions. Available at: https://gain.nd.edu [06 August 2022]
[13] EM-DAT contains essential core data on the occurrence and effects of over 22,000 mass disasters in the world from 1900 to the present day. The database is compiled from various sources, including UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, insurance companies, research institutes and press agencies. Available at: https://www.emdat.be [06 August 2022]
[14] IRENA (2022), Renewable Energy Statistics 2022, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Abu Dhabi. Available at: https://irena.org/Statistics [06 August 2022]
[15] IRENA (2022), Renewable Energy Statistics 2022, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Abu Dhabi. Available at: https://irena.org/Statistics [06 August 2022]
[16] IRENA jobs database 2021. Figures provided are the result of a comprehensive review of primary information sources by national entities such as ministries and statistical agencies, and secondary data sources such as regional and global studies. For more details refer to IRENA's report 'Renewable Energy and Jobs - Annual Review 2019'.

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