



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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MAP



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ACRONYMS

ABG	Autonomous Bougainville Government
ANU	Australian National University
ARB	Autonomous Region of Bougainville
AUD	Australian Dollar
FSV	Family and Sexual Violence
FSVU	Family and Sexual Violence Unit
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IPO	Interim protection order
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex
PGK	Papua New Guinea kina (currency)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
RPNGC	Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary
SARV	Sorcery Accusation Related Violence
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPNG	University of Papua New Guinea
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

GLOSSARY

Payback and traditional ‘compensation’

‘Payback’ is an act of retaliation that is usually carried out when one group has been harmed by another. In many cases, the perpetrator pays financial or other compensation to the victim or their family.

Wantokism/Wantoks

‘*Wantokism*’ is a system of social kinship, welfare and mutual obligation derived from PNG’s traditional tribal-based society. *Wantokism* affects most aspects of contemporary life in PNG, including in business and government. In the Tok Pisin language, *Wantok* means ‘One Talk’, referring to the language of the tribe or clan to which a person belongs. In PNG, the overall welfare of the tribe and its members is paramount. Face-to-face relationships, inter-marriage, kinship and reciprocal exchange create strong ties to keep the tribe together. At its best, *wantokism* operates as a social supporting mechanism that ensures those members of the tribe less able to look after themselves are supported.

In contemporary PNG, *wantokism* includes additional relationships, such as those between school classmates or work colleagues. People who gain a position of power or responsibility – for example, as a politician, public servant or business owner – are expected to look after their *wantoks*. Business people are expected to make significant contributions when traditional obligations are needed, such as compensation or ‘bride price’ payments. Senior politicians are expected to contribute even larger sums to their *wantoks*. *Wantokism* may involve state officials pressured to protect the interests of their *wantoks* above their legal duties to provide services or protection impartially to an individual. Officials can be reluctant to uphold the legal rights of those outside their *wantok* group if it requires them to act against – and especially prosecute – those within their group.

Terms used in this report

high risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

official discrimination

1. legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
2. behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

societal discrimination

1. behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
2. ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers)

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 This Country Information Report has been prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgement and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian Government policy with respect to Papua New Guinea (PNG).

1.2 The report provides a general, rather than an exhaustive, country overview. It has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision makers in Australia without reference to individual applications for protection visas. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction Number 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under section 499 of the *Migration Act 1958*, states that:

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination purposes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report is based on DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in PNG and elsewhere. It takes into account relevant and credible open source reports, including United States Department of State reports; those from relevant United Nations (UN) agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); recognised human rights organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, Reporters without Borders and Amnesty International; and reputable news organisations. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation, this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This updated Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report about Papua New Guinea published on 10 February 2017.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RECENT HISTORY

2.1 Papua New Guinea (PNG) became independent from Australia in 1975, with Australian development assistance initially making up two-fifths of the national budget. Mineral-rich PNG began to develop large-scale mining operations which quickly became the largest contributors to its economy. However, large-scale mining operations also caused major environmental degradation, and some localised social and political disharmony. Disputes over the disbursements of profits from the Panguna copper mine on the island of Bougainville descended into a violent conflict between the PNG Defence Force and secessionist guerrillas from 1988-97 which resulted in the deaths of 10-15,000 people.

2.2 PNG has consistently experienced periods of political instability. The country experienced a political crisis in 2011-12 when then-Prime Minister Michael Somare had an extended absence overseas while receiving medical treatment. This led to a majority of members of PNG's parliament withdrawing their support for him as prime minister, and instead placing it behind opposition leader Peter O'Neill. Somare challenged his dismissal in the Supreme Court, which ruled that his removal had been unlawful and ordered his reinstatement. O'Neill, supported by the majority of parliamentarians, refused to relinquish the position, and both men appointed separate police commissioners. National elections held in July 2012 resulted in victory for O'Neill.

2.3 Prime Minister O'Neill resigned in April 2019 following a loss of support from his party. He was replaced by James Marape, who enjoyed an eighteen-month period where he was protected from a Vote of No Confidence by virtue of PNG law. As soon as that period elapsed, opposition MPs and some members of his ruling coalition threatened a Vote of No Confidence against Marape. Marape held onto power, but the resulting coalition was fragile.

2.4 A general election was held in July 2022, with Parliament re-electing Marape as Prime Minister on 9 August. National elections are characterised by sporadic outbreaks of violence and accusations of malfeasance in individual electorates.

DEMOGRAPHY

2.5 PNG's most recent census was held in 2011. A National Population and Housing Census was planned for mid-2021 but was postponed to 2024, chiefly due to COVID-19. In 2011, the population was 7.25 million. The estimated population in 2022 is 9.3 million, according to UN data. PNG's population is roughly 15 per cent urbanised. The country is made up of four broadly defined subregions: Momase (northern coast and Sepik); Southern (lower coastal mainland); New Guinea Islands (north and east maritime and islands); and the Highlands (inland north-central ranges). There are 22 provinces, including the National Capital District and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Around half of the people in PNG live in the Highlands region. This region is connected to Lae on the coast by the Highlands Highway but not to Port Moresby, which is generally reached by air or sea. PNG is divided into more than 10,000 ethnic (or '*wantok*') groups, across more than 600 islands. The indigenous population is almost entirely Melanesian,

though there is a small Polynesian population on atolls north of Bougainville. Ethnic Chinese have been present in PNG since the nineteenth century. Migrant numbers have grown, and the ethnic Chinese community is now estimated to comprise around 20,000 people, or 0.3 per cent of the population. In 2022, there are also other more recent migrant populations, most notably from the Philippines and Bangladesh. The Philippine community in Papua New Guinea is estimated at 35,000.

2.6 PNG has three official languages – Tok Pisin, English and Hiri Motu – along with more than 800 indigenous languages (about 12 per cent of the world's total). Many indigenous languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers. Almost all PNG citizens are Christian (predominantly evangelical or mainstream Protestant, with around one quarter being Catholic). A small minority practises indigenous religions. There are very small communities of other faiths, including Baha'i and Muslim faiths.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.7 PNG is classified by the World Bank as a lower middle-income country and classified by the Asian Development Bank as a conflict-affected, fragile state, meaning that economic development is challenging and state capacity is limited. The country's economy remains dominated by two broad sectors: the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sector that engages most of PNG's labour force (the majority informally); and the minerals and energy extraction sector that accounts for most export earnings and GDP. According to the World Bank, in 2020, PNG's GDP per capita was USD2,757, lower than its level in 2014. (By comparison, Australia's GDP per capita in 2020 was USD51,692). PNG ranked 155th out of 189 countries, according to the UN's 2020 Human Development Index.

2.8 PNG is a poor country. The majority of the roughly 80 per cent of Papua New Guineans who live in traditional rural communities make their living from subsistence gardens and small-scale cash cropping. According to a measure of poverty used by the World Bank, 85 per cent of the people of PNG are considered poor, due to their lack of disposable income, low level of educational attainment and low level of access to electricity. Only about 15 per cent of PNG residents have reliable access to electricity, among the lowest level in the world.

2.9 PNG's population is very young. Around 35 per cent of the population is aged under 15 years and the median age is 22. However, most young people have limited access to education or skills training, and very limited job prospects. According to an ANU economist, PNG has been losing jobs since 2013, the year in which PNG LNG [the country's first and largest liquefied natural gas extraction and export project] construction was completed. Furthermore, women's substantially poorer access to health care services, lower levels of educational attainment and literacy, and cultural norms around violence and women's roles pose significant barriers to their equal participation in economic activities.

2.10 PNG has no formal welfare system. The '*wantok*' system, through kinship ties and social bonds, provides an informal and limited social protection mechanism during times of hardship but this system is weakening due to demographic changes (i.e. the rapidly growing population) and urbanisation. COVID-19 pushed many families back, or deeper, into poverty.

Corruption

2.11 PNG has not improved on its Transparency International Corruption Perception Index score since 2016 (its score remains 31 out of 100, in 2021, where 1 is most corrupt and 100 is least), and is ranked 124th out of 180 countries globally, level with Mexico, Niger, Azerbaijan and Bolivia. Domestic and international observers consider corruption to be endemic in PNG. Perceptions of corruption are

complicated by the cultural context; in one survey in PNG, respondents identified arguably corrupt behaviours as ‘tokens of appreciation that fulfil Melanesian obligations of reciprocity’. The networks of obligation that underlie *wantokism* can conflict with the duties of public offices.

2.12 PNG has laws prohibiting corrupt behaviour and is a signatory to the UN Convention against Corruption. A number of bodies have regulatory and legislative powers to fight corruption in PNG. These include the Ombudsman Commission, Leadership Tribunals, the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary’s National Fraud and Anti-Corruption Directorate (commonly referred to as the Fraud Squad), and various *ad hoc* Commissions of Inquiry. However, observers argue that none of these are effective against corruption and these institutions lack sufficient funding and resources to fully prosecute their mandates.

2.13 In November 2020, the Parliament voted unanimously (96-0) to pass a bill to establish an Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC), almost a decade in the making. At the time of publishing, PNG’s ICAC is not fully operational.

2.14 Both petty and grand corruption are perceived to be common in PNG. Respondents to a survey by a PNG researcher in 2021 stated that providing ‘public officials and others money for lunch, Coca-Cola, bus fare, *buai* (betelnut), phone credit cards and other gifts’ was often expected as a reward for providing a government service or ‘favours’.

2.15 Prime Minister James Marape came to office with a promise to fight corruption, but the passage of key anti-corruption legislation (Whistle Blower Act, ICAC’s establishment and the Proceeds of Crime Amendment Act) has not translated into meaningful progress.

Health

2.16 In 2019, the latest year for which data is available, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), PNG’s life expectancy was 63 years for men and 67 for women. PNG has some of the worst health indicators in the Asia-Pacific. The country’s health system is fragile, with poor health and immunisation outcomes, and has been assessed by the WHO as among the 10 worst in the world. With an under-five mortality rate of 57 per 1,000 live births, an estimated 15,400 children (one in 13 children), die each year in PNG, mostly from preventable diseases. Similarly, with a maternal mortality ratio of 215 per 100,000 live births, an estimated 580 mothers die in childbirth each year. (By comparison, Australia’s under-five mortality rate is 3.7 per 1,000 live births and maternal mortality rate is 6 per 100,000 live births.) PNG has one of the highest rates of stunting (‘the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition and repeated infection’) in the world, with nearly every second child under the age of five years being stunted. Stunting harms long term prospects for education and employment.

2.17 PNG’s rate of COVID-19 vaccination at 6.7 per cent single dose, 5.5 per cent double dose, is among the lowest in the world. As at July 2022, the country officially had 662 COVID-19 related deaths, but observers consider the real figure to be much higher as testing in rural areas is extremely limited. PNG has the highest rates and number of HIV cases in the Pacific. Communicable diseases, including malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhoeal diseases, and acute respiratory disease are major causes of morbidity and mortality. Access to health care is extremely challenging for urban poor and rural remote communities.

Education

2.18 More children than ever before are now enrolled in elementary, primary and secondary schools in PNG, but many of them do not perform at their grade level. About a quarter of children aged 6 to 18 do not attend school, with girls attending at a lower rate than boys. The primary school transition rate into lower

secondary school is 56 per cent (and only 50 per cent for girls). In recent years, attendance and student retention rates have been low across the country for a range of reasons, including poverty, illness, tribal fighting, child labour, natural disasters, family, domestic and sexual violence, lack of teachers, and, more recently, COVID-19.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.19 PNG is a constitutional monarchy and is a member of the Commonwealth. The National Parliament is a unicameral legislature broadly modelled on the Westminster system and elected for five-year terms. From the 2022 election onwards, the Parliament will have 118 members, with seven additional electorates approved by the PNG Parliament in 2022. A further six additional electorates are scheduled to be added in 2027. PNG's parliament is made up of 96 open members who represent local constituencies, and 22 provincial members who double as governors of their respective provinces. Governors are responsible for the administration of their province in addition to their parliamentary responsibilities. The National Capital District (NCD) is treated as a province; the NCD Governor is therefore effectively the mayor of Port Moresby. In place of a governor, the self-governing Autonomous Region of Bougainville is represented by an additional regional member, whose parliamentary function is analogous but who has no provincial responsibilities. Governors must cede their provincial responsibilities, usually to a politically aligned open member from the same province, should they accept a ministerial appointment. A national election was held in July 2022.

2.20 Historically, there has been a high turn-over of parliamentarians at general elections. In 2002, for example, around 80 per cent of sitting members lost their seats. In the 2012 elections, the figure was almost 60 per cent, and in 2017 it was down to 50 per cent. In 2022, the turn-over rate is expected to be around 33 per cent. To date, all governments have been coalitions.

2.21 The Government of PNG has the power to declare States of Emergency, under the PNG Constitution, the Defence Act or under other legislation such as the *Emergency (General Provisions) (COVID 19) Act 2020*. States of Emergency allow for the call out of the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) and its use to aid civil authorities. In addition to States of Emergency declared during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-22, they have been used to respond to civil disorder. For example, a nine-month state of emergency was declared in Southern Highlands province in June 2018, which included the suspension of the provincial government, due to widespread election-related violence. In May 2022, Prime Minister Marape declared a state of emergency in the mining district of Porgera in response to violence linked to illegal mining. Approved to last eight months, it is the third state of emergency declared in that district in ten years.

Autonomous Region of Bougainville

2.22 Following a period of civil conflict with the PNG national government between 1988 and 1997, the province of Bougainville gained a degree of autonomy with a licence to further explore independence, as a condition of the 2001 Peace Agreement (see also [Recent History](#)). In 2019, 97.7 per cent of Bougainvillean voters opted for independence from PNG in a referendum. However, the vote was non-binding and is subject to ratification by PNG's parliament. This process has been affirmed by the PNG Attorney-General and State Solicitor but remains subject to contestation by the Autonomous Bougainville Government. The PNG Government and the Autonomous Government of Bougainville are now in a period of constitutionally mandated post-referendum consultations. On 5 April 2022, Prime Minister Marape and President Toroama of the Autonomous Bougainville Government signed the Era Kone Covenant, which provides a framework

and a (non-binding) timeline for conclusion of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, which includes consideration by the National Parliament of Bougainville's political future between 2025 and 2027.

HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.23 Policies, principles and laws exist in PNG to protect human rights, but it remains challenging to operationalise these protections. PNG's constitution references human rights and gives the Supreme Court powers to initiate investigations into alleged human rights violations, or for any person or their representative to initiate proceedings funded by the PNG Government. PNG has ratified six of the nine major UN conventions on human rights, namely: the *International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*; the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child*; the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*; the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*; the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*; and, the *International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Papua New Guinea is yet to ratify three of the remaining core human rights instruments: the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*; the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*; and the *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance*.

2.24 PNG has not adopted any further treaties or protocols relating to human rights since its second cycle of UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of its human rights record in 2016. PNG underwent its third UPR cycle in November 2021. The 2021 UPR made 161 recommendations, which the Government of PNG is currently considering. Major areas of concern raised during the UPR process were ratification of the remaining core international human rights treaties, establishing a National Human Rights Institution, addressing gender-based and LGBTI violence, the decriminalisation of same-sex activity and abolishing the death penalty (since abolished in January 2022 – see 4.3).

National Human Rights Institution

2.25 Despite considerable discussion over the last 20 years, PNG is yet to establish a human rights commission. PNG first proposed setting up such a body at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. The idea was twice formally endorsed by the National Executive Council (PNG's cabinet), in 1997 and 2007, with legislation drafted in 2008. During its first UPR in 2011, PNG accepted the recommendation that a National Human Rights Institution should be established. In PNG's National Report for its third cycle UPR in 2021, PNG stated that – while it faced considerable challenges – the Government was continuing to work on establishing a National Human Rights Commission.

SECURITY SITUATION

Law and Order

2.26 Violent and petty crime are common in PNG, especially in Port Moresby, Lae and other urban centres. Robbery, assault, sexual assault and gang rape, and property crimes are all relatively common. Informal settlements in and around towns and cities are particularly dangerous. 'Bush knives' (machetes) and guns are often used in assaults and robberies. Most robberies involve weapons. Women face a much

greater risk of sexual assault and robbery. Women and girls are also subject to high levels of primarily family-centred gender-based violence (see [‘Women’](#)). Police response is usually inadequate (see [‘Police’](#)).

Inter-Group Violence

2.27 Tensions between and within PNG’s hundreds of different tribal groups arise frequently across PNG, and may be triggered for a variety of reasons, including land and territory-related issues, contested election outcomes, accusations of sorcery and witchcraft, or the souring of relationships or a misunderstanding after an altercation. These tensions have led to frequent outbreaks of fighting, rioting and looting, often resulting in the widespread destruction of property, disruption of normal services, serious injury and death. Violent tribal clashes and random killings of locals have occurred in Highlands Provinces in recent years, including incidents during the 2022 national election period.

2.28 Tribal violence is particularly prevalent in the Highlands region, an area which accounts for almost half the country’s population. Since 2012, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has responded to tribal violence in PNG’s Enga, Hela and Southern Highlands provinces by supporting survivors. In 2021, approximately 30,000 people were displaced by communal violence in the areas in which the ICRC operates. The most recent example of tribal violence was in Porgera district, Enga Province, where on 20 July 2022 an estimated 18 people were killed. The Acting UN Resident Coordinator expressed deep concern, noting reports of the attack also included allegations of sexual violence against women and girls, and estimated that several thousand people, mostly women and children, had been displaced.

2.29 Land disputes are a common catalyst for unrest in PNG. Ninety-seven per cent of land in PNG is customarily held. Conflict typically escalates from territorial disputes into violence, with some incidents being ‘payback’ for previous incidents. While inter-tribal conflict has historically occurred, especially in the Highlands region, observers suggest that such violence has become markedly worse in the last few years due to the increasing prevalence of high-powered firearms, the willingness to target the elderly, women and children, and the fact that conflict is less governed by customary law (which served to limit the extent and targets of violence) than in the past. Inter-tribal fighting often results in the destruction of communal property and services (such as health clinics, schools and transport infrastructure) and in substantial numbers of internally displaced persons. Sources report national and provincial governments are disinclined to rebuild after such destruction.

2.30 Observers have suggested that increased fighting in the Highlands should be viewed as a resort to self-help through violent means, in the absence of effective government alternatives for managing disputes peacefully. Police capacity and willingness to prevent and investigate tribal fighting is typically limited (see [Police](#)). In Hela province, which has a population of 400,000 people, there are just 83 Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) officers, as noted by Prime Minister Marape in response to the July 2019 massacre. Often the RPNGC are outnumbered and outgunned by warring groups and can only intervene at significant personal risk.

2.31 Inter-tribal conflicts often affect transmigrated populations in other parts of the country (e.g. Port Moresby and Lae). Members of ethnic groups may continue their conflicts in other locations. Individuals targeted for violence will often continue to be targeted in locations to which they relocate if members of an opposing tribe are present. Sources reported, for example, that a high school boy in Port Moresby was targeted for violence (and possibly murder) because of his membership of a Highlands clan involved in a conflict there.

2.32 DFAT assesses that those involved in inter-tribal conflicts face a moderate risk of societal harassment or violence which may not be ameliorated by relocation to another part of PNG.

3. REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

RELIGION

3.1 Article 45 of the Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, thought and religion. According to the 2011 Census, the most recent available, 98 per cent of citizens identified as Christian. (See also [Demography](#).) Many citizens integrate Christian faith with indigenous beliefs and practices.

3.2 There is not strong evidence in the media of discrimination against minority faiths. However, approval for a gathering of the Hindu community was initially refused by PNG's National COVID Control Centre in October 2021 as being against PNG's Christian values. The refusal was later reversed and an apology was issued.

3.3 In August 2020, the National Executive Council, the country's cabinet, approved a proposed constitutional amendment formally declaring the country a Christian nation, subject to parliamentary ratification. In early 2022, the proposed amendment was introduced into Parliament, but has not yet been passed. According to the US Department of State, parliament sessions and most government meetings continue to begin and end with Christian prayers, but persons of different faiths were able to opt out with no repercussions.

3.4 DFAT assesses, on the available information, that PNG citizens are unlikely to face government or societal discrimination on the basis of their religion.

POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.5 There are many political parties in PNG, but they are poorly anchored in society and typically do not have a wide membership base among the populace. PNG parliamentarians show little allegiance or obligation to the party they nominally represent and often appeal and respond to local or regional particularities rather than taking a national perspective or encouraging civic responsibility. The weakness of parties has meant that, for political survival, MPs engage in activities in the form of regular favours to their followers (known as '*wantokism*'). Many candidates run as independents and align with parties after they are elected. (See also [Political System](#).)

3.6 Serious flaws, including bribery and voter fraud, have been reported in the course of PNG elections. Some areas, notably the Highlands Region, have experienced significant election-related violence, often resulting in multiple deaths, as well as severe property damage. Serious election-related violence in the 2022 national election was largely concentrated in the Highlands Provinces with deaths and serious injuries under-reported through official channels. A woman was also killed in Port Moresby when police fired during crowd-control efforts at a polling station. Wilful destruction of ballot papers occurred in at least two provinces and there were allegations in some areas of fraudulently substituted ballot papers. In 2021-22, PNG has seen some tensions with respect to media criticism of the government. (See also [Media](#).)

3.7 DFAT assesses citizens of PNG are generally able to participate freely in the political process. However, the extent of this freedom varies considerably according to region and community practice.

Women face greater barriers to participation than men. Underlying violence can come to the fore during periods of heightened political activity, such as elections, particularly in the Highlands, and this can have a serious effect upon the ability of some groups to participate, particularly women, older people, and people with disability. Entrenched cultural practices of consensus-based decision making can be reflected in ‘bloc voting’ in Highlands Provinces of PNG, where a community collectively determines which candidate they will support, rather than casting individual ballots. Women are not always included in these community consultations.

GROUPS OF INTEREST

Civil Society Organisations

3.8 Article 47 of the Constitution provides for freedom of assembly. A range of civil society organisations provide some social services in PNG, and advocate for women’s rights, the environment and other causes. Churches in PNG are significant providers of social services including, according to PNG Government estimates, approximately 50 per cent of PNG’s health services, 40 per cent of primary and secondary school services, and support to vulnerable communities. Domestic and international human rights organisations generally operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases without substantial interference. International and domestic civil society organisations are also able to deliver development assistance without government interference.

3.9 The Government recognises workers’ rights to strike, organise, and engage in collective bargaining. However, it has been known to impose arbitration in labour disputes before workers have had the opportunity to strike. The Government has also frequently undermined attempts to hold demonstrations: marches and demonstrations require 14 days’ notice and police approval via an opaque process; approvals are rarely granted.

3.10 DFAT assesses that civil society organisations in PNG, and individuals associated with them, are generally able to operate freely, although the right to hold demonstrations has not always been respected in practice.

Media

3.11 Article 46 of the Constitution guarantees freedoms of speech, the press and information. Journalists can be sued for defamation in civil cases, and defamation was also introduced as a criminal offence in 2016. DFAT is aware of at least one prosecution for this offence. There has reportedly been an increasing trend by some politicians to sue the media for defamation particularly with regard to accusations of corruption. Politicians, or their staff, openly criticise certain reporting, which some journalists reportedly find intimidating.

3.12 PNG’s broadcast media consists of the main public broadcaster, the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC); several major commercial radio networks, including Nau FM and FM 100; and, the main television station, EMTV which is a State-owned enterprise. Radio remains the most important source of news, due to its ability to reach the country’s most isolated settlements, overcoming the challenge of PNG’s low literacy rates and challenging topography. Both of the country’s daily newspapers are foreign owned: *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier* is owned by an Australian subsidiary of News Corporation, while *The National* is owned by Malaysian logging company Rimbunan Hijau.

3.13 While not yet ubiquitous, internet usage continues to grow in PNG, assisted by the steady development of infrastructure which has provided remote access for internet, television and mobile phones. While the Government had not previously restricted access to the internet, in August 2016 the National Parliament passed the Cybercrime Code Bill which allows for the prosecution of offences committed online. At the time, the announcement attracted strong criticism that it was an attempt to regulate mainstream media by stealth. To date, these powers have not been widely exercised.

3.14 While news media in PNG has traditionally been among the most independent in the South Pacific, press freedoms have eroded somewhat in recent years. Threats and harassment against journalists, and attempts to interfere with their work, have increased over the last decade, particularly in reprisal for investigative reporting on wrongdoing by officials. Credible media sources told DFAT that bribes are often offered to journalists and editors with the intent of buying favourable coverage.

3.15 In February 2022, at the majority-government-owned EMTV television station, the entire newsroom was fired after walking out in response to a decision to suspend Sincha Dimara, the head of news and current affairs, for ‘insubordination’ (for continuing to report in a fashion opposed by the Government). Her predecessor, Neville Choi, was also suspended for ‘insubordination’ in 2019 and a senior EMTV journalist, Scott Waide, was suspended in November 2018 for reporting on alleged misuse of government funds.

3.16 DFAT assesses journalists in PNG who report stories perceived to be critical of the Government face a moderate risk of threats, verbal harassment, and other attempts to interfere with their work, and of being sued for defamation. DFAT assesses that journalists in PNG are at a low risk of physical violence on the basis of their occupation.

Women

3.17 Article 2(5) of the Constitution calls for equal participation by PNG’s women citizens in all political, economic, social, and religious activities. While some women hold senior positions in business, the professions, and the civil service, gender discrimination exists at all levels in PNG and cultural barriers continue to significantly limit the extent of female participation. In 2020, PNG ranked 161 out of 162 countries on the UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index (162, Yemen, being the worst). Following the 2017 election in PNG, the national Parliament had no female members (and has had only seven since independence). In 2022, 201 women candidates nominated for the election – slightly higher than the 167 who contested in 2017 – with two women successfully elected to Parliament.

3.18 Violence against women and girls in PNG is very common, among the most common in the world. In PNG, such violence is sometimes referred to as Gender-based Violence (GBV) or Family and Sexual Violence (FSV). Sources report that almost all women and girls will be subject to violence at some point during their lives. The PNG Demographic Health Survey of 2016-18, which is the latest data available, found very high levels of violence against women: 58 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 in PNG had experienced physical violence since the age of 15 (including 48 per cent in the last 12 months); 28 per cent experienced sexual violence; and 18 per cent of women who had been pregnant had experienced violence during their pregnancy. The PNG Coalition of Parliamentarians to End GBV states that one woman in PNG is beaten every 30 seconds and there are 1.5 million victims of GBV every year.

3.19 DFAT assesses that women across PNG face a high risk of societal discrimination due to long-standing traditional values and gender roles which restrict their ability to fully participate in the community and workforce. DFAT assesses that women are unable to participate fully in politics in PNG due to deeply held cultural traditions and institutional restrictions. DFAT further assesses that women in PNG face a high risk of gender-based violence, regardless of their social status. Women living in Highlands provinces are at

particular risk, although violence against women occurs nationwide. Women who are subjected to gender-based violence are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of adequate state protection or support services.

3.20 'Bride price' payment remains a common cultural practice in PNG (including among elites). A bride price is a sum of money ranging from PGK2,500 (about AUD1,050) to PGK300,000 (about AUD126,490) paid to the woman's family by the groom or his family. Bride price is a long-standing Melanesian tradition, and is intended to strengthen familial bonds. However, in recent years it has become increasingly monetised and led to a sense of 'ownership' of wives in some cases, giving husbands a sense of entitlement which can be seen as permitting violence. Furthermore, an obligation to pay back bride price in the case of marriage breakdown has complicated the ability of women to leave violent relationships, with their own families sometimes pressuring women to return to their husbands to avoid triggering such an obligation.

3.21 While there has been significant attention paid to the level of GBV in PNG by the national government and NGOs, and some state resources made available to address it, the police response remains inadequate. The RPNGC lacks the capacity, including most especially vehicles, fuel and human resources, to respond to crime generally (see [Police](#)). However, its response to GBV is especially lacking. Domestic and international sources report that police and prosecutors rarely pursue criminal charges against perpetrators of family violence, even in the most serious cases (such as those involving attempted murder, serious injury or repeated rape). Statistics provided by the RPNGC between December 2017 and October 2018 showed 2,013 family and sexual violence (FSV) cases were reported in Port Moresby and the Central Province, resulting in 195 arrests and 11 convictions; that is, only 1 in 200 of reported cases resulted in a conviction. Given how few women seek help from police, this suggests only a tiny proportion of perpetrators of violence are arrested or successfully prosecuted. Even seemingly clear-cut cases can end without a conviction. For example, on 3 September 2021, in Mt Hagen, following the murder of a 31-year-old woman, three men were released from prison following a magistrate dismissing all charges. This was despite the fact that, according to media reports, police found the deceased woman's body wrapped in a tarpaulin in the back of her husband's vehicle at a police checkpoint, with the other two co-accused men present, and the husband confessed to the murder. The men were re-arrested following public outcry.

3.22 FSV is still seen by many police officers (and many men in PNG) as a private matter in which the state should not intervene. Levels of GBV by police officers themselves are high. Police are more likely to act on complaints about perpetrators outside the family, if they act at all. However, the RPNGC has made some progress in recent years, establishing Family and Sexual Violence Units (FSVU) in every province. Sources told DFAT FSVUs represent progress in the policing of GBV, especially with regard to the willingness to investigate and make arrests, and in their connectedness to other services. However, there are not enough FSVUs to respond adequately to the scale of the problem. There are only 106 FSVU officers across the country and at the time of publication, there is a single FSVU officer in Tari, capital of the Highlands province of Hela, to cover the whole province (population of around 250,000). FSVU officers are typically subject to the same resource constraints as the rest of the RPNGC.

3.23 In September 2013, PNG's parliament unanimously passed the *Family Protection Act* (2013). It makes provision for interim protection orders (IPOs) and longer-term protection orders (POs), which forbid contact of the person seeking the order by a spouse, ex-spouse or family member. In-country sources told DFAT that this is a reasonable framework for a justice sector response to GBV, but suggest its implementation remains weak. IPOs can be issued by Village Courts, unlike POs, which must be issued by District Courts. While IPOs reportedly make a positive difference to perceived safety of FSV survivors, sources suggest they are not presently offering women in PNG much protection. Only about 1,000 such orders are issued per year, which is not enough given there are estimated to be 1.5 million acts of GBV in PNG each year. Furthermore, sources report the RPNGC typically lacks the inclination and resources to enforce such orders. That said, breaches of IPOs have reportedly been prosecuted upon occasion and offenders even jailed in several instances in Milne Bay province. Amendments to the *Family Protection Act*

(2013) were passed in January 2022, which increased the penalties for breaching an IPO or PO, created an aggravated domestic violence offence and created an 'Urgent Notice' scheme.

3.24 Sources report a significant lack of services for people requiring assistance after suffering family violence. There are now 22 Family Support Centres (FSCs) across the country (one in each province), typically attached to a general hospital to provide health services for GBV survivors. But while the FSC model is an advance for GBV health responses, their services are insufficient. Each centre tends to have 1-2 staff, primarily nurses or social workers, rather than doctors, and receives between 30-100 GBV referrals per month. FSCs usually charge somewhere in the region of PGK 20 (about AUD 8 dollars) for services and/or medical reports. These reports are often used for family compensation negotiations rather than police investigations – and it is normally the families of the survivors who benefit from such compensation rather than the survivor herself.

3.25 While women's refuges exist in PNG, they are insufficient for the level of GBV that exists. Sources report that Port Moresby, a city of 800,000 people, has only six safe houses for women suffering GBV, open to the public, and mostly run by faith-based organisations. Some of these safe houses have as few as two rooms, one for the survivor and one for a carer, while others can accommodate up to 10 survivors in a shared room. The situation for abused children is even tighter, with very few safe houses able to accommodate unaccompanied children.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

3.26 PNG's Criminal Code criminalises consensual sexual acts between adult males. Section 210 (1) states that the offence of 'sexual penetration against the order of nature' is punishable by up to 14 years' imprisonment, while Section 212 states that 'indecent practices between males' (non-penetrative sexual contact) is a misdemeanour offence punishable by up to three years' imprisonment. Sexual acts between females are not expressly legislated in any way, nor are there any other PNG laws dealing with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) people.

3.27 Despite the legislative framework, DFAT understands that actual prosecutions of same-sex sexual activity are rare. DFAT is not aware of any prosecutions since 2015.

3.28 The social stigma against diverse sexual orientation and gender identity in PNG (together with the criminality) has led to the LGBTI community being largely 'underground', with a small community in Port Moresby. Few gay or trans men are publicly open about their sexual orientation and may not identify as gay even to themselves. Lesbians are even less visible – sources report that, at an LGBTI event in 2018 to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), participants said they were 'not aware of any group specifically looking at the concerns of lesbian communities, noting this group was not represented in existing PNG networks.' Sources report this continues to be the case in 2022.

3.29 There have been credible reports that gay and trans men in Port Moresby are often physically targeted by local men and have been raped, beaten, or even murdered. Sources identified police as frequent perpetrators of violence, leading to an unwillingness by many victims of violence to seek protection or redress, including when raped. DFAT understands that people in the Highlands are even more homophobic than other parts of the country.

3.30 Societal discrimination against LGBTI individuals has reportedly prevented them from freely accessing health-care services. Sources report that gay and trans men may face harassment and humiliation when accessing services, including clinic services. Sources further report that patient confidentiality is often

not respected, leading some men who have sex with men to avoid seeking treatment for sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

3.31 DFAT assesses that LGBTI individuals in PNG face a high risk of societal discrimination, with traditional views about sexuality and gender restricting their participation in the community and workforce. Openly LGBTI individuals face a high risk of societal violence. Although prosecutions or legal punishments are not generally pursued in PNG, the existence of legislation prohibiting male homosexual acts can be used as a means of harassment, with sources reporting that some men are subject to fake prosecutions for the purpose of blackmail. Social media harassment of posts expressing pro-LGBTI views is common.

Sorcery and Witchcraft Accusations

3.32 There is a strong belief throughout PNG in the power of the supernatural, in particular the ability of ‘witches’ or ‘sorcerers’ to use magic. This belief is prevalent in both rural and urban areas and is also typically shared by PNG elites. Those accused of sorcery are often subject to harassment and violence, known as Sorcery Accusation Related Violence (SARV). Sources estimate that six people are killed and a further 23 suffer serious harm, including permanent injury, as a result of SARV each month. In addition, sometimes whole families of SARV victims need to move out of their communities, potentially facing difficult long-term displacement (see also [Internal Relocation](#)).

3.33 In PNG, anyone can be accused of sorcery. Researchers report that children and the elderly, blood-related family members, uneducated, previously accused, well-educated professionals and leaders and marginalised people have all been targets. Both men and women can be accused of sorcery, though accusations against women and children are more likely to result in violence and significant injury. In some places, such as Bougainville, accused sorcerers were historically men while in other places, like Enga, they were predominantly women. However, the nature of SARV has changed across PNG in recent years, becoming more prevalent and more violent, and spreading to provinces where sorcery beliefs were not historically widely held.

3.34 The proliferation of sorcery accusations has been partly attributed to modern social media and communication, as well as entertainment products such as the *Harry Potter* series, in a population inclined to accept supernatural explanations. The vast majority of accusations (82 per cent, according to an ANU estimate) involve a pre-existing conflict or tension between the accused and the accuser – often over land or money and goods. Other accusations involve finding a scapegoat for misfortune, such as the death (by HIV, for example) of a relative of the accuser. Such scapegoats will typically be less powerful, more isolated individuals, such as widows or single women, without the backing of male relatives.

3.35 In nearly all cases (99 per cent according to the ANU), there was an immediate trigger incident preceding an accusation, such as death, sickness or, less commonly, economic misfortune. Researchers identified two further predictors of violence following accusations: the level of precision (that is, the detail or specificity in the accusation) made against the accused individual and whether or not it involved an allegation that the accused had caused death.

3.36 In the ANU study, only a fifth of victims lodged complaints in relation to SARV, and, at the time of the study’s publication (2021), charges had been laid in only four cases from more than 1,000 incidents. Across the country, there are generally fewer than 10 offenders convicted each year for SARV, despite the high frequency of cases and the often very public nature of their violence. Police responses to SARV are limited by capacity limitations of the RPNGC (see [Police](#)). However, police officers may also believe the sorcery accusations or otherwise be sympathetic to the sorcery accuser. On occasion, police may face significant community opposition with regard to a SARV response and may have to contend with a large number of potential defendants (entire communities may participate in SARV violence).

3.37 The Government of PNG endorsed a Sorcery and Witchcraft Accusation National Action Plan in 2015, aimed at reducing sorcery-related violence. The Plan, with an initial budget of PGK3 million (AUD 1.3 million) focuses on five strategic areas: care and counselling; advocacy and communications; legal and protection; the health sector; and research. However, the Plan and its coordinating mechanism, the Technical Committee Against Sorcery Accusation Related Violence were not fully implemented. A review of the Plan is currently ongoing with the intent to establish funding and reinvigorate implementation. In late February 2022, PNG amended its Criminal Code to insert provisions criminalising acting as or procuring the services of a ‘Glasman’ or ‘Glasmeri’ – seers who claim to discern those responsible for sorcery, usually for money. The amendments included criminalising the accusation of sorcery, but do not refer to Sorcery Accusation Related Violence.

3.38 DFAT assesses that those accused of sorcery in PNG face a high risk of societal discrimination and violence. This discrimination may include being illegally detained, beaten or tortured, having their possessions stolen, being forced to leave their communities, or being killed.

4. COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

4.1 Sources told DFAT that between 1,000 and 2,000 people are considered missing from the Bougainville conflict in the 1980s and 1990s. The ICRC continues to work with the Autonomous Bougainville Government on a policy on missing persons and on an effective coordination mechanism to help clarify what happened to those missing and how to respond to the needs of the families of the missing. DFAT is not aware of more recent reports of enforced or involuntary disappearance in PNG.

Deaths in Custody

4.2 Accurate statistics on the numbers of deaths in judicial custody in PNG are not available. However, sources reported concerns about the treatment of individuals in police custody, noting cases where police had brought wounded individuals to police lock-ups and failed to provide them with medical assistance. A source reported that, in practice, proper records were often not kept of who was being held in the cells, why they were held, for how long and any medical conditions. Further, Correctional Services has the power to shoot to kill escaped inmates. This has resulted in significant numbers of deaths during breakouts, including 11 killed (nine on remand) during a breakout from Buimo prison in August 2020.

DEATH PENALTY

4.3 On 20 January 2022, the PNG Parliament passed legislation repealing the death penalty. The Criminal Code (Amendment) Bill was drafted with the intention to repeal all penalty provisions under the Criminal Code that make reference to the death penalty, and replace them with the maximum penalty provisions of either life imprisonment with no parole, or life imprisonment with parole after 30 years. PNG has reportedly commuted the death sentences of the 14 Papua New Guineans on death row to life imprisonment. PNG has not conducted any executions since 1954.

TORTURE/ CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

4.4 Article 36, Section 1 of PNG's Constitution states that 'No person shall be submitted to torture (whether physical or mental), or to treatment or punishment that is cruel or otherwise inhuman, or is inconsistent with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person'. However, Human Rights Watch

reports that police abuse and violence remain common. The US Department of State reported in 2021 that there ‘were credible reports that members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.’

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

4.5 Article 42 of PNG’s Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. However arbitrary arrest or detention by the RPNGC is relatively common. Police must have reason to believe that a crime was, is being, or will be committed to make an arrest. A warrant is not required, and police make most arrests without one. In 2021, the NGO Freedom House reported that opportunities to challenge such detention are limited in practice, chiefly due to a shortage of trained judicial personnel. In September 2020, then Police Minister Bryan Kramer alleged that the RPNGC maintains a ‘rampant culture of ill-discipline and brutality’.

Human Trafficking and Slavery

4.6 Human trafficking and slavery occur in PNG. According to the US Department of State, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in PNG, and traffickers exploit victims from PNG abroad. PNG is used as a transit point to exploit foreign individuals in other countries. Victims are typically Papua New Guinean women and children exploited in sex work, as well as forced labour in domestic service, the tourism sector, manual labour, forced begging, and street vending. Approximately 30 per cent of Papua New Guinean sex trafficking victims are children under the age of 18, with some as young as 10 years old. Trafficking and exploitation are also prevalent in and around the mining and forestry industries. NGOs provided some support services to victims in the absence of support from the PNG Government.

4.7 In November 2020, the PNG Government secured its first trafficking conviction since the criminalisation of trafficking in 2013. Outside that conviction, there are reportedly no further trafficking investigations underway. The RPNGC is subject to substantial capacity limitations (see [Police](#))

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

STATE PROTECTION

Military

5.1 The Papua New Guinea Defence Force's (PNGDF) core services are border security; maritime surveillance, patrol and response; public order and security; nation building; disaster relief; and the fulfilment of international obligations. The PNGDF is active in domestic security matters, typically in conjunction with police, and may be involved in the prevention of tribal conflicts, election security and other communal violence matters such as SARV.

5.2 PNGDF has had issues at times maintaining discipline. In a widely reported incident in January 2012, a small group of soldiers took control of Port Moresby's military headquarters for a short period in an unsuccessful attempt to restore ousted Prime Minister Michael Somare. PNGDF soldiers have also engaged in fighting in the streets with RPNGC officers, as occurred in Port Moresby in 2021. Such clashes have tended to occur when minor incidents have escalated. PNGDF personnel have sometimes clashed violently with civilians (often in retaliation to attacks on soldiers by civilians).

Police

5.3 The Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) is the national police force responsible for the investigation of crime and maintaining internal security in all regions of the country. At the time of independence in 1975, police services were estimated to only cover around 10 per cent of the country's total land area and 40 per cent of the population. Since then, the size of the RPNGC has increased by only 30 per cent, while the overall population has more than quadrupled. In 2022, the strength of the RPNGC is approximately 5,500 personnel. Failure to respond to requests for assistance and persistent reports of police abuse have led to low levels of public confidence in the RPNGC.

5.4 Alleged abuses of power and the use of unnecessary violence by police have been consistently highlighted by international human rights bodies. In March 2022, the 18-year-old son of a police officer was beaten severely by RPNGC officers in Port Moresby and driven about unconscious in the back of their van for hours before he was released to his family. As at the time of publication, there were no reported consequences for the officers responsible for the bashing. In April 2021, the US Department of State reported that 14 police officers had been suspended pending investigations into their alleged involvement in murders reported in Central, Western, and New Ireland Provinces in the previous two weeks.

5.5 The effectiveness of the RPNGC is severely limited by resource and staffing constraints. The police are routinely restricted in their ability to investigate crimes due to transport limitations, including a lack of vehicles and fuel. Sources reported that a trial in 2022 in Central Province for serious sexual offences against a child only went ahead because of NGO support in the form of petrol funding for the police and necessary accommodation provided to the complainant and her mother. One close observer of the RPNGC

suggested that, while the full complement of police stood at around 5,500, only around one quarter of these were fully effective as police officers. RPNGC officers endure poor working and living conditions, including low remuneration; frequently need to assert themselves in violent environments, often without weapons or protection; have family/clan obligations to meet; and are generally poorly trained, particularly on human rights. Some police are also disinclined to act in response to some GBV, SARV or tribal fighting offences due to sympathy for the alleged perpetrator(s).

5.6 DFAT assesses that the capacity of the RPNGC and other security forces such as the PNGDF to provide protection for vulnerable cohorts is typically severely limited; such protection will often only be provided following a large public outcry.

Private Security Firms

5.7 Private security is estimated to be one of the largest industries in PNG, with far more security guards than there are police officers. ANU researchers estimated that in 2018 the 566 security companies of PNG employed 30,279 security guards, not including unlicensed companies employing guards without the requisite permits. Many of these guards earn below the official minimum wage. Although restrictions are placed on the carrying of firearms by employees of private companies, there have been cases in which employees have used excessive force, resulting in some instances in deaths. Concerns have been expressed by NGOs over insufficient training, the lack of a regulatory framework, and the lack of accountability for employees of private companies who act outside the law.

Traditional Mediation Systems and Customary Law (Village Courts)

5.8 A report by Human Rights Watch in 2015 (latest figures available) estimated there were around 1,600 Village Courts located across PNG, both in outlying rural areas and in and around cities and settlements. Servicing these are 18,000 village court officials of which only 780 are women. Since their inception at independence in 1975, Village Courts have played a vital role in providing access to justice for a significant portion of the population, particularly for dispute resolution within and between communities. Village Courts also play an important role in upholding matters of custom, being a hybrid of customary law and formal courts.

5.9 Tribal disputes are often brought before Village Courts, rather than higher level courts. Generally, a cash payment is offered as compensation to resolve the dispute. However, it may happen that the communities are not satisfied with the financial compensation offered, which could give rise to renewed fighting. In addition, Village Court mediations may foster impunity if the tribal fight involved crimes such as killing or rape and serious physical injury.

5.10 Village Courts provide people with an opportunity to seek justice that may not otherwise be available, particularly in rural areas. They have been criticised on occasion for hearing matters outside of their jurisdiction and for seeking to keep the peace rather than deliver justice, such as through dealing with sexual or domestic violence through reconciliation or compensation processes rather than referring them to District Courts, as required by law.

Detention and Prison

5.11 Prisons in PNG are run by the PNG Correctional Service, which reports to the Ministry for Correctional Service. Each province maintains a prison, although some are temporarily closed on occasion

due to tribal and land conflicts or condemned due to health standards. The prison administration is also jointly responsible, together with the Department of Provincial and Local Level Government, for ten rural lock-ups throughout the country. Police stations, run by the RPNGC, are also used for detention purposes. DFAT is aware of cases whereby police stations have been used for long-term detention, sometimes for months, in contravention of their mandate to be used as 'lock-ups' for no longer than 72 hours. Those in police lock-ups are frequently denied medical care except in the most obviously life-threatening situations.

5.12 Overcrowding is a common problem in both prisons and police stations. In some areas, infrequent court sessions, slow police investigations and bail restrictions for certain crimes exacerbate this overcrowding.

5.13 Large-scale prison breaks occur frequently in PNG. Thirty-one men escaped from police holding cells in Lae in September 2020, when prisoners took the keys from a sleeping guard. In August 2020, 47 prisoners escaped from Buimo prison in Port Moresby, with eleven being shot dead by guards during the jailbreak. There were at least two other mass escapes from prisons in PNG in 2020.

5.14 Female prisoners make up a small percentage (approximately 5 per cent) of PNG's total prison population (including pre-trial detainees). Male and female prisoners are usually held separately, but some rural prisons lack separate facilities. There have been reports in the past of assaults on female prisoners.

INTERNAL RELOCATION

5.15 Internal relocation for vulnerable groups in PNG may be possible – people can and do regularly migrate to cities, either in search of economic opportunities or to escape tribal and other violence or natural disasters. As much as 50 per cent of Port Moresby's population is comprised of internal migrants residing in informal settlements. Those who relocate to Port Moresby and other major cities face very high unemployment – 80-90 per cent in the formal sector in Port Moresby – and very high levels of crime, including tribal fighting.

5.16 However, some people struggle to relocate within PNG to avoid issues such as GBV or SARV. Papua New Guineans commonly rely upon family and tribal networks for support, in the absence of government services. Lack of resources and language difficulties can present problems, especially for single women, even more so for those with children. Where relocation has succeeded, it has typically been accompanied by substantial NGO support. Exacerbated by the widespread take-up of mobile phones and social media, and the presence of diaspora from other parts of PNG (most especially in Port Moresby which one source referred to as 'Little PNG'), those who relocate are often recognised in their new home and this information will typically be communicated to their place of origin. This may present a continuing threat to those attempting to escape violence (see [Tribal Violence](#) and [Women](#)).

TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

Exit and Entry Procedures

5.17 As of the date of publication, Port Moresby's Jacksons International Airport was PNG's only airport operating international commercial services. PNG's national carrier, Air Niugini, and a small number of other airlines operate direct international flights to Singapore, Manila, Cairns, Brisbane and Sydney.

5.18 Other airports throughout PNG provide domestic and charter services. Some, including Vanimo near the Indonesian border, may provide international charter services, while those located near key mine

sites offer chartered fly-in fly-out services for miners. A number of seaports offer immigration services for international cruise ships and fishermen. The only legal land border crossing point that is recognised by PNG is on the North coast between Jayapura (Indonesia) and Vanimo.

Conditions for Returnees

5.19 Australia facilitates approximately 10-15 assisted departures to PNG annually. Persons in this category either do not have funds or are unwilling to return to PNG. Those who have overstayed their visa in Australia may be issued a bridging visa to assist them in making arrangements to depart Australia. They may also be given a sum of money for transport costs on return to PNG (as occurs worldwide). DFAT does not have any information available on conditions faced by those who have not been granted protection and returned to PNG.

DOCUMENTATION

PNG National Identification Biometric System

5.20 In 2015, PNG officially launched a national identification biometric system (NID). The system is intended to capture fingerprints as the unique identifier of people. A report in 2019 suggested that 80 per cent of Papua New Guineans lacked a clear form of identification, and that the NID, which is intended to remedy this situation, is subject to problems. By the end of 2018, the system was reportedly intended to have signed up 1.5 million people but had managed only 500,000.

Passports

5.21 Current requirements for adult passport applicants include evidence of citizenship, in the form of either a birth certificate or citizenship certificate, and two recent photographs. Married women are also required to submit their marriage certificate. Applicants under 17 years of age must furnish the consent of their parents or legal guardian.

5.22 Media reports in 2020 suggest that the RPNGC suspected 'rogue immigration officers' had produced fake visas and passports as part of a crime syndicate, following the arrest of an Australian woman in possession of a fake visa bearing genuine stamps and labels. The PNG Passport Application page belonging to the Immigration and Citizenship Authority notes, at the time of publication, that 'due to recent integrity issues concerning lodgement of applications for PNG Passport by persons providing misleading/falsified information, the Authority is now implementing a stringent assessment and processing mechanism.'

PREVALENCE OF FRAUD

5.23 Document fraud occurs frequently in PNG, particularly in relation to identity documents. It is reportedly very easy to obtain birth certificates in any name. Fraudulent supporting documents, including fake bank certificates and letters of invitation, can also be readily obtained. It is reportedly not uncommon in cases of visa non-compliance for people to re-apply under a new identity.