



Papua New Guinea: Rebuilding lives through peace and local services

Highlands Joint Programme Phase II (HJP2)

HJP2 uses an area-based approach: partners work on the connected needs of a place and its residents, rather than provide separate assistance to each population group. Its broader framework brings eight UN entities together around shared locations, with complementary funding streams and institutional roles.

A durable solution means rebuilding life without exclusion or special protection needs caused by displacement. For families, it means safety, secure housing, access to services, a livelihood, and a voice in local decisions, whether they return home or settle where they sought safety.



At a glance

Country	Papua New Guinea: Enga, Hela, Southern Highlands and Western Highlands provinces.
Displacement context	Repeated inter-community violence forces families from their homes. This includes Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence (SARV) which drives individuals and families to leave their communities and live in permanent displacement. Many stay with relatives or in existing communities rather than camps; natural hazards add to local pressures.
Government partners	Provincial administrations; district and local-level governments; the Department of National Planning and Monitoring; the Papua New Guinea Civil and Identity Registry; health, child-protection, gender-based violence, and local-justice institutions.
Solution pathway	Support for safe, voluntary return and local integration: helping people build their lives through services shared with host communities. ^[1]
Main challenge	Renewed violence, damaged homes and livelihoods, pressure on land and services, and barriers to documentation, weak community-based justice mechanisms, and protection prevent families from rebuilding their lives. Victims of SARV also face active threats of further harm, social isolation, and stigma. .
United Nations contribution	Eight UN entities align peacebuilding, public services, protection and economic recovery around locally agreed plans and government institutions.
Headline progress	583 residents accessed registration services in June 2026. By August, programme reporting recorded seven memoranda of understanding involving provincial hospitals to support access to legal identity, alongside two operational birth-registration centres and 15 locations with confirmed multi-agency engagement. Between February and August 2026, the programme advanced durable solutions through community-based planning, civil registration outreach, local justice strengthening, disaster risk management, and conflict monitoring. Intensive participatory planning processes engaged 364 participants (234 men and 130 women) across ten target communities and wards, supporting the development of eight Community Peace and Development Plans (CPDPs) and two Ward Development Plans (WDPs). Mobile civil registration outreach supported the registration of 583 individuals for Birth Certificates and National Identification documents, while 32 Village Court officials were trained and a Provincial Village Courts Committee was established to strengthen community-based justice services.
Remaining gaps	Secure land and housing, sustained incomes, continued safety, and reliable service financing.



Displacement in PNG and government led approach to solution pathways

Internally displaced people have been forced to leave their homes but remain within their own country. In the Highlands in PNG, conflict often causes repeated movement, and some particularly vulnerable groups such as those targeted by Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence (SARV) face stigma and social isolation.. Families may return when violence subsides, stay with relatives, or settle near provincial centres. For SARV victims, there is often no prospect of return to their community. Host communities provide essential support while also sharing land, water, housing, schools and health facilities.

An August 2026 conflict monitoring recorded approximately 2,827 people displaced in nine incidents across Papua New Guinea in May 2026.

Recovery is difficult when homes and food gardens are damaged, roads and markets become unsafe, and services are disrupted. Women and girls face risks of gender-based violence and violence linked to accusations of sorcery. Children may lose access to schooling, documentation and protection. These barriers affect both families seeking to return and those building a future in host communities.

The government opted to address these problems through existing government and community institutions. Provincial administrations brought departments, district- and local-level governments, churches, civil society, and other partners together around priority areas.

Community Peace and Development Plans identified locally agreed actions to reduce conflict and support recovery. Ward Development Plans connect community priorities with local government planning. Through these mechanisms, displaced people, host communities, women and young people have been able better access help through services, infrastructure and livelihoods.

A complementary national reform strengthened the basis for legal identity. Parliament passed the Civil and Identity Registration Act in December 2024, and its public launch in May 2025 marked a step towards more accessible registration services. The programme's registration work sits within this wider government reform.

The August 2026 an agreement making Mara Haus, a Western Highlands Provincial Government building in Mount Hagen, available for shared UN use. The arrangement places programme teams closer to provincial counterparts for joint planning and follow-up.



Public authority and community leadership

National institutions provide registration, child-protection, gender-based violence, and SARV frameworks and policies.. Provincial administrations convene and coordinate; district and local-level governments connect priorities with local plans, services and infrastructure. Displaced and host communities identify needs through dialogue and planning. Churches, customary leaders, women's and youth groups, and civil society help facilitate participation and link people with support.

Eight Community Peace and Development Plans (CPDPs) and two Ward Development Plans (WDPs) are currently under development across target communities and wards in Enga, Hela, Southern Highlands and Western Highlands Provinces. Building on community assessments and the training of 97 Community Facilitator Team (CFT) members (64 men and 33 women), intensive planning workshops engaged 364 participants (234 men and 130 women), including women, youth, traditional leaders, ward councillors, churches and government stakeholders. The draft plans are currently undergoing further consultations, review and validation prior to formal endorsement. By linking community priorities with government planning processes, service delivery systems and future community-driven investments, the plans are expected to strengthen local ownership, support peaceful coexistence, address drivers of displacement and contribute to durable solutions for displaced and host communities. Through the participatory planning process, communities identified and prioritized a range of community-driven recovery and resilience investments, including educational facilities, water supply systems, community markets, footbridges, community centres, evacuation centres and safe houses. Bills of Materials (BOMs) for priority projects have been completed, and procurement processes for in-kind construction materials have been initiated to support implementation of selected community priorities.

Community Peace and Development Planning enabled displaced persons, host communities, women, youth, traditional leaders, and local authorities to jointly identify priorities and participate in decision-making processes affecting their recovery and future development.

UN Support

UNDP coordinates HJP2 and supports provincial platforms, local planning, mediation and development planning that considers conflict and disaster risks. IOM contributes through conflict and displacement monitoring and analysis, community-based planning through Community Peace and Development Planning (CPDP) and Ward Development Planning (WDP), strengthening community-based justice systems and mediation mechanisms, development of Provincial Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Strategies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), support for community-driven recovery and resilience projects, and mobile civil registration outreach to improve access to legal identity documentation and essential services for displacement-affected and vulnerable populations



UNICEF supports civil registration, child protection and links with health and community services. UNFPA supports the strengthening of prevention of and response to gender-based and sorcery accusation-related violence through community-based programming and support to frontline service providers, including, referrals to police, psychosocial support, safehouses, and health and legal services through survivor-centered case management. UNFPA also strengthens the capacity of Family Support Centres and frontline health workers through training on MHPSS, GBV and SARV management, and the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP) for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Emergencies. UN Women supports women's leadership in peacebuilding, governance and economic decision-making.

FAO, ILO and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) contribute through the Livelihood Enhancement and Economic Diversification component. Their respective roles connect agricultural production and markets, skills and enterprise development, and access to financial services. Provincial agriculture departments, training providers, producer groups, employers and financial institutions are important counterparts.

A shared location matrix tool presents details on which actors deliver what services in which locations. Provincial platforms, regular UN coordination and joint monitoring are intended to sequence mediation, services and livelihoods so they reinforce one another. Australia and New Zealand support the programme through the Papua New Guinea UN Country Fund II, alongside complementary Peacebuilding Fund support.

Bringing registration into communities and services

Kelua II in Western Highlands illustrates the local-integration approach. Whereby Ward planning connects displaced and host-community priorities with governance, services and economic opportunities. In response to a community-identified need for improved access to legal identity services, the Papua New Guinea Civil and Identity Registry (PNG CIR), with support from IOM, conducted mobile civil registration outreach in Kelua II (1-3 June 2026) and Balk 2 (8-10 June 2026), resulting in the registration of 583 individuals, including internally displaced persons and other vulnerable community members, for Birth Certificates and National Identification (NID) documents. Registration applications have since been submitted to PNG CIR and are undergoing review and verification prior to issuance.

Mobile civil registration outreach improved access to legal identity documentation for displacement-affected and vulnerable populations, strengthening their ability to access government services, education, health care, and other social and economic opportunities.

Beyond civil registration, IOM continued to support community-led recovery and durable solutions through Community Peace and Development Planning (CPDP) and Ward Development Planning (WDP) processes. These participatory platforms bring together displaced persons, host communities, women, youth, traditional leaders, churches, and local authorities to identify shared priorities, address conflict and displacement drivers, and develop locally owned solutions that strengthen social cohesion, resilience, and sustainable recovery. By linking community priorities with local government planning processes and future community-driven investments, the initiative supports longer-term recovery, peaceful coexistence, and improved prospects for durable solutions.



By August 2026, programme reporting recorded seven memoranda of understanding involving provincial hospitals to support access to legal identity, alongside two operational birth-registration centres. These are institutional steps towards making registration part of ordinary public services. Within the wider registration effort, the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority provided space and operational support for a hospital registration desk. UNICEF reported on 3 August that Mount Hagen Provincial Hospital had recorded 464 registrations and that 228 newborns had received certificates.

UNFPA provided training to sixty-three provincial health community mobilisers from all four provinces on condom awareness and correct use and community-based distribution, creating a broader community service channel for sexual and reproductive health information and commodities. UNFPA also supported Sports for Peace Training of Trainers for forty-nine coaches from the four provinces integrating peacebuilding, gender equality, SARV prevention, conflict resolution and MHPSS to shift narratives and norms around violent practices in the Highlands using sport as the entry point. Community cascades continue through November.

Furthermore, interim child-friendly space on Bethel Lutheran Church premises was set up, linked to the Mount Hagen Safe Market Corner initiative. Forty facilitators from the Scout Association of Papua New Guinea were trained to support structured play, learning, basic emotional support and safe referrals.

IOM reports highlight that families in Alamba who fled violence in 2012. Community-led dialogue began rebuilding trust in 2023, and some families returned. They came back to lost homes, damaged gardens and fragile livelihoods. Subsequent support brought women, young people, elders and people with disabilities into discussions about peace and development. Their experience shows why return needs to be accompanied by recovery. Reconciliation and initial returns began before HJP2. The programme therefore builds on a recovery process that communities themselves had already begun

Families in Alamba who were displaced by tribal conflict in 2012 began returning to their community following locally led reconciliation efforts that commenced in 2023. Community-driven dialogue and mediation processes played a critical role in rebuilding trust between previously divided groups and creating conditions for the gradual return of some displaced families. However, returnees faced significant challenges, including destroyed homes, damaged food gardens, limited livelihood opportunities, and weakened social cohesion. Their experience highlights that return alone does not constitute a durable solution and must be accompanied by sustained recovery, reintegration, and resilience-building efforts.



The peace process in Alamba was largely initiated and driven by the community itself. Building on these locally led efforts, IOM supported the implementation of the Community Peace and Development Planning (CPDP) process to strengthen community leadership, promote inclusive decision-making, and support the identification of locally owned recovery priorities. Through the process, seven Community Facilitator Team (CFT) members were trained, and an intensive week-long planning programme engaged more than 40 participants representing women, youth, elders, persons with disabilities, community leaders, and other stakeholders.

A central theme of the CPDP process was strengthening community capacity to manage conflict constructively. Discussions emphasized that criminal acts should be treated as individual offences rather than collective clan or tribal disputes, helping to address one of the underlying drivers of recurring conflict in the Highlands context. This approach reinforced community understanding of accountability, the rule of law, and peaceful dispute resolution.

Evidence of this shift emerged following a recent murder incident in the community. Rather than allowing the incident to escalate into broader tribal conflict, community leaders, youth representatives, and members from both former factions responded collectively and treated the matter as an isolated criminal act. Community members worked together to hand over the alleged perpetrators to law enforcement authorities and publicly discouraged retaliatory action. Community leaders also encouraged immediate family members connected to the incident to relocate temporarily to prevent further tensions and reduce the risk of revenge-related violence. This collective response demonstrated increased confidence in peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms and reflected the influence of the CPDP process in strengthening local leadership and community resilience.

Today, Alamba is led by committed community leaders, including youth representatives from previously opposing groups, who regularly convene meetings, facilitate dialogue, address emerging issues, and promote peaceful coexistence. Their collaborative leadership has strengthened social cohesion, rebuilt trust, and contributed to a more stable environment for recovery and development.

The Alamba experience demonstrates how locally led peacebuilding initiatives, reinforced through inclusive community planning processes such as CPDP, can contribute to durable solutions by strengthening social cohesion, supporting the safe and sustainable reintegration of displaced families, rebuilding livelihoods, and enhancing community resilience to future conflict and shocks.



Key results and data

Reporting area	Reported progress and its significance
Public registration	Mobile civil registration outreach conducted in June 2026 supported the registration of 583 residents for birth certificates and National Identification (NID) documents. Registration applications have been submitted to the PNG Civil and Identity Registry (PNG CIR) and are currently undergoing review and verification prior to document issuance; seven memoranda of understanding involving provincial hospitals to support access to legal identity, alongside two operational centres reported by August.
Planning and joint coverage	34 locations in 17 districts mapped; 15 with confirmed multi-agency engagement. Eight community plans and two ward plans were under development, involving 282 participants, including 100 women.
Protection capacity	54 facilitators from 36 communities were trained on the SARV Community Curriculum with 1,923 recorded session attendances by August 2026. 3 Highlands psychologists/counsellors are currently undertaking trauma-focused counselling training to receive national certification. Eighteen churches schools with approximately 6,400 enrolled students registered are implementing the curriculum-anchored in-school SARV package using learning materials endorsed by the National Department of Education. and more than 750 participants in prevention activities were reported by August 2026.
Local justice	A total of 32 Village Court officials (29 men and 3 women) from Kuga, Paiakona and Alkena Village Courts were trained on mediation, dispute resolution, case management, child protection and trauma-informed approaches. In addition, a 12-member Provincial Village Courts Committee (PVCC) was established in Western Highlands Province to strengthen coordination, oversight and referral pathways across community-based justice systems. These interventions contribute to more accessible, inclusive and accountable justice services while promoting peaceful dispute resolution and social cohesion. .



Key results and data | continued

Reporting area	Reported progress and its significance
Local justice	In Southern Highlands Province, the IOM-supported Munihu Multipurpose Community Hall continued to serve as an important community asset, facilitating Village Court hearings, mediation sessions, peace dialogues, community consultations, capacity-building activities and other locally led development initiatives. During a donor monitoring mission on 2 July 2026 , representatives from the New Zealand High Commission, UN agencies and project partners observed a Village Court session and engaged with community justice actors at the facility, demonstrating the practical utilization of community infrastructure to support peaceful dispute resolution, social cohesion, local governance and access to justice services
Provincial Disaster Strategies & SOPs	In partnership with the 2 July 2026 visit also documented court proceedings at Munihu's multipurpose hall with provincial authorities and relevant stakeholders, draft Provincial Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Strategies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Enga and Western Highlands Provinces are under development. Once finalized, these DRM strategies are expected to strengthen institutional preparedness, coordination and response capacities while supporting resilience-building, risk reduction and sustainable recovery efforts in displacement-affected communities.
Economic recovery	Production, skills, finance and market support were being aligned through the livelihood component.

The Highlands Joint Programme demonstrates community stabilization can be advanced through integrated, community-led approaches that combine peacebuilding, local governance, access to justice, civil registration, livelihoods recovery, climate resilience, and community-driven development. By strengthening local institutions, supporting inclusive planning processes, improving access to essential services and legal identity, strengthening community-based justice mechanisms, expanding livelihood opportunities, and promoting climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures, the programme is helping displacement-affected and host communities rebuild their lives, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance resilience to future shocks, climate risks, and conflict.



Photos



Group photo of participants from the Timal, Paliukin, and Sikinwan tribes during IOM's five-day Community Peace for Development Planning (CPDP) Intensive Training in Lenki Village, Enga Province, aimed at strengthening peacebuilding and locally led development.



Participants of the Provincial Village Court Committee (PVCC) Inception Workshop in Western Highlands Province. The newly established committee brings together government, police, civil society, faith-based organizations, women, and the media to strengthen village court systems and improve access to justice for communities.



Group photo of representatives from the New Zealand and Australian High Commissions, UN agencies, and Western Highlands Provincial Administration during a review meeting on Highlands Joint Programme Phase II progress and coordinated development efforts in Western Highlands Province.



Photos | continued



Participants and partners pose for a group photo following a five-day training in Western Highlands that equipped Village Court officials with enhanced skills in legal procedures, mediation, dispute resolution, child protection and trauma-informed approaches.



Participants from government agencies, districts, humanitarian organizations, faith-based groups, and the media during the Enga Provincial Disaster Risk Management Strategy and SOP Consultation Workshop held in Wabag, Enga Province



Deployment of PNG CIR registration team to Kelua 2 community



Photos | continued



CFT training from Sakarip and Balk 2 Wards



Village court hearing at Munihu station, Lai valley, SHP



CPDP intensive planning at Kipos in Enga province