



**Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Papua New Guinea
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Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:

Human Rights in Papua New Guinea

Submitted by:

Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)
(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

and

Marist Brothers – Star of the Sea Province

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Papua New Guinea (PNG), covering developments since the country's third UPR cycle in 2021. It provides a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis of the situation of children's rights, assessed in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and relevant commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. The report highlights key areas of concern related to **children's rights** in Papua New Guinea, particularly **education; quality employment; health care and wellbeing; and child protection and gender-based violence**. It identifies systemic gaps, and provides targeted, evidence-based recommendations to support the Government of Papua New Guinea in strengthening implementation and ensuring the full realization of children's rights in accordance with its international obligations.
3. This joint submission, which adopts a child-rights-based and equity-focused approach, is presented by the Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI) and the Marist Brothers, Star of the Sea Province, organizations with extensive experience in advancing children's rights through education, advocacy, and community engagement.
4. **The Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)** is an international non-governmental organization established and promoted by the Marist Brothers, with a presence in over 80 countries worldwide. With more than 18 years of experience, FMSI is dedicated to the protection and promotion of children's rights, particularly in the areas of access to quality education, child protection, and social inclusion.¹ The organization works closely with local communities, educators, and civil society actors to strengthen child-centred systems and to advocate for inclusive and equitable policies at both national and international levels. FMSI holds Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), enabling it to actively engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.²
5. **The Marist Brothers, Star of the Sea Province** is an administrative unit of the global Marist Institute, encompassing a network of Marist communities and educational institutions across several countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Papua New Guinea.³ The Marist Brothers are a religious congregation within the Catholic Church dedicated to the education and holistic development of children and young people, particularly those in vulnerable and marginalized situations. In Papua New Guinea, the Marist Brothers have a long-standing presence, especially in Port Moresby, where they are actively engaged in educational, pastoral, and social outreach initiatives. Their work focuses on promoting social justice, fostering inclusive education, and supporting young people facing socio-economic challenges, including those involved in informal economic activities such as street vending.⁴ Through direct interaction with youth, families, and local communities, the Marist Brothers bring grounded insight into the everyday realities affecting children's well-being and development.

¹ Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI), *Institutional Profile and Strategic Framework* <https://fmsi.ngo/en/>

² United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), List of NGOs in Consultative Status; FMSI, Engagement with UN Human Rights Mechanisms.

³ Marist Brothers, Star of the Sea Province: Mission and Structure. <https://www.mariststar.org/>

⁴ Field observations and community engagement by Marist Brothers in Port Moresby (2024–2026); FMSI program reports.

6. Together, FMSI and the Marist Brothers, Star of the Sea Province combine international advocacy expertise with local community engagement. This collaboration ensures that the present submission reflects both global human rights standards and the lived experiences of children and families in Papua New Guinea. Drawing on their complementary strengths, the submitting organizations aim to provide a balanced, evidence-based assessment of key challenges and to propose practical, context-sensitive recommendations to support the Government in advancing the rights of children.
7. Papua New Guinea has undertaken important steps to strengthen its legal and policy frameworks for the protection and promotion of children's rights. Notable measures include the enactment of the *Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015*, which establishes the primary child protection system, and the Family Protection Act 2013, addressing domestic and gender-based violence.⁵ In addition, sectoral initiatives such as the Tuition Fee-Free (TFF) Policy and the National Health Plan 2021–2030 reflect the Government's commitment to improving access to essential services.⁶
8. Notwithstanding these efforts, significant challenges remain in translating policy commitments into tangible outcomes for children. A persistent implementation gap continues to affect access to quality education, healthcare, protection services, and economic opportunities, particularly for children in rural areas, informal settlements, and other marginalized communities.⁷ Structural constraints, including poverty, geographic isolation, limited institutional capacity, and socio-cultural practices, further hinder the effective realization of children's rights.⁸

II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)

9. Papua New Guinea was reviewed during the 39 session of the Working Group for its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle in 2021, during which it received a total of 161 recommendations, supporting 101 and noting the remainder.⁹ The State's engagement with the UPR process reflects a continued willingness to participate in international human rights dialogue and to align national frameworks with global standards.
10. The submitting stakeholders welcome Papua New Guinea's commitment to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly by supporting recommendations linked to some of them as SDG 4 - Quality Education (7%), SDG 5 - Gender Equality (20%), SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth (5%), SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities (7%), and SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (42%).¹⁰ The Government has also taken steps to incorporate international human

⁵ Government of Papua New Guinea, *Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015*; Government of Papua New Guinea, *Family Protection Act 2013*

⁶ Government of Papua New Guinea, *Tuition Fee-Free Policy* (Department of Education, (2012); Government of Papua New Guinea, *National Health Plan 2021–2030*

⁷ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Papua New Guinea* (2023); World Bank, *Papua New Guinea Economic Update* (2024).

⁸ UNDP, Human Development Report: *Papua New Guinea*; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *UPR Compilation on Papua New Guinea* (2021).

⁹ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Papua New Guinea* (2021).

¹⁰ Government of Papua New Guinea, national policy frameworks on education, health, and child protection; OHCHR, UPR National Report: Papua New Guinea (2021)

rights obligations into domestic policies and legislation, including reforms in child protection, education, and health sectors.¹¹

11. Notwithstanding these commitments, progress in implementing and domesticating international human rights obligations remains uneven. Several structural and systemic challenges continue to hinder effective implementation, including limited financial and human resources, weak institutional coordination, and capacity constraints at provincial and local levels.¹² Papua New Guinea's geographic complexity, with a large proportion of the population living in remote and hard-to-reach areas, further complicates service delivery and monitoring efforts.¹³
12. Cultural and social norms also present challenges in the full realization of human rights, particularly in areas such as gender equality, child protection, and access to justice. Practices such as the “payback” system and beliefs related to sorcery accusations continue to undermine the enforcement of legal protections, especially for women and children.¹⁴
13. While Papua New Guinea has established mechanisms for reporting to international human rights bodies, including treaty bodies and the UPR, stakeholders note the need to strengthen its National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF). Improved coordination among government agencies, as well as meaningful engagement with civil society organizations and local communities, remains essential to ensure effective monitoring, accountability, and follow-up on accepted recommendations.¹⁵
14. Furthermore, there is limited publicly available data on the implementation status of many UPR recommendations, making it difficult to assess progress comprehensively. Strengthening data collection systems, including disaggregated data on children and vulnerable groups, is critical to evidence-based policymaking and reporting.¹⁶
15. To respond effectively to these challenges, the submitting stakeholders respectfully encourage the Government of Papua New Guinea to enhance its implementation capacity, strengthen institutional coordination, and ensure that accepted UPR recommendations are translated into concrete, measurable outcomes that improve the lived realities of children and their families.

III. METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION

16. This report places strong emphasis on the lived experiences and voices of adolescents and families, recognizing that their perspectives are essential to understanding the realities of children's rights in Papua New Guinea. The methodology combines both primary engagement with communities and analysis of existing data, ensuring that the findings are both grounded and evidence-based.

¹¹ Government of Papua New Guinea, national policy frameworks on education, health, and child protection; OHCHR, UPR National Report: Papua New Guinea (2021).

¹² UNDP, *Papua New Guinea Human Development Report*; World Bank, *Papua New Guinea Economic Update* (2024).

¹³ World Bank, *Rural Population Data: Papua New Guinea*; Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Country Overview*

¹⁴ Amnesty International, *Sorcery Accusation Related Violence in Papua New Guinea*; OHCHR UPR Compilation (2021).

¹⁵ OHCHR, *National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF): Practical Guide*; UPR Info, PNG follow-up assessments.

¹⁶ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Papua New Guinea* (2023).

17. **Primary Data Collection:** Primary data was gathered in March 2026 through direct engagement with communities in Port Moresby. The process involved:
- Conversations and interviews with parents and caregivers.
 - Focus group discussions with adolescents of secondary-school age.
18. A total of 22 participants took part in these consultations. Many of them were families and young people involved in street vending at bus stops and small stalls, reflecting the realities of those navigating economic hardship. Participants were selected intentionally to ensure that the report captures the experiences of those most affected by barriers to education, healthcare, and protection.¹⁷
19. The discussions were guided but open, allowing participants to speak freely about their daily challenges, hopes, and concerns. Their voices are reflected in the report through direct quotations, helping to ensure that the findings remain closely connected to real-life experiences.
20. **Secondary Data Analysis:** To complement these insights, the report draws on a wide range of secondary sources, including:
- United Nations reports and UPR documentation
 - National laws, policies, and development plans
 - Reports from organizations such as UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank
 - Relevant civil society and academic studies
21. Special attention was given to the recommendations from the 2021 UPR cycle, allowing this report to assess progress and identify areas where further efforts are needed.¹⁸
22. **Data Validation and Limitations:** Every effort was made to ensure that the information presented is reliable and balanced, by comparing different sources and checking consistency across findings. At the same time, some limitations should be noted:
- The number of participants was relatively small and focused on Port Moresby, which may not fully reflect rural realities
 - There is limited disaggregated data available on children in vulnerable situations
 - Sensitive issues such as violence or exploitation may be underreported, due to social and cultural factors¹⁹
23. Despite these challenges, the combination of direct community voices and existing data provides a meaningful and credible picture of the situation, highlighting issues that are often not fully captured in official statistics.

¹⁷ Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

¹⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Papua New Guinea* (2021).

¹⁹ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Papua New Guinea* (2023); UNDP, *Human Development Report: Papua New Guinea*.

IV. EDUCATION (SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION)

24. Papua New Guinea has taken important steps to improve access to education, most notably through the introduction of the **Tuition Fee-Free (TFF) Policy in 2012**, aimed at ensuring universal access to basic education.²⁰ This policy has contributed to increased enrolment at the primary level and reflects the Government's commitment to advancing SDG 4 and the right to education.
25. However, while access has improved in principle, significant challenges remain in ensuring equitable participation, retention, and meaningful learning outcomes. National data indicate that a considerable number of children do not complete basic education, with dropout rates rising sharply at transition points between primary and secondary levels.²¹ These challenges are particularly pronounced among children from low-income households and those living in rural or peri-urban communities.
26. In practice, many families experience "free education" as only partial. The hidden costs associated with schooling such as uniforms, transportation, learning materials, and informal "project fees", continue to place a heavy burden on households already facing economic hardship.²² During consultations, parents and young people repeatedly expressed that education, while valued, often feels financially out of reach. As one participant noted, *"School fees may be free, but there are many other costs families cannot afford."*
27. For families struggling to meet daily needs, difficult decisions must be made. In some cases, children are withdrawn from school to support household income through activities such as street vending, particularly in urban areas like Port Moresby. This reality shapes how education is perceived. Rather than being seen as a clear pathway to a better future, it can feel uncertain and disconnected from immediate survival needs. A young participant captured this sentiment: *"Education doesn't feel like a pathway."*
28. Parents further described what they referred to as a "pyramid system," where many children leave school at Grades 8 or 10, with limited opportunities to continue their education or acquire practical skills. This contributes to a growing number of young people entering adulthood without the competencies required for formal employment or sustainable livelihoods.
29. These realities highlight persistent challenges, including hidden costs that undermine the effectiveness of the TFF policy, high dropout rates, limited access to technical and vocational pathways, inequalities between urban and rural areas, and constraints in teacher availability, infrastructure, and learning resources.
30. In its most recent Universal Periodic Review, Papua New Guinea supported several key recommendations aimed at strengthening access to inclusive and quality education for all children. These included intensifying efforts to provide quality education across all age groups (144.110, Iraq); ensuring meaningful access to free, quality primary and secondary education for all children, including those with disabilities (144.111, Canada); increasing investment in educational infrastructure and improving enrolment rates, particularly in remote areas (144.115, China); and finalizing and implementing a national strategy to address out-of-school children, especially in rural and underserved communities (144.117, Spain). These commitments provide a strong foundation for advancing the right to education and, if effectively implemented, would to a large extent address many

²⁰ Government of Papua New Guinea, *Tuition Fee-Free (TFF) Policy* (Department of Education, 2012)

²¹ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Papua New Guinea* (2023); World Bank, *Education Statistics PNG*.

²² World Bank, *Papua New Guinea Economic Update* (2024); UNICEF PNG Reports

of the concerns raised by participants, particularly those relating to limited access, inadequate infrastructure, and exclusion of children in remote and marginalized communities

31. **In response to these challenges, the submitting stakeholders recommend that the Government of Papua New Guinea:**

- a. **Introduce targeted financial support measures** for vulnerable families, including transport subsidies, school feeding programmes, and assistance with uniforms and learning materials, to reduce the indirect costs of education and improve school attendance.²³
- b. **Integrate technical and vocational education and training (TVET)** into the lower secondary curriculum, ensuring that students who exit the formal system early acquire practical and marketable skills.²⁴
- c. **Strengthening policies and programmes aimed at improving student retention and transition**, particularly in Grades 8 and 10, including career guidance and flexible learning pathways.
- d. **Increase investment in teacher training, recruitment, and retention**, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- e. **Improve school infrastructure and access to learning materials**, including digital resources, where feasible.
- f. **Enhance community engagement and awareness**, working with parents, faith-based organizations, and local communities to reinforce the value of education and support children's continued attendance.

V. QUALITY EMPLOYMENT (SDG 8: DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC GROWTH)

- 32. Papua New Guinea has recognized the importance of employment and economic participation as key drivers of development, as reflected in policy frameworks such as the **Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Policy (2016)** and broader national development strategies aimed at promoting inclusive economic growth.²⁵ These efforts align with SDG 8, which emphasizes decent work, productive employment, and economic inclusion, particularly for young people.
- 33. Despite these commitments, many young people continue to face significant barriers in transitioning from education to meaningful employment. A major challenge lies in the growing **mismatch between the skills acquired through formal education and the demands of the labour market**.²⁶ While young people complete basic or secondary education, they often lack practical, technical, and entrepreneurial skills required for available opportunities.

²³ World Food Programme (WFP), *School Feeding Programmes and Education Access*

²⁴ UNESCO, *Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Strategy*; ILO, *Skills for Employment Policy Briefs*.

²⁵ Government of Papua New Guinea, *Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Policy (2016)*; National Development Plans.

²⁶ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Skills Mismatch and Youth Employment Reports*; World Bank, *PNG Labour Market Overview*

34. During consultations, young participants expressed a strong sense of frustration and uncertainty about their future. Many highlighted that employment opportunities are not only scarce but are often perceived as dependent on personal connections rather than merit. As one young person stated, *“Many young people finish school but cannot find jobs.”* This perception undermines confidence in both the education system and the labour market.
35. For those already engaged in informal activities such as street vending, the challenges are even more pronounced. Young vendors described experiencing **stress, stigma, and social exclusion** in public spaces, alongside a lack of structured support to transition into formal employment or training pathways. Without access to guidance, skills development, or financial support, many remain trapped in cycles of informal and precarious work.²⁷
36. These experiences reflect broader structural challenges, including high levels of informal employment, limited job creation in the formal sector, and insufficient investment in youth-focused employment programs. Young women face additional barriers due to gender norms and limited access to economic opportunities.²⁸
37. Drawing from its latest Universal Periodic Review, Papua New Guinea supported recommendations relating to employment primarily within the context of the **rights of persons with disabilities**, including maintaining efforts to promote their access to employment and basic services (**144.157**, Cuba) and implementing concrete measures to overcome barriers to education and the labour market while combating stigmatization (**144.158**, Spain).²⁹ While these commitments are important and align with Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, the broader issue of quality employment was not explicitly highlighted in the review. Current consultations with young people, however, reveal pressing concerns, including the lack of decent and stable job opportunities, perceptions of unfair recruitment practices, and a significant mismatch between skills acquired through formal education and labour market demands
38. **Considering the concerns outlined above, the submitting stakeholders recommend that the Government of Papua New Guinea:**
 - a. **Expand and strengthen school-to-work transition programmes**, including internships, apprenticeships, and micro-enterprise training, to better prepare young people for employment opportunities.³⁰
 - b. **Develop targeted youth employment and entrepreneurship initiatives**, with a focus on practical skills development, access to start-up capital, and mentorship, particularly for vulnerable and out-of-school youth.
 - c. **Establish and fund mobile outreach programmes (“street-to-school” or “street-to-skills” teams)** to reconnect children and young people engaged in informal work with education, training, and social support services.
 - d. **Promote merit-based and transparent recruitment practices**, ensuring equal access to employment opportunities and reducing reliance on informal networks or connections.

²⁷ Field consultations, Port Moresby (March 2026); UNICEF PNG Reports.

²⁸ UN Women, *Gender and Economic Participation in Papua New Guinea*; UNDP, *Human Development Report PNG*.

²⁹ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Papua New Guinea – Addendum*, A/HRC/49/11/Add.1 (2022), recommendations 144.157–144.158.

³⁰ ILO, *School-to-Work Transition Surveys and Policy Guidance*

- e. **Increase investment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET)** aligned with labour market needs, including emerging sectors such as digital services, agriculture, and small-scale enterprise.
- f. **Strengthen partnerships with the private sector** to create pathways for youth employment, including incentives for businesses to engage young workers and support skills development.

VI. HEALTH CARE AND WELLBEING (SDG 3: GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING)

39. Papua New Guinea has demonstrated commitment to improving health outcomes through policies such as the Free Primary Health Care Policy and targeted strategies in maternal and child health under the **National Health Plan 2021–2030**.³¹ These initiatives aim to expand access to essential health services and align with SDG 3, which promotes good health and well-being for all.
40. However, despite these policy commitments, access to quality healthcare remains uneven, particularly for children and families living in rural areas, informal settlements, and other marginalized contexts. Significant gaps persist in service delivery, infrastructure, and the availability of trained health personnel.³² While basic health services are theoretically free, many communities continue to face challenges related to distance, cost of transport, and inconsistent availability of care.
41. During consultations, these systemic gaps were reflected in the experiences shared by young people and families. Concerns about **mental health** emerged strongly, with participants noting that emotional and psychological challenges are common but rarely addressed in a structured way. One participant remarked, *“Mental health issues are common but not properly addressed”*
42. Access to essential medicines was also raised as a recurring issue, with some participants reporting that *“hospitals sometimes lack medicines.”* These shortages, combined with limited diagnostic facilities and overstretched health workers, reduce confidence in the health system and discourage timely care-seeking.
43. Young people engaged in informal activities, such as street vending, described experiencing **high levels of stress and anxiety**, often without access to any form of psychosocial support. The absence of **school-based counsellors or youth-friendly services** further limits opportunities for early intervention and support, particularly for adolescents navigating complex social and economic pressures.³³
44. These challenges are compounded by broader structural issues, including shortages of healthcare workers, weak supply chains for medicines, and disparities between urban and rural service provision. Maternal and child health outcomes, while improving, remain a concern, with maternal mortality rates still high compared to regional averages.³⁴
45. During the last review cycle, Papua New Guinea supported recommendations addressing aspects of the right to health. This included a recommendation to ensure universal access to health (**144.101**, Mauritius, **144.107**, India and **144.108**, Malaysia); to increase health-care funding and facilities, even in rural areas (**144.102**, Vanuatu); and to ensure that hospitals and rural medical services are properly

³¹ Government of Papua New Guinea, *National Health Plan 2021–2030; PNG Health Policy Frameworks*

³² World Health Organization (WHO), *Papua New Guinea Health System Overview*; World Bank, *PNG Health Sector Analysis*

³³ Field consultations, Port Moresby (March 2026); UNICEF PNG Reports.

³⁴ WHO, *Maternal Mortality Estimates: Papua New Guinea*; UNFPA Reports.

funded and accessible (144.103, Canada).³⁵ While these recommendations reflect important dimensions of SDG 3 and SDG 5, broader health system challenges persist. Consultations with young people reveal significant concerns, including limited access to essential medicines, overstretched and under-resourced hospitals, inadequate attention to mental health, and uneven access to healthcare services, particularly in rural and remote communities. These findings highlight critical gaps between existing commitments and the lived realities of many, underscoring the need for **a more comprehensive, inclusive, and well-resourced approach to health care delivery**

46. **To mitigate these challenges, the submitting stakeholders recommend that the Government of Papua New Guinea:**
 - a. **Pilot and scale up school-based wellbeing hubs**, providing accessible mental health and basic health services through part-time nurses, counsellors, and referral systems for children and adolescents.³⁶
 - b. **Strengthen mental health services**, including community-based programmes, training of counsellors, and integration of psychosocial support into primary healthcare and education systems.
 - c. **Improve the availability and distribution of essential medicines**, ensuring consistent supply across both urban and rural health facilities.
 - d. **Increase investment in health infrastructure and workforce development**, particularly in underserved and remote areas, to reduce disparities in access to care.
 - e. **Strengthen coordination between national and provincial health authorities**, with a particular focus on improving maternal and child health outcomes and reducing preventable mortality.
 - f. **Promote youth-friendly and community-based health services**, including outreach programmes that address the needs of vulnerable groups such as children engaged in informal economic activities.

VII. CHILD PROTECTION AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SOCIAL ISSUES): SDG 16: PEACE AND JUSTICE/SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY)

47. Papua New Guinea has taken important legislative steps to strengthen the protection of women and children, including the enactment of the **Family Protection Act 2013** and the repeal of the **Sorcery Act in 2013**, alongside the introduction of the *Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015*, which provides a framework for child protection.³⁷ These measures reflect the Government's commitment to addressing violence, strengthening justice systems, and aligning with SDGs 5 and 16.
48. Despite these legal advancements, violence against women and children remains widespread and deeply embedded in many communities. Studies indicate that a significant proportion of women and children in Papua New Guinea experience some form of **Gender-Based Violence (GBV)** or abuse

³⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Papua New Guinea – Addendum*, A/HRC/49/11/Add.1 (2022), recommendation 144.106.

³⁶ UNICEF & WHO, *School Health and Wellbeing Programmes: Global Guidance*.

³⁷ Government of Papua New Guinea, *Family Protection Act 2013; repeal of the Sorcery Act (2013); Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015*.

during their lifetime.³⁸ Children are particularly vulnerable to physical punishment, neglect, and exploitation, often within the home or immediate community.

49. During consultations, participants spoke openly about these realities. Some children shared that **“some children experience abuse at home,”** while families acknowledged that although awareness of rights has improved, particularly under the *Lukautim Pikinini Act*, the availability of practical support services at the community level remains limited. Many described support systems as “thin,” with few safe spaces, limited access to social workers, and weak follow-up mechanisms.
50. The persistence of **Sorcery Accusation Related Violence (SARV)** continues to pose a serious threat, especially to women and children. Accusations of sorcery often lead to severe violence, including assault, displacement, and, in extreme cases, death.³⁹ Fear of retaliation, social stigma, and limited trust in law enforcement discourage victims and families from seeking justice. In addition, the traditional **“payback” system**, which can involve retaliatory violence between families or communities, further undermines formal justice processes and perpetuates cycles of harm.
51. Concerns were also raised regarding the **reluctance or limited capacity of law enforcement agencies** to intervene effectively in cases of domestic violence, child abuse, or sorcery-related accusations. This contributes to a culture of impunity, where perpetrators are not consistently held accountable.⁴⁰ At the same time, access to justice remains uneven, particularly in rural and remote areas, where formal legal systems are less accessible.
52. These challenges are compounded by limited investment in child protection services, including shortages of trained social workers, insufficient shelters and support services, and weak coordination between institutions responsible for child welfare.
53. In the previous review cycle, Papua New Guinea supported a range of recommendations aimed at strengthening child protection and addressing gender-based violence. These included efforts to combat child abuse and exploitation, including improving birth registration to support the effective implementation of the Child Protection Act (2015) (**144.154**, Japan).⁴¹ In parallel, the Government supported multiple recommendations focused on preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including implementing findings from national inquiries and action plans on sorcery accusation-related violence; enforcing the Family Protection Act to address sexual and physical violence against women and children; and developing comprehensive strategies, policies, and adequately resourced programmes to combat all forms of violence against women and girls.⁴²
54. Additional recommendations emphasized strengthening protection mechanisms, enhancing the capacity of law enforcement and judicial actors, increasing funding for prevention and response services, and addressing harmful practices such as sorcery accusation-related violence.⁴³ These

³⁸ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Papua New Guinea (2023)*; UN Women, *Gender-Based Violence in Papua New Guinea*

³⁹ Amnesty International, *Sorcery Accusation Related Violence in Papua New Guinea*; OHCHR, *UPR Compilation on PNG (2021)*.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, *PNG Reports on Violence and Justice System Challenges*; UNDP, *Rule of Law in Papua New Guinea*.

⁴¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Papua New Guinea – Addendum*, A/HRC/49/11/Add.1 (2022), recommendation 144.154.

⁴² Ibid., recommendations **144.133–144.139**, **144.146**.

⁴³ Ibid., recommendations **144.133**, Australia; **144.138**, Philippines; **144.139**, Canada; **144.141**, Cyprus; **144.143**, Netherlands; and **144.144**, Italy.

commitments align with Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16 and reflect a strong normative framework for protecting women, girls, and children from violence and exploitation.

55. **Building on these commitments, the submitting stakeholders now propose actionable measures to support the Government in effectively implementing and monitoring its national strategies to protect vulnerable populations:**
- a. **Strengthen the legal framework for child protection** by repealing Article 278 of the Criminal Code and explicitly prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment in all settings, including the home.⁴⁴
 - b. **Ensure accountability for Sorcery Accusation Related Violence (SARV)** by prioritizing the investigation and prosecution of such cases and ensuring they are addressed promptly and effectively through the National Court.⁴⁵
 - c. **Enhance the capacity and responsiveness of law enforcement agencies**, including specialized training on gender-based violence, child protection, and community engagement, to ensure timely and sensitive handling of cases.
 - d. **Expand community-based child protection systems**, including the deployment of trained social workers, establishment of safe spaces, and strengthening referral mechanisms at the local level.
 - e. **Implement sustained national awareness and behaviour-change campaigns**, engaging community leaders, faith-based organizations, and local “champions” to promote positive parenting, challenge harmful practices, and increase understanding of rights under the *Lukautim Pikinini Act*.
 - f. **Strengthen access to justice and support services**, particularly in rural and underserved areas, including legal aid, shelters, and psychosocial support for victims of violence.

VIII. CONCLUSION

56. The voices of Papua New Guinea’s families, children, and young people reveal a resilient population striving to thrive despite poverty, **systemic barriers, and geographic isolation**. Across the country, children face significant challenges in accessing quality education, healthcare, protection, and opportunities for meaningful employment. Their experiences highlight the gaps between policy commitments and the realities of daily life.
57. While the Government has enacted commendable laws and policies including the *Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015*, the *Family Protection Act 2013*, and the Tuition Fee-Free policy, implementation remains uneven. Hidden costs, limited infrastructure, insufficient support services, and social and cultural barriers continue to prevent many children from fully enjoying their rights. In urban centers and rural communities alike, children are often forced to leave school, engage in informal work, or navigate unsafe environments, demonstrating that legal frameworks alone are not enough to guarantee protection and opportunity.

⁴⁴ Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, *Country Report: Papua New Guinea*.

⁴⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, *UPR Recommendations on PNG (2021)*.

58. The submitting stakeholders urge the Government of Papua New Guinea to **move beyond high-level strategies** and prioritize practical, community-level interventions. These include, but are not limited to, school feeding programs, targeted financial support for families, accessible health and wellbeing services, outreach to children in informal work, and the deployment of village-based social workers and child protection officers. Strengthening these measures will ensure that laws and policies translate into **tangible improvements in children's lives**, empowering the next generation to reach their full potential.
59. Finally, the experiences shared in this report underscore the importance of **inclusive and participatory approaches**. Engaging children, families, communities, and civil society in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of programs is essential to ensure accountability, equity, and lasting change. Papua New Guinea can fulfill its obligations to protect human rights and develop the Sustainable Development Goals by bridging the gap between policy and practice, leaving no one behind.