

PNG Positioned to Meet International Obligations

Papua New Guinea (PNG) Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority (ICSA) expands its refugee assessment capacity through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

3 July 2023



Asylum seeker in PNG
Photo credit: PNG ICSA

PNG has a long and proud history of embracing those seeking asylum within its territory and in dealing with them in a fair and humane way. As more and more people throughout the world become displaced by conflict, violence, and persecution, some find their way to PNG. To date, PNG has assessed approximately 1,200 claims for refugee status¹. There are currently over a thousand asylum seekers waiting to be processed and ICSA is at the forefront of this caseload. They recruited and trained 12 new refugee status determination (RSD) officers in early 2023 to deal with the increased need, positioning PNG well to meet its international obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol.

With support from PNG Institutional Partnerships Program (PIPP) advisors, two UNHCR trainers from Australia were secured to deliver a week-long workshop in Port Moresby that strengthened understanding of RSD processes and procedural standards. New and existing staff from the ICSA Refugee Branch, Compliance and Enforcement Branch, and Legal Branch participated in the training event. Building on their multilateral ties in the Pacific region and further facilitated by PIPP advisors, ICSA also extended an invitation to three participants from the Solomon Islands Immigration Division (SIID) who are in the process of legislative reform to capture refugee processing provisions. While Fiji, Nauru, and Vanuatu have also enacted refugee-specific national legislation and accompanying regulations, PNG takes the lead on these matters in the Pacific.

Over the span of five days, participants developed a common understanding of international and national legislation on the right to seek asylum. Other topics covered included credibility assessment, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, country of origin information, interactive interviewing techniques following the PEACE model², international principles guiding refugees' rights, and durable settlement solutions.

The practical outcome of the workshop was the immediate upskilling of new and existing staff within ICSA (and SIID) who are able to support the outstanding caseload and help asylum seekers avoid a protracted years-long wait time. The fair and timely assessment process promotes a more stable Pacific region and enables PNG to serve as a good neighbour. Many of these asylum

¹ Source: PNG ICSA

² PEACE stands for Preparation and Planning, Engage and Explain, Account, Closure, and Evaluate. Under the PEACE method, investigators allow a person to tell his or her story without interruption, before presenting any inconsistencies or contradictions between the story and other evidence. Source: College of Policing (UK)

seekers either go on to settle in third countries or remain in PNG contributing their unique skills, culture, and training to their host communities.

PIPP advisors through the Australian Department of Home Affairs and PNG ICOSA partnership continue to support PNG ICOSA to lead the way in refugee policy and processing.



PNG ICOSA and SIID Refugee Status Determination training participants. UNHCR trainers, second row 4th and 5th from left, Ms. Kavithaa Chettier and Ms. Sarah Mansour. PIPP Advisor Mr. Sinisha Belinic back row 3rd from left. Photo credit: PNG ICOSA

PIPP supports a strong and durable economic and strategic partnership between PNG and Australia and will deliver benefits to both nations through stronger institutional relationships. The whole-of-government engagement is funded by the Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Abt Associates supports nine Australian Government agencies in implementing PIPP.