



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Papua New Guinea

June 2026

Context

Period covered by the report: January-June 2026

Since the beginning of the year, Papua New Guinea (PNG) has faced a period of significant socio-economic and security challenges that have placed a strain on fundamental freedoms. The year started off with PNG being placed under increased financial scrutiny with the [Grey-listing announcement](#) in February 2026. With this announcement, there is now an increased pressure on the government to implement the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations to get PNG off the Grey-list. In addition to this, Government priorities have been largely focused on early preparations for the [2027 National General Elections](#). While the [Government](#) has committed resources toward substantial administrative reforms, including updating the flawed [Common Roll](#), the electoral commission remains under-resourced, fuelling public scepticism and tension regarding the state's capacity to deliver credible elections.

The country has also been impacted by a chain of crises, such as the system [failure](#) of the electricity payment system in April 2026, leaving households and businesses without power for several days. Fuel shortages driven by foreign exchange issues were followed by unrest within the PNG Defence Force in April 2026, which saw soldiers staging unauthorised roadblocks and protests, forcing Prime Minister Marape to issue a [late-night directive](#) to restore military discipline and public order. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been impacted by these challenges due to added security measures for workers in critical zones and panic buying without reliable services for daily operations.

At the same time, the rapidly evolving pace of government's online control mechanisms, including the implementation of large state-scale [internet content filtering](#) and the mandatory [Digital ID verification](#), poses a threat to digital freedom and risks censoring legitimate educational resources from CSOs. There is concern over forced displacement of settlers during urban evictions and the passage of the [Vagrancy Act 2026](#). Amidst these challenges, civil society actors continue to face intimidation and legal threats under the [Cybercrime Act](#), indicating a narrowing of civic space despite the government's formal participation in regional initiatives to improve inclusivity and social protections in the country.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Freedom of conscience, the press, information, expression, and assembly and association are guaranteed under the [Papua New Guinea \(PNG\) Constitution](#) (see Sections 46, 47, and 51 of the PNG Constitution). However, developments between January and June 2026 continue to demonstrate increasing pressure on the practical enjoyment of these fundamental freedoms.

Freedom of expression continues to face significant restrictions, particularly through the continued application of the [Cybercrime Act 2016](#) which has increasingly been used to initiate SLAPP (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation) lawsuits and criminal complaints against activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens. In January 2026, CIVICUS [raised concerns](#) regarding the use of the Cybercrime Act to criminalise online expression, the proposed implementation of the [National Social Media Policy](#) and the broader efforts to regulate

mainstream and online media, which civil society actors fear may undermine media freedom and freedom of expression.

Concerns over journalist safety and media freedom intensified during this period, following the [recent attack](#) and intimidation of a female journalist while reporting on matters involving a public body in March 2026. The incident drew [widespread condemnation](#) from the Media Council of PNG and civil society organisations, who warned that harassment and intimidation of journalists continue to undermine independent reporting and public accountability. Similar concerns pertaining to the use of the Cybercrime Act to silence critics, activists and journalists are [captured](#) in the recent Joint [Universal Periodic Review](#) Submission published by CIVICUS, PIANGO and Transparency International PNG in April 2026.

The [National Counter-Terrorism Act 2024](#) continues to face criticism from civil society and the wider legal fraternity for its overly broad definition of “terrorist” within the law. This strong opposition was voiced during the recent [Rule of Law March](#) organised by the PNG Law Society in March 2026. The Law Society [publicly warned](#) that fundamental rights and democratic freedoms were increasingly under threat due to the rise in overreaching laws and executive actions. The Law Society specifically raised concerns regarding the National Counter-Terrorism Act, the newly enacted [Vagrancy Act 2025](#), and proposed social media restrictions, cautioning that such measures without appropriate safeguards will continue to risk undermining constitutional freedoms, civic participation, and the rule of law.

Freedom of assembly remains relatively protected under the Constitution of PNG, however authorities increasingly cite public order and security concerns to limit assemblies and demonstrations. The January 2024 unrest, triggered by a police strike and resulting in [widespread looting and riots](#), made peaceful protests more difficult to organise and contributed to a more securitised civic environment. These concerns were further heightened by [military unrest](#) and security tensions in April 2026, which saw [authorities acting swiftly](#) to contain the situation.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

Civil society actors have generally been free to identify and advocate issues of concern at the national, sub-national and community levels. In PNG, most non-profit and civil society organisations retain the legal ability to register and operate through the [Investment Promotion Authority](#) (IPA) under the new [Associations Incorporation Act 2023](#) which seeks to amend the previous [Associations Incorporation Act 1966](#). Scheduled to come into effect on 1st July 2026, the new act introduces stringent governance requirements for CSOs in alignment with international anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CFT) standards. Starting on 30th June 2026, IPA will commence a mandatory one-year transition period to allow for [mandatory re-registration](#) of all existing incorporated associations. Failure to comply with new registration rules will result in de-registration or incurred penalties.

These changes come at a time when Papua New Guinea was placed on the [Financial Action Task Force \(FATF\) grey list](#) in February 2026 due to weaknesses in its anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing framework. The government has made a high-level political commitment to address [seven action items](#), including improving risk understanding, increasing investigations and prosecutions, and strengthening supervision. In the short term, the listing is likely to tighten compliance settings for financial institutions and donors. Practical

implications for CSOs include more rigorous know-your-customer checks, longer settlement times for cross-border transfers, and a higher bar for onboarding and due-diligence reviews, especially where organisations receive foreign funds or operate in provinces with weaker documentation systems. These operational frictions add to the paperwork already created by recent AML/CTF requirements for associations. Over 2026, the practical impact will depend on visible progress against FATF's action plan and whether banks perceive lower risk as reforms take hold.

In addition to this and with the passage of the [Community Development Law](#) in June 2025, international development partners are now required to register and submit their plans and activities to the Department of Community Development and Religion (DfCDR). It is still unclear as what practicalities these new legal parameters will entail in terms of oversight, operational independence and flexibility of NGOs and development partners working in the community development sector.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Funding for civil society actors in PNG is relatively accessible, with support from international donors, private foundations, and local contributions, including government support in some cases. Many organisations successfully secure resources to implement impactful programmes, and there are no major government interruptions to funding sources. While administrative requirements exist, they are generally manageable, allowing organisations to focus on their core functions.

The current PNG tax regime also allows for non-profit organisations to receive refunds for Goods and Services Tax on expenditure. This amounts to 10% of the cost of any goods or services procured by non-profit organisations in the course of their operations. Moreover, the current tax regime provides for corporate and other donors who fund CSO operations under their corporate social responsibility programmes to earn rebates. This applies to charitable donations in cases where the recipient meets the Internal Revenue Commission's legal requirements and has a proper deed of trust.

While these legal provisions significantly improve access to funding for legitimate CSOs, gaps in the legal framework (i.e., [Criminal Code Act](#) and [Organic Law on the Independent Commission Against Corruption](#)) also leave room for these provisions to be exploited by corrupt actors; notably, the absence of criminal, civil, or administrative liability of "legal persons" (as opposed to that of "natural persons"), as required by [Article 26](#) of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, to which PNG is a party. Although no precedents of such a nature have been prosecuted in PNG, this is more of a pre-emptive consideration, given that serious and sophisticated crimes are frequently committed under the cover of legal entities, such as companies, corporations, or charitable organisations, in comparable legal jurisdictions.

During this period, [fuel supply disruptions and rising fuel prices](#) experienced throughout April and May 2026 also increased operational costs for organisations conducting outreach and service delivery activities, especially within rural and remote communities where transport and infrastructure challenges are already significant. Analysis from the [PNG National Research Institute](#) highlights that sustained shortages increase the cost of doing business and recommends steps to ease FX constraints and improve domestic supply security issues that directly shape CSO operating conditions.

Although these developments have not resulted in direct restrictions on CSO funding or operations, they demonstrate the extent to which broader economic and regulatory developments can indirectly affect the accessibility and sustainability of resources available to civil society actors in PNG.

4. Open and responsive state

Access to Information is a fundamental right formally enshrined in Section 51 of the PNG Constitution. However, Papua New Guinea still lacks a standalone Right to Information (RTI) framework to effectively facilitate public access to information. Despite this gap, the Government of Papua New Guinea has generally maintained a cordial working relationship with civil society. Collaboration on high-level initiatives such as the [PNG Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#) and the [PNG Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative \(EITI\)](#) are key examples that demonstrate the ongoing engagement between government, civil society and citizens.

Progress is currently under way to [finalise](#) Papua New Guinea's Third Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan (2025–2029), which once again includes commitments relating to the development of a Right to Information framework. While there have been [delays](#) in the implementation of long-standing reform priorities, the Government has demonstrated renewed commitment by advancing key initiatives such as the proposed [Right to Information Bill](#) and the establishment of a [National Human Rights Commission](#).

In February 2026, the Special Parliamentary Committee [held a hearing](#) on preparations for the 2027 National General Elections, taking evidence from key agencies and highlighting funding and readiness gaps in security planning, logistics, and voter services. This followed the government's January 2026 [announcement](#) of early national preparations and the establishment of a high-level security and governance task force for the polls. For state openness and responsiveness, the hearing placed needs and timelines on the public record; the key test now is transparent follow-up with clear milestones and timely funding to close the gaps identified, or the shortcomings seen in 2022 risk being carried into 2027.

In April 2026, PNG [underwent](#) its third cycle of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) Validation process, which included consultations with government, industry, and civil society representatives through the PNGEITI Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG). Civil society organisations participated in stakeholder consultations and contributed to discussions on transparency, accountability, and extractive sector governance reforms. While the EITI mechanism has fostered a more inclusive and participatory approach to extractive sector governance, capacity and resource constraints within government agencies continue to [hinder timely reporting](#) and availability of reliable data.

Likewise, access to reliable government data remains a key challenge faced by the media and civil society. In April 2026, civil society organisation ACT NOW! [commenced legal proceedings](#) against the PNG Forest Authority seeking the release of forestry-related information concerning large-scale logging operations. ACT NOW! argued that despite constitutional guarantees on access to information and provisions under the Forestry Act, the PNG Forest Authority had repeatedly failed to disclose information requested by civil society.

Public advocacy and collective action organised through civil society bodies, professional associations and unions continue to retain some capacity to influence government responses and create broader public pressure.

For instance, in January 2026, [widespread public concern](#) emerged over payroll and salary deductions affecting teachers and public servants through the government's payroll system. Teachers' associations publicly raised concerns over salary suspensions and payroll irregularities, which prompted intervention by the Teaching Service Commission (TSC). In April 2026, the TSC reportedly [ordered](#) the immediate restoration of salaries for approximately 8,000 suspended teachers following sustained advocacy and public pressure.

Similarly, In March 2026 the Papua New Guinea Nurses Association (PNGNA) [publicly opposed](#) the termination of nurses and threatened nationwide industrial action over pay-related grievances, staffing concerns, and working conditions during March and April 2026. Government agencies subsequently [entered](#) discussions with the PNGNA amid growing public scrutiny and strike threats.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

There are not many known records of PNG government officials using language that discourages civil society actors from conducting their activities. A prominent incident occurred in February 2026, when the Prime Minister ordered an investigation into the [alleged assault](#) of a female journalist who was reporting on the misconduct of PNG Correctional Services (PNGCS) Officers and the ill-treatment of inmates.

Legal frameworks that strengthen protections for journalists and support access to credible information, such as a [Right to Information Law](#), remain important in safeguarding press freedom and civic participation. Despite Prime Minister James Marape being vocal with his support of [independent journalism](#), media continue to face intimidation and pressure when demanding accountability.

CSOs have continued to voice stern and frequent opposition to specific developments and actions by the executive government, while the relationship between CSOs and the government remains a cordial one. There has been increased collaboration, with CSOs working alongside constitutional and government agencies in advocating for stronger financial, legal, and policy support. Recent examples of this include CSO support for the implementation of the [Organic Law on the Independent Commission Against Corruption](#) and the [PNG Electoral Commission](#).

Significant developments in this period showed growing tensions surrounding the passage of the [Vagrancy Act 2026](#) and ongoing urban evictions. The Act, passed in March 2026, grants authorities broad powers to remove individuals deemed "vagrants" from urban centres, and has faced [political opposition](#) for disproportionately targeting poor and vulnerable communities and undermining constitutional freedoms. Its passage coincided with a [series of eviction exercises](#) across the nation's capital, raising concerns about forced displacement, inadequate consultation, and protections for affected communities. While the Government later [called](#) for a slowdown in evictions and promoted long-term urban housing solutions, concerns remain regarding the increasing securitisation of urban poverty and displacement.

On the other hand, the launch of Papua New Guinea's first [Internally Displaced Persons \(IDP\) Policy](#) in February 2026 was widely welcomed as a positive step towards strengthening protection for vulnerable populations, although it also highlighted ongoing tensions between displacement protection measures and restrictive urban enforcement policies. Further

demonstrating its commitment to social protection, in May 2026 the Department for Community Development and Religion (DFCDR) hosted the [Community of Practice \(SP-CoP\) Conference on Social Protection](#), bringing together regional stakeholders to exchange experiences and lessons learned. The conference provided valuable opportunities for cross-learning from other Pacific Island countries and helped inform more inclusive approaches to addressing social protection challenges affecting vulnerable and marginalised groups.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

There has been a steady increase in the accessibility and use of digital technologies in PNG. However, online penetration still stands at only 24.1 per cent, and mobile cellular usage now sits at about [47.2 per cent](#). Internet coverage is especially bad in rural areas where the lack of trunk infrastructure (road links, electricity, etc.) continues to present a barrier to progress. The poor digital infrastructure in rural PNG limits CSOs' ability to communicate with communities, deliver services efficiently, coordinate with partners, and access vital information, significantly reducing their operational reach and effectiveness in the areas that most need support.

Starlink terminals have served thousands of people across entire remote villages, where telecommunication services are unreliable and non-existent. In early 2024, the Ombudsman Commission issued a directive which blocked National Information and Communications Technology Authority's (NICTA) licensing powers for Starlink, with implications to ban its services within PNG. In April 2026, a [National Court ruling](#) annulled the Ombudsman Commission's directive and confirmed that NICTA could proceed with licensing. Public officials like [Allan Bird](#), Governor of East Sepik Province, advocated for the return of the service, due to the communication obstacles faced by CSO's and other essential service providers in remote areas. This development will hopefully improve internet access for CSOs in PNG, to help them enhance the impact of their outreach and advocacy.

Beyond these technical limitations, GoPNG's recent push to utilise digital technologies for enforcement represents a growing threat to digital freedom and civic space. In May, 2026, [NICTA](#), acting under the directive of Acting ICT Minister Hon. Peter Tsiamalili Jnr, issued a formal mandate to implement large-scale internet content filtering in compliance with [National Executive Council \(NEC\) Decision No. 265/2023](#). The filtering targets five categories of "unsuitable" content: pornography, violent content, hate speech, substance abuse, and illegal activities. While framed as a measure to remove harmful material, the imprecision of filtering poses a risk, where legitimate educational information is also censored. Though the government has taken steps to ensure that harmful content is being removed from online platforms, educational resources and awareness materials from CSO's, whose work is predominantly based on reproductive health, family and sexual violence, and gender-based violence (GBV), will also be censored and this will be a barrier to essential information for citizens.

To provide an enabling infrastructure for freedom of information and to support accessible and accurate data storage by public institutions, the [Government Cloud Policy of 2023](#) and the recent [Draft National Sovereign Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy \(2026\)](#) seek to bring all government data into a single platform. This model will support a healthy government footprint for organised filing and ease of access to timely, accurate information for CSOs and journalists to monitor the GoPNG and keep them accountable.

There has been a push by the government towards digitalisation; however, coupled with [poor procurement](#), weak [cybersecurity](#), and [siloing of data](#), there is a clear risk that citizen rights will be impacted if digitalisation is not done holistically and based on citizens' needs.

Challenges and Opportunities

In the coming months, civil society in Papua New Guinea is likely to face increasing legal, regulatory, and operational challenges.

As the country continues to navigate the recent Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey-listing, CSOs may continue to experience tightened compliance requirements. The ongoing application of laws such as the Cybercrime Act and the National Counter-Terrorism Act, coupled with emerging digital control measures, continues to attract criticism due to their potential impact on freedom of expression, access to information, and public participation. With the 2027 National General Elections now less than a year away, Papua New Guinea is entering a critical period of public debate and political scrutiny, making the protection of media freedom and public access to credible information more important than ever to ensure informed public participation and democratic accountability.

Key opportunities in the coming months include the Government's commitment towards the finalisation of a Right to Information (RTI) Policy and commencement of drafting of the RTI Legislation. This presents a significant opportunity to improve public access to government information. Multistakeholder platforms such as the Open Government Partnership & Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative continue to play a vital role in coordinating CSO views in policy and legislative reform. Papua New Guinea's participation in the 53rd Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2026 is an important avenue for ensuring sustained international pressure on states to implement international human rights obligations.

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