



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

**Eighth periodic report submitted by Panama under
article 18 of the Convention, due in 2020***

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Introduction

1. The Government of Panama, in accordance with article 18 of the Convention, submits its eighth periodic report to the Committee for the period 2010–2020.
2. Although the entire population has been affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it has differing impacts on women in Panama. Women act as first responders in their roles as paid domestic workers, unpaid homemakers, health professionals, civil society volunteers, community volunteers or paid or unpaid caregivers. The effects of the crisis on women are compounded by the fact that they are seen to be responsible for preventing contagion within the family, maintaining the health of the household, providing emotional support and managing the family's resources. They also work on the front line in roles that are essential for fulfilling basic requirements in the health sector (hospital staff, laboratory workers, pharmacists, cleaners, administrators etc.) and the retail sector, where they account for 52 per cent of workers (National Statistics and Census Institute, 2019).
3. This report sets out the legal, legislative, administrative and other measures taken by Panama to mitigate the risks of gender-based violence and discrimination of all kinds faced by women and girls. It also describes the measures taken recently in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which include allocating funding to virus genome sequencing activities in order to diagnose possible cases and strengthen the health system.
4. Panama is a regional and global hub for investment, trade and services. It is highly exposed to the outside world owing to the tourists and business travellers who have been coming to the country for years.
5. The Government has acted swiftly to tackle the economic paralysis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group consider Panama to be one of the countries least affected by the pandemic, which is believed to have caused the gross domestic product for 2020 to fall by nearly 3 per cent.
6. The package of economic measures implemented by the Government includes payments to affected persons and small business owners made through the Panama Solidarity Plan, the provision of basic food packages to persons in need, subsidized electricity, and the suspension of payments for public services (electricity, landlines, mobile phones and Internet service provision) from March to June.
7. In May 2020, the Government launched the plan "A Better Panama" to reactivate the economy and protect jobs through public-private partnerships. The plan sets out laws aimed at protecting and generating jobs that could attract over 500 million balboas (B) of investment.
8. As Panama is the logistics hub of the Americas and the world, the economic paralysis caused by the pandemic has resulted in a reduction in air and maritime transport, including through the Panama Canal and ports (export of services and import of goods) and the Colón Free Zone. It has also brought about a decrease in foreign direct investment and tourism and has had an adverse collateral impact on industry, health, agriculture, wholesale and retail trade, education, the availability of services, internal demand, consumption, productivity (unemployment), income levels, local investment and taxation (revenue vs. expenditure) and has caused fluctuations in the prices of goods and services.
9. The economy is to be gradually reopened in six blocks corresponding to different types of economic activity. Block one was reopened on 13 May, while block two was reopened on 1 June. The Government will announce the next reopening dates

in due course, subject to safety regulations (such as the mandatory use of masks). The guidelines include key points with which public institutions and private companies must comply in order to ensure the safety of members of staff.

10. For the reasons mentioned above, the National Human Rights Commission set up a subcommission to prepare the report. The work of the subcommission was coordinated by the National Institute for Women, under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which chairs the Commission. Technical support was provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

11. In order to ensure that the report accurately reflects the situation in the country, civil society organizations received the draft in advance and provided feedback on it at a meeting held on 6 July 2020.

12. Fourteen documents were compiled with a view to identifying common themes, which include the need to update methods for gathering quantitative data in all areas covered by the Convention and the need to establish equal conditions in the labour market and consultation mechanisms for the advancement of women.

II. General

13. Panama is a multi-ethnic society whose largest ethnic groups include Panamanians of African descent, indigenous peoples and people of Asian, European and Jewish origin. Each ethnic group has cultural characteristics of its own.

14. Throughout history, women in Panama have overcome obstacles in order to be fully included in development policies. To consolidate the progress made in this regard, the gender perspective must be incorporated in all processes for formulating, implementing and evaluating public policy, including institutional and sectoral action plans.

15. The results of the eleventh population census and the seventh housing census, conducted in 2010, indicate that indigenous people account for 12 per cent of the total population of Panama. Of this total, 49 per cent (205,108) are women. Persons of African descent account for 9.2 per cent of the total population. The household survey showed that 14.9 per cent of the population identified as being of African descent in 2015, while 17.2 per cent of the population identified as such in 2016.¹

16. According to statistical data, the population of Panama was estimated to be 4,037,043 in 2016. In 2017, it had risen by 1.51 per cent (61,092). The ratio of women to men tends to be evenly balanced, with 50.2 per cent of the population being male and 49.8 per cent female, a ratio that remained unchanged during this period.

17. Training and awareness-raising programmes continue to be carried out in the public and private sectors. However, the lack of modern, complementary mechanisms for obtaining descriptive data limits the effectiveness of such programmes and actions.

18. In this connection, steps are being taken to modernize the national system of gender-based indicators, which will entail reactivating the Network of Public and Civil Entities (currently made up of 44 participating bodies) and making the corresponding amendments to Executive Decree No. 89 of 2002.²

¹ Source: National Statistics and Census Institute of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance.

² Establishing the network of public and civil entities that produce and use statistical information for the incorporation of the gender perspective in national statistics.

19. The national system of gender-based indicators provides for the use of a form to collect data. The system defines the indicator code, the name of the indicator, and the classification determining whether it belongs to the first, second or third disaggregated category, depending on the indicator, in order to provide information on the situation of Panamanian women and men in different areas of life, identifying those areas where they are equal and those where there are differences.

III. Visibility of the Convention

20. The National Institute for Women, which is a State agency, has taken steps to raise awareness of women's rights, prioritizing the Convention as the most important international legal instrument in the fight against all forms of discrimination against women.

21. The National Institute for Women and the National Women's Council, which advises the Ministry of Social Development on the advancement of women in the country's political, social and economic life, cooperate in disseminating information on the different areas covered by the Convention.

Awareness-raising and training sessions on women's rights and international standards, including the Convention, 2015–2019

| <i>Training course</i> | <i>Number of participants</i> | <i>Academic training</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Forum on preventing violence against women | 250 | Students of public and private universities |
| Supporting women victims of domestic violence | 140 | Police officers |
| Women's rights and violence against women | 515 | Representatives of the National Assembly Officials of the Ministry of Public Security |
| Awareness-raising on human rights, international standards and violence against women | 724 | Middle school and high school students of the Panamanian education system |
| Workshop on international standards on women's rights; communication and gender | 58 | Communications workers (journalists, public relations officers, publicists, communicators) |
| National and international standards, gender and the prevention of violence against women | 40 | Members of the network of governmental mechanisms |
| Women's rights | 23 | Young women with a visual impairment |
| Webinar entitled "Violence and Women with Disabilities in the Americas: Towards Gender-sensitive Access to Justice" | 38 | Members of the National Commission on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| Gender and the media | 15 | Public relations officers of security service agencies |

| <i>Training course</i> | <i>Number of participants</i> | <i>Academic training</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Guiding principles, standards and operating parameters set out in the national protocol for the comprehensive care of women victims of intimate partner violence | 30 | Justices of the peace, due process judges, victim advocates and other justice officials |
| National and international standards, the construction of gender, and violence against women | 25 | Non-operational police and administrative staff serving as gender liaison officers |
| Introductory session on a holistic approach to violence against women | 25 | Officials of the multidisciplinary team of the judiciary's Prevention and Family Guidance Centre |
| Awareness-raising session on trafficking in persons and the forms that it takes | 22 | Officials of the National Institute for Women, interdisciplinary team members and administrative staff |
| Expressions of violence against women, national and international standards and support for victims | 38 | Liaison officers of the Special Police Service for Combating Domestic and Gender-based Violence, including uniformed and civilian staff |
| Actions taken by justices of the peace to support victims of gender-based violence, focusing on human rights, national and international regulations, gender, and violence against women | 260 | Justices of the peace of Chiriquí, Coclé, Herrera and Los Santos |

Source: National Institute for Women.

22. In order to ensure that the legal training received by public officials includes content on gender equality and the Convention, the judiciary holds specialized academic workshops for legal officials and other actors involved in the justice system that are facilitated by the Higher Institute of the Judiciary of Panama and the Clara González de Behringer School, thereby strengthening public defence and the defence of victims. The workshops are coordinated by the Gender and Access to Justice Unit and provide an opportunity to discuss and raise awareness of the Convention.

23. The Higher Institute of the Judiciary offers an advanced judicial training course that covers the subject of inclusive justice, including gender and access to justice. The training is geared towards strengthening competence in the human rights protected by the Convention.

24. In coordination with the Higher Institute of the Judiciary, a significant number of training sessions have been held on topics such as human rights; access to justice; the rights of women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, persons of African descent, children, adolescents and migrants; the Brasilia Regulations regarding Access to Justice for Vulnerable People; the Charter of Rights of Individuals in the Justice System; the Institutional Policy on Gender and Access to Justice; trafficking in persons; violence against women; and national and international laws on the rights of vulnerable groups. Women's rights are covered in the advanced judicial training course taken by judges.

25. On 8 March and 25 November every year, a statement on women's rights by the Office of the President of the Supreme Court is published. The subject is also addressed in social media campaigns and television and radio programmes.

IV. Constitutional, legislative and institutional framework

26. In accordance with the Constitution, which was adopted in 1972 and amended by the Reform Acts of 1978, the Constitutional Act of 1983 and the Legislative Acts of 1994, Panama is organized as a sovereign and independent State. The national Government is unitary, republican, democratic and representative.

27. The State's authority emanates entirely from the people and, in accordance with the Constitution, is exercised through the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, which act separately within their respective domains but in cooperation with one another. It is a constitutional democracy operating under a presidential regime, in which the President of the Republic heads the executive branch and is Head of State and Head of Government.

28. The legislative branch, which consists of a single chamber known as the National Assembly, is responsible for enacting the laws necessary for the achievement of the objectives and the performance of the functions of the State set out in the Constitution. Its members are called deputies and are elected by party nomination and direct popular vote.

29. The executive branch is made up of the President of the Republic and the ministers of State, who are appointed and removed at the discretion of the President and whose portfolios are established by law. The executive branch coordinates the work of the Government and State agencies, ensures the preservation of law and order, sanctions and promulgates laws, obeys these laws and ensures that they are fully upheld, enters into administrative contracts for the provision of services and the execution of public works, directs the country's foreign affairs, hands down pardons for political offences, reduces sentences, grants parole to persons convicted of ordinary offences and establishes regulations on laws to improve compliance with them, while always respecting the letter and spirit of the law.

30. The administration of justice is free, expeditious and uninterrupted and is primarily the responsibility of the judiciary, which consists of the Supreme Court of Justice and the courts established by law. The judiciary works closely with the Public Prosecution Service, which includes the Attorney General, the Government Prosecutor, and the prosecutors and other officials whose posts are established by law.

31. The responsibilities of the Public Prosecution Service include defending the interests of the State or municipality; ensuring compliance with and the enforcement of laws, court decisions and administrative orders; monitoring the official conduct of public officials and ascertaining that they properly discharge their duties; prosecuting offences and violations of the Constitution and the law; and acting as a legal adviser to administrative officials.

V. Access to justice

32. Since the entry into force of article 33 (3) of Act No. 82 of 2013, the judiciary's Department of Legal Aid for Crime Victims has offered free legal assistance to women victims of violence, irrespective of their socioeconomic status. As of 2018, the number of defence lawyers in the country had risen to 72, covering all provinces. Free legal assistance is provided not only during the initial stages of proceedings but also up to the sentence enforcement stage.

33. In 2017 and 2018, technical assistance understand why women victims of violence withdraw from judicial processes was provided in conjunction with the Regional Programme for Social Cohesion in Latin America.

34. Women victims of domestic violence often have to go to the family courts to deal with matters involving their children, divorce and other related issues. Steps have been taken to purchase audio and video equipment so that oral proceedings can be conducted in family courts, enabling persons involved in proceedings to receive a decision from the judge at the hearing and ensuring that proceedings are not held up while transcripts are produced or any other procedures that might delay the issuance of a judgment are carried out. As part of this process, judges have been trained to conduct hearings.

35. Family courts are located in the provincial capitals and in the Province of Chiriquí, part of which is now in the Ngobe Buglé indigenous region. Owing to the level of poverty in the region, the indigenous inhabitants experience difficulties that other users of the justice system do not face. For this reason, the court has decided to operate as a mobile court in order to provide justice services in the community.

36. In view of the widespread poverty in the indigenous region, the judges have ruled that legal aid should be offered to all persons appearing before the mobile court. When the court has been convened by a local judge, it travels to the region to receive complaints, take evidence and conduct hearings. The missions undertaken by the court were conducted in coordination with the Public Defender's Office and the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Family Law Cases, as both agencies are required to attend its hearings. Lawyers with experience in family matters have volunteered to provide a defence, free of charge, to defendants, including indigenous Ngäbe women, enabling parties to proceedings to communicate with their lawyers in their native language. The court's interdisciplinary team accompanies the court, as do volunteer mediators and a genetics laboratory responsible for collecting DNA evidence to be used in the proceedings.

VI. National machinery for the advancement of women

37. Pursuant to Act No. 71 of 2008, the State established the National Institute for Women, which replaced the National Directorate for Women of the Ministry of Social Development. The National Institute for Women is a politically and financially independent body that plays the leading role in the field and coordinates public policies on promoting equal opportunities for women.

38. In recent years, the State has established additional national mechanisms for the advancement of women, including the National Women's Council, the National Committee on Violence against Women and the Network of Government Mechanisms for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities in Panama. It has also established working groups such as the National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons, the National Advisory Council on Disability, the National Standing Commission on Human Rights, the National Council on Support for Adolescent Mothers and the National Intersectoral Committee for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents. In so doing, the State assumes responsibility for coordinating public policy on the promotion of the gender perspective and combating discrimination against women, especially members of vulnerable groups.

39. In January 2018, Panama adopted the Gender Parity Initiative launched by the World Economic Forum as a platform for public-private collaboration to bring more women into the economy and implement good practices to close existing gaps. In

2019, the National Gender Parity Council,³ overseen by the Minister of Social Development, was established to coordinate and generate synergies between the public and private sectors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to promote gender equity.

40. The Beehive Plan (“Panama Free of Poverty and Inequality, the Sixth Frontier”) is a strategy for taking regional action through the effective coordination of targeted public services. The employment and gender directorates are to implement programmes to empower women in the area of employment.

41. The lead agency in the field, the National Institute for Women, was established as a national mechanism for the advancement of women and has a staff of 163, 80 per cent of whom are women and 20 per cent of whom are men. The Institute’s budget is based on the priority actions to be taken to achieve the established targets.

42. Despite the spending restrictions imposed on the general State budget, the Institute’s budget has increased by 50 per cent since 2014.

Budget of the National Institute for Women from 2014 to 2019

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Amount requested</i> | <i>Amount recommended by law</i> | <i>Operating budget</i> | <i>Investments</i> |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 2014 | 4 595 200 | 2 962 900 | 2 776 000 | 186 900 |
| 2015 | 9 499 720 | 3 615 300 | 2 615 300 | 1 000 000 |
| 2016 | 10 420 000 | 4 600 000 | 3 600 000 | 1 000 000 |
| 2017 | 10 081 020 | 6 144 400 | 5 403 900 | 740 500 |
| 2018 | 10 421 580 | 6 641 510 | 6 000 000 | 641 510 |
| 2019 | 6 808 061 | 7 158 061 | 6 516 551 | 641 510 |

43. The 14 centres of the National Institute for Women have enabled it to expand its geographical coverage to include every province in the country, including two indigenous regions. The centres provide free, personalized and comprehensive support to women whose rights have been violated, promoting their physical, economic and political independence in every region in the country.

44. At the centres, women receive legal and psychological support and assistance from social workers to guide and support them during the legal process, to direct them to shelters when required and to offer them new opportunities. Their 72 technical and administrative staff members attend to the various needs that arise, including the needs of indigenous women, who receive support in their own language.

45. The team spirit and sense of belonging of the administrative and specialized staff at the centres have been enhanced by in-service training and awareness-raising sessions on the Institute’s vision and mission in the light of national and international standards.

46. Over the past five years, the Network of Government Mechanisms for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities in Panama has strengthened its coordination efforts, promoting research, analysis, programme planning and the advancement of different groups and enhancing the support that they receive. In this connection, the Network aims to enhance the role of women in social, political and economic development, ensuring that that women can exercise their rights in relation to men

³ See executive Decrees No. 192 of 2019 and No. 315 of 2019, which concerns the Ministry of Education.

and making it possible for women to gain access to power and decision-making at all levels and in all agencies and forums.

47. Act No. 7 of 1997 provided for the establishment of the Ombudsman's Office as an independent body with functional, administrative and financial autonomy and a mandate to ensure the protection of the rights established in the Constitution and international human rights instruments. The budgetary funds allocated to the Office are shown in the table below.

Budget of the Ombudsman's Office

| <i>Budget (B)</i> | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <i>Year</i> | <i>Operating budget</i> | <i>Investment</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| 2016 | 4 752 000 | 262 000 | 5 014 000 |
| 2017 | 5 438 000 | 262 000 | 5 700 000 |
| 2018 | 4 856 000 | 217 000 | 5 073 000 |
| 2019 | 5 378 000 | 407 000 | 5 785 000 |
| 2020 | 5 833 000 | 381 000 | 6 214 000 |
| Rate | 5.25% | 9.81% | 5.51% |

48. Since 2003, 14 regional offices of the Ombudsman's Office have been established. As of 2020, the Office has 203 public officials (111 women and 92 men) and a specialized department known as the Directorate for the Protection of Women's Rights.

49. From 2015 to 2019, the Directorate received 94 complaints of alleged human rights violations and 114 requests for intervention or petitions, which relate to immediate actions to prevent or resolve situations that affect human rights.

50. The complaints received in 2019 were related to various rights that had allegedly been violated: 19 (50 per cent) of the complaints were related to the right to work, 8 (21 per cent) were related to the right to due process, 4 (11 per cent) were related to the right to the integrity of the person, and 3 (8 per cent) were related to the right to equality and non-discrimination. There was one complaint related to the right to family, one to the right to identity, one to the right to freedom of movement and one to the right of petition (each of these complaints accounted for 3 per cent of all complaints).

51. In 2019, the Directorate conducted six investigations into complaints. In five cases, human rights violations were identified and recommendations were made. The institutions penalized were the National Police, which violated the right to work and the right to information in connection with a case of harassment in the workplace; the National Office of Refugee Affairs, which violated the right to work and the right to due process in connection with a case of harassment and dismissal; the International Maritime University of Panama, which violated the right to due process, the right to work and the right of petition in a case of harassment in the workplace that ended in dismissal; the National Police, which violated the rights to liberty, personal integrity, due process, judicial protection, judicial guarantees, special protection measures for children and adolescents, and equality and non-discrimination in connection with a complaint concerning arbitrary detention and violence against a transgender adolescent; and the Office of the Superintendent of Banks, which violated the right to work, the right to due process and the right to equality and non-discrimination in connection with a complaint concerning harassment in the workplace.

VII. Women and peace and security

52. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, which was adopted unanimously in 2000, constitutes a milestone in the incorporation of the gender perspective in the prevention, management and resolution of armed conflicts.

53. Since Panama does not have an army, the resolution, which is implemented through strategies for preventing and combating transnational organized crime, is seen as a way of consolidating national and international cooperation, the provision of humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters, and support for migrants. The Government's actions in the area of peace and security are carried out by security services made up of men and women who specialize in different fields and so carry out specific functions.

VIII. Stereotypes and harmful practices

54. The new sustainable development agenda adopted by Panama calls for the development of strategies for achieving a more inclusive democracy and transcending the sociocultural barriers and stereotypes that, in all spheres of social and political life, prevent women from participating in decision-making forums either as beneficiaries of economic development or as equal protagonists in the construction of sustainable development models.

55. Act No. 7 of 2018 provides for the establishment of administrative measures to prevent, prohibit and punish discriminatory acts and sets out other provisions. The purpose of the Act is to prohibit and establish responsibility for acts of violence that violate the honour, dignity or physical and mental integrity of persons and to protect the right to work in equal conditions through the establishment of public policies to prevent these acts, in accordance with the human rights treaties ratified by Panama.

56. Intercultural, bilingual and gender education is provided in the indigenous regions (Guna Yala, Ngobe Buglé and Emberá-Wounaan). In order to prevent discriminatory practices and combat harmful stereotypes, contextualized studies on interculturalism are conducted as part of the process of implementing intercultural bilingual education.

57. The functions of the Ombudsman's Office include promoting human rights, including women's rights, and disseminating information about them. In this connection, a total of 9,477 persons (7,244 women and 2,233 men) were trained and sensitized from 2015 to 2019, including public officials, students, persons deprived of their liberty, community members and representatives of civil society organizations. In 2015, training was provided to 10,783 persons (8,443 women and 2,340 men) through the "Women, Know Your Rights" project.

58. From 2016 to 2019, approximately 90,598 copies of publications on women's rights were distributed, including the booklet "Women, Know Your Rights", which contains information on human rights, domestic violence, femicide, guardianship and parenting, marriage, divorce, alimony, gender, employment rights, political rights and health rights. This document has been translated into the Ngäbe and Güna language, which is spoken by the largest indigenous groups in Panama, and has also been transcribed in Braille. Also in 2015, a folded leaflet setting out the recommendations on women's rights made to Panama as part of the universal periodic review was published.

59. In 2015, the Ombudsman's Office organized the "Because I Know My Rights" campaign in order to break down sexist stereotypes by highlighting their

consequences in personal, political and economic life and in the area of employment. Around 100,000 people participated in the activities. In the same year, a television and radio campaign on preventing violence against women was run in conjunction with the Community Legal Aid Foundation. The campaign was coordinated by the Corporate Social Responsibility Department of the corporation Medcom.

60. The National Institute for Women has signed agreements with some media outlets with a view to disseminating programmes on gender equality and the prevention of violence against women. In this connection, the Institute works in a coordinated manner to train social communicators and administrative staff working for TVN Media on gender analysis, the phenomenon of violence and Act No. 82 of 2013, which establishes domestic violence and femicide as separate offences in law.

61. In 2016, another agreement was signed with Televisora Nacional S.A. (TVN Media) to promote socially responsible actions in the area of gender, including prevention and awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women and technical capacity-building activities for Panamanian television presenters, journalists, broadcasters, producers and other persons involved in the development, design and dissemination of programmes for local audiences that portray a dignified image of women in the media.

62. Furthermore, a national radio station belonging to the State Radio and Television System has helped to create the radio programme *Con Igualdad* with a view to promoting a more egalitarian society that is free from violence. The participants in the programme include specialists in the field.

63. Awareness-raising workshops based on an inclusive methodology have been held in order to engage with media students and professionals at public and private universities – specifically, the University of Panama and the Latin University of Panama – in coordination with the School of Social Communication. The workshops addressed issues such as the portrayal of women in the media, the reinforcement or breaking down of existing stereotypes and the professional challenges faced by social communicators in exercising their profession.

64. Thanks to this action, the networks of gender-responsive social communicators, which are made up of social communications professionals operating at the provincial level, have been strengthened in 7 of the country's 10 provinces, making it easier to link up the different sources used by public and private media outlets and establish a series of useful contacts that take a comprehensive approach to the promotion of women's rights and gender equality.

65. The “Partnership for a Life without Violence” project, conducted by the National Institute for Women, has given rise to training packages for the prevention of violence against women (referred to as notebooks for unlearning), which are methodological tools that address gender equality and stereotypes and promote the elimination of such stereotypes.

66. Another important tool is an education and training package that includes a flipchart and educational board games intended to promote reflection on women's rights. The package was used in three training workshops, based on peer education, which were held in February and March 2016 and were attended by 91 young persons aged from 18 to 23 years from the Provinces of Coclé, Panamá Oeste, Chiriquí, Bocas del Toro, Los Santos and Darién. The workshops, which were based on the theme of young persons building a society free from violence, were intended to strengthen the participants' ability to address issues related to the prevention of violence against women and its various manifestations and to establish and strengthen young person's organizations that have both male and female members. The subjects covered by the flip chart and board games are gender, new masculinities, assertive dating, violence

against women, sexual violence, trafficking in persons, bullying and cyberbullying. Following this process, 724 middle school and high school students from the above-mentioned provinces participated in replicas of the workshops held on 10 occasions by the young persons who had previously been trained.

67. Working women and members of women's organizations from rural and indigenous areas are participating in a pilot programme on empowerment and the development of skills for decent work organized by the Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development. As part of this programme, additional thematic content on gender theory and traditional stereotypical views of the roles and responsibilities of women and men is being developed, thereby helping to eliminate stereotypes and multiple forms of discrimination against women.

68. One of the most common problems faced by Panamanian women is their lack of knowledge of their rights and existing laws that serve as protection mechanisms. The Gender and Equal Employment Opportunities Office of the Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development is conducting a pilot programme on empowerment and the development of skills for decent work that is targeted at working women and members of women's organizations from rural and indigenous areas, who mostly work in agriculture, handicraft production and other areas.

69. The programme initially focuses on gender theory, which makes it possible to analyse traditional stereotypical views of the roles and responsibilities of women and men in family life and the prevention of violence against women. It also examines the different types of violence that exist and the various national and international protection mechanisms, including the Convention.

IX. Violence against women

70. The implementing regulations of Act No. 82 of 24 October 2013, which were enacted by Executive Decree No.100 of 2017, undoubtedly constitute a unique institutional legal framework. This framework is consistent with the State's obligations, ensures greater effectiveness of public policies for the protection of women and provides a definition of violence against women, as well as other forms of violence.

71. Act No. 82 of 2013 provided for the establishment of the National Committee on Violence against Women, a national mechanism whose objective is to bring together efforts, instruments, policies, services and inter-agency actions for the prevention, punishment and eradication of, and response to, violence against women. The Committee performs advisory, monitoring and oversight functions in respect of public policies on violence against women. It is chaired by the National Institute for Women and includes a representative of the National Women's Council, in addition to the heads or representatives of 12 government agencies and 6 civil society organizations with a proven track record in efforts to provide protection from violence and promote human rights.

72. The National Committee on Violence against Women organized an international academic forum entitled "International Dialogue on Justice and Gender", the aim of which was to create an opportunity for discussion and analysis of the progress and challenges of gender mainstreaming in the administration of justice. The forum was designed for its members and, more particularly, for justice officials (2018). Likewise, training sessions have been held on the application of the adversarial criminal justice system to violations of the family and civil status law (domestic violence and femicide).

73. In giving effect to the above-mentioned Act, the National Institute for Women promotes approval of the Inter-Agency Agreement on the Protection of Women Victims of Gender Violence, insofar as it relates to standards and agreements established in Panama for the protection of women victims of domestic violence and their families and to dealing with the crime of femicide. The Agreement was signed on 29 July 2015 by 13 government agencies and the mayors of the municipalities of La Chorrera, Arraiján and San Miguelito.

74. As part of the Agreement concluded by the agencies involved in the chain of custody of women victims of domestic violence, the Comprehensive Assistance Protocol for Women Victims of Intimate Partner Violence was drawn up, and the Specialized Police on Gender Violence was established.

75. The Protocol is a set of regional model standards for assistance procedures and services for women victims of violence. Its objective is to activate protection mechanisms and the provision of comprehensive assistance to victims, enhance the institutional response to such offences by improving inter-agency investigation, assistance and coordination, and optimize the response capacity of intervening bodies in order to restore the legal order and provide effective protection to victims and their children.

76. Beginning in 2016, a process was begun to set up the Specialized Police on Gender Violence, in accordance with article 31 (3) of Act No. 82 of 2013 on a specialized police unit to combat violence against women. The establishment of this police service in Panama in 2018 was the culmination of efforts to strengthen police units, in which the National Institute for Women had taken part, and the development of inter-agency coordination. These services were set up in all police districts throughout the country, which was a positive development in terms of the response to domestic violence.

77. Another measure adopted by the National Institute for Women in coordination with the Human Resources Training and Development Institute is the provision of scholarships for victims of gender violence and survivors of femicide. These were approved by decision No. 259 of 26 January 2018, which amends some articles of the Institute's scholarships and academic financial aid regulations. In this case, they include a subprogramme of financial aid for victims of gender violence and their children, which has the particularity of providing tuition for elementary, middle school, high school, technical and higher education, in public and private establishments of Panama.

78. With the help of international partners, the National Institute for Women has developed a number of projects that have had significant impact. Along these lines, the Project for the Prevention of Violence against Women in Central America was carried out at the regional level, as part of the Central American Security Strategy of the Central American Integration System. It called for direct action in the selected municipalities, technical capacity-building for preventing and dealing with violence and the promotion of entrepreneurial skills and employment alternatives for women victims of violence.

79. The Project supported the establishment and strengthening of 10 gender offices in the following municipalities: Arraiján, Changuinola, Barú, Renacimiento, Bugaba, La Chorrera, La Palma, Darién Province, Pedasí, Penonomé and La Pintada. It also provided equipment and technical support to improve municipal institutional capacity and developed local plans for the prevention of and response to violence against women in these communities.

80. The United Nations Development Programme supported the implementation of the Project for the Prevention of Violence against Women in Central America, with

outputs such as the financing of the police units of the Specialized Police on Gender Violence, which were allocated to the National Police of Panama, and the preparation of anti-violence training and promotional materials to be distributed at the International Book Fair. Funding was also provided for the audiovisual project on women of African descent conducted by the Office of the Mayor of Colón.

81. The United Nations Joint Global Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence, in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund, is a global initiative for the improvement of essential services where key actors provide care and assistance to women and girls, including police protection, social assistance and health care. In 2017, the National Institute for Women prepared a list of essential services for Panama, as well as a plan to improve services for women and girls.

82. Other measures to prevent violence against women include campaigns carried out in the context of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November). Three campaigns were designed between 2015 and 2019. As part of the campaign “I Stand Up To Violence against Women”, nationally disseminated visibility material (sweaters, banners) and a digital campaign (Twitter, Facebook and other media outlets) were developed; purple light was projected onto the buildings of the Electoral Tribunal, the Caja de Ahorros, the Panama Canal Authority and the Ministry of the Interior; and a human rights awareness-raising video was projected in the Panama subway.

83. The campaign “Stopping Violence Is in Your Hands”, which was conducted jointly with the Office of the First Lady and the Secretariat of State for Communication as part of its “Safe Women, Safe Families” initiative, used broadly disseminated audiovisual outputs aimed at a wide audience. It included the printing of nationally disseminated reference materials and flyers, awareness-raising sessions in various public and private establishments and the designation of project spokespersons.

84. The campaign “It’s Up To All of Us to Prevent Femicide and Domestic Violence” relied on audiovisual material published on social media and other media outlets, project spokespersons on radio and television, guidelines, nationally disseminated flyers, awareness-raising sessions and the projection of the campaign spot throughout the month of November in the Panama subway stations and cars in order to highlight societal responsibility and to prevent violence against women. (See www.inamu.gob.pa and the National Institute for Women’s YouTube channel.)

85. In 2018, following enormous efforts on the part of the Institute, the free 24/7 hotline number 182 was assigned with a view to responding to a greater number of women at risk of becoming victims of violence.

86. Other advances in terms of national laws include the adoption of executive Decree No. 27 of 4 June 2019, which provides implementing regulations for Act No. 29 of 13 June 2002, as amended by Act No. 60 of 30 November 2016 on pregnant minors, and establishes other provisions as well. In this context, the National Council on Support for Adolescent Mothers was established. These regulations are aimed at ensuring the rights of pregnant adolescents to receive comprehensive health care and to remain in the education system, with a view to improving their quality of life and their full inclusion in social development, thus enhancing the recognition of and respect for their dignity.

87. In addition, Executive Decree No. 39 of 30 April 2014, which establishes the National Intersectoral Committee for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents, was enacted. This body coordinates the design and joint implementation of public policies, strategies, plans, programmes, projects and actions for the

prevention of violence against children and adolescents. The National Multisectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents 2018–2023 and its Plan of Action are currently being implemented.

88. The Government, through the Ministry of Education, developed a Module on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and the Dangers of Social Media in order to prevent cyberbullying, the new forms of access to our children and youth used by sexual predators. This module covers the legal provisions that protect minors from child sexual abuse that are laid down in part III of the Criminal Code, which deal with rape and sexual exploitation.

89. Training is provided by psychologists and social workers to public contact points and guidance, family and community development educators on the following topics: the 10 most visible signs of child sexual abuse; cyberbullying; the latest forms of online sexual harassment used against the country's children and young people; sexual abuse and asymmetrical relationships; types of abuse and victim characteristics; definition of pederast, paedophile and voyeurism; and characteristics of child molesters.

90. Act No. 16 of 2004 established the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, whose objective is to prevent and eradicate crimes of sexual exploitation. The National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation formulated the National Plan for the Prevention of the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, which has four pillars – namely: prevention of the offence; victim assistance; investigation and punishment of offenders; protection of the rights of victims of the offence; and institutional strengthening.

91. In response to this mandate, the National Commission carried out a broad prevention programme aimed at children and adolescents, teachers, parents, businesspersons and the general public, in order to teach them the warning signs and how to identify the conduct and report it.

92. The institutional strengthening programme was implemented, and training was provided to the agencies that compose the National Commission in order to inform them about the offence and its various manifestations, as well as how to prevent, detect and combat it. Members of the law enforcement, investigative and prosecutorial services were included in those programmes.

93. In the last four months of 2019, the National Commission organized technical round tables with a view to replicating the Commission's structure and the plans and programmes approved by the governing board in the provinces. They were also organized with a view to encouraging the provinces to produce information on the phenomenon and to organize activities and projects corresponding to each of the pillars of the National Plan for the Prevention of the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, while at the same time carrying out the activities outlined by the National Commission's governing board.

94. Victim assistance is supported by the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family, the Ministry of Social Development and NGOs that work with children and adolescents.

95. Many factors are responsible for the problem of violence against women in Panama, not least of which is the socioeconomic context in which it occurs; ethnicity, marital status, level of education and income are important social determinants. Studies suggest that indigenous women, women of African descent and women with disabilities are especially vulnerable to violence. Prevention measures should therefore focus on those segments of the population.

96. It is worth noting that Act No. 7 of 2018 sets out measures to prevent, prohibit and punish acts of discrimination and violence that violate the honour, dignity and physical and psychological integrity of persons.

97. Executive Decree No. 100 of 2017 regulates the provisions of Act No. 82 of 2013. It sets out measures for the prevention of violence against women and provides for amendments to the Criminal Code that criminalize femicide and establish penalties for acts of violence against women. The aim of these measures is to give effect to the Act, strengthen institutional mechanisms and establish procedures for its implementation, in accordance with the Act's aims and objectives.

98. The purpose of Act No. 60 of 2016 is to establish a regulatory framework that provides the legal mechanisms needed for the full exercise of the rights recognized in national legislation and the international conventions signed and ratified by Panama on the subjects of children and pregnant adolescents. Its aim is to improve their quality of life, guarantee their full inclusion in social development, ensure that they remain in the education system, support the recognition of and respect for their dignity and prevent and reduce pregnancies in minors.

X. Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

99. By means of Act No. 23 of 2004, Panama ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the three Protocols thereto: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition.

100. Act No. 79 of 2011 on Trafficking in Persons and Related Activities was implemented by Executive Decree No. 303 of 2016, which designated it as a domestic policy of the State and established the National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons, which is chaired by the Ministry of Public Security, and criminalized that conduct in article 456-A of the Criminal Code. Furthermore, by Executive Decree No. 125 of 2018, the Republic of Panama adopted the National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

101. The National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2017–2022 has five strategic components and was adopted by Executive Decree No. 125 of 17 April 2018. For example, the first component of the Plan, on prevention, sensitization and awareness-raising, lists actions aimed at raising awareness and sensitizing nationals and foreigners about the characteristics and modalities of trafficking in persons and related activities, and at promoting the early detection of trafficking in persons and related activities in Panama.

102. For its part, Executive Decree No. 7 of 2019 establishes the category of temporary resident and the temporary humanitarian permit for persons identified as victims of trafficking in persons and related activities. Executive Decree No. 21 of 2019 amends and supplements Executive Decree No. 17 of 1999, which regulates articles 17 and 18 of the Labour Code, which in turn establish new categories for the issuance of permits to foreign workers with a temporary humanitarian permit and to foreign workers with a permanent resident work permit.

103. Panama ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography by means of Act No. 47 of 2000, and its initial report is scheduled for review in September 2020. It also signed the Inter-American Convention on International Traffic in Minors,

which was adopted in Mexico City in 1994 and was adopted by Panama by means of Act No. 37 of 1998.

104. The most common types of trafficking in persons in Panama are those related to sexual exploitation (33 victims), labour exploitation (18 victims) and sexual servitude (1 victim) There were nine people who did not fully meet the criteria for identification as victims of trafficking in persons.

105. In order to monitor statistics with a comprehensive approach to prevention, investigation, prosecution and punishment, a thematic round table on the crime of trafficking in persons was organized with the support of the Integrated Crime Statistics System. This conduct is characterized as a criminal offence in article 456-A of the Criminal Code, which prescribes a penalty of 15 to 20 years' imprisonment, which has been increased to 20 to 30 years' imprisonment. The fact that consent was given by the victim of trafficking in persons and related activities does not exempt the perpetrator from criminal liability, even if the victim has reached the age of majority. This criminal offence is not subject to any statute of limitations.

106. Article 190 of the Criminal Code punishes sex tourism and international sexual exploitation with a term of imprisonment of 8 to 10 years. Article 191 of the Code punishes the ownership or administration of a business for the purposes of the corruption or sexual exploitation of minors. The State, pursuant to Act No. 79, established the National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons, which is composed of representatives of 16 governmental agencies and civil society organizations.

107. The governing board approved the Identification and Assistance Unit's protocol of action for detecting, identifying, assisting and protecting victims of trafficking in persons in Panama and its rules of procedure. The use of this tool helped to reduce the response time for the preliminary and full identification of victims of trafficking in persons and the aspects to be evaluated, which include characteristics of vulnerability in personal appearance in terms of sex, age, gender, sexuality, gender identity, biotype, disability, or ethnic minority, and state of physical health as an indicator of prior assault or violence, addiction, drug or alcohol abuse, or sexually transmitted disease.

108. The protocol calls for examining the person's state of emotional health for signs of crisis, anguish, fear, denial or any emotional change resulting from a threat and/or feelings of persecution. The person is checked for personal identification documents, current family situation, cultural considerations and possible exploitation in terms of place, time, conditions and type, place of detection and characteristics of the related districts or neighbourhoods. In addition, if they are minors or presumed to be under the age of 18, they are checked to see with whom they are travelling, if they are in communication with their parents and relatives, if they seem intimidated, if they behave oddly and if they carry cell phones with preset numbers.

109. Strengthening the capacity of law enforcement and security agencies allowed for the early detection of a possible victim of human trafficking in Panama City, which resulted in a simultaneous raid in El Dorado and the historic district on 6 September 2019 and the rescue of 25 possible victims and the arrest of five Colombian nationals, who were charged with aggravated drug possession and corruption of minors.

110. The National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons held seven sensitization and awareness-raising workshops for professionals in the fields of social communication and health, the diplomatic corps accredited in Panama, public institutions, private companies and civil society organizations that are members of the National Commission.

111. In 2019, the National Commission held 12 regular meetings and 13 special meetings, during which it fully identified 27 victims and on a preliminary basis identified 61 potential victims of trafficking in persons. According to data provided by the Identification and Assistance Unit of the Secretariat General on Combating Trafficking in Persons, 61 potential victims of trafficking in persons and related activities were rescued in 2019, while 54 were rescued in 2018. Forty-one women and one girl were identified as victims of human trafficking.

112. According to figures from the Public Prosecution Service, a total of 10 sentences were handed down in 2019, whether through the semi-inquisitorial system or the adversarial criminal system. Two Chinese nationals were convicted in oral proceedings and, by means of sentence No. 151/TJ-J of 24 September 2019, given a principal penalty of 25 years' imprisonment and a fine of B 4,200. This sanction represents the stiffest penalty recorded since trafficking in persons and related activities was characterized as a criminal offence in Panama.

113. At a bilateral meeting between Colombia and Panama in September 2018, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the prevention, investigation and control of trafficking in persons, and in victim assistance and protection. Both countries have put into practice their own protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons and have concluded agreements to implement international cooperation, in accordance with article 30 (4) of the aforementioned Convention.

114. In terms of bilateral cooperation with Costa Rica, three voluntary returns were successfully carried out with the participation of the Consulate, the technical secretariat of the National Commission to Combat the Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons and the immediate response team of the Directorate General for Migration of Costa Rica. The technical evaluation team of Panama coordinated with the immediate response team of Costa Rica and following a risk assessment of a Costa Rican transsexual victim, who was given medical and psychological attention, lodging and food, they worked together to achieve the full recovery of the victim, returning her to life in society with full enjoyment of her human rights.

115. In another case, following the specialized technical assessment process, the Identification and Assistance Unit granted a 32-year-old Costa Rican woman, who had been a victim of sex trafficking, the status of possible victim of trafficking in persons. Application was made to the National Migration Service for a temporary residence permit for up to 90 days, in accordance with article 47 of Act No. 79 of 2011. After completing full identification, a temporary humanitarian permit was obtained for a renewable period of one year. The victim was evaluated by the technical evaluation team psychologist, and her risk characteristics were determined. A plan for medium-term intervention and follow-up was drawn up.

116. On 31 October 2019, the Canadian Mounted Police and the Department of Justice of Canada met with the secretariat of the Commission, the National Police, the Joint Migration Task Force and the National Migration Service, with the aim of identifying needs in combating transnational crime related to migrant smuggling, and with a view to developing a project to support Panama in strengthening investigators' capacity to handle migrant smuggling offences and to use technological resources and best practices.

117. Panama has set up a 311 hotline to a citizen service centre, which has been established to provide immediate attention to citizens wishing to present complaints, reports, petitions or requests for information, whether as a natural or legal person. In accordance with article 49 of the Constitution, this is a service that the Public Prosecution Service is required to provide and serves as a mechanism through which all persons can exercise their rights.

118. The rules governing the Unit for the Management of Funds for Victims of Trafficking in Persons are contained in articles 66, 67 and 68 of Executive Decree No. 303 of 2016. This is a technical unit responsible for managing funds to be used for assistance to victims of trafficking in persons, as set forth in articles 56 to 59 of Act No. 79 of 2011.

119. Among the main achievements of the Unit is the preparation of a draft budget for the operation of a shelter, draft operating regulations for the Unit and a draft fundraising and funds management handbook. In order to give effect to the provisions of article 13 of Act No. 79 of 2011, the Central Taxpayers Registry was set up.

120. The Unit for the Management of Funds has a bank account with the Banco Nacional de Panamá for the Special Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons of the National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons, which has a balance of \$7,328.64. A deposit of \$8,079.90 is being processed; it corresponds to the provisional seizure of money from a case of trafficking in persons. The account of the National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Persons of the Ministry of Public Security has a balance of \$1,249.42.

121. In accordance with article 30 of Act No. 79, the National Commission has at its disposal the funds allocated in the State's general budget to the Ministry of Public Security for this purpose. Accordingly, the Ministry of Public Security, by means of decision No. 004 of 2019, established an Institutional Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons, with the rank of directorate, whose functions include coordinating and facilitating law enforcement operations to combat organized crime in relation to trafficking in persons.

XI. Participation in political and public life

122. In the electoral reform of 1997, provision was made for a gender quota for the first time in Panamanian electoral law. It provided that, in their internal elections, political parties were to ensure that at least 30 per cent of candidates for party positions or those on nomination lists for offices whose holders are elected by popular vote.

123. The main flaw with this quota is that it has no genuine enforcement mechanism, since, in any case, if the 30 per cent quota was not met and this was certified by the women's secretariat, then the candidacies could be filled by men.

124. The electoral reform of 2012 provided that, in the internal elections of political parties, including in primary elections, at least 50 per cent of the candidates on nomination lists must be women. However, this rule also lacked an effective enforcement mechanism, since it stipulated that, in cases where female participation, as confirmed by the women's secretariat of the party, was less than the established percentage, political parties could complete the nomination lists with other applicants for the respective positions.

125. A comparison of the number of women elected in the 2014 general elections to the number of those elected in 2009 reveals a quite significant increase in participation. However, this was due not only to the reform but also to the support provided by women's political groups and foundations that promote women's participation, which joined forces to train women and promote their participation, among other factors.

126. In 2017, Panama amended its electoral legislation to include electoral parity in party primary elections. Article 239 of Act No. 54 of 2017 provides that, in the

internal and primary elections of political parties, 50 per cent of the candidates on nomination lists must be women.

127. The 2017 electoral reform addressed important issues, among them that electoral campaign advertising was to be financed only through public funds, that private financing could be used only for travel expenses, fuel and so on and that the campaign period was to be shortened, since very long campaigns consumed too many financial resources. Ceilings were imposed on financing and contributions, and controls were placed on private financing, in terms of opening bank accounts, prohibiting government advertising during electoral periods and other activities. All these controls directly benefit women's political participation, since it has been shown that women have fewer of the economic resources needed for entering into politics.

128. Pursuant to the reform of 2017, women's political participation is regulated in such a way as to ensure that at least 50 per cent of candidates on nomination lists for political parties' internal elections, including general elections, are women. Political parties must nominate a minimum number of female candidates and in a proportion such that they have a chance of being elected. Lists that fail to meet the requirements will not be accepted.

129. The new design of the rules provides for parity in nomination lists up to and including general elections, and for the possibility that the Electoral Tribunal will not accept lists that do not meet that requirement. Consequently, the following provision was included in the regulatory decree of the elections of 5 May 2018 (Decree No. 12 of 21 March 2018): Gender parity. The procedure for ensuring gender parity in political party nominations is as follows:

(a) If the party decides to nominate only main candidates in its primary elections, each person elected as a candidate shall choose, in agreement with his or her party, an alternate of the other sex, bearing in mind that it is the party that puts forward nominations. This rule applies in both single-member and multi-member constituencies.

(b) If the party decides to nominate both main candidates and alternates in its primary elections, the members of each pairing must be of different sexes. In other words, if a man stands for election as a main candidate, his alternate must be a woman, and vice versa.

130. The Electoral Tribunal, as the body responsible for approving each party's regulations on nominations, whether for primaries or for other party organs that must elect candidates for other positions, is required to take measures to ensure compliance with this parity rule.

131. In the case of independent candidacies, the lists must be composed in accordance with the gender parity required under article 303 of the Electoral Code. When for any reason a list of candidates must be changed, whether as a result of political party nominations or independent nomination, the change must respect the gender parity embodied in article 303 of the Electoral Code.

132. Other important advances contained in the 2017 reform in relation to women's political participation include:

(a) Recognition of the National Forum of Women Members of Political Parties as a permanent consultative body of the Electoral Tribunal;

(b) The statutes of political parties must provide for the establishment and composition of a women's secretariat, or its equivalent, as part of the party's organization, with the powers conferred on it by the Electoral Code, its regulations and the party's statutes;

(c) Parity in women's political participation was achieved through the reform of the Electoral Code by the National Electoral Reform Commission.

133. In the area of public financing, pursuant to the 2019 Electoral Code reforms, political parties are to receive 50 per cent of post-electoral financing for the purposes of conducting training activities, of which a minimum of 20 per cent must be allocated exclusively to women's training. This training is to be coordinated by the women's secretariat of each political party, which must prepare and submit an annual training plan. These provisions were regulated by Decree No. 17 of 9 August 2017, which stipulates the following in relation to the annual training plan for political parties:

(a) Clear indication must be given that a minimum of 20 per cent is to be allocated exclusively to women's training;

(b) Proof must be provided that the women's secretariat has developed a plan for such training and that it has been approved by the governing board;

(c) Changes to the plan must be made by the women's secretariat, approved by the governing board and endorsed by the Electoral Tribunal;

(d) An account must be opened at the Banco Nacional de Panamá, where the Electoral Tribunal will deposit the corresponding funds on a quarterly basis. Two signatures, one by the women's secretariat and one by the governing board, are required.

134. The Electoral Tribunal's Institute of Democratic Studies carries out various training activities on various topics, including electoral issues, and runs electoral civic education programmes on an ongoing basis throughout the country, in an effort to ensure the overall promotion of democratic values.

135. In 2018, the Institute created a gender equality office, whose strategic goals include the following: promotion of legal and institutional mechanisms to ensure women's participation and leadership in political and civic activities of local and national government authorities and political parties; strengthening of the gender perspective, women's empowerment, and women's leadership training, in all areas of democratic life, and the effective exercise of women's political citizenship; and promotion of various forms of citizen participation, so that women's groups can carry out citizen oversight actions in exercise of their rights enshrined in the law and in public policy on equal opportunity.

136. Below is a table of the number of women employed in the Electoral Tribunal; 50 per cent of its nearly 4,000 staff members are women.

| <i>Women:</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| With executive authority | 129 |
| Without executive authority | 1 955 |
| Total | 2 084 |

137. When for any reason a list of candidates must be changed, whether as a result of political party nominations or independent nomination, the change must respect the gender parity rule set forth in article 303 of the Electoral Code. Lists of candidates, whether from political parties or as a result of independent nomination, that do not meet gender parity requirements shall be rejected outright, as prescribed by article 303 of the Electoral Code. Other important advances contained in the 2017 reform in relation to women's political participation include the following:

- The proposal presented by the National Electoral Reforms Commission to reform the Electoral Code in order to achieve de facto parity in women's political participation was much more ambitious; however, it was amended in the National Assembly at the time of its approval
- Social auditing and other forms of citizen participation were promoted to enable women's groups to carry out citizen oversight actions in exercise of their rights enshrined in the law and in public policy on equal opportunity for women

138. The Panamanian State, by means of Act No. 56 of 2017, established women's right to gain access to and to participate actively in the decision-making processes of the public and private entities of the country. This Act requires the organizational structure of central government agencies, decentralized agencies, public enterprises, financial intermediaries and the institutions regulated by them to include a governing board, or an administrative council or similar body, in order to ensure that at least 30 per cent of all posts are filled by women.

XII. Education

139. The organization Intercultural Bilingüe has had great success in carrying out intercultural and bilingual literacy projects (in participants' mother tongue and in Spanish) incorporating a gender perspective for Ngäbe, Guna and Emberá women in rural areas. It has been deemed one of the most innovative projects in Latin America by the European Union. As part of its training programme, the Ministry of Education taught literacy to 1,500 Ngäbe women who had completed schooling only up to the sixth grade and third year so that they could become literacy teachers and coordinators. More than 50 per cent of these women have become professionals, working either as teachers or in other careers.

140. The following were used in the literacy programme: Study to identify the needs of Ngäbe, Guna and Emberá women; a first reader for Ngäbe, Guna and Emberá women; a teacher's guide for the Ngäbe, Guna and Emberá peoples; and 3,000 charts on 32 literacy topics that take into account intercultural, bilingual and gender considerations.

141. In 2015, through the "Make a Move for Panama" programme, 1,562 adults, 705 more than the previous year, learned to read and write. In 2016, 1,771 people became literate, of which 68.7 per cent were female and 31.3 per cent were male. However, while these data remain positive, it should be noted that according to the Multipurpose Survey of March 2015 conducted by the National Statistics and Census Institute, in Panama there were 151,616 people 10 years of age and older who could not read or write. The country therefore still has a long way to go.

142. Between 2014 and 2016, on average, 5.11 per cent of women in the national population were illiterate. This is a higher percentage than that for men, of whom 4.09 per cent, on average, are illiterate. In addition, there are still gaps in some segments of the population, such as indigenous people, who have much higher rates of illiteracy than non-indigenous people. For example, in 2016, 31.25 per cent of indigenous women were illiterate, whereas the figure for non-indigenous women was 3.22 per cent.

XIII. Employment

143. In the past ten years, the Ministry of Labour, whose objective is to develop and implement government policies on labour issues, has designed a national employment and vocational training strategy in coordination with the National Vocational Training Institute for Human Development; the strategy, which goes by the name "Increasing

Employment, Productivity and Social Inclusion with More and Better Technical and Vocational Training”, was agreed on by multiple stakeholders and informed by the need to actively promote women’s participation in the labour market. The country squanders opportunities if there is no policy designed to bring women into the labour market – not only because what they contribute is not put to use but also because not pursuing a professional career means that they do not continue their studies and are prevented from improving their quality of life and that of their families.

144. With regard to the request for data on child labour broken down by sex, see the results of the latest child labour survey, which was organized and analysed by the National Statistics and Census Institute of Panama in 2016. According to the Institute’s analysis of the survey results, there were 23,855 minors between the ages 5 and 17 involved in child labour. The data show that 73.9 per cent of the children who were working were boys and that 26.1 per cent were girls. These results showed that boys were more likely to enter the labour market at an earlier age. For every 283 boys in the labour market, there were 100 girls.

145. Article 10 of the Labour Code states that the principle of equal pay is guaranteed. With regard to this article, Panama believes that the mandate of article 67 of the Constitution is implicit – i.e., that “equal work” implies “by men and women” – and that it is consistent with the spirit of the Constitution, which states that equal pay is to be provided for equal work, with no distinction on the basis of sex. Similarly, article 145 of the Labour Code states that if the principle of equal pay is violated, the worker may, in a summary proceeding, request the pay he or she is entitled to.

146. The most recent change to the minimum wage in Panama was made in December 2019 pursuant to Executive Decree No. 424 of 31 December 2019, whereby the new minimum wage rates were set throughout the country. It sets the minimum wage, an hourly rate, by economic sector of the employer, by number of employees in some cases and by geographic region.

147. The Panamanian State has been making significant efforts to comply with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, in accordance with article 11 of the Convention, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), which Panama has ratified.

148. Within the framework of the Equal Pay International Coalition and the country’s commitment to equal pay for work of equal value, made in a document signed on 27 July 2018 by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry’s employee association, a pilot study on gender-neutral job evaluation was done with a view to moving towards the effective implementation of ILO Convention No. 100 in the Ministry. Technical support was provided by the Bureau for Workers’ Activities-ILO regional project.

149. In October 2017, furthermore, the Ministry of Labour signed an agreement on the project “Labour Equality in Panama: Support for the Implementation of the Institutional Plan for Labour Equality and the Gender Equality Seal in Companies”. The agreement was entered into by the Ministry of Labour, the National Institute for Women, the United Nations Development Programme, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the Governance Committee was created to develop the country standard for the Equality in Business Seal.

150. The Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme certifies that the enterprise or institution actively promotes gender equality among its employees and that it does so in accordance with the requirements of a gender equality management system. It is a collective effort by the Government, the private sector and civil society to narrow wage gaps and guarantee decent work in terms of gender equality. The Gender

Equality Seal for Companies Project is being piloted with nine prestigious companies, six of which have already been awarded the Seal.

151. Gender Equality Seal for the Public Sector: Panama is one of the three pioneering countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to award the Seal for public sector institutions. On 4 June 2019, after an exhaustive evaluation begun in 2018 by the United Nations Development Programme and the National Institute for Women, the Ministry of Labour was awarded the Gold Gender Equality Seal for the Public Sector for the progress it had made.

152. In Panama, there are two Acts that provide for measures to address and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace: Act No. 82 of 24 October 2013, on the adoption of measures to prevent violence against women and amend the Criminal Code with a view to making femicide a criminal offence in its own right and punishing acts of violence against women, which is regulated by Executive Decree No. 100 of 20 April 2017, and Act No. 7 of 14 February 2017, on the adoption of measures to prevent, prohibit and punish discriminatory acts and on other stipulations, an act for which the implementing regulations are being drawn up.

153. Article 3 of the latter Act states that sexual and psychological harassment are to be understood as the systematic, continuous or repeated actions or omissions in which a person insinuates, invites, requests, pursues, limits or restricts rights, diminishes freedom, acts rudely or insultingly, humiliates others to obtain a sexual favour or robs another persons of his or her dignity.

154. In the area of employment, it includes but is not limited to exploitation, refusal to give the victim equal employment opportunities, failure to use the same selection criteria, failure to respect the victim's seniority or general working conditions and belittlement of a person's work.

155. One of the institutions responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act is the Ministry of Labour. Responsibility for establishing a policy to combat the conduct referred to in the Act, on the other hand, lies with the employer.

156. Significantly, article 9 of the Act states that anyone found to have committed, in any area, any of the behaviours described in the Act will be subject to penalties commensurate with the seriousness of the behaviour and its effects and does not rule out the possibility of criminal proceedings when the behaviours are punishable under the Criminal Code.

157. There are mechanisms for effective legal protection from dismissal for pregnant women. Pregnant workers are protected under the Constitution and the Labour Code. Article 68 of the Constitution states: "A pregnant woman may not be dismissed by her employer, public or private."

158. In addition, article 105 of the Labour Code clearly states that it is the duty of the State to protect working women who will be giving birth. Article 106 of the Code states: "A woman who is pregnant may be dismissed from her job only for just cause and with the prior authorization of a court."

159. Workers in both the private and the public sectors are eligible for paternity leave, which was established under Act No. 27 of 2017. Later, the implementing measures for the Act were set forth in Executive Decree No. 83 of 27 December 2017. The Act, which is an initiative of the Ministry of Labour, has is informed by the duty of the Panamanian State, enshrined in the Constitution, to protect the family. The father's involvement in childcare and child-rearing is thus guaranteed.

160. In Panama, some trade unions have managed to have included in their collective bargaining agreements provisions for paternity leave that guarantee fathers them more days to take care of their wives and newborn children. The Ministry of Labour

adopted this initiative proposed by the United Nations Development Programme in the context of the above-mentioned Labour Equality Project, as part of which the Gender Equality Seal for Companies is awarded.

161. Measures are in place to combat discriminatory practices, including mandatory pre-employment pregnancy and HIV/AIDS testing and the dismissal of women with HIV/AIDS. Article 38 of Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002, which sets out the measures to implement Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999, introduces equal opportunities for women.

162. Article 37, paragraph 2, of Act No. 3 of 5 January 2000, the General Act on Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV and AIDS, states that no public or private employer, domestic or foreign, may request that a worker provide medical reports and certifications concerning his or her HIV status to get or keep a job. Infection is not grounds for dismissal. In the same context, article 38 of the Act states that an employee is not obliged to inform his or her employer or his or her colleagues that he or she is HIV positive; when that status must be disclosed, the employee may inform his or her employer, who must keep the matter confidential and try, if necessary, to change the working conditions to enable the employee to better perform his or her duties.

163. Article 2, numeral 1, of Act No. 25 of 2018 defines chronic illnesses as those that, once diagnosed, require treatment of more than three months, for which the treatment is a palliative measure rather than a cure, thereby implying a chronic nature. Such illnesses include diabetes mellitus, malignant tumours (cancer), high blood pressure and AIDS. The Act also states that workers affected by the illnesses mentioned in the Act may be dismissed or removed from their jobs only for just cause and with the prior authorization of the local labour courts or, in the case of public servants, for one of the just causes provided for by law, in accordance with the relevant procedures. For public servants subject to special labour regimes, requests for reinstatement are to be made in accordance with the special legislation in force. According to assessments of the programme for the prevention and eradication of child labour and the measures that have been taken to protect girls, particularly indigenous girls and girls of African descent, Panama is one of the countries in the region that has made steady progress in reducing child labour, putting itself in a good position to achieve the goal of eliminating child labour within a given time frame.

164. In 2018, the Department of State of the United States of America, in its report on child labour, highlighted the considerable progress made by Panama in the area of child labour. In addition, the United States Department of Labor, after examining the results of the mixed-methods study of child labour in the production of sugar cane in Panama, done in 2018 by ILO with funding from the United States of America, decided to remove Panama from the list of countries in which sugar cane was produced by child labour.

165. The statistical data on child labour provide evidence of progress towards the elimination of child labour in Panama; according to the latest child labour survey, for example, taken in October 2016, there were 89,767 children and adolescents engaged in child labour in 2008, 60,702 in 2010, 50,410 in 2012, 26,710 in 2014 and 23,855 in 2016. This means that in the last three years of the period considered by the survey, the rate of child labour fell to 2.5 per cent, with the number of children engaged in child labour having decreased by 2,855 from 2014 to 2016.

166. Panama has managed to remove a total of 26,555 working children and adolescents from the streets to date, giving the country the lowest rate of child labour in Latin America. From 2014 to May 2019, as part of the Direct Action Programme, the Directorate for the Eradication of Child Labour and Protection of Adolescent Workers of the Ministry of Labour awarded 5,523 economic assistance grants for the

eradication of child labour nationwide. In 2018 alone, 1,451 such grants were awarded. These grants are meant for students in basic general education (elementary and middle school), including the indigenous regions (Ngobe Buglé, Emberá-Wounaan and Guna Yala) and the rest of the provinces.

167. All these achievements are the result of a policy of long standing that has contributed to the inclusion of the children and adolescents concerned in social programmes. Panama must acknowledge that it has received valuable technical assistance and funding from ILO and the United States Department of Labor, respectively. However, there are still major challenges to achieving the goal, which is why the national Government, with technical support from ILO, has been making great efforts to implement various agreements, projects and programmes whose aim is to eliminate child labour.

168. In this regard, the Directorate for the Eradication of Child Labour and Protection of Adolescent Workers of the Ministry of Labour has expanded the coverage of the Government's Direct Action Programme to include the entire country, including the indigenous regions. The aim of the Programme is to prevent and eradicate child labour in the most sensitive areas and in the areas that, according to the national child labour survey, have the highest incidence of hazardous child labour.

169. Statistical information from the Directorate shows that, during the period 2009–2019, 673 indigenous persons in the Guna Yala indigenous region, 1,612 in the Ngobe Buglé indigenous region, and 150 in the Emberá-Wounaan indigenous region benefited from the Government's Direct Action Programme. The Programme had a grand total of 2,435 beneficiaries.

170. Since 2016, strategies have been developed to ensure compliance with obligations towards domestic workers, with whom there has been a series of awareness-raising and training activities on the labour rights established in the Labour Code and ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which the country has ratified.

171. Three trade unions for domestic workers have been set up in Panama since the ratification of ILO Convention No. 189, two in Panama City and one in the Province of Bocas del Toro. Considerable emphasis – with media campaigns – has been placed on encouraging domestic workers in Panama to register with and enrol in the social security system, as only 10 per cent of what, according to figures from the National Statistics and Census Institute and the Office of the Controller of the Republic of Panama, are more than 80,000 domestic workers in the country contribute to the system.

172. The Ministry of Labour's Office of Equal Opportunities provides them with the necessary guidance and services at facilities belonging to the Ministry and has organized labour clinics that, held on Sundays and in places easily accessible to domestic workers, focus on domestic work.

XIV. Health

173. According to the 2010 census, the most recent census conducted in Panama, the country had 3,405,813 people, of whom 1,172,747 were children and adolescents – that is, 34 per cent of the total population of the country. Of the population of children and adolescents, 51 per cent, or 598,394, were boys and 49 per cent, or 526,913, were girls (National Statistics and Census Institute, 2010).

174. Panama, as of the date of this report, does not have a sexual and reproductive health programme in schools for girls, adolescents and other young people at the

national level. In August 2014, bill No. 61, through which public policies on comprehensive education, care and health promotion would be adopted with a view to promoting comprehensive sexual health education, was put forward. As a result of pressure from conservative groups in the country, however, the bill did not become law.

175. According to the results of the national sexual and reproductive health survey 2014–2015, 43 per cent of men and boys, as opposed to 27 per cent of women and girls, became sexually active between the ages of 15 and 19 (Instituto Conmemorativo Gorgas, 2018).

176. These data are related to the large number of girls who are pregnant and have AIDS. Figures provided by the Ministry of Health show that the number of pregnancies among pre-adolescent and adolescent girls is very high.

177. In 2015 and 2016, care was provided to 34,509 and 34,806 pregnant adolescents, respectively. As mentioned above, the situation led to the amendment of Act No. 29 of 2002 on the Health and Education of Pregnant Adolescents, the adoption of Act No. 60 of 2016 and the creation in 2018 of an inter-institutional and multidisciplinary commission that oversaw the development of thematic and teaching material for the sex education and relationships classes taken during their training by prospective teachers in State schools, as approved by the current Administration.

178. Ministry of Health statistics for the period 2012–2015 show that 10,502 pregnant adolescents received care in 2012, 10,152 in 2013, 10,735 in 2014 and 7,413 in 2015.

179. In 2016, there were 14,025 live births to mothers under the age of 20. These births accounted for 18.7 per cent of all births in 2016; births to girls under the age of 15 accounted for 0.7 per cent of all births, while those in 15–19 age group accounted for 18 per cent. The highest percentages were in the Province of Panama with 5.7 per cent, Ngobe Buglé indigenous region with 2.5 per cent, Panamá Oeste Province with 2.4 per cent and Chiriquí Province with 2.3 per cent.

180. The Government of Panama identified a number of obstacles to achieving the targets related to Millennium Development Goal 5 (improve maternal health). For this reason, priority has been given to efforts to design and take measures to ensure that the impact of public policies to improve maternal health, with special emphasis on the most vulnerable indigenous areas of the country, is felt more swiftly. The Panama National Strategic Plan for the Reduction of Maternal and Perinatal Morbidity and Mortality 2015–2020 is a scientific, programmatic and guiding instrument for the development of public policies for women.

181. The aim of Act No. 60 of 2016 is to establish a regulatory framework that guarantees the legal mechanisms for the exercise of the children's rights, including the rights of pregnant adolescents, recognized in domestic law and the international instruments signed and ratified by Panama. The Act also seeks to improve the quality of life of children and pregnant adolescents, ensure that they take full part in social development and remain in the education system and thus to contribute to the recognition of and respect for their dignity and prevent teen pregnancy.

182. The National Council on Support for Adolescent Mothers is attached to the Ministry of Social Development; it is a coordinating body that will ensure that the implementation of Act No. 60 will lead to progress. Council members were sworn in in February 2017. Since then, the Council has been working on rules of procedure, which are now ready to be submitted to the executive authorities. Four subcommissions have been set up to coordinate efforts to raise awareness of and provide oversight and training in respect of sexual health, dating violence, empowerment and other issues. These efforts have been designed to ensure that adolescent mothers have useful tools

for their lives and that of their children and to encourage the active participation of the minor father, as well as the families of both parents.

183. In 2018, with technical and financial support from the EUROsociAL+ Programme, the situation of pregnant adolescents was analysed to diagnose the roots of the problem. The analysis will inform the development of the regulations to implement the Act, thereby protecting the rights of Panamanian adolescents and ensuring that they have access to better living conditions; an inter-institutional protocol, for its part, will draw up a road map for care.

184. The Department for Protection from Abuse and Violence of the Directorate for Special Protection of Rights provides psychosocial support and coordinates with governmental and NGOs to provide support to and restore the rights of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers. In addition, preventive information sessions are held in schools to educate the adolescent population, educators and parents and/or caregivers. The issues covered relate to the prohibition of discrimination against children and adolescents.

185. In Panama, health services have been free for children under 5 years of age since 2005. In 2016, HIV and syphilis diagnostic tests and treatment were made free of charge for the entire population. Also under way is the development of primary health care and comprehensive health programmes, including the Water and Environment Programme, the Child Nutrition Programme, the 100/0 Basic Sanitation Project, plans for the reduction of maternal mortality and of child malnutrition and a policy to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.

186. In terms of improving the delivery of health services and access to them, since 2016 the Integrated Health Service Network Programme has been implemented in 12 of the 15 health regions, covering approximately 550,000 beneficiaries; the services are prioritized according to a life-course approach and include comprehensive health promotion and disease prevention services.

187. The Rural and Indigenous Water and Sanitation Programme continues to be implemented in specific indigenous and rural areas in order to increase access to and improve drinking water and sanitation services. The specific objectives are: (i) to rehabilitate, expand and build water systems and individual sanitation solutions; (ii) to contribute to the sustainability of water and sanitation systems through community development and the strengthening of rural water management boards and the indigenous regions' water and sanitation commissions; and (iii) to strengthen the Ministry of Health (in its role as supervisor and technical adviser on rural water and sanitation issues) at the central level and in regional health offices located in the Programme's target area.

XV. Economic empowerment of women

188. The Ministry of Labour's Office of Equality of Opportunities and Gender conducted an institutional study with a gender perspective that contains information current as of February 2019. That information indicates that 69 per cent of the 3,022 Ministry employees are women and that 31 per cent are men. Of the 17 posts at the head of the offices in the provinces and the regions, including the indigenous regions, 11, or 65 per cent, were filled by women and 6, or 35 per cent, were filled by men. Seventy-one per cent (111) of the posts for which the pay is more than 2,000 balboas a month are filled by women, whereas 29 per cent (45) are filled by men.

189. The Ministry of Social Development has been increasing the number of programmes it runs primarily for women beneficiaries. Since 2017, more than \$200 million a year has been disbursed in the context of the "120 at 65" programme,

the Opportunities Network Programme and the Guardian Angel Programme or by the National Secretariat for the Food and Nutrition Security Plan. “A Country Commitment”, a national pact on entrepreneurship, was signed in 2016. It is a contribution made to national development with a view to ensuring that growth is more equitable and poverty is reduced. The National Entrepreneurship Council, which has a coordinating and management role and monitors, assesses and presents the results of measures taken as part of the pact to the signers and the public at large, was set up within the framework of the pact. The aim of the 2017–2022 national policy “Panama Starts Up and Grows” is to promote a framework that, with an appropriate focus, informs the political and private steps taken in this field, aligning efforts to complete pending tasks and making it necessary to set priorities for the coming years.

190. The National Council for Economic Entrepreneurship, established in March 2018, is composed of the National Institute for Women, the Specialized University of the Americas, the University of Panama, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance and other public and private institutions. The Council has been making progress in designing strategies to help more women receive the technical and financial assistance they need to start and operate businesses of their own. In the same vein, Act No. 56 of 11 July 2017 was adopted in 2017; under this Act, more women are encouraged to contribute to the development of the country and become involved in important decisions on developing and implementing national policies. The law calls for significant efforts to reach out to and raise awareness among influential social actors and thus transform the decision-making hierarchy.

191. The Banco de Desarrollo Agropecuario, an agricultural development bank, approved the creation of the loan programme “Women in Agribusiness” on the legal basis of resolution No. 034-2018 of 14 August 2018. The aim of the resolution is to promote the participation of rural women in agricultural production. The objective of the loan programme is to promote the inclusion of rural women in the bank’s activities by offering credit facilities to enhance family development and integration into national production; rural women are the beneficiaries. The activities for which the loans are made are farming, stock raising, the establishment of agribusinesses, the acquisition of infrastructure and equipment, the marketing of agricultural and agribusiness products and aquaculture projects.

192. The Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Business Authority, established under Act No. 8 of 29 May 2000, was created as an autonomous State agency to promote the development of such businesses by implementing national stimulus policy to strengthen the sector, help create productive jobs, contribute to the economic growth of the country and ensure that national income is better distributed, including through business development programmes such as the Seed Capital Competitive Fund, the Financing Programme for Micro- and Small Companies and access to the microcredit financing fund (Microcredit Trust Panama) and the Opportunity Bank Programme. Support is provided for activities involving farming, crafts, technology, trade, creation, tourism, ecology and fisheries.

193. In accordance with resolution No. 20/DG/DDHE/2018, signed on 15 October 2018, the National Institute for Women, with its programme “You Can, Woman” (2018–2019), promotes, in a partnership with the National Vocational Training Institute for Human Development formed as part of a cooperation and technical assistance agreement, the empowerment and economic autonomy of women at the national level at the Institute’s centres and with training sessions conducted by other State institutions. In all, 718 women between the ages of 18 and 80, of whom 40 per cent are indigenous, 15 per cent are of African descent and 45 per cent are mestiza, benefited from the programme. Sixty-eight per cent of these women do not work outside the home, 30 per cent work in the informal economy and 2 per cent have paid work with social benefits. Sixty per cent of the participants have an elementary

education, 15 per cent have a middle school education, 15 per cent have a high school education, 1 per cent have a university education, 2 per cent have technical training and 7 per cent have no schooling. Women living in hard-to-reach areas have been given training in agricultural production, crafts, cosmetology and fish and seafood processing.

194. There are 125 priorities for the transformation of Panama envisaged in the Government Plan 2019–2024, which has four pillars and a star – the star is for high-quality education in values and for life.

195. The pillar “Competitive Economy that Creates Jobs” supports a comprehensive, environmentally and socially sustainable and competitive economy with clear rules of the game, revitalizing the traditional engines of economic growth and promoting the emergence of new sectors. Specific actions have been taken – for example, with regard to the Opportunity Bank Programme, which provides financing and support to entrepreneurs with an emphasis on projects.

196. The aim of the pillar “Combating Poverty and Inequality” is to provide the country with an effective and efficient system of high-quality education, based on values and for life, in which teachers are valued and professionals and skilled workers are formed and prepared for work. The leap forward, towards the realization of the country’s potential, will be made with the help of knowledge, science, technology and innovation. Education, which will be the highest priority, will be aligned with the national commitment to education. The “Change Your Life” programme promotes entrepreneurship among women and young people through the Opportunity Bank.

XVI. Rural women

197. Between 2015 and 2019, every effort was made to coordinate the steps taken by institutions and local governments with a view to making a differential impact on rural women and female survivors of domestic violence. The loan programme “Women in Agribusiness”, created by Banco de Desarrollo Agropecuario (resolution No. 034–2018 of 14 August 2018), should be mentioned again in this regard. Similarly, there is the Seed Capital Programme, aimed at promoting the participation of rural women in agricultural production within the framework of a project, known as the B.A.1 Project, for the prevention of violence against women, trafficking in persons and femicide in Central America.

198. The programme “You Can, Woman” is the result of national actions promoted by the National Institute for Women within the framework of the Regional Agenda for Rural Women, during the Panamanian presidency pro tempore of the Council of Ministers of Women’s Affairs of Central America and the Dominican Republic of the Central American Integration System. In a step forward taken in 2018, the Ministry of Agricultural Development made it possible for women to secure no-interest loans for their productive activities.

199. Since 1 July 2019, the Government and society have been implementing the action plan “Joining Forces”, which involves actions for the urgent changes that, with the help of efficient and dynamic public administration, the country needs to make. This action plan and State Vision Panama 2030, a national strategic plan for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, are aligned.

200. Similarly, the Government of Panama is developing and implementing numerous strategies, with a gender perspective, to expand social protection and social security systems, bringing into these systems women who have spent their entire lives in productive work – domestic workers, for example, rural women and women working in the informal economy.

201. The Ministry of Social Development is continuing to administer the “120 at 65” programme, as part of which means-tested older adults who are not covered by the social security system receive 120 balboas a month.

202. Similarly, the Social Security Fund and the Ministry of Labour are holding registration drives for domestic workers to guarantee and facilitate their access to social security. In addition, under the Ministry’s leadership and with the inter-institutional participation of the Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Business Authority, the Panamanian Autonomous Cooperative Institute and the National Vocational Training Institute for Human Development, makers of handicrafts and rural workers, including cooperatives and owners of small businesses, are being organized into groups to ensure that they have access to social protection.

XVII. Disadvantaged groups of women

203. Panama recognizes that there are still obstacles to the collection of descriptive data on the condition of disadvantaged groups of women and all the issues that affect them as human beings, thereby making it impossible to create effective policies designed to improve their socioeconomic circumstances.

204. The Panamanian State has therefore adopted public policies to combat discrimination and inequality in respect of age, sex, ethnicity, disability, origin and, in particular, discrimination and inequality resulting from a person’s migration, asylum and refugee or other status. The Opportunities Network Programme, for example, was created in 2008 to narrow the gap between poverty and extreme poverty in households headed by women.

205. Studies have shown that, as a result of many factors, including their socioeconomic status and cultural traditions, indigenous women do not usually attend university or, if they do, complete their studies.

206. The 2010 census shows that only a small percentage of indigenous women have university degrees. In Guna Yala, for example, only 4.5 per cent of women have a university degree, while in Emberá-Wounaan and Ngobe Buglé, the figures are 4.2 per cent and 1.5 per cent, respectively (National Statistics and Census Institute, 2010 population and housing census).

207. Since 2015, the Opportunities Network has provided support to 41,179 households, of which 6,194 are headed by indigenous women and 26,419 are headed by farm women and women of African descent.

208. The Ministry of Social Development has continued to promote citizen participation by creating the Territorial Networks Programme, which is the foundation for the development of social capital and improvements to quality of life. There is a need to move away from the welfare-based approach that informs rural policies and view the inhabitants of rural areas as agents of productive development.

209. Indigenous women’s lack of access to education increases the vulnerability of their group, depriving them, their families and their communities of opportunities for development and empowerment.

210. With regard to the quality of health services and its impact on indigenous women, life expectancy in the country ranges from 75 years for men to 80 years for women; indigenous people’s life expectancy, however, is lower. For indigenous men, average life expectancy is 68 years, whereas for women it is 73 years; in other words, life expectancy for indigenous men and women is seven years less than in non-indigenous areas.

211. In 2016, a cooperation agreement with the Specialized University of the Americas was adopted for the joint implementation of the project “My Entrepreneurial Region”, the aim of which is to promote personal development and business management. Other job-creation initiatives include the projects “Starting My Business” and “Improving My Business”.

212. The main causes of indigenous women’s lack of participation in political life should be highlighted, since such women are barely involved in internal and national decision-making. Only one woman, the general chief of the Congress of the Ngobe Buglé region, has won elective office.

213. With regard to women of African descent, Panama has the National Secretariat for the Advancement of Panamanians of African Descent, which is affiliated, pursuant to Act No. 64 of 6 December 2016, with the Ministry of Social Development. The Secretariat will be responsible for administering and implementing policies for the social inclusion of Panamanians of African descent throughout the country.

214. Although Panama has a broad regulatory framework that protects women’s rights, there are still considerable shortcomings in the generation of statistical data that make it possible to assess the situation of women of African descent, who are still at a disadvantage to other women. In 2019, with technical support and funding from United Nations Development Programme, the National Institute for Women began a study on the situation of women of African descent to obtain input for the development of intersectional public policies. As part of the study, first-hand information on the needs, problems and specific situation of women of African descent in the country will be collected.

215. The percentages of persons aged 5 and over of African descent and not of African descent who were attending an educational institution were obtained from the results of the household survey of March 2016.

216. The largest share of the population of the country as a whole that is attending an educational institution is, unlike that of the population of African descent, enrolled in elementary school or high school.

217. People of African descent who are pursuing an education are more likely to be enrolled in a high school or in an institution of higher learning; women of African descent are particularly well represented at higher academic levels. Although women in general tend to be better prepared academically than men, the gap between men and women of African descent is particularly wide.

218. Women of African descent were more likely to be economically active than other women; for every 100 economically active women, there were nearly 111 economically active women of African descent, although the gap between them and men of African descent was almost 23 percentage points in the same year.

219. In the period 2015/16, more women of African descent, 57 out of every 100, were economically active; 79 out of every 100 men of African descent were economically active in the same period.

220. The inequality in the economic participation of men and women is significant, with a gap of almost 22 percentage points to the detriment of women; however, women of African descent were more likely than other women to participate actively in the economy. For both periods, the figures were very similar. However, if the unemployment rate for women of African descent (9.3 per cent) is compared with that of other women (7.7 per cent), it can be seen that unemployment among women of African descent is higher, meaning that the percentage by which they were more likely to be economically active than other women was accounted for by unemployed women of African descent who were looking for work. The unemployment rate for

the period in question was higher for women and men of African descent than for people not of African descent, thus showing that the former group is at a disadvantage in economic activity.

221. For women of African descent and indigenous women, the inequality gap is wider than for women who report that they are neither indigenous nor of African descent.

222. For the survey period 2015/16, there are improvements; compared to the population of all women, however, the percentage of women of African descent in decision-making positions is very small (8.2 per cent and 7.9 per cent, respectively).

223. There were 13,505 direct reports of child abuse in the period 2015–2019. Although the data provided are totals not broken down by sex, girls account for 83 per cent of the victims of child abuse in Panama (National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family and the United Nations Children’s Fund, 2018 (Statistics Center, Public Legal Service/adversarial criminal justice system, the semi-inquisitorial justice system and the Offices of the Juvenile Court Prosecutors).

224. The National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family has offices in the Provinces of Panama, Panamá Oeste, Colón, Chiriquí, Veraguas, Bocas del Toro, Darién and the district of San Miguelito and maintains a list of programmes as part of which activities such as the promotion of the rights of children and adolescents are organized.

225. Other activities relate to the prevention and eradication of child labour, the prevention of sexual violence against children and adolescents and support for the victims, the protection, care and restoration of family dynamics, foster families, the unification and strengthening of families, and the oversight and monitoring of the institutions for the protection and social reintegration, with the help of social re-education, of adolescents in conflict with the law.

226. There were an estimated 770,353 women, of whom 36,585 were over the age of 60, in Panama in 2019. National Statistics and Census Institute. A large percentage of the older adult population, especially older women, depends on economic subsidies, including the programme “120 at 65”, which provides a monthly income less than the approximate price of the basic food basket or the sum needed for a decent standard of living in the country. This subsidy, which is often the only support for multiple family needs, does not cover all the living needs of older women.

227. Groups and provincial federations of older people offer some of the few opportunities for activity available to older people; there is a shortage of initiatives to help such people maintain their physical and psychosocial health. Most of the programmes involve recreational and sporting activities. There are no policies related to the rights of older adults, specifically older women. By cultural tradition, care providers are given considerable responsibility. Although there are no official statistical data broken down by sex or time periods on abuse or ill treatment of older persons, abandonment and the failure to look after family members have presumably increased.

228. The incidence of chronic illnesses in women, older women especially, is linked to cardiovascular, pulmonary diseases and cancer. Older women are more likely to get timely and appropriate treatment than older men, as culture is a protective factor for older women. In 2015, according to data from the Public Prosecution Service, 5 of the 61 victims of femicide in Panama were older women; in 2016, 3 of the 31 victims were older women.

229. The Ministry of Health has a programme, run by the Directorate General of Public Health, on the health of older adults. Its mission is to ensure the development

of technical and administrative standards, management guidelines and protocols for comprehensive health care for older people, as well as to monitor health facilities in timely fashion with a view to helping older people regain their independence and improve the quality of their lives.

230. The impact of the programme “125 at 60” on older people’s standard of living. In 2013, pursuant to Act No. 117 of December 11, the name of the programme was changed from “100 at 70” to “120 at 70”, reflecting a monthly increase of 20 balboas. In 2014, pursuant to Act No. 15 of September 1, the age of access to this programme, whose name was changed to “100 at 65”, was changed; the Act entered into force in January 2015. This payment is made to the eligible older person or, in the event that he or she is not in a position to receive it, to his or her authorized legal representative.

231. In Panama, according to the 2010 census, there are 97,165 people with disabilities, 2.9 per cent of the total population. The disability rate is slightly higher in the male population (30 per 1,000 inhabitants) than in the female population (27 per 1,000 inhabitants).

232. The highest rates of disability among women were found in Los Santos Province (45 per 1,000), the Emberá-Wounaan region (43 per 1,000) and Herrera Province (43 per 1,000). The prevalence of disability among women by sex, province and indigenous region is 199,738. In the 2010 census, physical impairment and blindness were, for both sexes, the main forms of disability. There were 24 more cases of blindness per 1,000 women with disabilities than per 1,000 men. And there were 24 more cases of mental retardation per 1,000 men with disabilities than per 1,000 women. As the data are quite similar for both sexes, it cannot be concluded that gender plays a decisive role in any particular condition.

233. Men with disabilities (71.5 per cent of whom were economically active, as opposed to 28.5 per cent of women with disabilities) were much more likely than women with disabilities to be economically active. In fact, for every employed woman with a disability, there were three employed men, even though the percentage of women who had completed high school (20.2 per cent) and university studies (14.4 per cent) was higher than that of men (14.4 per cent and 5.3 per cent, respectively). The percentage of men with disabilities with no schooling (14.4 per cent) was twice that of the percentage of women (7.2 per cent). In 2019, the Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with the National Advisory Council on Disability, launched the campaign “Let Me Be, Trust Me”, which was designed to provide women and men with special needs, particularly girls, adolescents and adult women, with greater opportunities for social inclusion, employment, education and civic participation.

234. The Guardian Angel Programme was created by Act No. 39 of June 2012 to provide economic assistance to people with severe disabilities in conditions of dependency and extreme poverty; beneficiaries receive economic support of \$80 a month, which enables them to meet their basic needs, including for food, medicine and services. Between 2014 and 2016, 38,989 people nationwide, of whom 56 per cent were men and 44 per cent were women, signed up for the Programme (Ministry of Social Development, 2016).

235. The economic support (subsidies) programme run by the National Secretariat for Disabilities supports people with disabilities with quarterly grants of 150 balboas to help defray the costs of medicine, food and transportation. The aim of this project is to bring people with disabilities and their families into the social and economic spheres in more favourable conditions. In all, 487 women with disabilities, ranging in age from less than 5 years old to more than 65 years old, benefited from the Programme in 2016. Another programme run by the National Secretariat is the Family Business Programme, which had 166 women beneficiaries in 2016. The Programme

makes it possible for people with disabilities or their families to earn income of their own and, despite the considerable expenditures on medical care and transportation their disabilities cause them to incur, to support themselves.

236. The National System of Statistics on the Population with Disabilities, whose primary objective is to establish a technical advisory committee on statistics on the population with disabilities, was created pursuant to Executive Decree No. 148 of 17 June 2015. The System will include a single platform of information on socioeconomic characteristics, access to the physical environment and means of transportation, cultural and sporting activities, access to information and communication technologies and all other information on persons with disabilities.

237. Panama has made legislative progress by adopting laws and ratifying international instruments relating to persons with disabilities; however, an understanding of the need for the real inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, with the adoption of public policies that allow more such persons to take part in public life, has yet to be arrived at.

238. Positive developments include the programmes administered by the National Secretariat and the Ministry of Social Development, but the welfare-based approach taken by those programmes must give way to an approach that helps the beneficiaries realize their productive potential. Benefits are currently received by less than 1 per cent of the population with disabilities in Panama. Persons with disabilities must be given the opportunity to participate in programmes that will enable them to empower themselves and gain a greater degree of independence, especially in cases of disabilities that do not prevent empowerment or a greater degree of independence.

XVIII. Marriage and family relations

239. In the 2010 census, households were broken down into single-person households, nuclear-family households, extended-family households and composite households; single-parent households, households made up of parents of the same sex and other households of other forms, which do not fall into any of these four categories, were not included in the statistics. Fifteen per cent of the country's households were single-person households, 51 per cent were nuclear-family households, 27 per cent were extended-family households and 0.07 per cent were composite households (National Statistics and Census Institute, 2010 population and housing census).

240. In 2010, there were 912,590 households in Panama, of which 29 per cent were headed by women and 71 per cent by men. Seventy-seven per cent of the male heads of household had wives. Only 15 per cent of the female heads of household, on the other hand, had husbands. In other words, in 85 per cent of the households headed by women, administrative and other responsibilities are borne by women. The 2011 time use survey showed that the burden of care work and household management is borne disproportionately by women. In 2019, the National Institute for Women, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, took steps to conduct a second time use survey but was prevented from doing so by the National Statistics and Census Institute because of the cost and work involved in the population census of March 2020.

241. In 23 per cent of the households headed by men, household responsibilities are borne by the man.⁴

⁴ Source: National Statistics and Census Institute.

XIX. Additional information

242. People with COVID-19, including indigenous people, have been identified in contexts relating to migration and asylum. The Ministry of Health, together with community organizers, health promotion personnel and interpreters, thus took a sector-by-sector approach to assessing the cases, identifying and isolating people with asymptomatic cases and organizing COVID tests.

243. As a result of the situation in this part of the country, the Ministry of Health hired doctors and nurses and provided medicines and supplies to treat patients diagnosed with COVID-19. Similarly, medical equipment was made available, 48 modular units and four multipurpose tents were put together and food for the people in the area was provided with the help of joint efforts by the National Border Service, the National Migration Service, local authorities, the Red Cross and the International Organization for Migration.

244. For its part, the Ministry of Public Security created an emergency commission to ensure care for migrants who are in vulnerable conditions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, promote cooperation among governmental and non-governmental partners and international agencies, mobilize resources, personnel and capacities and protect and duly assist migrants in vulnerable conditions in border, urban and rural areas.

245. The National Office of Refugee Affairs has also taken measures to guarantee the rights of applicants for refugee status and recognized refugees in the midst of the pandemic. Those measures include:

- Coordination of inter-institutional registration and documentation missions to the Guna Yala region (Puerto Obaldía and La Miel) and the Province of Darién (Yaviza, Metetí, La Palma, Piña and Jaqué) with the Electoral Tribunal and the National Migration Service and with the support of the National Border Service, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Norwegian Refugee Council
- Training and awareness-raising on international protection for officials of the National Border Service, the National Migration Service, the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family, the Ministry of Labour, the Electoral Tribunal, the Ombudsman's Office, local governments and justices of the peace in the Province of Darién and the Guna Yala indigenous region
- Suspension, starting on 19 March 2020 and continuing as long as the declaration of a state of national emergency is in force, of the deadlines for filing appeals for reconsideration of the interviews scheduled for the month of March
- Extension until 15 May of the validity of the renewable refugee status cards that expired in March
- Preparation of a list of applicants and refugees recognized by the State who, with their vulnerabilities and specific needs, are to benefit from programmes promoted by the national Government
- Processing of requests for withdrawal of applications in order to facilitate voluntary returns on humanitarian flights
- Ongoing monitoring by officials in Puerto Obaldía, Yaviza and La Palma of the refugees and asylum seekers in these remote areas
- Meetings with UNHCR and civil society organizations (RET International, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Norwegian Refugee Council and others) to

adopt a comprehensive approach to the people seeking refuge who, in the midst of the pandemic, are recognized by the Panamanian State

- Preparation of a list of applicants and refugees recognized by the Panamanian State who, with their vulnerabilities and specific needs, are to benefit from programmes promoted by the national Government
- Constant efforts to inform to civil society organizations and UNHCR of the legal provisions issued by the institutions with a stake in the management of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

246. Panama and the Ministry of the Interior's Directorate General of the Prison System have the honour to report on the measures the country has taken to address the effects of the pandemic in the places of deprivation of liberty under its jurisdiction.

247. To reduce the number of persons in places of deprivation of liberty, the country's President has granted sentence reductions to persons deprived of their liberty for ordinary offences who have served two thirds of their sentences, who have chronic illnesses, who are over 60 years of age and who may be particularly vulnerable if they contract COVID-19.

248. The technical boards of all the women's prisons have been instructed to immediately draw up lists of prisoners who are pregnant or mothers of dependent children, who meet good-behaviour requirements, have the required rehabilitation scores, comply with prison regulations and have completed two thirds of their sentences with a view to granting them conditional release.
