



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports submitted by
parties to the Convention under article 35**

List of issues in relation to the initial report of Panama

Addendum

Replies of Panama to the list of issues*, **

[Date received: 29 May 2017]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annexes to the present document are available for consultation in the files of the Secretariat.

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A. Purpose and general obligations (arts. 1 to 4)

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues (CRPD/C/PAN/Q/1)

1. The Government of Panama implements the National Disability Policy through strategic plans that are produced during each presidential term, with an approach that promotes inter-institutional and cross-sectoral collaboration and coordinated actions.
2. The Policy focuses on three strategic areas: promotion and prevention, equal opportunities, and habilitation and rehabilitation.
3. The National Secretariat for Disabilities is responsible for the National Strategic Plan 2015-2019, which was developed with the participation of civil society, but does not have sufficient financial, material or human resources for its full implementation.
4. The National Strategic Plan was developed taking into account the guidelines established in the National Disability Policy and is structured around issues that link both instruments. The strategic priorities outlined in the Plan are framed by the ethical and operational principles established in the Policy and its action lines reflect the ongoing relevance of the approach taken in the Policy.

Allocation of resources

5. The operations and investment budget allocated to the National Secretariat for Disabilities in 2014 stood at 7,099,210 balboas; for 2017, the figure was 7,363,000 balboas; for 2016, 8,941,000 balboas and for 2017, 9,219,000 balboas.
6. The Secretariat maintains ongoing communication with the Equal Opportunity Offices established in government entities and with the liaison officers appointed by each institution to work on disability issues.
7. The Equal Opportunity Offices work internally to mainstream the principles of social inclusion in the various units of the institutions to which they are attached. They also work externally in coordination with the National Secretariat for Disabilities and the National Disability Council.
8. Equal Opportunity Offices prepare an annual operating plan and an operating and investment budget, which must in turn be reflected in the annual budget of the institution.

Monitoring

9. A monitoring and follow-up mechanism, adopted in 2016 after consultation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of and for persons with disabilities, is used to measure compliance with the actions set out in the National Strategic Plan 2015-2019.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 2 of the list of issues

10. NGOs of and for persons with disabilities are represented on the Board of Directors of the National Secretariat for Disabilities, which is the senior institutional decision-making body. Moreover, they take part in decision-making as members of the National Advisory Council on Disability, which is the advisory and support body responsible for disability-related issues (arts. 5 and 19, Act No. 23 of 28 June 2007).
11. The existing mechanism for consultations with NGOs of and for persons with disabilities depends on the nature of the issue at hand and takes the form of meetings on specific topics, workshops to facilitate the process of gathering input, and written queries, usually concerning specific issues.
12. To ensure the continued participation of civil society in public policymaking through a formal consultation mechanism, the process of developing guidelines for the participation of NGOs of and for persons with disabilities with the National Secretariat for Disabilities was launched in 2016.

13. Civil society was involved in this process, which concluded on 1 November 2016. The document is currently the subject of consultations with the Board of Directors of the National Secretariat for Disabilities, including the representatives of organizations of and for persons with disabilities who are members of the Board (annex 1).

14. The preparation of guidelines was requested by the President of Inclusión Panamá, an organization of parents of persons with disabilities that is represented on the Board of Directors. The guidelines were drafted by the Secretariat and then sent to all NGOs for consultation.

15. Civil society has been represented in the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities of the Organization of American States since 2014.

B. Specific rights (arts. 5-30)

Equality and non-discrimination, reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

16. Act No. 15 of 31 May 2016, whose article 10 concerns non-discrimination on the basis of disability, has come into effect to ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy the rights conferred by the Constitution and by law (annex 2).

17. The reforms introduced under the Act are consistent with the guiding principles recognized by the Convention and by Act No. 25 of 10 July 2007, article 1.

18. Decision No. 108-2016 of 14 July 2016, reaffirming and calling for the use of the term “persons with disabilities”, was adopted with a view to harmonizing and standardizing the use of this term in the public and private sectors and in the media, in accordance with the international instruments relating to the rights of persons with disabilities (annex 3).

19. Since 2017, pursuant to Decision No. 42-2017 of 27 March 2017, complaints have been compiled in a systematic manner through the use of a form for submitting complaints of possible violations of the rules relating to disability (annex 4).

Women with disabilities (art. 6), reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues

20. A national plan for the implementation of the public policy for equal opportunities for women was officially launched in 2016; it contains priority actions, with defined responsibilities, initiatives and time frames. Area 5 on diversity and Strategic Guideline 3 promote non-discrimination, equal opportunities and the comprehensive development of women with disabilities.

21. The Fami-Empresa Project promotes programmes for the empowerment of women with disabilities, including through access to credit, training, employment and other benefits. A total of 158 women benefited from the Project between 2014 and 2017.

Children with disabilities (art. 7), reply to paragraph 5 of the list of issues

22. The National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family is responsible for taking protection measures in cases where the victim may be considered at risk. The children’s and adolescents’ judge performs oversight in order to restore the rights that have been violated and may cancel any measures that have been adopted if it is confirmed that the threat of a rights violation no longer exists.

23. Activities undertaken include making support programmes available for victims and their families, providing psychosocial care and assistance, encouraging reporting of cases of suspected sexual violence, and placing children in safe settings.

24. The State provides services continuously at Counselling and Comprehensive Care Centres throughout the country. These Centres function as one-stop social offices serving priority population groups, including persons with disabilities.

25. As well as providing counselling and care services, the Centres deliver mobile health-care services to priority and at-risk population groups, operate the “Tu Línea 147”

free hotline and provide for home visits by social workers, psychologists, gerontologists and lawyers.

26. Since 2013, different mechanisms and protocols have been used to guarantee the adequate protection of child and adolescent victims and to facilitate and guide the actions of the entities involved in their protection.

27. These include the Protocol for the Comprehensive Care of Child and Adolescent Victims of Sexual Violence, a Protocol on Assistance for Underage Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and the Inter-Agency Road Map and Protocol for the Care of Child and Adolescent Victims of Ill-Treatment.

28. The Government has also introduced a protocol for the care of children deprived of parental support in shelters and a procedural manual for the care of children and adolescents in need of special protection.

29. The ongoing “Knowing my Rights and Responsibilities” programme aims to empower children and adolescents to assert their rights and to prevent abuse.

30. Training is provided to highlight the importance of reporting cases of violence, abuse and ill-treatment against any child or adolescent. Coordination has been improved to expedite responses to cases and professionals working with children and adolescents have been made aware of the importance of proper care for victims in order to prevent revictimization.

Measures to prevent the abandonment, neglect and institutionalization of children with disabilities

31. Special focus has been placed on programmes geared towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities to help them overcome conditions of poverty and extreme poverty that may lead to abandonment, neglect or institutionalization.

32. Between 2014 and April 2017, targeted programmes for the inclusion of persons with disabilities allocated the sum of 850,356.67 balboas to 959 boys and 738 girls.

33. The Disability Revolving Fund ensures that persons with disabilities receive any technical assistance that they may require, while promoting their autonomy by eliminating the barriers that limit their activities and participation in the home, in the community and in society in general. Between 2014 and April 2017, the sum of 174,587.63 balboas was allocated for technical assistance for 59 boys aged 15 years and under, and 124,750.32 balboas was allocated to 45 girls in the same age group.

34. Persons with disabilities living in poverty are provided with a quarterly allowance of 150 balboas to help them cover their priority health and education costs.

35. The “Guardian Angel” programme helps to ensure that the minimum requirements of persons with severe disabilities are covered and to prevent abandonment, neglect or institutionalization, due to a lack of economic resources in the household. Between 2014 and 2016, the Programme assisted an estimated 3,916 children and adolescents.

Awareness-raising (art. 8), reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues

36. Various activities are being coordinated to raise social awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities. These include ongoing campaigns and activities and forums for discussion and capacity-building.

37. The National Secretariat for Disabilities promotes these activities in keeping with the National Disability Policy.

38. In recent years, some notable initiatives have been carried out by public bodies and businesses to raise awareness among their staff about the rights and the care of persons with disabilities.

39. In 2016, the national “#SomosIguales” campaign was launched with the objective of promoting a society that is aware of and recognizes the universal values and principles of respect for diversity.

40. The ongoing awareness programme “My Friends and Me”, aimed at primary school pupils from the first to sixth grades, was established to provide guidance for the educational community on the treatment of persons with disabilities, focusing on inclusive education. Eighteen sessions were held nationally during 2016, benefiting 1,516 teachers and students.
41. The Convention has been translated into the Ngäbere language, with the aim of providing access to information for indigenous persons with disabilities, their families and the general public.
42. The Public Prosecution Service has introduced a training manual for its officials on the subject of disability, from a prosecution perspective.
43. Since 2014, staff taking up positions in the Public Prosecution Service must complete an induction on the Charter of Rights of Persons Brought to Justice in the Public Prosecution Service of Panama so that they understand the rights of users, including persons with disabilities, and are aware of how they should be treated.
44. The training courses previously provided to health professionals and justice officials have been extended to local government institutions.
45. An awareness-raising and training programme has been carried out for personnel at Tocumen International Airport, including training in sign language to ensure access to information for hard-of-hearing persons. During 2016, 18 courses were delivered to 417 participants.
46. The “#SomosIguales” campaign was implemented with the direct involvement and leadership of persons with disabilities, including men and women with intellectual, physical, visual and hearing impairments.
47. Annex 5 details the main training and awareness-raising activities carried out.

Accessibility (art. 9), reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues

48. Pursuant to Municipal Decree No. 11-2016 of 18 April 2016, the Technical Advisory Committee on Universal Accessibility was established within the Projects and Construction Department of the Mayor’s Office of Panama City. It is an inter-agency team that benefits from the active involvement of NGOs of persons with disabilities and parents.
49. The Fire Brigade of Panama checks compliance with regulations when carrying out inspections of public and private buildings throughout the country, in accordance with a technical cooperation, mutual assistance and education agreement signed by the Fire Brigade of Panama and the National Secretariat for Disabilities.
50. The third Conference on Accessible Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean will be held by October 2017 and will be overseen by the National Secretariat for Disabilities. It will provide a platform for promoting the right of persons with disabilities to access the physical, economic, social and cultural environment.
51. The Government of Panama approved the inclusion of accessible tourism as the subject of a standard under development by Technical Committee 228 of the International Organization for Standardization, with specific reference to tourism and related services.
52. Progress is being made on the new edition of an accessibility manual, which will contain an updated description of national regulations on accessibility in the sphere of urban planning and architecture; it is intended for architects, engineers and others.
53. Since 2014, the new headquarters of the Electoral Court has been accessible to visitors with disabilities who come to the facility to carry out procedures relating to identity cards, certificates and registrations of births and other vital events.
54. The Panama Metro public transport system, which opened in April 2014, has 14 stations that are accessible to persons with disabilities.
55. The National Secretariat for Disabilities provides technical advisory and follow-up services concerning the accessibility of State projects including the Panama Metro, the Roofs of Hope Programme, the urban renewal of Colón and the construction of social housing in Arraiján.

Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies (art. 11), reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues

56. In 2014, the National Secretariat for Disabilities established the Emergency Safety Plan for Persons with Disabilities and disseminated it nationally through awareness-raising workshops, the media and social networks, so that the public knows what to do before, during and after an emergency.

57. A disaster risk prevention and management programme is in place and involves the participation of teams of volunteers from various government entities.

58. The National Strategic Plan 2015-2019 includes risk management as an issue to be addressed by all institutions represented on the National Advisory Council on Disability and establishes action lines for its development and implementation.

59. In 2016, a mutual technical assistance and cooperation agreement was signed between the Ministry of Interior and Justice, represented by the National Civil Defence System, and the National Secretariat for Disabilities for the development of an emergency safety plan for persons with disabilities.

60. A road map for the protection and care of persons with disabilities exists within the framework of comprehensive risk, emergency and disaster management by the National Secretariat for Disabilities and the National Civil Defence System, which was developed with consultation and input from the National Federation of Persons with Disabilities and Inclusión Panamá, which are members of the national platform for comprehensive disaster risk management of the National Civil Defence System.

Equal recognition before the law (art. 12), reply to paragraph 9 of the list of issues

61. Article 1 of Act No. 15 of 31 May 2016, amending Act No. 42 of 1999, recognizes the legal capacity of persons with disabilities, which was not previously contemplated in domestic legislation.

62. Through the Working Group on Legal Capacity of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities of the Organization of American States, Panama is helping to prepare a regional analysis of legal capacity and a handbook on support and safeguards for the exercise of legal capacity by persons with disabilities.

Access to justice (art. 13), reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues

63. From June 2014 to April 2017, the National Secretariat for Disabilities provided sign language interpretation for court cases on 56 occasions nationwide.

64. The 2017 budget of the judiciary included an allocation for the installation of accessibility features in the buildings of the justice system, including the adaptation of electronic computer terminals at Single Record of Entry offices and the introduction of JAWS software.

Liberty and security of the person (art. 14), response to paragraph 11 of the list of issues

65. Further to Decision No. 16 of 13 February 2005, the Directorate of Prison Assistance and Coordination was created to guarantee the human rights of persons deprived of their liberty by order of the Public Prosecution Service.

66. The communications of persons deprived of their liberty are handled by the precautionary measures unit of the Public Prosecution Service, in coordination with the prison system. Any request received by our institution is communicated to those entities and to the office of the prosecutor responsible for the case.

67. In 2016, amendments were made and articles added to Act No. 55 of 2003, reorganizing the prison system. These provisions recommended the establishment of appropriate facilities to accommodate prisoners with physical, intellectual or sensory impairments, and measures were adopted accordingly (arts. 1-4).

68. The Charter of Rights of Persons Brought to Justice in the Public Prosecution Service of Panama, under section 5, on persons with disabilities, establishes the right to the least onerous appearance possible, to appropriate facilities, to preferential treatment and to assistance by an interpreter and by means facilitating communication (arts. 50-54).

69. The Public Prosecution Service is currently working on variables and indicators by which it can compile information and produce accurate statistical reports. It participates in the Technical Advisory Committee on Statistics on Persons with Disabilities to that end.

Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 15), reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues

70. The Government has created the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment under Act No. 6 of 22 February 2017, in conformity with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. The implementing regulations of the Act are currently being drawn up.

71. The definition of places of deprivation of liberty provided in article 4 (2) of the Act covers locations in which persons with disabilities are imprisoned, meaning that they can be visited by the National Mechanism in the performance of its functions.

Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse (art. 16), reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues

72. Measures are provided, under both substantive and auxiliary criminal legislation, to protect victims against ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation. Victims may include minors, without distinction, meaning that measures may be applied equally to minors with disabilities.

73. During investigations, rules relating to the protection measures set forth in the Code of Criminal Procedure, Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001 and Act No. 31 of 28 May 1998 (art. 2 (3)) are applied to grant victims protection status —vis-à-vis aggressors— for the duration of proceedings.

74. Protection measures may include ordering the eviction of alleged aggressors, suspending their custody and upbringing of children, ordering interim maintenance payments, providing special police protection for victims and other measures permitted by law (arts. 331 and 333 of the Code of Criminal Procedure).

75. The National Migration Service and the National Directorate of Passports are responsible for preventing the unauthorized departure of minors in order to combat trafficking in minors, transnational abductions and other criminal acts (art. 331 of the Code of Criminal Procedure).

76. When persons with hearing and speech impairments are called upon to testify in court, the judge will appoint an interpreter (art. 951 of the Judicial Code and art. 838 of the Labour Code). This assistance is coordinated between the judiciary and the National Secretariat for Disabilities, which provides certified interpreters.

77. In family proceedings, any minor who may not be understood as result of his or her disability has the right to give statements through a translator, interpreter or other specialist (article 489 (12) of the Family Code).

78. The Public Prosecution Service has a victim protection and care unit, consisting in an interdisciplinary team that offers legal, psychological and social assistance to crime victims and witnesses.

79. The officials of the Public Prosecution Service are trained in the handling of persons with disabilities, so that if they require an interpreter or special equipment — such as a wheelchair or stretcher — these can be provided in order to facilitate proceedings.

80. Under Act No. 79 of 2011 on trafficking in persons and related activities, measures were put in place to prevent victimization and revictimization and to protect and assist the victims and potential victims of human trafficking, including persons with disabilities.

81. The obligation of the State to protect persons with disabilities from any form of exploitation, violence or abuse was established under article 9 of Act No. 15 of 31 May 2016.

Shelters

82. The National Institute for Women administers and provides technical assistance to three shelters (two providing long-term and one short-term accommodation), which were established to protect women victims of domestic violence whose lives are in danger and their children up to the age of 14 years.

83. Shelters provide psychological, legal and social assistance, including direct support in trial proceedings. To date, shelters have accommodated hard-of-hearing women and women with physical and mild intellectual impairments. One shelter offers wheelchair accessibility and an adapted ground-floor room.

84. In 2015, national geographical coverage was achieved thanks to the establishment of 14 comprehensive care centres for women, 2 of which are in indigenous regions.

85. At these centres, women whose rights have been violated receive psychological care and legal and social assistance. The staff of the National Institute for Women have been trained in the use of sign language so as to provide better care for women with disabilities.

86. On 20 April 2017, the implementing regulations of Act No. 82 of 2013 on violence against women were approved, marking a new development in public policy for the prevention of various forms of violence against women in Panama.

87. The National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family adopts protection measures aimed at under-age victims of sexual violence and minors in situations of risk. It develops inter-institutional individualized care plans which contain follow-up time frames, relevant reports and evaluation sheets for the minor victim and/or his or her family members, which describe the care provided by this institution.

88. There are currently 58 protection institutions (shelters) in Panama, of which 18 receive minors with disabilities and only 1 provides care exclusively for minors with disabilities.

89. According to the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family, 161 children with disabilities — 76 girls and 85 boys — were admitted to protection institutions throughout the country in 2016 (annex 6, statistics on shelters).

Living independently and being included in the community (art. 19), reply to paragraph 14 of the list of issues

90. The regional directorates of the National Secretariat for Disabilities coordinate with their counterparts from other institutions and with local authorities so that the social inclusion of persons with disabilities is mainstreamed through provincial disability councils, which in turn carry out actions, programmes and projects at the provincial level.

91. The National Office of Comprehensive Health Care for Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Health manages disability care and equal opportunities projects and programmes and continuously promotes social integration activities.

92. Services are provided at the local level through various health facilities.

93. The Technical Aids Bank Project loans wheelchairs, crutches, canes and walking frames for those in the community who require them owing to illness or injury.

94. The Fire Brigade of Panama has installed Braille signage at its main facilities to enhance the movement of and communication with persons with visual impairments carrying out formalities on its premises. These facilities, located in 11 regional areas of the country, also have libraries containing specialized material on disability.

Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information (art. 21), reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues

95. Under Act No. 9 of 12 April 2016, Panama adopted the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled.

96. In 2016, the National Civil Defence System in cooperation with the National Secretariat for Disabilities introduced sign language interpreting in televised communications relating to hazards and disasters, thus ensuring access to information for persons with hearing difficulties.

97. The National Policy on Science, Technology and Innovation and the National Plan 2015-2019 were adopted under Decision No. 29 of 17 March 2015 with the aim of using science, research, innovation and technology to achieve sustainable development, social inclusion and competitiveness, among other goals.

98. Work is being undertaken with the National Secretariat of Science and Technology and the National Authority for Government Innovation to coordinate and implement various projects that facilitate access to information and the participation of persons with disabilities:

- The SOLCA learning-by-doing workshop on free and open-source software for persons with disabilities and technicians, which makes it possible for participants to work independently in the labour, educational and social sectors.
- The Ágora Panamá Project, which resulted in the Digital Resource Programme for Persons with Visual Disabilities as a framework for conducting and intensifying activities such as national courses on assistive technologies to improve functioning and quality of life.
- The release of Educational Software for Dyslexia (SEDI version 1.0), which was developed for the re-education of children with learning difficulties, reaching 1,200 children and 500 teachers thanks to an investment of 29,953 balboas.
- The incorporation of information and communications technology into inclusive education through the communication and learning software “Hablando con Julis”, which aims to remove communication and learning barriers in school, in the family and in society. Seventy-five children, from preschool to the ninth grade, have benefited and 15 teachers have been trained thanks to an investment of 10,000 balboas.
- The development by the Technology Foundation of Panama of a prototype system, based on electronic assistive technologies, for the mobility of persons with visual impairments on public transport in Panamanian cities, with an investment of 64,794.45 balboas.
- The ongoing project for the development of a smart system incorporating a brain-computer interface to provide support for persons with reduced mobility, with 98,406 balboas invested.

Sign language

99. The Specialized University of the Americas teaches a degree course in Panamanian sign language interpreting and translation, to train professionals in this field and to promote the right of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons to information and communication.

Forums that facilitate participation, access to information and the Internet

100. In Metropolitan Natural Park in Panama City, an interpretive trail was created for persons with disabilities and the general public. The initiative was part of an environmental education programme with a budget of 30,000 balboas and approximately 3,000 beneficiaries.

101. The Digital Learning Objects Portal is a project for children that aims to create innovative learning opportunities to help them take part in academic and day-to-day activities; the sum of 49,348.53 balboas was invested in the project.

102. The national Internet network provides free Internet service for all citizens. It can be accessed from public locations, including outdoor spaces, via Wi-Fi.

103. There are 10 accessible Infoplazas, which are community centres that provide access to information and the Internet.

Television and radio programmes

104. The State Radio and Television System (SERTV) broadcasts the radio programme “Know Me without Limits” every day from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. on its Crisol FM station. The aim of the programme is to inform the general public about various issues related to disability. Sign language interpreting is included in television news programmes broadcast from Monday to Friday.

105. The Panamanian Institute for Special Training has a radio programme devoted to raising citizen awareness on disability issues. The programme is broadcast twice a month, from 1.30 p.m. to 2 p.m., on Radio Nacional FM.

106. In March and April 2017, the opening of the Special Olympics Latin American Games was scheduled and broadcast live as part of a sponsorship arrangement. The cost of the programming was 103,546 balboas. Similarly, the Oír es Vivir Foundation presented radio slots at a cost of 4,710 balboas.

Respect for home and the family (art. 23), reply to paragraph 16 of the list of issues

107. In 2015, the Ministry of Health updated the technical and administrative rules and the care protocols of its sexual and reproductive health programme to improve and promote prevention, protection and health recovery for the development of women, their partners and their unborn and newborn children, and for the welfare of the family in general.

108. During the period 2014-2015, antenatal checks were provided for 120,505 women, 330,468 women underwent Pap tests, 223,899 accessed family planning services and 69,597 received pregnancy care. These are overall statistics, since data are not disaggregated on the basis of disability.

Education (art. 24), reply to paragraph 17 of the list of issues

109. As part of its strategic plan, the Ministry of Education aims to establish a national committee for dialogue on education for all, with the participation of government institutions, NGOs, teachers’ associations, civil society and parents’ and students’ representatives.

110. A study of inclusive schools in Panama was produced in 2014, drawing on the perspectives of teachers, families, students and administrators in view of the need for verified data to support investment strategies and analyse the situation of the schools that participate in the Inclusive Education Programme.

111. The Ministry of Education, together with special education teachers and professionals from the Education Support Service, compiles quarterly data on assistance, assessment and support services for persons with special educational needs, regardless of whether these are associated with disability, to reduce barriers to learning and participation.

112. Panama is a member of the Ibero-American Intergovernmental Cooperation Network for the Education of People with Special Educational Needs. As such, the Government has reviewed education policies, the organization of schools and teachers’ work methodologies, which together form the means of achieving the objectives set out in the Convention.

113. It is estimated that between 2015 and 2017, the Panamanian Institute for Special Training placed more than 3,000 children from extremely poor and remote areas in the education system. It also increased the number of special education teachers to 1,008, with

opportunities to teach at 388 education centres in townships with a primary and secondary school student population of 15,323.

Accessibility

114. Panama participates in the Meso-American Cooperation Programme which allows head teachers to view the criteria needed for their school to be classed as inclusive, using an online tool to assess the accessibility of school buildings.

115. Schools can use this platform to review available human resources, teaching materials and infrastructure and, based on the resulting assessment, enhance their education planning. Training sessions have been held for grade teachers, special education teachers, head teachers, supervisors, technical staff, parents and students.

116. Hospital and home teaching plans and programmes are implemented under an agreement with the José Domingo de Obaldía Hospital and a resource centre is provided for persons with visual impairments.

Accessible information and communications technology

117. The Ministry of Education purchased, installed and provided training in the use of information and communications technology at 85 centres.

118. It commissioned the translation of books in Braille, the production of large print and audio books and the development of the “Hablando con Julis” software for students with disabilities.

Special education teachers and technical staff

119. Special education teachers and interdisciplinary technical staff have been appointed to provide students with the support necessary for overcoming barriers to learning and participation at school, in accordance with their obligations under the Education Act.

120. Special education teachers and grade teachers work together to support students by providing reasonable accommodation and thus ensuring that learning and participation objectives are met.

Student support

121. A cooperation and technical assistance agreement was signed with the Valórate Foundation to ensure equal opportunities for pupils with attention deficit disorder and to prevent school failure and abandonment.

122. A cooperation and technical assistance agreement was signed by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the National Secretariat for Disabilities and the Panamanian Institute for Special Training, with the goal of establishing a centre to provide good quality comprehensive education for persons with autism and other conditions.

123. Joint actions are undertaken with the Luz del Ciego Trust to ensure equal educational opportunities and improvements in everyday functioning for persons with visual impairments. These efforts seek to achieve well-being and development and to contribute to the prevention of visual impairment.

124. Through its programme for the primary prevention of visual disability, the Trust directly provides training and guidance for head teachers, teachers and sixth-grade students, as well as other staff in mainstream schools, on measures for the prevention of visual problems.

Teacher training

125. The Specialized University of the Americas offers a degree in learning difficulties and runs the “Path to Quality” programme for the prevention of educational special needs; the programme specifically aims to develop prevention and/or educational psychology programmes for children with low academic performance in mainstream schools. The University also has academic programmes catering for students with disabilities in rural

areas, as well as degree courses in psychology, speech and language therapy, rehabilitation counselling, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

126. The University has a Reference Centre for Early Child Development, a training institution which is in its initial phase of implementation and which will consider the topic of inclusion as part of its research, outreach and teaching.

127. Workshops are held to enhance the teaching of biological sciences and science teachers in the provinces of Panamá and Chiriquí have been trained to deal with persons with Asperger's syndrome.

128. In 2014, the National Secretariat for Disabilities and the University of Panama launched a postgraduate specialization in universal accessibility, with emphasis on the physical environment and communication and information; 23 students have graduated from this programme. Another 20 students enrolled in a new Master's degree in universal accessibility, which was launched in April 2014.

129. Schoolteachers, together with the professors of the University's education faculty are trained in an array of subjects relating to the inclusive process. Postgraduate specialization and diploma courses have also been developed to complement standard teacher training.

Health (art. 25), reply to paragraph 18 of the list of issues

130. Executive Decree No. 1458 of 6 November 2012 regulates the application of Act No. 68 of 20 November 2003, which governs the rights and obligations of patients regarding information and free and informed choice;

131. These regulations establish the right of patients to have access to information, the right to autonomy and the right to informed consent.

132. Concerning the right to information, it is stipulated that all public and private health centres and facilities must display, in a visible place, legible information about the services that they provide. They are also required to provide the same information in Braille.

133. To ensure access to information for hard-of-hearing persons, annual courses in sign language are taught to health personnel.

134. A disability handbook is used to disseminate information to the general public and to the relatives of persons with disabilities in relation to access to health and other rights available to them to facilitate living with others in society.

Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues

135. The Ministry of Health has developed a tool for the measurement of universal accessibility in its health facilities.

136. A national census programme for detecting and preventing disease is being carried out, with primary care provided at various health centres. Several health centres also provide early learning programmes.

137. Rehabilitation services are provided at Reintegra facilities, Ministry of Health Innovative Primary Health-Care Centres (MINSA-CAPSI) and health centres and hospitals throughout the country to support persons with disabilities.

138. A national course on the Bobath concept was implemented for Ministry of Health physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists working at Reintegra centres. Health professionals throughout the country were trained on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health.

139. A telemedicine (virtual rehabilitation) programme was implemented by the Reintegra centres of Penonomé, Santiago and Los Santos in conjunction with the National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute. The Institute has a gait laboratory and robotics programme and a TheraSuit programme, and also offers continuous training related to the prescription of assistive technologies and wheelchairs.

140. In 2015, the Social Security Fund established that persons with disabilities should be given priority care in its facilities. Facilities were assessed and plans were drawn up to upgrade them: the improvements are currently at 75 per cent of completion.

141. The Interdisciplinary Centre for Education and Health Assistance and Research at the Specialized University of the Americas caters for children and adults with disabilities and provides rehabilitation, eye examinations, audiometry, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and other services.

142. The Centre of Excellence in Occupational Safety and Health seeks to provide individualized care for workers with permanent or temporary disabilities by creating a working environment and conditions that allow them to work to the best of their ability.

Work and employment (art. 27), reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues

143. The Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development conducts employment programmes and projects such as: the “My First Job” programme, the Labour Market Integration Support Programme, the National Employment Service, the Vocational Guidance Programme, the “Panama Pro-Youth” programme, the Seed Capital Programme and the Business Training Programme.

144. Legislative measures have been taken to ensure protection against discrimination in all stages and forms of employment and to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work in accordance with Executive Decree No. 293 of 22 December 2015, which is reviewed every two years.

145. Work is proceeding on a protocol to make use of the funds raised from fines imposed on companies that refuse to hire persons with disabilities.

146. The Ágora Panamá Project promotes the labour market integration of persons with visual impairments by identifying potential beneficiaries and offering them career guidance and free training on labour issues through the National Human Development Institute.

147. In the period between 2015 and May 2017, 142 persons with visual impairments entered the labour market.

148. The Ministry of Trade and Industry provides accreditation for artisans with disabilities, grants them a 7 per cent discount on the purchase of raw materials and facilitates their participation in craft fairs.

149. The Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Authority promotes the Seed Capital Programme and the Business Training Programme to promote the entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities.

Adequate standard of living and social protection (art. 28), reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues

150. The State administers social programmes aimed at poverty eradication and the social inclusion of vulnerable populations, targeting indigenous and rural areas and covering persons with disabilities in these areas. The most important are described in the paragraphs below.

151. Opportunity Network is a socially sensitive programme that aims to help families living in poverty and extreme poverty to access the national system of health and education services through family support and a conditional cash transfer of 100 balboas.

152. “120 at 65” is a programme consisting in the transfer of 120 balboas per month to Panamanian citizens aged 65 years and over who do not receive a retirement pension and who face conditions of social risk, vulnerability, marginalization or poverty.

153. The “Guardian Angel” programme, established under Act No. 39 of 14 June 2012, grants allowances of 80 balboas per month for persons with severe disabilities in conditions of dependency and extreme poverty.

154. The Fami-Empresa Project seeks to inform, prepare and promote the creation of small family businesses in the agricultural, commercial and services sectors and is aimed at

persons with disabilities and their families living in rural, marginal urban and remote areas. The Project aims to strengthen families, securing their integration in the country's production system and improving their quality of life. From 2014 to April 2017, Fami-Empresa channelled seed capital totalling 975,141.21 balboas to 1,068 families.

155. The Disability Revolving Fund allocates and administers funding for the procurement and provision of technical assistance for persons with disabilities, in accordance with their needs and requests.

156. This funding, which may be full or partial, allows for the provision of assistive devices and/or technical aids for persons with disabilities, in order to improve their ability to function.

157. From 2014 to April 2017, funding provided for technical assistance stood at 174,587.63 balboas for 59 boys and 124,750.32 balboas for 45 girls, in the 0-15 years age group. A total of 232 persons aged 16 years and over benefited from funding in the amount of 785,605.53 balboas, taking the overall number of beneficiaries to 336, and total funding to 1,084,943.48 balboas.

158. From 2014 to April 2017, economic subsidies totalling 102,450 balboas were granted to 683 boys, with 75,150 balboas granted to 501 girls, again in the 0-15 years age group. Subsidies for the 1,837 beneficiaries aged 16 years and over totalled 274,050 balboas. The overall number of beneficiaries was therefore 3,021, with a total of 451,650 balboas allocated.

159. The programmes of the National Charity Lottery offer technical assistance, furniture, household equipment and funding for persons with disabilities. From January 2014 to December 2016, support was provided to 868 persons (495 women and 373 men), with an estimated value of 557,370.26 balboas.

160. A community-based development strategy is being implemented at Hato Pilón in the district of Mironó, Ngobe-Bugle region. The overall objective is to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the township of Hato Pilón through the various programmes offered by the State for the self-sustainable development of communities, including access to the services and training opportunities for socioeconomic development that are offered to non-disabled persons.

161. The strategy led to the drafting of 34 social reports and the assessment of 126 students in the area of occupational therapy; in addition, physiotherapy needs were detected in 42 children and developmental problems were identified in 28 children.

162. Audiometry tests detected 50 children with hearing problems ranging from plugged ears to ear infections, and 7 children with hearing loss. Eye examinations were administered to 136 students and adults, with 21 persons found to have significant sight loss.

163. In 2014, an agreement was signed by the Electoral Court and the National Civil Registry Office of Colombia with the aim of ensuring that children born in Panama to Colombian migrants are registered, even where their parents' migration status is irregular. Having the names and identities of these individuals recognized by the State results in better access to health care and education.

Participation in political and public life (art. 29), reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues

164. Further to amending Act No. 15 of 31 May 2016, the Electoral Court must take the necessary steps to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to freely exercise their right to vote, through the adaptation of polling stations.

165. Under the "Check Your Status" programme, persons with disabilities can register to vote at an accessible polling station.

166. The Electoral Court implements the Mobile Chamber Programme for persons with disabilities. This consists in an accessible home service for residence and certification procedures, including the registration of marriages and other vital events.

167. The Court also utilizes indicators that measure the full enjoyment of the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life. It does not place restrictions on voting in elections or standing for elected office.

168. The Office of the Electoral Prosecutor refers electoral offences to the electoral courts, including offences against the freedom, integrity or effectiveness of suffrage and offences against the administration of electoral justice, which may be reported by any person, with or without disabilities.

Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport (art. 30), reply to paragraph 23 of the list of issues

Sport and culture

169. The Panama Sports Institute is engaged in ongoing activities to promote the participation in sport of persons with disabilities.

170. From 20 to 28 April 2017, Panama hosted the third Special Olympics Latin American Games with the participation of more than 800 athletes and 200 trainers from Latin America. The Games promote the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in sporting activities.

171. The Panamanian Institute for Special Training is carrying out a music therapy project. It is also the home of the “Resilience” choir and is supporting a student orchestra as an innovative proposal to meet students’ specific needs through the playing of musical instruments.

172. The first Adaptive Games were held in 2015, giving students with intellectual impairments the chance to participate in sporting activities.

173. The “Art is Inclusive” project aims to foster in students awareness of the right to inclusive education, as well as a sense of belonging, self-esteem and motivation, with activities including art, painting, theatre, dance, choreography and public speaking. The project is implemented at the national and regional levels with the participation of all students.

Recreation

174. In early 2017, the refurbished social, cultural, sport and family recreation site at Amador Causeway reopened after refurbishment; it now has facilities that enable the access and movement of persons with disabilities.

175. A number of construction projects that include or comply with accessibility features have been completed or are in progress. Examples include the Amador Convention Centre (under construction) and the Panama-Costa Rica border station at Paso Canoas. The projects planned for Taboga Island will include adapted areas for persons with disabilities.

176. The historic monument complex of Panamá Viejo and the San Carlos Turiscentro resort have facilities for the access and movement of persons with disabilities.

Tourism

177. Tocumen International Airport is upgrading its infrastructure to make it more accessible for passengers.

178. The Investment Directorate of the Tourism Authority of Panama receives applications to provide tourism services. The Directorate checks that the proposal meets the accessibility requirements provided for by law; and in the case of accommodation providers, that they have the required number of rooms for persons with disabilities.

179. For the purposes of registration under Act No. 80, which promotes tourism investment and development, projects must fully comply with the concept of universal accessibility at the time of their assessment. Five technicians, who have received theoretical and practical training on universal accessibility, are responsible for the inspection of tourism businesses that provide accommodation to the public.

180. Awareness-raising initiatives are being implemented in the private sector with a view to developing the range of tourism services aimed at persons with disabilities, as well as among persons with disabilities themselves, so that they are aware of the available options.

181. Efforts are being undertaken in coordination with the National Secretariat for Disabilities to adapt tourism-related promotional videos by adding a box containing sign language interpreting. Orientation videos are being developed for accessible sites.

C. Specific obligations (arts. 31-33)

Statistics and data collection (art. 31), reply to paragraph 24 of the list of issues

182. Executive Decree No. 148 of 17 June 2015 led to the creation of the national system of statistics on persons with disabilities and the establishment on 24 March 2017 of the Technical Advisory Committee on Statistics on Persons with Disabilities, in which NGOs of and for persons with disabilities participate.

183. The Government is currently working to implement the second national survey on disabilities with a view to obtaining up-to-date data that can be used to determine the prevalence persons with disabilities and type of disabilities involved.

184. The survey will permit the formulation and implementation of policies that will help Panama achieve the objectives of the Convention and of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The pilot test was conducted in April 2017 and its findings are currently being analysed.

185. Panama is part of the Working Group on the Regional Observatory of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities of the Organization of American States, which aims to collect statistical data from various countries and make projections in relation to the guidelines set forth in the Programme of Action for the Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, and to make that information available to users.

International cooperation (art. 32), reply to paragraph 25 of the list of issues

186. The Government adopted the Sustainable Development Goals as a blueprint for national development and ordered the establishment of an inter-institutional commission to support and follow up on their implementation (Executive Decree No. 393, published in Official Gazette No. 27870-B of 15 September 2015).

187. The National Consultation Council for Development aligned the strategic objectives, agreements and initiatives in the area of national consultation for development with the Sustainable Development Goals in order to consolidate joint efforts for the realization of sustainable development.

188. The National Strategic Plan with a State Vision “Panama 2030”, which seeks to bring national development targets into line with the Sustainable Development Goals, considers persons with disabilities under strategic action lines EE1, EE2 and EE4.

189. In early 2017, the International Cooperation Action Plan 2017-2019 was developed to provide a road map for Panama in the areas of cooperation and sustainable development until 2030. The Plan’s thematic areas are aligned with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which is important when defining development activities.

190. The Government is currently working on the “Panama Cooperates” project to align national and international objectives in the area of sustainable development, including those of eliminating extreme poverty and reducing inequality. The project provides a mechanism for coordinating public policies, including disability policy, with the Sustainable Development Goals.

National implementation and monitoring (art. 33), reply to paragraph 26 of the list of issues

191. Panama has a National Advisory Council on Disability, an inter-institutional and intersectoral body composed of public institutions and NGOs involved in disability matters. It also has a national standing commission for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the human rights commitments of Panama at the national and international level.

192. The National Disability Council and the national standing commission are the mechanisms mandated to monitor the implementation of the Convention, the first in terms of harmonization and alignment with the Convention, and the second in respect of the country's progress in the sphere of human rights.

193. Act No. 15 of 2016 recognizes that legally constituted NGOs of and for persons with disabilities are entitled to participate in decision-making laws, regulations and policies relating to disability issues and to have permanent representation in the entities that deliver programmes and services (art. 10).

List of annexes

- Annex 1 Guidelines for the participation of NGOs
 - Annex 2 Act No. 15 of 31 May 2016, amending Act No. 42 of 1999, establishing equal opportunities for persons with disabilities
 - Annex 3 Decision No. 108-2016, reaffirming and calling for the use of the term “persons with disabilities” when addressing, identifying or mentioning persons with disabilities, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Act No. 25 of 10 July 2007
 - Annex 4 Decision No. 42-2017, adopting the form for submitting complaints of possible violations of the rules relating to disability
 - Annex 5 Training and awareness-raising activities
 - Annex 6 Statistics on shelters for children and adolescents
 - Annex 7 2015 statistics of the National Secretariat for Disabilities
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