



## **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

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### **Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

## **Combined second to fourth periodic reports submitted by Panama under article 35 of the Convention, due in 2021\***

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



## I. Introduction

1. By constitutional mandate, and cognizant of its international obligations, Panama submits to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities its combined second to fourth periodic reports under article 25 of the Convention, in which it describes the legislative, judicial, administrative and other measures taken for the effective implementation of the Convention.
2. General information about the Republic of Panama and the general framework for the protection and promotion of human rights is provided in the common core document ([HRI/CORE/PAN/2017](#)), dated 7 August 2017.
3. One important element of the present report is the content related to government measures to mitigate the harmful effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, in particular on vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities.
4. Executive Decree No. 393 of 2015, which was adopted to give effect to the 2030 Agenda, established an inter-institutional commission responsible for supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission is attached to the Social Affairs Office and is responsible for guiding State institutions towards achieving the Goals and the accompanying targets, leaving no one behind.
5. Sustainable Development Goal 10 is aimed at social, economic, and political inclusion. Sustainable development is a cross-cutting element in the road map for the 2030 Agenda, in particular as regards marginalized and vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities.

## II. Demographic and economic overview

6. According to statistical data from the Population and Housing Census conducted in 2010, Panama had an estimated population of 3,405,813 inhabitants, 106,375 of whom were persons with disabilities (3.1 per cent of the total population); 56,228 of them were men (53 per cent) and 50,147 were women (47 per cent).
7. According to data obtained from the 2010 Census and processed using the Retrieval of Data for Small Areas by Microcomputer (REDATAM) tool, it is estimated that in Panama there were 94,580 persons of working age (10 years and older) with observable disabilities (1.5 per cent of the economically active population).
8. National data collection systems such as censuses generally collect less – and less specific – information than surveys owing to the wide range of methodologies used for assessing persons with disabilities on the basis of limitations that focus on “disease” and measurement criteria.
9. In 2018, with the involvement of experts from the National Statistics and Census Institute, the University of Panama and the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities, a pilot initiative was organized with the aim of updating, on the basis of new scenarios, the methodological aspects of the data-gathering process and the tools and validation methods used. Following the pilot, a systematized methodology was developed for use in the Second Disability Survey. The research was shared with a number of non-governmental organizations and with national and international peers for their comments.
10. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities was established under Act No. 23 of 2007 as an independent State body with legal personality, operational autonomy and its own resources. It is tasked with setting and implementing policy on the social inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families.
11. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities has 257 employees, 47 of whom have a physical, visual, hearing or intellectual impairment (18 per cent of the workforce).
12. The social inclusion policy referred to in the Act is based on the principles of equal opportunities, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and citizen participation.

13. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities is composed of the following:
- (a) Director;
  - (b) Assistant Director;
  - (c) Secretary;
  - (d) Advisory Offices, as set out below:
    - International Technical Cooperation Office
    - Planning Office
    - Legal Office
    - Technical Office
    - Public Relations Office
    - Internal Audit Office
  - (e) Support units, as set out below:
    - Administration and finance
    - Accounting
    - Treasury
    - Procurement
    - Budget
    - General Services
    - Human Resources
    - Information Technology
  - (f) Operational units, as set out below:
  - (i) National Directorate of Sectoral Policies:
    - Policy Formulation and Evaluation
    - Research
    - Inter-agency Liaison
  - (ii) Directorate for Equal Opportunities:
    - Special Projects
    - Accessibility
  - (iii) National Directorate of Promotion and Citizen Participation:
    - Services and Guidance
    - Promotion and Awareness-raising
    - Development and Strengthening of Associations
  - (iv) Regional Directorates and Liaison Offices:
    - Regional Directorate of Bocas del Toro
    - Regional Directorate of Coclé
    - Regional Directorate of Colón
    - Regional Directorate of Chiriquí
    - Regional Directorate of Darién
    - Regional Directorate of Herrera
    - Regional Directorate of Los Santos

- Regional Directorate of Panamá Oeste
- Regional Directorate of Veraguas
- (h) National Directorate of Certification:
  - Disability Evaluation and Assessment
  - National Registry and Certification Statistics
  - Training and Auditing of Disability Assessment Boards

14. Although Act No. 15 of 2016 stipulates that all autonomous and semi-autonomous government institutions must have a Directorate for Equal Opportunities specializing in disability issues, currently the vast majority have only an office, rather than a directorate. Between 2017 and August 2021, 16 new Equal Opportunities Offices were established in State institutions, bringing the total to 47.

15. The annual budget of the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities has risen, with the highest increase occurring in 2020. Due to the ongoing pandemic, however, adjustments were made to the budgets of all State institutions for 2020 and 2021.

16. Civil society organizations requested detailed information on the projects covered by these adjustments, as well as on their geographical location and expected reach.

17. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities presented to the Inter-American Development Bank a proposal for a social inclusion project aimed at persons with disabilities. The Secretariat completed the proposal, validation, negotiation and approval phases with the Bank, the National Economic Council and the Council of Ministers.

18. Between 2017 and 2020, around US\$ 220,000.00 have been provided from the investment fund of the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities to ensure follow-up to the epidemiological study on disability risk factors conducted in 2012 in the township of El Tejar, located in the district of Alanje, Province of Chiriquí, and in the district of Las Minas, located in the Province of Herrera, in particular with regard to visual impairment, habilitation and rehabilitation, as well as the use of early childhood initiatives as a preventive measure where multidimensional poverty is prevalent.

*Use of allocated budget (US\$)*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of funds</i>	<i>Budget allocation provided for by law</i>	<i>Adjusted budget allocation</i>	<i>Amount spent</i>	<i>%</i>
2017	Operating expenses	7 014 000.00	7 014 000.00	6 459 497.54	92
	Investment	2 205 000.00	2 205 000.00	1 995 933.71	91
<b>Total</b>		<b>9 219 000.00</b>	<b>9 219 000.00</b>	<b>8 455 431.25</b>	<b>92</b>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of funds</i>	<i>Budget allocation provided for by law</i>	<i>Adjusted budget allocation</i>	<i>Amount spent</i>	<i>%</i>
2018	Operating expenses	7 189 000.00	6 939 000.00	6 201 340.07	89
	Investment	1 836 000.00	1 786 000.00	1 484 644.97	83
<b>Total</b>		<b>9 025 000.00</b>	<b>8 725 000.00</b>	<b>7 685 985.04</b>	<b>88</b>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of funds</i>	<i>Budget allocation provided for by law</i>	<i>Adjusted budget allocation</i>	<i>Amount spent</i>	<i>%</i>
2019	Operating expenses	7 223 342.00	4 086 432.00	4 001 827.06	98
	Investment	2 023 999.00	2 031 499.00	2 030 770.71	100
<b>Total</b>		<b>9 247 341.00</b>	<b>6 117 931.00</b>	<b>6 032 597.77</b>	<b>99</b>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of funds</i>	<i>Budget allocation provided for by law</i>	<i>Adjusted budget allocation</i>	<i>Amount spent</i>	<i>%</i>
2020	Operating expenses	7 139 508.00	7 139 508.00	6 132 308.36	86
	Investment	3 714 278.00	3 714 278.00	3 647 900.51	98
<b>Total</b>		<b>10 853 786.00</b>	<b>10 853 786.00</b>	<b>9 780 208.87</b>	<b>90</b>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of funds</i>	<i>Budget allocation provided for by law</i>	<i>Adjusted budget allocation</i>	<i>Amount spent</i>	<i>%</i>
2021	Operating expenses	7 631 278.00	3 572 914.00	2 871 157.29	80
(to May)	Investment	3 953 769.00	2 891 142.00	1 423 375.28	49
<b>Total</b>		<b>11 585 047.00</b>	<b>6 464 056.00</b>	<b>4 294 532.57</b>	<b>66</b>

19. The following items are considered to be auxiliary devices and technical aids: orthotics, prostheses, hearing aids, cochlear implants, glasses, canes, walkers, crutches, wheelchairs, orthopaedic wheelchairs, bath chairs and bathtubs, commodes, special beds, computer accessories, accessories for alternative means of communication, and other items that facilitate the daily activities of persons with disabilities.

*Budget for technical aids (in US\$)*  
2019 to 2021

<i>Investment project</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>
Support provided for technical aids	33 000.00	85 000.00	150 000.00

20. Between 2017 and June 2021, the programmes provided by the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities had a greater impact in urban areas, at 65.56 per cent, compared to 32.30 per cent in rural areas and 2.04 per cent in Indigenous areas.

21. The State promotes microenterprises such as the Fami-Empresas Project, which aims to provide guidance and training and promote the creation of small businesses in the agricultural, commercial and service sectors, with a focus on persons with disabilities and their families who live in poverty or extreme poverty in rural or hard-to-reach areas.

22. In addition, the State grants conditional financial support for the start-up of each microenterprise project, with a focus on the proper use of the funding, to ensure the development of small family businesses. The creation of vegetable gardens is promoted through a comprehensive learning-based guidance programme that encourages entrepreneurs to take advantage of local natural resources and cultivate, prepare and consume healthy, highly nutritious food at low cost.

23. One of the aims of the Fami-Empresas project is to advise beneficiaries on employment, administrative, managerial and business training techniques, taking into account natural resources and cultural frameworks, to enhance their skills and abilities in their chosen area of activity.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Adjusted (US\$)</i>	<i>Amount spent (US\$)</i>
2017	9 219 000	8 455 431
2018	8 725 000	7 685 985
2019	6 117 931	6 032 98
2020	10 853 786	9 780 209
2021	6 464 056	4 294 533

*Projects and services, 2017 to 2021*

Area	Amount	Sex		Total (US\$)	Percentage
		Male	Female		
<b>Total</b>	<b>31 184</b>	<b>16 349</b>	<b>14 835</b>	<b>2 471 758.11</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Urban	20 476	10 477	9 999	1 270 985.64	65.66
Rural	10 072	5 522	4 550	976 992.62	32.30
Indigenous	636	350	286	223 779.85	2.04

*Number of participants, 2017 to 2021*

Service type	Participants	Sex		US\$
		Male	Female	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 387</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>1 510 083.05</b>
Fami-Empresas	1 141	636	505	800 103.02
2017	431	241	190	304 764.35
2018	372	213	159	259 480.61
2019	225	120	105	157 407.10
2020	79	45	34	55 150.96
2021	34	17	17	23 300.00

24. In order to contribute to improving quality of life for persons with disabilities, economic support is provided with the specific aim of ensuring that persons with disabilities living in poverty receive a monthly income towards essential health and education expenses. Payments are set at 50.00 balboas (B) per month for a fixed period (1 balboa equals US\$ 1).

**2017 to 2021**

Year	Participants	US\$
2017	509	B 76 350 00
2018	409	B 61 350 00
2019	643	B 96 450 00
2020	421	B 63 150 00
2021	434	B 65 100 00
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 416</b>	<b>B 362 400 00</b>

### III. Methodology for preparing the report

25. The National Advisory Council on Disability conducted an initial information-gathering exercise through its eight committees:

- (a) Accessibility Committee
- (b) Employment Affairs Committee
- (c) Culture and Sports Committee
- (d) Human Rights Committee I
- (e) Human Rights Committee II
- (f) Education Committee

- (g) Family Affairs Committee
- (h) Health Committee

26. The Council prepared a preliminary draft and, with technical coordination support from the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities, forwarded it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in its capacity as President of the National Standing Committee, the body responsible for ensuring compliance with and follow-up to the national and international human rights commitments of Panama (the Human Rights Commission). The draft was submitted to the members for review and evaluation.

27. The Human Rights Commission, the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities and coordinators from the National Advisory Council on Disability held the first consultation in hybrid format on Thursday, 12 August 2021. Another seven virtual consultations then took place on 17, 18 and 20 August and 15, 16 and 17 September 2021 with the participation of civil society organizations, the Central America regional field office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other specialized agencies from the system, with the aim of ensuring a transparent and reliable process.

28. The participating civil society organizations acknowledged the efforts made to produce the draft and found that it reflects the progress made; however, they are of the opinion that a lot of information was omitted from the document. While they are concerned about inappropriate terminology, they recognize that such terminology is used in the national legal framework.

29. Subsequently, the draft was submitted to the Government for approval and forwarding to the secretariat of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## **A Specific information on the Convention**

### **Articles 1 to 4**

#### **General principles and obligations**

30. The Disability Assessment Boards are interdisciplinary and follow a biopsychosocial approach; a minimum of three members must be competent in the use of the qualifiers set out in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and the tenth revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10) produced by the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization.

31. The process begins when the interested party submits an application form to the National Directorate of Certification at the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities. The regulations set out certain requirements, according to the type of disability. The person is requested to appear before the Disability Assessment Board, which is responsible for assessing and certifying disability. The Board is comprised of doctors, psychologists, social workers, therapists and physiotherapists from a range of State bodies.

32. The person's health condition is assessed by means of the assessment protocol used to determine the functioning profile according to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. The Assessment Board then issues a decision setting out its reasons for certifying, or not certifying, the person's disability.

33. Between 2015 and 30 June 2021, 10,240 certifications have been granted, taking into account certain factors such as ethnicity and religion.

May 2015 to June 2021

<i>Year</i>	<i>Requested to appear</i>	<i>Did not appear</i>	<i>Assessed</i>	<i>Certified</i>	<i>Not certified</i>	<i>Pending</i>
2015	517	94	423	324	31	68
2016	1 620	142	1 478	1 119	174	185
2017	2 233	192	2 041	1 710	135	196
2018	1 652	130	1 522	1 324	70	128
2019	2 942	254	2 688	2 277	190	221
2020	2 757	262	2 495	2 115	189	199
to 30 June 2021	1 832	190	1 720	1 371	137	134
<b>Total</b>	<b>13 553</b>	<b>1 264</b>	<b>12 367</b>	<b>10 240</b>	<b>926</b>	<b>1 131</b>

34. The roll-out of the National Certification Registration Platform (RENACER), a technological tool that facilitates the registration of applications, disability assessments and the issuance of decisions, has led to improvements in the response time for the granting of disability certificates.

35. The RENACER platform was launched in March 2020 to provide quality, comparable, reliable and up-to-date demographic and vital statistics that contribute to decision-making and help to shape and improve public policies and strategies on inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

36. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, assessment boards began to conduct virtual assessments using mobile devices. This interactive telemedicine option was in place until 30 June 2021.

37. The mechanism for consulting persons with disabilities in urban and rural areas and in Indigenous regions is set out in Act No. 23 of 2007, which established both the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities, including regulating the Secretariat's functions and the composition of its Board of Directors, and the National Advisory Council on Disability, which is an inter-agency and intersectoral consultation body that provides support to the Secretariat.

38. The internal rules of the National Advisory Council on Disability, as approved pursuant to Resolution No. 1 of 2019, contribute to the expansion of the consultation mechanism. Rule 21 regulates the organization of the Council's committees in the provinces and Indigenous regions. The committees are comprised of the regional directors of those public entities with a presence in the area which are members of the Advisory Council and representatives of civil society organizations and stakeholders. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities provides technical and coordination support, and the provincial governors, as the highest authority and representative of the executive branch in each province, are also involved.

39. To give effect to Resolution No. 01-2019 setting out the internal rules of the National Advisory Council on Disability, work was begun in 2020 to set up advisory committees in the 10 provinces and three Indigenous regions. The 13 provincial and regional governors who lead the committees were provided with information and guidance.

40. The efforts described above are part of the schedule of activities aimed at ensuring ongoing linkages, using a cross-cutting approach to the issue throughout the country, and including stakeholders in the implementation of the five action areas of the National Strategic Plan for 2019–2024, namely:

- (a) Area 1. Legal framework, access to justice and social security;
- (b) Area 2. Social protection;
- (c) Area 3. Accessibility and equal opportunities;
- (d) Area 4. Culture of participation, inclusion, equality and respect; and



- (e) Area 5. Coordination and institution-building.

41. Following the establishment of the provincial and regional committees of the National Advisory Council on Disability, the Governors' Offices and Regional Directorates are responsible for giving follow-up to the national policy and strategic plan and for preparing annual reports on the results obtained.

## **B. Specific rights**

### **Article 5**

#### **Equality and non-discrimination**

42. The State evaluated developments in the area of disability issues between 2010 and 2019 and used the findings to formulate the 2020–2030 National Policy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, which is aimed at achieving greater intersectoral participation in efforts to improve the quality of the State's capacity to respond effectively to the social needs of persons with disabilities, as well as at strengthening associations of and for persons with disabilities. The Policy also serves to ensure external coherence and is coordinated with government plans and the sectoral policies of the various organizations involved in ensuring compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

43. The principles set out in the Convention are recognized in the Policy using a cross-cutting approach addressing four main areas:

- (a) Human rights of persons with disabilities and the realignment of public perception to ensure that they are regarded as persons with dignity;
- (b) Institutional strengthening to respond to the social needs of persons with disabilities;
- (c) Strengthening of capacities of, and links between, associations of and for persons with disabilities; and
- (d) Quality of life of persons with disabilities as rights holders.

44. In accordance with the 2020–2030 National Policy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, the 2020–2024 Strategic Plan for Social Inclusion is designed to be a tool to give impetus to the National Disability Policy. It covers five strategic areas which are divided into 22 strategic actions with the aim of achieving 58 priority results, as assessed against 193 indicators. The strategic areas are:

- (a) Legal framework, access to justice and public safety;
- (b) Social protection;
- (c) Accessibility and equal opportunities;
- (d) Culture of participation, inclusion, equality and respect; and
- (e) Coordination and institution-building.

45. Reasonable accommodations, which are defined in the Convention as modifications and adjustments aimed at ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others, are described in the different sections of the report. They include physical accessibility adjustments, support for sign language interpretation, access to information, health services and justice and the translation of information to make it accessible according to the disability and mother tongue.

46. Certain institutions, including the Panama Canal Authority, explicitly include reasonable accommodations in their regulations, describing them as measures that have no adverse impact on operations and allow applicants and employees to apply for or hold a post. The measures may include adjustments to facilities to make them accessible for persons with disabilities, job restructuring, appropriate changes to examinations and other similar accommodations.

**Article 8****Awareness-raising**

47. Awareness-raising workshops and online sessions have been held for public and private media, advertising agency personnel, health workers, security agents, teachers, parents and non-governmental organizations with the aim of overcoming the barriers of the welfare model and helping the general population to understand and adopt the social model of human rights.

*Number of participants in awareness-raising days, by year*

<i>Categories</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>
Public institutions	1 708	1 725	1 543	158	956
Private companies	1 132	766	439	138	139
Civil society organizations	414	867	210	69	132
Schools and universities	2 446	3 976	2 382	92	223
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 700</b>	<b>7 334</b>	<b>4 574</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>1 450</b>

48. Sign language courses are held annually for the institutions that are part of the National Advisory Council on Disability, as well as for educational institutions, private companies and the general public. The first cohort is currently enrolled in the undergraduate degree course in Panamanian Sign Language at the Specialized University of the Americas (UDELAS).

49. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health has issued and disseminated in the media 365 communiqués in accessible formats, including posters in simple and clear language, sign language versions and audio information, to ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

**Article 9****Accessibility**

50. In 2017, the Third Conference on Accessible Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean: “Panama, a route for everyone” was held to discuss accessibility in the tourism supply chain, from the choice of destination, the surroundings and means of transportation, to recreational and leisure activities, tourist routes and the overall experience, with the aim of ensuring customer satisfaction.

51. In 2019, the third edition of the Accessibility Manual was updated by students enrolled in the Master’s Degree in Universal Accessibility, with a focus on access to the physical environment, at the University of Panama. The Manual, which was created by students from the Postgraduate Accessibility Programme, is a national reference in the field of urban, architectural and graphic project design and provides technical and scientific guidance on adapting spaces to ensure their accessibility for the general population, including persons with disabilities.

52. The Government approved the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development 2020–2025. Its objectives include:

- (a) Improving the accessibility of tourist destinations in Panama and promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities by adopting a new approach to destination management that considers the needs of all users;
- (b) Developing new marketing strategies to reach tourists with disabilities;
- (c) Promoting offerings that position Panama as an accessible tourist destination, attuned to the needs and respectful treatment of persons with disabilities.

53. Institutional projects were carried out to promote accessibility in tourist areas, including:

- (a) Updating of tourist facilities in the Anton Valley (Fauna and Flora); wide pavements with tactile paving, signage, night lighting, bicycle lanes and street furniture;
- (b) Updating of tourist facilities in Taboga Island (accessible beach facilities, adapted services, external showers and beach access ramp);
- (c) Amador Convention Centre and Atlapa Convention Centre (parking spaces, toilet facilities, lifts, signage and ramps);
- (d) Tourist Dock Project at Puerto Cabimo, Río de Jesús (adapted toilet facilities, accessible gate, parking spaces and ramps for persons with reduced mobility).

54. The metropolitan public transport service has been improved through staff training (between 2017 and 2019, 266 administrative and operational staff of the Panama Metro were trained on providing suitable assistance to persons with disabilities), regular inspections in the ticketed zones of the MetroBus network and at the 30 stations of the Panama Metro (accessible lifts, access ramps, accessible turnstiles at the entrance and exit of each station, escalators and tactile floors) and the purchase of new bus units and train carriages. Panama Metro has 235 accessible carriages. Each train is made up of five carriages, two of which have space for wheelchair users. Trains are equipped with intercoms, audio signals, a public address system and priority seating.

55. However, to improve the accessibility of the capital city's bus service, the State recognizes the need to address access via pavements and bus stops. It also acknowledges the lack of accessibility of the bus service throughout the rest of the country.

56. In March 2021, with the participation of organizations of persons with disabilities, the Government had initiated the development of the Measurable Indicators Plan, aimed at ensuring accessibility in public transport, air and land terminals, tourist sites and public buildings and facilities, including information and communications technologies, applicable in both urban and rural areas. As of August 2021, 145 indicators have been developed, complementing the 16 indicators outlined in the National Development Plan 2020–2024. Furthermore, three technical advisory committees on universal accessibility have been created.

57. In addition, a number of financial institutions have adapted lifts to meet universal accessibility standards and implemented basic customer service training. Regarding the accessibility of these services, reasonable adjustments have been made with respect to the use of car parks, signs, ramps and handrails.

## **Article 10**

### **Right to life**

58. Article 17 of the Constitution of Panama recognizes that the authorities of the Republic are responsible for protecting the life, honour and property of nationals, wherever they may be, and of foreign nationals within their jurisdiction. In addition, article 29 of the Constitution establishes that there is no death penalty in Panama.

59. The State has a duty to guarantee human life as a fundamental right, enshrined not only in domestic law, but also in international conventions, such as article 4 of the American Convention on Human Rights and article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

60. In the same vein, flowing from the right to life, the right to identity is regulated by articles 8 and 9 of the Constitution. These articles establish the methods for acquiring nationality, which is guaranteed in accordance with the human rights instruments ratified by Panama.

## **Article 11**

### **Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies**

61. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities and the Federation of Persons with Disabilities are part of the National Platform for Comprehensive Disaster Risk

Management, chaired by the National Civil Protection System, to ensure that emergency and disaster response protocols guarantee the safety and protection of persons with disabilities.

62. The National Platform was involved in the 2017 efforts to update the application of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America, taking an inclusive approach to ensure that no one is left behind.

63. The Standards for the Inclusion, Protection and Care of Persons with Disabilities in Emergencies and Disasters were disseminated in 2019. The Standards were developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Coordination Centre for Disaster Prevention in Central America and the Dominican Republic, with support from the United States Agency for International Development. In March 2021, the Benemérito Firefighting Corps conducted the first basic first aid course designed for persons with hearing impairments.

## **Article 12**

### **Equal recognition before the law**

64. The Constitution, in article 20, Chapter I on fundamental guarantees, Title III on individual and social rights and duties, guarantees equal recognition before the law for all Panamanians and foreign nationals.

65. There are two judicial avenues for the reinstatement of public officials with disabilities or chronic or degenerative diseases causing an inability to work. The first is the constitutional remedy of *amparo*, which can be sought when an action violates the provisions of the Constitution.

66. The second is an administrative remedy of full jurisdiction, through which a resolution by the appointing authority can be challenged for violating the law. This protection has been strengthened with the adoption of Act No. 151 of 2020, which provides for the right of workers to receive back pay for the period between dismissal and their return to work by means of a reinstatement order issued by the court.

67. The judiciary has conducted various campaigns to raise awareness about the inclusion of persons with disabilities and respect for their rights. The campaigns were rolled out on social media and institutional web pages, in addition to training for public officials and the community in general.

68. There is currently a trend towards filing wrongful termination suits with the Supreme Court, alleging discrimination or violation of due process on account of the person's status as having a chronic illness causing disability. These cases have in common the citing of diseases such as cancer, arthritis, diabetes and hypertension and have led to an expansion of case law in such matters.

69. Panama recognizes that there remain areas of conflict between the Convention and national law, for example:

(a) The interdiction regime remains in place and was even strengthened through Act No. 15 of 2016 amending Act No. 42 of 1999, which is incompatible with the support model of disability;

(b) The Commercial Code, the Civil Code and the Family Code, among others, still contain discriminatory provisions and pejorative language.

## **Article 13**

### **Access to justice**

70. The judiciary and the Attorney General's Office, with support from the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities and the Panamanian Institute for Special Training, have taken measures to guarantee that persons with disabilities are able to exercise fully their right to access to justice in all proceedings involved in the different stages of the judicial process, including, in particular, through the use of sign language and other forms of information transmission.

71. From 2019 to June 2021, the Attorney General's Office carried out 11 training and awareness-raising activities on the Convention and the Optional Protocol, in which 442 judicial and administrative staff nationwide took part with a view to training others.

72. In the prison system, around 2,610 virtual hearings involving persons with disabilities were held in 2020 and, in collaboration with the judiciary, facilities for virtual hearings have been set up as part of steps taken to reduce overcrowding and guarantee due process for persons deprived of their liberty.

73. Pursuant to Act No. 16 of 2016, which establishes community justices of the peace and provides for community mediation and conciliation, the Solicitor General's Office has trained 2,640 aspiring justices of the peace. A total of 1,686 people – 1,053 women and 633 men – have completed a course on national and international standards for the protection of persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups with the aim of strengthening access to justice and equal treatment.

74. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Public Prosecution Service, together with the National Institute for Women, the National Police, the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Families and the Ministry of Social Development, prepared an orientation guide for women in situations of domestic violence in the context of the pandemic. In addition, coordinated inter-agency action was taken in cases of suspected domestic violence to provide women with legal advice, including guidance on how to file a complaint, information on their rights as victims of violence and psychological support.

75. At the request of the judiciary and with support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a specialized course was organized for judges, public defenders, judicial support personnel and public officials of the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities to explore the following topics: legal capacity of persons with disabilities, the system for supported decision-making, and comparative law on legal reform in the area of legal capacity and disability.

76. Disability is a cross-cutting topic in the training organized by the Higher Institute of the Judiciary. On the specific topic of the human rights of persons with disabilities, 220 staff received training in 2017, 121 staff in 2018, 50 staff in 2019 and 138 staff in 2020. Members of the judiciary, the legal profession and civil society also have access to a wide range of training courses related to vulnerable populations, such as victims of violence, children and Indigenous persons, in which disability is among the topics covered.

77. The judiciary has held virtual sessions to prepare justice officials in the areas of legal capacity and the supported decision-making system that were also open to the general public, public entities and civil society organizations so that all actors in the country can develop the skills necessary to bring about the legislative changes required by the Convention.

78. Judicial premises have been making progress in terms of accessibility, while newly built premises were designed in accordance with legal specifications. In the area of information technology, adjustments have been made to the institutional web page to enable users to increase the font size. Communiqués, especially during the pandemic, are published in both PDF and Word format, so that they are accessible using electronic text readers.

79. The Supreme Court issued agreement No. 173 of 2020 on the adoption of measures for users of judicial offices during the COVID-19 pandemic, which makes it mandatory to ensure accessibility, to address the needs of persons with disabilities as a matter of priority and to permit persons with disabilities to be accompanied on visits to judicial premises.

80. By law, the judiciary is responsible for the provision of free assistance to crime victims. Nationwide coverage is ensured by 72 public defenders. Efforts have been made to streamline the service. As of 2020, assistance had been provided to 55 individuals with disabilities, including 24 men and 31 women, most of whom had either physical or intellectual disabilities. The most frequent offences were domestic violence, offences against sexual freedom and personal injury.

81. Regarding access to justice for persons with disabilities, Chapter VII of the Charter of Rights of All Persons Involved in Judicial Proceedings Brought by the Public Prosecution Service, adopted by resolution of 6 January 2012, deals with rights and the protection of

especially vulnerable groups or sectors, while section 5, article 53, specifically addresses the reasonable accommodations to be made for these groups or sectors to ensure their preferential treatment, such as the provision of a sign language interpreter and support measures to facilitate communication and the transmission of necessary procedural information.

82. The Academy of the Public Prosecution Service conducts training and awareness-raising activities on the Convention and the Optional Protocol, including seminars and conferences for judicial and administrative staff who will in turn train others.

83. Between 2017 and 2021, 31 people (children, adolescents and adults with disabilities) received assistance in a Gesell chamber. Of these, 24 are listed as victims of sexual offences. In 2021, 2,438 complaints of offences against sexual integrity and freedom committed against persons with disabilities were received, involving a total of 1,277 suspects.

84. In keeping with Act No. 82 of 2013, the Public Prosecution Service maintained user services during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for all female victims of gender-based violence, who are entitled to free assistance and representation during proceedings.

85. The Attorney General's Office applies the relevant protocols in all its investigations into cases of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and family violence. The protocols contain procedures for the care of victims, including women with physical or mental disabilities. Prosecutors also draw on the Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-related Killings of Women.

86. The Protection Unit for Victims, Witnesses, Experts and Other Parties Involved in Criminal Proceedings applies the protocol for providing comprehensive support to victims and witnesses of offences against liberty and sexual integrity. The protocol is complemented by a manual on the use of the Gesell chamber, to ensure appropriate treatment, safeguard rights and guarantee access to justice without discrimination.

87. In 2020, the Juvenile Court ensured the protection of the human rights of 5,542 minors. Of these, a large number of cases involved protecting children and adolescents who were suffering ill-treatment (1,364), while other cases involved children and adolescents whose rights had been ignored, threatened or abused (1,883) or who had been victims of sexual abuse (527). The victims in the remaining cases had various protection needs. This group, which includes children and adolescents with disabilities or who have not had access to diagnosis or treatment, receives protection from the State taking into account their special situation of vulnerability.

88. Panama has made great efforts to make the justice system more transparent, rapid and efficient, especially in the case of children and adolescents. The judiciary's Access to Justice Unit is running an oral proceedings project in family courts, juvenile courts and mixed municipal courts, all of which hear family cases, particularly cases relating to maintenance payments, to which children, spouses, older persons and persons with disabilities are entitled. The right to food is fundamental to human survival, which is why this project guarantees the public's access to justice, particularly for individuals with limited resources who are in a vulnerable situation.

89. In 2020, the judiciary, with international cooperation assistance, published the Protocol for Judicial Action in Matters of Human Trafficking and Related Activities, which was developed by the Access to Justice and Gender Unit pursuant to Act No. 79 of 2011. The Protocol is quick and easy to use. Through the Protocol, which is based on the 100 Brasilia Regulations Regarding Access to Justice for Vulnerable People, judges have access to all the national and international standards that should be considered in the judicial management of this crime against humanity, including standards relating to the rights of persons with disabilities (right to an interpreter, use of Gesell chambers, inclusive forms of participation in proceedings, etc.).

90. In June 2021, the judiciary's Department of Free Legal Assistance for Crime Victims entered into an inter-institutional agreement to improve the chain of care for female victims of gender-based violence, in which the Public Prosecution Service, the Institute of Forensic Medicine, the National Institute for Women, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Security are also involved. The agreement, which was developed with international cooperation assistance, aims to improve coordination among the actors with a legal and

constitutional duty to care for female victims. Many such victims abused by aggressors who take advantage of their disability, while other victims may have acquired a disability as a result of domestic violence or attempted femicide. It is in the State's interest to continue improving the care provided to this sensitive vulnerable population.

91. The State provides dispute resolution services to the public other than through court proceedings. The judiciary runs a service that provides free alternative methods of dispute resolution in cases that, by law, are subject to mediation. This may apply in criminal, civil, agricultural or family justice matters. The judiciary's Directorate of Alternative Methods reports having received 21 mediation requests nationwide from users with disabilities in 2018, 39 requests in 2019 and 10 requests in 2020. In mediation proceedings, as in court hearings, access to a sign language interpreter can be arranged where necessary for any of the parties.

92. From 2019 to early 2020, field visits were made to the Ngobe Buglé Indigenous region, which is home to the largest number of Indigenous persons in the country, in addition to having the highest rates of poverty and extreme poverty. The field visits are part of a project on access to family justice, whereby the entire family court, including all services, namely, judicial officials, an interdisciplinary team, public and private defence lawyers, interpreters, mediators, civil registry staff and forensic doctors, are moved from the capital of Chiriquí Province to remote communities.

#### **Article 14**

##### **Liberty and security of the person**

93. In Panama, public security is people-centred and is considered a right. Fundamental human rights are recognized in Titles III and IV of the Constitution. Article 30 of the Constitution establishes the prohibition of the death penalty, while articles 21 and 23 (habeas corpus) contain safeguards against arbitrary arrest and deprivation of liberty.

#### **Article 15**

##### **Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**

94. Panama has addressed health research in national legislation. For instance, article 38 of Act No. 84 of 2019 states that the committees on research bioethics shall conduct ethics reviews of research projects, in accordance with international ethics standards, taking into consideration, at a minimum, the social value, scientific validity, fairness of participant selection and protection of the well-being of research participants and their communities.

95. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health continuously disseminates information on the right to free and informed consent of persons with mental disabilities and ensures that this right is respected. Care protocols are in place for each of the following areas: psychiatric emergency rooms, drug programmes and eldercare.

96. Panama adopted the guidelines of the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences through Executive Decree No. 1843 of 2014. The current version of guideline 15 addresses research involving vulnerable individuals and groups, recognizing that the exclusion of potentially vulnerable groups, who are more likely to be subjected to abuse or additional harm, has resulted in a data gap.

97. The database of prisoners with disabilities is maintained by the Directorate General of the Prison System and the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies. There are a total of 181 persons deprived of their liberty nationwide, including 175 adults and 6 minors. They have access to various programmes and benefits, such as education and employment schemes, religious and recreational activities and temporary relocation to a domestic or hospital setting for persons with serious chronic illness.

98. The national mechanism for the prevention of torture was established under the Ombudsman's Office pursuant to Act No. 6 of 2017 and is regulated by Executive Decree No. 378 of 2018.

99. The national preventive mechanism has conducted 169 visits to detention centres. Furthermore, there have been 13 training sessions on the prevention of torture for public officials, academia, civil society organizations and the general public.

100. The national preventive mechanism has recommended to the Government that, in centres where women with mental or psychosocial disabilities are held in isolation, staff should ensure that the women maintain contact with other people and that, as part of their treatment plan, they should be gradually encouraged to interact with other people.

101. The State has implemented some of these recommendations. For example, the metal sheeting covering the cells in House 7 of the Cecilia Orillac de Chiari Women's Rehabilitation Centre has been removed, allowing for better visibility, lighting and ventilation, and these cells are no longer used to hold female inmates who are subject to disciplinary measures. Other recommendations are being implemented to ensure, in practice, decent living conditions for persons deprived of their liberty.

## **Article 16**

### **Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse**

102. The National Commission for the Prevention of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents carries out training and public awareness-raising on the human rights of persons who are especially vulnerable to this form of sexual violence, including persons with disabilities, through campaigns run in the media, schools, health centres, national and international airports and other immigration control posts, with the invaluable support of security agencies, the National Police, the National Border Service and the National Air and Naval Service.

103. The Secretariat for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses and Other Parties Involved in Criminal Proceedings has increased its human resources since January 2021, with the appointment of 17 officials, including psychologists, social workers, legal advisers, secretaries and Gesell chamber operators. In addition, the body tasked with coordinating the work of the Protection Unit for Victims, Witnesses, Experts and Other Parties Involved in Criminal Proceedings is responsible for, among others, enhancing the quality of the services provided to users, including reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities who require them during criminal proceedings.

104. The Office of the Senior Prosecutor for Indigenous Affairs is made up of a team of qualified professionals committed to observing and enforcing the Constitution and the law for the benefit of children and the entire population across the national territory, including persons with disabilities, with the aim of realizing the right to access to justice without discrimination.

105. With regard to the protection of children and adolescents, a new comprehensive care model has been set up, comprising the following two streams:

(a) The first stream is the provision of first aid through primary care facilities, including psychological and medical care, protective measures and accommodation in facilities providing appropriate care;

(b) The second stream is deinstitutionalization and provides for the comprehensive review of every case so as to restore the right of children and adolescents to live with their family and in their community.

106. The protection and care of children and adolescents who are victims of violence and sexual abuse includes early childhood support through the provision of care to adolescent girls who are pregnant or have children. Temporary Protection Centres for Children and Adolescent Victims of Violence and Sexual Abuse have been established at the community level, offering a range of specialized protection services.

107. Given the discovery of irregularities and possible cases of different forms of abuse against children and adolescents in some shelters, an inter-institutional commission was established to provide a comprehensive response to the issue of shelters and serve as a mechanism for the review of compliance with national regulations and of the quality of the protection services provided by the country's shelters.

108. Therapy is provided in individual and group sessions for the purpose of family reunification of children living in shelters and of providing support for child victims of violence who are institutionalized while a solution is found to uphold their right to live in a



stable and protective family. A protocol was signed between the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Families and the Ministry of the Interior concerning the identification, referral and care of children and adolescents seeking refugee status who require international protection.

## **Article 17**

### **Protecting the integrity of the person**

109. Sterilizations are performed in accordance with Act No. 7 of 2013, which establishes that voluntary sterilization is a woman's personal right.

110. However, the State recognizes the need to review the Act to provide for reasonable accommodations, in keeping with the Convention, in the case of persons with disabilities.

111. Article 448 of the Criminal Code states that any person who violates the regulations on the housing of women and families or on the special protection of women and children or induces or causes forced pregnancy or forced sterilization is liable to 10 to 12 years' imprisonment.

112. With regard to abortion, under article 143 of the Criminal Code, terminating a woman's pregnancy without her consent or against her will carries a penalty of 4 to 8 years' imprisonment. If a woman dies as a consequence of the methods used to terminate a pregnancy, the penalty is 5 to 10 years' imprisonment. These penalties are increased by one sixth where the guilty party is the woman's partner.

113. Article 144 of the Criminal Code authorizes abortion with the woman's consent when the pregnancy is the result of carnal rape confirmed to have occurred by investigators or when serious health problems endanger the life of the mother or the product of conception. In both cases, the informed consent of the mother is indispensable.

114. There are two types of abortion under Panamanian law: termination of pregnancy resulting from rape and therapeutic abortion. Therapeutic abortion is provided for in Chapter III, article 144 (1), of the Criminal Code, which establishes that the procedure is indicated in cases where there are proven fetal malformations incompatible with life or where the pregnant woman is at high risk of dying due to severe illness.

115. Requests are submitted to the Therapeutic Abortion Commission, coordinated by the Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme, and must include the patient's written consent, a note from the treating physician explaining the reasons for the request, and a documented diagnosis.

## **Article 18**

### **Liberty of movement and nationality**

116. The State has enshrined in article 27 of the Constitution the right of persons, without distinction, to move freely within the national territory and to change their domicile or residence. It has also enshrined in article 8 the right to obtain Panamanian nationality, whether by birth or naturalization or through constitutional provisions. In addition, article 9 provides for Panamanian nationality by birth for children born abroad.

117. The National Directorate of the Civil Registry, which is regulated by Act No. 31 of 25 July 2006, ensures that all life events and legal acts are registered, taking a human rights approach, in accordance with the international conventions recognized by Panama.

118. To facilitate registration, the National Directorate has regional and district offices, as well as desks in major public and private hospitals and in supermarket chains nationwide. There are also auxiliary registrars in the Indigenous regions and the most remote areas of the country, who are responsible for registering births and deaths and thus guaranteeing the right to identity.

119. The Electoral Court, through the civil registry, promotes different programmes and projects to ensure the enjoyment of the right of all persons to have their birth registered, without discrimination. To this end, various administrative and operational measures have been taken on the basis of the State's legal competence and its commitment to the Sustainable

Development Goals in the area of identity, specifically, target 16.9, to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.

120. In the context of the national emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, identification documents were issued and access to institutional services was maintained for users, such as:

- In-home assistance for persons with disabilities in completing the birth registration procedure and obtaining a birth certificate. The services are provided in shelters for persons with disabilities; once the procedure has been completed, coordination with the identity card office is ensured for the processing of their identity card. These services are aimed at adults and minors. Identity cards are delivered on site, thus guaranteeing that persons with disabilities are identified.
- The National Directorate of the Civil Registry has a Special Projects and Underregistration Unit, which ensures continuous and periodic inter-institutional coordination with various entities and ministries that have direct contact with the population, mainly with people in remote areas of the country, as well as in rural areas, including in shelters for minors, adults and persons with disabilities. This coordination includes the involvement of international and national organizations such as the country offices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNICEF, the Ombudsman's Office, the National Migration Service, the National Border Service, health centres and the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Families in the provinces and Indigenous regions.
- The National Directorate of the Civil Registry, which is part of the Electoral Court, performs marriages for persons with disabilities, including with the participation of interpreters, and issues civil marriage certificates.

121. At the Court's Equal Opportunities Office, several awareness-raising and training sessions have been held for officials regarding human rights, with a focus on persons with disabilities, including on the topic of sign language. The institution is a member of the National Advisory Council on Disability and is structured in such a way as to offer several access points for persons with disabilities with the aim of providing them with prompt assistance.

122. In the context of the COVID-19 emergency, the Electoral Court took administrative steps to guarantee services for users. For example, it set up an online service platform with the title "The Court is with You" and adopted Decree No. 31 of 17 August 2020 regulating the provision of services. The Decree addresses all aspects of the digital platform, including access to the platform and online services.

123. The purpose of the online service platform was to modernize, decentralize and automate the services that the Electoral Court provides to the public, especially services related to the registration of life events and the issuance of the associated certificates or identification documents, as well as election-related services, including participation in public affairs through political parties or independent candidacy and maintenance of the electoral roll.

124. The self-service channel gives users access to external and platform-based tools so that they can complete automated procedures without the need for online intervention by an Electoral Court official, although there is a biometric identity check in keeping with Decree No. 31 of 17 August 2020. The procedures available through the online service platform have the same legal value as those carried out in person. The platform covers all of the country's geographical districts.

## **Article 19**

### **Living independently and being included in the community**

125. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities has technical staff trained in helping persons with physical, intellectual, hearing and visual disabilities develop skills for independent living. Since 2011, training has been carried out with the involvement of international experts. Seven workshops were held in 2018 and 2019, with the participation of 119 persons with disabilities from different provinces.

**Development of independent living skills, 2018–2019**

<i>Title of workshop</i>	<i>Number of workshops</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
Independent living for persons with physical disabilities	1	13
Independent living for persons with hearing impairments	2	28
Independent living for persons with intellectual disabilities	2	42
Independent living for persons with visual impairments	2	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>119</b>

126. The general objective of this training is to improve the quality of life, autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency of the participants, fostering the ability of individuals with hearing, visual, intellectual or physical disabilities to help themselves so that they can be agents of their own social inclusion, have control over their lives and thus achieve full social, employment and economic independence.

127. The training deals with the following topics: sexuality, cleanliness and personal hygiene, daily life skills, leadership, self-esteem, social media use, personal appearance and image, prevention of abuse, wheelchair use and handling techniques, mobility and use of technical aids.

128. These components are tailored to the needs arising from the different types of disability. Follow-up interviews are conducted to assess progress in the participants' level of independence.

129. During the workshop for persons with physical disabilities, wheelchair use and handling techniques were taught in outdoor and indoor spaces. In 2018, 13 people participated.

130. The independent living skills development programme includes advice on healthy lifestyles, sexuality, exercise, personal appearance, self-esteem, leadership, study alternatives and entering a work environment. It includes a methodology on the philosophy of independent living designed to help therapists interact with the group. Training technical personnel in this methodology to promote the rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons with physical disabilities is considered one of the programme's main objectives. Results have been satisfactory.

*Workshops on independent living for persons with hearing impairments*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>Number of workshops</i>
January–December	2018	13	1
January–June	2019	15	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>

131. A sign language interpreter is involved in the workshop for persons with hearing impairments to ensure assertive communication with the young participants, as most do not have the possibility of properly addressing these issues at home.

132. The following topics are addressed during the workshop: self-esteem, deaf culture, social media use, prevention of abuse, interpersonal relationships (which often develop into promiscuity), communication in the home, family decision-making, positive attitudes towards disability, independence, rights of persons with disabilities, drug and alcohol abuse, comprehensive health and entrepreneurship. Other topics, such as human anatomy, sexually transmitted diseases, sexuality, gender and disability, are also broached.

133. The workshop for persons with hearing impairments is intensive and lasts for four 12-hour days.

134. More teams are needed to implement these interactive methodologies with participants, as well as more time (days) to address matters of interest to them.

*Workshops on independent living for persons with intellectual disabilities, 2018–June 2019*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>Number of workshops</i>
May	2018	16	1
June	2019	26	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>2</b>

135. The workshop for persons with intellectual disabilities focuses on strengthening skills for daily life and the ability to follow a routine at home. It is conducted in two phases.

136. The workshop addresses the topics of personal training, healthy lifestyles, morning exercise and stretching, key daily life skills, housekeeping, cooking, transportation and orientation, use of landline and mobile telephones, handling of social media, leisure and hobbies, and leadership and includes an art therapy class and the “Little Shop” module on understanding the concept of money.

*Workshops on independent living for persons with visual impairments*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>Number of workshops</i>
May	2018	18	1
April	2019	18	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>36</b>	<b>2</b>

137. The workshop for persons with visual impairments has three focus areas. Its main objective is for all participants to acquire the techniques, skills and knowledge to perform day-to-day activities and thus achieve independence and greater socialization. It includes the topics of self-care, hygiene and nutrition, among others, and is run under the slogan “Independence gives me dignity”.

138. The purpose of the module on orientation and mobility is to develop as much as possible the skills, abilities and techniques needed to get around autonomously and safely, in familiar or unfamiliar indoor and outdoor spaces, for instance through the use of a white cane, trailing, and high and low protective techniques. The module is run under the slogan “My blindness will not stand in my way”.

139. Under the traditional way of thinking, dependency and low confidence were instilled in persons with blindness or severe visual impairments. Alongside the current changes in education, technology enables these individuals to solve problems, develop greater personal responsibility and perceive themselves as having agency over their own lives. Nowadays, persons with a visual impairment can achieve productive and effective inclusion through the development of functional skills.

140. With the aim of strengthening the independence of persons with disabilities, the Third Assistive Technology Congress was held in 2018 on the theme of “Assistive Technology: From Theory to Practice” and was aimed at promoting paradigm shifts and bringing technical and scientific benefits to the public, in particular, persons with disabilities.

## **Article 20**

### **Personal mobility**

141. The Constitution establishes the fundamental duty of the State to guarantee that the population lives in a healthy, pollution-free environment, where air, water and food satisfy the requirements for the development of human life.

142. Executive Decree No. 36 of 2019 contains provisions on service dogs and other services for persons with disabilities designed to ensure that these persons obtain recognition

and that they can enter, move about and spend time in any public place, establishment or mode of transportation in the company of a service dog or aid, with the aim of strengthening the autonomy and independence of this population group.

143. To ensure the right to information of persons with disabilities, specific actions have been carried out on the basis of the third edition of the Accessibility Manual. These actions include the introduction of accessible signage, tactile maps and paving, audio signage and broadcasting services.

## **Article 21**

### **Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information**

144. Under article 37 of the Constitution, the State recognizes freedom of expression by any means without censorship, provided that it does not harm the reputation or honour of individuals, public security or public order. Furthermore, articles 42 and 43 of the Constitution recognize the rights to information and to access to information, including information contained in public and private databases or records and information of public or collective interest contained in databases or records kept by public officials or private individuals providing public services.

145. The Manual of General Standards for the Management of Information and Communications Technologies by Government, published in 2017, addresses the matter of users with disabilities to standardize and strengthen technological systems and infrastructure in State entities. The Manual establishes that State institutions are responsible for facilitating access for users with disabilities or special conditions to the information necessary to carry out procedures online. To this end, the introduction of plug-ins for visual or hearing impairments or motor disabilities is recommended.

146. In accordance with the right of persons with disabilities to access to information and communication, two bodies of the Public Prosecution Service have prepared documents containing legal information and standards in accessible format to ensure access to information for persons with disabilities who require it.

147. The Solicitor General's Office published the Manual of Good Practices for the Care of Persons with Disabilities in 2018 and the Guide on National and International Jurisprudence on Disability in 2019. Both documents were distributed to 15 government agencies and the Ernesto J. Castellero National Library. They were also donated to the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights.

148. To eliminate barriers and ensure access to health services, the Social Security Fund has made its website accessible for persons with disabilities. As of March 2021, the website had been seen more than 12,394 times. It can be visited at <https://discapacidad.css.gob.pa>.

## **Article 22**

### **Respect for privacy**

149. Article 29 of the Constitution protects correspondence, private communications and private documents and establishes their inviolability.

150. Obtaining such protected communications and documents without a court order prevents their use as evidence and can incur criminal liability. Furthermore, as mentioned, article 37 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, in writing or by any other means, without censorship, provided that the reputation or honour of individuals, public security and public order are respected. Otherwise, legal liability is incurred.

151. Articles 42 and 43 of the Constitution provide for the right to access personal information contained in public and private databases and records. Persons who request access may amend or change their information and request access to public information or information of collective interest contained in databases or records kept by public officials or private individuals providing public services. In addition, the Data Protection Act (No. 81 of 2019) came into effect in March 2021.

**Article 23****Respect for home and the family**

152. As part of efforts to establish mechanisms for the implementation of preventive actions and care for families experiencing various types of violations that impair their functioning, an online portal has been designed to strengthen family ties, provide more tools on violence-free child-rearing and education and enable timely follow-up by the technical team on individual assistance to families.

153. To strengthen assistance for children, adolescents and families, psychological counselling is available via telephone or online chat through the Aunt Elaine virtual clinic to help manage emotions during the COVID-19 health crisis and in situations of violence affecting children and adolescents. The virtual clinic, which also provides family counselling to parents and caregivers, was created to promote harmonious family relationships in which children are protected. Between April and December 2020, 2,651 users accessed the virtual clinic, with 74 per cent of the queries coming under the scope of the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Families.

154. To strengthen family ties, reduce risk factors and prevent violence, families are given knowledge and tools through the “Working and Learning as a Family” workshop, which broaches topics for parents and caregivers (parenting styles, setting rules, limits and consequences, and family emotional intelligence), for children and adolescents (relations with family, emotional awareness and life plans) and for working as a family (family structure, roles, limits, agreements and negotiations). Between January and June 2021, 1,216 people took part in the workshop.

155. In Panama, marriage is regulated by the Family Code, which defines marriage as the voluntary union of one man and one woman, both of whom must have legal capacity, for the purpose of making and sharing a life together.

156. Article 33 of the Family Code does not establish restrictions on marriage to the detriment of persons with physical disabilities; however, the last paragraph states that, in health matters, impediments due to illness are regulated by the Health Code and the provisions adopted by the Ministry of Health.

157. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities launched the “Your CAIPI at Home” platform (CAIPIs are Comprehensive Early Childhood Care Centres). It sought to promote early childhood development from home by providing didactic content and material for parents and caregivers. The platform was designed to be inclusive, for both parents with disabilities and children with disabilities.

**Article 24****Education**

158. The right to education is a fundamental guarantee that the Panamanian State is obliged to safeguard and protect, especially in the case of persons with disabilities. Panama is a signatory to a number of international conventions and treaties guaranteeing the rights of these persons.

159. The education system is free and compulsory up to the ninth grade. As stated in the Constitution, the provision of education to children and young people with disabilities is a right for which the State is responsible.

160. Between 2018 and 2020, the commitment to education for all was reaffirmed with the provision of educational services in 1,324 schools attended by students with disabilities, or 42.64 per cent of the 3,105 education centres, located in 71 of the country’s 79 districts, which represents an increase in coverage and access of 89.14 per cent compared to 2017.

161. The education centres have 3,017 special education teachers and 417 technical professionals who guide, direct or develop educational services for these students so that they can attend school in their community on an equal basis with their peers thanks to an educational model that enables them to progress academically through reasonable accommodation and values their strengths and abilities.

162. During the same period, seven new schools meeting universal accessibility standards were built.

163. Between 2018 and 2020, 19,603 students with disabilities were enrolled in the education system, from the early childhood level to the secondary and vocational levels. Of these, 82.33 per cent are enrolled in a school in their community identified as an inclusive school. A total of 32.5 per cent of the students are in inclusive classrooms full-time, 46.95 per cent spend part of their time in such classrooms and 2.88 per cent receive instruction in special classrooms. A total of 72.96 per cent of them are in urban areas, 25.01 per cent in rural areas and 2.03 per cent in Indigenous areas. There are 10,070 boys (62.8 per cent) and 6,070 girls and young women (37.2 per cent).

*Location of students by geographical area*

*Inclusive schools by type of disability*

2019–2020

<i>Disability</i>	<i>Grand total</i>	<i>Indigenous regions</i>	<i>Rural areas</i>	<i>Urban areas</i>
Hearing impairment	642	20	161	461
Physical disability	1 206	19	268	919
Intellectual disability	16 174	275	3 991	11 908
Mental disability	22		9	13
Visceral disability	26	1	13	12
Visual impairment	351	15	85	251
Multiple disabilities	232		51	181
Other condition	1 725	83	519	1 123
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 378</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>5 097</b>	<b>14 868</b>
Percentage	100 %	2.03 %	25.01 %	72.96 %

164. The largest group of students with disabilities enrolled in inclusive education within special education is found at the primary level, with 9,559 students, followed by 1,064 students at the preschool level, 5,572 students at the lower secondary level and 3,251 students at the secondary and vocational levels. Of these, 2,244 are enrolled in secondary schools and 1,007 are taking intermediate vocational or technical courses; 117 students are enrolled in university. In relation to target 4.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, 12,756 students are in the final year of primary, secondary or vocational education.

<i>Disability</i>	<i>2019</i>			<i>2020</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>2019 total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>2020 total</i>
Hearing impairment	169	191	360	222	280	502
Physical disability	326	237	563	449	315	764
Intellectual disability	2 058	1 181	3 239	8 760	5 017	13 777
Mental disability	3 660	1 997	5 657	17	5	22
Visceral disability	43	24	67	13	13	26
Visual impairment	251	195	446	170	117	287
Multiple disabilities	1		1	56	34	90
Other condition	389	237	626	383	289	672
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 897</b>	<b>4 062</b>	<b>10 959</b>	<b>10 070</b>	<b>6 070</b>	<b>16 140</b>
Percentage	62.93 %	37.07 %	100 %	62.39 %	37.61 %	100 %

165. Approximately 3,465 students whose condition requires the provision of reasonable accommodation are enrolled in education or habilitation programmes in facilities run by the Panamanian Institute for Special Training.

*Educational level by number of students and by disability, 2019–2020*

<i>Disability</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Early childhood</i>	<i>Preschool</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Lower secondary</i>	<i>Upper secondary</i>	<i>Vocational</i>
Hearing impairment	646	14	38	296	168	90	40
Physical disability	1 214	26	153	624	259	106	46
Intellectual disability	16 326	198	724	7 869	4 794	1 879	862
Mental disability	22			9	3	10	
Visceral disability	26			7	14	5	
Visual impairment	358	3	25	154	100	56	20
Multiple disabilities	232	6	28	107	37	33	21
Other disability	890	21	96	493	197	65	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>19 714</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>1 064</b>	<b>9 559</b>	<b>5 572</b>	<b>2 244</b>	<b>1 007</b>

166. In response to the recommendation to take account of persons with intellectual disabilities in the education system, 13,838 students, representing 85.74 per cent of students with disabilities, are enrolled in schools and receive additional services, such as Braille, information and communications technologies and reasonable accommodation, according to their needs.

167. Pursuant to Executive Decree No. 280 of 2019, a new grant was established through the Equity and Quality Education Fund for inclusive schools, which benefits 16,140 students from remote areas experiencing multidimensional poverty and is designed to minimize barriers in access to technical and technological aids.

168. Act No. 148 of 2020 established the Universal Social Education Assistance Programme, which provides economic support to students with disabilities for the dual purpose of ensuring their participation and retention in school.

169. The pedagogical component of teacher training is part of the State's efforts to harmonize inclusive schools. Between 2017 and 2020, 35,156 teachers, or 70.31 per cent of teaching staff in the education system, took part in training. The emphasis for the 3,147 special education teachers was on universal design for learning, while 500 school principals completed the diploma in Managing Excellence in Schools for All and 45 teachers followed the Pedagogical Approach and Student-Centred Education Programme focused on family and community life.

170. During the COVID-19 health crisis, the Government promoted the provision of reasonable accommodations under the slogan "Education is the Star", and the segment "The Star Connects with Diversity", which included sign language interpretation, ran on 9 television channels for 56 hours a week, for a total of 1,792 hours of airtime and 4,600 hours of broadcasting, and on 13 national radio stations, including 3,400 hours of transmission in remote areas.

171. In terms of reasonable accommodation, 12,518 workbooks on the Moodle platform, prepared by special education professionals, and 28,703 Education Portal guides were downloaded from virtual platforms using equipment provided through international technical cooperation.

172. In terms of technological tools, a total of 1,943 tablets were provided to lower secondary students. In addition, 22,000 activity workbooks for home learning were delivered, including resources in native languages for Indigenous communities.

173. Between 2017 and 2020, participation in international sports programmes was made possible for 4,791 athletes with disabilities, including 3,226 boys and 1,565 girls.



174. Helplines were set up for parents and the educational community in the 16 education districts to report psychosocial issues in a timely manner; 3,694 calls were received by the first quarter of 2021.

175. Panama adopted the “Joining Forces” Inclusive Government Plan for the period 2019–2024 and, thanks to the professional responsibility of education leaders, a working group was established to determine the actions needed so that the country can bring the inclusive education project to fruition, in compliance with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

176. Act No. 30 of 2006 established the National Evaluation and Accreditation System for the Improvement of University Education, which consists of two bodies – the National Commission for University Assessment and Accreditation and the Technical Oversight Board.

177. The university evaluation matrix used by the National Commission for University Assessment and Accreditation consists of 185 indicators, 3 of which explicitly refer to disability. These indicators relate to the activities available to students with physical, intellectual or sensory disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

178. There are 22 accredited universities, including 5 public institutions (23 per cent) and 17 private institutions (77 per cent). Among the public universities, 80 per cent have Equal Opportunities Offices in keeping with Executive Decree No. 56 of 2007. However, to ensure that private universities are also involved, the Inclusion Commission, composed of four public and five private universities, was established under the National Council of University Rectors in 2018.

179. Awareness-raising activities have been carried out at universities, reaching 47,266 people. In addition, specialized support services for students with visual impairments (Braille and audio materials) are offered at two public universities, adaptations have been made to infrastructure and signage, workshops have been held for teachers and administrative staff on how to attend to persons with disabilities, sign language workshops have been organized, and outreach activities have been conducted, including participation in radio shows and the organization of an exhibition of artwork by persons with disabilities.

180. Universities contribute to promoting compliance with the Convention through training programmes, such as the Master’s Degree in Public Policy Management for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and their Families, currently in its fifth year; the Master’s Degree in Universal Accessibility, with a focus on access to the physical environment; the Bachelor’s Degree in Translation and Interpretation in Panamanian Sign Language; and Certificates in Accessible Tourism and in Statistics and Disability.

181. Notwithstanding efforts to achieve inclusive education, elements of the medical model of disability persist in special education. Therefore, given the need to establish an inclusive education plan, the Ministry of Education has held consultative round tables, with support from UNICEF, to integrate equitable education services into a single system.

## **Article 25**

### **Health**

182. The State, through the Ministry of Health, guarantees free healthcare in public facilities, in accordance with Decree No. 546 of 2005, which mandates free healthcare for children under 5 years of age, and Decree No. 129 of 2021, which establishes free health services for persons with disabilities who, having been previously identified through an outpatient consultation, hold an identification card. A total of 20,538 cards were issued during the reporting period.

183. In ensuring access to healthcare, the Social Security Fund gives priority attention to persons with disabilities in all public facilities and does not charge uninsured persons with disabilities for services from providers in the interior of the country.

184. Between 2017 and 2020, a total of 185,603 persons with disabilities, including 100,619 men and 84,984 women, received care at Ministry of Health facilities.

*Persons with disabilities served by the Social Security Fund by type of disability, 2018–2021*

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Hearing impairment	5 829	5 197	2 218	9 454
Physical disability	1 584	2 926	1 224	4 372
Intellectual disability	428	464	294	812
Mental disability	525	737	433	1 219
Multiple disabilities	175	352	134	641
Visual impairment	167	285	100	513
Visceral disability	17	42	19	76
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 735</b>	<b>10 003</b>	<b>4 422</b>	<b>17 087</b>

185. The data collected by the Social Security Fund on the care provided to persons with disabilities, disaggregated by type of disability, show that persons with hearing impairments account for a larger share of beneficiaries than persons with visceral disabilities.

*Patients at the National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute, 2017–2021*

Year	Total	Insured	Uninsured	Men	Women
2017	76 514	59 457	17 057	35 675	40 839
2018	88 785	67 010	21 775	42 832	45 953
2019	94 873	65 532	29 341	45 893	24 314
2020	65 898	41 311	24 587	31 245	34 653
2021	15 136	8 034	7 102	7 339	7 797
<b>Total</b>	<b>341 206</b>	<b>241 344</b>	<b>99 862</b>	<b>162 984</b>	<b>153 556</b>

186. A total of 341,206 persons with disabilities have been provided with services by following specialized departments of the National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute: Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Orthopaedics, Neurology, Paediatric Psychiatry, Paediatrics, Psychiatry, General Medicine, Dentistry, Psychology, Social Work, Nutrition, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Respiratory Therapy, Physiotherapy, and Orthotics and Prosthetics.

*Budget of the National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute, 2017–2021*

Year	Amount
2017	B 6 057 900
2018	B 6 458 500
2019	B 1 200 000
2020	B 8 000 000
2021	B 6 500 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>B 35 216 400</b>

187. Between 2017 and 2021, the National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute was allocated a budget of B 35,216,400, allowing it to provide different types of treatments, including conventional rehabilitation treatment (physical, occupational, respiratory and speech therapy), treatment using sophisticated robotics, intensive rehabilitation (Therasuit), orthotics, medicinal treatment (injections of botulinum toxin, corticosteroids, platelet-rich plasma) and dental treatment.

**Number of persons with mental disabilities receiving services at the National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute**

Year	Outpatient	Hospitalized	Sex	
			M	F
2017	1 110	786	468	318
2018	1 175	707	451	256
2019	1 071	782	467	315
2020	1 170	841	457	386
**2021	221	202	116	86
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 577</b>	<b>3 318</b>	<b>1 959</b>	<b>1 361</b>

188. Between 2017 and May 2021, the mental health department saw 3,577 patients, of whom 3,318 required hospitalization.

189. Through the Step-by-Step programme, which was launched in 2021, the Ministry of Health is working on prevention and early care of neurodevelopmental disorders by taking tangible steps to unify diagnostic and treatment criteria, from birth to age 9 years.

*National Subdirectorate for Primary Care, Neonatal Screening, 2017–2020*

Year	Total	Insured	Uninsured
2017	14 277	9 458	4 819
2018	15 838	10 334	5 504
2019	16 312	10 961	5 351
2020	15 184	9 365	5 819
<b>Total</b>	<b>61 611</b>	<b>40 118</b>	<b>21 493</b>

190. The State is continuing disability prevention efforts through early detection of metabolic and endocrinological diseases. In this connection, 286,627 neonatal screening tests have been performed, including 237,508 for uninsured patients, or 86 per cent of the population. As illustrated by area of action 3 of the Health Master Plan 2018–2025, there are plans to expand the child health prevention strategy, with the inclusion of screening for other types of health issues, such as metabolic, visual, auditory, cardiac and child development disorders.

*Neonatal Screening in health facilities, 2017–2020*

Year	Number of newborns screened	Positive cases	Glucose 6-phosphate	Congenital hypothyroidism	Galactose	Phenylketonuria	Adrenal hyperplasia	Haemoglobinopathy
2017	56 906	3 551	937	10	1	0	11	2 592
2018	55 962	3 683	730	9	0	0	6	2 937
2019	52 980	3 329	901	13	2	1	6	2 406
2020	50 167	3 460	919	8	5	2	4	2 522
<b>Total</b>	<b>216 015</b>	<b>14 023</b>	<b>3 487</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>10 457</b>

191. During the reporting period, 86,062 children, including 50,555 boys and 35,507 girls, were treated in rehabilitation departments. Injections of botulinum toxin were administered to 663 children with cerebral palsy, including 410 boys and 253 girls.

192. The Congenital Blood Clotting Clinic treated 3,953 patients, while 11,103 patients, including 6,037 males and 5,066 females, received treatment under the High-Risk Programme, which was designed with a focus on social protection.

**Hospitalized patients, by sex**  
**Centre for the Study and Treatment of Addictions Programme (2017–2021)**

Year	Outpatient	Hospitalized	Sex	
			M	F
2017	1 297	142	982	458
2018	1 079	135	876	383
2019	1 099	93	74	19
2020	592	70	789	379
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 067</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>2 721</b>	<b>1 239</b>

193. Between 2017 and 2020, the Centre for the Study and Treatment of Addiction cared for a total of 4,067 patients. The cost of the programme is B 25,671.72. It is a public programme financed by the State. Patients entering the recovery programme contribute B 410.

**Community Medication Support Programme**

Year	Patient total	Sex		Patient status		Family support		Exemption	
		Male	Female	Insured	Uninsured	No	Yes	Total	Partial
2017	2 409	1 285	1 124	652	1 757	191	2 218	499	1 910
2018	2 772	1 472	1 300	922	1 850	160	2 612	286	2 486
2019	3 451	1 856	1 595	1 208	2 243	3 046	405	414	3 037
2020	3 868	1 947	1 921	1 464	2 401	3 498	370	620	3 248
2021	290	187	103	91	199	276	14	51	239

194. The Community Medication Support Programme has granted 1,870 full exemptions and 10,920 partial exemptions.

195. At a cost of US\$ 157,948.40, 66 per cent of hospitals have been assessed with the aim of making the modifications necessary to ensure certain areas are accessible, including by adapting ramps, toilets and windows to the needs of persons with disabilities.

196. In 2017, seven elevators were purchased at a cost of US\$ 161,436, thus improving accessibility for all children requiring specialist medical care.

197. Circular No. DENSYP-S-DNSS-CN-MFR-C-009-2021 of 26 February 2021 reiterates the instruction to follow the Guide on prescribing and dispensing medical devices to persons with disabilities. The G-01.08.19 Standards Manual on procedures concerning such devices was developed in 2019.

Year	Admissions	Outcome			Specialized consultations	Emergency paediatrics
		Discharged	Deceased			
<b>Total</b>	<b>50 422</b>	<b>48 624</b>	<b>1 819</b>		<b>438 935</b>	<b>331 020</b>
2017	13 143	12 686	464		112 509	91 918
2018	13 353	12 855	453		121 380	94 052
2019	12 853	12 421	468		127 496	92 887
2020	8 195	7 924	346		56 707	36 301
2021	2 878	2 738	88		20 843	15 862

198. Since 2017, 50,422 patients and their relatives have been provided with accommodation while receiving specialist medical care or rehabilitation services.

199. Support is available for family members of persons with disabilities living in remote places to help them travel to appointments and treatments; 50,022 families have benefited.

The legal framework on a human rights-based approach has been strengthened through various agreements with governmental and non-governmental entities providing support for the transportation of families who need to travel from the interior of the country for several coordinated appointments. Such support is also available for children with amputations who are sent abroad for the creation of prosthetic limbs.

200. Following the onset of the pandemic, a temporary clinic was established for patients of the National Institute of Mental Health (March to June 2020), where 1,818 assessments were performed, involving 907 male patients and 911 female patients, 200 injections were administered and 3,149 calls made to the telephone helpline were answered (898 male, 2,251 female). Patients aged 42 to 51 years accounted for the highest number of calls, followed by those aged 61 to 70 years. In addition, 225 public awareness activities dealing with topics including mental health prevention and management were carried out through television and social networks.

201. In 2020, 194 children were hospitalized, including 118 boys and 76 girls.

202. With the establishment of the ongoing PanaVac-19 COVID-19 vaccination strategy, 80,090 persons with disabilities were immunized up to June 2021. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, the 169 helpline was set up to provide people with assistance in specific areas (psychology/psychiatry).

## Article 27

### Work and employment

203. The Panamanian State, through the Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development, promotes the labour inclusion of persons with disabilities. Between August 2017 and July 2021, 1,563 persons with disabilities entered the private sector labour market. Of these, 1,015 were men and 548 were women.

204. A targeted recruitment strategy was established for the period from August 2017 to June 2021 to incorporate persons with disabilities into the labour force. Over that period, 132 people were directly hired by private firms. In addition, 838 employment certificates were issued for processing the tax incentive accorded to companies that hire persons with disabilities.

205. Between August 2017 and July 2021, 150 awareness-raising workshops were held in accordance with article 50 of Act No. 15 of 31 May 2016. A total of 1,529 public and private sector workers – 821 men and 708 women – took part.

#### *Awareness-raising workshops*

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Workshops	20	17	30	31	52	150
Men	180	342	87	10	202	821
Women	86	221	129	32	240	708
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>1 529</b>

206. Between January and June 2021, during the pandemic, employment counselling was provided to 145 persons with disabilities and their families nationwide, including 101 men and 44 women. In the search for employment opportunities, 194 companies were contacted, resulting in 18 vacancies for persons with disabilities.

207. Panama introduced the “I Follow the Rules” (Yo sí cumplo) seal to recognize good labour practices and companies’ commitment to the labour inclusion process; 137 certificates were awarded. This process involves training and awareness-raising in the business sector, with the participation of 74 labour inspectors nationwide who use revised and adapted forms for verifying compliance with labour principles and laws, particularly the 2 per cent quota for persons with disabilities.

208. To improve the quality of services and procedures for employers, workers and jobseekers, the Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development has been promoting an innovation and digital transformation plan, with online services, since September 2019.

Given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Panama Digital portal has provided guidelines for returning to normality since May 2020.

209. Records of the application of biosecurity and digital identity protocols and the reinstatement of contracts for workers at private companies have been consolidated. As of 12 June 2021, a total of 150,200 database entries were confirmed, with 44 companies in 7 of the country's 10 provinces indicating that they had persons with disabilities on their payroll.

*Total contracts reinstated by companies employing persons with disabilities, by province*

<i>Province</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Companies employing persons with disabilities</i>
Panama	Panama	33
Colón	Colón	2
Chiriquí	David	2
Herrera	Chitré	1
Panamá Oeste	La Chorrera/Capira	2
Veraguas	Santiago	3
Coclé	Aguadulce	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>44</b>

210. Act No. 201 of 26 February 2021 establishes temporary measures to preserve employment and normalize labour relations. It also contains other provisions that make up the legal framework for the operation of the National Unemployment Register in order to identify solutions and help people whose jobs were affected by the pandemic find employment. Records from March to June 2021 show a total of 70 persons with disabilities, of whom 12 were hard of hearing, 40 had physical disabilities, 1 had multi-system and organ dysfunction, 4 had organ damage and 13 had unspecified conditions. They included 37 men and 33 women, and 66 were Panamanians and 4 were foreigners.

211. As regards job training, the National Vocational Training Institute for Human Development delivered 153 technical training activities for persons with disabilities, in which 345 men and 255 women throughout the country took part.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Training courses</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
2017	16	127	84	221
2018	55	78	65	143
2019	64	136	92	228
2020	18	4	14	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>600</b>

## **Article 28**

### **Adequate standard of living and social protection**

212. The Government, through the Ministry of Social Development, launched the Guardian Angel Programme pursuant to Act No. 39 of 14 June 2012. Its aim is to improve the quality of life of persons with severe disabilities who are dependent on others and live in extreme poverty by providing a cash transfer to allow them to meet their basic needs for food, medicines and access to essential services.

213. A total of B 81,557,120 was invested between 2017 and 2021, and 19,106 persons with severe disabilities have benefited to date.

**Guardian Angel Programme beneficiaries, by year and sex, for the period 2017–2021**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
2017	8 212	10 285	18 497
2018	8 434	10 540	18 974
2019	8 594	10 660	19 254
2020	8 533	10 573	19 106
2021	8 525	10 581	19 106

**Distribution of Guardian Angel Programme beneficiaries by age, as of June 2021**

<i>Age range</i>														
			<i>Young children</i>				<i>Children</i>				<i>Adolescents</i>			
<i>Beneficiaries</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>0 to 8 years</i>		<i>Sex</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>9 to 14 years</i>		<i>Sex</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>15 to 17 years</i>		<i>Sex</i>	<i>Number</i>
19 106			1 254				2 528				1 191			
	M	10 581			M	673			M	1 488			M	697
	F	8 525			F	581			F	1 040			F	494

214. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, a cooperation agreement was concluded by the Mayor's Office of Panama City, the United Nations Development Programme and the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities, under which 1,244 bags of food worth B 25,007.26 were distributed to vulnerable persons with disabilities.

215. As part of the occupational hazards programme, active users are offered a cash allowance or grant in the event of an accident or occupational illness, and treatment and prostheses or assistive devices are covered. Beneficiaries are also offered grants under the illness programme if their health is affected or they acquire a disability. All these services are evaluated by a medical committee, which is in charge of assessing and certifying an occupational illness or accident causing a temporary or permanent disability.

216. In accordance with Act No. 134 of 2013, all persons with disabilities within the national territory who are duly certified by the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities qualify for:

(a) A 25 per cent discount on monthly electricity bills, up to 600 kWh. The normal rate will be applied in excess of this amount.

(b) This discount will be applied regardless of whether the person is a minor or an adult. In the case of minors, evidence must be provided of the person responsible and his or her place of residence.

217. The table below provides the number of customers who have applied for the grant and the yearly amount, as reported by the electricity distribution companies.

<i>Company</i>	<i>2015</i>		<i>2016</i>		<i>2017</i>		<i>2018</i>		<i>2019</i>		<i>2020</i>	
	<i>Customers</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Customers</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Customers</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Customers</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Customers</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Customers</i>	<i>Amount</i>
EDEMET	2	0.13	30	3.77	99	11.50	181	21.48	294	39.87	424	61.63
EDECHI			3	0.44	5	0.63	3	0.48	1	0.12	0	0.02
ELEKTRA			35	5.14	121	19.82	104	19.82	224	47.35	337	67.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>9.36</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>31.94</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>41.78</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>87.34</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>129.14</b>

**Drinking water service**

<i>Period (Year)</i>	<i>Number of customers</i>	<i>Amount (B, US\$)</i>
		-35 166.03
2015	3	-8.18
2016	48	-473.23
2017	165	-2 793.46
2018	279	-5 384.26
2019	437	-8 546.32
2020	527	-11 504.20
2021	596	-6 456.38

218. On 27 May 2021, the executive branch approved Act No. 217 of 2021, establishing the Seed Capital Programme for Persons with Disabilities under the Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Authority, through the National Business Development System operated by the Ministry of Social Development. The programme provides non-refundable grants of between B 500.00 and B 5,000.00 to persons with disabilities. It also exempts them from paying income tax for the first three financial years after starting their main economic activity.

219. The State, through the Ministry of Health and the National Water Supply and Sewage Institute, guarantees the supply of drinking water and the collection and treatment of wastewater to help maintain and improve the level of health and well-being of all Panamanians.

220. In Panama, drinking water is a public service and is kept at an affordable rate, one of the lowest in Latin America. Water is a right of all citizens, without discrimination. This service benefits 3,125,552 inhabitants through a 9,420 km-long water distribution network. The country also has a 2,713 km-long sewage network.

221. In accordance with Act No. 134 of 2013, the National Water Supply and Sewage Institute offers a 25 per cent discount on the cost of drinking water to all persons with disabilities within the national territory and to those whose children or other family members have disabilities. This discount is applied regardless of whether the person is a minor or an adult. In the case of minors, the responsible person at the minor's place of residence must be identified. In 2017, 165 customers with disabilities benefited; in 2018, there were 279 beneficiaries; in 2019, 437 customers with a family member with disabilities benefited; and in 2020, 527 customers with disabilities received the discount.

**Article 29****Participation in political and public life**

222. The consolidated Electoral Code, which was in force during the last elections in 2019, contains two articles on the freedom to vote of persons with disabilities.

223. Article 377 allows persons who are "manifestly blind or dependent" to be accompanied by a trusted person and article 378 grants persons with disabilities priority in voting.

224. With the involvement of non-governmental organizations and through the Justice and Peace Committee of the National Commission on Electoral Reform, persons with disabilities proposed the following elements as part of the draft amendments to electoral law: the creation of a party secretariat to empower people with disabilities; the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of disability in membership of political parties; accessible formats for election publicity; accessibility of public election statistics; where suitable polling stations are lacking, the option of using polling stations in neighbouring constituencies, to facilitate access; and an explicit ban on inaccessible polling stations and the obstruction of access, as well as on any one person providing assistance to more than one person with a disability.

225. These innovations, which are still subject to approval by the legislature, would enter into force in the next elections, scheduled for 2024.



226. Assistive technologies are also used to ensure secrecy of voting for persons with disabilities, and 15 per cent of post-electoral funding is earmarked for the training of persons with disabilities in political action.

227. In addition, an accessibility guide to polling stations for persons with disabilities and older persons was published in 2019; for the 2024 elections, the guide will have the status of protocol. Another significant qualitative advance is that the subcommission on the General Plan for Elections, which previously dealt with preferential treatment for voters with disabilities, has now become the Voting Accessibility Commission, with its own budget.

228. It is important to note that, in 2019, the number of persons with disabilities was recorded as 29,644; in 2024, a project on voluntary registration of persons with disabilities was launched by the National Directorate of Identity Documentation and the National Directorate of Electoral Organization.

229. The awareness-raising sessions offered to public officials, election stewards and State security agencies will be extended to political parties, with provision in the programme for training civil society organizations, in order to promote the use of accessible election materials and informed voting.

230. Article 193 of the current Electoral Code empowers women by providing that the post-electoral political funding earmarked specifically for the training of women (20 per cent of the 50 per cent allocated to training in political parties) will be coordinated by the existing women's secretariats or their equivalent.

231. As to the right to stand for election, women have a recognized guaranteed quota of 50 per cent of nominations, from party primary elections up to general elections, the aim being to boost the number of female candidates (Electoral Code, art. 303). The rule is not strictly applied and, as the Secretariat for Women has found, smaller proportions are allowed and can be made up by male candidates.

232. In this connection, the electoral reforms submitted to the National Assembly in 2021 provided for parity in electoral lists, whether in elections of delegates to a political party's constituting convention or among independent candidates or in joint inter-party lists; and for the introduction of a system of alternation (female-male or male-female) in multi-member constituencies.

233. Persons with chronic, involuntional or degenerative diseases shall have priority in voting at their designated polling station.

234. Inter-agency working meetings were held to discuss Act No. 184 of 2020 on Gender-based Political Violence, aiming to prevent, punish and eliminate political violence against women, as manifested through any action, conduct or omission carried out either directly or through a third party, and which, on the basis of gender, causes harm or suffering to one or more women and is intended to impair or deny the recognition, use or full enjoyment or exercise of their political rights.

235. As established in article 1 of the Act, such conduct may include physical, sexual, psychological, ethical, moral, economic or symbolic violence, or discrimination of any kind, within political parties.

### Article 30

#### Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

236. The Panamanian State, through the Ministry of Culture (formerly the National Institute for Culture) which was created two years ago, on 15 August 2019, by Act No. 90, is promoting strategies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in cultural life.

*Participation of persons with disabilities, by cultural activity (2017–2020)*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Art exhibitions</i>	<i>Museum tours</i>	<i>Cultural festivals</i>	<i>Theatrical works</i>	<i>Inclusive Gala</i>	<i>Craft fairs</i>	<i>PROFE writer training programme</i>	<i>Inclusive dance</i>
2017	89	126	48	802	0	30	0	12
2018	86	37	59	0	0	62	0	28
2019	172	55	77	0	113	6	0	6

*Participation of persons with disabilities, by cultural activity (2017–2020)*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Art exhibitions</i>	<i>Museum tours</i>	<i>Cultural festivals</i>	<i>Theatrical works</i>	<i>Inclusive Gala</i>	<i>Craft fairs</i>	<i>PROFE writer training programme</i>	<i>Inclusive dance</i>
2020	29	0	0	0	47	34	8	102
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>148</b>

237. On 3 November 2020, the General Act on Culture, Act No. 175 of 2020, was adopted. Article 32 sets forth provisions for persons with disabilities, guaranteeing their right to use their creative, artistic and intellectual capacity; the universal design of spaces in which cultural activities are carried out or cultural services are provided; access to cultural materials and products; and recognition of cultural identity.

238. In July 2019, a situational analysis was carried out to evaluate vertical and horizontal mobility in commercial premises, restaurants and other establishments in the San Felipe district, which includes the Casco Antiguo (Old Town), the place where Panama City was moved and refounded in 1673. Since 1997, this area has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

239. Since 2017, the Office of the Panama City Casco Antiguo has carried out projects and programmes at a cost of approximately US\$ 1,518,003.08, including:

- (a) Pedestrian route for persons with disabilities in the Old Town;
- (b) Study, design and development of preliminary and final plans and documents for the restoration and enhancement of the Plaza de Francia;
- (c) Repair and maintenance service for the Panama Tourist Authority parking lot, including accessibility measures.

240. In 2019, the Festival of Inclusive Culture was held in the Cathedral Plaza. Counting performers and spectators, 287 people took part, 77 of them persons with disabilities (45 women and 32 men). The National Theatre, the main venue for the performing arts, hosted the first Inclusive Gala, which attracted 781 people, including performers and spectators, 113 of them persons with disabilities (68 men and 45 women).

241. In 2020, virtual activities were developed, such as the “Zumba for All” programme, led by a person with intellectual disabilities and recorded twice a week and uploaded to all social media platforms of the Ministry of Culture. The second Inclusive Gala was recorded at the National Theatre; 47 performers took part, 21 of them persons with disabilities (12 men and 9 women).

## C. Articles 6 and 7

### Special situation of children with disabilities and women with disabilities

#### Article 6

##### Women with disabilities

242. The Attorney General’s Office conducted a census in May 2021, which recorded 393 male and 654 female employees with chronic illnesses, and 9 male and 11 female employees with disabilities. This census became an essential tool for understanding the situation of these individuals in the context of the pandemic, with a view to guaranteeing their human rights and providing appropriate arrangements in line with their health status and general welfare needs.

243. The Secretariat for Human Rights, Access to Justice and Gender of the Attorney General’s Office offers accessible spaces for training and awareness-raising on gender-related human rights issues for prosecutors and technical staff and provides them with technical assistance in the investigation of cases of gender-based violence, including support for victims and alleged perpetrators or participants with disabilities.

244. Civil society organizations have requested the publication of disaggregated statistics on such cases to determine the number involving women and girls with disabilities and the related judicial proceedings.

245. In compliance with article 31 of Act No. 82 of 2013, a police unit specializing in domestic and gender-based violence was created within the National Police in 2018 to ensure that all police stations across the country had officers trained in providing care and guidance to female victims of these offences. Civil society organizations have requested that officers in the specialized police unit receive training in handling cases involving persons with disabilities.

246. Criminal legislation on combating violence against women is of a general nature, with the exception of the punishable acts added by Act No. 82 of 2013. A victim's disability is considered an aggravating circumstance in certain offences, such as those outlined in Title III on offences against sexual integrity and freedom.

247. Act No. 21 of 2018 introduced changes to the existing Criminal Code, including the strengthening of sanctions for offences against sexual integrity and freedom. A sentence of up to 18 years' imprisonment could be imposed in cases of aggravated rape against a person in a vulnerable situation, such as a person with a disability. In other criminal offences, a victim's disability is considered an aggravating circumstance.

248. The victim gives his or her testimony in a *Gesell* chamber, with the authorization of the due process judge, and at the request of the Prosecutor's Office. The victim is accompanied by a professional psychologist who is qualified to provide this service to children, adolescents and adults with disabilities.

249. At present, through the Ministry of Public Security, the Government provides the police units of the security forces, who are first responders, with a protocol on handling cases of violence against women.

250. The State published an orientation guide entitled "You are not alone" for women in situations of domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also launched a pilot "Support Point" plan, which establishes a practical, free and secure mechanism for communication in emergency situations aimed at female victims of violence and older adults.

251. Between 2017 and June 2021, the Ombudsman's Office trained 230 people on the rights of women and persons with disabilities. Through its social media channels, it continues to run awareness-raising campaigns on women's rights and gender-based violence and has published a guide entitled "Women, know your rights" in Spanish and two Indigenous languages.

252. Furthermore, the Ministry of Public Security, together with the Public Prosecution Service, provided training to units of the security forces on issues related to gender and persons with disabilities. The two-day training course focused on the protocol for investigating acts of violence against women committed by partners or family members, taking into account the role these units play as first responders. Since 2017, around 3,500 units have received this training.

253. Through the National Intersectoral Committee for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents, the 2021–2022 Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents has been drafted as part of the activities of the Committee's Technical Commission. The Plan is linked to the National Multisectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents and the strengthening of local implementation mechanisms, namely the Municipal Round Tables for the Prevention of Violence.

254. The service for women at risk of violence or in vulnerable situations has been strengthened by 15 centres operated by the National Institute for Women at the national level, located in all 10 provinces and in some Indigenous regions.

255. The Institute's data web platform was established in 2019 as a central repository for data and information collected regarding situations of violence and the users of the centres and shelters.

256. The platform has a digital form, used by the centres' staff during the assistance phase, which includes questions regarding the user's disability status and other specific questions related to the disability, such as whether it was the result of violence.

257. Between the platform's launch in January 2019 and May 2021, 6,790 female users registered with the Institute's centres across the country. A total of 179 of these women had a disability.

258. Female victims of violence who face an imminent risk of death can receive protection at two shelters that have been made accessible for women with motor disabilities or reduced mobility. Women can stay in the shelters with their children for as long as they require protection.

259. During the consultations carried out for the preparation of the present report, non-governmental organizations stated that State institutions still lacked sufficient means to ensure equal opportunities and equity, such as through the provision of sign language interpreters, the use of universal design and the facilitation of access to communication and information.

## **Article 7**

### **Children with disabilities**

260. Article 202 of the Criminal Code defines corporal punishment as the offence of child abuse punishable by a prison sentence of 2 to 4 years or 3 to 6 years, increased by one third to one half when the victim is a child with a disability.

261. By virtue of this provision, and of article 203 of the Code, any punitive action taken by a parent, relative or caregiver against a child alleged to have suffered corporal punishment will be investigated ex officio by the competent authority to determine whether it constitutes the offence of domestic, physical and/or psychological violence.

262. Act No. 60 of 2016, amending Act No. 29 of 2002 on pregnant minors and other provisions, is the regulatory framework intended to prevent and reduce pregnancies in minors, improve the quality of life of pregnant minors and ensure that they are integrated fully into development efforts, that they remain in the education system and that their dignity is respected. Between 2016 and 2020, the country's hospitals reported 1,601 cases of pregnancy in adolescents.

263. Act No. 171 of 2020 on comprehensive protection in early childhood and early childhood development has been adopted.

264. Under the Act, the State ensures the protection of early childhood rights without discrimination and taking into consideration the needs of children with disabilities or special needs, who benefit from special protection, in order to enable them to lead full lives in conditions that guarantee their dignity and allow them to develop to the fullest extent possible.

265. Since 2017 the Children and Adolescents' Advisory Councils have provided forums for the participation, inclusion and development of children and adolescents where their voices are heard and their opinions have an impact on decision-making by the authorities in their communities. The Councils are created through municipal agreements at the national level and have benefited from the participation of members with disabilities.

266. The Intergenerational Network for Good Internet Use was created in 2019 with the aim of empowering students, parents and teachers to use the Internet safely; to prevent, address and follow up possible violations of the rights of children and adolescents relating to Internet use; and to provide support to victims.

267. Civil society organizations question the omission from the present report of the deplorable events occurring in shelters for children and adolescents in Panama and request their inclusion. Moreover, they request information on the status of the cases reported to the competent courts.

268. Since 2017 the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Families has lodged 11 complaints of alleged crimes involving violations of the human rights of children and adolescents in protection centres or shelters under its supervision.

269. The National Secretariat has placed itself at the disposal of the investigating authorities to ensure that the persons involved are sanctioned, the victims' rights are guaranteed and due process is respected.

## **Statistics and their use in evaluating development**

### **Statistics and data collection**

270. The 2020s Census Programme, which will include the twelfth National Population Census and the eighth Housing Census and provide statistical information to identify and quantify persons with disabilities at different geographic levels, has not yet begun owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

271. The National Statistics and Census Institute and the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities have undertaken joint work on measuring disability in the upcoming twelfth National Population Census and the eighth Housing Census. The pilot census, undertaken in August and September 2021 using a rights-based methodology, included three self-identification options whose design and conceptual framework were provided by the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities.

272. The National Statistics and Census Institute and the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic will consider procedural and operational aspects and methodological tools, as well as considering developments in the COVID-19 pandemic and budgetary matters, to determine the date of the twelfth National Population Census and the eighth Housing Census.

273. The lack of statistical data and prevalence studies on disability in Panama, disaggregated by age and sex, also poses a major problem and hinders the implementation of coordinated and effective public policies to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, since the only prevalence study as yet carried out was conducted in 2006. It does seem possible, however, to collect such data without violating individual rights. The country report of Panama refers to, and takes as valid, data from the 2010 census, information that we consider unreliable.

## **Technical assistance, guidance and voluntary commitments**

### **International cooperation**

274. Since 2017, technical advice has been provided through international cooperation on matters including universal accessibility and universal design, specifically for centres operating in the areas of rehabilitation, social integration, human rights and disability. Training has also been provided by international experts, meetings have been organized, and Panamanian representatives have participated in international congresses, benefiting the technical staff of the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities and representatives of civil society. During the COVID-19 crisis, experiences were exchanged among countries by means of various virtual platforms.

275. Furthermore, Panama is part of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which identifies the status of the implementation of projects to improve compliance with the Convention, applying the inclusive Sustainable Development Goals.

276. The Panamanian State calls on the Committee and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to work jointly to develop a training programme on the rights of persons with disabilities and, in particular, the Convention.

### **National implementation and monitoring**

277. The national human rights institution, known as the Office of the Ombudsman, was created by means of Act No. 7 of 5 February 1997 and granted constitutional rank through articles 129 and 130 of Legislative Act No. 1 of 2004.

278. Its mandate is set out in article 129 of the Constitution of Panama and article 2 of Act No. 7 of February 1997, as follows:

Article 129: “The Office of the Ombudsman shall ensure the protection of the rights and fundamental safeguards enshrined in this Constitution, as well as those provided for in international human rights conventions and the law through a non-judicial review of the facts and the acts or omissions of public officials and providers of public services and shall act to ensure that they are respected.”

279. Another monitoring mechanism was established by Executive Decree No. 7 of 2012, which created a national standing committee tasked with ensuring compliance with and follow-up to human rights recommendations. Its members are responsible for monitoring the implementation of recommendations made by human rights treaty bodies and for preparing country reports, including in relation to the inter-American system.

#### **Voluntary pledges and commitments**

280. Panama, cognizant of its international human rights commitments, particularly those relating to the rights of persons with disabilities, is committed to establishing an interdisciplinary round table to identify and review current regulations that run counter to the spirit and purpose of the Convention so that the necessary amendments may be made, thereby continuing to promote and strengthen the rights and fundamental safeguards of this population group.

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