

STATUS OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN PANAMA



Scan here for the full report

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM PREVIOUS CYCLES

In 2020, Panama received 70 recommendations concerning women's rights and sexual and reproductive rights. The State accepted 55 and noted 15. The most recurrent subtopics included the prevention and sanction of discrimination and violence—18 specifically addressing the situation of LGBTIQ+ persons—as well as measures to guarantee comprehensive sexuality education. These were made by 45 States from all regions, including Belgium, Mexico, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Iceland. However, despite acceptance, implementation has remained limited and effective policies are still lacking.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Although Law 7 of 2018 on non-discrimination against women exists, it presents three central limitations: its practical application has been deficient; it does not incorporate sexual and reproductive rights; and it excludes other historically discriminated groups such as LGBTIQ+ persons, failing to adopt an intersectional approach that addresses overlapping forms of exclusion. Likewise, public policies and support programs for victims of violence face structural barriers that undermine their effectiveness. Coverage is insufficient in addressing the diversity of human sexuality; budgetary resources remain minimal; the availability of shelters is scarce; and profound inequalities persist between urban, rural, and indigenous areas. In this context, civil society plays a decisive role in advancing comprehensive sexuality education and combating gender-based violence and discrimination. Yet, civic space is increasingly restricted, further limiting the capacity to respond.

CHALLENGES

- 1. Structural weakness of the State in guaranteeing the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ persons.**
- 2. Absence of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law** that includes sexual and reproductive rights and explicit protection for LGBTIQ+ persons.
- 3. Normative frameworks for the prevention of adolescent pregnancy and for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care**—including HIV and other STIs—remain insufficient.
- 4. Gender- and sexuality-based violence:** Women and LGBTIQ+ persons face physical, sexual and psychological violence, including by state agents, with minimal investigation and sanction.
- 5. Absence of a gender identity law** recognizing the legal identity of trans persons and guaranteeing their rights.

IMPACTS

- Panama's efforts remain **below international human rights standards.**
- Female sterilization is subject to discriminatory conditions** (23 years of age, two children, medical approval), while men may access it from age 18.
- Abortion is not guaranteed even in life-threatening situations.**
- High adolescent fertility (57/1,000 in 2023), with one girl aged 15–19 forced to give birth every 46 minutes .**
- HIV prevalence reaches 0.92%**, one of the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the regional average is below 0.5%.
- The Ministry of Women, created only in 2023 after more than two decades of demands from civil society, now faces the threat of elimination.** This undermines State capacity and sending a clear message that gender equality is not a national priority.
- Executive Decree No. 149 of 1949** imposes weekly controls (52 per year) on more than 11,000 sex workers, with costs borne by them and reinforcing stigma.

CHALLENGES

6. Limited access to inclusive education: Absence of policies and SOGIESC-sensitive content in Law 302 of 2022 and its regulation.

7. Exclusion from the labor market: LGBTIQ+ persons—especially trans women and sex workers— face discrimination and the stigmatization of their livelihoods.

8. Structural invisibility and shrinking civic space.

IMPACTS

h) Unsafe school environments perpetuate dropout and limit future opportunities for LGBTIQ+ persons, with disproportionate effects on those in rural areas and among Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations.

i) Deepening poverty and social marginalization exacerbate income precarity and limit autonomy, perpetuating cycles of exclusion.

j) The absence of official data and monitoring mechanisms perpetuates impunity, while civic space is increasingly restricted, further limiting accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Reform Law No. 7 of 2018 into a comprehensive anti-discrimination law**, ensuring the inclusion of sexual and reproductive rights and effective legal protection for LGBTIQ+ persons in the full enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights. (By France (112), Mexico (113) and Italy (41))
- 2 Eliminate discriminatory requirements for voluntary female sterilization** and align conditions with those established for adult men, by 2026.
- 3 Repeal Executive Decree of 1949 that imposes mandatory health checks** on cis and trans women in certain occupations, by the end of 2026.
- 4 Incorporate into the Penal Code the explicit classification of hate crimes motivated by SOGIESC**, ensuring that bias motivation is recognized as an aggravating circumstance in sentencing, in order to enable effective investigation, prosecution and sanction.
- 5 Guarantee an enabling environment for gender equality and the protection of LGBTIQ+ persons by: ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality education** at all levels and maintaining and adequately resourcing the Ministry of Women as the national mechanism for equality.
- 6 Establish an independent monitoring mechanism to oversee the implementation of UPR recommendations** on sexual and reproductive rights, with the participation of civil society, including the preparation of mid-term public reports with disaggregated data.

QUESTIONS

What concrete progress has Panama made since the last UPR cycle to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health—including comprehensive sexuality education, contraceptives, stigma-free care and safe abortion—for women, girls and LGBTIQ+ persons, given the absence of updated public information on implementation?

What legislative and administrative measures has Panama adopted to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, given the absence of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law?

What independent monitoring mechanisms, with civil society participation, has Panama established to follow up on UPR and other international recommendations on sexual and reproductive rights of women and LGBTIQ+ persons, considering the lack of data on indicators and results?