

CLIP - PANAMA

1. Context for EU action gender equality and women's empowerment in the country

During Panama's decade of continuous, sound economic growth and development preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, some progress on women's rights has been achieved as well. According to UN-Women, 83.3% of legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality, with a focus on violence against women, are now in place. However, concerning concrete advances in women's rights and gender equality, Panama's record remained rather poor.

President Cortizo, when entering office in July 2019, repeatedly underlined the further improvement of gender equality to rank high on his government's agenda, including the creation of a Ministry of Women and of different programmes empowering, supporting and protecting women against violence at the professional and personal level, among others. Nevertheless, two years later, follow-up to those proposals has been moving slowly or not started at all (e.g. creation of Ministry of Women). Moreover, as of February 2021, only 22.5% of seats in parliament were held by women. Data also show that Panamanian women continue to work more than men (paid and unpaid work) and are more educated, with higher average score of schooling years (girls: 13,3 years; boys: 12,1 years), but still earn 35% less than men.

While according to recent studies, close to 70% of women of reproductive age have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods, over one fourth of women aged 20–24 years old were married or in a union before age 18. Panama is also among the top 3 countries in Latin America with regard to adolescent pregnancies. Mobility restrictions and lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are thought to have reversed the downward trend of the adolescent birth rate in recent years (e.g. 74/1,000 women in 2018, down from 75.9/1,000 in 2017).

Violence against women is the second most common crime in Panama. According to Government sources, every 30 minutes a case of domestic violence is reported. In a recent study, 10.1% of women aged 15-49 years reported that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Reports indicate that the COVID-19 crisis has led to a notable increase in gender-related and domestic violence in Panama.

In terms of policy tools, as of December 2020, less than 50% of indicators needed to monitor the SDGs from a gender perspective were available in Panama. Particular gaps included key areas like information and communications technology skills, highly relevant to measure the significant digital gender gap. In addition, many policy areas – such as gender and poverty, physical and sexual harassment, women's access to assets (including land), and gender and the environment – still lack comparable methodologies for regular monitoring. Closing these gender data gaps is considered an essential element for achieving gender-related SDG commitments in Panama.

In the framework of the 2021 EU Human Rights (HR) Strategy, the EU and EU Member States (MS) commit to supporting public diplomacy and awareness raising actions to promote violence-free lives for women and girls, through the engagement of larger communities focusing on changing social norms and attitudes in both public and private spheres. The HR

Strategy also prioritises women's economic empowerment and access to decent work and education, as well as their enhanced political participation and the promotion of gender-equal role models through educational and social means.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

Panama does not have a MIP for the period 2021-27. Nevertheless, two Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) have been identified for Panama, one on digital transformation and one on water security/climate change. For each TEI, specific thematic objectives and possible implementation modalities are being defined. Key crosscutting issues like gender equality and women's empowerment were duly mainstreamed into the Panama TEIs. The financing and implementation of TEIs on the part of the EU will fully depend on funding from regional, sub-regional, global, thematic, and other available allocations.

In the absence of a bilateral MIP for Panama, specific thematic objectives for 2021-27 EU technical and financial cooperation related to gender equality and women's empowerment will be mainly determined by the regional MIP for Latin America and the Caribbean, the sub-regional MIP for Central America (SICA countries), as well as by thematic programmes.

Nevertheless, based on relevant recent exercises by EU and EU MS in Panama (e.g. Human Rights Strategy...) as well as the TEIs, the specific objectives for future EU-Panama action in this field should possibly include:

- Combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, including social norms and practices affecting their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Increase support and protection to victims of sexual and gender based violence
- Promote gender equality and combat discrimination, in law and in practice, and increase political and social participation of women
- Foster economic empowerment of women, participation in the labour market, fight unemployment among women, and support female entrepreneurship, including through women and girl's digital inclusion and better education/opportunities for girls.
- Enhanced protection and inclusion of female migrants, refugees and displaced.

Areas of engagement:

- Through "programmes", for objective "Combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, including social norms and practices affecting their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Increase support and protection to victims of sexual and gender based violence":

- Capacity development and pilot actions of CSOs and CSO networks in combatting violence against women, protection of victims, reproductive rights, family law reforms, related areas (through technical/ financial support, subject to availability of EU funding).
- Institutional and technical strengthening of key government bodies combatting gender-related violence (previously, bilateral SECOPA; options: future SPOTLIGHT country window for Panama; enhanced gender violence-focus of regional/sub-regional security sector programmes such as El Pacto, ICRIME

etc.), and fomenting sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls, including comprehensive sexuality education and health-care services, countering teenage pregnancies etc. (so far, mainly through EUROsociAL+).

- Promote "Panama-window" under (sub)regional priority sector on governance/security

- Through "programmes", for objective "Promote gender equality and combat discrimination, in law and in practice, and increase political and social participation of women":

- Capacity building and pilot actions of CSOs and CSO networks working on political empowerment, family law reforms, and related areas (through technical and financial support, subject to availability of funding).
- Strengthening key public institutions, exchange of best practices, fomenting peer-to-peer dialogue (e.g. current PI-funded INTER PARES multi-country project...)
- Promote "Panama-window" under (sub)regional priority sector on governance/security

- Through "programmes", for objective "Foster economic empowerment of women, participation in the labor market, fight unemployment among women, and support female entrepreneurship, including through women and girl's digital inclusion and better education/opportunities for girls":

- Strengthening and pilot actions of CSOs and CSO networks promoting women economic empowerment, digital inclusion, gender-focus on climate change mitigation actions, girls' education (through technical and financial support, subject to availability of future funding)
- Enhanced gender-focus in regional initiatives with public counterpart institutions (e.g. INTEC, DINAMICA; MIPYMES Verdes, AL-Invest etc.)
- Promote "Panama-windows" under (sub)regional priority sectors on digital transformation, and/or on economic recovery, climate change

- Through "programmes", for objective "Enhanced protection and inclusion of female migrants, refugees and displaced":

- Capacity development and pilot actions of CSOs and CSO networks; INAMU, etc. (through technical/ financial support, subject to availability of future EU funding; currently, there exist loosely related actions under EIDHR, IcSP etc).
- Promote "Panama-window" under (sub)regional priority sector on governance/security

- Through "dialogues" and other "actions", for all specific thematic objectives:

- Enhanced gender focus in political and Human Rights EU-Panama dialogues
- Targeted EU/EU MS outreach and dialogue with key line Ministries, in particular, the Ministry of Justice, Social Affairs, and other relevant state institutions, as well as National Woman Institute (INAMU)
- Coordinated EU/EU MS participation in MEGECIPAN ("Mesa de Género de la Cooperación Internacional en Panamá"; composed of EU MS and other Embassies; Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Social Development; UN Women)
- Civic education and community engagement actions on gender equality and diversity.

- Targeted EU/EU MS public diplomacy campaigns/events/use of social media to promote gender-related EU values, visibility of respective EU action (including EU-funded projects/programmes) etc., in particular, but not only, around key international dates (March 8th; December 16th,...), including with UN partners with representation offices in Panama; CSO partners; media, academia.
- Regular strategic dialogue with INAMU and the National Gender Equality Commission (coordination meetings; joint events and initiatives;).
- Promote crosscutting capacity building and development at appropriate level, e.g. teachers, community leaders, parents, care-givers, municipalities, police, media

3. Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women's empowerment

In the absence of a bilateral MIP for Panama, any EU G2 actions benefitting the country will have to be funded under regional, sub-regional, global, thematic, and/or other related programmes in accordance with the latter's specific objectives, intervention areas and implementation modalities.

Despite these limitations, where possible, priority should be given to G2 actions in Panama in the following strategic areas identified by the HR Strategy and TEIs:

- Combat violence against women and girls
- Foster economic empowerment and digital inclusion of women and girls
- Enhanced protection and inclusion of female migrants, refugees and displaced.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment

- MoU on EU-Panama Political Dialogue (recently concluded) provides advanced engagement framework to promote gender equality and women empowerment
- Follow-up UPR exercise by EU/EU MS
- Strategic dialogue with INAMU, the National Gender Equality Commission, Panamanian Observatory against Gender Violence
- Regular meetings with key ministries
- Sector policy dialogues and thematic "mesas país" (e.g. those supported by Euroclima+; Eurosocia+;...)
- Strategic dialogue with female politicians
- Specific dialogues on HR-business nexus (CERALC/ILO/OECD initiative...)
- CSO dialogue incl. NGOs, academia, private sector

5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities

Possible strategic communication/high level events on gender equality foreseen during the period 2021-2025 by the EU, in coordination/cooperation with EU MS, include:

- Specific EU/EU MS events/actions on related international days (March 8; December 16)
- Promote gender-focus on Panama book fair (if EU co-organisation confirmed)
- Joining action/campaigns with UN-Women (e.g. adolescent pregnancy; gender-violence etc.)
- Well-publicised events/ visits to EU cooperation projects in Panama with strong/innovative gender-focus (e.g. fomenting artisanal fisherwomen in Montejo Bay)

6. Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation

Due to the lack of bilateral funding, the proposal for an "EU Cooperation Facility" for Panama funded under the regional envelope is currently being presented in the framework of the AAP 2021.

Depending on modalities, specifications and financial allocations approved for this facility, certain costs for technical assistance for developing or updating Panama's Gender country profile, or for specific related trainings, reporting or communication, might possibly be covered by the facility.

Date: 14 October 2021

Signature by Head of Delegation: 

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