

COUNTRY: Panama

COMMITTEE: UNCSW (Commission on the Status of Women)

AGENDA: Combatting Global Human Trafficking of Women: Addressing Exploitation and Forced Labour

Human trafficking is widely recognized as a violation of human rights – a form of “modern slavery” that is affecting millions worldwide. United Nations studies estimate that over two million people are exploited in human trafficking, and the vast majority are women and girls. In fact, about 80% of trafficking cases involve sexual exploitation of women and girls, while forced labor (often seen in agriculture or informal work) makes up most of the rest. Traffickers often operate regionally, exploiting poverty and inequality. The Sustainable Development Goals also target human trafficking (such as SDG 5.2 and 8.7) as part of the agenda to eliminate the exploitation of women and achieve a decent work for all. In short, combatting trafficking of women is seen as an integral to promoting gender equality, security and development worldwide.

Panama strongly condemns all forms of human trafficking and reaffirms its commitment to eradicate this crime. The Government of Panama emphasizes that protecting women from exploitation is a national priority. Officials note that Panama’s geography creates vulnerabilities that must be addressed. In multilateral meetings, Panama has consistently called for international cooperation and greater awareness. The country upholds the view that gender equality and empowerment of women are essential to prevent trafficking. Accordingly, Panama supports the strengthening of legal standards and human rights norms: it has approved the UN Trafficking Protocol and has formally joined UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Panama also stresses labor rights as part of the solution- the country is the first in the Americas to approve all three core ILO instruments on forced labor, underlining its dedication to fight modern forms of slavery. In all discussions, Panama urges partners to uphold these treaties and work together to protect women’s dignity.

Panama has developed a comprehensive domestic framework to combat trafficking. In 2011, it enacted a landmark anti-trafficking law, which broadened the legal definition of trafficking and explicitly criminalized forced labor and modern slavery. This law has since been strengthened and in late 2024, Panama passed a new change that further redefines the definitions and penalties for trafficking and related offenses. Under these laws, traffickers face severe prison terms, reflecting the State’s zero-tolerance policy. The Government also approved a multi-year National Plan against Trafficking. This Plan is built around five strategized pillars – including prevention, criminal prosecution, and victim care – and it guides the country’s coordinated response.

Panama’s National Commission Against Trafficking brings together some agencies (such as justice, security, migration, labour, health, etc.) along with civil society groups to implement the plan. For example, the Ministry of Public Security leads the Commission, and its specialized unit operates a 24-hour hotline and public reporting platform. Official figures show that in 2019 alone, Panamanian authorities identified about 61 trafficking victims (mostly women). By 2023, enhanced prevention campaigns and citizen tips helped rescue over 40 victims. Panama also invests in awareness and prevention as the Commission organizes school drawing contests, awareness walks, media outreach and seminars to inform the public about trafficking. These efforts encourage communities to report suspicious cases and protect vulnerable women.

Panama supports the United Nations’ comprehensive anti-trafficking agenda. The country aligns with key UN initiatives such as the Global Plan of Action (adopted by the General Assembly in 2010), which urges Member States to integrate anti-trafficking measures into development and security programs. In line with that Plan’s “3P” approach, Panama focuses on preventing trafficking, prosecuting offenders, and protecting victims. Panama also validates the UN trust fund for trafficking victims, which channels funding to rehabilitation projects in Latin America.

Panama takes part in UN-led awareness campaigns to keep this issue in the global spotlight. In regional UN forums (such as the Commission on Crime Prevention) Panama contributes experiences and supports shared solutions. More broadly, Panama joins other UN member states in criticizing trafficking as a threat to peace and development, in keeping with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Through these actions, Panama reinforces the message that combatting trafficking is a collective responsibility under the UN charter and international law.

Panama believes a holistic strategy – combining law enforcement with social support – is essential to end trafficking. Domestically, the government will continue to strengthen its legal framework and enforcement. This includes providing ongoing training for judges, prosecutors, police and border officials on identifying and handling trafficking cases. Panama is prepared to enhance its criminal justice response, for instance by creating specialized anti-trafficking units and ensuring that penalties are strictly applied. Simultaneously, Panama will expand victim services: it plans to support shelters and medical care for survivors, offer legal and psychological assistance, and help victims reintegrate into society through education or job programs. These measures aim to protect women from revictimization and give them a fair chance to rebuild their lives.

On the prevention side, Panama will intensify education and public outreach. The Government intends to launch more nationwide campaigns, using media and community events to raise awareness about trafficking and women's rights. Special attention will be paid to vulnerable groups, including migrants and youth, with school programs and informational materials. Panama also encourages private sector involvement, urging businesses especially in tourism and agriculture to ensure their operations are free of forced labor.

Internationally, Panama advocates deeper cooperation. It calls for enhanced information-sharing and coordinated investigations with neighboring countries, especially across land borders and at major transit points. Recognizing that root causes often lie in poverty and inequality, Panama urges development partners to invest in economic opportunities for women and education in at-risk communities. The country also emphasizes gender equality programs as a long-term preventative solution.

In all its efforts, Panama remains committed to upholding relevant international treaties and encouraging other nations to do the same. Ultimately, Panama stresses that ending the exploitation of women requires solidarity: government, civil society and international partners must work hand-in-hand.

In conclusion, Panama sees the fight against human trafficking as essential to protecting women's rights and human dignity. The country is proud of its legislative and operational achievements so far, and it pledges to keep strengthening prevention, prosecution and victim protection. Panama reaffirms its partnership with the United Nations and all stakeholders in this cause, confident that together we can eliminate trafficking and ensure a safer, more just future for women everywhere.