

Panama



Population: 3,410,676 (July 2010 est.)
Population Growth Rate: 1.463% (2010 est.)
Birth Rate: 19.71 births/1,000 population (2010 est.)
Life Expectancy: *total population:* 77.25 years; *male:* 74.47 years; *female:* 80.18 years
Literacy Rate: *total population:* 91.9%; *male:* 92.5%; *female:* 91.2% (2000 est.)
Net Migration Rate: -0.46 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2010 est.)
Unemployment Rate: 7.1% (2009 est.)
Gross Domestic Product per Capita: \$11,900 (2009 est.)
Religions: Roman Catholic 85%, Protestant 15%
Languages: Spanish (official), English 14%; many Panamanians are bilingual
Ethnic Groups: mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white) 70%, Amerindian and mixed (West Indian) 14%, white 10%, Amerindian 6%
Capital: Panama City¹

Trafficking Routes

Panama is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in persons. Panama's location between North and South America provides an intermediary point for smuggled immigrants. Panama is considered a transit point for victims en route to the United States. According to a 2007 article by Panama America, Chinese mafia consider Panama a safe route for trafficking to the United States.² Women are trafficked from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and other Central American countries to Panama. Instances of trafficking women from Panama to Jamaica have been reported.³ Trafficking also occurs between along Panama's borders with Colombia and Costa Rica.⁴

Factors That Contribute to the Trafficking Infrastructure

Throughout the Central American region, "machismo" attitudes are prevalent, and women are often viewed as sexual objects. Interfamily violence, the breakdown of families, and poverty push young people to leave their homes and communities to search for better lives. The prospect of jobs in the United States leads many young people to illegally migrate northward, while some move to more prosperous neighboring countries. Oftentimes, these individuals are exposed to sexual exploitation or domestic servitude, which is perpetuated by the gap between rich and poor in Panama.

¹ CIA, The World Factbook, (2010), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pm.html>.

² Marijulia Pujol Lloyd, *Panama a Transit Depot for Human Trafficking*, PANAMA STAR, June 17, 2009, available at: <http://www.laestrella.com.pa/mensual/2009/06/17/contenido/111993.asp>.

³ The Fund for Peace, *Country profiles, Panama*, 2009, available at:

http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=360&Itemid=550.

⁴ Lloyd *supra* at 2.

Trafficking activity throughout Central America is aided by the free transit agreement between El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, accompanied by a lack of security on the borders.⁵ A lack of technology and tools to investigate certain sexual crimes contributes to the continuity of child trafficking and sexual exploitation.⁶

Forms of Trafficking

Women from surrounding countries travel voluntarily to Panama in search of jobs and are forced into prostitution after their handlers confiscate their passports, leaving them with no other option for work.⁷

A sexual crime prosecutor in Panama has stated that the most common crimes reported are child pornography, child prostitution, and child slavery.⁸ Children are trafficked internally from rural to urban areas for labor purposes.⁹ Underage children from Colombia and the Dominican Republic are reportedly employed in massage parlors within the country.¹⁰

In July 2009, 17 people, including four government officials and Panamanian citizens, were arrested for their involvement in the creation of forged Panamanian identification cards for foreigners.¹¹

Government Responses

Although Panama does not have a national commission to combat trafficking in persons,¹² the country has various government bodies that fight human trafficking. In 2007, CONAPREDES, the national committee for the prevention of sexual crime, allocated additional funding for combating trafficking and for victims' assistance via member institutions. CONAPREDES also discussed details of a national effort against commercial sexual exploitation of children, such as methods of prevention and protocols for repatriation of victims.¹³ Law No. 16, article 19 of 2004 states that "A victim of trafficking in persons shall not be criminally liable for punishable acts related to migration, prostitution or any other crime that is the direct result of being trafficked."¹⁴

On February 2, 2008, Panama passed a reform of its immigration policy. This new law, particularly articles 6, 57, 81, 82, and 83, includes provisions to protect and combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation.¹⁵

⁵ *Id.* at 4.

⁶ Marijulia Pujol Lloyd, *Sexual crimes against children*, PANAMA STAR, May 12, 2009, available at: <http://www.laestrella.com.pa/mensual/2009/05/12/contenido/97738.asp>.

⁷ Lloyd *supra* at 2.

⁸ Lloyd *supra* at 6.

⁹ The Fund of Peace *supra* at 3.

¹⁰ Lloyd *supra* at 6.

¹¹ Ana Teresa Benjamin, *Fiscalia Realiza 12 Allanamientos*, PANAMA-GUIDE, July 14, 2009, available at: <http://www.panama-guide.com/article.php/2009071418284786>.

¹² IOM, *Migrations Initiative Appeal*, 2009, available at: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/activities/countries/mi/panama.pdf>.

¹³ CONAPREDES Commissioners prepared the National Plan, MINISTERIO PUBLICO DE PANAMA, Apr. 11, 2007, available at: <http://www.ministeriopublico.gob.pa/DetalleDeNoticia.aspx?Id=120>.

¹⁴ Law No. 16 (2004), art. 19.

¹⁵ Panama Legal, *Panama Immigration Law Change Update*, (Feb 27, 2008), http://www.panamalaw.org/panama_new_immigration_law_update_Feb27-2008.html (Last visited 16 July 2009).

The National Immigration Service ensures compliance with the rules in force in Panama in terms of prevention and suppression of crimes of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants.

The “*alternadora*” visa, which allowed foreign women to work as prostitutes in Panama, was also eliminated from the penal code.¹⁶

Nongovernmental and International Organizations Responses

MADRE is an organization working to promote human rights through social justice with programs on peace building, improving women’s health, combating violence in women, and achieving economic and environmental justice. MADRE works particularly with the indigenous community in Panama.¹⁷

LibertadLatina.org is a Web-based news source on violence against and trafficking in women and children in Latin America. The Web site provides information about organizations within Panama to combat human trafficking, as well as local news and reports on issues related to trafficking.¹⁸

Multilateral Initiatives

Panama is one of the participants in the FBI-led program to combat child pornography, Innocent Images National Initiative, which seeks to prevent child sexual exploitation through technology.¹⁹

The Ministry of Social Development offers shelter and other services to victims of commercial sexual exploitation, using substitute families, a shelter, and the nongovernmental organization Hogar Malambo’s shelter, which it subsidizes. The government shelter, located in a former prison, did not have adequate infrastructure to house trafficking victims.²⁰

The government worked with the International Labour Organization’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour on trafficking initiatives, including the distribution of pamphlets on sexual exploitation and trafficking to public school educators.

In March, CONAPREDES held awareness-raising sessions with journalism associations in the provinces of Chiriqui, Bocas del Toro, and Panama on the media’s role in communicating the problems of sexual exploitation and trafficking of minors.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is assisting many Colombian migrants who have been displaced in the Darien region of Panama.²¹ The IOM also publishes a counter-trafficking newspaper throughout Central America and Mexico, which provides resources for victims as well as information on projects to combat trafficking in the region.

During the Conference at the International Relations Ministry in Colombia in March 2008, the IOM reported that in Latin American countries, including Panama, the government,

¹⁶ Lloyd *supra* at 4.

¹⁷ MADRE, *Mission/Vision*, (Aug. 5, 2009), www.MADRE.org.

¹⁸ Libertad Latina, <http://www.libertadlatina.org> (last visited Aug. 5, 2009).

¹⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), *Innocent Images National Archive*, Dec. 11, 2007, available at: <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/innocent.htm>.

²⁰ United States Department of Labor, Panama (2006), available at: <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/tda/tda2006/Panama.pdf>.

²¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Panama*, (July 16, 2009), available at: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/activities/americas/central-america-and-mexico/panama>.

NGOs, and international organizations need to coordinate actions in order to develop accurate information about the populations being exploited. According to the IOM, the victims of trafficking need assistance to claim their psychological, physical, legal, educational, and employment rights.²²

The IOM is working with several partners to assist victims of trafficking from Colombia. The IOM is also working with the government of Panama to respond to challenges faced by migratory workers during the current expansion of the Panama Canal.²³

The government's consular officers in Jamaica, Guatemala, and Mexico provide assistance to Panamanian trafficking victims in those countries.

²² IOM, *The IOM Handbook: Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking*, (Feb 18, 2008), available at: http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/CT%20handbook.pdf.

²³ IOM *supra* at 21.