

## **Human Trafficking and Sexual Violence against Migrant Women: OAS/CIM/MESECVI Delegation Visits Panama to Strengthen Capacities for Action and Regional Cooperation.**

*Panama City, February 9, 2024.* Amid regional concerns about the situation of migrant women and girls victims of violence along the migratory route, a team from the Technical Secretariat of the [Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention \(MESECVI\)](#), as part of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS), conducted a three-day visit to Panama from February 6 to 8. The objective was to provide technical assistance and develop a joint action plan to address violence and sexual exploitation against women and girls in mobility in the hemisphere.

The CIM/MESECVI team, integrated by its Technical Secretary, Luz Patricia Mejía, specialist Eva Villarreal, and consultant Emma Puig de la Bellacasa, held meetings with State authorities, high-level representatives of United Nations agencies, and members of civil society organizations. During these meetings, they discussed the on-the-ground situation and the need to enhance state capacities to prevent these forms of violence and attend to women and girls who are victims.

Eighty percent of individuals falling victim to cross-border trafficking are women and girls, with the majority (79 percent) destined for sexual exploitation. Women victims in these cases are three times more likely to experience physical or extreme violence, including sexual violence. Along the migratory route, women and girls also face other risks, such as being forced to engage in sex to pay bribes and being raped or sexually abused.

In response to this context, within the framework of the visit, the event 'Contributing to the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Migrant Women and Girls in the Americas' took place. The event had the participation of the Minister of Women and President of the CIM, Juana Herrera Araúz; Supreme Court Justice Ángela Ruso de Cedeño; OAS Representative in Panama, Rubén Farje, as well as high-level representatives from United Nations agencies and representatives of civil society organizations, including leaders from indigenous communities, Afro-descendant communities, and the diaspora.

Through various panel discussions, the cross-border context, the characteristics of violence against women and girls in mobility situations, and the barriers they face in accessing support services, protection, and justice were addressed. One of the goals of the discussion was to delve into the necessary adaptation of legal frameworks and the development of public policies that enable a comprehensive approach to violence and sexual exploitation against migrant women and girls.

During her intervention, the Minister of Women, Juana Herrera, emphasized that: "The issue of sexual violence, given the migratory flow we are experiencing, is a potential risk factor that we must address. This moment of reflection is crucial to create a roadmap that allows us to establish what we are going to do and how we will address this situation."

On her part, the Technical Secretary of MESECVI, Luz Patricia Mejía, pointed out that: "Considering the characteristics of sexual violence in the Darién and the obligations established by the Belém do Pará Convention, some key public policies that could be implemented to eradicate this violence include: strengthening the presence and protection of the State, prevention and awareness actions, comprehensive care for victims, and the development of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, among others."

During the visit, MESECVI authorities also held a bilateral working meeting with Minister Juana Herrera and officials from various government agencies to provide technical assistance in relation to the IV Multilateral Evaluation Round, which monitors progress in implementing the Belém do Pará Convention. In this regard, a workshop on the indicator system was conducted, emphasizing the importance of collecting information to assess progress and pending challenges regarding violence against women.

This visit is part of a project developed by MESECVI and the Inter-American Commission of Women, in collaboration with the Department of Public Security (DPS/SMS) of the OAS, and with the financial support of the United Kingdom, to strengthen frameworks for preventing sexual violence against migrant women and girls. The project aims to contribute to enhancing normative frameworks addressing sexual violence and crimes faced by migrant women and girls in Panama, with a focus on gender, security, and human rights.

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