

The National Composite Index for Family Planning (NCIFP)

PANAMA 2017 Scores and 2014-2017 Trendsⁱ

What is the NCIFP?

A tool that supports FP2020'sⁱⁱ efforts to improve the policy environment for family planning (FP), the NCIFP provides information on FP program activities that are not readily available in national demographic or reproductive health surveys or service statistics systems. The NCIFP measures the existence of FP policies and program implementation based on 35 items that fall under five dimensions: **Strategy**, **Data**, **Quality**, **Equity**, and **Accountability**.

Strategy – whether a national FP strategy/plan exists that includes quantified objectives, targets to reach the poorest and most vulnerable, projected resource requirements, and support for wider stakeholder participation. Also included are two items that affect strategy implementation: high-level leadership and regulations that facilitate contraceptive importation or production.

Data – whether the government collects/uses data on special sub-groups (e.g. the poor) and their access, private sector commodities, and the quality of service statistics. It also includes data-based evaluation and research to improve the program.

Quality – whether the government uses WHO standards of practice (SOP), task-sharing guidelines, and quality of care indicators in public and private facilities. Quality of care (QOC) also considers the adequacy of structures for training, logistics, supervision, IUD and implant removal, and informed choice, including informing clients about the permanence of sterilization.

Accountability – whether mechanisms exist to monitor discrimination and free choice, review violations, report denial of services, enable facility-level feedback, and encourage communication between clients and providers.

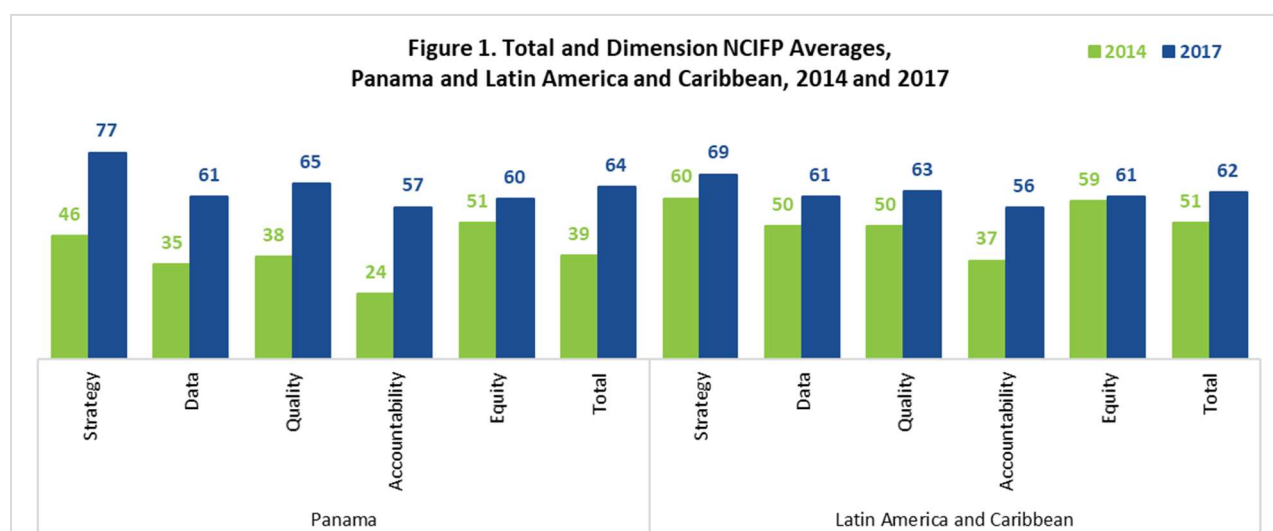
Equity - whether anti-discrimination policies exist, providers discriminate against special groups, the population has easy access to modern contraceptive methods (referring to STMs meaning short-term methods, or LAPMs meaning long-acting and permanent methods), and services are provided to underserved areas through community-based distribution (CBD).

First undertaken in 2014, the NCIFP builds on the long-standing National Family Planning Effort Index (FPE). In 2017 Avenir Health's Track20 project (funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to assist countries participating in the FP2020 Global Initiative) administered a new round of NCIFPs to assess current national FP program status and changes since 2014.

Panama vs Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Results

Figure 1 shows increasing total and dimension NCIFP scores between 2014 and 2017 for Panama and the region, with Panama outscoring the region by 2017.

- Panama's highest rated dimensions were Strategy and Equity in 2014 but Strategy alone in 2017. Accountability persisted as the country's lowest rated dimension in both years, even though the dimension's average improved significantly.
- The region's highest rated dimensions were also Strategy and Equity in 2014 with Strategy becoming the LAC's sole highest ranked in 2017. Just like Panama, the LAC's lowest ranked in both years was Accountability.

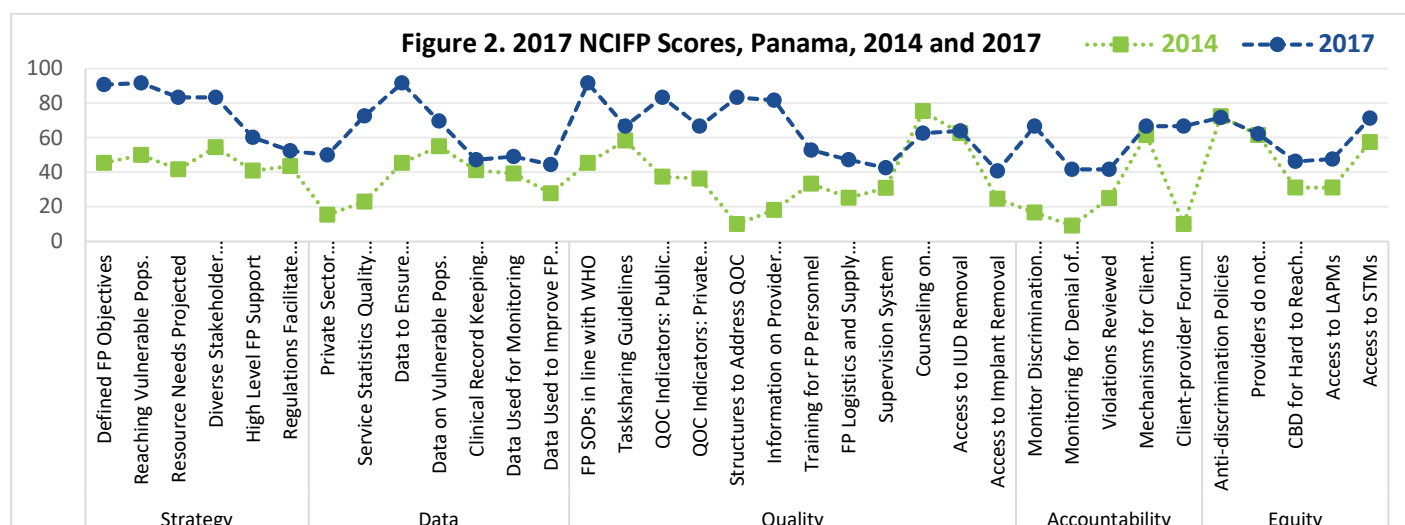


Individual NCIFP Trends, 2014 and 2017

Ratings of individual NCIFP items over time indicate which FP program activities are progressing, stagnant, or deteriorating. Figure 2 shows Panama's marks rising for nearly 30 items during the years studied, including 9 items rated 80 or higher in 2017.

- **Strategy** – Scores rose to levels between the 80s to the low 90s for the FP strategy's objectives, focus on vulnerable groups, estimate of resource needs, and support for diverse stakeholder participation, and to 60 for high-level program support and 53 for regulations that facilitate contraceptive importation.

- **Data** – Improved marks by 2017 included 92 for the use of data to ensure the most vulnerable have access; 70s for quality control of service statistics and data on population sub-groups; and between 40 to 50 for government data collection of private sector commodities, clinical recordkeeping/feedback to clients, and data-based evaluation and program improvement efforts.
- **Quality** – Higher 2017 scores included 92 for the use of WHO SOPs; 80s for QOC indicators in public facilities, clinic/community monitoring structures, and provider bias monitoring; 60s for tasksharing guidelines, QOC indicators in private facilities, and access to IUD removal; 53 for training; but only in the 40s for logistics, supervision, and access to implant removal. As stated above, sterilization counseling was the only item given a lower rating in 2017 (63, which was 12 pts lower than that of 2014).
- **Accountability** – 2017 scores included 67 each for mechanisms to monitor discrimination and free choice, solicit client feedback, and support client-provider forums; and 42 each for mechanisms to report denial of services and review violations.
- **Equity** – 2017 ratings stayed in the low 70s for anti-discrimination policies and 60s for provider non-discrimination against certain populations. Scores increased for STM access (71), LAPM access (48) and CBD coverage in underserved areas (46).



Implications

Panama's total population is around 4.2 million of which 35% are below 20 years of age.ⁱⁱⁱ Its economy has performed well in the recent years; GDP growth was close to 4% in 2018. The poverty headcount based on the national poverty line was 22% in 2018.^{iv} The country's population is very diverse; over 12% is indigenous and 9.2% are of African descent. The UNFPA Country Programme Document 2016-2020 emphasizes the needs of the most marginalized sectors of Panama. The greatest socio-economic disparities affect indigenous populations: 84% live in poverty and have limited access to services due to geographical dispersion. The maternal mortality ratio has stabilized (at 60 deaths per 100,000 live births) although five times higher among indigenous populations in 2013.^v Panama's total fertility rate is 2.5 lifetime births per woman compared to 4.5 births in the indigenous Ngäbe-Buglé community. The national modern contraceptive prevalence rate is about 50%; unmet need for FP is 38% compared to 80% among Ngäbe-Buglé women. The adolescent fertility rate remains high; teenage mothers account for 20% of all births. Gender-based violence is another problem; the female homicide rate has been rising. There is a clear need for youth-friendly services and an effective logistics system to ensure access to reproductive health (RH) commodities all over the country. Although various development and RH policies and plans exist and key data are available, there is a need to strengthen national and local capacities in policy implementation and in generating and using timely and disaggregated data on vulnerable groups.^{vi}

Panama's predominantly improved and many high NCIFP scores reflect experts' recognition of the country's efforts to strengthen the national FP program. Nevertheless, a number of NCIFP concerns had 2017 ratings no higher than the 40s, particularly clinic recordkeeping and feedback of results to clients; the use of data to monitor and improve the program; quality of care concerns especially sterilization counseling, the logistics and supervision systems, and access to implant removal; accountability mechanisms to report denial of services and review violations; LAPM access and CBD coverage of underserved areas and groups. Many of these challenges are also cited in the UNFPA document and call for Panama's stakeholders to consider in their efforts to improve access to FP services among the most vulnerable population sectors of the country.

ⁱ Suggested citation: Avenir Health Track20. "The National Composite Index for Family Planning (NCIFP): PANAMA 2017 Scores and 2014-2017 Trends". 2017 NCIFP Policy Brief Series (2019).

ⁱⁱ FP2020 is a global initiative through which governments, civil society, multilateral organizations, donors, the private sector, and the research and development community work together to enable more women and girls to use contraceptives by 2020. (See: <https://www.familyplanning2020.org/>)

ⁱⁱⁱ UN World Population Prospects, 2019 Revision. <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>

^{iv} Panama country profile from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/Panama?view=chart>

^v National Institute for Statistics and Census from <https://www.inec.gob.pa/>

^{vi} <https://www.unfpa.org/data/transparency-portal/unfpa-panama>