

Panama Fact Sheet

February 2024



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Introduction

Panama is at the center of a significant displacement crisis as one of the main transit points through the Darién jungle crossing. In 2023, at least 500,000 people crossed the dangerous Darién Gap on the border with Colombia, doubling the historic milestone reached in 2022. The country is a critical transit point for people from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and South America, heading north in pursuit of protection.

Panama also hosts more than 121,600 Venezuelans who have received residence permits, while nearly 2,600 asylum claims from Venezuelans are pending. Additionally, Panama is home to thousands of Central American refugees and migrants.

HIAS Programs and Focus

HIAS Panama helps refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants access dignified and sustainable livelihoods, improving their self-reliance. We collaborate with local communities and NGOs to foster the integration of refugees, creating safe spaces where refugees and members of the host community collaborate on community projects and address shared challenges. HIAS Panama is able to provide assistance to refugees and migrants with the support of UNHCR, UNFPA, ECHO, AECID, and the Hilton Foundation.

Community Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (CB-MHPSS)

Our MHPSS programs train key community members to identify acute emotional distress in children and adults, and to respond with empathy and respect. As a result of elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and gender-based violence (GBV) during the pandemic, HIAS Panama implemented innovative methods to remain at the forefront remotely. In 2020, HIAS Panama introduced L.I.S.A. (Linea Segura de Apoyo), a virtual safety support line to enhance communication with

affected populations and address growing needs due to COVID-19. HIAS now uses the remote platform to identify individuals requiring support, conduct assessments to pinpoint specific needs, and share resources for community integration. We also carry out capacity building for providing psychological first aid, and direct individuals with acute needs to partners for further assistance.

Economic Inclusion

We partner with UNHCR and Manpower Group to deliver training and empowerment sessions and to address the barriers many face in accessing information and resources needed for job market competitiveness. Additionally, HIAS works with Coursera, a company that collaborates with universities and organizations to offer online courses, providing high-quality courses at no cost for refugees and aiding their transition into the labor market.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Risk-Reduction, Response, and Prevention

HIAS addresses the disproportionate impact of forced displacement on women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals through survivor-driven GBV services. Our programming in Panama prioritizes survivors by offering case management, psychosocial services, and support groups. We refer survivors to health and legal protection spaces, promoting recovery and empowerment. HIAS also reduces threats to women and girls through risk-reduction activities that address unsafe environments and economic instability. Additionally, we work with men and boys through workshops and group sessions to challenge harmful gender stereotypes that contribute to GBV. Collaborating with government and non-government institutions, HIAS Panama works to prevent and respond to GBV, raising awareness of refugee and



CB-MHPSS Support

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Economic Inclusion

We deliver training and empowerment sessions to address barriers refugees face in accessing the job market.



GBV Response

We provide survivor-driven GBV prevention and mitigation services to women, girls and LGBTQ+ individuals.



Legal Protection

Our legal services focus on providing refugees with consultations, counseling, and capacity-building to promote protection.



HIAS staff distributes personal supplies to migrant women at the HIAS support tent in the Migration Reception Center of Lajas Blancas, Darien Province, Panama. July 31, 2023. (Tarina Rodriguez for HIAS)

migrant rights. This includes responding to challenges in the Darién Gap by implementing a GBV response project in temporary migration shelters.

Legal Protection

HIAS Panama’s legal services focus on providing clients with community-based protection, legal consultations, counseling, and capacity building. We also provide refugees with information on their rights, supporting them to advocate for themselves as they seek legal protection.

HIAS in Latin America and the Caribbean

HIAS advocates for the protection of refugees, asylum seekers, other displaced populations, and local host communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. As part of a comprehensive regional response to meet the urgent needs of these populations, HIAS co-leads and participates in several coordination platforms and partnerships with a focus on protection, socioeconomic integration, MHPSS, food security, GBV, and cash and voucher assistance.

HIAS currently has programs in 11 countries in LAC (Aruba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela) and partners with a wide range of government agencies, UN entities (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, UNVFVT), the private sector (Airbnb, TATA Consultancy Services, and Manpower), and other NGOs and consortia, including Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council and World Vision.

Contact

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