



**HIAS**

Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.

2022-2023 Overview  
**HIAS GUYANA**

# HIAS Guyana Overview 2022-2023



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Protect the refugee.**

**HIAS GUYANA 2022**

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## Our History

From our beginnings in the 1880s in a storefront on the Lower East Side of Manhattan providing food and shelter to Jews fleeing antisemitism in Eastern Europe, to our work nearly 140 years later providing social, emotional, legal, and advocacy support to those in need around the world, HIAS has served as a pivotal force for displaced people for generations. Indeed, HIAS began its work even before the world had a legal concept of a “refugee.”

Having helped more than 4.5 million refugees and immigrants escape persecution, HIAS is uniquely qualified to address the modern refugee situation, which has become a global humanitarian crisis. After over 100 years of serving Jews fleeing persecution around the globe, HIAS, starting in the 2000s, expanded its work in the U.S. to include assistance to non-Jewish refugees devastated by the aftermath of conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Hungary, Iran, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Tunisia, Vietnam, and the successor states to the former Soviet Union.

HIAS began a new chapter in 2002 when it established operations in Kenya to provide protection to refugees from African countries plagued by conflict, to advocate on their behalf, and to resettle the most vulnerable. Soon after, we began work in Latin America, serving people displaced by conflict in several countries. Currently HIAS works in 16 countries including Aruba, Austria, Belgium, Chad, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Greece, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Mexico, Panama, Peru, United States, and Venezuela. As the only global Jewish organization whose mission is to assist refugees wherever they are, HIAS continues to protect, empower, and resettle refugees of all faiths and ethnicities from around the world.



## Vision, Mission, and Values

### Vision

HIAS stands for a world in which refugees find welcome, safety, and opportunity.

### Mission

Drawing on our Jewish values and history, HIAS provides vital services to refugees and asylum seekers around the world and advocates for their fundamental rights so they can rebuild their lives.

### Values

Impassioned by our mission, we bring the lessons of HIAS' history and Jewish ethics and experience to our commitment to serve refugees and other displaced persons of concern around the world through the following values:

#### Welcome • Acogimiento • Hospitalité • הכנסת אורחים (Hachnasat Orchim)

We **Welcome** the Stranger

#### Justice • Justicia • Justice • צדק (Tzedek)

We Pursue **Justice**

#### Empathy • Empatía • Empathie • חסד (Chesed)

We Approach our Clients with **Empathy**

#### Partnership • Compañerismo • Coopération • חברותא (Chevruta)

We Believe in Changing the World through **Partnership**

#### Courage • Coraje • Courage • אומץ (Ometz)

We Act with **Courage** to Build a Better World

#### Resilience • Resiliencia • Résilience • רוח (Ruach)

We Adapt and Thrive, Continuously Demonstrating our **Resilience**



Photos: Glenna Gordon; Michael Datikash

## Our Impact

Around the world, HIAS makes tangible changes in the lives of refugees and other forcibly displaced people, advancing their legal, social, and economic rights. Our experience and technical expertise, as well as our integration of international best practices, allows for our work to have real and sustained impact. We partner with government agencies and other humanitarian organizations to reach the greatest number of those in need. The core areas where we work include:

1. Legal Protection
2. Gender-Based Violence Response and Risk Reduction
3. Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
4. Economic Inclusion

### Legal Protection

Refugees and other people forcibly displaced from home are fleeing persecution and violence. They need to be able to safely cross borders into countries where their lives are not at risk. Once over the border, they need information and legal representation to secure legal status and access their rights. Without that status, refugees are forced to live on the margins of society, sometimes for generations, without access to healthcare, education, dignified work, or safe shelter. HIAS begins by educating refugees about their rights, then secures protection by engaging in advocacy, legal representation, and strategic litigation, and working with government authorities.

### Gender-Based Violence Response and Risk Reduction

Compounded by rampant gender inequality, forced migration and displacement quickly erode the limited protections women, girls, and LGBTQ populations have, even in times of stability. HIAS is driven by their voices and needs, working to empower them and engage the whole community to reduce the risk of gender-based violence. We raise awareness so survivors know where and how to get help after experiencing violence. We train advocates and support existing services so that no survivor—regardless of age, sexual orientation, or gender identity—suffers alone. We help communities begin the kind of transformative work

that leads to longer-term change. We stay connected to and raise our collective voice alongside those of displaced women, girls, and LGBTQ populations globally.

### Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Violence, conflict, and displacement disrupt relationships and daily life, break down existing support systems, and have a devastating impact on mental health, overall wellbeing, and recovery. A supportive environment is essential to healing and recovery for refugees and other people forcibly displaced from their homes. One of the best ways to build a supportive environment is to strengthen existing relationships, networks, and practices which promote mental health and well-being and allow communities to cope and heal. We facilitate community support groups and psychological support from both lay and professional providers and ensure access to services for more intensive mental health support. Crucially, we sustain our efforts by building the psychosocial competence of HIAS personnel and stakeholders to respond to the acute distress of forcibly displaced persons.

### Economic Inclusion

When refugees and forcibly displaced people arrive in countries of asylum, they often need to adapt their skills to earn sustainable and safe livelihoods. HIAS supports refugees on their road to self-reliance, helping them to find programs focused on poverty eradication, employment, entrepreneurship, and financial services. We advocate for the rights of both refugees and local host communities to access dignified, sustainable, and safe work, alongside economic development.

### Emergency Response

In 2021, with the support of a transformational grant from MacKenzie Scott, HIAS embarked on an exciting new initiative to strengthen our global capacity to respond quickly to new humanitarian emergencies. HIAS' Emergency Department will work closely with country offices to create emergency preparedness plans and provide guidance to adapt core programs to emergency contexts. HIAS will also train a cadre of staff with specialized skills able to deploy quickly during emergencies for assessments, response activities, donor engagement, external communication, and advocacy. Through this multiyear initiative, HIAS will build the skills, systems, and organizational culture needed for effective coordination and response to emergencies.

## Accountability to Affected Populations

HIAS' Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Framework ensures the inclusion of refugees, other forcibly displaced people, and vulnerable host communities throughout the program cycle. Informed by the Core Humanitarian Standards and the principle of "Do No Harm," the framework pillars are: communication and transparency; feedback and response; participation and inclusion; and learning and adaptation.

HIAS ensures that program design is based on evidence from needs assessments, including the annual UNHCR participatory needs assessment, and consultation with affected communities. HIAS shares information about its accountability commitments and available

services in all country offices. HIAS proactively invites affected people to provide feedback on planned and ongoing activities through context-appropriate, accessible channels, ensuring that all affected people can voice feedback, recommendations, and concerns safely and equitably. HIAS uses feedback received to adapt ongoing programs and shape the design and implementation of future programming.

## Governance, Structure, and Policies

Globally, HIAS employs more than 1,300 staff in 16 countries, with headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland (U.S.).

HIAS' Board of Directors is made up of 22 members, including 10 women. It meets at least four times a year. The Board has three officers and operates with six active committees that meet regularly. Board members bring a wide range of professional and business experience to their service, including law, finance, education, and non-profit and refugee advocacy leadership.

HIAS staff are subject to a robust Code of Conduct and set of internal policies, including PSEA, Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment, Conflict of Interest, Privacy, Whistleblowing, Security and Emergency Preparedness, Information Security, Data Breach, Finance and Accounting, as well as others relating to procurement, travel, and reimbursements.



HIAS Guyana's country director Alex Theran visits Port Kaituma and its environs to determine the greatest needs of the recently arrived refugees, November 2020. **Photo:** Alex Theran

## Context for Vulnerable Refugees and Migrants in Guyana



The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Region continues to face intersecting forced displacement crises, including Venezuela, Colombia, Northern Central America, and Nicaragua. The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the economic and social hardships faced by both displaced populations and those hosting them. More than 18 million people displaced in the region have fled violence, insecurity, persecution, and human rights violations. This number accounts for 20% of all global displacement. HIAS' comprehensive regional response meets the urgent needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced people in Aruba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana,

Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.

Guyana is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Until recently, Guyana's history was one of emigration to other countries rather than large scale migration to Guyana. Many migrants use Guyana as a transit country, including Brazilians, Cubans, and Haitians. Despite closures of land and sea borders due to COVID-19 pandemic policies, Venezuelans continue to seek safety from the ongoing socio-economic, political, and humanitarian crisis at home—with at least 33,000 displaced Venezuelans now in Guyana. This increased migration flow combined with already constrained resources and the COVID-19 pandemic has further tested the local government's limits. The need for shelter, food, and hygiene products are in high demand while refugees and migrants also face challenges related to cultural and language barriers.

In the absence of national asylum and refugee legislation and procedures in Guyana, authorities provide a 90-day legal stay permit with the possibility of continuous extension. However, the current practice of requiring continuous three-month extensions of visitor status means Venezuelans are often unable to successfully extend their stay and fall into irregular status. Moreover, the stay permit does not entitle Venezuelans to legally work in the country. Migrants and refugees mostly resort to working in the informal sector and earn much less than Guyanese workers. Regardless of legal status, Venezuelans are eligible to receive basic services like public education and primary healthcare although language barriers can often make this challenging.

In addition to labor exploitation, other protection risks faced by migrants include gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, and scarcity of safe shelter. Venezuelan women, adolescent girls, and LGBTQ individuals are especially vulnerable to GBV, human trafficking, and forced labor. A critical number of Venezuelans seeking refuge in Guyana are women and adolescent girls, who are subjected to intimate partner violence, sex trafficking, and forced labor in mining communities in the interior and urban areas. A 2019 R4V GBV assessment found that the main concentrations of Venezuelan women tend to be around mining areas in shops, cleaning services, bars, hotels, nightclubs, and other places they are likely to work and face exploitation and abuse. A longstanding territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela and clashes between refugees and host communities have increasingly fueled xenophobic attitudes towards

migrant populations. Displaced indigenous communities, including the Venezuelan Warao, are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

## HIAS Programs in Guyana

HIAS Guyana assists vulnerable Venezuelan migrants and refugees, Guyanese returnees, a small percentage of migrants of other nationalities, as well as host communities. HIAS Guyana focuses on protection, GBV, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and economic inclusion so that refugees can access integrated, high-quality services that build social and economic protection as well as social cohesion in Guyana. HIAS realizes people carry a diversity of experiences and intersecting identities requiring unique support and solutions. As such, HIAS takes a holistic approach to its interventions and offers integrated programming in GBV prevention and response, community-based MHPSS, economic inclusion, and legal protection. Operational since 2020, HIAS Guyana has already served 5,700 refugees with this comprehensive programming.



HIAS Guyana Protection Officer Lyn Morales and the first beneficiary to receive support in Guyana under the Airbnb Shelter Project, February 2021. **Photo:** HIAS Guyana

HIAS Guyana’s **protection** work provides Venezuelans with key information in Spanish about their rights and responsibilities, support with issuance and renewal of stay permits, and facilitating access to basic services like health and education. Following a needs assessment in 2021, HIAS Guyana established a presence in Mabaruma, with dedicated programming and staff to serve the Venezuelan indigenous Warao, who are particularly exposed to labor exploitation, malnutrition, lack of clean water, sanitation, and hygiene resources. HIAS has a dedicated protection case worker to support the community with registration, translation, and other protection needs.



A HIAS officer hands a box of food items to an Issano Landing resident in June, 2021, after the area's worst flooding in 10 years. HIAS was able to collaborate with partners from the government to reach these distant villages.  
**Photo:** HIAS Guyana

HIAS Guyana’s **GBV programming** helps to reduce the risk of GBV and trafficking and ensures GBV survivors can access quality response services. HIAS Guyana uses a survivor-centered approach, offering safe spaces and psychosocial support, referral to other services providers, emergency shelter, and cash and voucher assistance. HIAS Guyana also engages with communities providing practical information on GBV and anti-trafficking, and hosts orientation group sessions for women at risk.

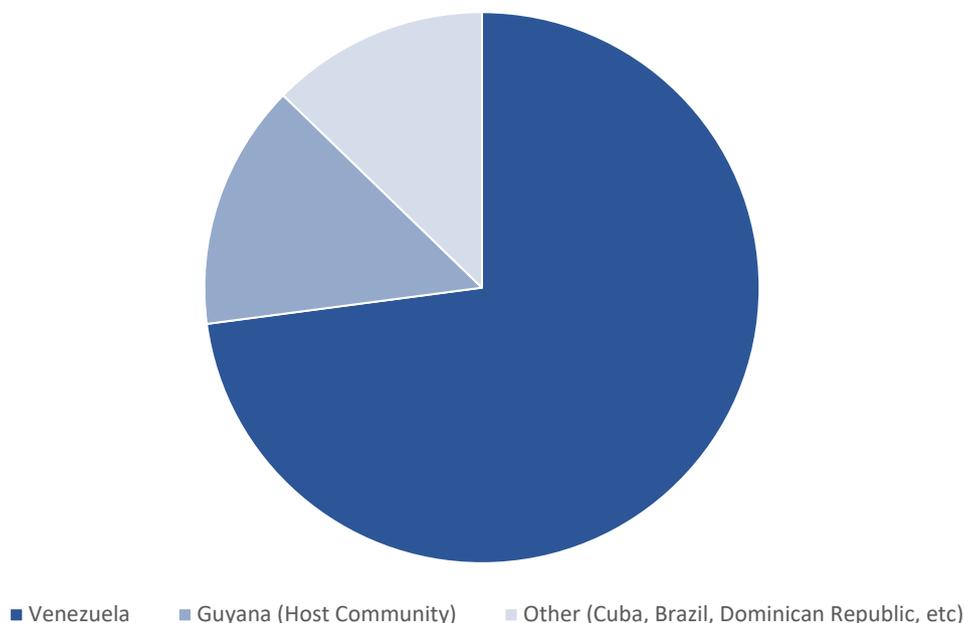
HIAS Guyana’s **economic inclusion** work includes training on financial literacy, vocational opportunities, and job skills. It also includes an Entrepreneurship School that promotes

business modelling and incubates business ideas, and an Entrepreneurship School with a gender lens aimed at assisting women at risk and survivors of GBV.

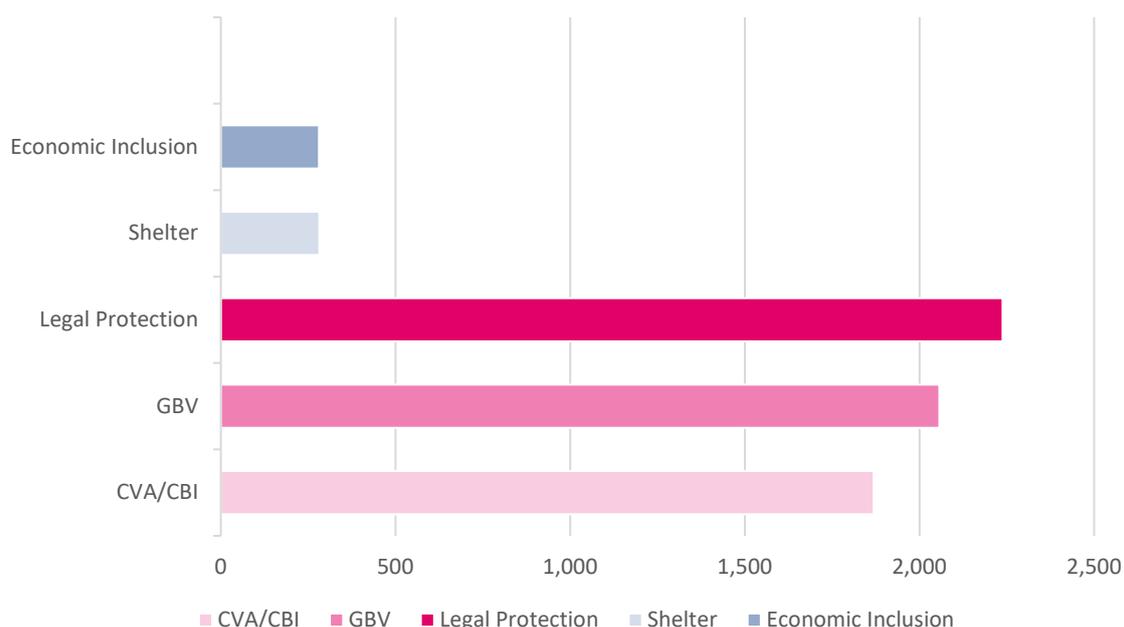
HIAS Guyana currently provides **mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** to survivors of and those at risk of GBV. These services are offered remotely due to the lack of Spanish-speaking mental health providers in Guyana. HIAS Guyana also supports Venezuelans' wellbeing by implementing culturally appropriate support programs focused on community-based approaches that promote positive coping mechanisms and resilience building. HIAS Guyana supports the development of community and peer groups and networks, facilitating opportunities for mutual support and social connectedness in a safe environment.

HIAS Guyana implements HIAS' global **Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Framework** and staff are trained on AAP principles and standard operating procedures. HIAS Guyana displays the Code of Conduct in each office location and shares information about its accountability commitments and available services through written information and through standard operating processes for case management with clients. HIAS Guyana uses feedback and response mechanisms that are accessible and context appropriate, including a confidential email address for beneficiaries to submit complaints or provide comments and feedback.

**Graph 1: Populations Served in 2021**



**Graph 2: People Reached by Program Area in 2021**



## Coordination: Partners and Peer Networks

HIAS Guyana works closely with UNCHR and its partners and will continue to collaborate on multiple levels at the country and subregional (Caribbean) levels to avoid duplication of services and coordinate responses to gaps and emerging needs. HIAS Guyana is actively engaged in multiple sectoral working groups led by UNHCR and the R4V platforms, including the GBV working group and the trafficking in persons (TIP) sub-working group. HIAS Guyana is considered a leader within the humanitarian community in Guyana and is one of only two international NGOs responding to the Venezuela crisis and the primary partner for UNHCR in GBV and protection.

**Looking ahead with programs,** HIAS Guyana will strengthen its technical and operational capacity to reach more beneficiaries, including in new locations, and address unmet needs across all program areas. As HIAS Guyana continues to expand programming to new areas, identifying strategies to support host communities will be critical, including in indigenous communities and other rural areas where newly arrived Venezuelans are perceived to be competing for resources and opportunities. Likewise, given the high number of cases of Venezuelan victims of TIP and the limited services offered by government and civil society organizations, HIAS Guyana will seek to expand its scope and implement programs to prevent and respond to human trafficking in coming years. HIAS Guyana will train its protection team to use individualized case management, to include counseling and helping clients navigate social service systems. The team will also conduct sensitization sessions on migrant and refugee rights with public service providers. HIAS Guyana will build the skills of GBV officers to provide holistic case management, in particular building safety plans with GBV survivors given their high mobility in Guyana. HIAS Guyana will also strengthen formal

referrals to other government and non-government institutions for sexual and reproductive health services. HIAS Guyana and IOM are conducting a joint MHPSS Needs Assessment which will allow for the opportunity to map needs and feasible partners. With additional resources, HIAS Guyana will expand its MHPSS programming to implement a more coordinated, multi-layered approach that leverages community resiliencies.

In 2021, HIAS Guyana granted its first subaward to the Guyana-based Hope Foundation to support gender programming and sexual and reproductive health outreach. Moving forward, HIAS Guyana will continue to focus on strengthening partnerships with local organizations.

## Operational Support for Programs

As HIAS' programs expand to meet new global needs, HIAS remains committed to delivering the highest quality of services to those it seeks to support and empower. To enable country teams to succeed and thrive, HIAS will invest new operational resources in our programs, processes, and people.



HIAS Guyana and UNHCR staff stand in front of the "World Refugee Day" mural in Bartica, made in honor of all refugees and displaced people from all over the world, especially honoring the Venezuelan community.

**Photo:** HIAS Guyana

HIAS Guyana currently employs 18 staff members in three locations. The Country Office leadership team is comprised of the Country Director, Programs Manager, and Finance and Admin Manager. Each HIAS Guyana staff member abides by HIAS' Code of Conduct and other policies and procedures in line with global best practices. All staff members have completed trainings on **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)**. These trainings are updated and repeated regularly to ensure both prevention and response to any reported incidents of SEA. HIAS applies a gender lens when analyzing, planning, and making decisions across all its operations, to ensure the safety, security, and wellbeing of the entire organization's staff.

HIAS invests in the skills and capacity of staff worldwide, supporting a wide range of local, national, regional, and international trainings for staff. HIAS ensures that international staff have diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) training. HIAS Guyana's Georgetown office also celebrates and shares information about the multicultural holidays observed in Guyana as part of a diversity and inclusion initiative spearheaded by the staff. Going forward, HIAS Guyana will be mapping its staff training and capacity building needs against programmatic objectives. To promote **staff wellbeing**, HIAS has a global contract with the Konterra Group, which provides support both for work-related issues and for personal challenges. Staff wellbeing and support for Guyana currently includes support from outside resources and will fall under the global staff wellbeing assessment and working group. The goal of these efforts is to enhance program outcomes as well as improve staff satisfaction, retention, and wellbeing across the country team.

HIAS is also committed to developing an effective, sustainable **safety and security** management system that is in line with its values and mission and our organizational duty of care. Safety and security remain a high priority in Guyana. HIAS Guyana's security focal point and the HIAS Safety and Security Department in HQ, in collaboration with the LAC regional office, work together with the Country Director and program teams to ensure that the measures in place enable programming objectives while cultivating organization-wide compliance. HIAS Guyana continually works to update the overall Guyana safety and security management plan. HIAS Guyana has unarmed security guards in Georgetown and Bartica and utilizes van service between the Georgetown office and public transport. The observance of no-go zones for international staff and visitors will continue to be implemented. Safety and security in the region rely heavily on building acceptance with government and community stakeholders. HIAS Guyana will continue to monitor the security climate in all high-risk locations and respond accordingly to changes in the security climate in areas where HIAS has operations and programming. For all new offices a security assessment will be carried out to identify potential gaps and to take measures to address them.

Globally, HIAS is rolling out a **Digital Transformation Strategy** to ensure that beneficiaries' personal information is digitally secured and protected. The strategy will also create one universal source of information and collaboration; ensure all organizational knowledge is standardized, digitized, organized, and discoverable; ensure data around inputs, outcomes, and impact is readily accessible; help employees collaborate on gathering and building resources on this information platform; and easily share and leverage data from partners

and affiliates. HIAS will be providing annual refresher training to all country offices on IT tools and procedures.

With support from the LAC Regional Office and headquarters (including the regional office), HIAS Guyana will also continue to review and strengthen procedures and tools related to data and reporting as well as finance and compliance, in line with donor requirements and international standards. HIAS Guyana will work with headquarters to establish an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. The ERP system will improve alignment of operations, finance, programs, and human resources, allowing for more efficient and cost-effective country operations.



This beneficiary came to Georgetown from the hinterland areas of Mabaruma to give birth, encountering many challenges along the way. She finds comfort at the HIAS office, where her child can rest or play while she speaks with staff. **Photo:** HIAS Guyana

## Donors and Development

HIAS is committed to growing and diversifying its donor base in each country of operation. With support from the LAC Regional Office and headquarters, HIAS Guyana is developing a donor strategy to sustain, increase, and diversify funding sources, building on its reputation for providing comprehensive services to highly vulnerable refugees in often remote and difficult to serve locations. HIAS Guyana began its programming in 2020 with a regional award and continues to situate its work within the broader context of the Venezuela response. At the same time, HIAS Guyana is now well positioned to identify and respond to the significant and growing unmet need within Guyana.

HIAS Guyana gratefully acknowledges support from State/PRM, UNHCR, Canada, and Airbnb. HIAS Guyana will continue to seek support from funders to address the significant rates of GBV, including trafficking risks among displaced women and girls in Guyana.

The government of Canada's Funds for Local Initiatives (CFLI) program supported HIAS Guyana clients through in-kind assistance. HIAS Guyana looks forward to strengthening its relationship with Canada in the coming year. HIAS Guyana also partners with Airbnb to offer safe housing to clients and hopes to develop that partnership further. Moving forward, HIAS Guyana will strengthen relationships with current funding partners and build new partnerships with both public and private sector donors.

## Communications, Policy, and Advocacy

HIAS Guyana is developing an advocacy strategy that will focus on protection gaps and advancing long-term change through policy, funding, and services. HIAS Guyana's priority advocacy issues include securing the right for Venezuelans to work legally and streamlining the stay permit renewal process for Venezuelans to avoid losing legal status. The advocacy environment is becoming more challenging, as tension between Guyana and Venezuela has increased in the last year and public support for Venezuelan refugees has declined. Nevertheless, HIAS Guyana recognizes the link between survival sex, trafficking, and other forms of labor exploitation and the lack of labor rights for Venezuelans, and will continue to press on these issues, including by leveraging relationships with the UN and supportive governments.

HIAS Guyana uses social media and other communication tools to support these advocacy goals, as well as to contact beneficiaries and make appointments and share guidance and information on topics such as refugee rights, gender equality and GBV, and how to access healthcare and other basic services available locally as well as through HIAS Guyana. HIAS Guyana's operations were impacted during the Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp shutdowns in October 2021, highlighting the need to have alternative means of communicating with our participants.

While the main audience for HIAS Guyana's social media is refugees and other potential program participants, in 2021, the office started using the social media platforms to more widely promote HIAS Guyana's events, activities, and partnerships. This exposure, along

with more media appearances on topics such as World Refugee Day and GBV, raised the organization's profile and strengthened HIAS Guyana's relationships among private sector businesses and embassies. As a result of World Refugee Day press coverage, several businesses reached out to express interest in employing Venezuelans in need. HIAS Guyana will continue to build on this success in the coming year to gain more visibility with key stakeholders in the community. Regionally, HIAS will work to ensure that people traveling across Latin America are aware of HIAS services and locations and other available resources across different countries through digital and other information tools.

**Cover Photo:** HIAS Guyana  
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