UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

FACT SHEET

Panama

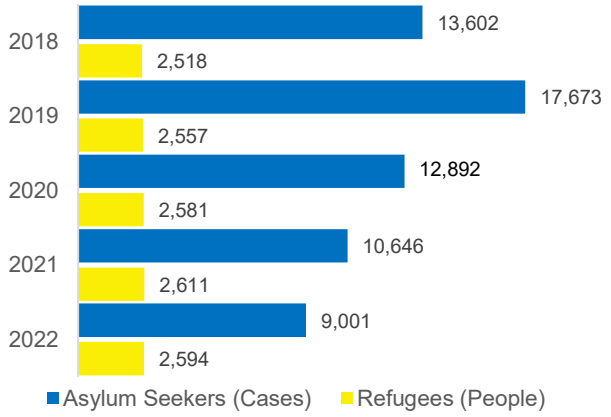
September – October 2022

Panama is home to some **13,000 refugees and asylum-seekers**. As of October 2022, approximately **145,900 displaced Venezuelans** were living in the country[1].

From January to October 2022, over **211,355**[2] people crossed the **Darien Gap.**

In 2022, UNHCR assisted more than **2,300** asylum-seekers and refugees with **multipurpose cash or vouchers** to cover their basic and urgent needs.

People UNHCR protects

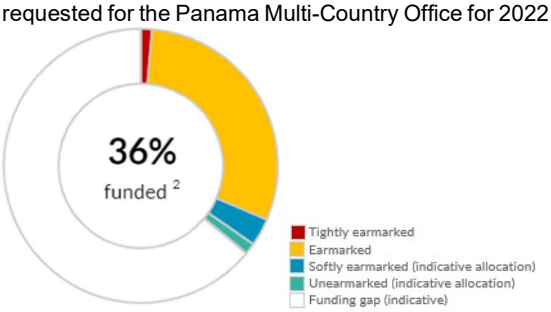


*ONPAR, October 2022

FUNDING (AS OF 25 OCTOBER 2022)

US$ 54.3 M

requested for the Panama Multi-Country Office for 2022



1 The financial requirements for the Panama MCO include requirements for the Coronavirus Emergency and the Venezuela Situation. **Panama** is part of the Panama Multi-Country Office since 2022 along with Belize, Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Southern Caribbean
2 The percentage funded includes indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions

CONTEXT

Refugees and asylum seekers in Panama are mainly from Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. These groups face exacerbated risks and increased vulnerabilities in local integration, mainly due to limited opportunities to generate income.

During the months of September and October, Panama faced one of the most challenging mixed movements crises ever registered here, with an unprecedented number of refugees and migrants risking their lives in the perilous Darien Gap, in search of protection and better opportunities northwards.

In September, the number of people crossing rose to some 2,000 daily, and throughout October authorities registered the highest amount of irregular entries ever in Panama, with over 4,000 persons crossing daily.

However, after the United States announced, on 12 October, a new policy for Venezuelans[3], the mixed movements in Darien shifted substantially, and within a period of 15 days, the numbers decreased as low as 400 people crossing daily, also reflecting changes in nationalities and international protection needs[4].

UNHCR strengthens its presence in Darien

Credit: UNHCR | Braulio Rodriguez Yanez | Alejandra Gaviria Reyes

Since September, UNHCR leads the protection working group in Metetí, coordinating response strategies with local authorities and partners. The agency counts on field staff in community-based protection, information management, shelter, communication with communities, and coordination to support protection services and monitoring exercises, at the Migratory Reception Centres and in host communities, including remote indigenous communities. In October, UNHCR partook in the visit of the EU Commissioner for Crisis Management briefing about UNHCR work to support vulnerable people engaged in mixed movements[5].

1 https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes 2 https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2021/pdf/IRREGULARES_POR_DARIÉN_OCTUBRE_2022.pdf
3 https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/10/12/dhs-announces-new-migration-enforcement-process-venezuelans 4 https://data.unhcr.org/es/documents/details/96920 5 https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/96926

UNHCR Response and Strategy

UNHCR works in close coordination with the Government, civil society, UN agencies, refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants in Panama. Close coordination with the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) is maintained to channel support and continue strengthening the asylum system in the country. UNHCR closely liaises with the Ombudsperson's Office, the Electoral Tribunal, and the National Migration Service. UNHCR co-chairs with IOM the UN inter-agency group on human mobility, which coordinates humanitarian support and interventions namely related to the mixed movements in Darien and Chiriquí provinces. UNHCR has established partnership agreements with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the Pastoral of Human Mobility (PMH), Panamanian Red Cross, *Fútbol con Corazón* (FCC), and *Fundación Espacio Creativo* (FEC). Furthermore, UNHCR supports the government in implementing its commitments under the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS).

Main Activities

Alongside the government, partner organizations, civil society, development actors, and UN Agencies, UNHCR undertakes protection and solutions activities, including:

Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- UNHCR trained 186 National Border Service (SENAFRONT) officers and other 53 officials from diverse Ministries on international protection mechanisms. The agency also co-facilitated a workshop on access to rights of refugees and migrants for 43 officials from the Ministry of Health and trained 42 service providers on Gender-Based Violence case management and referral, including officers from ONPAR and the Ombudsman's Office.
- UNHCR, conducted a joint mission with the Minister of Interior and the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) where core relief items (CRIs) such as blankets, hygiene kits and sleeping mats, were distributed to some 400 refugee and other vulnerable families in hard-to-reach indigenous communities in Darien. Together with the Ministry of Interior, UNHCR also organized the high-level forum "Rights and Dignity of Persons in Search of International Protection". More than 100 people attended the event, including state officials, leaders of diplomatic missions, and 12 asylum seekers and refugees, who showcased their entrepreneurship projects.

Protection

- UNHCR conducted Protection Monitoring Exercises in Darien, reaching over 300 people, and referring several cases to partner Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for legal counselling in refugee status determination procedures.
- UNHCR provided legal assistance to 43 persons with international protection needs to access the asylum procedure during the months of September and October.

Cash-Based Assistance (CBI)

- UNHCR through partners provided CBI to 616 persons, including single-purpose and multipurpose cash vouchers for food, medicines, livelihoods, rent payments, and/or temporary accommodation during September and October.

Durable Solutions and Livelihoods

- UNHCR, HIAS, and ManPower Group carried out two employability workshops for the second group of Talent Without Borders programme participants. A total of 35 people enhanced their skills and improved their job search through strategies given in the training.
- UNHCR through partners assisted 161 persons in livelihoods activities, including access to technical or vocational skills certification, seed capital grants, and training for self-employment.

Local Integration

- UNHCR held a business breakfast to raise awareness of the financial inclusion of refugees. The event counted with the participation of 15 representatives of the private sector willing to advocate for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the national workforce.
- UNHCR facilitated the first session of the Youth Leadership and Mentoring Program for 13 Panamanian students, and 11 refugees and asylum seekers, to co-develop youth-led projects focused on the integration of refugees and other vulnerable groups in local communities.

UNHCR Panama MCO wishes to convey a special thank you to its donors: Canada, the European Union, France, Guyana, the United States of America, and the UN Programme on HIV/AIDS. We also thank the fundamental support provided by donors who have contributed to UNHCR with unearmarked and softly earmarked funds: Australia | Austria | Belgium | Denmark | Germany | Ireland | Italy | Japan | Netherlands | Norway | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom. Private donors in Australia | Canada | Germany | Italy | Japan | the Republic of Korea | Spain | Sweden| and the United States.

For more information:
Philippa Candler, Representative, candler@unhcr.org
Viola Bruttomesso, Associate Communications Officer, bruttome@unhcr.org

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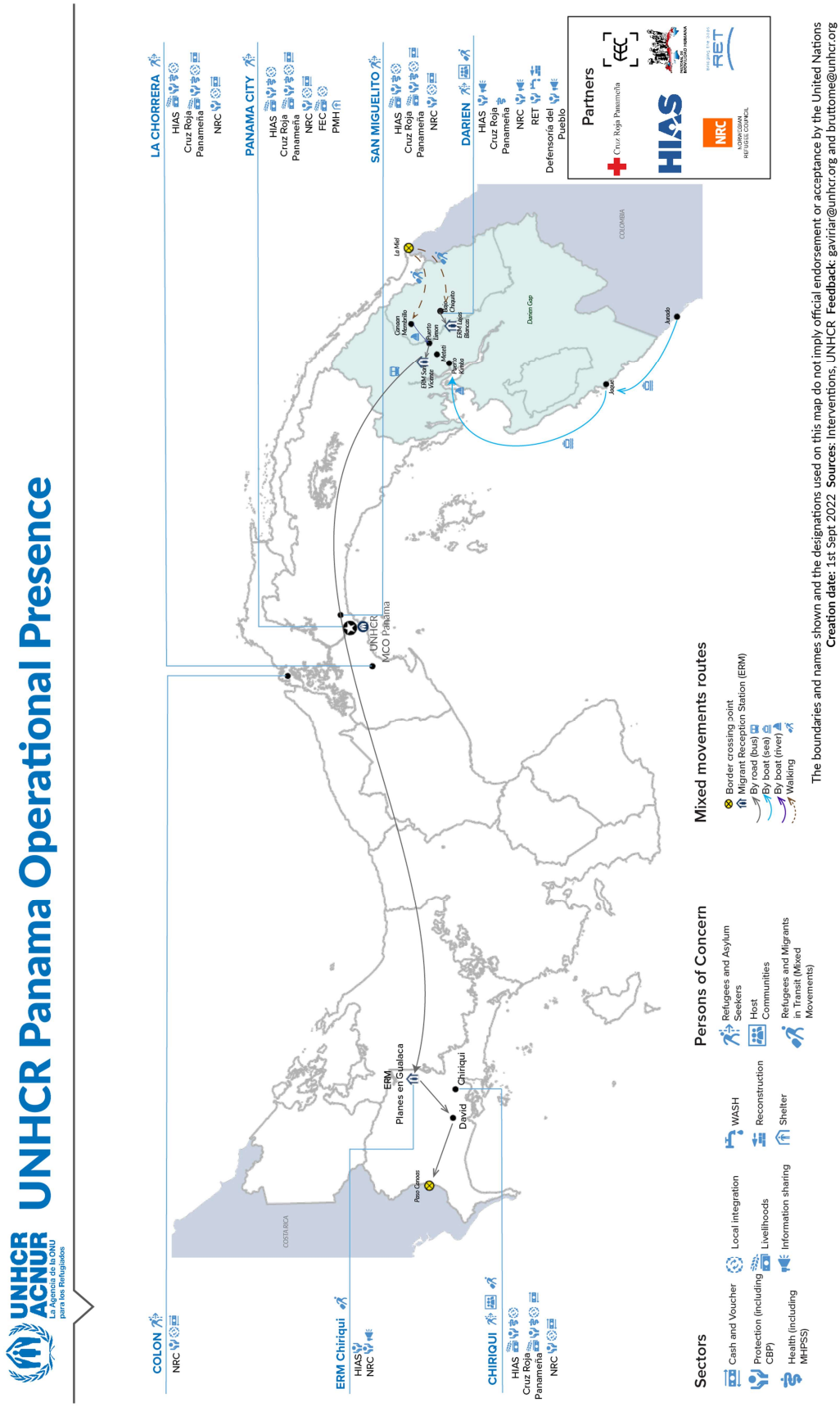
UNHCR Panama Operational Presence
UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados
COLON
NRC
ERM Chiriqui
HIAS
NRC
CHIRIQUI
HIAS
Cruz Roja Panameña
NRC
LA CHORRERA
HIAS
Cruz Roja Panameña
NRC
PANAMA CITY
HIAS
Cruz Roja Panameña
NRC
FEC
PMH
SAN MIGUELITO
HIAS
Cruz Roja Panameña
NRC
DARIEN
HIAS
Cruz Roja Panameña
NRC
RET
Defensoría del Pueblo
Partners
Cruz Roja Panameña
FEC
HIAS
NRC
NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL
RET
COSTA RICA
COLOMBIA
Darien Gap
La Miel
Caracolí Veracruz
Puerto Limon
Metetí
Puerto Piña
Chepigana
EBM Lajas Blancas
EBM Sol Victoria
Jaque
Jurado
UNHCR MCO Panama
ERM Planes en Gualaca
David
Chiriqui
Paso Canoas
Sectors
Cash and Voucher
Local integration
WASH
Protection (including CBP)
Livelihoods
Reconstruction
Health (including MHPSS)
Information sharing
Shelter
Persons of Concern
Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Host Communities
Refugees and Migrants in Transit (Mixed Movements)
Mixed movements routes
Border crossing point
Migrant Reception Station (ERM)
By road (bus)
By boat (sea)
By boat (river)
Walking
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations
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