

# PANAMA

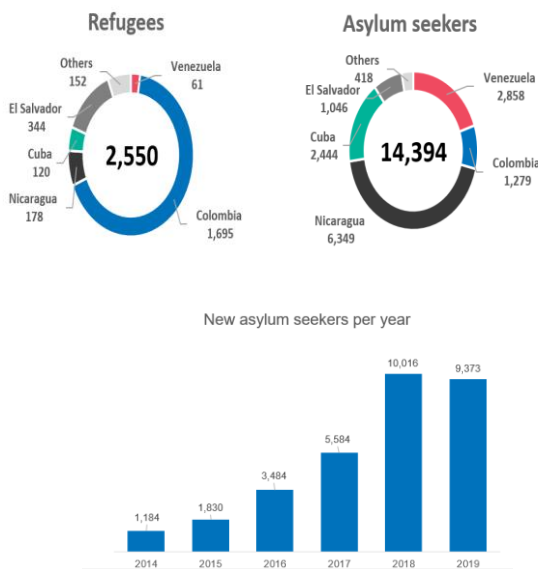
August 2020

Panama is home to **+16,000** refugees and asylum-seekers. **115,768** Venezuelans displaced abroad are estimated to be living in the country.

**742** persons were provided with legal counselling and assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2,603** refugees and asylum-seekers were supported through CBI and multipurpose grants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## POPULATION OF CONCERN



Source: based on data provided by ONPAR, August 2020.

## TRENDS

The refugee population is mainly composed of persons from Colombia, El Salvador, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Especially during the last two years the asylum claims from Venezuela and, in particular, Nicaragua, have dramatically increased.

At the same time mixed movements entering through Darien (border with Colombia) increased during 2019 (more than 23,000 people<sup>1</sup>) with small numbers requesting international protection in Panama, whilst most others transiting northward through Panama. During the COVID-19 pandemic, over 2,000 persons remain in the Reception Centers in Darien and Chiriquí since March due to border closures to prevent the spread of the virus.

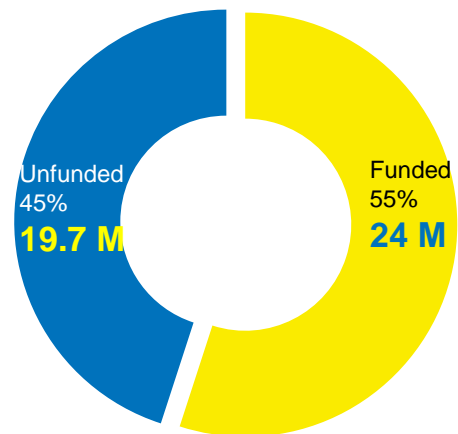
During the COVID-19 pandemic, refugees and asylum seekers in Panama have faced new and exacerbated risks, especially with the loss of opportunities to generate an income and daily subsistence has become a challenge.

<sup>1</sup>Source: National Migration Service

## FUNDING (AS OF 8 SEPTEMBER 2020)

# USD 43.7 M

requested for Panama MCO



Nicaraguan asylum seeker Camila\* shows a pre-paid card from Banesco, where she now receives cash-based assistance from UNHCR's partners. Thanks to a partnership with Banesco, refugees and asylum seekers in Panama will be able to receive assistance through pre-paid cards.  
*UNHCR/ Angela Florez*

## Working with Partners

- UNHCR works in close coordination with the Government, civil society, UN agencies and refugees and asylum-seekers in Panama. UNHCR has established partnership agreements with different national and international organizations, including the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Refugee Education Trust (RET), HIAS, the Human Mobility Pastoral (PMH), the Panamanian Red Cross, Fútbol con Corazon, and Programa Enlaces (Fundación Espacio Creativo). Also, a Partnership Agreement with the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) is maintained, to channel support and continue strengthening the asylum system in the country. Additionally, UNHCR works in close coordination with other entities such as the Ombudsperson's Office, SENNIAF, INAMU, the Electoral Tribunal, National Migration Service, among other authorities. UNHCR co-chairs with IOM the UN inter-agency group on human mobility, which has been coordinating all humanitarian support related to the mixed movements in Darien.
- On 6 March 2020, the Panamanian government informed the first COVID-19 case in the country. UNHCR and partners strengthened and adapted their support to refugees and asylum seekers in line with the prevention measures taken by the government.

## Main Activities

### COVID-19 response

- **More than 2,000 refugees and asylum seekers** received cash assistance from partners Panamanian Red Cross and Norwegian Refugee Council for food supplies, medicine and rent. Panamanian Red Cross has also distributed more than **300 prevention kits** (masks, gloves and alcohol gel) and hygiene kits (bars of soap) for refugee families, reaching 900 persons.
- UNHCR, continues to support the government's response to COVID-19 in the Migratory Reception Centers in Peñitas and Lajas Blancas in Darien and Los Planes de Gualaca in Chiriquí. In June and July, UNHCR delivered **48 Refugee Housing Units** to the new Migratory Reception Center in San Vicente, Darién. UNHCR has also donated food, cleaning materials and disinfectants to strengthen the current response in the Centers, as part of the inter-agency response of the United Nations system in the country. HIAS, UNHCR's partner, delivered **2,600 hygiene supplies**, such as soaps and pampers, in the Migratory Reception Center in Los Planes de Gualaca, Chiriquí supporting **over 600 persons**.
- UNHCR in Panama received **50,000 bars of soap** from Unilever as part of a global donation to support the efforts to prevent COVID-19 and provide refugees and asylum seekers with basic hygiene kits.
- The online counselling service for refugees and asylum seekers launched by UNHCR to strengthen mental health initiatives and accompaniment during the pandemic has continued to provide a safe space for more than **20 refugees and asylum seekers** every week in individual and group sessions. HIAS, UNHCR's partner, has supported **75 persons** through psychosocial assistance since June.
- The online story telling project "*Tu Cuento Cuenta*" (Your Story Counts) reached **20 refugee families** since June. Refugee children and local volunteers met on a weekly basis through love story telling sessions via WhatsApp. The project is part of various initiative supported by UNHCR to provide emotional accompaniment spaces for refugees during the lockdown in Panama.

- **3,839 refugee, migrant and Panamanian children** are part of the FCC en Casa (FCC at home) implemented by Futbol Con Corazón with UNHCR's support. The program trained P.E. teachers in a specific methodology, using soccer, to work upon solidarity and peaceful coexistence.
- UNHCR and IOM joint campaign **#SomosLoMismo** continues to reach locals, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants living in Panama with solidarity and inclusion messages. During COVID-19, the campaign has promoted messages of solidarity, inclusion and prevention measures through social media accounts.

Somos Lo Mismo held a Forum with Journalists to discuss the role of journalism in addressing xenophobia and creating more inclusive communities. Over 180 persons participated in the online event. During the event, Somos Lo Mismo launched a special [landing page for journalists](#) with relevant information on refugees, migrants, international protection and human rights.

For Children's Day, Somos Lo Mismo organized an online camp with 50 Panamanian, refugee and migrant children with recreational activities such as storytelling, theatre and yoga.

Somos Lo Mismo published a series of videos for social media "*Sueños en la Maleta*" (Dreams in a Suitcase) where stories of inclusion, hope and friendship between locals, refugees and migrants were portrayed. The series of videos can be found [here](#).

## External / Donors Relations

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, and countries in Central America, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding: [Canada](#) | [Denmark](#) | [European Union](#) | [France](#) | [Germany](#) | [Ireland](#) | [Italy](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [Norway](#) | [Spain](#) | [Sweden](#) | [Switzerland](#) | [United Kingdom](#) | [United States of America](#)

And to our private donors: [Private donors Australia](#) | [Private donors Germany](#) | [Private donors Italy](#) | [Private donors Japan](#) | [Private donors Spain](#) | [Private donors Republic of Korea](#) | [Private donors United Kingdom](#) | [UN Covid-19 MPTF](#) | [Private donors USA](#)

### CONTACTS

**Renee Cuijpers**, Deputy Regional Representative  
[cuijpers@unhcr.org](mailto:cuijpers@unhcr.org), Tel: +507 304 9652

**Angela Florez**, Senior Communications Associate,  
[florez@unhcr.org](mailto:florez@unhcr.org), Tel: +507 304 9654

### LINKS

[Regional portal](#) – [Panama HELP- Latest Webstory](#) - [Twitter](#) – [Facebook](#)