

PANAMA

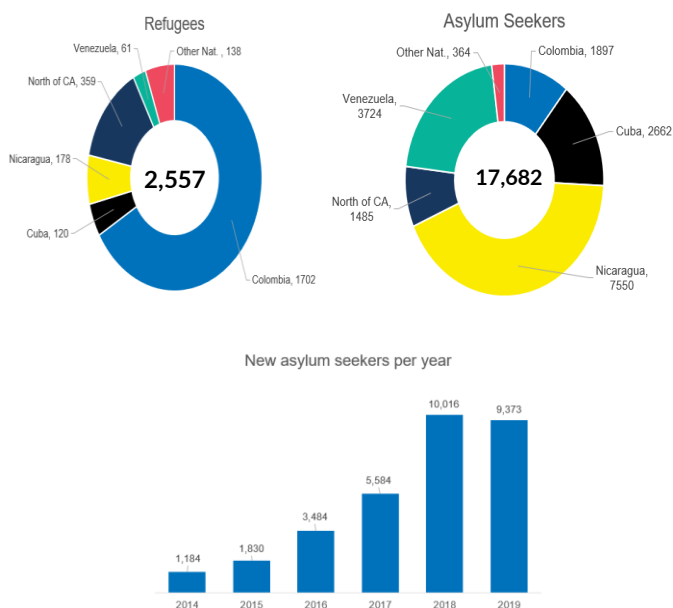
June 2020

Panama is home to **+19,000** refugees and asylum-seekers. **115,768** Venezuelans displaced abroad are estimated to be living in the country.

+400 persons were provided with legal counselling and assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

+2,000 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.

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) have increased during 2019 (more than 23,000 people¹) with small numbers requesting international protection in Panama, whilst most others transiting northward through Panama.

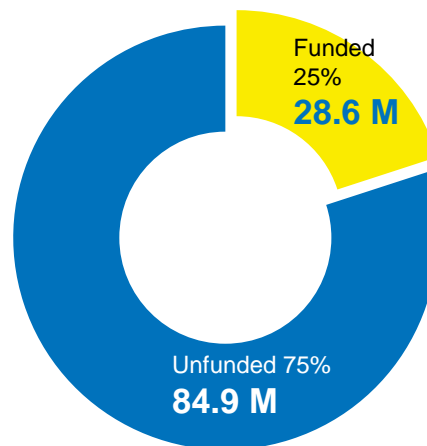
During the COVID-19 pandemic, refugees and asylum seekers in Panama have faced new and exacerbated risks, especially with the loss of opportunities to generate an income and daily subsistence has become a challenge.

¹Source: National Migration Service

FUNDING (AS OF 28 MAY 2020)

USD 113.6 M

requested for the NCA situation



The financial requirements of the North of Central America situation include requirements in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama MCO



Panamanian Red Cross (CRP) provides cash-based assistance to refugee and asylum-seeking families with UNCR's support. During the COVID-19 measures in Panama, CRP continued supporting over 1,000 persons with cash grants to buy food supplies, medicine and pay rent.
UNHCR/ Nairobi Estrada

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 100 kits for refugee families with masks, gloves and alcohol gel.
- UNHCR and Banesco, a financial entity in Panama, will deliver 800 prepaid cards to refugees and asylum seekers, through a recently signed MoU. With the prepaid cards, UNHCR's partners will continue providing assistance without using cash or requiring refugees and asylum seekers to personally approach partners offices, to receive the assistance. The 800 prepaid cards are a first instalment of this new assistance mechanism.
- UNHCR, has supported the Migratory Reception Centers in Peñitas and Lajas Blancas in Darien and Los Planes de Gualaca in Chiriquí. As part of the inter-agency response of the United Nations system in the country, UNHCR has donated food, cleaning materials and disinfectants to strengthen the current response in the Centers.
- UNHCR launched an online counselling service for refugees and asylum seekers. The service aims to strengthen mental health initiatives and accompaniment during the pandemic.
- UNHCR joined the story telling initiative "*Tu Cuento Cuenta*" (Your Story Counts) through which volunteers recorded videos reading stories for children and adolescents, during confinement. UNHCR and Cuentos Sin Fronteras, the lead organization of the initiative, also launched a pilot project with 20 refugee families and 20 volunteers being part of a live story telling session, for a three-month story telling project.
- UNHCR and partner Futbol con Corazón launched the initiative FCC en Casa (FCC at home). The program will train P.E. teachers in a specific methodology, using soccer, to work upon solidarity and peaceful coexistence. The training will be carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Education and will be implemented in 9 schools in

Panama and West Panama provinces (with highest number of refugee children enrolled).

- 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 was part of the International Film Festival 2020 home edition and the online concert VenezolanIstmo with a [short video](#) on Panama's history and the inclusion of refugees and migrants. Through an alliance with El Metro de Panamá, Somos Lo Mismo delivered 400 masks to its users with a message of solidarity and inclusion.

- UNHCR has provided PPEs to partners and government offices on the frontline in assisting refugees and asylum seekers, including ONPAR, Migration, Senafront, and Panamanian Red Cross, among others. Masks, gels and soap were delivered to refugees, asylum seekers and persons in transit in Darien and Chiriquí (50,000 bars of soap, and more than 6,000 masks), in addition to other personal protection equipment.

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](#) | [Germany](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [Norway](#) | [Sweden](#) | [Switzerland](#) | [United Kingdom](#) | [United States of America](#)

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