

# Panama

January 2021

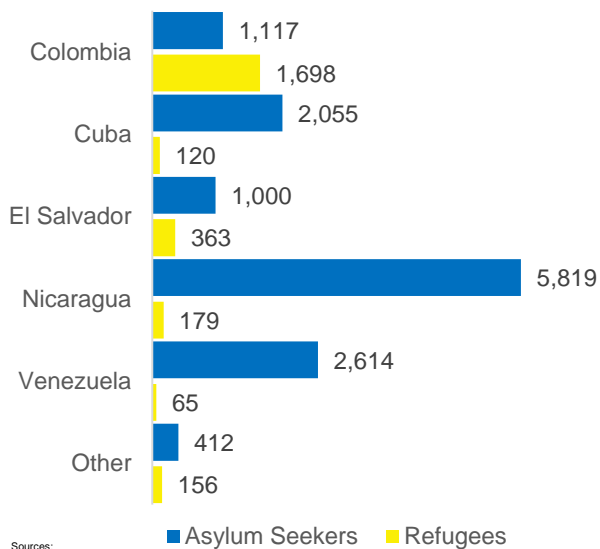
Panama is home to **+15,500** refugees and asylum-seekers.

**115,768** Venezuelans displaced abroad are estimated to be living in the country.

**1,665** persons were provided with legal counselling and assistance during 2020.

**4,999** refugees and asylum-seekers were supported through CBI and multipurpose grants during 2020.

## Population of concern<sup>1</sup>

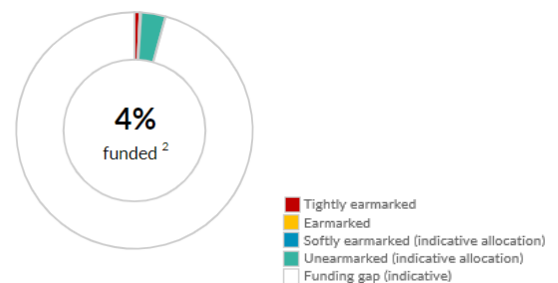


Sources:  
1. ONPAR, November 2020  
2. National Migration Service, December 2020  
3. National Migration Service, January 2021

## FUNDING (AS OF 02 FEBRUARY 2021)

# USD 48.7 M

requested for the Panama Multi Country Office CO



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 in 2021 along with Belize, Nicaragua, Cuba and the Southern Caribbean

2 The percentage funded includes indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions

## CONTEXT

The refugee population is mainly composed of persons from Colombia, El Salvador, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. 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, daily subsistence has become a challenge.

Movements of people entering through Darien (border with Colombia) increased during 2019 (more than 23,000 people<sup>2</sup>) with small numbers requesting international protection in Panama, whilst most others transited northward. In 2020, due to the pandemic, the number was significantly lower (6,465 people<sup>2</sup>) As a result of border closures in March 2020, over 2,000 persons remain in the Reception Centers in Darien and Chiriquí. During January 2021, 1,009 persons<sup>3</sup> have entered through the Darien border. These persons remain in the Reception Centers of Lajas Blancas and San Vicente.



Vice Minister of Interior, Juana Lopez, and UNHCR's Deputy Regional Representative, Renee Cuijpers, meet with a group of Colombian refugees during a humanitarian mission to Darien.  
Credits: Ministry of Interior

Sources:  
1. ONPAR, November 2020  
2. National Migration Service, December 2020  
3. National Migration Service, January 2021

## Working with Partners

UNHCR works in close coordination with the **Government, civil society, UN agencies and refugees and asylum-seekers** in Panama. 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. UNHCR co-chairs with IOM the UN inter-agency group on human mobility, which has been coordinating humanitarian support and interventions related to the mixed movements in Darien and Chiriquí provinces. UNHCR has also 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). Furthermore, UNHCR supports the government in implementing their 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:

### Protection

- UNHCR conducted the [High-Frequency Survey](#) to collect new data on demographics, specific needs, movement trends and the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and asylum seekers. 435 interviews were carried out between October and December. The persons interviewed are from the main countries seeking asylum in Panama: Venezuela, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Colombia. In the preliminary results, refugees and asylum seekers highlighted access to basic needs as a priority, as well as access to documentation, regularization and job opportunities. 98% of the persons interviewed indicated that COVID-19 restrictions affecter their work situation; 49% confirmed they are currently unemployed.
- UNHCR, the Ministry of Interior and ONPAR carried out a humanitarian mission to four communities in Darien. During the visit, ONPAR verified the validity of the refugee's documents and provided information on the permanent residency for those who have more than 4 years as recognised refugees. A mission to renew the IDs and process permanent residences for refugees will be carried out in the coming months.
- UNHCR's partner, Norwegian Refugee Council continued to provide information, orientation and legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. In November and December 2020, [529 persons](#), mainly from Colombia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and El Salvador, were supported.

### Humanitarian assistance

- During January 2021, [38 families](#) were supported with cash assistance through the Panamanian Red Cross for food supplies, medicines and rent.
- UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior delivered [2,000 kits with food supplies](#) to refugee and local families in four host communities in Darien (Alto Playona, Boca de Cupe, Yape and Vista Alegre).
- UNHCR supported state entities and partners in 2020 with the [donation of more than 300,000 bars of soap](#) in support of refugees, asylum seekers, host communities and to respond to emergency situations, including mixed movement in Darien and the ETA and IOTA storms, as part of the COVID-19 prevention strategy and response.

### Education

- [100 teachers were trained](#) on psycho emotional tools for the gradual return to school and for how to provide accompaniment to children and their families in this process. The training was led by UNHCR's partner, RET and by the Ministry of Education.

### Durable solutions and livelihoods

- [Talento Sin Fronteras](#), an employability program led by UNHCR, ManpowerGroup and HIAS, adapted its training scheme to an online modality in 2020. [59 refugees and 20 Panamanians](#) were part of the four generations of online training, participating in group sessions with talent development experts on job search techniques and how to develop an employment plan. Participants have been supported by partner HIAS with digital literacy courses to strengthen their technical skills towards livelihood opportunities.

### Advocacy and peaceful coexistence

- UNHCR and Ecocinema implemented COMPARTIR, a pilot community film project, targeting 7 communities where a significant number of refugee and asylum seeker families reside. The project reached a total of [314 people, mainly children and their families](#), through small workshops and film screenings to reinforce solidarity, social cohesion, empathy, and respect between locals and refugees.
- UNHCR and IOM joint campaign [#SomosLoMismo](#) continues to reach locals, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants living in Panama with solidarity and inclusion messages. In November, the campaign launched a series of videos telling the stories of three asylum seekers in Panama, preparing dishes from their home countries with Panamanian ingredients, showing the fusion of the two countries through their cooking. The videos can be found here: [Marisol and Venezuela](#), [Lenya from Nicaragua](#), [Francisca from El Salvador](#).

Somos Lo Mismo held 6 Theatre-Forum sessions with [165 university and high school students](#) where they could propose ideas and ways to address discrimination in everyday life situations.

- UNHCR, UNFPA, HIAS, and NRC launched a [campaign to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence](#), highlighting its impact on refugee and displaced girls. The campaign was supported by the Women's Office of the Municipality of Panama.
- To celebrate Mother's Day in Panama, UNHCR presented a [virtual concert with Camerata Panama](#), dedicated to Panamanian and refugee mothers in the country. During the virtual event, UNHCR thanked Panama for its solidarity towards refugees and migrants in the country and highlighted the resilience of refugee mothers.

**Thanks to donors:** 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](#)

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#### **LINKS**

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