



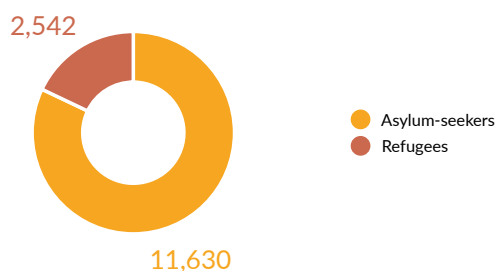
## ADDRESSING FORCED DISPLACEMENT: THE MIRPS IN PANAMA

The Republic of Panama is currently home to approximately 13,000 people in need of international protection, with 2,573 refugees and 10,272 asylum-seekers predominantly from Colombia, El Salvador, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, with the majority residing in the Metropolitan Area of Panama City. In addition to receiving people forced to flee, Panama is also a transit country for thousands of people from Venezuela, Haiti, Cuba, and countries in Africa and South Asia who cross the Darien Gap heading northwards in search of new opportunities, family reunification, or protection. In recent years, the Darien Gap has become one of the most significant and risky transit points in the region. In 2021, approximately 133,720 people entered the country irregularly through this border, a record number of people in mixed movements heading towards the north of the continent.

According to the National Migration Service, in the first seven months of 2022, more than 75,000 people crossed the Darien Gap, almost twice the total of the equivalent period in 2021, with some days reaching 1,000-1,300 entries. In 2022, the most common nationality of people in transit is Venezuelan. The majority of people seeking asylum in Panama in recent years arrived by plane, while new asylum claims from people fleeing both neighbouring and distant countries is increasing.

### FIGURES AT A GLANCE

#### PEOPLE OF CONCERN IN PANAMA



Source: UNHCR / Dec 2021

### NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

#### 20 COMMITMENTS



**PROTECTION**  
11 COMMITMENTS



**EDUCATION**  
2 COMMITMENTS



**HEALTH**  
1 COMMITMENT



**JOBS & LIVELIHOODS**  
3 COMMITMENTS



**SOCIAL PROTECTION**  
3 COMMITMENTS

### MIRPS IN PANAMA

#### NATIONAL TECHNICAL TEAM

- Ministry of Government
- National Office for the Attention to Refugees (ONPAR)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Legal Department)
- Ministry of Labour and Laboural Development
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Public Security
- National Institute for Women
- National Secretary for Children, Adolescents and Family
- Ombudsman Office

#### CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING THE MIRPS

- HIAS
- NRC
- Panamanian Red Cross
- RET

#### OTHER ALLIANCES

- Private Sector (ManpowerGroup)

# ACHIEVEMENTS

## Increased technical capacities of Government officials in international protection

In 2021, more than 500 state security officers (from the National Police, National Border Service, National Naval Air Service) and representatives from the Ombudsman's Office, National Women's Institute, CONARE, ONPAR, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took part in a training on international protection.

# 1



### PROTECTION

## Recognition of statelessness

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to implement the commitments made at a high-level meeting that led to the creation of an inter-institutional mechanism to facilitate the implementation of the Executive Decree approving the statelessness procedure. With this progress, other related authorities have been made aware of their responsibilities within this legal framework.

## Expansion of ONPAR's presence in critical border areas,

to respond to the needs of people entering the country as part of mixed movements through the Darien Gap. This has facilitated the identification and processing of specific cases that have requested international protection in Panama, and others that would otherwise not have done so. In coordination with the Civil Registry, National Migration Service, and the Ombudsman's Office, the registration of 90 newborns was achieved in 2020 in Darien province. The registered individuals were all persons on the move who were born in Darien province while their parents were transiting the country. This is an important achievement towards the mitigation of the risk of statelessness in the future.

# 3



### JOB AND LIVELIHOODS

## The participation of asylum-seekers and refugees in public consultations

In 2021, refugees and asylum seekers took part in a national consultation for the creation of inclusive public policies to close economic, social, educational, and health gaps, called "Pacto Bicentenario." Asylum-seekers and refugees submitted 14 recommendations as their contribution to this initiative.

## Participation in activities coordinated by local governments

Through an agreement with the Municipality of La Chorrera, asylum seekers and refugees were included in gender-based violence prevention programmes, not only as beneficiaries but also as key actors empowered to provide support and advice to other people in the community.

# 2



### LOCAL INTEGRATION

## Employability for refugees, asylum-seekers, and host communities

The implementation of the onsite/online "Talents Without Borders" programme, in alliance with ManpowerGroup and HIAS, continued to strengthen the capacities and skills of displaced persons, promote their access to the formal labour market, and facilitate their integration into the country. In addition, the implementation of a Female Entrepreneurs Programme, in alliance with the Ciudad del Saber Foundation, has benefited a total of 76 women who are heads of households.

## Access to professional training for refugees

The National Institute for Vocational Training and Human Development (INADEH) has formally enabled access for refugees to their vocational training programmes, which were previously only accessible for Panamanian citizens and foreign nationals with more than 10 years of residency in the country.

### Implementation of the Technical Standard for Mental Health Care for the Migrant and Refugee Population in Panama

The new provision instructs the regional offices of the Ministry of Health to produce valuable statistics and for institutions, NGOs, and local communities to be involved in an integrated mental health approach, which emphasizes prevention, referral systems, universal access, and community-based initiatives. The protocol provides mental health professionals with specialized tools and support to work with these populations to address the consequences of their forced displacement, address their integration challenges within the national public health system, and invest in related support systems and host community capacities.



## UPDATED COMMITMENTS

### 2022-2023

The MIRPS National Technical Team in Panama reviewed and updated its National Action Plan in 2022 to maintain the relevance and validity of the MIRPS and reflect the current challenges for addressing displacement.

Governmental institutions have identified strategic interventions that require urgent support for the implementation of the plan in the short term (2022-2023). These interventions would address critical needs for the protection and solutions of displaced populations.

### ESTIMATED COST FOR STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS (2022-2023): USD 600 K\*

\* This estimated cost only includes prioritized commitments that have been costed and can be implemented by governmental institutions in 2022 – 2023. It does not include activities by international organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders.

The full list of commitments are presented below by focus area:



## PROTECTION

Continue to strengthen the asylum system by protecting the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees; reinforcing reception capacity in border areas; and reinforcing capacities for the identification, referral, and care of persons in need of international protection or at risk of statelessness.

- **Continuous strengthening of training processes for public officials** at the national and local levels in matters of international protection, to expand their abilities to identify and refer people with protection needs (refugees and stateless persons). In addition to MIRE, the Electoral Tribunal (Civil Registry), SENAFRONT, SNM, SENAN, ONPAR, CONARE, INAMU, SENNIAF, the Ombudsman's Office and local authorities in prioritized areas, officials from other relevant state entities will be included.
- **Develop a care, identification, and referral protocol** between the Ministry of Security (SNM and SENAFRONT) and the Ministry of Government, as established in Executive Decree no. 5 of 2018.
- **Improve the national registration system**, incorporate biometrics, and issue a new card with QR codes to facilitate the verification of asylum-seekers between authorized public institutions, while ensuring data confidentiality.
- **Speed up the processing of asylum claims** by reducing the delay in applications through the restructuring of internal processes, as well as the development of technical tools.

- **Continue facilitating the hiring of human resources** (lawyers, social workers, psychologists, and other related professions) for ONPAR, to have sufficient capacity to respond to the growing number of requests.
- **Ensure that no child is born stateless and ensure birth registration to prevent statelessness** through carrying out birth registration and registration days in border areas.
- **Continue developing inter-institutional sessions for issuing and renewing documents** (temporary and permanent residence, and defined or indefinite work permits) in areas that are difficult to access.
- **Promote the issuance of driver's licenses** to asylum-seekers who maintain an active application certified by ONPAR.
- **Develop training and awareness programmes** for officials to identify stateless persons.
- **Provide care for female refugees/asylum-seekers and survivors of gender-based violence** through the development and implementation of a care, referral, and counter-referral protocol between the Ministry of Government (ONPAR) and the National Institute for Women (INAMU), and the promotion of the Attention Route.
- Encourage legal clinics of the Faculties of Law of public and private universities to **provide guidance, support, and free legal assistance to asylum-seekers.**



## EDUCATION

Continue promoting equitable and quality education by strengthening national systems to foster inclusion, resilience, and participation of children and youth in host communities.

- Promote the development of **instructions, a procedural manual, and level tests** for the operationalization of Decree 1225 of October 21, 2015.
- **Socialization of information for refugees** about the availability of courses, workshops, and trainings provided by the National Institute of Professional Training and Training for Human Development (INADEH), in follow-up to the agreements reached at the beginning of 2019.



## JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS

Expand opportunities for integration of the refugee and asylum-seeking population into Panama's economic and social systems, increasing their self-sufficiency through access to formal employment, vocational training, and income-generating opportunities.

- **Raise awareness amongst the private sector** about the refugee population, who are in search of employment.
- Explore the feasibility of **opening bank accounts for recognized refugees.**
- **Promote inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers admitted for processing in the database of the Ministry of Labour,** for their participation in job listings and employment fairs.



## HEALTH

Ensure equitable access to public health services, promoting knowledge and coordination among relevant actors to facilitate referral processes for refugees and asylum-seekers.

- **Continue to guarantee access to public health services** and promote referral processes among civil society actors (for refugees, asylum seekers and other persons in need of international protection).



## SOCIAL PROTECTION

Promote the consolidation of comprehensive services for protection and care for people with international protection needs, continuing to promote the training of officials and the coordination of government agencies to ensure the inclusion and full access of refugees and asylum-seekers to social protection programs and services.

- Continue to facilitate the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in existing social protection programs, such as Panama Solidario, among others.
- **Continue promoting non-discrimination and inclusion campaigns** aimed at different entities to promote the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers in Panama.
- **Establish components on awareness-raising on refugee status** within the training processes of institutions that provide social protection services.

## THE MIRPS

The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) is a regional contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees formed by the governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama to strengthen protection and promote solutions for forcibly displaced populations, addressing the underlying causes and promoting a stable environment that ensures security, economic development and prosperity.



[www.mirps-platform.org/en](http://www.mirps-platform.org/en)



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