



ANNUAL REPORT

MIRPS 2024

Comprehensive
Regional Protection
and Solutions
Framework







Belize

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Indicators



117

PEOPLE SENSITIZED on promoting the inclusion of forcibly displaced people.

48



171

ASYLUM APPLICATIONS AND 40 APPROVALS in 2024.



156

REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION (RSD) INTERVIEWS conducted between October 2022 and August 2023.



12,800

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AND 1,855 APPROVALS under the Amnesty Program in 2024.

In 2024, Belize made noteworthy contributions as the MIRPS Pro-Tempore Presidency. Assuming this leadership role at the beginning of the year, Belize has actively sought to enhance synergies between the MIRPS and other significant mechanisms, including Cartagena +40, the Quito Process, and the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM). Through participation in various meetings and by delivering interventions on behalf of the nation, Belize has demonstrated its commitment to fostering collaborative approaches in addressing issues related to forced displacement within the region.

A key initiative undertaken by Belize has been the reactivation of its MIRPS National Technical Team (NTT). This reactivation has empowered the NTT to engage in a range of activities, including participation in Regional Technical Team Sessions, where they have contributed valuable interventions and shared best practices that could benefit other countries facing similar challenges. Moreover, the National Technical Team has developed the Belize MIRPS National Action Plan for 2024-2026, which serves as a strategic framework to guide the nation's efforts in

In 2024, Belize made notable contributions as MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency. Since assuming this leadership role, Belize has worked to enhance synergies between MIRPS and other regional mechanisms.

addressing displacement issues comprehensively. The team is also in the initial phases of a good practice implementation project, designed to assist in Labor Integration.

Between October 2022 and August 2023, Belize conducted 156 Refugee Status Determination (RSD) interviews, reflecting the nation's ongoing commitment to addressing the needs of displaced individuals and ensuring the protection of their rights. Additionally, acknowledging the importance of local engagement, the team conducted several missions aimed at meeting with local governments. These interactions were focused on strengthening relationships and enhancing the social integration

of forcibly displaced persons, ensuring that the specific needs of these communities are effectively addressed at both local and national levels.

Significantly, Belize is scheduled to host the VII MIRPS Annual Meeting in December, an event that underscores its leadership role while convening stakeholders to assess progress, challenges, and future initiatives in the region.

Overall, these initiatives highlight Belize's proactive approach and dedication to leading the MIRPS framework, while ensuring that the challenges faced by forcibly displaced persons remain a priority on both national and regional agendas.



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Protection



In the past year, the Refugees Department, with the assistance of the MIRPS NTT, has made significant strides in enhancing the protection of asylum-seekers. An information package detailing the services and rights available to individuals once they are recognized as refugees was developed. This resource is crucial for empowering refugees to navigate their new environment. The package includes vital information on various types

of services, such as Social Security Benefits, healthcare access, educational opportunities, and pathways to employment.

Moreover, the package contains contact information for key civil society organizations, such as UNHCR, Human Rights Commission of Belize, Help for Progress, and Humana People to People, which play a crucial role in supporting refugees.

Additionally, the Refugees Department opened a Refugee Information Center in Benque Viejo, strategically located to assist asylum-seekers entering Belize through the Western Border. This centre serves as a vital support hub for newcomers seeking guidance and information.

Throughout the year, **the Refugees Department conducted a remarkable number of interviews,**

processing approximately 171 applications, resulting in 40 approvals. These efforts reflect the Department's commitment to facilitating the integration of asylum-seekers into Belizean society. By providing essential information and resources, the Department aims to ensure that refugees can access their rights and services effectively, fostering a safer and more supportive community for all.

Education



The Ministry of Education has launched several transformative programs this year to benefit both Belizeans and forcibly displaced persons. One of the key initiatives is the Education Upliftment Program, which provides critical support to schools nationwide, assisting students with tuition,

uniforms, and meals. **Notably, Bella Vista High School is actively participating in this program, currently benefiting 5 refugees.** This inclusive approach enables displaced individuals to access quality education, fostering their personal development and integration.

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Health



The Ministry of Health has continued its dedication to providing accessible healthcare by offering low-cost services at both primary and secondary healthcare levels. This includes free consultations and various essential services, aiming to ensure that all individuals, including forcibly displaced persons, receive necessary medical attention.

Additionally, the launch of the Community Health Worker's (CHW) Manual and Job Aid tool marks a significant advancement in community health. This resource equips community healthcare workers with the technical and communication

skills needed to better serve individuals in their neighbourhoods. By enhancing their capacity, CHWs can potentially assist forcibly displaced persons who may face additional barriers to accessing healthcare. The Ministry's ongoing commitment to affordable healthcare plays a crucial role in supporting the well-being of refugees and other vulnerable populations. With continued efforts to expand services and improve healthcare delivery, the Ministry of Health is essential in fostering a healthier community for all Belizeans and displaced individuals alike.

Social Protection



To raise awareness and foster acceptance, the Refugees Department hosted an event on World Refugee Day, emphasizing the importance of integrating forcibly displaced individuals into local communities. With 117 recorded attendees, this initiative aimed to sensitize the public about the challenges faced by refugees while combating the negative stigma associated with displacement. The event's success was a step towards encouraging a more open and accepting society.

Furthermore, the Refugees Department established two child-friendly spaces at its

Belmopan main office and the Benque Viejo Refugee Information Center. These areas are specifically designed to create a welcoming environment for families seeking assistance, making the process less stressful for both children and parents. By prioritizing the emotional and psychological well-being of displaced families, the Department is taking a holistic approach to social protection. This understanding and support aim to bridge gaps between local communities and refugees, fostering a spirit of inclusion and compassion throughout Belize.





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Jobs and Livelihoods

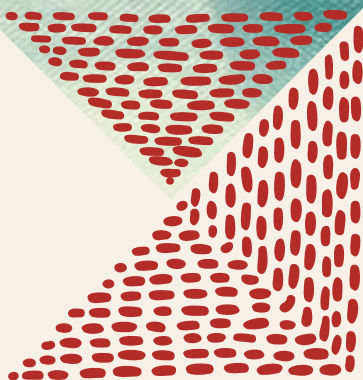


This year, the launch of the Good Practice Implementation Project has marked a significant step forward in promoting labour integration for forcibly displaced individuals. Conducted by the MIRPS National Technical Team under the Refugees Department’s leadership, the project comprises four key components aimed at facilitating economic opportunities. The first component involves conducting a needs-based assessment survey to understand the skills and requirements of the displaced community. The second component is tailored training based on feedback from the assessment, ensuring that individuals are equipped with the necessary job skills. The third component focuses on enhancing access to economic integration, while the fourth

includes meetings with employers to discuss potential job placements.

UNHCR and its partners have played a vital role by allowing the Department to collaborate and conduct surveys at various documentation clinics. They will continue to support other aspects of the project as it progresses. Currently, the team is nearing completion of the first component and is making progress on the remaining stages.

Additionally, the amnesty project has seen 12,800 applications with 1,855 approvals this year. These initiatives collectively seek to empower forcibly displaced persons, enabling them to build sustainable livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to Belizean society.



Asylum-seekers find hope through Belize's Amnesty Program

BY MATEO PRIVITERA TORRES

Marilyn* and Alejandra* arrived in Belize seeking safety after fleeing violence in their home country. Although their paths did not cross until they arrived in Belizean lands, they share a similar story. Through the Government of Belize's Amnesty Program, they found not only refuge, but also an opportunity to thrive and rebuild their lives.

Marilyn arrived in Belize in 2015 with her partner and daughter. "We never thought about leaving our home; it was something unexpected. The gangs started extorting us, and everything changed overnight," she recalls. In their country, they had a farm, but violence and extortion left them with no choice but to flee to save their lives.

Alejandra, on the other hand, arrived in Belize in 2016 with her two children. "My life was in danger, and I focused on my children since I am the only person they have," she comments. Initially, adaptation was not easy: "I like Belize, and we are adapting, but it's difficult. The cultures and language are different," Alejandra explains.

In Belize, both found new opportunities through programs supported by Help for Progress and UNHCR. Although they initially faced barriers such as language and lack of documentation, Marilyn and Alejandra decided to join a sewing course that changed their lives. "The process of adapting to this country is long, but with perseverance

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The day I received the news that I could obtain my residency was a unique emotion and a feeling of hope.”

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and discipline, everything will come together,” says Marilyn.

After the course, they forged a special friendship. Together, they opened a small sewing business, and their perseverance has been rewarded with a clientele that has grown over time.

The Amnesty Program in Belize has been a ray of hope for around 12,765 people who applied, including 737 asylum-seekers like Marilyn and Alejandra. “The day I received the news that I could obtain my residency was a unique emotion and a feeling of hope,” says Marilyn. For both, having documentation means much more than a legal document. “It’s the opportunity to give my

children a future, to see them grow up without fear, to open a bank account, and to access land.”

Marilyn and Alejandra now dream of expanding their business and ensuring a better future for their children. “I’m going to stay here. I no longer feel the fear and insecurity I felt before,” Alejandra says joyfully.

**Names changed for protection reasons.*



