



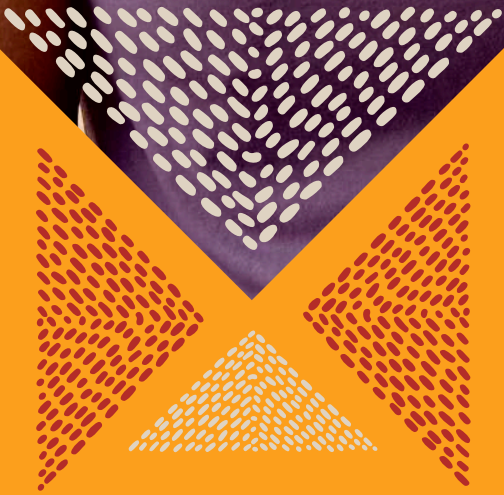
ANNUAL REPORT

MIRPS 2024

Comprehensive
Regional Protection
and Solutions
Framework



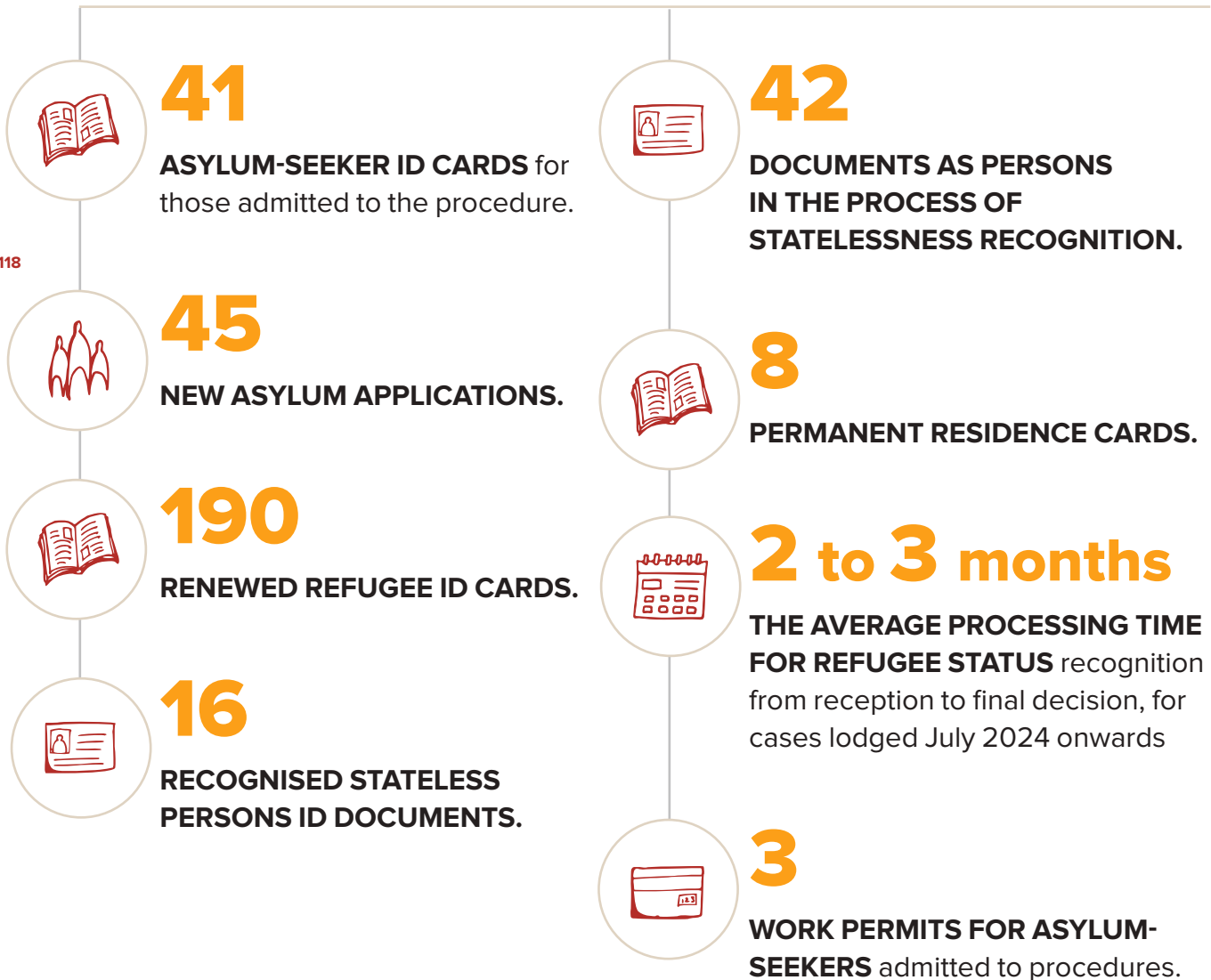




Panama

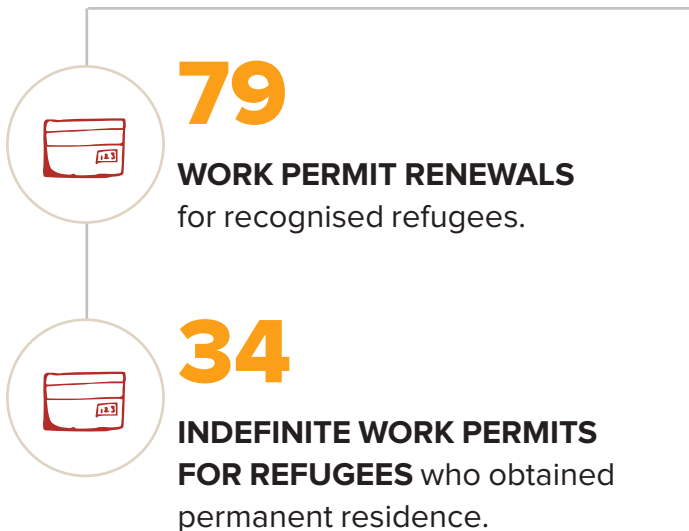
NATIONAL CONTEXT

Indicators



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Panama's new government has begun to take measures to support people in transit through the country, seeking to guarantee their safety and protect their human rights.



Source: National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR, by its Spanish acronym) of Panama, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MIRE, by its Spanish acronym) of Panama, National Migration Service (SNM, by its Spanish acronym) of Panama.

Panama is a country of transit and asylum in Central America, and has become a receiving country for asylum-seekers due to various favourable conditions, thus increasing the flow of people seeking international protection. According to data provided by the Panamanian migration authority, more than 266,000 people have crossed the Darién jungle from January to September 2024, mostly from Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Haiti.

Panama's new government has begun to take measures to support people in transit through the country, seeking to guarantee their safety and protect their human rights. This work includes the implementation of humanitarian assistance policies, the improvement of conditions in reception centres and the strengthening of resources dedicated to assist this population, many of whom come from vulnerable situations in their countries of origin. In addition, the government is working with international agencies to address the challenges posed by the increase in mixed movements, especially through the dangerous Darién region.

At the third trilateral meeting between Panama, Colombia, and the United States, authorities addressed the displacement crisis in the region, focusing on finding solutions to reduce irregular crossings and improving the protection of people on the move.

The Ministry of Government, through its National Office of Attention to Refugees (ONPAR, by its Spanish acronym) has made significant strides in strengthening Panama's asylum and refugee protection system. Key initiatives include ongoing training for public officials to improve

the identification and referral of persons with protection needs, as well as the implementation of improved procedures for the reception and registration of asylum applications, among other relevant interventions.

These efforts reflect Panama's commitment to the protection of human rights and the improvement of the living conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country.

Panama has granted refugee status to 2,646 people. The refugee population is mainly composed of Colombian, Salvadoran, Venezuelan, Nicaraguan and Cuban nationals, among other nationalities. So far in 2024, the *Comisión Nacional para los Refugiados* (National Commission for Refugees, CONARE, by its Spanish acronym) has held three meetings in which more than 20 people have been recognised, including their families.



PROGRESS

Protection



The border office located in Meteti, Darién, has been strengthened to provide timely attention and facilitate access to refugee status determination procedures for those who enter Panama as part of mixed movements and who wish to claim asylum.

Likewise, the registration system has been updated and a back-up copy of asylum-seekers and refugees' files is maintained. A total of 860 cases have been digitized and 300 of them have been closed. In addition, coordination with safety agencies has taken place to prevent misuse of shelter services by individuals with criminal record.

During this reporting period, a total of 16 passport applications have been processed for persons who have been officially recognised as refugees. In addition, 44 exit permits and 4 driver's licence certifications have been issued.

From January to date, ONPAR has received more than 300 asylum claims, which are currently being fully processed in approximately two months. The backlog of appointments for new asylum claims has been cleared, reducing the waiting time for an appointment from three months to only one week.

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Education



Panama has implemented a series of measures to improve access to education for refugees and asylum-seekers. Among the main measures is the integration of inclusive educational programmes that allow access to elementary and secondary education without discrimination.

Likewise, the Executive Decree No. 1225 of 2015, which facilitates access to the school system for

refugees and asylum-seekers, is being reviewed and updated.

Children in remote areas of Darién have benefited from the delivery of 230 school kits in the communities of Alto Playona and Boca de Cupe, facilitating their access to education.

Healthcare



During this period, a project related to best practices in mental health services and psychosocial support to facilitate the integration of people seeking asylum was submitted under the MIRPS Good Practice Implementation Projects initiative. This project focuses on enhancing support services by establishing a unit where specialized staff will deliver psychosocial assistance to vulnerable populations, including displaced persons, refugees, and residents of rural areas with limited support services. In addition

to offering a safe and supportive environment, the unit will serve as a bridge to connect people to service providers, including legal assistance, healthcare, educational support, or job placement.

Thanks to the MIRPS Fund, 500 basic humanitarian assistance healthcare kits have been distributed in the village of Metetí, benefiting the refugee population in the province of Darién in areas that are difficult to access and have limited resources, which limits their access to the healthcare system.

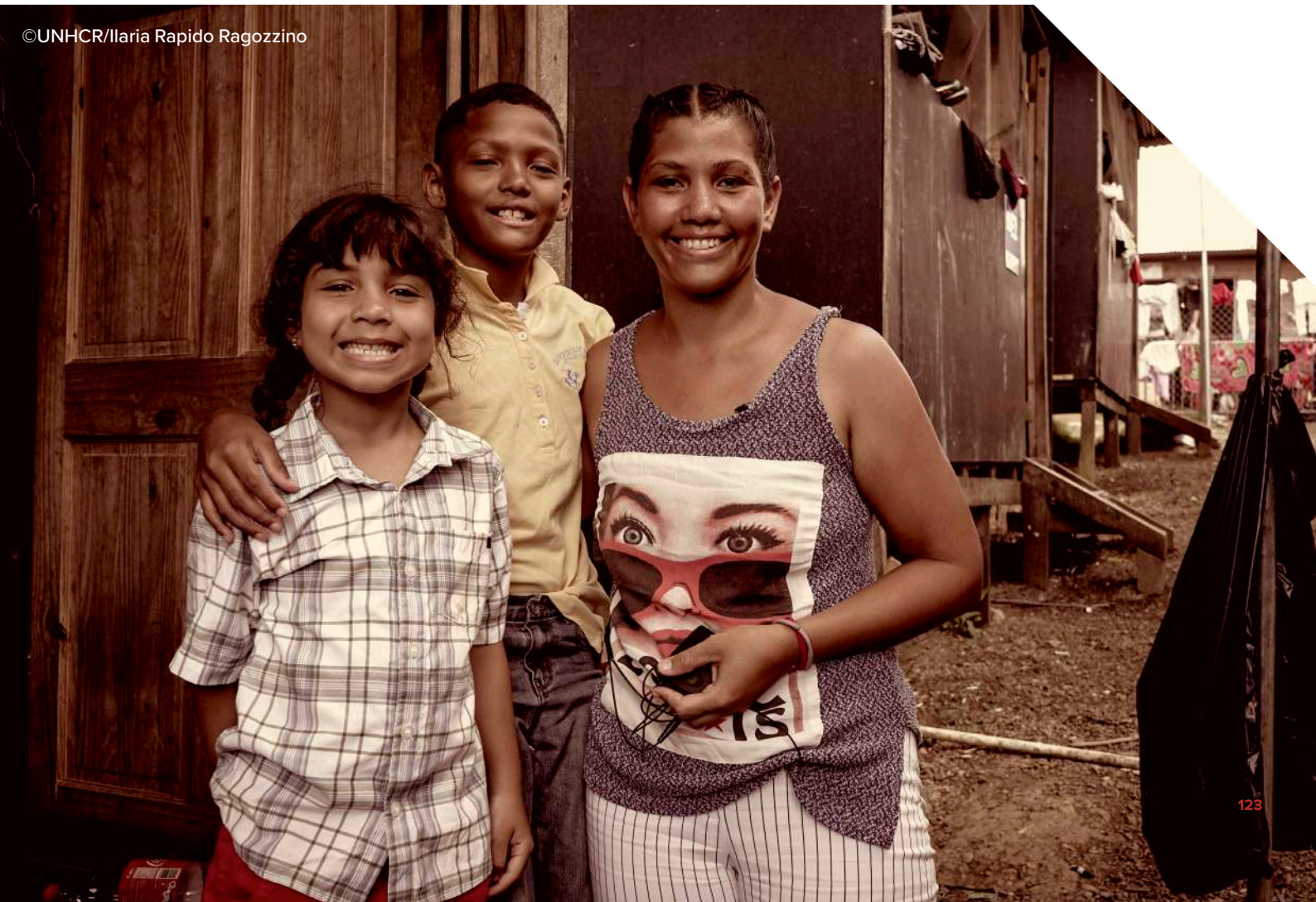
Social protection



Through Executive Decree No. 2 of 5 June 2024, the Public Policy on Equal Opportunities for Women 2024-2034 was approved, establishing a comprehensive framework aimed at advancing gender equality over the next decade. This policy seeks not only to guarantee equal opportunities, but also to foster an environment where women can fully exercise their rights across all areas of life. A key component of the policy is its focus on migration and human mobility, with specific measures designed to guarantee the rights and protection of refugee women.

In line with the MIRPS National Action Plan, significant efforts have been made to strengthen the attention, integration, and protection of refugees, asylum-seekers, and host communities in the Darién Province and the Embera Wonaan region. Special emphasis has been placed on supporting women, children, and adolescents. Among the initiatives implemented, 75 women from host communities have received seed funding as part of economic self-reliance programs, providing them with alternatives for sustainable livelihoods and empowering their role in community development.

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Jobs and livelihoods



Under the pledges made in relation to providing international protection to stateless persons, following their status determination by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first work permit for a stateless person was issued by the Ministry of Labour and Labour Development, also representing the obtaining of a humanitarian work permit.

Over this period, 113 work permits were processed for persons who have been granted refugee status. These permits are essential for enabling

the economic integration of refugees into the community, giving them the opportunity to work legally and contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. This initiative is part of our efforts to promote the self-reliance and dignity of refugees by ensuring their access to basic labour rights and social protection programs.

In addition, three work permits have been processed for asylum-seekers who are admitted for processing while the CONARE's decision is pending.



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From the limbo of statelessness to belonging in Panama

BY MELISSA PINEL

For 71 of her 72 years, Hermelinda lived in the shadow of invisibility. Born in a small rural town in Colombia, her life took a turn when, at the age of 20, she moved with her husband and daughter to Darién, Panama, seeking a better future. However, upon arrival, she discovered that she lacked the necessary documentation to establish herself regularly in her new home. She returned to Colombia in search of proof of her identity, but was faced with a painful reality: there was no official record of her birth. Undeterred, Hermelinda returned and settled in Darién, where she spent decades growing corn, rice, and

bananas. But without an identity document, she was constantly denied access to basic rights. She had no access to healthcare services, education, or formal job opportunities. She lived in constant fear of being detained by the authorities.

In 2019, Panama implemented a new legal procedure for statelessness determination, after adhering to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. This step forward made it possible to identify and protect people like Hermelinda, facilitating their access to fundamental rights.





When I held that identity card in my hands, I felt great joy in my heart. I feel like I have come back to life.”



Her life changed in 2021, when a joint mission by UNHCR, the United Nations (UN) Refugee Agency, and the Government of Panama visited her community. Upon hearing her story, UNHCR assessed her situation and protection risks and referred her case to the Panamanian authorities.

Finally, in 2024, at the age of 72, Hermelinda was recognised as a stateless person and received an identity document for the first time in her entire life. With tears of happiness, she recounts: “When I held that identity card in my hands, I felt great joy in my heart. I feel like I have come back to life.”

LINK TO
FULL STORY:



