

**HIAS IN PANAMA****Founded:** 2010**Staff Size:** 15**Country Director:** Isabel Altuve**Office Locations:** Colon, Panama City**REFUGEES IN PANAMA**

Panama is host to an estimated 2,435 refugees and asylum seekers. This includes Colombians fleeing the protracted conflict in their home country; Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans seeking a safe haven from gangs (Mara Salvatrucha and M-18); and Venezuelan citizens seeking respite from the crushing effects of inflation, insecurity, lack of food, lack of medical care and human rights violations.

Panama also serves as a transit point for Cubans and other Caribbean, African and Asian refugees and migrants going northwards in search of asylum or better opportunities in the United States and Canada. HIAS estimates that there are also thousands of people who have not registered as refugees, but are in need of international protection in Panama. These are people that are unaccounted for in refugee statistics and whose basic needs are unmet.

**HIAS BENEFICIARIES IN PANAMA**

Since 2010, HIAS has directly assisted **more than 6,000 refugee families** and trained **more than 4,000 public officials** and community members on refugee issues and international protection responses for refugees. As a result of HIAS' work, more than 700 people have accessed documentation and 2,400 families (comprised of more than 4,100 individuals) have received financial assistance to cover their urgent, basic needs.

**HIAS SERVICES IN PANAMA**

HIAS works through an inclusive, community-based approach, paving the way for beneficiaries to become more self-sufficient and integrated in their local communities. The guiding principle of HIAS' work is to build the capacities of beneficiary and host communities, encouraging self-sufficiency and empowerment. HIAS also conducts outreach with underserved refugees to bring them into the system and builds capacity within key institutions and communities to recognize and appropriately respond to gaps in refugee protection.

## **Psychosocial Services**

Many refugees in Panama suffer from severe mental health and physical consequences due to violence and torture experienced in their home countries. HIAS conducts assessments with refugee and local communities to identify their needs, resources and ideas for community integration interventions. Following the assessments, HIAS focuses on building capacity within these resources to provide psychological first aid and emotional support, referring individuals with more acute mental health and psychosocial support needs who require more focused care to other partners for further assistance.

## **Legal Services**

HIAS focuses its legal protection work on three main activities: community-based protection and empowerment; individual legal information and counseling; and coordination and capacity-building to advance refugee protection. These activities allow refugees to access necessary legal and services information to understand their rights and advocate for themselves as they seek protection and durable solutions. It also ensures that the most vulnerable refugees can access individualized assistance to enjoy their legal rights. This includes access to refugee status; release from detention; access to the right to work, medical care and education; and access to protection from physical violence, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

## **Livelihood Services**

HIAS' livelihoods framework responds to refugees' economic exclusion due several factors including the challenges of exercising the right to work, the lack of information, skills and resources necessary to compete in markets, as well as the ability to accumulate productive assets in order to achieve self-reliance. HIAS recognizes that women, older people, youth, people with disabilities and people with significant illnesses often face a trade-off between their protection and their livelihoods. The HIAS Employment Support Center (ESC) delivers needed information and promotes job opportunities for all of these populations through career services, employment referrals and skills-building workshops, vocational training and group coaching.

HIAS provides material and financial assistance for highly vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers who are overwhelmed by survival-level issues such as food security and illnesses. For the most vulnerable, basic material or cash support can stabilize households and help facilitate access to services that allow families to prioritize education and livelihoods opportunities.

## **PARTNERS**

**Hogar Luisa**

**Norwegian Refugee Committee (NRC)**

**Oficina Nacional para la Atencion de Refugiados (ONPAR)**

**Red Cross**

**RET International**

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

