



HIAS IN PANAMA

Founded: 2010

Staff Size: 30

Country Director: Roberto Mera

Field Offices: Chiriquí,
Panama City

Panama currently hosts over 121,600 Venezuelans who have residence permits and regular stay granted, and almost 2,600 asylum claims for Venezuelans are pending. In addition, Panama hosts thousands of Central Americans, and serves as a transit point for Cubans and other Caribbean, African, and Asian refugees and migrants traveling north in search of asylum.

HIAS PROGRAMS AND FOCUS

HIAS protects and supports refugees to build new lives and reunite with family members in safety and freedom. HIAS Panama helps refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants access dignified and sustainable livelihoods, leading to self-reliance and economic inclusion in their new communities. HIAS Panama helps individuals and families recover from the shock of displacement, build resilience, and live in safety, protected from harm, violence, and discrimination. HIAS is able to provide assistance to refugees and vulnerable migrants with the support of UNHCR, European Union, USAID, UNICEF, and IDB.

Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (CB-MHPSS)

Refugees and forcibly displaced people face adversity and extreme stressors, including loss of loved ones, violence, and disruptions to daily life. HIAS' MHPSS programs train key community members to recognize acute emotional distress in children and adults as a result of crisis, and how to respond with empathy and respect. To respond to the increase in stress, anxiety, and gender-based violence stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, HIAS Panama



developed and implemented new and innovative ways to continue to be on the frontlines remotely. In 2020, HIAS Panama launched L.I.S.A. (Línea Segura de Apoyo), a virtual safety support line designed to strengthen communication with affected populations and respond to the increase in needs due to COVID-19. Through this remote mechanism, HIAS identifies individuals with acute mental health and psychosocial support needs and conducts assessments to identify their specific needs, and share resources and ideas for community integration. HIAS focuses on building capacity to provide psychological first aid and emotional support, referring individuals with acute needs who require more focused care to partners for further assistance.

Economic Inclusion

Access to dignified, sustainable, and safe livelihoods are at the core of HIAS' economic inclusion interventions. Our methodology enables refugees, vulnerable migrants, and host communities to find opportunities to enhance self-reliance, increase resilience, regain dignity, and provide opportunities to build independent and meaningful futures. HIAS Panama works with local communities and NGOs to promote the local integration of refugees and offers safe spaces where refugees and locals can work on community projects and identify problems that affect their community. To support the challenges refugees face regarding the right to work and accessing information and resources necessary to compete in the job market, HIAS Panama partners with UNHCR and Manpower Group to provide trainings and empowerment sessions. HIAS also partners with Coursera, a company that works with universities and organizations to offer courses online. Through Coursera, refugees can access state-of-the-art courses at no cost, helping to move them into the competitive job market.



Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Risk-Reduction, Response and Prevention

Women, girls, and LGBTQ individuals are disproportionately affected by forced displacement. HIAS' GBV services are driven by the needs and the voices of survivors, and our GBV programming helps forcibly displaced women, girls, and LGBTQ individuals pursue their potential, free from violence and gender-related oppression. HIAS prioritizes survivors' leadership when designing and implementing activities, and in Panama, HIAS provides case management, psychosocial services, and support groups, and refers survivors to health and legal protection spaces that enable them to recover, heal, and thrive. Through risk reduction activities HIAS Panama decreases the threats to women and girls that arise from unsafe living environments, unstable economic situations, or isolation. In addition, HIAS implements programs that support transformative change, including programs for men and boys to unlearn norms and behaviors that contribute to or condone violence. HIAS Panama works with government and non-government institutions on programming to prevent and respond to GBV and also to raise awareness of the rights of refugees and migrants. HIAS Panama is also responding to the Darién Gap's challenges for vulnerable migrants that cross the border of Colombia and Panama, implementing a GBV response project in Lajas Blancas and San Vicente (both temporary migration shelters).



Legal Protection

Without legal status, refugees are forced to live on the margins of society, sometimes for generations, without access to healthcare, education, dignified work, or safe shelter. HIAS Panama's legal services focus on providing clients with community-based protection, individualized legal information, counseling, and capacity-building to advance refugee protection. HIAS Panama also provides refugees with information on their rights and helps them to advocate for themselves as they seek protection.

HIAS in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

HIAS advocates for the protection of refugees, other forcibly displaced populations, and local host communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. As part of a comprehensive regional response to meet the urgent needs of these populations, including the millions of displaced Venezuelans, HIAS participates in several regional

coordination platforms and partnerships with a focus on protection, food security, GBV, and cash and voucher assistance, including:

REDLAC (IASC Regional Work Group Risk, Emergencies and Disasters)
UNHCR/IOM Regional Platform for the Venezuela Situation Response (R4V)
Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM) in Colombia
Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (GTRM) in Ecuador and Peru

HIAS currently has programs in nine countries in LAC (Aruba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela) and partners with a wide range of government agencies, UN entities (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, UNV/FVT), the private sector (Airbnb, TATA Consultancy Services, and Manpower), and other NGOs and consortia, including Jesuit Refugee Service, Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council, Plan International, and Girls not Brides.

CONTACT

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