



### HIAS IN MEXICO

Founded: 2019

Staff Size: 42

Country Director: Blanca Lomeli

Office Locations: Juárez, Monterrey,  
Tijuana, Mexicali, Matamoros

Thousands of refugees and other forcibly displaced people have arrived at Mexico's northern border from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean seeking asylum in the United States. This increase in migration has been driven by the effects of armed conflict and gender-based violence in the region, in addition to the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP). Refugees and migrants living in Mexico's northern border cities, particularly women, girls, and LGBTQ refugees, face extremely high levels of violence including kidnapping, human trafficking, and exploitation.

*COVID-19 has destabilized the lives of refugees and migrants across Latin America and the Caribbean, cutting off access to income and increasing vulnerability to violence. To respond to their heightened needs, HIAS Mexico has modified its services by implementing remote support and developing other innovative solutions. HIAS Mexico helps the most vulnerable including single women, women-headed households, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), survivors of torture, older people, people with disabilities and serious medical conditions, and LGBTQ refugees.*

### HIAS PROGRAMS AND FOCUS

HIAS protects and supports refugees to build new lives and reunite with family members in safety and freedom. HIAS' response in Mexico helps refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants to obtain legal protection by pursuing their claims for asylum in the U.S. or by applying for legal protection in Mexico.

#### 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 Mexico offers Know Your Rights workshops and individual legal consultations to equip asylum seekers with information on accessing their legal rights in both the U.S. and Mexico. HIAS legal staff assess all cases to provide direct legal representation in Mexico and, when appropriate, refer cases to partners on the U.S. side of the border for representation. HIAS Mexico partners with U.S.-based attorneys through HIAS' robust pro bono network to represent people seeking protection.



Photograph taken prior to March, 2020

### 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' mental health 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. HIAS Mexico is currently one of the only service providers in Northern Mexico offering community-based protection interventions and mental health and psychosocial support. Staff provide specialized mental health counseling — both remote and in-person — and provide referrals for psychiatric care. HIAS Mexico also distributes hygiene kits, including menstrual hygiene materials, to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and lessen the stress and anxiety many feel without access to basic hygiene items.

### Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response

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 access human rights to pursue their potential, free from violence and gender-related oppression. Asylum seekers and other vulnerable populations living or traveling through Mexico have identified GBV as a prevalent form of abuse they have faced in their home country, on migration routes, or while waiting in Mexico to receive legal protection. HIAS Mexico offers survivor-centered services to help reduce the risk of GBV, including GBV case management, psychosocial support, and health services. In addition, capacity building is a key component of successful GBV programming in emergencies. To this end, HIAS recruits, trains, and deploys Mobile Protection Response teams with GBV response and MHPSS capacity; organizes trainings for HIAS legal staff and partners on a survivor-centered approach to referring survivors; and trains shelter staff and service providers on referral mechanisms. As part of the response to COVID-19, Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) has been implemented to support survivors of GBV and LGBTQ individuals at risk to help mitigate negative coping mechanisms and address their immediate needs.

### 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 which focus on protection, food security, GBV, and CVA, 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/VFT), 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

Blanca Lomeli, Country Director • [blanca.lomeli@hias.org](mailto:blanca.lomeli@hias.org)  
Find us on Facebook at @HIASMX