Panama currently hosts over 75,000 Venezuelans who have residence permits and regular stay granted, and almost 3,000 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.

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 Panama has modified its service by implementing remote support and developing other innovative solutions. HIAS Panama helps many different groups, 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 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.

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 has 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.
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, UNVFVT), 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.

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