

Humanitarian Response at Migrant Receiving Stations (MRS) due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Panama

25 March to 02 July 2020



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UN MIGRATION

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INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, the Province of Darién in Panama has been characterized as one of the most important points of transit for extra-regional migrants heading to North America. It is one of the most socially economic challenging regions, which only increases the complexity of attending massive and irregular migration flows.

The Province of Darién has turned into one of the main routes for transiting extra-regional migrants. It is the only portion of the international Pan-American Highway that is physically interrupted and is a geographical break between the North and South American Continents. Smugglers, and drug and arms traffickers normally use these types of irregular passageways¹. This combination of situations places migrants that transit through this region at a higher risk, exposing them to different threats that range from wildlife attacks to the possibility of suffering physical, sexual or psychological aggression, robbery and assassination (IOM, 2019).

Migrants that transit through these passageways form part of the mixed migration flows, because they have been identified as people that require international protection because they have immigrated due to political or religious persecution or by other civil groups in their country of origin (IOM, 2019). Further, people in condition of vulnerability have been identified, mainly pregnant women, boys, girls y adolescents -accompanied y unaccompanied- in conditions of poor health (dehydration, allergies, infections, and others).

In 2009, a significant number of extra-regional migrants were identified from other continents, such as Africa and Asia, as well as a flow of migrants coming from the Caribbean, specifically Haitians and Cubans (FLACSO, 2009). During 2011-2016, 58,934 irregular

migrants and during 2017-2019 at least 33,883 irregular migrants crossed the border between Panama and Colombia through the Darién Gap (IOM, 2017 and 2019).

Between 2014-2015 there was such an increase, that 2015 saw its first migration crisis² with extra-regionals stranded in the Darién Province, causing a major border shutdown between Costa Rica and Nicaragua with the arrival of massive migration flows that generated a domino effect along the way. It is estimated that during this period, the majority of migrants irregularly entering Panama came from the Caribbean, totaling 24,643 people in 2014, and 24,129 people in 2015 (IOM, 2019). This crisis greatly affected the communities in the province; which according to estimates had 2,000 and 5,000 migrants stranded in small villages of approximately 100 to 200 inhabitants (IOM, 2017).

Challenged by this situation, the Government of Panama established “Operation Controlled Flow”³ with the purpose of providing humanitarian aid to migrants. In 2016, the National Border Service (SENAFRONT) as part of its operation, opened temporary humanitarian aid shelters, currently referred to as: Migrant Receiving Stations (MRS), which sought to shelter migrants that were continuously crossing the border between Panama and Colombia (IOM, 2017). Currently (as of July 2020) the following MRS shelters are open: Bajo Chiquito, La Peñita and Lajas Blancas en Darién and Los Planes in Chiriquí.

¹ The situation worsened with the departure of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia from the Darién jungle after a bilateral peace treaty was signed between Panama and Colombia, and trafficking groups settled in the jungle and provided a new way of understanding the territory based on migrant, arms and drug smuggling.

² According to the MCOF, a migration crisis is understood as a migration flow which mobility patterns are associated to a crisis that may create conditions of vulnerability to migrants and affected transit communities, generating challenges for a long term migration management. (IOM, 2012).

³ It is worth highlighting that Operation Controlled Flow is carried out in coordination with the Government of Costa Rica via bilateral agreement between governments in order to prevent a new migration crisis.



To contextualize this, it is crucial to understand the characteristics of the locations where the MRSs are located in:

Bajo Chiquito

Bajo Chiquito is a community located deep in the Darién jungle, located about 72 kilometres from the city of Metetí, in the Emberá Wounaan administrative region, Cemano District. In order to arrive at this community it is necessary to cross the Tuqueza River, and is done so using dugouts or canoes from Peñitas to Bajo Chiquito. This is where the main migration route ends for migrants crossing the Darién Gap. This community is considered an internal transit point because it sits approximately 35 kilometres from the official border between Panama and Colombia.

La Peñita

La Peñita is an Emberá community located within the Pinogana district in the Province of Darién. An estimated 40 families live scattered throughout this area; it is a completely rural community that lacks basic services, such as potable water, public transportation and solid waste collection. Located about 30 kilometres from Metetí, it is only accessible via 4x4 vehicle or truck. Historically, this community has been known as a port that connects the communities of the Emberá Wounaan administrative region, specifically those that dot the riverbank, upstream from Chucunaque River and Tuqueza River, and its tributaries, such as the Marrangantí River; where goods and services are traded.

Lajas Blancas

Lajas Blancas is located approximately 30 kilometres from Metetí, it is not a town as such, but rather a place mainly used for cattle grazing and is considered as secondary forest. This land was acquired in order to provide additional shelter for migrants, when La Peñita became overcrowded. This shelter was properly planned for a total capacity of 1000 persons.

Los Planes

Los Planes is a remote and scarcely populated community located approximately 50 kilometres from City of David, in Chiriquí. The MRS grounds come from an old State-owned recreational complex and have been considered fit to house migrants. Green areas with several scattered trees surround this facility, mainly pine trees. The actual building is made out of timber, and a few sections have deteriorated over time and therefore the building cannot be used entirely.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Panama has carried out several efforts to strengthen the institutional capacities to handle this situation, particularly regarding the shelters located throughout the country. As a result, in 2019 the Presidency of the Republic approved by executive Decree, the use of a Temporary Shelter Management Guide issued by the IOM for the MRSs. The IOM has accompanied the Government of Panama, providing support and assistance in managing shelters based on humanitarian standards with the purpose of establishing a Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.



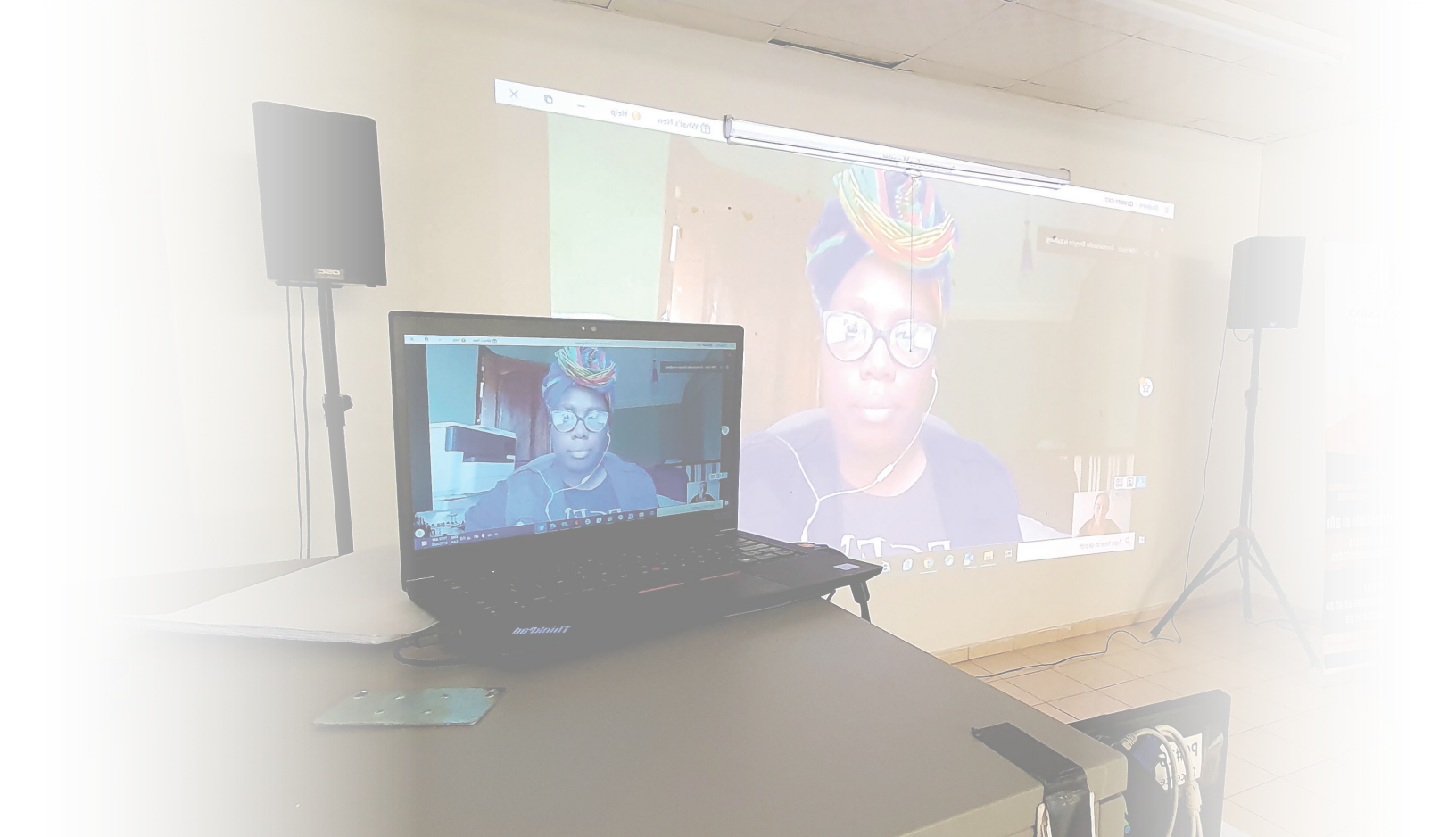
However, after the COVID-19 pandemic emergency was declared, the Government of Panama faced a new migration crisis by extra-regionals now stranded at the MRSs, particularly in the Darién Province. This situation reactivated a series of demands made by migrants regarding the conditions of the MRSs. Currently, migrants have been held at the MRS between 90 to 120 days, which is excessive. Prior to the pandemic migrants had an average stay of one month when transiting through Panama (IOM, 2019).

The IOM through the mobility tracking component in the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) tool - in coordination with the United Nations Inter-Agency Human Mobility Group in Panama has followed up in order to provide an adequate humanitarian response based on the needs expressed at each MRS; from the migrant perspective as well as from petitions proposed by the Government of Panama.

The United Nations Inter-Agency on Human Mobility Group is being co-led by the IOM and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with participation from other United Nations agencies in Panama: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Pan-American Health

Organization (PAHO), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UN AIDS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This group coordinates nation-wide actions in order to cooperate with efforts with the Government of Panama to face the challenges of human mobility management from a dignified, safe, orderly and regular perspective.

This document gathers a contextualization of the emergency triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and migrants stranded by travel restrictions imposed throughout Central America. As well as an analysis of the humanitarian response during the months of April, May and June, and the results of such efforts based on humanitarian standards required by the current pandemic and the administration of the shelters.



METHODOLOGY

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a methodology developed by the IOM that captures, processes and disseminates information with the purpose of providing a better understanding of the displacements and changing needs of migration flows.

One of its components is a mobility tracker, which quantifies a specific population, its demographic characteristics and specific needs at a defined site. In this case, it is the migrant population stranded by the enforcement of a travel ban at the MRSs in Panama. This component is activated by the emergency-tracking requirement with the intention of following up when an event has triggered or stopped a migration movement. Therefore, it implies performing several assessment rounds that will provide real-time updates. In this case, the intention is to collect a description and statistics on specific groups of migrants, and initial data on multi-sectoral needs regarding humanitarian response (water, sanitation and the promotion of health, nutrition, shelter, infrastructure and non-food items and protection.)

The period of analysis comprises 27 March to 02 July 2020, and also includes the periods for which we have issued weekly situation reports under the Emergency Follow Up methodology, and developed throughout the period mentioned above.

The information contained in this analysis is collected by IOM Panama staff in Darién and Chiriquí, through field monitoring, multi-sectoral assessments through key informants, as well as regular information exchange at the technical level, and at the central level of the United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Human Mobility. Regarding the multi-sectoral assessments on humanitarian response, the information was collected through guiding questions selected from the Sphere Handbook based on the situation of the MRS. In regards to the analysis, it is carried out according to the humanitarian standards established by the Sphere standards and IOM's operational framework on emergency response (MCOF).



CONTEXT OF EMERGENCY

After an COVID-19 pandemic emergency was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020, several Central American countries implemented a series of measures to mitigate the spread of the virus⁴ and infection, which include the closing of land borders, and the amendment of border management policies as a public health measure .

Costa Rica, under the resolution issued by Executive Decree No. 42238-MGP-S on 17 March 2020, imposed countrywide entry restrictions for non-residents and tourist into the national territory, valid until 01 August 2020⁵. Panama has decreed the closing of its borders that has severely affected Operation Controlled Flow since 16 March 2020; causing the extra-regional migrants sheltered at the MRSs to become stranded and without any possibility of continuing with their journey.

The border closing, once again provoked a migration crisis for more than 2,520 extra-regional migrants, that have been stranded between 90 -120 days at the MRSs in Panama, mainly in the Darién Province. This has generated a series of challenges related to the lack of resources for the proper promotion of health, food, and the right to dignified shelter that migrants should received under the current pandemic context.

In regards to current Country emergency status concerning the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, as of 25 June 2020, Panama registered 29 037 confirmed cases nationally, of which 13 673 are active and 564 deaths due to the virus. Specifically for the bordering provinces, Darién reports a total of 986 accumulated positive cases, and Chiriquí has a total of 849 positive cases. It is important to indicate that MRS Lajas Blanca was opened due to positive COVID-19 cases identified at MRS La Peñita, and therefore Lajas Blancas is considered as a Migrant Receiving

Station for the duration of the quarantine and treatment of COVID-19 positive patients and their contacts.

It is because of this reason that La Peñita community was cordoned off with an epidemiological health perimeter at the beginning of April due to the high risk of infection among migrants and the local community. An average, 76 cases have been confirmed among migrants at La Peñita during the past three months. No COVID-19 positive cases have been reported at MRS Los Planes as of the date of this report.

Migrants infected with the virus have not suffered major health setbacks as of 02 July 2020; approximately 200 people have recovered (93% of total infections). Fifteen positive cases have been transferred to a Hotel-Hospital in Panama City, mainly because they are considered moderate and require specialized monitoring on the progress of the virus spread, nonetheless, without greater risk to their health. Also, a pregnant woman diagnosed as COVID-19 positive was hospitalized at the Child Maternal Centre in Yaviza and has been admitted into a specialized ward because of her vulnerable condition, requiring special monitoring.

Due to the spike in COVID-19 cases throughout the province of Darién, the authorities have established an epidemiological sanitary perimeter on 09 June 2020, at Agua Fría in Pinogana and in the community of Yaviza, to guarantee the safety of the population of the Emberá-Wounam administrative region⁶. The intention of this sanitary perimeter is to adequately control the entry and exit of people in the Darién Province.

⁴ As part of the action, a Regional COVID-19 Contingency Plan fostered by the Central American Integration System (SICA) was put into place, which was mainly aimed at complementing national efforts and mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and the early recovery of the countries that integrate the system. On migration matters, this plan contemplated the consolidation of a Central American Humanitarian Corridor, focused entirely on the safe return of member-country nationals stranded in other countries of the region.

⁵ Executive Decree No. 42432-MGP-S formalized the extension of the border closing until 01 August, because the temporary restrictions imposed by the resolution are based on the current epidemiological context of the country, and based on Art. 13 of the General Law on Migration that stipulates that the General Directorate is authorized to impede the entry of migrants into the national territory due to public health reasons.

⁶ By Decree Resolution No. 003 on 09 June 2020 by the governor of the Pinogana Mayorship in coordination with the Regional Director of the Ministry of Health (MINS), and the Provincial Director of the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC) and SENAFRONT.



The following risk and vulnerability factors have been identified under the current context of this pandemic:

- The rainy season has begun in Panama: in Darién, specifically La Peñita, a community settled on the banks of Tuqueza River, has seen water levels rise flooding the lower area of the MRS. Mosquitoes have proliferated throughout, which are vectors for viral diseases such as malaria (two cases have been identified in Bajo Chiquito), as well as skin allergies due to mosquito bites in children.
- High levels of stress due to the uncertainty of their situation and the current state of emergency, have triggered protest demanding better conditions of infrastructure, shelter and food at the MRS. As well as demanding to continue on with their journey, because the majority has no desire to stay in Panama, and would rather continue towards their destination in North America.
- Incidents of violence among migrants: the most serious of incidents occurred at MRS Lajas Blancas, where four migrants were injured in the fight; as a result 14 were removed and expelled from the MRS. There has also been a disturbing increase in the number of gender-based violence and violence towards minors; SENAFRONT and SNM have had to intervene in these situations. Victims have been provided with some level of protection at the MRS, mostly because the victims had no desire to press charges against the attackers in a country that they had no intentions of staying.

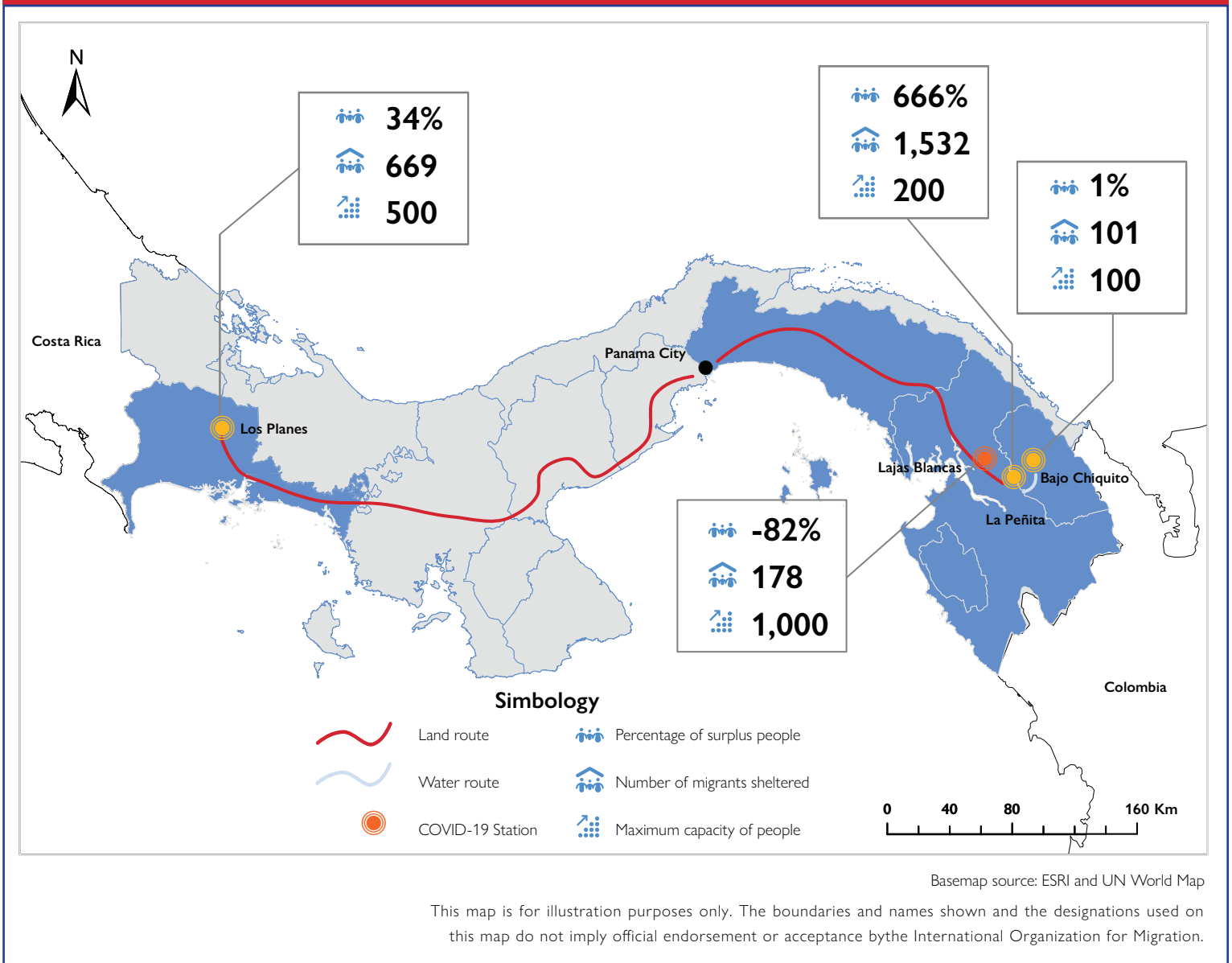


DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON MIGRANTS SHELTERED AT THE MRSS

As previously indicated, the current population stranded at the MRSs in Panama is currently estimated at 2,520. There are a total of 1,811 people sheltered at stations located in the Darien region, of which 512 (28%) are boys, girls and adolescents under 17 years of age. The majority of migrants are housed at MRS La Peñita with 1,532 migrants; MRS Lajas Blancas with 178 migrants and Bajo Chiquito with

101 migrants. Also, MRS Los Planes of Gualaca in Chiriquí, totaled 669 migrants. However, these numbers have not been static; the number of movements between the MRSs has varied during the quarter.

MAP 1: POPULATION HOSTED BY STATIONS
MIGRANT RECEIPT SYSTEM (MRS) AS OF JULY 2, 2020



There were 890 migrants registered in Bajo Chiquito in March, prior to the declaration of the pandemic; however by the end of the month only 297 migrants remained. As of 29 March no new entries are registered for Bajo Chiquito, however, we cannot rule out migrants traversing the Darién jungle.

As of 23 April 2020, the community of Bajo Chiquito registered 136 people, which explains the transfer of 161 migrants to MRS La Peñita in order to receive medical attention and food. As of 02 July 2020, the number of people in this area was 101, because the rest were transferred to MRS La Peñita.

La Peñita, at the beginning of the pandemic, had a major population of approximately 1500 migrants. As the pandemic has evolved, this MRS saw an increase in its population, particularly in April, due to migrants coming in from Bajo Chiquito as well as from travel restriction and the suspension of Operation Controlled Flow between Panama and Costa Rica.

As of 23 April 2020, 1.766 migrants were being sheltered at La Peñita, this has been the maximum number of migrants stranded at one time at this station during the quarter. After this date, a slight decline was seen at the MRS; however, the months of May and June averaged about 1650 sheltered migrants.

The lower number of migrants at MRS La Peñita, is due to a COVID-19 community transmission outbreak. COVID-19 positive migrants and their contacts were transferred to MRS Lajas Blancas as part of the protocol established by the health authorities and SENAFRONT. As of 02 July 2020 a total of 1532 migrants were being sheltered at the MRS.

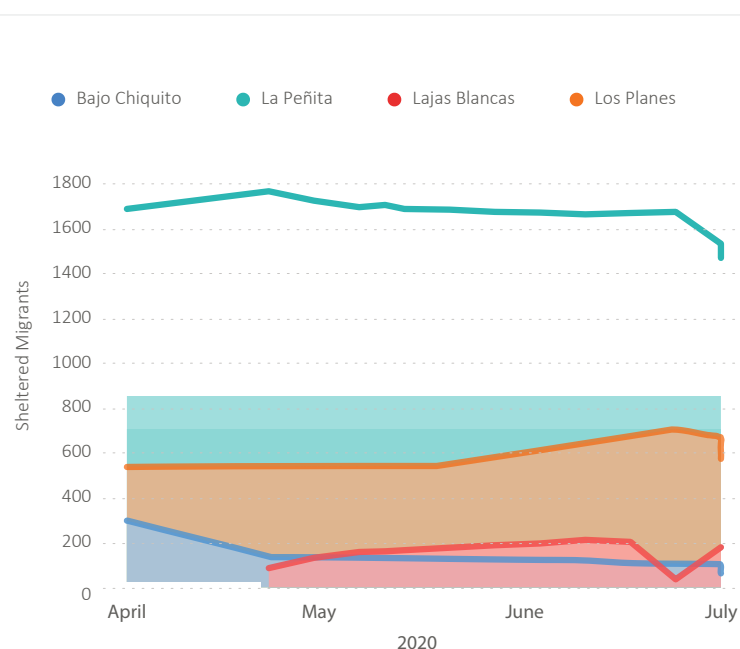
The upward trend of the population sheltered at MRS Lajas Blancas by mid-June peaked at 211 migrants. After identifying a great number of COVID-19 recoveries with negative results, the corresponding authorities made the decision of transferring 168 migrants to MRS Los Planes de Gualaca in Chiriquí.

It is worth noting that nine migrants were expelled from the MRS after being involved in a violent clash with other migrants towards the end of June. That month closed with 35 migrants, including a group of recovered COVID-19 cases and their contacts that complied with the period of quarantine. On 02 July 2020, the MRS registered 178 migrants that were admitted before the sanitary protocol was established.

The number of migrants sheltered at MRS Los Planes has been quite stable during the quarter. 538 migrants were waiting to continue on with the controlled flow to Costa Rica during the last week of March. However, due to the decision by the neighboring country of delaying the opening of its borders, this large group of migrants was halted during the entire month of April and until mid-June.

The month of June did in fact see an increase in the number of people sheltered at the MRS, mainly due to the transfer of 168 migrants coming from MRS Lajas Blancas (people that recovered from the COVID-19 and their contacts that were released from infection); MRS Los Planes reached a total population of 705 people. On 02 July, the population at station declined to a total of 669 because many migrants left the station voluntarily in order to continue with their journey and reach Costa Rica.

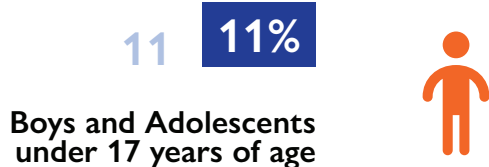
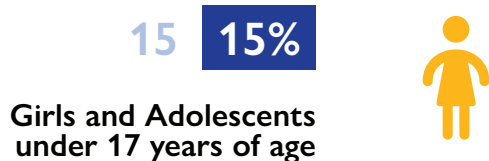
GRAPH 1. QUARTERLY TREND FOR SHELTERED MIGRANTS, 2020



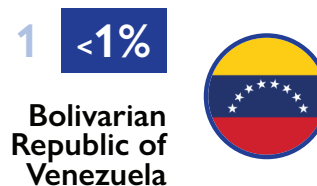
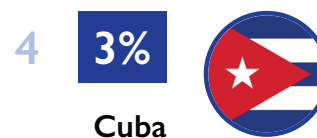
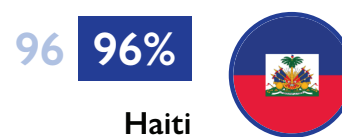
CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS SHELTERED AT THE BAJO CHIQUITO COMMUNITY

2 JULY 2020

SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA



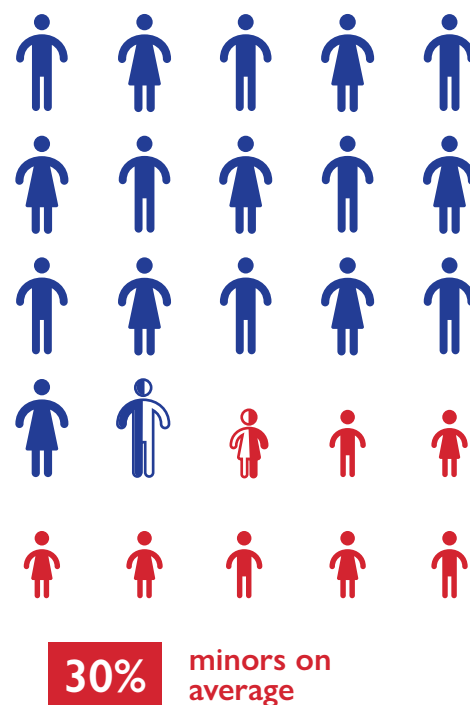
HIGHLIGHTED NATIONALITIES



Regarding the population distributed by age group, migrants under 17 years of age represent about 30% of the total population sheltered at Bajo Chiquito. Also, 11 pregnant women were identified during the quarter. The majority of these women reached La Peñita with the first group that arrived on 23 April 2020; by 02 July 2020 only two pregnant women remained in the community; no births were reported in Bajo Chiquito.

More than 90% of migrants are Haitian nationals, and 10% come from other countries, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Morocco, Cuba, Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The number of these populations has varied according to the movements at the MRSs. On 02 July 2020, the community registered migrants from Haiti (96 people), Cubans and Venezuelans (5 people).

GRAPH 2: AVERAGE MINORS
SHELTERED AT BAJO CHIQUITO
DURING THE QUARTER, 2020



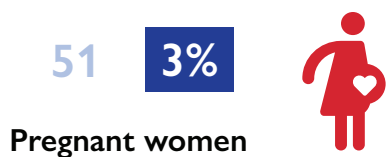
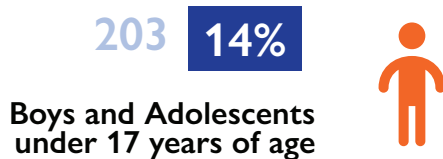
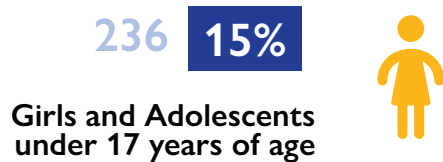
Source: self-compiled from data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

In regards to COVID-19 positive cases, only three people have been reported as of 18 June, which were infected by community transmission in Bajo Chiquito. These individuals were transferred to MRS Lajas Blancas as per the protocol implemented by the authorities to order to handle COVID-19 positive cases.

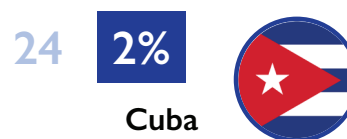
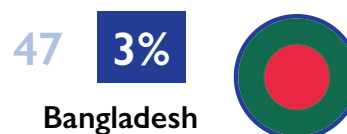
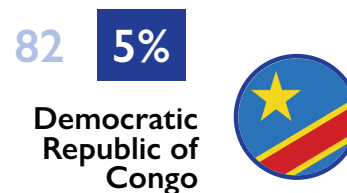
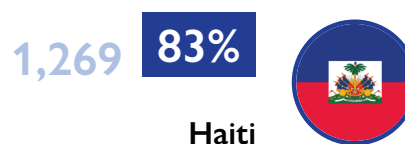
CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS SHELTERED AT MRS LA PEÑITA

2 JULY 2020

SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA

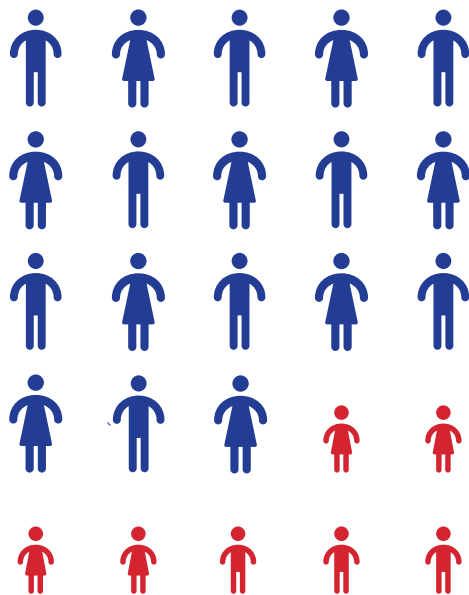


HIGHLIGHTED NATIONALITIES



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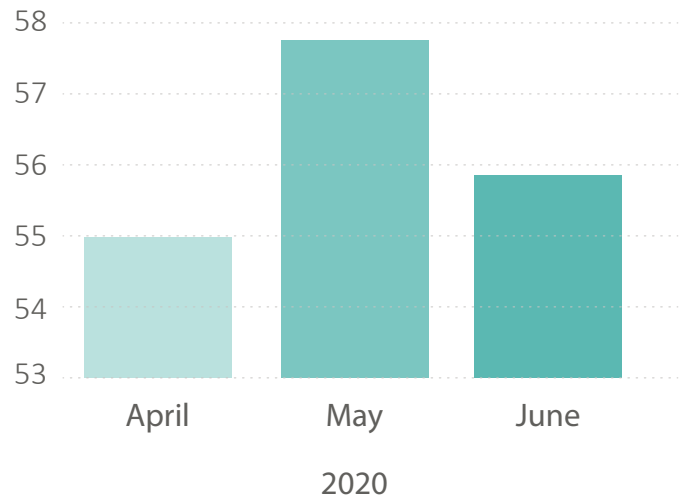
GRAPH 3: QUARTERLY AVERAGE FOR MINORS SHELTERED AT LA PEÑITA, 2020



28% minors on average

Source: self-compiled from data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

GRAPH 4: AVERAGE MONTHLY PREGNANCIES AT MRS LA PEÑITA, FOR THE QUARTER, 2020



Source: self-compiled from data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

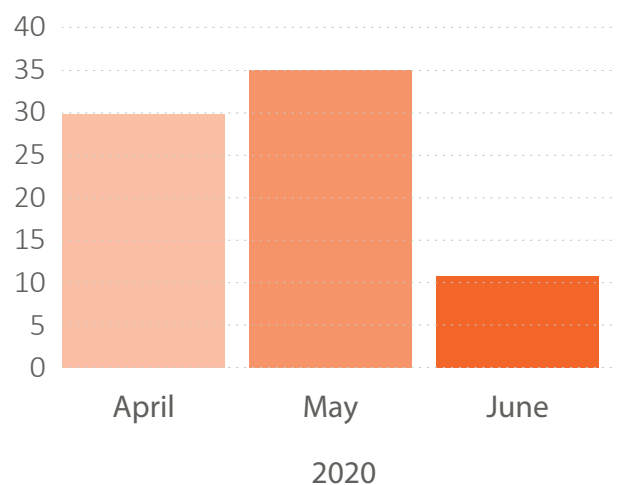
Regarding minors under 17 years of age, this age group represented 28% of the sheltered population for the quarter. There is an equal gender distribution for this age group, where boy and male adolescents represent about 54% (four were identified as unaccompanied adolescents, and reached adulthood during the quarter), and girls and female adolescents totaling 46%.

There were between 47 and 82 pregnant women reported. The main reason for the wide range in numbers is due to the fact that a systematic count, control or follow up on these women was unavailable mainly because the difficulties of visiting the MRS due to sanitary control restrictions. For this case, UNICEF in alliance with FICR are carrying out an ongoing census to accurately detect all women who suspect

that they are pregnant, or that have just started their pregnancy or are quite advanced with their pregnancy. Of all the women that have been identified as pregnant, eight births have been attended at the Child Maternal Centre (CMI) in the city of Metetí and Yaviza in Darién. Also, there is a single case of an underage pregnant minor.

Regarding nationalities, more than 80% of the population are nationals from Haiti and the remaining 20% are divided between 26 other nationalities, including: Angola, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Costa Rica, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Gambia, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Nepal, Pakistan, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Senegal, Sierra Leona, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Togo and Yemen. Such diversity of nationalities also brings diversity of languages spoken by migrants, which include: Spanish, English, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Bengali, Burmese, Tamil, Sinhalese, Urdu and Arabic.

GRAPH 5: TOTAL MONTHLY COVID-19 POSITIVE CASES IDENTIFIED AT MRS LA PEÑITA, 2020



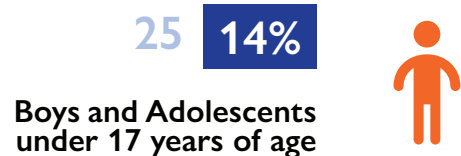
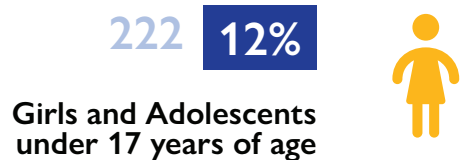
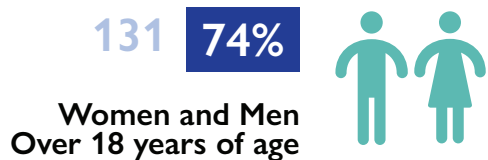
Source: self-compiled with data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

At least 76 migrants have been diagnosed as COVID-19 positive at the MRS, and have been included in the statistical count at MRS Lajas Blancas as part of the established protocol.

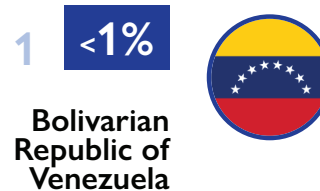
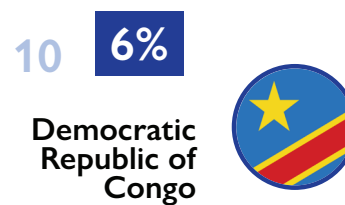
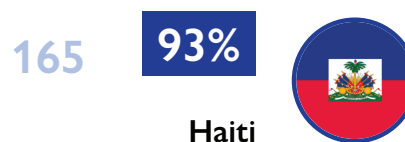
CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS SHELTERED AT MRS LAJAS BLANCAS

2 JULY 2020

SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA

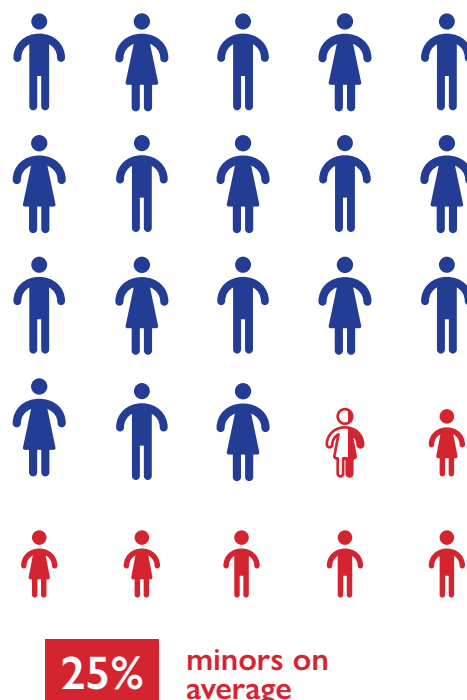


HIGHLIGHTED NATIONALITIES



MRS Lajas Blancas was temporarily opened to attend COVID-19 positive migrants and identified contacts when positives cases were detected in Darién. This MRS was opened during the last week of April with 85 migrants, and the majority of migrants that were transferred to this MRS came from La Peñita; only three migrants were brought in Bajo Chiquito (in mid June).

GRAPH 6: AVERAGE MINORS SHELTERED AT LAJAS BLANCAS DURING 2020



Source: self-compiled from data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

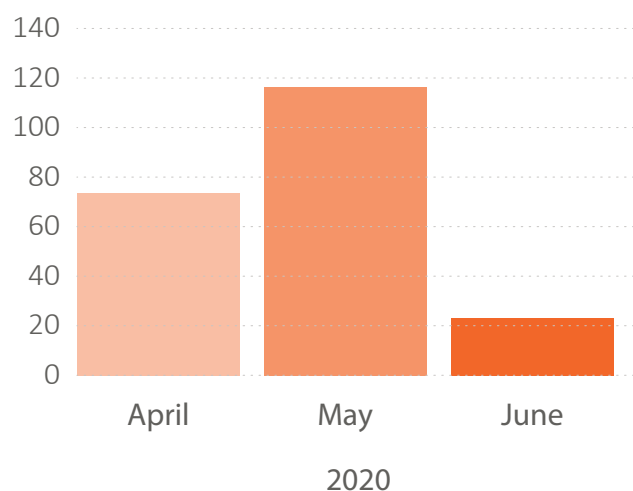
Minors under 17 years of age represent about 25% of the total population sheltered at the MRS. Disaggregated by gender: boys and male adolescents initially represented up to 75% of the population, but throughout the period their numbers have declined to 52%. At the beginning of the outbreak at La Peñita, boys and male adolescents were greatly prone to infection, including one unaccompanied minor who was COVID-19 positive. Regarding girls and female adolescents, they represent the average for the underage population at Lajas Blancas for the quarter.

At least 6 pregnant women were reported at this MRS, as of 18 June. The majority of pregnant women were moved to MRS Los Planes in mid June, and one was hospitalized at the CMI in Metetí due to COVID-19. On 02 July 2020, at least 4 new pregnancies were registered.

Regarding the nationalities of migrants, Haitians have generally represented at least 55% of people sheltered at the MRS, based on the natural trend of the migration flow in general⁷. The remaining 45% include several other nationalities, such as: Angola, Bangladesh, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic and Yemen. The main languages identified amongst the migrant population are Spanish, English, French, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Portuguese and Nepali.

Regarding statistics on COVID-19 positive cases for the quarter; the MRS has identified at least 214 migrants infected with the virus, and during the quarter 57 people on average have been monitored for being contacts of those identified as positive. At least 200 people have recovered from the COVID-19 virus, in other words 93% of infected people for the quarter. Also, at least 322 COVID-19 tests were performed every week⁸.

GRAPH 7: TOTAL MONTHLY COVID-19 POSITIVE CASES IDENTIFIED AT MRS LAJAS BLANCAS, 2020



Source: self-compiled with data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

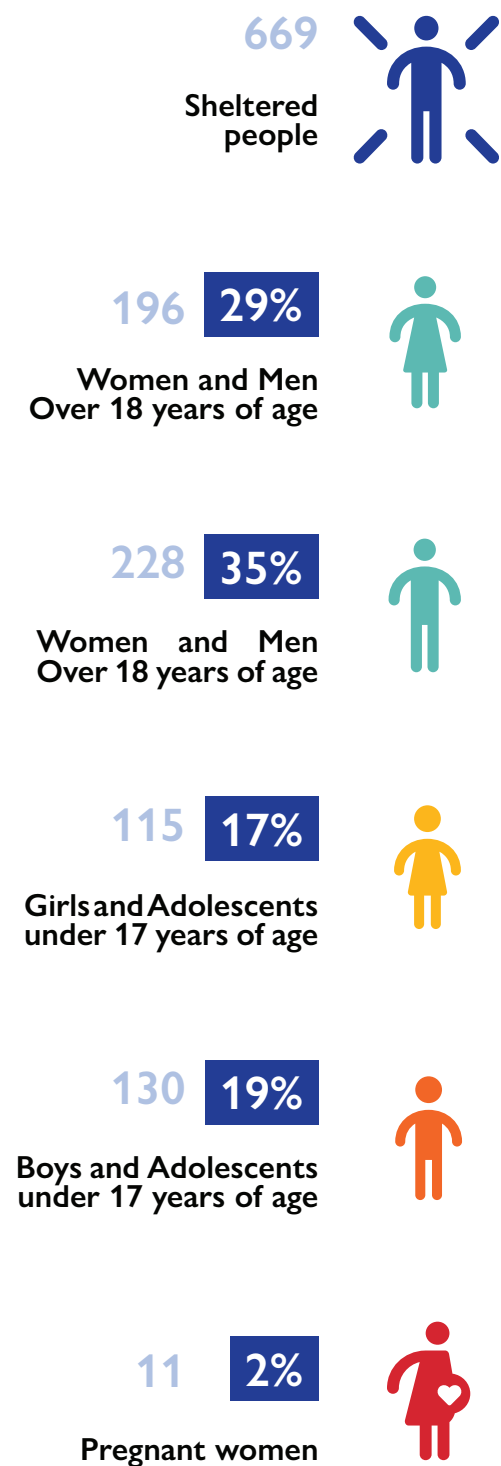
⁷ Last week, 93% of migrants transferred to the MRS were Haitians.

⁸ No official data is available on the number of accumulated tests performed during the quarter.

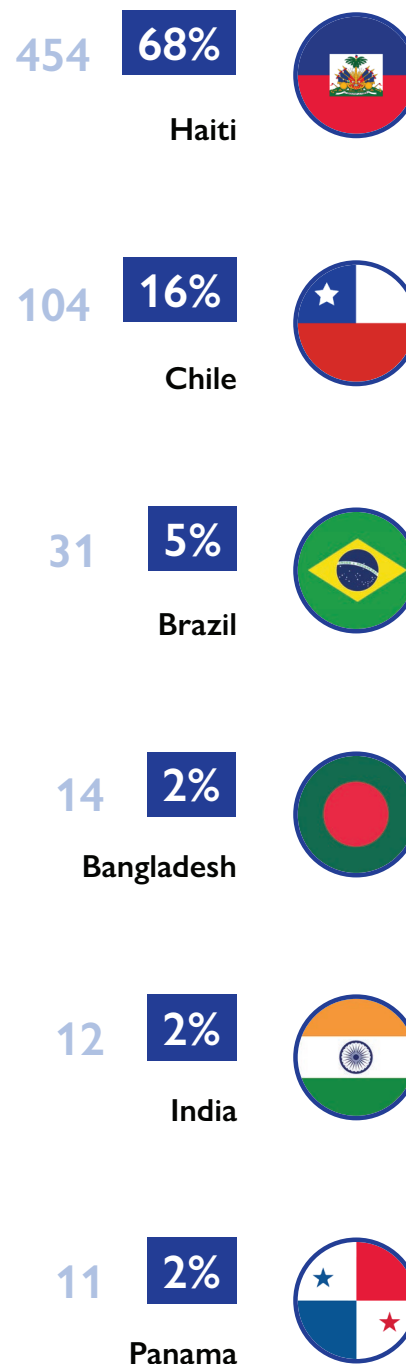
CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS SHELTERED AT MRS LOS PLANES IN CHIRIQUÍ

2 JULY 2020

SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA

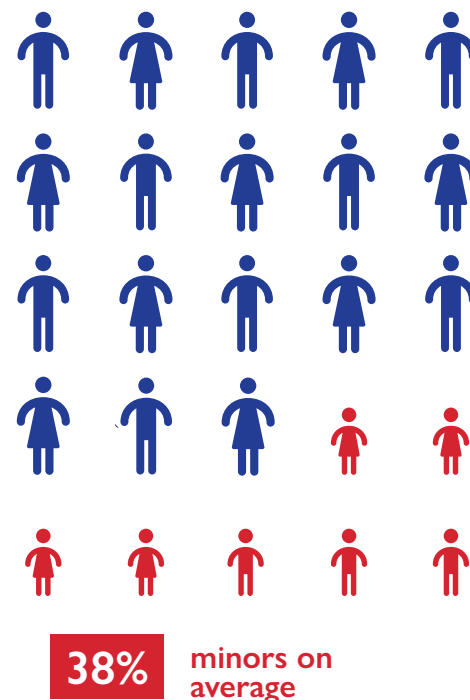


HIGHLIGHTED NATIONALITIES



Minors under 17 years of age represent 38% of the population at this shelter, equally distributed among genders, although there are more male than female adolescents. 65% of this group falls between the ages of 0 to 3 years of age, in other words, breastfeeding infants that require special needs and attention in regards to food, nutrition and health surveillance. No official cases of unaccompanied children or adolescents have been identified at this MRS.

GRAPH 8: AVERAGE MINORS SHELTERED AT BAJO CHIQUITO DURING THE QUARTER, 2020



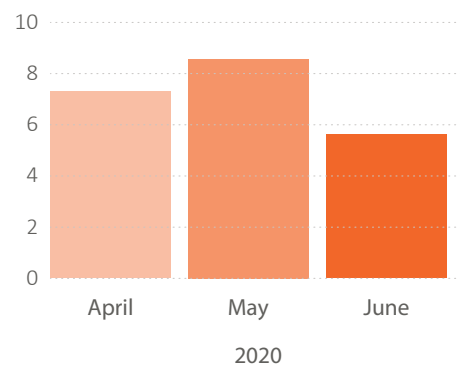
Source: self-compiled from data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

Ten pregnant women were identified at MRS and two births were attended, one in April and the other in May. Both births were performed in hospitals located in the City of David. As of 2 July 2020, there are 11 pregnant women registered at the MRS.

Regarding the nationalities of migrant, Haitians represent the majority of migrants sheltered at this MRS with 68%, followed by Chileans with 16%, Brazilians with 5%, Bangladeshis with 2%, and Indians with 2%. The migrants from South American that were identified among this group are in fact children born from Haitian mothers

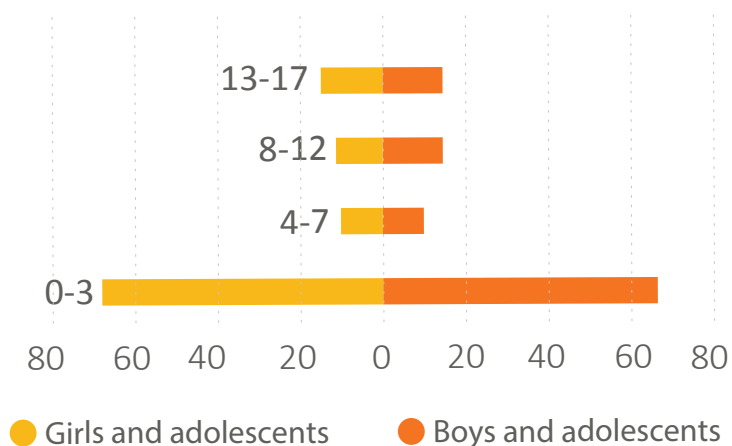
that were previously sheltered in said countries at the time. The remaining 7% are divided among 13 other nationalities, such as: Angola, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador (children born in the country from extra regional mothers), Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Panama, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Sri Lanka. The languages identified among the migrant population include: Spanish, English, French, Haitian Creole, Tamil, Sinhalese, Urdu, Portuguese, Nepali and Arabic.

GRAPH 10: AVERAGE MONTHLY PREGNANCIES REPORTED AT MRS LOS PLANES, 2020



Source: self-compiled with data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

GRAPH 9: POPULATION PYRAMID FOR GIRLS, BOYS AND ADOLESCENTS AT MRS LOS PLANES. MAY 2020



During the quarterly period of analysis 27 March to 2 July 2020, no COVID-19 positive cases have been detected at MRS Los Planes.

Source: self-compiled with data from the Government of Panama, 2020.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE BY SECTORS AT MIGRANT RECEIVING STATIONS (MRS)

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MRSs were already facing certain difficulties and challenges that limited the attention of migrants coming into Panama after crossing the Darién jungle. The need of having adequate infrastructure at the migrant receiving stations and points of crossings in the Darién Province, and the requirement of having additional services at MRS Los Planes in Chiriquí, are one of the primary demands made by migrants when arriving in Panama. When defining a humanitarian response it is necessary to consider cultural aspects, language barriers and communication issues, service provider capacity, safety, environmental elements and available resources (Sphere, 2018).

With the onslaught of this pandemic, the demands made by migrants have increased because many of these individuals have been staying at the MRS between 90 to 120 days. At the government level, the response has been quite limited because this population requires many different levels of attention and assistance, and SENAFRONT and SNM simply do not enough personnel available; especially considering that the majority of the administrative functions fall on both of these institutions. This has generated certain challenges when attending migrants in condition of vulnerability and the ability in providing a human focus on the matter.

From an MCOF perspective, the IOM has provided support that has articulated efforts and enhanced the coordination and capacities of the Government of Panama through the articulation of agencies of the United Nations via the United Nations Inter-Agency Mobility Group, in conjunction with other organizations and agencies of cooperation, providing technical and financial support in contributing with the government's response when attending migrants transiting through the country. Particularly, the focus on a humanitarian response has been provided through the management and coordination of shelters, where resources have been mobilized and capacities have been strengthened in order to face this migration crisis under different sectors of humanitarian aid.

During the quarter, certain actions and needs have been assessed based on Sphere humanitarian standards. The sectors of assistance are framed on the needs expressed by the migrant population, and areas of action from the Government of Panama, which include: protection, water supply, promotion of health and sanitation, food assistance, shelter, settlement and health.



The following sections describe the actions provided under cooperation schemes, as well as actions from the Government of Panama:



Principles of Protection⁹

Principle of Protection 1:

Enhance safety, dignity and the rights of affected people, and avoid exposing people to further harm

SENAFRONT is responsible in providing safety and security to the population sheltered at the Migrant Receiving Stations and local communities; from channeling migrants through the Darién Jungle up to their protection at the MRSs, and safeguarding their transit through a controlled flow. In Bajo Chiquito, SENAFRONT has at least 5 units responsible in protecting the community; La Peñita and Lajas Blancas have at least 14 units providing protection, and Los Planes has at least 8 units responsible for safeguarding the perimeter at the MRS.

Towards the end of June, a group of migrants voluntarily left Los Planes in order to continue with their journey to Costa Rica, ignoring the recommendations issued by the responsible authorities and indications regarding the current border status throughout Central America. This group was detained when they attempted to enter Costa Rica; they were stranded for several days at the Paso Canoas Border. After some negotiations between the Governments of Costa Rica and Panama, a decision was made to return these individuals back to the MRSs in Panama. The Government of Panama issued Resolution N°. 492 on 06 June 2020, prohibiting and penalizing the movement of migrants through 'caravans', intended to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and prevent migrants from falling into the hands of smugglers and fraud.

Principle of Protection 2:

Ensure people have access to assistance based on their needs without discrimination

Under this principle, a series of needs have been identified, but under the current context and the sanitary dispositions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, these needs have not been adequately addressed. The majority of State institutions responsible for safeguarding migrants, in tMRSs of family, children, refugee applicants, gender-based and intra-family violence, among others, are not present in the field due to the pandemic sanitary measures.

⁹ The Principles of Protection under the Sphere standards are based on the right to dignity and humanitarian aid, protection and safety; the States and government authorities have the legal responsibility to provide wellbeing to the individuals within their territory; external humanitarian and support stakeholders play a secondary role in order to strengthen the capacities of the States (Sphere, 2018).

This complicates the possibility of establishing functional protocols that help address migrants that require some type of protection. Primary needs are focused on the implementation of different protocols considered priority, such as the attention of pregnant and post-partum women, gender-based violence, access to justice, protection of children and international protection.

In regards to protocols for pregnant women who are in labor and during the post-partum process, the UNFPA, PAHO and UNICEF have accompanied MINSA in updating these protocols under the current pandemic context and are implementing the new agreed protocol. Similarly, the NRC, with the support of UNHCR and the Ombudsman Office have identified at least 10 individuals in Darién that have requested assistance in filing their refugee application with the Republic of Panama. These individuals have been provided with assistance in filing their application with the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (Panama).

For cases of unaccompanied migrant minors in Darién, UNICEF has carried out an advocacy process that prioritizes their attention with the National Secretariat of Children, Adolescents and Family (SENNAIAF for its Spanish acronym) and the Family Court. It is important to indicate that many unaccompanied adolescents actually reached adulthood during the last quarter; with one of the individuals requiring international protection (this case is being coordinated with the NRC, UNHCR and the Ombudsman Office). Also, UNICEF and UNHCR have accompanied parents of at least 15 boys who are at risk of statelessness located in Darién, and were born in Panamanian territory. Eight boys and girls have been properly registered with the Civil Registry as Panamanian Nationals, the remaining minors are being followed up and coordinated with the respective authorities of the Civil Registry. Furthermore, a request has been filed with SENAFRONT and SNM requesting that families with children at risk of statelessness and the unaccompanied minor at MRS Los Planes should not be mobilized until protection measures are established and the respective process completed.

The presence of government institutions is limited at MRS Los Planes and is therefore challenged to provide quick referrals of cases that require protection. The IOM, prior to the pandemic, maintained its presence through field visits, support and assistance to migrants, but the current COVID-19 sanitary measures during this quarter have limited the field support actions. The SNM regularly provides support to migrants at the MRS and coordinates –with other institutions- the processing of documents, the civil registration of births, citizenship identification documentation, death certificates, and others.

Principle of Protection 4:

Helping people assert their rights

During the quarter, migrants have protested at all the receiving stations, mainly demanding better food, adequate conditions of infrastructure and complaints against discrimination. Protests have also been accompanied with incidents of physical violence caused by migrants that are basically due to desperation and increased stress levels.

IOM and the Ombudsman Office have held high-level meetings with SENAFRONT and SNM to seek out solutions to the demands made by the migrants that have protested at the MRS La Peñita. IOM and The Ombudsman Office have served as mediators regarding the needs expressed by the migrant population and the Government. The agreements from the high-level meetings are being monitored; such as SNMs commitment to provide prepared meals to La Peñita, reducing the number of people at the MRS and transferring migrants to other MRS that offer better conditions. The Ombudsman Office installed a suggestion box at the receiving stations in Darién so that migrants may anonymously submit any complaint regarding the services provided at the shelter.

The IOM, in collaboration with the authorities, have carried out actions to strengthen the crisis communication strategy included the period of this report, as well as intercultural mediation sessions with the authorities and leaders from the Haitian migrant community at MRS La Peñita in Darién. This has allowed migrants to express their concerns, frustrations and needs regarding information and attention. This exercise will be replicated at the other migrant receiving stations, as well as implementing the crisis communication plan.

The SNM has consulted with the migrant population at MRS Los Planes regarding their interest in opting for a voluntarily return to their countries of origin. However, the migrants manifested their desire to stay in Panama, as regulars, while the mobility situation normalizes in the region.





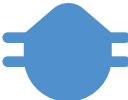






WATER, SANITATION AND HEALTH (WASH)

A series of needs have been identified throughout the quarter, which are mainly focused on the Promotion of Health to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the availability of personal care kits, the construction of latrines and shower stalls, and guaranteed access to water for human consumption at the MRS. Below is a brief description of each of these, based on the corresponding standard:

Standard 1. Promotion of Health

Regarding the Promotion of Health, 2772 family kits including personal care items were distributed to family groups during the quarter. The agencies and institutions responsible for the donations include: IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, FICR, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Embassy of Libya, Rotaract Club of Panama, Rotary Club of Panama, and the Apostolic Vicariate of Darién.

TABLE 1: PERSONAL CARE ITEMS DONATED TO GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGO'S, APRIL-JUNE 2020

	Liquid soap 50 gallons
	Shower soap 1,000 bars
	Masks 6,300 units
	Disinfectant Gel 2,800 8-oz bottles
	Toilet paper 2.240
	Disposable Baby diapers +1,500 units
	Alcohol 960 16-oz bottles
	Sanitary pads 500 units
	Gloves 3,000 pairs

Source: Self-compiled, 2020.

TABLE 2: CLEANING ITEMS DONATED
TO GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA BY
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND
NGO'S, APRIL-JUNE 2020

The Government of Panama has been responsible in providing bio-safety items; mainly masks and gloves to migrants sheltered at the MRS. The UNFPA made a donation of bio-safety supplies available to MINSA's health personnel, which included disposable gowns, surgical masks, gloves, face shields, disinfectant gel, surface disinfectant, paper towels and sanitary pads. However, as of 02 July, these supplies have been in shortage at MRS Los Planes and Bajo Chiquito; MRS Los Planes had to suspend their remittances tours to the City of David.

The Promotion of health and sanitation at MRS Lajas Blancas has been seriously affected by the lack of water for human consumption. This is a maximum priority matter, especially since this MRS holds COVID-19 positive migrants; it is a matter of sanitary control that generates a high risk of infection to the community. According to Standard guidelines in the context of a pandemic, basic elements that prioritize the interventions in mitigating the impact of this disease are simply not met, because access and the necessary amount of potable water are simply insufficient for a proper promotion of health. (Sphere, 2020).

MRS Los Planes requires the installation of hand washing basins, which currently do not exist and are necessary to promote the constant washing of hands; so far there are no positive cases of COVID-19 at this location.

Disaggregated data is not available on the quantity of items donated or supplied by the Government of Panama, in order to establish a criteria regarding compliance with Standard 1.2 on the Promotion of Health. Similarly, it is impossible to ensure that children under the age of 3 have access to disposable diapers at the Receiving Stations in Darién, nor is there information on the availability of sanitary pads for menstruating women (standard 1.3 menstrual and incontinence hygiene management).



Chlorine
240 gallons



Powdered detergent
2.500 grams



Fumigation pumps
3 to 20 litres each



Power washers
6 to 10 litres each



Water hoses
2 to 46 metres

Source: Self-compiled, 2020.

Standard 2. Water Supply

The actions in this sector related to standard 2.1 on access to water for human consumption has been liberated by the UNICEF-FICR alliance. Its main action has been to support the Government of Panama in the distribution and sanitation of water for human consumption, especially at Receiving Stations in Darién. Main observations include:

- Installation of a water distribution, purification and sanitation system for human consumption, with a capacity of 24,000 litres at the community of Bajo Chiquito.
- A monitoring and maintenance water distribution, purification and sanitation system for human consumption with a capacity of 64,000 litres at MRS La Peñita.
- Technical support to inspect the sanitation and potability water system at MRS Lajas Blancas.

The installed infrastructure at Bajo Chiquito and La Peñita is intended for individuals from both communities; in other words, these stations fulfill the needs of migrants as well as from both communities. Furthermore, SENAFRONT has also been responsible for water for human consumption at these locations; Bajo Chiquito received at least 5,000 gallons, and water has been delivered by water trucks to La Peñita.

UNICEF-FICR has promoted establishing a Local Water Board at Bajo Chiquito, integrated by people from the community. The organizations have been responsible for training local people, and SENAFRONT has been responsible for managing filters and chemicals to potabilize water. The organizations in La Peñita have provided technical support with four field technicians that monitor the distribution, sanitation and hygiene of water.

Also, MRS Lajas Blancas has faced certain difficulties with the sanitation treatment plants because they have been underused and have quickly deteriorated, which has made the existing plumbing system installed at the shelter unavailable to provide water for human consumption. SENAFRONT and SNM has supplied water for human consumption by providing water jugs and bottled water.

This solution is merely temporary due to its high cost. In addition, UNICEF-FICR has technically assisted SENAFRONT in finding a solution to the deteriorated condition of the water sanitation and potabilization system.

In regards to MRS Los Planes, the SNM continues to operate two water storage tanks, which provide 15000 gallons of potable water every day to the station. Nonetheless, these tanks are also deteriorated (oxidation), showing signs of leaks. The actual rainy season has generated sedimentation buildup in the water and does not seem clean or adequate for human consumption, even though SNM maintains a chlorination system for water potabilization.

TABLE 3: ASSESSMENT OF HUMANITARIAN STANDARD 2.1 ON ACCESS TO WATER FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

BAJO CHIQUITO	✓
MRS LA PEÑITA	✓
MRS LAJAS BLANCAS	✗
MRS LOS PLANES	✓

Source: Self-compiled, 2020.

According to humanitarian standards for the quarter, compliance with standard 2.1: Water Supply was only seen for Bajo Chiquito and La Peñita:

“People have equal and accessible access to a sufficient amount of healthy water to fulfill their consumption and domestic needs” (Sphere, 2018).

Los Planes complies with the standard, the quality of water is not tested even though its color is inadequate and has sediment. Migrants do not trust the quality of water that is available. So, even though water for human consumption is fully available, there is no guarantee that the access to water actually complies with standard 2.2 based on its quality, primarily because there is no analysis performed to ensure its quality.

Standard 3. Waste Management

TABLE 4: ASSESSMENT OF HUMANITARIAN STANDARD 3 ON WASTE MANAGEMENT

BAJO CHIQUITO	X
MRS LA PEÑITA	X
MRS LAJAS BLANCAS	X
MRS LOS PLANES	X

Source: Self-compiled, 2020.

The migrant receiving stations in Darién do not comply with Standard 3.2 on access and use of latrines. There are no latrines available at Bajo Chiquito and does not have a proper drainage system installed. MRS La Peñita only has 16 portable latrines available, which is simply insufficient to cover the needs of all migrants sheltered at this Station; MRS Lajas Blancas does not have running water to the latrines, and are therefore out of service. One of the main needs at MRS Los Planes is to increase the cleaning frequency of latrines, as well as an urgent repairs to the latrines, which is basically 70% of the total number of latrines available.

MRS La Peñita and Los Planes identified the need of having the latrines cleaned with greater frequency. SNM has contracted a cleaning service company that services the latrines three times a week. However, this cleaning effort needs to be reinforced by increasing the cleaning frequency due to the number of people actually using the latrines. Even though the latrines at MRS Lajas Blancas are out of service, they continue to be used by migrants. UNICEF-FICR promoted establishing a cleaning committee formed by the migrants themselves. Migrants have been seen using the Chuquenaque River –which crosses the site - to defecate and urinate.

In particular, MRS Los Planes has identified a few groups of migrants that refuse to use the available latrines and end up defecating in open public spaces, and therefore affecting compliance with Standard 3.1 on ensuring an environment free from human waste. The SNM has managed to identify the individuals who are openly defecating and urinating and have been requested to make use of the available latrines; these individuals have also been sent to a general presentation on the Promotion of Health.

La Peñita and Los Planes, in particular, have areas that are inadequately illuminated making it unsafe at night, especially for women and children. Bathrooms at the Migrant Receiving Stations (except for Lajas Blancas) do not have adequate door latches and are highly risky, limiting the safety of migrants, primarily vulnerable groups. Also, latrines are not segregated by gender.

Standard 4. Vector Control

The arrival of the rainy season to the region has triggered an outbreak of mosquitoes and other vectors that in Darién, especially, constitute a high risk of spreading Malaria. With this consideration, the MRSs had to increase the frequency of fumigation, which is being carried out by SNM, SENAFRONT and MINSA at all the receiving stations. UNICEF-FICR has delivered mosquito nets and bug repellent at MRS La Peñita and Lajas Blancas.

MRS Los Planes, besides finding mosquitoes, has also identified the presence of snakes around the shelter and is therefore requires constant fumigation.

Standard 5. Solid Waste Management

The main problem with solid waste management is the incredible amount of waste generated by migrants and the low response capacity by institutions to deal with its collection and the sanitation of public spaces. Unfortunately, the MRSs have very few solid waste disposal landfill locations, and it very common to find solid waste scattered throughout the compounds.

Organizations, such as UNICEF-FICR have collaborated with the cleaning of common areas, and donated general cleaning items, such as garbage bags, gloves and brooms to be used by SENAFRONT. Migrants have volunteered to collaborate with the waste collection efforts from public spaces at MRS Los Planes.

It is also necessary to indicate that the garbage landfill in Metetí (at Darién) and the landfill opened at Los Planes in Gualaca have exceeded their load capacity. Both locations show signs of accumulation, which is why the Mayorship of Gualaca maintains a heavy-duty excavator at Los Planes to mitigate the collapse of the landfill and is currently designing plans and weighing options to expand the load capacity of the landfill.



FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION










En cuanto a seguridad alimenticia y nutrición, en las MRS la respuesta humanitaria se basa en una asistencia alimenticia. El principal desafío en este sentido implica garantizar a las personas migrantes no solamente el derecho a la alimentación sino también el derecho a la nutrición, lo cual se perfila como uno de los principales desafíos que se tienen en las MRS. Por otra parte, una de las barreras que se tienen en las MRS sobre este tema, es la cultura de las personas migrantes que en su mayoría no puede ser tomado en cuenta como un criterio para adecuar la alimentación.

Standard 6. Food Assistance

In regards to Food Security and Nutrition, humanitarian aid provided to the stations are based on Food Assistance. The main challenges are ensuring that migrants are not just simply given food, but ensure their right to proper nutrition, which is the main challenge at the MRSs. One of the barriers confronted by the receiving stations is that it cannot take the general cultural makeup of migrants into consideration as criteria to adapt the meals that are served.

Food Assistance has been the one of the main actions promoted by the Government of Panama and by organizations and institutions that supports the efforts from the State in this regard. The Government of Panama via SENAFRONT and SNM, have sought to supply food to migrants sheltered at the receiving stations. This has been done through the delivery of unprepared meals at Bajo Chiquito and La Peñita, as well as the delivery of prepared meals at Lajas Blancas and Los Planes three times a day. The main difference in the type of aid, is that Bajo Chiquito and La Peñita do not have adequate eating facilities such as cafeterias or kitchens, and is therefore impossible to offer an adequate dining hall; the situation at the two other stations is quite different and it is possible to have kitchen staff responsible for the preparation of meals.

TABLE 5: NON-PERISHABLE FOODS DONATED TO GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGO'S, APRIL-JUNE 2020

	Rice +13.400 Lb.
	Salt +850 Lb.
	Sugar +14.100 Lb.
	Oil +2.060 Litres
	Flour +2.500 Lb.
	Pastas +3.624 Lb.
	Vegetables +3.300 Lb.
	Tuna and Sardines +5.900 cans
	Sausages and Ham +1.800 cans

IOM in coordination with SENAFRONT updated the feeding protocol under the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. A “Migrant Feeding Table” program was launched in Darién, and is operated by the Apostolic Vicariate of Darién, the National Secretariat for the Defense of Afro-Panamanians (SENADAP), IOM and SENAFRONT. A large quantity of food has been donated and distributed to the MRSs in the province. IOM has acquired donations of food through organizations such as the Sunni Muslim Religious Association of Panama, the Islamic Foundation of Panama, the Muslim Community of Bocas del Toro, UNHCR, the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES, for its Spanish acronym) and SNM.

The following donations have also been received: liquid milk, cream of corn, cereals, cookies, coffee, baby formula, baby preserves and purees, bread and pineapples. One of the primary needs that were identified is guaranteeing a regular provision of food, in addition to donations. The dietary requirements must include carbohydrates. Currently, migrants are not provided with fruits, vegetables and other foods from those already indicated above. It is for this reason that Standard 6.1 on General Nutritional Requirements cannot fully affirm if migrants are obtaining an adequate caloric intake, specifically at Bajo Chiquito and La Peñita.

Regarding standard 6.3 on Food Selection, Distribution and Delivery, UNICEF-FICR installed a Meal Distribution System at MRS La Peñita in order to ensure an adequate delivery of meals to all migrants at the shelter. The system consists of meal tickets linked to the list of migrants currently housed at the shelter. Due to the current sanitary provisions imposed on supporting organizations at the station, the migrants at the shelter now control the system.

Also, migrants sheltered at Bajo Chiquito, Lajas Blancas and Los Planes have complained about the amount and quality of foods supplied to them (mainly at Lajas Blancas). This issue must be taken into consideration when assessing compliance with Standard 6.2 on Ideal Quality and Acceptability of Food. The SNM carried out an integration exercise with migrants at MRS Los Planes; speakers were used to assist the people in charge of preparing meals; this definitely improved migrant acceptance; two additional individuals were hired as kitchen support staff.

Source: Self-compiled, 2020.



SHELTER AND SETTLEMENT

In regards to Shelter and Settlement, the Darién region has certain gaps, especially at Bajo Chiquito and La Peñita. This is due to the fact that both communities have not been able to establish adequate and dignified infrastructures to house migrants. On the contrary, Lajas Blancas and Los Planes are infrastructures that have been properly planned, and therefore have more elements that make it adequate. The following sections reference standards that are applicable to Shelter and Settlements according to the context of the migrant receiving stations:

Standard 1: Planning

From all Migrant receiving Station sites, the only shelter that can be considered a well-planned out shelter is Lajas Blancas. However, the construction process has been quite slow due to compliance requirements with humanitarian standards. But due to the COVID-19 emergency outbreak at La Peñita a decision was made to enable the station early, even with its limited planned capacity of 1000 persons.

As part of the humanitarian response and the lack of sustainability of MRS La Peñita, the corresponding authorities led by SNM have initiated the construction of MRS San Vicente located in the community of Nicanor in the same province, with the intention of decommissioning MRS La Peñita and moving the entire migrant population to the new shelter site. This is a mid to longer-term project and for now a temporary camp has been setup for short-term relocation of migrants.

This MRS will have a maximum holding capacity of 500 persons, and will be a modular-based facility. The UNHCR donated 48 Refugee Housing Units (RHU) to SENAFRONT. Proper training will be provided on the installation of the modular housing units so that they can be installed at MRS San Vicente. Also, the IOM and the Ombudsman Office in conjunction with the UNHCR will constantly monitor the progress of the construction.

Standard 3: Living Space

Currently, Bajo Chiquito and La Peñita are shelters that present the greatest challenge when complying with a dignified living space for migrants. Even though migrants at Bajo Chiquito have tarps, the rest areas do not have dignified conditions, and it is because of this that SENAFRONT is seeking to acquire land to start building a properly planned migrant receiving station.

MRS La Peñita is currently overcrowded by 666% (which is why MRS San Vicente is being built) and does not have individual rooms -and therefore does not meet the proper conditions for social distancing if a positive COVID-19 is detected-, nor does it have private resting spaces or other types of similar areas. IOM has advised SENAFRONT and SINAPROC regarding the needs of conditioning an infrastructure based on standards set by WHO and from the Settlement Coordination and Maintenance Inter-Agency group.

Similarly, IOM, UNICEF and FICR have donated tarpaulins, overhead tarps and multiuse tents to SENAFRONT in order to cover areas that do not have a roof, but are required by migrants. However, with the onset of the rainy season, many of these tarps have deteriorated. Many of the areas where such tarps were installed are prone to flooding and must be moved as soon as possible.

Standard 4: Household Items

Regarding household items at the MRS, the following items have been donated: clothing, sleeping mats, cots, bed sheet, blankets and kitchen utensils. The organizations responsible for such donation are: UNICEF, IOM, Rotaract Club of Panama, Rotary Club of Panama, Ombudsman Office, Dejando Huellas Association and the UNHCR. Migrants at Bajo Chiquito do not have sleeping mats or adequate bedding items; therefore UNICEF has made a list of required items.

Standard 5: Technical support

Regarding technical support, specifically for the construction of the shelters, repairs and selecting proper construction methods and materials; MRS Los Planes requires repairing and enabling 100% of its infrastructure. It is estimated that 40% of this station requires repairs, mainly the electrical wiring installations, rooms, common areas (which is considered a higher risk for children that use such recreational areas), 70% of the latrines require repairs and 100% of the roof requires replacement.

After relocating migrants from Darién to MRS Los Planes, SNM had to install 15 tents, built 15 shower stalls and 15 hand washing basins, including the installation of portable latrines. A few volunteers have aided the SNM in performing minor repairs to the Shelter. However, specialized technicians are required to repair major infrastructure issues.

TABLE 6: ASSESSMENT OF HUMANITARIAN STANDARD 4 ON HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

TABLE 7: HOUSEHOLD ITEMS DONATED TO GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGO'S, APRIL-JUNE 2020

ACCESS TO QUALITY CLOTHING OR APPAREL AND SLEEPING ITEMS ADEQUATELY

BAJO CHIQUITO



MRS LA PEÑITA



MRS LAJAS BLANCAS



MRS LOS PLANES



Source: Self-compiled, 2020.

Furthermore, an emergency plan must be updated for several scenarios. In this regards SINAPROC and the Fire Department have issued general recommendations on risk management and emergency prevention, but still requires developing a strategic plan.



Clothing (T-shirts, blouses, trousers/pants, sweaters, among others)
+70.675 pieces



Sleeping mats
+1.650 units



Cots
+150



Kitchen spoons
+2.000



Bowls
+2.000



5-gallon buckets
+200



Sheets and Blankets
+800

Source: Self-compiled, 2020.



HEALTH

Regarding health, the Government of Panama through MINSA is attempting to maintain primary medical care at the MRSs, either through permanent medical posts and periodic medical tours. The availability of health services is vital for the context of this pandemic, as well as the regular dynamics for the care of migration flows coming from the Darién jungle. As explained before, there are several reasons why migrants deciding on traversing through Darién to enter Panama require primary medical care, including specialized medical care (on a case-by-case basis).

Below are the humanitarian responses based on standards for health care:

Standard 1: Health Systems

According to standard 1.1 on health services, and 1.2 on health personnel, the receiving stations have a system that responds to the basic needs of the migrant population, but is rather limited in regards to specialized care, as well as immediate attention for chronic or severe illnesses. On the other hand, the distances between MRSs and hospital centers offering specialized care is an important factor that determines the quality and speed of such medical response for those who actually require it.

In the Darién Province, the health system has a total focus on primary care, in such a way that many of these health centers had to adapt to the new dispositions to attend cases related to COVID-19. Comparatively, in order to comply with these demands, the Government of Panama received a donation of two field or mobile hospitals equipped with an electrical power system, mechanical beds, oxygen concentrators, as well as assistance in the installation and setup of temporary medical facilities. In addition, CMIs are available to attend pregnant women if required, and to transfer women in labor.

MINSA's capacity at MRS Bajo Chiquito is quite limited and does not offer permanent coverage for health services at this community.

However, MINSA has scheduled periodic medical tours in order to provide COVID-19 sanitary monitoring, including any necessary medical care required, but these medical tours are not weekly. MRS La Peñita has a medical post that provides care by MINSA staff (which provides regular general medical and nursing services).

MRS Lajas Blancas, offers health controls solely focused on monitoring COVID-19 positive case evolution, suspect cases and recovered cases. IOM with the support of MINSA and through the strengthening of institutional capacities, has donated four swab-sampling booths (two for MRS Lajas Blancas and two for MRS La Peñita). It is important to indicate that COVID-19 moderate positive cases have been transferred to hospitals located in Panama City and others, as well as pregnancies that have been transferred to a special care unit at the CMI in the city of Metetí.

The health system in Chiriquí includes primary care services and hospital care, and therefore provides a greater offer of health services if required by migrants. MRS Los Planes has a permanent medical post for primary care and pre-hospital attention (emergency medical care), and is serviced by a physician. When required, specialized medical attention is referred to hospitals located in the City of David, which are increasingly valuable for the treatment of illnesses.

Medical attention of migrants is truly limited by the scarcity of health professionals compared to the number of people that currently require medical attention. MINSA has reported at least 500 migrants that have been attended with general medical care at MRS La Peñita. UNICEF-FICR has assisted health authorities in providing health services to pregnant women, nutritional screening and general medical support with a health field professional. The medical post at MRS Los Planes operates every day and averages 30 patients per day, and has referred at least 7 cases requiring specialized medical care (including women in labor) in hospitals in the City of David.

Under standard 1.3 on medical essentials and medical equipment, the offer is affected by the fact that it is simply insufficient to cover the demands of migrants. In June, health personnel located at MRS Bajo Chiquito identified a shortage of medications and basic medical personal protection equipment. In response to this UNICEF-FICR has made a list of medications needed in stock. Due to the shortage of medications at MRS Los Planes, physicians have been providing migrants with prescriptions that can be used in regular commercial pharmacies. However, the main issue is that migrants simply do not have the monetary resources to purchase such medications.

Standard 2: Essential Health Assistance

The actions carried out during the quarter have been mainly focused on preventing and monitoring COVID-19. However, throughout the years that the MRSs have been functioning, migrants -especially boys, girls and pregnant women- have been identified with chronic diarrhea, malnutrition and severe skin injuries due to burns and infections. Frequently, migrants entering Panama are sick and most of them contract diseases when crossing the Darién Jungle. Providing Essential Health Assistance has been one of the most important services provided by the Government of Panama to migrants based on their capacities.

Based on the current context and in accordance with standard 2.1.1 on the Prevention of Infectious Diseases, the IOM, UNICEF-FICR, Panamanian Red Cross, MINSA and PAHO have carried out talks, in several languages, with the intention of informing the migrant population on recommendations issued by WHO and MINSA on preventative measures against COVID-19 infection. This also includes the elaboration of posters and informative flyers in several languages (English, French, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and others), which have been donated to SENAFRONT and SNM to be used at MRS Lajas Blancas, La Peñita and Los Planes.

Within the framework of this pandemic and standard 2.1.2 on surveillance, outbreak detection and early response, and standard 2.1.3 on diagnosis and case handling, a system was implemented to detect and treat cases related to COVID-19.

The following graph illustrates the process:

GRAPH 14: COVID-19 POSITIVE CASE REFERRAL AND MEDICAL ATTENTION PROTOCOL



Identification of Suspect Cases

Authorities from the Ministry of Health (MINSA) carry out systematic testing at MRS La Peñita and Bajo Chiquito in order to maintain epidemiological tracking of people manifesting COVID-19 symptoms.



Transfer of COVID-19 positive cases and their contacts

Once a positive result has been identified, individuals that have been in contact with the positive case are identified and are transferred to MRS Lajas Blancas.



Quarantine and Recovery

MRS Lajas Blancas has been divided into 3 zones: 1. COVID-19 positives, 2. Contacts under quarantine, and 3. Recoveries. Based on the evolution of the disease, migrants are placed in the corresponding zone under epidemiological and health criteria according to MINSA.

Source: Self-compiled, 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Existing limitations suffered by humanitarian response organizations, as a result from the current context when assisting extra-regional migrants and the challenges related to the implementation of priority field actions have increased and generated new challenges in how humanitarian support is provided. However, below are recommendations that are considered priority:

- A Psychosocial Needs Assessment for migrants, and for MRS service providers and administrators that can redirect project actions aimed at the integral attention of the psychosocial health of migrants at multiple levels.
- Adequate Psychosocial First Aid training for all MRS staff. Although the institutions responsible for administrative and security staff at the MRS are focused on the physical safety of migrants; a holistic approach must be promoted and capacity-building must be improved for first line responders, which are responsible in ensuring proper emotional support to migrants through Psychosocial First Aid.
- The dissemination of information on regularization options in Panama. Access to information on sudden changes in the migration journey and country border closing that would help reduce the effects of uncertainty and frustration from the frustrated and unsuccessful travel plans.
- Creation of medical files that compiles data on the medical care, medications and treatments provided to migrants from the health services at the MRS.
- Collaboration with the Government of Panama in order to increase the number of qualified staff at the MRS, especially medical professionals, nurses, psychologist and social workers.
- Consolidation of unique records and an integrated personal data management system for migrants via specialized software guaranteeing the right of protection and security of their data.
- Creation of a transportation protocol when transferring migrants between MRSs, especially in the context of this pandemic, which has required increasing the number of MRSs in order to ensure proper health protocols for the treatment of cases.
- Authorities must submit or establish a contingency plan for the eventual opening of borders, which defines border opening and migrant mobility scenarios. This coordination, must involve the authorities of Costa Rica as minimum, once the Controlled Flow mechanism is reactivated.
- Identification and implementation of the necessary bio-security measures when opening borders in order to ensure proper humanitarian handling when transporting migrants.
- Include multi-sectoral data collection in the “Essential Humanitarian Standards” indicators -based on the Sphere standards- to improve the quality of the humanitarian response and accountability analysis criteria that allows identifying areas of improvement and responsibility.

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