



PANAMA

2023 IFRC network country plan

Funding Requirement **CHF 5.5M**

Appeal number **MAAPA002**

In support of the Red Cross Society of Panama



23

National Society branches



116

National Society staff



1,716

National Society volunteers

People to be reached



53,000

Ongoing
emergency
operations

IFRC network multiyear focus

Emergency response

- Population movement

Longer term needs

- Disaster risk management
- Climate change adaptation
- Violence prevention and protection
- Epidemic preparedness and response

Capacity development

- Humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy
- Partnerships and resource mobilization
- Quality and upgraded management systems

Key country data

Population **4.4M**

INFORM Severity rating **Medium**

Long-term Climate Risk Index **118**

Human Development Index rank **61**

Population below poverty level **21.5%**

Hazards



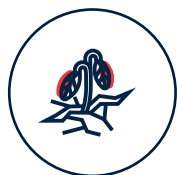
Population movement



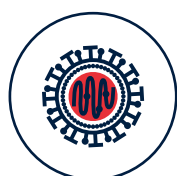
Hurricanes and cyclones



Floods



Drought



Disease outbreaks



Poverty

Funding requirements

Total 5.5M CHF

Through the IFRC

4M CHF

Through Participating National Societies

→ **30,000** CHF

Host National Society

→ **1.5M** CHF

IFRC Breakdown

2M CHF

Ongoing emergency operations

Longer term needs

45,000 CHF

Climate and environment

92,000 CHF

Disasters and crises

26,000 CHF

Health and wellbeing

1.4M CHF

Migration and displacement

55,000 CHF

Values, power and inclusion

367,000 CHF

Enabling local actors

Ongoing emergencies

MDR43008

Mexico and Central America
Migration Crisis
population movement

Participating National Societies

American Red Cross*

British Red Cross*

Canadian Red Cross Society*

German Red Cross*

Iraqi Red Crescent Society*

Italian Red Cross

Japanese Red Cross Society*

Netherlands Red Cross*

Spanish Red Cross

Swedish Red Cross*

Swiss Red Cross*



NATIONAL SOCIETY PROFILE

The Red Cross Society of Panama has existed in Panama since 1917 and was admitted to the International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 1925. It is officially recognized by the government as an association of autonomous volunteers who act in an auxiliary role to the government.

The National Society cooperates in the development of communities and is currently developing activities in the areas of relief, social welfare, training and outreach; community disaster preparedness; restoring family links; promoting voluntary blood donation; care for migrants; children's homes; and shelter for the elderly. Its services include pre-hospital care (basic rescue units), first aid training, and training in water safety and rescue.

In the past year, the National Society responded to different emergencies with an integrated approach, providing humanitarian assistance to people on the move, communities affected by disasters, and supporting the Ministry of Health in the response to and prevention of COVID-19.

Over the last three years, the Red Cross Society of Panama has been working with populations in transit in the Darien region through an IFRC regional Emergency Appeal on population movement. It has a migration and displacement strategy, significantly strengthening its capacities in this area.

The Red Cross Society of Panama's Strategic Plan 2020-2023 is directly aligned with the IFRC's Strategy 2030. The National Society aims to undergo different reforms to establish itself as a leader in the field of disaster risk management, while also diversifying its humanitarian action. It is committed to growing its support to improving living conditions for the most vulnerable populations, thereby providing better health and safety, along with empowerment and resilience. This is accomplished via four strategic directions:

- Be adequately prepared and focused on crisis and disaster preparedness
- Be adequately prepared and focused on climate change crises and disasters
- Be adequately prepared and focused on preparation of the National Society to respond to migration and displacement
- Red Cross Society of Panama's commitment to accountability and transparency in its management

The National Society has a dashboard monitoring its preparedness and response mechanism, which facilitates tracking of progress in its priority areas: information management, multi-purpose cash support, contingency and disaster plans, standard operating procedures, health in emergencies, epidemics and pandemics, geographic information systems, and early warning systems.

IFRC NETWORK ACTION IN 2023

Joint situational analysis

The Republic of Panama is located in the centre of the western hemisphere, bordering the Caribbean Sea to the north, the Republic of Colombia to the east, the Pacific Ocean to the south and the Republic of Costa Rica to the west. As an isthmus, Panama is the link between Central America and South America, with a nearly impenetrable jungle, the Darien Gap, between Panama and Colombia. This is the only place where there is a break in the Pan-American Highway, which otherwise forms a continuous roadway from Alaska to Chile.

At approximately 75,000 square kilometres, it has a total population of 4.4 million, and a population density of 58 persons per square kilometre. Panama is politically

divided into nine provinces, 75 municipalities, and seven semi-autonomous indigenous territories.

The culture, customs, and language of Panama are predominantly Caribbean Spanish in character. Ethnically, the majority of the population is mestizo or mixed Spanish, Chinese, Amerindian, and African descent. Spanish is the official and dominant language. Indigenous populations are scattered throughout the country. The Ngäbe-Buglé, Naso-Tjër Di and Bribrí are mostly in the western part of the country, constituting roughly 70% of the indigenous population, and the Emberá-Wounaan and Guna in the east.

Panama is one of the most dynamic economies in Latin America in recent years, though without similar growth in social achievements. It has one of the highest inequality rates in the region, according to World Bank data, only surpassed by Brazil and Honduras. The poverty rate is almost twice as high among the rural population (40.8%) when compared with the rest of the country (20.7%), and among the indigenous population it is four times higher (82%). COVID-19 accentuated existing socio-economic disparities, including for those in the informal labour sector, and brought higher levels of inequality, lack of social protection and poverty.

Between June 2021 and June 2022, Panama's Consumer Price Index registered a more than 50 per cent increase in inter-annual inflation, up 5.2 per cent, compared to 1.6 per cent the previous year. There have been intense nationwide protests demanding accountability for government spending and immediate relief from the rising costs of basic consumer goods, essential medicines and transportation.

Panama shows trends of communities becoming more exposed and vulnerable to the impact of natural and technological hazards, and population movement crises. According to a World Bank Hotspot study, 15 per cent of the total area of the country and 12.5 per cent of the population are vulnerable to two or more hazards. The same study places Panama among the 35 countries

with the highest percentage of its population with a "relatively high" mortality risk due to multiple hazards. Panama is characterized by intense and long-lasting rainfall, storms, strong lightening, floods, and more. Global climate change models indicate that Panama will be subject to severe changes, such as increased temperatures, droughts, more intense rains, more frequent storms, and rising average sea levels; these effects are already visible.

Due to Panama's geographical location, the country has become a common entry point for people in transit with protection needs. Daily, people from more than 40 countries travel through the Darien Gap, crossing from Colombia to Panama. Host communities in Panama receiving those who survived the trek through the jungle (predominantly indigenous groups) lack essential services such as paved roads, potable water systems, public transportation, solid waste systems and physical and mental health systems. The Panamanian government controls migration either via Migratory Reception Stations, where people may be detained for several months, or by being fast-tracked to the western border with Costa Rica within a week. Besides existing protection needs due to gender and sexual orientation, pregnancy or breastfeeding, or separated and unaccompanied minors, both control systems create additional needs.

Ongoing emergency response

For real-time information on emergencies, see IFRC GO page <https://go.ifrc.org/regions/1Panama>

- Appeal number: MDR43008 Mexico and Central America migration crisis
- Appeal launch date: 15 July 2022
- Appeal end date: 31 July 2023
- People affected: 500,000 people
- People to be assisted: 210,000 people

The increase in people on the move across Central America since early 2022 has been significant. The Darien Gap on the border between Colombia and Panama is one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world. People arrive in Panama after walking seven to 14 days in the Darien jungle, where they face violence, wild animals, lack of food and water, and hostile weather conditions. Upon arrival, migrants require medical care, hydration, and psychosocial support.

According to official data, from January to June 2022, 48,430 people crossed the Darien Gap, an increase of 85 per cent compared with the same period in 2021. People of many nationalities cross, but about 58 per cent are from Venezuela. The number of minors has doubled to more than 5,000 since the beginning of 2022, according to UNICEF. Nearly 170 children travelled unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Migrants, refugees and returnees mostly move through irregular channels. Along the routes, many of them face administrative barriers, suffer accidents and injuries, face extortion and sexual violence, and are separated from their families. Tragically, others die from disease or harsh environmental conditions and weather. The majority come from Cuba, Venezuela and Haiti. The situation is especially serious for the most vulnerable groups such as children, young people and women; indigenous communities; people living with disabilities; the LGBTI+ community and the elderly population.

The main reasons for migrating include better economic opportunities, escaping violence, reuniting with family members, and recovering from the impact of recurring disasters and extreme weather events. The devastating socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing political crises are also factors, and will continue to increase population movements and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

People on the move require significant assistance, in particular those with health problems. This high demand for assistance can be hampered by the exhaustion of personnel or the limited availability of food, water, facilities and first aid supplies. The impact of migration on children is of increasing concern as they face the threat of drowning, physical violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, exploitation and health risks, including mental health. Sixteen of every 100 migrants crossing the Darien Gap in 2022 are minors.

The Red Cross Society of Panama is able to identify the needs of people on the move due to its network of humanitarian service points and community engagement and accountability approach, combined with several years of working on migration flows. These needs range from protection and health care to accessing specific information that allows them to make informed decisions along the route and at their destination. The most vulnerable migrants need access to medical care, mental health support, basic humanitarian assistance, connectivity and legal information.

Short description of emergency operational strategy

In July 2022, the IFRC launched a CHF18 million Emergency Appeal aiming to increase the reach of the National Societies of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama. This will scale up assistance and protection for 210,000 people along migratory routes throughout Central America, through more effective preparedness and response, and strengthened capacities and risk reduction. Due to the urgency of the situation, immediate assistance started in Costa Rica and Panama. Out of the 210,000 people expected to be reached, 175,000 are migrants in transit, 25,000 are returnees and 10,000 are people in host and origin communities.

The Emergency Appeal focuses on:

- Integrated assistance: shelter, livelihoods and multi-purpose cash

- Health and care: including water, sanitation and hygiene, mental health and psychosocial support, primary and pre-hospital health care, and community health
- Protection and prevention: protection, gender and inclusion; community engagement and accountability; migration; environmental sustainability; risk reduction; and climate adaptation and recovery

Humanitarian service points are the cornerstone of this operation, with 20 existing throughout the region to provide comprehensive and integrated assistance and protection services to migrants based on need. Humanitarian service points sit along migratory routes to provide a neutral, welcoming and safe environment for migrants to access essential services that might otherwise be inaccessible. Services include psychological first aid, drinking water and hygiene supplies, and primary health care, first aid, food and non-food distribution, support to restore family links, accurate information on service points along the route and, in some cases, legal advice. Thus far, with the support of donors, the National Societies of Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama are operating 20 humanitarian service points. With this Emergency Appeal, regional response capacity is increasing, with 30 more humanitarian service points in different locations, to achieve a total of 50.

The Red Cross Society of Panama will recognize and value all members of communities that access humanitarian service points by incorporating community engagement and accountability, and protection, gender and inclusion approaches into operations. This creates opportunities to adapt services to accommodate diverse and evolving migration needs, and support efforts to improve the quality of services based on feedback from service users.

The Mexico and Central American Migration Crisis Emergency Appeal was launched to urgently address the growing humanitarian needs of migrants, returnees and host communities in the region. This Emergency Appeal complements the Americas pillar of the IFRC Global Route-Based Migration Programme, a multi-year programme that addresses the ongoing assistance and protection needs of people on the move, irrespective of their status.

Once the Emergency Appeal is completed, the operation and response activities of the National Societies of Central America and Mexico will continue in accordance with their three-year programmes and strategic plans. These plans include responding to the migration situation through a medium- and long-term approach, and facing a prolonged crisis.



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Strategic priorities

Climate and environment

Climate change and extreme weather-related events in Central America have become a significant threat to health conditions, food security, access to safe water and environmental security of people, especially for the most vulnerable and remote communities with low response, coping and recovery capacities.

These events are increasingly recurrent, some of them becoming chronic, and have transboundary effects such as the drought of the Central American Dry Corridor. Intensifying hurricane seasons place the region among the most challenged by extreme hydro-meteorological events. These unprecedented hurricanes affected more than eight million people in Central America. Over the past fifty years, Panama has experienced an increase in a number of extreme weather events, including intense and prolonged rainfall, windstorms, floods, droughts, forest fires, landslides, tropical cyclones, and impacts of the El Niño and La Niña Southern Oscillation.

The year 2020 was also among the warmest in the last 40 years, while intense rainfall events brought landslides, floods and flash floods to rural and urban areas. Flood impacts are common to the entire country, while droughts are considered a threat mainly for the Central Pacific region (Arco Seco). The intensification of these extreme climate events is having a severe impact on Panama, including water shortages, agricultural losses, displacement and compromised health and safety.

Above all, climate change is affecting the livelihoods of the most vulnerable people, reducing crop yields and food production, leading to worsening food insecurity in many areas, and exacerbating the effects of economic shocks, COVID-19 restrictions, violence and political instability.

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Main actions and areas of support

The Red Cross Society of Panama is part of the [IFRC Global Climate Resilience Programme](#), which aims to foster an unprecedented scale-up in locally led climate-smart disaster risk reduction and adaptation efforts to prevent and reduce climate-related disaster impacts, and build community-level climate resilience. The programme aims to support 500 million people in 100 of the most climate-vulnerable countries, focusing on the least supported and marginalized communities. This holistic, multi-year programmatic approach consists of four operational pillars: (1) scaling up climate-smart disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action and preparedness; (2) reducing the public health impacts of climate change; (3) addressing climate displacement;

and (4) enabling climate-resilient livelihoods and ecosystem services.

The National Society leads locally owned actions to support communities and authorities in their efforts to adapt to climate change and build resilience to extreme weather events. Adaptation requires a collective effort to improve knowledge of climate trends and their impacts, preparation techniques, and adaptation strategies to fight the risk to food production and livelihoods.

The National Society also supports local authorities in actions that address the current climate and environmental crisis through advocacy, education and conservation programmes and actions in communities. It is an active member of the regional IFRC-led network of climate and environmental practitioners, which aims at promoting peer-to-peer knowledge and best practice exchanges, as well as empowering local stakeholders to address urgent climate and environmental crises.

The IFRC network will support the National Society to:

- Develop environmental policies and climate change adaptation strategies, based on evidence, and through mapping and risk scenarios
- Conduct climate-related capacity building to enable better planning and forecast-based financing
- Define operational guidelines and internal procedures to reduce the environmental impact of IFRC operations, and improve dissemination within the organization to staff and volunteers, with emphasis on Red Cross Youth
- Develop information and dissemination actions on climate change and its impacts, oriented within the organization, involving staff and volunteers, with emphasis on Red Cross youth
- Develop communication, education and information strategies on climate change and its impacts, targeting community behavioural transformation and aimed at informing local policy-making
- Promote community-led climate-smart solutions and plans that address challenges, improve behaviours and promote mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change
- Offer technical support for climate-smart livelihoods, especially those based on food production and agriculture

Disasters and crises

According to its geographic position and geo-tectonic characteristics, the country is exposed to a variety of hydrometeorological and geophysical hazards. Panama is characterized by intense and long-lasting rainfall, and is susceptible to ENSO/El Niño-La Niña episodes. The recurrent impacts of weather and climate-related events present natural hazards including hurricanes, strong electrical discharges, floods, sea spills, droughts, and vegetation fires. In 2020, due to tropical storm Eta, 300 mm of accumulated rainfall was recorded, causing four major rivers to overflow. The Government of Panama opened 29 temporary shelters, where almost 4,000 people took refuge. The Ministry of Housing and Land Management reported 999 homes structurally affected throughout the country.

Other geological, sudden-onset and high-impact events include volcanos, earthquakes and tsunamis. Spills of hazardous substances also represent a risk. Panama ranks 14th among the countries most exposed to multiple hazards based on land area. The country has 15% of its total area exposed and 12.5% of its total population is vulnerable to two or more climate-related hazards. In addition, Panama ranks 35th among the countries with the highest percentage of total population considered to be at relatively high mortality risk from multiple hazards.

According to studies by the University of Panama, the country can be divided into four hazard zones according to the presence and intensity of earthquakes, hurricane winds, floods and landslides. These regions are: the Azuero region (droughts, floods, earthquakes and hurricane winds); Western region (floods, earthquakes and hurricane winds); Metropolitan region (floods, hurricane winds and earthquakes); and Eastern region (earthquakes and floods). Some areas with higher susceptibility to flooding are those located on the Caribbean coasts, such as districts in the provinces of Panama and Bocas del Toro, and on the Pacific coast, the district of Tonosí in the Province of Los Santos.

Man-made hazards include widespread violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups, social unrest, and political and economic crises. These are further aggravated by the high impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health conditions in the region. This has led to a worsening of living and welfare conditions and a deepening of the migration and displacement crisis in the region, as well as protection problems.

The capacities for improving preparedness, response, recovery, coping and resilience are not sufficiently developed at community, local and national levels. Regional coordination mechanisms have also not reached an adequate level of operational capacity to address these high levels of vulnerability.

Main actions and areas of support

The National Society, in its auxiliary role, aims to intervene effectively in the face of a wide variety of evolving crises and disasters, working closely with communities to adopt measures to increase resilience. The Red Cross Society of Panama will continue working to consolidate its auxiliary role in preparedness and response actions, mainly by strengthening institutional and national mechanisms aligned with the results obtained through the IFRC Preparedness for Effective Response assessment, and developing and updating documents, tools and procedures for the effective management and control of disasters and crises.

Based on lessons learned from the IFRC's long-term presence in the region and the most recent regional response in the aftermath of the impact of Hurricanes Eta and Iota, the IFRC focuses on two common challenges in Central America in its support of building the capacity of the National Societies, community and national civil protection systems and the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC). The first of these is high risk and multiple hazards scenarios, in particular, recurrent climatic threats including storms and floods, also combined with man-made risks such as displacement and violence. The second challenge is low resilience and response capacities at community level, with weak links to disaster management systems and hindered access to humanitarian assistance.

The IFRC network will work to build the National Society's capacities to adapt to increasingly complex humanitarian environments, and to develop preparedness and readiness to respond to shocks by strengthening community resilience. This includes early warning, early action, and anticipation to mitigate risks from multiple hazards that affect the livelihoods, homes and living conditions of vulnerable communities and the most disadvantaged people. Supporting the National Society ensures appropriate targeting that places affected people and communities at the centre of preparedness and response activities. The IFRC will promote ethical and people-led approaches such as cash and livelihood transfer programmes, and support the shift to response models that promote localized and regional action.

The IFRC network will support the Red Cross Society of Panama to:

- Share knowledge and develop assessment and needs analysis tools, including digitalization efforts, to produce evidence-based preparedness and response planning
- Use preparedness for effective response to better prepare for the increasing frequency of disasters and crises
- Access technical support in cash and voucher assistance preparedness, and promote the integration of organizational tools, systems, procedures and learning opportunities
- Provide training and learning opportunities to set up community engagement and accountability strategies mainstreamed in all actions
- Improve anticipatory and early action planning and implementation, in order to react in a timely manner to the possible impact of catastrophic events
- Strengthen local preparedness and response capacities, and promote proper coordination with local civil protection structures and with national systems
- Integrate an early recovery and community resilience approach from the start of emergency response actions, which will in turn promote linkage with longer-term actions
- Develop content and media coverage that will catalyse social conversations about the National Society's role in responding to, and enabling recovery from, hurricanes in Panama
- Collaborate with state agencies in order to coordinate their responses to disasters and crises
- Implement strategies to advocate for international disaster response laws

Under the global Pilot Programmatic Partnership (PPP) between the IFRC and the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), with implementation support from the IFRC, the National Society will strengthen its collaboration with the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC) at the national level by assessing and contributing to the Panamanian National Response Plan, the update of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy and the activation of the National Disaster Risk Reduction working group. In the Darien area specifically, after advocacy efforts by the National Society with its partners, a coordination mechanism has been

established, in which the Red Cross Society of Panama and the IFRC play an important role. This mechanism requires further strengthening to ensure effective inter-agency coordination and to promote effective civil-military relations, vital in this context.

At the community level, the Red Cross Society of Panama will continue coordinating with local actors and authorities to collaborate on the monitoring of hazards, disseminating warnings and contributing to the establishment of community Early Warning Systems in the Darien area and beyond. Two new Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) analyses will be conducted targeting communities that are commonly affected by droughts and other types of hazard. Community brigades will be established, supported and trained. Based on the VCA results collected during the inception phase, the National Society will finance community microprojects aimed at strengthening the livelihoods of the people of La Peñita and Bajo Chiquito (Darien area).

Health and wellbeing

Medical care in Panama is divided into two large systems, the Ministry of Health and the Social Security Fund, which function in parallel, both administratively divided into 14 health regions. Ninety percent of the population has access to health services from at least one of the two public institutions. Panama has a national average of 29.2 physicians and nurses per 10,000 inhabitants, however that ratio is less in rural areas and comarcas.

State spending on health for 2019 was 7.6 per cent of GDP and private health spending was 33.8 per cent, as many people rely on the private sector for healthcare. There are challenges to the health system, including scarce health infrastructure (personnel, access to medicines, technology), and economic, geographic and cultural barriers, that result in poor health outcomes for the indigenous and rural population.

In 2020, the infant mortality rate had a significant decrease of 3.6 per cent, compared to 2019. However, maternal deaths in 2020 doubled compared to 2019.

Non-communicable diseases constitute the number one cause of death in Panama, primarily cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks, arterial hypertension and strokes (26 per cent); cancer (14 per cent), chronic respiratory diseases (4 per cent), and diabetes (7 per cent).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had diverse and compounded negative impacts on people in Central America. The crisis contributed to a deterioration in

people's health conditions, including those not related to COVID-19, as public systems were overwhelmed by the pandemic. The pandemic hindered access to basic services, including education, as school classes for a whole year were suspended as part of the governments' containment measures. It has also had a major impact on family income and has even affected the situation of rights protection. These combined impacts resulted in a deterioration of mental health, especially in children, adolescents and women, and in an increase on gender-based violence risks, with victims of violence being forced to stay in confinement with their aggressors.

Main actions and areas of support

In its auxiliary role to the Government, the Red Cross Society of Panama provides key support through pre-hospital services and first aid, and has played an important and active role in supporting the Ministry of Health in the response to and prevention of COVID-19. The National Society has been very much involved in the Ministry of Health's process to immunize against COVID-19. In spite of all of these interventions, the National Society lacks a clear health strategy.

The main focus of the IFRC network is aimed at improving, promoting and increasing access to health services and disease prevention at community level, with comprehensive community health programmes directed towards the most vulnerable and remote populations. Efforts have been channelled into increasing capacity for health services, and the improvement of coordination with public health systems.

The IFRC network will support the Red Cross Society of Panama to:

- Develop its capacities, in terms of knowledge and health information management for evidence-based strategies, staff and volunteer training, and organizational development
- Develop its position on relevant health policy-making spaces, and its role as an auxiliary to the Ministry of Health
- Improve the social, institutional and financial viability and sustainability of its health programmes and departments, including blood donor recruitment plans, and improve dissemination of service information
- Strengthen community-based health programmes to improve access to affordable, quality, needs-appropriate and comprehensive health services, including improved referral pathways

- Strengthen community-based health programmes to promote disease prevention and care, through information, education and risk communication strategies and through the provision of care services including water, sanitation and hygiene, maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, food and nutrition, mental health and psychosocial support services, and protection, gender and inclusion
- Develop emergency health preparedness, response and recovery actions to ensure timely access to health care services during emergencies
- Increase its capacities to prepare and respond to epidemics, including the setting up of community-based epidemiological surveillance systems, in coordination with health systems, and the development of standard operating procedures
- Support the development and standardization of its mental health and psychosocial support services

Under the global Pilot Programmatic Partnership, the Red Cross Society of Panama will work on developing an integral and comprehensive health strategy aimed at defining the areas of action, objectives, and approaches under which the National Society will function and respond to health needs including epidemic and pandemic response, either through programmes or emergency operations. This document will be developed through year one and will provide the basis for the potential actions under this pillar to be included in years two and/or three. Even though the National Society will be defining its health strategy, it has already identified a crucial need to increase volunteers' capacities on vector control. A first training for volunteers will be conducted so volunteers are better prepared to take actions at the community level to prevent and respond to outbreaks.

The National Society will develop and promote an educational campaign in schools that targets children in the Darien area and other communities (based on analysis) to promote behavioural change. In addition, they will continue supporting the water system installed in La Peñita through the population movement emergency operation, which aims to supply water to the community and people on the move. Once the community ceased to be a host community, the Red Cross Society of Panama supported the creation of a community committee aimed at managing the water system, however, the committee continues to face different challenges and requests support from the Red Cross Society of Panama to adequately ensure the sustainability of its water system. Hence, the Red Cross Society of Panama

will continue assisting the community committee and will provide technical advice on water management. In addition, the National Society will advocate with the Ministry of Health to ensure the regulation of the committee, to guarantee sustainability.

Migration and displacement

Due to its geographical position, Panama is a natural pathway of migratory flow. People from more than 45 countries cross its borders daily. Migratory flows in Panama are increasing, with significant and unpredictable changes and daily arrivals of up to 1,000 people. Transit routes tend to be dynamic in a rapidly changing context. The month of June marked the highest irregular migratory flows in 2022, entering Panama through the Darien Gap bordering Colombia, with a total of 31,055 people, of which 4,165 (13 per cent) were children and adolescents. Darien represents a complex context in which population movement collides with indigenous communities living in vulnerability with little access to services. By the end of August 2022, over 100,00 migrants had entered through the Darien Gap, compared to 70,000 in the same period in 2021, reflecting an increase of 69 per cent. As in 2021, the trend of transiting through Panama to follow the migratory route to the north of the continent continues, and very few people submit applications for refugee status in the country.

Main actions and areas of support

The National Society is part of the IFRC's three-year Global Route-Based Migration Programme, which aims to improve the safety and dignity of people on the move along deadly and dangerous land and sea-based migration routes. The programme aims to support 4.7 million people annually across the world who are either on the move or living in host communities. It will do so through three operational pillars: (1) improving access to assistance and protection, including through humanitarian service points; (2) strengthening National Society capacities; and (3) local to global humanitarian diplomacy.

As a result of its auxiliary role and the close collaboration with the Ministry of Security through SENAFRONT, the Red Cross Society of Panama enjoys access to the Migration Reception Stations (MRS) in Darien and provides different humanitarian services through its humanitarian service points in collaboration with various partners in addition to the IFRC.

Over the last three years the Red Cross Society of Panama has been working with populations in transit in Darien through the IFRC regional Emergency Appeal on population movement and has significantly strengthened

its capacities in migration and displacement. The Red Cross Society of Panama's migration programme has grown considerably, increasing its services and scope, while also demanding a lot of resources, forcing a rapid increase of its capacities. In line with its long-term objectives, the Red Cross Society of Panama has been working on a programmatic vision for its humanitarian assistance to people on the move, including the update of its Migration Strategy. The National Society now has an approved migration policy, which lays the groundwork for working with migrants. The migration action of the National Society has increased tremendously over the past years as the needs are high, but this also demands an increase of capacities to manage and adapt a programme that will aim to assist the differentiated and fluctuating needs of the most vulnerable in a constantly evolving context.

The IFRC network will support the Red Cross Society of Panama to:

- Roll out its migration strategy, fostering regional coordination to address the cross-border migration phenomena in Central America
- Build its capacities by developing tools and training, and providing technical support, including the development and proper maintenance of national and regional information management systems for migratory flows
- Enable it to establish and expand the range of services available at humanitarian services points in key locations along migratory routes, to support migrants' access to comprehensive needs-appropriate assistance
- Ensure that assistance and protection services are provided and promoted through engagement with local and national authorities, host communities and affected people, as well as with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), other organizations and donors
- Promote the use of discrimination-free culturally appropriate information that builds on the National Society's assistance and protection services, promotes voluntary access to comprehensive services, and ensures migrants receive proper information on their legal rights

- Provide global, regional and local analysis on current and emerging trends, anticipating population movement when possible, in order to support the National Society's information-based programming
- Conduct humanitarian diplomacy with national and international actors regarding migration and host community interventions, based on evidence

Under the global Pilot Programmatic Partnership, the Red Cross Society of Panama will strategically strengthen its capacity to ensure an effective and sustained response to this crisis. Thus, more technical capacities on migration and other relevant thematic areas will be built among its volunteer base, while also provision of psychological support to volunteers will be ensured for coping with stress and reducing staff/volunteers burn out. Likewise, an organizational restructuring process will also be supported to ensure that capacities are in place to manage such a complex programme and guarantee its sustainability. Coordination and the development of some specific protocols will be also promoted as well as efforts to conduct comprehensive and systematic context and entry point analysis. Based on its constant exercises of scenario-based planning and contingency planning for population movement crises, this initiative is intended to strengthen the Red Cross Society of Panama's current efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs of people on the move in Panama, especially in Darien area.

Values, power and inclusion

Four out of 10 children in Panama do not have access to pre-school education, and three out of five do not have access to secondary school. Seven out of 10 students do not achieve basic competencies (PISA 2018 test). A study by the Ministry of Labour and Labour Development and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2017 concluded that 17.2 per cent of adolescents and young people in Panama were neither studying nor working.

Panama has a gender gap of 74.3 per cent, ranking 40th in the gender gap ranking, which measures inequality in participation in the economy and the skilled labour market, in politics, in access to education and in life expectancy.

Central America continues to be considered highly violent, and Panama is no exception. For 2019, various government institutions reported a homicide rate of 11 per 100,000 inhabitants, a domestic violence rate of nearly 40 per 10,000 inhabitants, and a sexual violence rate of 15 per 10,000 inhabitants. Although

there has been some reduction in crimes affecting life and property, organized crime and gangs, including human trafficking organizations and other non-state armed groups, are still a major concern for many people. Opportunities to break out of these violent environments are few, because of high levels of structural inequality. These circumstances hinder equitable access to basic services and livelihoods that would allow for a standard of living above that of survival.

These compounded risk and vulnerability factors have a disproportionate impact on women, children, the LGBTI+ community and people living with disabilities, and are not addressed by the state. Vulnerable groups suffer not only differential impacts of compounded crises, but they face additional barriers to access adequate assistance and protection mechanisms. Gender inequalities are aggravated in rural communities, partly due to the traditions of indigenous populations, where inequalities are established at the moment of birth. This translates into limited access to basic services, resources, economic opportunities and livelihoods, as well as high vulnerability to violence, especially sexual and gender-based violence. There continues to be a gender gap in organizational and political participation.

Main actions and areas of support

The IFRC network will support the Red Cross Society of Panama to:

- Develop information, education and communication strategies to raise awareness on rights, protection, gender and inclusion values
- Fight against social barriers to equal access to information, assistance and protection services
- Increase institutional capacities for social inclusion and gender, supporting the development of protection, gender and inclusion policies and operational protocols, monitoring and reporting tools, and training for staff and volunteers
- Improve decision-making processes aimed at promoting inclusion, diversity and equal participation both within the National Society, among their volunteers and in the communities in which they serveDevelop operational and referral protocols addressing the specific inclusion, protection and assistance needs of women, children, the LGBTI+ community and people living with disabilities
- Develop community engagement and accountability policies and plans that use performance indicators to monitor community satisfaction within protection, gender and inclusion activities and programmes

Enabling local action

The Red Cross Society of Panama is committed to pursue its institutional strengthening, and has carried out the self-assessment part of the IFRC's Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification ([OCAC](#)) process in 2016 and 2020. The self-assessment part of the OCAC process is intended to capture the strengths and weaknesses of National Societies as a whole in relation to a wide range of organizational capacities. The Red Cross Society of Panama is also committed to the Preparedness for Effective Response ([PER](#)) process, and is at the action and accountability phase. The PER approach is a continuous and flexible process that enables National Societies to assess, measure and analyse the strengths and gaps of its preparedness and response mechanism, and ultimately take necessary action to improve it.

The IFRC network is committed to support the National Society in its development, according to its priorities.

Engaged

- Prepare, maintain and update advocacy strategies that promote the humanitarian diplomacy capacities of the National Society, and enable it to maximize its privileged position as an auxiliary to the authorities
- Support the generation and consolidation of alliances, partnerships and inter-institutional coordination outside the IFRC network, with government institutions, humanitarian-relevant actors and civil society organizations, academia, social influencers, media and alternative distribution platforms
- Promote the innovation of structures, processes and competencies to develop and implement a communications incubator and accelerator for the National Society to create, test and run innovative formats and strategies that increase their impact and build public trust and understanding of their roles

- Provide technical support in the development of business continuity plans to respond efficiently when services and functions are affected by crises and disasters
- Strengthen institutional capacities on information management, with a focus on improving anticipation to high-impact events, not only climate and non-weather-related but also including large population movements
- Support the National Society to increase technological capabilities and digitalization for services at headquarters and branch offices including data collection, information management and planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting
- Review and update the accounting and administrative systems, to be extended within the branch network to improve financial controls and reporting to authorities
- Develop and implement a strategy on proactive and reactive communication to mitigate the risk of fraud and corruption
- Standardize and apply accountability mechanisms internally and externally to the National Society through the community engagement and accountability methodology
- Strengthen volunteer programmes by promoting peer learning, setting up motivational and benefit plans for volunteers, and implementing institutional training curricula to ensure meaningful, timely and relevant participation of volunteers

Accountable

- Develop a resource mobilization strategy based on peer-to-peer learning and good practices exchange, that builds on improved capacities through technical assistance and training on financial sustainability, proposal development, outreach and donor relations
- Support in the identification and generation of new funding sources through innovative sustainability initiatives
- Support the implementation of quality management systems, incorporating a service user approach
- Promote volunteer recruitment programmes, mainstreaming a gender and inclusion approach to ensure the incorporation of diverse profiles, paying special attention to the management of youth volunteers
- Develop and implement the operational internal security strategy, reviewing communication mechanisms and flows related to security incidents, and the capacity of the security liaison network in terms of recruitment, awareness raising, equipment and training

Trusted

- Provide technical support for the development of monitoring systems for programmes and projects, including information management in emergency operations through the development of information tools, training and technical support
- Ensure all of the IFRC network present in the country adheres to the framework for joint planning and priority setting, using the common action strategy as the basis for unified country planning

THE IFRC NETWORK

The IFRC

The IFRC supports the Red Cross Society of Panama through its Central America Country Cluster Delegation, based in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and the IFRC Americas regional office, based in Panama. The IFRC operates with an extended team of specialists in different areas in all Central American countries. This enables close support, coordination and constant communication with the National Societies of Central America and the participating National Societies that support them. The IFRC support centres on strategic and operational

coordination, National Society development, and humanitarian diplomacy. It also supports accountability as a cross-cutting theme. The IFRC annual programme for Panama is aligned with IFRC's Strategy 2030 and includes integral National Society Development support, as well as the sectorial support in disaster risk management, health, WASH, migration and displacement, cash and voucher assistance, and community engagement and accountability.

In recent years, the IFRC has supported the Red Cross Society of Panama through a number of Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) and Emergency Appeal [operations](#) in relation to population movement, floods, civil unrest, hurricanes, and disease outbreaks. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IFRC, through its [global Emergency Appeal](#), has supported the National Society in its COVID-19 response.

IFRC membership coordination

The IFRC coordination involves working with member National Societies to assess the humanitarian context, humanitarian situations and needs; agreeing on common priorities; co-developing common strategies to address issues such as obtaining greater humanitarian access, acceptance and space; mobilizing funding and other resources; clarifying consistent public messaging; and monitoring progress. This also means ensuring that strategies and programmes in support of people in need incorporate clarity of humanitarian action, development assistance, and efforts to reinforce the auxiliary role of National Societies in their respective countries.

The Red Cross Society of Panama leads its partnerships with sister National Societies. The combined experience, technical capacities and field knowledge within the IFRC network constitute a solid basis for achieving the expected outcomes in-country, in terms of disasters and crises (both man-made and caused by natural hazards), primary health care, the prevention and response to epidemics (COVID-19 and others), longer-term

resilience building programmes including livelihoods and protection, and responding to unmet humanitarian and protection needs of migrants and displaced people.

The National Society is part of the global [Pilot Programmatic Partnership](#) between DG ECHO and the IFRC, benefitting from the support of EU National Societies and the IFRC for the implementation of activities in the areas of disaster risk management, epidemic and pandemic preparedness and response, humanitarian assistance and protection for people on the move, cash and voucher assistance, and risk communication, community engagement and accountability. The partnership meets the realities of extended crises with longer-term predictable funding, facilitating actions and processes with the potential for greater, longer-term impact. It leverages the IFRC's global network and unique access to people and communities, and it helps to fulfil the ambitions of the European Union as the world's biggest international donor for humanitarian assistance.

The following participating National Societies support the Panama Red Cross Society: German Red Cross, Italian Red Cross and Spanish Red Cross.

The **Italian Red Cross** supports the Panama Red Cross Society with technical accompaniment and financing of its culture of peace and non-violence programme.

The **Spanish Red Cross** works with the National Society on migration and provides technical support.

Movement coordination

The IFRC leads regular coordination meetings between the different International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement actors, including participating National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), through established national and regional mechanisms. It also coordinates humanitarian assistance during emergency responses. This is carried out in line with the Strengthening Movement Coordination

and Cooperation (SMCC) principles, and the newly adopted [Seville Agreement 2.0](#).

The ICRC contributes the National Society's work in protection, including minimum standards, restoring family links, self-care messages for migrants, health and first aid, and support in humanitarian diplomacy.

Coordination with other actors

The Red Cross Society of Panama works in close collaboration with local and national authorities and other humanitarian organizations for a coordinated response. It is a member of the national civil protection system,

takes part in the National Operations Centre during emergencies, and coordinates with its network of branches in response to emergencies. Local and departmental government authorities are actively involved in

all operations undertaken by the National Society to ensure it complements and works in alignment with public policies and response plans in emergencies.

The National Society plays a key role as auxiliary to the public health system in the areas of primary health, outreach to vulnerable communities and pre-hospital care. During operations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Society coordinated with the Ministry of Health to implement and follow up on prevention measures. The emergency operation centres that were leading the response – along with government departments, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and World Health Organization (WHO) – were assisted by the IFRC in making recommendations to ensure an appropriate response and coordinate actions. The National Society held regular technical coordination meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Health, WHO and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) at the national level.

The situation of migrants and displaced people in the region has become an increasingly challenging priority for government authorities and the organizations that make up the Humanitarian Country Team. The cross-border phenomenon of migration and displacement requires coordination both within and between countries to maintain the humanitarian chain of assistance that delivers urgent protection services to

migrants, people in transit, returnees and displaced persons. The National Society regularly coordinates with the state, including the National Civil Protection System, National Border Service (SENAFRONT), National Migration Service, National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Family Affairs, and the Ministry of Health. The state leads a large part of the humanitarian response through SENAFRONT. The Red Cross Society of Panama also holds weekly inter-agency coordination meetings with humanitarian actors in Darien and Chiriqui, such as the United Nations's International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other humanitarian organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Doctors of the World and Save the Children.

The IFRC participates in national and regional coordination spaces with external partners, to stay informed about the humanitarian context and contribute to the IFRC network's perspective and work. The IFRC also provides support to the National Society for better partnerships with international, regional and national organizations, such as the Gorgas Institute, Médecins Sans Frontières, the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC), and other humanitarian actors.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [IFRC Global Plan and Country Plans](#)
- [Subscribe for updates](#)
- [Donor response](#) on IFRC website
- [Live Disaster Response Emergency Fund \(DREF\)](#) data
- Operational information: [IFRC GO platform](#)
- National Society data: [IFRC Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System](#)



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with **192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** and around **14 million volunteers**. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

Contact Information

Nelson Aly Rodriguez

Head of Delegation
IFRC Country Cluster Delegation for
Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala,
Honduras & Panama, based in
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
T +504 99860160
nelson.alyrodriguez@ifrc.org

Monica Portilla

Head of Strategic Engagement
& Partnerships
IFRC Regional Office for Americas,
Panama
T +502 586 57619
monica.portilla@ifrc.org

Red Cross Society of Panama

W www.cruzroja.org.pa
