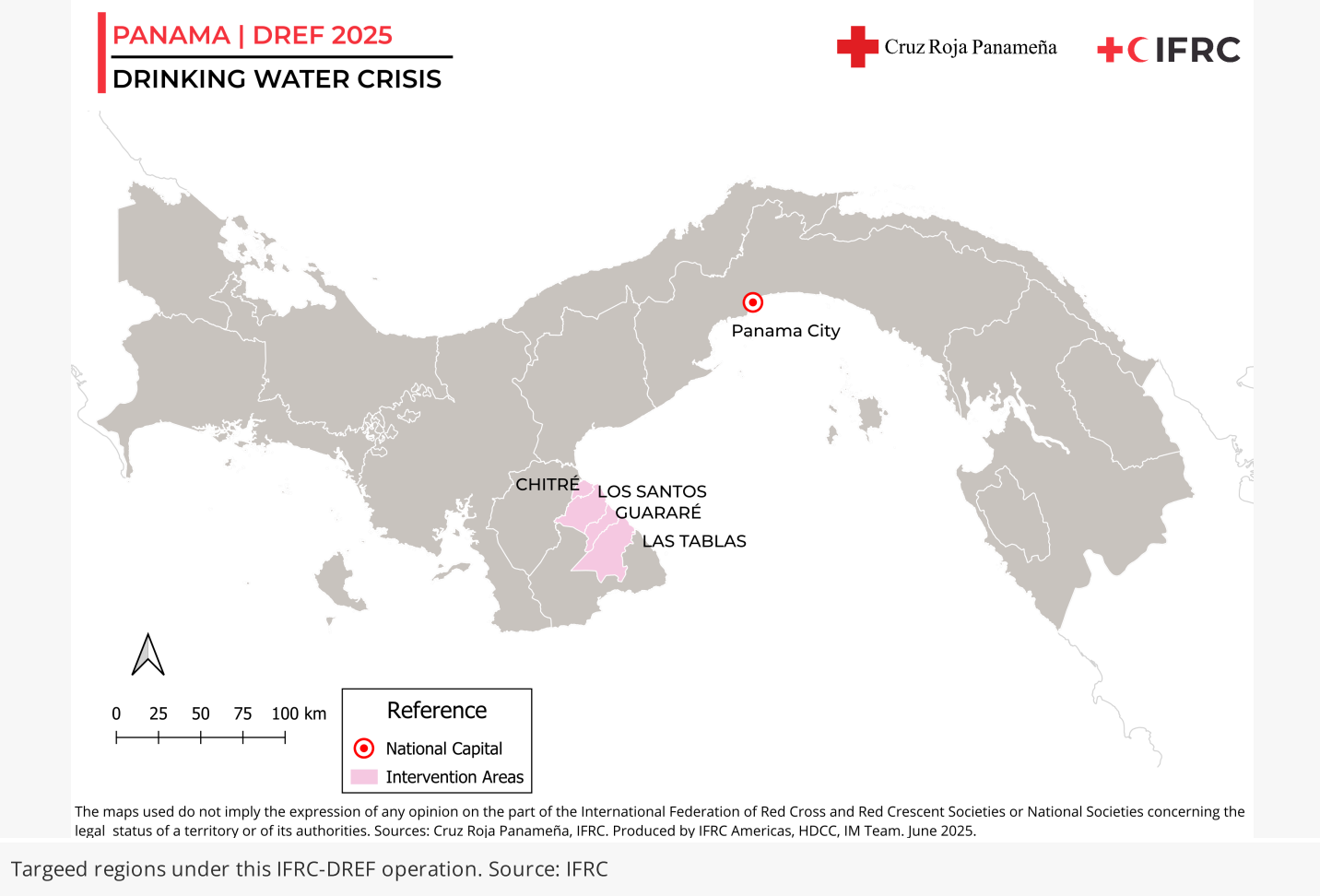




Jerrycan distribution and promotion of safe water points, July 2025. RCSP

Appeal: <b>MDRPA021</b>	Total DREF Allocation: <b>CHF 349,720</b>	Crisis Category: <b>Yellow</b>	Hazard: <b>Biological Emergency</b>
Glide Number: <b>-</b>	People at Risk: <b>106,000 people</b>	People Targeted: <b>30,000 people</b>	
Event Onset: <b>Sudden</b>	Operation Start Date: <b>24-06-2025</b>	New Operational End Date: <b>30-11-2025</b>	Total Operating Timeframe: <b>5 months</b>
Reporting Timeframe Start Date: <b>24-06-2025</b>		Reporting Timeframe End Date: <b>15-08-2025</b>	
Additional Allocation Requested: <b>0</b>		Targeted Regions: <b>Los Santos, Herrera</b>	

# Description of the Event



## Date of event

10-06-2025

## What happened, where and when?

Since the end of May 2025, the La Villa River — the main water source for the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos — has been facing a critical situation due to severe contamination. A technical operation carried out by the Ministry of Environment (MiAmbiente) between 27 May and 6 June identified at least 23 critical contamination points along the watersheds of the La Villa and Estibaná rivers.

The main sources of pollution include pig farms, industrial discharges, and a municipal landfill in the district of Macaracas. These have contributed to the presence of animal fecal matter, sediments, and other solid waste in the river, significantly deteriorating water quality (1).

During the inspection — which covered 20 km of the La Villa River and 19 km of the Estibaná River — a substantial decline in both physical and biological water parameters was documented, posing a direct threat to public health and the well-being of local communities (2). In response to this environmental emergency, the National Government declared a state of emergency on June 10, through Resolution No. 69-25, covering both provinces. This measure led to the temporary suspension of water treatment plant operations due to high levels of turbidity and organic matter in the river (3).

The most affected districts are Chitré, Los Santos, Las Tablas, and Guararé, where thousands of people rely directly on the La Villa River for access to drinking water. The situation has generated growing concern among the population, which is now facing water supply restrictions and increased health risks.

Authorities continue to closely monitor the situation, and additional measures are expected to be announced in the coming weeks, between September and November 2025, to mitigate the impacts and gradually restore water quality in the region. In the meantime, the Red Cross Society of Panama, in its auxiliary role to public authorities, continues to play a critical role in supporting affected communities



through the implementation of health and hygiene promotion activities, the distribution of safe water, and community engagement actions. These ongoing interventions remain essential to reducing health risks and ensuring that the most vulnerable populations maintain access to safe water until public systems are fully rehabilitated and operational.



Distribution of jerrycans for safe water storage. July 2025. Source: RCSP



Safe water distribution and key messaging. July 2025. Source: RCSP



Water quality testing for safe consumption. June 2025. Source: RCSP

## Scope and Scale

The water crisis affecting Panama's Azuero region continues to deepen following the contamination of the La Villa River — the primary source of drinking water for the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos. Elevated levels of turbidity and organic pollutants have forced the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage Systems (IDAA) to suspend operations at four key water treatment plants: La Villa, Macaracas, Llano de Piedra, and Chitré.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), an estimated 106,000 people depend on the La Villa River for their drinking water. The river basin spans approximately 1,446 km<sup>2</sup>, underscoring the wide geographic impact of the crisis. Eleven communities have been affected, with the most severely impacted areas including Chitré, Las Tablas, Guararé, La Villa de Los Santos, Macaracas, and several rural zones with limited infrastructure and high vulnerability levels.

In coordination with national authorities, the Panamanian Red Cross is planning to assist 30,000 people through this DREF operation. This target population includes communities currently not covered by the government response, prioritizing remote and underserved areas to ensure a complementary, inclusive, and equitable humanitarian intervention.

The Ministry of Health (MINS) has confirmed the presence of nematodes—hazardous microorganisms typically found in untreated water—along with significant levels of organic contamination from domestic wastewater, agricultural runoff, and leachates from the municipal landfill in Macaracas. These contaminants have been further spread by recent rainfall events, compounding the crisis.

As a result, the situation has escalated into a combined health, environmental, and social emergency. The water from the La Villa River is no longer safe for human consumption, contaminated with animal fecal matter, sediments, nematodes, and other biological and chemical pollutants. The forced closure of treatment plants has disrupted access to potable water for thousands of households and institutions.

The deterioration of water quality presents serious public health risks, including the spread of gastrointestinal diseases, parasitic infections, and other waterborne illnesses. Additionally, the cost and complexity of water treatment have increased considerably, requiring more advanced purification technologies and the implementation of robust public communication strategies.

Agricultural livelihoods are also under threat, as the contaminated water impacts irrigation systems, potentially disrupting food production and worsening local food security in already vulnerable communities.

As a preventive public health measure, the Ministry of Education (MEDUCA) suspended in-person classes in all public and private schools across the districts of Los Santos, Guararé, and Las Tablas as of 9 June. Classes have been shifted to virtual modalities until the safe water supply is restored (4).

Community life has also been disrupted. Cultural events such as the traditional Mañanita Sanjuanera—organized annually by the San Juan Bautista parish in Chitré—have been canceled due to water shortages.

This crisis is not only jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of tens of thousands but also undermining public confidence in institutional capacity to ensure access to safe and reliable water services.

## Source Information

Source Name	Source Link
1. National Government – Cabinet Council Declares State of Emergency in Herrera and Los Santos	<a href="https://www.presidencia.gob.pa/publicacion/consejo-de-gabinete-declara-estado-de-emergencia-en-herrera-y-los-santos">https://www.presidencia.gob.pa/publicacion/consejo-de-gabinete-declara-estado-de-emergencia-en-herrera-y-los-santos</a>
2. TVN – In-person classes suspended in three districts of Los Santos due to water crisis	<a href="https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/suspenden-clases-presenciales-tres-distritos-los-santos-crisis-del-agua_1_2193146.html">https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/suspenden-clases-presenciales-tres-distritos-los-santos-crisis-del-agua_1_2193146.html</a>
3. La Estrella de Panamá – Feces and Agrochemicals in the La Villa River	<a href="https://www.laestrella.com.pa/panama/heces-y-agroquimicos-en-rio-la-villa-autoridades-responden-en-azuero-D113396731">https://www.laestrella.com.pa/panama/heces-y-agroquimicos-en-rio-la-villa-autoridades-responden-en-azuero-D113396731</a>
4. TVN – Water Crisis in Azuero	<a href="https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/falta-de-agua-azuero-turbiedad-rio-la-villa-río-estibana-plantas-potabilizadoras-idaan_1_2193075.html">https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/falta-de-agua-azuero-turbiedad-rio-la-villa-río-estibana-plantas-potabilizadoras-idaan_1_2193075.html</a>

## Summary of Changes

Are you changing the timeframe of the operation	Yes
Are you changing the operational strategy	No
Are you changing the target population of the operation	No
Are you changing the geographical location	No
Are you making changes to the budget	No
Are you requesting an additional allocation?	No

### Please explain the summary of changes and justification:

Through Operational Update No. 1, the Red Cross Society of Panama is requesting a two-month no-cost extension, proposing a new end date of 30 November 2025. This request is based on the fact that national authorities are still in the process of defining timelines for the rehabilitation of the water treatment plant and the affected water distribution networks; however, this process does not yet have a clear schedule or implementation on the ground. In this context, and in coordination with national authorities, the National Society considers it necessary to continue ensuring access to safe water for affected people, particularly in the most exposed communities.

The extension of the operational period will allow key activities to continue, focused on promoting safe water, sanitation, and hygiene practices through community fairs and household visits. These interventions are designed to ensure direct access to critical information, promote active community participation, and guarantee that messages reach both collective and household levels—thus strengthening community resilience and encouraging sustainable behaviors.

The total allocated budget remains unchanged. However, adjustments within existing budget lines are foreseen to allow for flexible response to emerging needs during the extension period.

## IFRC Network Actions Related To The Current Event

<b>Secretariat</b>	The Red Cross Society of Panama is receiving ongoing technical support from the IFRC Central America Country Cluster Delegation (CCD) to strengthen its response to the evolving emergency. This collaboration has been instrumental in guiding the strategic and operational aspects of the intervention. In addition, the Regional Logistics Unit (RLU), based in Panama, has been mobilized to manage specific procurements with longer lead times, ensuring the timely availability and delivery of essential supplies. The National Society anticipates continued technical and administrative support from the
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	IFRC Central America CCD throughout the implementation and eventual closure of this operation, ensuring full compliance with the operational plan and IFRC standards.
Participating National Societies	The Spanish Red Cross, in coordination with the Red Cross Society of Panama, issued a situation report to raise awareness and identify potential areas of support at the national level in response to the emergency.

## ICRC Actions Related To The Current Event

The Red Cross Society of Panama does not foresee any specific support from the ICRC for this operation.

## Other Actors Actions Related To The Current Event

Government has requested international assistance	No
National authorities	<p>Panama’s national authorities have been actively implementing a range of actions to address the crisis resulting from the contamination of the La Villa River. The National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage (IDAAN) suspended operations at the Roberto Reyna water treatment plant in Herrera and the Rufina Alfaro plant in Los Santos after detecting anomalies in the raw water extracted from the river.</p> <p>As part of the immediate response, authorities coordinated the distribution of more than 1,100,000 gallons of water across the affected region. This has been carried out using 20 water tankers, 45 wells, and 143 vehicles, prioritizing essential services such as hospitals and health centers. In addition, 466,800 bottles of water were delivered in the province of Los Santos and 541,644 in Herrera.</p> <p>The Ministry of Environment (MiAMBIENTE) increased monitoring efforts by conducting hydrological measurements at key locations to evaluate river conditions and support water quality assessments. At the judicial level, the Public Prosecutor’s Office launched investigations into possible environmental crimes related to the contamination. Meanwhile, the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC) provided logistical support in distributing bottled water, although this measure is acknowledged as temporary given supply limitations and its environmental impact.</p>
UN or other actors	On 13 June 2025, technical staff from the WASH sector of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) were deployed to the area in coordination with the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC), with the objective of providing technical guidance to stakeholders at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). At the time of issuing this operational update, no other organization has reported actions in the framework of this emergency response.

**Are there major coordination mechanism in place?**

The Red Cross Society of Panama has maintained constant and coordinated communication with national and local authorities to ensure that its actions are aligned with and complementary to the government-led response to the emergency. This coordination has helped to avoid duplication, identify gaps in coverage, and direct humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable communities that are not being reached — or only partially reached — by institutional efforts, thereby strengthening the collective impact of the intervention.



# Needs (Gaps) Identified



## Water, Sanitation And Hygiene

The Red Cross Society of Panama has identified multiple structural and operational gaps in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector at the provincial level, particularly in areas affected by the contamination of the La Villa River. One of the main concerns observed at the community level is the growing perception of distrust toward institutions responsible for water management and oversight, particularly the Ministry of Health (MINSA) and the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage (IDAAN). This perception has been exacerbated by limitations in inter-institutional coordination and the circulation of unverified information, which has contributed to uncertainty about the safety of the water being distributed.

Furthermore, notable differences in risk perception have been identified among communities, seemingly influenced by previous experiences with water-related crises. These perceptions influence community behavior in response to official recommendations and may affect the acceptance of measures implemented during the current emergency.

From a technical-operational perspective, communities report deficiencies in water supply infrastructure, housing conditions that hinder hygienic water storage, and the lack of standardized water distribution, which compromises equity and consistency in access to basic services.

Although the MINSA has not officially reported any epidemiological outbreaks in the current context, it has emphasized that prolonged exposure to non-potable water can trigger the rapid spread of waterborne diseases. Among the most common in the Panamanian context are acute diarrheal diseases, gastroenteritis, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and intestinal parasitosis. These illnesses pose a significant risk, particularly to vulnerable groups such as children, older adults, and individuals with compromised immune systems.



## Protection, Gender And Inclusion

In the affected provinces, women—particularly those heading single-parent households—and groups in situations of vulnerability, such as girls, boys, adolescents, persons with disabilities, and older adults, face differentiated impacts in the context of the current emergency. Existing data reveal persistent gender inequalities in Panama, with a 72.4% gap between men and women even under non-emergency conditions. These disparities are further reflected in barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance, including difficulty collecting water for individuals unable to carry heavy loads, limited mobility among persons with physical disabilities, and lack of accessible information adapted to different needs (e.g. visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments).



## Community Engagement And Accountability

The Red Cross Society of Panama has identified several community-level needs related to communication, trust, and access to information. A primary concern reported by community members is the lack of trust in the safety of the water being generated and distributed, which is not perceived as suitable for human consumption. This perception has led to increased financial burdens for many households, who are compelled to seek alternative sources of water. In addition, some individuals have reported feeling unheard and insufficiently informed about where and how to access safe water for their homes.

## Any identified gaps/limitations in the assessment

The Red Cross Society of Panama has not encountered any significant limitations or restrictions in accessing data and information related to the emergency, as much of this information is publicly available. Additionally, the National Society local branches have established coordination mechanisms with local authorities, which has facilitated the exchange of information and timely access to relevant data for operational planning and response.



# Operational Strategy

## Overall objective of the operation

The Red Cross Society of Panama will contribute to the national response to the contamination of the La Villa River by addressing the most immediate needs of the affected population through interventions in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI), and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA). The operation targets 6,000 families (approximately 30,000 people) in the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos, over a period of three months.

## Operation strategy rationale

The strategy has been designed to address the immediate needs arising from the contamination of the La Villa River through a coordinated, efficient, and people-centered response. The implementation is structured around five complementary lines of action, aligned with the operational capacity and territorial presence of the Red Cross Society of Panama.

### 1. Interinstitutional and Territorial Coordination

The operation is being implemented in close coordination with Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) at both national and provincial levels, ensuring alignment with public policies and avoiding duplication of efforts. At the territorial level, the local branches of the Panamanian Red Cross in Chitré, La Villa, and Las Tablas have been activated and serve as focal points for identifying priority needs, organizing activities, distributing supplies, and conducting community follow-up. This coordination facilitates joint action between the National Society and government institutions such as the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC), the Ministry of Health (MINSA), the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage (IDAAN), and local authorities.

### 2. Community Training

A capacity-building component will be implemented at two levels:

**Community Volunteers:** Volunteers will be trained to act as multipliers of key messages. Training will focus on hygiene promotion, safe water use, and prevention of waterborne diseases to strengthen community resilience.

**General Population:** Informative and demonstrative sessions will be conducted in communities to promote safe water conservation and hygiene practices. These sessions will deliver key messages on responsible water use and the prevention of acute diarrheal diseases. Activities will be carried out through household visits, allowing the information to be shared directly with each family and adapted to their specific context and reality. This personalized approach fosters trust with community members and creates a safe space for dialogue, enabling individuals to clarify doubts and engage more actively. It also ensures the inclusion of groups that are often left behind in collective activities, such as older adults, caregiving women, and families with limited mobility.

### 3. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Interventions

To ensure immediate and safe access to drinking water, a comprehensive technical intervention will be implemented within the WASH sector. This strategy includes the installation of water storage tanks equipped with elevated collection points to allow for the hygienic filling of household containers, as well as the distribution of two jerrycans per household to promote safe water storage at home. Water will be supplied via tanker trucks to refill the tanks, serving as logistical support to national institutions responsible for water services. A logistics plan has been designed to accommodate both rural and urban contexts in the interior provinces, ensuring secure and efficient delivery routes from MINSA-approved wells to the affected communities.

Additionally, community fairs will be organized to raise awareness about the importance of protecting shared water resources and to foster community engagement. These fairs will also serve as platforms for inter-institutional coordination and the dissemination of key information, strengthening social cohesion and reinforcing public health messages.

### 4. Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

The CEA approach will be integrated through the Red Cross Society of Panama standardized institutional mechanism, ensuring that affected people are informed, actively participate in decision-making, and can provide feedback. This component includes:

Monitoring community satisfaction regarding the quality, quantity, and accessibility of water provided.

Mass community information campaigns to increase visibility, build trust, and enhance transparency around the operation.



Accessible feedback channels—such as the MATILDE WhatsApp line, suggestion boxes, and surveys—allowing people to express concerns, questions, or complaints and enabling the adaptation of interventions based on community needs.

## 5. Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI)

A cross-cutting PGI approach will be applied to ensure dignity, safety, and equity for all individuals, with particular attention to people in vulnerable situations. Specific actions include:

Installation of inclusive and informative signage at water distribution points, accessible to people with diverse needs.

Inclusive design of temporary infrastructure, such as water tanks, considering the needs of older adults, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women.

Deployment of volunteers to provide personalized assistance to individuals who cannot reach the collection points, ensuring that no one is excluded from access to services.

It is important to highlight that the budget distribution allocates 57% to operational costs and 43% to support costs. This proportion reflects the need to conduct daily water quality monitoring at distribution points—an activity that requires continuous mobilization of technical staff and volunteers in the field. As a result, there is an increase in logistical costs related to transportation, supervision, and technical analysis.

Also, the prioritization of WASH sector, CEA, and PGI cross-cutting approaches by the Red Cross Society of Panama is based on a contextual analysis identifying these areas as those where the National Society can provide the most added value, in line with its humanitarian mandate, technical expertise, and operational capacity. Other sectors, such as health, have not been directly included in the strategy, as they are currently being led by the relevant government authorities—particularly the Ministry of Health (MINSA)—with whom close coordination is maintained to ensure complementarity.

MINSA is currently implementing mental health support activities in the affected communities, including stress management and team-building sessions. In parallel, the Red Cross Society of Panama is carrying out specific Psychosocial Support (PSS) sessions targeted at volunteers actively involved in the emergency response. These sessions are being funded with the National Society's own resources and reflect its institutional commitment to safeguarding the mental health and well-being of its staff and volunteers throughout the operation.

Finally, in light of the closure of this IFRC-DREF operation and recent changes in the rehabilitation timeline of water treatment plants and distribution networks by the authorities, the Red Cross Society of Panama has defined an exit strategy aimed at ensuring an orderly transition, minimizing dependency risks, and sustaining the results achieved.

The key components of the strategy include:

- Operational transition with a community-based approach: The exit will be implemented based on the achievement of operational objectives, with a focus on continued community engagement during the post-emergency phase. Community resilience activities—such as health fairs, household visits, and safe water use promotion sessions—will be reinforced to sustain key practices.

- Strengthening of community engagement mechanisms: Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) channels will be enhanced, including participatory spaces that encourage feedback and maintain community commitment, thereby mitigating the risk of disengagement due to emergency fatigue.

- Inter-institutional coordination for post-operation sustainability: Active coordination will be maintained with national and local authorities, WASH sector actors, and community-based organizations to support the transfer of capacities, resources, and knowledge, ensuring continuity of the processes initiated.

- Risk management and mitigation measures: Identified risks include reduced community participation, continued limited access to safe water, and exposure to extreme weather events. To mitigate these risks, regular monitoring of climatic and epidemiological conditions will be conducted, alongside adaptive operational adjustments as needed.

- Responsible and transparent closure: The operation will conclude in alignment with CEA principles, ensuring that communities understand the scope and limitations of the support provided and have access to information on available follow-up or referral mechanisms, as appropriate.





# Targeting Strategy

## Who will be targeted through this operation?

The Red Cross Society of Panama has been implementing its emergency response in selected communities within the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos, where the primary source of water is the La Villa River.

Based on coordination with the National Emergency Operations Center (COE) and information provided by its local branches, the National Society plans to assist 6,000 families (approximately 30,000 people) through this IFRC-DREF operation. The target population has been prioritized according to criteria such as vulnerability, limited access to basic services, and lack of coverage from governmental entities. This approach aims to ensure a complementary, equitable, and people-centered humanitarian response, focusing on those facing the greatest barriers to accessing safe water.

## Explain the selection criteria for the targeted population

The Red Cross Society of Panama has established a set of technical criteria for identifying and prioritizing the affected population to be assisted through this operation. These criteria may be adjusted during implementation, based on community validation processes, emerging needs, and the evolving nature of the emergency.

The selection criteria include:

- Families directly affected by the disruption of safe water supply.
- Households that have not received humanitarian assistance from the government or other actors.
- Communities located in hard-to-reach areas that face logistical barriers to water distribution.
- Areas with low socioeconomic conditions that limit the capacity for response and recovery.

Presence of groups in vulnerable situation, including:

- Single-parent households
- Older adults
- Pregnant women
- Children under five
- Persons with disabilities

This prioritization approach aims to ensure timely and equitable assistance to those facing the most significant structural barriers to accessing basic services. It also helps channel available resources more effectively toward populations with higher levels of exposure and lower coping capacity during the ongoing emergency.

## Total Targeted Population

Women	14,298	Rural	70%
Girls (under 18)	1,243	Urban	30%
Men	13,445	People with disabilities (estimated)	7%
Boys (under 18)	1,014		
Total targeted population	30,000		

## Risk and Security Considerations (including "management")

Does your National Society have anti-fraud and corruption policy?	Yes
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Does your National Society have prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse policy?	Yes
Does your National Society have child protection/child safeguarding policy?	Yes
Does your National Society have whistleblower protection policy?	Yes
Does your National Society have anti-sexual harassment policy?	Yes

**Please analyse and indicate potential risks for this operation, its root causes and mitigation actions.**

Risk	Mitigation action
Adverse weather conditions (heavy rains, flooding) hindering access to rural communities or delaying supply deliveries.	Design alternative logistics routes and contingency plans that account for adverse weather scenarios. Maintain constant monitoring of weather conditions in coordination with the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC). Utilize all-terrain vehicles and adjust delivery schedules as necessary to ensure operational continuity.
Road closures or civil unrest due to water scarcity or delays in distribution.	Establish ongoing coordination with local authorities, community committees, and security forces to ensure safe access and movement of personnel and vehicles. Strengthen the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach to ensure clear and transparent communication regarding the progress of the operation. Identify and validate alternative access routes to mitigate potential blockades or unforeseen closures.
Misinformation or community resistance affecting the acceptance of the intervention.	Apply the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach from the outset of the operation, ensuring information is clear, timely, and provided in accessible formats. Engage community leaders, local volunteers, and key actors to foster trust, open dialogue, and active participation in the design and implementation of activities.

**Please indicate any security and safety concerns for this operation:**

The implementation of activities in areas affected by the water crisis may increase community tensions, potentially leading to road blockades, protests, or confrontational situations resulting from water scarcity. These scenarios pose safety risks for both staff and volunteers operating in the field.

To mitigate these risks, the Red Cross Society of Panama has been maintaining close coordination with local authorities, community leaders, and security actors to ensure safe access and strengthen community acceptance of the operation. Contingency routes and rapid communication mechanisms have been established to enable timely responses to any emerging security incidents.

All personnel involved in the operation have been equipped with official National Society uniforms and visibility items to enhance their safety and reinforce the legitimacy of the response in high-risk areas. The National Society has consistently applied strict operational security protocols and upheld the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, ensuring a neutral, impartial, and humanitarian approach at all times.

Has the child safeguarding risk analysis assessment been completed?	No
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# Planned Intervention



## Water, Sanitation And Hygiene

**Budget:** CHF 258,374

**Targeted Persons:** 30,140

**Targeted Male:** 0

**Targeted Female:** 0

### Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of households in prioritized communities with safe and regular access to drinking water during the intervention (safe water distribution, jerrycan distribution).	6,000	6,148
Number of people trained (volunteers, government staff, and community members) in safe water management and hygiene practices.	440	146

### Progress Towards Outcome

The Red Cross Society of Panama has made steady progress in implementing its water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions as part of the response to the water crisis caused by the contamination of the La Villa River. A comprehensive needs assessment was carried out in the most affected and prioritized communities, which served as the basis for targeted and evidence-based action. In the communities of La Villa, Chitré, Las Tablas, and Guararé, 21 elevated water storage tanks were installed to ensure safe access to clean water at the community level. Complementing this intervention, a total of 12,296 jerrycans (two per household) were distributed—a figure higher than originally planned, as post-assessment findings revealed a greater number of families in need of safe water storage solutions. During these distributions, informative sessions were conducted to promote hygienic practices for storing water at the household level.

Between June 10 and August 15, 1,943,994 liters of water were delivered through daily refilling of the installed water storage tanks using rented tanker trucks, under a 40-day service contract. Given the continued need, a new procurement request has been initiated to extend this service for an additional 40 days. These water points are monitored on a daily basis, and to support this, water sampling kits have been acquired to ensure ongoing water quality surveillance.

In coordination with the Ministry of Health (MINSa), joint route planning and verification have been carried out to optimize the safe water distribution process, ensuring effective and equitable access in the most affected areas. Daily monitoring of both water quality and distribution points is maintained as part of this effort.

Capacity building has also been a key component of the response: 64 community volunteers have been trained in safe water handling and hygiene promotion, while 82 government officials have received training on safe water management. Additionally, the National Society procured essential tools to support the installation and maintenance of the water systems. However, due to the shared use of the infrastructure, frequent consumption of basic components such as keys, pipes, and plugs has been observed, prompting the need for ongoing replenishment of these supplies.

Looking ahead, the Red Cross Society of Panama has planned a series of community training sessions and informational fairs throughout September and into October. These events aim to reinforce safe water practices, promote hygiene awareness, and foster community engagement in the management and protection of shared water resources.



## Protection, Gender And Inclusion

**Budget:** CHF 24,452

**Targeted Persons:** 400

**Targeted Male:** 0



Targeted Female: 0

## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of people in vulnerable situations (including persons with disabilities, pregnant women, older adults, etc.) who have received assistance to ensure access to safe water.	400	0
Number of volunteers and operational staff updated on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy, who have signed the commitment to compliance.	100	60

## Progress Towards Outcome

The Red Cross Society of Panama has made progress in integrating Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) approach as part of its response to the water crisis caused by the contamination of the La Villa River. Since the beginning of the operation, PGI minimum standards have been effectively incorporated into needs assessments, enabling actions to be tailored to the differentiated risks and vulnerabilities present in the affected communities. A detailed risk analysis focusing on child protection was conducted, taking into account the varying levels of interaction between operational teams and different population groups. This approach ensured that protection measures were adapted to the specific needs and dynamics of each affected group.

To reinforce internal capacity and uphold the integrity of the intervention, targeted training sessions were conducted for active volunteers and staff on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy. These sessions emphasized the applicability of the policy in emergency settings and ensured that all participants understood its importance and implications. As a result, 60 participants signed the policy acceptance form, demonstrating their commitment to ethical standards and community protection. Although this number was lower than initially expected, it reflects the focused training of volunteers directly engaged in the response.

As part of its Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) efforts, the National Society also carried out a participatory assessment with communities and institutions to identify real needs and locate areas with higher concentrations of older adults and other vulnerable groups. Based on this analysis, water storage and distribution systems were installed in alignment with the DAPS (Dignity, Access, Participation, and Safety) standards. Coordination with local authorities, the Ministry of Health (MINSAL), and the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage (IDAA) ensured that these systems were strategically placed to guarantee safe water access for all, eliminating the need for additional emergency water supply assistance.

Key messages tailored to different population groups have been developed and disseminated at water distribution points, ensuring information accessibility. Lighting has been installed near water reservoirs in dark areas to improve safety, and inclusive signage has been placed to ensure that clear, visible, and understandable information is available to everyone affected.



## Community Engagement And Accountability

Budget: CHF 20,725

Targeted Persons: 600

Targeted Male: 0

Targeted Female: 0

## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of pre- and post-distribution surveys conducted to assess community perception and satisfaction regarding the assistance received.	600	517



Number of people reached through information and feedback mechanisms (community meetings, informational materials, feedback boxes, etc.).	600	300
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## Progress Towards Outcome

The Red Cross Society of Panama has made significant progress in implementing actions aimed at strengthening the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach as part of its response to the water crisis caused by the contamination of the La Villa River. Since the beginning of the operation, a rapid context analysis was carried out to understand community structures, local capacities, power dynamics, knowledge, practices, behaviors, and relevant cultural and social values. This exercise enabled the identification of affected individuals or those at greater risk and was complemented by meetings with local authorities, which helped to strengthen key strategic partnerships for the response. Based on this analysis, and through the National Society's institutionalized feedback mechanisms—such as the WhatsApp line, email, and QR code—the most effective communication channels were identified for communities to share their experiences, feedback, and suggestions, fostering a two-way communication process tailored to the local context.

In parallel, 517 baseline surveys were conducted to assess community perceptions of the intervention and the level of acceptance of the activities implemented. Although this number was lower than initially expected due to the limited availability of community members who had other daily responsibilities, the sample was representative and provided valuable insights. The results guided strategic adjustments, including the need to reinforce safe water messages through accessible media such as community radio, the production of informational stickers for water tanks, and the increased presence of volunteers through short micro-training sessions (10 to 15 minutes) at water distribution points, during door-to-door visits, and in community spaces. These sessions have addressed key topics such as chlorine dosage, safe water storage in clean and covered containers, and proper household water management, supported by simple visual materials like infographics to reinforce learning.

Additionally, a training and refresher process on the CEA approach was conducted with the participation of 60 volunteers, emphasizing its cross-cutting importance and practical ways to integrate it into emergency operations. As part of community awareness activities, four community meetings in the format of "community cinema" were organized, reaching approximately 300 people. These sessions served to explain the objectives of the operation, address community concerns, collect feedback, and raise awareness about the importance of protecting water sources. With the requested operational extension, additional community meetings are planned to further expand the reach of key messages and promote greater community ownership.

At the same time, a radio campaign remains active to promote safe practices related to drinking water, hygiene, and community rights. Finally, a follow-up survey is planned for October to assess the population's perception of the actions implemented by the Red Cross Society of Panama and to continue improving the quality, relevance, and inclusiveness of the humanitarian response.



## Secretariat Services

**Budget:** CHF 2,982

**Targeted Persons:** 0

**Targeted Male:** 0

**Targeted Female:** 0

## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of field monitoring visits conducted during the operation.	1	1

## Progress Towards Outcome

As part of the technical support mechanisms provided by the IFRC to the Red Cross Society of Panama, a field monitoring visit was conducted by the Disaster Risk Management Coordinator from the IFRC Central America Country Cluster Delegation. This visit enabled direct observation of the progress made in the operation, identification of good practices, and the provision of technical recommendations to further strengthen implementation.





**Budget:** CHF 43,187

**Targeted Persons:** 100

**Targeted Male:** 0

**Targeted Female:** 0

## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of volunteers and operational staff equipped with visibility kits.	100	60
Number of lessons learned workshops conducted at the end of the operation.	1	0

## Progress Towards Outcome

The Red Cross Society of Panama has made progress in the acquisition and distribution of visibility kits, which include caps and t-shirts bearing the emblem, for 60 active volunteers and staff involved in the emergency response. Additionally, personal protective equipment has been procured to reinforce the safety of all personnel. These measures align with the principle of operational security, ensuring that all participants are easily identifiable in the field and reducing risks associated with misidentification during activities. While the original plan anticipated the active participation of 100 volunteers, a total of 60 have remained consistently engaged throughout the operation. This figure has been used as the reference for both visibility materials and training processes, ensuring a coherent and needs-based approach to resource allocation.

To further strengthen the implementation of the operation, two key professionals were recruited: a Finance Specialist and a WASH Coordinator. These staff members have played a crucial role in ensuring that all supplies and actions are executed in line with the operational plan, as well as in close coordination with local authorities—contributing to both the effectiveness and transparency of the intervention. The planned recruitment of a Water Quality and Supply Monitoring Officer did not materialize, as the open call for applications did not yield candidates who met the required profile. In response, a technical assessment was conducted, and the National Society designated three technical focal points for Water Quality and Supply Monitoring—one for each intervention zone. This decentralized approach has proven to be more efficient and effective, allowing for closer monitoring and faster decision-making within each operational area.

In preparation for the operational closure, the National Society has scheduled a lessons learned workshop for the month of October, which will be supported by the IFRC Central America Country Cluster Delegation Senior PMER (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting) Officer. This activity aims to capture key learnings, strengthen institutional memory, and enhance future emergency response efforts.

## About Support Services

### How many staff and volunteers will be involved in this operation. Briefly describe their role.

For this operation, the Red Cross Society of Panama initially planned the active mobilization of 100 volunteers; however, as the implementation progressed, 60 volunteers remained consistently active and engaged throughout the response. These volunteers were organized across three key operational components: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH); Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI); and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA).

-WASH volunteers supported the installation of elevated water storage tanks, distribution of jerrycans, and community-level monitoring of water quality.

-PGI volunteers contributed to ensuring safe, equitable, and inclusive access to water distribution points by providing tailored support to individuals in vulnerable situations.



-CEA volunteers facilitated pre-distribution surveys, coordinated community meetings, disseminated key messages, and managed the feedback mechanisms. These volunteers, affiliated with the local branches in Chitré, La Villa, and Las Tablas, had previously participated in emergency operations in the region, and their continued involvement has proven essential in maintaining a localized and community-centered approach.

In terms of human resources, two key staff members were successfully recruited to support the technical and administrative management of the operation: a local WASH Coordinator, responsible for overseeing WASH activities and liaising with local authorities, and a Finance Officer, tasked with financial planning, expenditure tracking, and compliance with IFRC financial standards. However, the planned recruitment of a Water Quality and Supply Monitoring Officer could not be finalized, as the applications received did not meet the required technical profile. In response, the National Society conducted a technical assessment and determined that the responsibilities could be more effectively addressed by assigning three dedicated focal points—one for each intervention zone. This adaptation has ensured more localized and timely monitoring of water quality and supply systems, maintaining the operation's technical rigor and alignment with safety standards.

## **Does your volunteer team reflect the gender, age, and cultural diversity of the people you're helping? What gaps exist in your volunteer team's gender, age, or cultural diversity, and how are you addressing them to ensure inclusive and appropriate support?**

The Red Cross Society of Panama has an active volunteer team that reflects the gender, age, and cultural diversity of the communities affected in the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos. For this operation, priority has been given to engaging volunteers from the local branches in Chitré, La Villa, and Las Tablas. These individuals have previous response experience in the area and have received targeted training in key sectors and approaches, including Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI), and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA).

The team is composed of both men and women from diverse age groups, with a focus on ensuring that volunteer profiles are well-suited to address the differentiated needs of the population—particularly in rural settings. However, some gaps remain, particularly regarding the participation of youth, persons with disabilities, and individuals from indigenous communities. These gaps are being addressed through awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives, ensuring that inclusion remains a cross-cutting priority throughout the operation.

## **If there is procurement, will it be done by National Society or IFRC?**

The Red Cross Society of Panama carried out the procurement processes directly, following its internal procedures and with technical support from the IFRC logistics team. The only exception was the procurement of jerrycans, which was managed through the IFRC Regional Logistics Unit to ensure the timely availability of this essential supply.

All procurements were intended for direct distribution to the affected communities and not for replenishment purposes.

Key items procured included water storage tanks, cleaning kits, personal protective equipment (PPE), tools for the installation of temporary infrastructure, signage with accessible messaging, and context-appropriate informational materials to support hygiene promotion and community engagement. Procurement and contracting processes took an average of two to four weeks, ensuring that deliveries aligned with operational needs and community demand.

## **How will this operation be monitored?**

Operation monitoring has been carried out on an ongoing basis and in coordination across national, provincial, and community levels. A designated specialist has been conducting daily technical follow-up on the quality and quantity of distributed water, overseeing supply points and logistics processes to ensure standards are met. In addition, technical staff and volunteers have been carrying out field visits to verify the proper implementation of key activities, including the installation and functionality of water tanks and distribution systems.

As part of the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) strategy, post-distribution surveys are being conducted in targeted communities to assess perceptions, access, and levels of satisfaction among affected populations. These efforts aim to ensure that community feedback is incorporated into operational adjustments and improvements.

At the operational level, periodic reports have been compiled by the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (PMER) team, consolidating data on progress, achievements, and necessary adaptations. Toward the end of the operation, an in-person lessons learned



workshop is planned, bringing together technical teams, volunteers, and key local stakeholders, with facilitation provided by the IFRC.

The IFRC has also been providing remote technical support through follow-up meetings, report reviews, and, when required, participation in strategic field visits, ensuring accountability, technical quality, and alignment with institutional standards throughout the operation.

## **Please briefly explain the National Societies communication strategy for this operation**

The communication strategy of the Red Cross Society of Panama in the context of this emergency response has been implemented through a comprehensive campaign focused on information dissemination, institutional visibility, and reinforcing its auxiliary role. This strategy has been carried out using social media, traditional media outlets, and radio campaigns to keep the population informed about ongoing activities, highlight the National Society's Fundamental Principles—especially Neutrality and Impartiality—and reinforce public understanding of its humanitarian mandate.

In parallel, specific actions have been carried out under the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach, focusing on communication at the community level. These have included the use of local radio and other accessible media to disseminate clear, culturally appropriate messages on safe water use, household hygiene, and the prevention of waterborne diseases, in alignment with guidance from the Ministry of Health. These efforts have helped promote community participation, ensure access to reliable information, and enable two-way communication through established feedback mechanisms.

It is important to note that CEA activities have complemented, rather than replaced, broader institutional communication efforts. While CEA has fostered direct dialogue with affected communities, the institutional communication strategy has included field visits by the communications team, engagement with the media, targeted social media campaigns, the production of special multimedia content, and training sessions on emergency communication and spokesperson protocols. These initiatives have been supported by technical guidance from the IFRC to ensure consistent, transparent, and people-centered communication.

To guarantee coherence and alignment between community-level and public messaging, the CEA focal point has been actively involved in the joint development of communication materials in collaboration with the institutional communications team.





# Budget Overview



## DREF OPERATION

- Panama Red Cross Society  
Panama: River Pollution

### Operating Budget

Planned Operations	303,551
Shelter and Basic Household Items	0
Livelihoods	0
Multi-purpose Cash	0
Health	0
Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	258,374
Protection, Gender and Inclusion	24,452
Education	0
Migration	0
Risk Reduction, Climate Adaptation and Recovery	0
Community Engagement and Accountability	20,725
Environmental Sustainability	0
Enabling Approaches	46,169
Coordination and Partnerships	0
Secretariat Services	2,982
National Society Strengthening	43,187
TOTAL BUDGET	349,720

*all amounts in Swiss Francs (CHF)*

Internal

#V2022.01

[Click here to download the budget file](#)



# Contact Information

For further information, specifically related to this operation please contact:

**National Society contact:** Daniel González, Head of Risk Management, [daniel.gonzalez@cuzroja.org.pa](mailto:daniel.gonzalez@cuzroja.org.pa)

**IFRC Appeal Manager:** Marjorie Sotofranco, Head of Delegation, [marjorie.sotofranco@ifrc.org](mailto:marjorie.sotofranco@ifrc.org)

**IFRC Project Manager:** Mariela Gómez, Disaster Management Coordinator, [mariela.gomez@ifrc.org](mailto:mariela.gomez@ifrc.org)

**IFRC focal point for the emergency:** Diana Oviedo, Programs and Operations Coordinator, [diana.oviedo@ifrc.org](mailto:diana.oviedo@ifrc.org)

**Media Contact:** Hennessy Wagner, Communications and Public Relations Coordinator, [hennessy.wagner@cuzroja.org.pa](mailto:hennessy.wagner@cuzroja.org.pa)

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