

# Covid-19 and (Im)mobility in the Americas

## PANAMA

1. **Poverty rate:** 37% out of the total population.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Migration data** <sup>2</sup>
  - a. Sending country: Around 162,000 Panamanians, or 4% of the population, reside abroad mainly in the US (78%), Costa Rica (7%), and Spain (3%).
  - b. Destination country: Around 186,000 immigrants or 4.45% of the total population live in Panama. The main countries of origin are Colombia (24%), China (11%), and the US. (8%).
  - c. Transit country: migrants from Caribbean, South American, Asian, and African countries transit Panama, particularly through the Darien Gap, en route to the US.
  - d. Host country for refugees: 2,500 refugees live in Panama, mainly from Colombia, Venezuela, and El Salvador.
3. **Impact by COVID-19<sup>3</sup> (as of July 14, 2020)**
  - a. Registered cases: 47,173
  - b. % of cases out of the total population: 1.09%
  - c. Number of deaths: 932
4. **State measures**
  - Closure of borders and increased surveillance measures.
  - Passengers arriving on International flights are permitted to enter the national territory only for humanitarian reasons and if required to assist with the COVID-19 pandemic
  - The National Customs Authority (ANA) announced that it will maintain the flow of international terrestrial transport into the national territory, under strict controls that dictate the state of emergency to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but without harming commercial activity.
  - Migration extends residence permits for foreigners.
  - 80 Migration Units join the "Panama Solidarity Plan".
  - The border with Costa Rica is closed: they do not allow the entry of migrants from African and Asian in transit through Panama.
  - A new center will be built to assist irregularized migrants who arrive in the country through the inhospitable Darien Gap jungle at the border with Colombia after more than 2,000 people were stranded when borders were closed due to COVID-19.

### 5. At risk populations

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.onu.org.pa/objetivos-desarrollo-milenio-ODM/erradicar-pobreza-extrema-hambre>

<sup>2</sup> <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/panama>,  
<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/inmigracion/panama>

<sup>3</sup> John Hopkins University (2020). "Coronavirus Resource Centre". <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

- *Irregularized migrants in transit, mainly South American, Caribbean, Asian and African, in particular, the ones that have crossed the Darien Gap* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
  - Before the pandemic:
    - Irregularized migrants lived under constant threat of deportation and detention and had limited access to health services.
    - They were the target of abuse and of multiple kinds of violence along the way.
    - **The situation for irregularized migrants in transit has NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks have possibly been exacerbated, which directly affects the lives of irregularized migrants in Panama.**
  - During the pandemic:
    - The vast majority have been stranded and waiting until the borders are opened in order to continue their transit north.
    - The conditions in which they migrate are very precarious.
    - They do not have a place to socially distance or self-isolate at home.
    - Many do not have a source of income, since they are in the middle of the migratory journey.
    - Due to their condition of irregularity, they not only face a threat of deportation but if they do become ill, they have limited access to health care.
    - The majority live in overcrowded conditions that endanger their health.
    - Crossings across the southern border have continued. The following are the most alarming situations:
      - i. About 1,991 migrants from Cuba, Haiti and other countries have been stranded in the Darien Gap jungle, at the border between Colombia and Panama. This is one of the most dangerous places on the planet. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, at least 17 confirmed COVID-19 infected people are trapped. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) approximately 23% of these migrants are children and adolescents, some of them are unaccompanied.
      - ii. The Migration Centre that receives migrants has operated since 2009 and remains open to receive migrants in transit. Among the migrants received, there are more than 2,500 immigrants (from South American, African, and Caribbean countries) who crossed from the Darien Gap. Out of the total, 27% are children and adolescents.
    - Panamanian immigration authorities will escort the thousands of migrants from that country to the border between Panama and Costa Rica. From that point, the Costa Rican authorities will be in charge of the custody of the foreigners and will transport them by bus to the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua.
    - Panamanian immigration authorities provide accommodation to transit migrants. Together with Colombian immigration authorities, they are seeking support from local entrepreneurs to set up tents and provide

food. The Ministry of Health promised to increase personnel to provide on-site COVID-19 testing.

## Social Responses

- *Solidarity networks:*
  - o UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF have donated hygiene kits for families, women and babies. The agencies have also expanded the delivery of food bags, including special food for children, at four migration centres, located in Darien and Chiriquí.. Similarly, IOM has distributed multipurpose tents and temporary shelters in order to improve shelter and accommodation conditions. UNHCR will deliver temporary housing units with a capacity of up to six people.
- Xenophobia
  - o Migrants from African and Asian countries are not allowed to transit through Panama

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\*For more detail go to the digital achieve that we created:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1o00O4-LalYs9FNi0PIRRz99hinvqyWgT>

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E-mail: covid19inmovilidad@gmail.com