

**P A N A M A**

**An Emergency Preparedness Profile**

**Office of the United Nations  
High Commissioner for Refugees**

**June 1990**

## FOREWORD

This profile of Panama is part of a Regional Emergency Preparedness profile for Central America and Mexico. These profiles are designed to provide, in one accessible document, factual information on selected countries and are intended as an emergency preparedness measure in support of UNHCR planning and relief operations. The profiles are principally concerned with the kinds of information and resources needed during refugee emergencies in order to facilitate contingency planning and action along with rapid decision-making.. They are designed to satisfy a number of audiences including UNHCR decision-makers, UNHCR Headquarters personnel proceeding on mission, newly-appointed UNHCR field personnel and consultants, UNHCR regional bureaux and field offices, and implementing partners. The UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies will often be able to provide complementary information.

Various sections of UNHCR have helped the Emergency Unit compile this profile. The information does not claim to be complete - indeed an effort was made to keep the profile short, readable and concise while pointing readers to additional sources containing detail they may need. The profile has been drawn up at short notice to respond to current demand and should be viewed as a draft that may still contain inconsistencies and inaccuracies. It would be appreciated if these as well as suggestions that may strengthen future editions of the Panama profile could be brought to the Emergency Unit's attention.

Emergency Unit  
Technical Support Service

THE UNHCR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROFILE SERIES

(as of March 1990)

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Malawi (1989)  
Mozambique (1987)  
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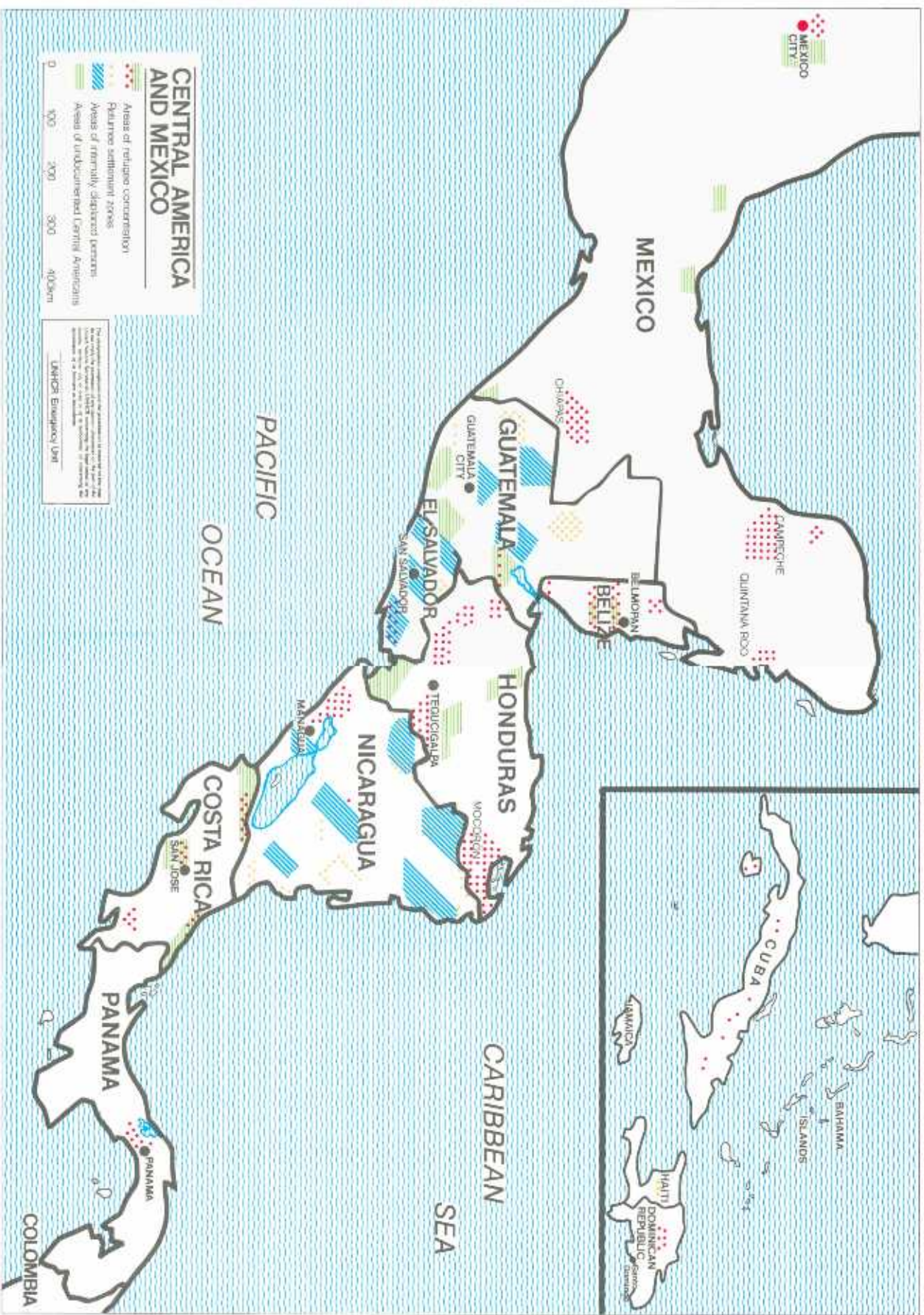
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Honduras (1989)  
Mexico (1989)  
Nicaragua (1989)  
Panama (1989)

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Kampuchea (1989)

SOUTH-WEST ASIA

Pakistan (1987)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### I. BASIC FACTS

- A. Time Zones
- B. Currency
- C. Visa Information/Vaccination Requirements
- D. Calendar and Holidays
- E. History
- F. Government
- G. Language
- H. Climate and Geography
- I. Disaster Vulnerability
- J. Economy
- K. Population
- L. Health
- M. Housing
- N. Transportation
- O. Communications

### II. INFRASTRUCTURAL RESOURCES OF PANAMA AS CONCERN REFUGEES

- A. Health System
  - . Structure
  - . Medical Supplies
  - . Cold Chain
  - . Vulnerability to Disease
- B. Transportation Resources
  - . Road Network
  - . Railway Network
  - . The Canal Area
  - . Port Facilities
  - . Airport Facilities
- C. Water Resources
  - . Overview
  - . National Water Authority
  - . Ciudad Romero
- D. Storage Facilities

### III. DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS OF AFFECTED POPULATIONS

- A. Salvadorians - General
  - . Housing Customs
  - . Food Preferences
  - . Health Status
- Salvadorian Refugees in Panama
  - . Refugee Population
  - . Language
  - . Previous Occupational Activities

IV. INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES/PROGRAMMES

- A. Relief Machinery of the Government of Panama
  - . Policy Towards Refugees
  - . Government Organization
  - . Relationship with UNHCR
- B. UNHCR Presence
- C. UN Agencies
  - . ILO
  - . UNICEF
  - . UNDP
  - . UNFPA
- D. Voluntary Agencies

ANNEX I.

UNHCR Programme

I. Basic Facts

A. Time Zones

GMT: -5 hours

B. Currency

1 Panamanian balboa = 1 US\$  
The US\$ is the official currency and is labelled the "balboa" in international transactions. Coins representing fractions of the balboa circulate along with US coins, but no paper money is denominated in balboas.

C. Visa Information/  
Vaccination Requirements

Visa Information: A visa is required for entry into Panama and should be obtained prior to arrival in the country. Immigration authorities at the airport will issue visas to travellers on official business upon arrival.

Vaccination Requirements: Smallpox and cholera vaccinations are required if coming from an infected area. The United Nations Medical Service also recommends immunization against typhoid, tetanus, and poliomyelitis, as well as gamma-globulin injections. For children, protection against whooping cough and diphtheria is also recommended. Yellow fever inoculation should be kept up to date. Prophylactic measures against malaria should be taken when travelling in some areas of the interior where malaria incidence is high.

D. Calendar and Holidays

New Year	1 January
National Mourning	9 January
Shrove Tuesday )	varies
Holy Thursday )	from year
Good Friday )	to year
Labour Day	1 May
Revolution Day	11 October
Ibero American Community	12 October
Republic Foundation	3 November
Flag Day	4 November
First Movement towards	
Independence from Spain	10 November
Independence from Spain	28 November
Mother's Day	8 December
Christmas Day	25 December

## E. History

At the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, three main Indian groups were living in the Isthmus: the Kunas, the Guaymies, and the Chocoas. The Isthmus was discovered by the Spanish in 1501, by one of the captains who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to America. Twelve years later, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus with the help of Indian guides and reached the Pacific Ocean. The narrow area surrounding the present Panama Canal became an important link in the Spanish colonial empire, with gold and silver moving from South America to Spain.

Panama proclaimed its independence from Spain in 1821 and joined the Republic of Greater Colombia. The gold rush of 1849 in the United States provided the impetus for building a trans-isthmian railroad which, upon completion in 1855, encouraged the building of the canal. In 1878, a French company headed by Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal, began construction but the company was dissolved in 1889 before the canal was finished because of technical and financial difficulties.

In 1903, Panama proclaimed its independence from Colombia and signed a treaty with the United States authorizing construction of a canal. Under this agreement, the United States completed, in 1914, an 83-kilometer (52 mile) lock canal in the U.S.-administered Canal Zone, which extended eight kilometers (five miles) on each side of the waterway - a strip of land over which the United States gained sovereignty in perpetuity. For three-quarters of a century, the history of Panama was that of two nations, with the Canal Zone operated and governed by a commission responsible only to the President of the United States. On 1 October 1979, a new treaty came into force giving Panama partial jurisdiction over the Canal Zone, leading to complete jurisdiction in the year 2000. Under this new treaty, the United States is required to withdraw from the 109 square miles of military sites, including five military bases, exclusively under U.S. control at the end of the century.

In October 1968, President Arnulfo Arias Madrid, who had been overthrown as president on two previous occasions, was again ousted by the National Guard after only 11 days in office.



A provisional junta government was established in which Colonel (later Brigadier General) Omar Torrijos Herrera became the principal power. Freedom of the press, speech and assembly were suspended between October 1968 and November 1969. Party political activity was banned in February 1969 and remained so until October 1978. The election of Dr. Aristides Royo as President of the Republic at this time marked the return to nominal civilian government.

Recent political history in Panama has been marked by the resignations of President Barletta in 1985 and President Delvalle in 1987, at which time the Head of the National Guard, General Manuel Noriega took a leading role in the continuing political crisis. His position as de facto ruler of the country was further strengthened by the annulment of the results of the elections in May 1989.

The unstable political situation severely affected Panama's economy and differences with the USA (the US government had repeatedly called for the extradition to the US of General Noriega to face drug trafficking charges) led to the imposition of economic sanctions which cost Panama 135 million US dollars in 1988. Relations with the USA deteriorated to such an extent that the Asamblea de Corregimientos declared that a "state of war" existed between the two countries. Eventually a US force invaded Panama on December 20, 1989 with the objectives of capturing General Noriega and his extradition to the US to stand trial, and the safeguarding of US responsibilities for the defence of the Panama Canal.

A further objective of the US intervention was to install a new government, headed by Guillermo Endara (credited with winning the May election). By the end of 1989, an electoral tribunal had reversed the annulment of the presidential election, thereby legitimizing the presidency of Endara and his deputies, Vice Presidents Guillermo Ford and Ricardo Arias Calderón. In February 1990, the electoral tribunal also confirmed the election of another 57 members of the legislature.

F. Government

Polical Status: Constitutional republic.

Structure: Under the terms of the amendments to the Constitution that were approved by a referendum in April 1983, the 67 members of the unicameral Legislative Assembly (replacing the National Assembly of Community Representatives) are elected by popular vote every five years. Two Vice-Presidents are elected by popular vote to assist the President. The President appoints the Cabinet.

G. Language

Spanish is the official and dominant language. However, English is the first language of 14% of the population and is a common second language used by most Panamanians in the professions and business. Indian languages are spoken by indigenous groups located in the provinces.

H. Climate and Geography

Area: 77,082 km<sup>2</sup> (29,208 square miles)

Geographical Overview: The Republic of Panama is located near the equator, and occupies the Isthmus connecting the North and South American Continents. The country is bounded on the north by the Caribbean Sea (an arm of the Atlantic Ocean), on the south by the Gulf of Panama and the Pacific Ocean, on the east by Colombia and on the west by Costa Rica. The coastline on the Atlantic side is 763 km long and on the Pacific side, 1,227 km long.

A single chain of mountains, the "Cordillera Central", extends from east to west. There are many lateral ranges extending towards both the Caribbean and the Pacific, resulting in a number of dispersed plateaux. Elevations are uneven, and there are few peaks, the highest being Baru Volcan, in the Province of Chiriquí (about 11,500 feet above sea level). The eastern regions are covered almost entirely by heavy tropical forests, and rainfall is heavy but seasonal. The Atlantic side has much higher precipitation and a less clearly defined dry season than the Pacific side. The Cordillera Central provides a natural watershed; there are 478 rivers in Panama, 325 of which flow into the Caribbean

Sea and 153 into the Pacific Ocean. The principal navigable rivers are in the Province of Darien where the Cordillera splits in two.

Panama lies in what is considered one of the most important strategic locations in the world. Being the narrowest part of the Isthmus, it provides the world with its most reliable shortcut between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans - the Panama Canal - which saves nearly 8,000 nautical miles by eliminating the trip around Cape Horn. The Canal Waterway extends from the Pacific mouth on the southeast to the Atlantic or Caribbean side on the northeast, and the distance from one entrance to the other is 69.1 km. (The average time for a ship in the Canal waters is about 24 hours; the average transit through the Canal is about nine hours.) Adding to its importance as a world crossroads, Panama also constitutes the land bridge between the Americas.

There are small natural lakes in the provinces of Panama, Chiriquí and Veraguas, some of which are the craters of extinct volcanoes. Three artificial lakes, fed by eighteen rivers, form part of the Panama Canal system.

Of the 1,600 islands belonging to Panama, Coiba, off the southwest coast, is the largest. The Archipelago of San Blas off the northern coast is composed of 365 islands.

Climate:

Panama has a year-round tropical climate, and rainfall is heavy but seasonal. The Caribbean coast has a much higher level of precipitation and a less defined dry season than the Pacific side. The dry season usually lasts from January through April and the rainy season from May through December, but variations of from two to three weeks may occur in either direction. Annual rainfall in Panama City averages about 178 cm (70 inches) and in Colón, about 328 cm (129 inches). The mean annual temperature is 27°C (81°F) in the lowlands and 23°C (73°F) at approximately 600 m elevation with only minimal seasonal variations.

Relative humidity averages above 80% in the rainy season and 60% in the dry season. Winds, which are strongest in the dry season, seldom exceed 35 miles per hour. Panama lies outside the sweep of the hurricanes of the Caribbean Sea.

I. Disaster Vulnerability

Floods, fires and earthquakes are the most frequent disasters.

J. Economy

Overview:

In 1983, 28.3% of the working population was employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing, but the sector made a relatively modest contribution of 9.1% to the GDP. After several years of sluggish growth, the Government, in its development plans, has recognized the need to increase output. However, attempts to increase labour productivity may cause increased rural unemployment and encourage further unwanted migration to Panama City and Colón. About 1.4 million hectares (18.5%) of Panama's land surface are cultivated, with bananas and sugarcane as the principal export crops. The USA has been the only customer for Panama's sugar exports in recent years (with the exception of 1982 when a small amount was exported to Tunisia). The banana industry, with annual production estimated at just over one million metric tons, has entered a critical phase, with falling prices and the prospect of redundancy for 3,000 workers.

Agriculture has suffered from low levels of investment, owing to price controls on rice, meat, potatoes and dairy products, and also from poorly-developed marketing facilities. In 1985, the Government announced plans to invest \$482 million in agriculture over the following four years in an attempt to revitalize the sector.

The continuing political crisis of the late 1980s, which was brought to an end after the invasion of US forces in 1989, has had disastrous repercussions for Panama's economy. Economic sanctions imposed by the US in 1987 had cost Panama US\$135 m by the end of 1988 and the departure of many banks and the flight of capital virtually ended Panama's traditional role as an international banking centre. Although the sanctions were lifted at the time of the invasion, liquid reserves at the Banco Nacional had fallen to only US\$70 m at the time of the accession of the Endara administration.

Balance of Payments:	In the 1980s, invisible trade surpluses tended to be larger than merchandise trade deficits. The current account has been in surplus since 1983. Panama's total foreign debt in early 1985 was \$3,700 million, giving Panama one of the highest levels of debt per citizen in the world.
Exports:	Raw sugar, bananas, coffee, shrimp, petroleum products. Principal export markets: over half of all exports go to the United States, with the Panama Canal Zone, Costa Rica, and the Federal Republic of Germany as remaining major markets.
Imports:	Mineral fuels, manufactured goods, and food. Major suppliers: the United States, Mexico, Ecuador and the Free Zone of Colón.
Crop Production and Livestock:	Panama's principal crops include beans, coffee, maize, rice, sugarcane, and tobacco. After Argentina and Uruguay, Panama has the highest per capita beef consumption in Latin America. Chicken and pigs are also raised, although they are expensive to produce.

Source: Europa Yearbook 1987; Panama: Structural Change and Growth Prospects, World Bank, 1985.

Planting and Harvesting Calendar

Commodity	Planting Season	Harvesting Season
Cacao	---	April-June/ October - December
Coffee	May-October	October-December
Corn		
first crop	May-June	August-September
second crop	September-October	December-January
Rice		
first crop	April-May	August-September
second crop	August-September	December-January
Oranges	---	January-March
Sugarcane	May-June	January-April
Watermelons	---	March-May
Tobacco	November-December	February-March
Beans		
first crop	April-May	August-September
second crop	October-November	January-February
Cabbage		
first crop	May	August-September
second crop	August-October	November-January
Carrots		
first crop	April-June	August-October
second crop	October-November	February-April
Celery	---	December-September
Chili peppers		
first crop	April-June	July-October
second crop	November-January	February-May
Eggplant	---	March-May
Green beans	---	March-May
Potatoes		
first crop	May-June	September-October
second crop	November-December	March-April
Yuca	May-June	December-February
Head lettuce	---	December-September
Okra	---	March-May
Peppers	---	March-May
Tomatoes	---	March-May

Source: Planting and Harvesting Seasons, in Latin America. Foreign Agricultural Service, United States Department of Agriculture, 1958.

## K. Population

### Figures for 1987

Panama Province	1,037,446
Chiriquí	360,296
Colón	203,716
Veraguas	209,954
Cocle	164,517
Herrera	101,317
Los Santos	81,330
Bocas del Toro	77,479
Darien	38,393

## L. Health

Vital Statistics:	Births/1,000 population (1983)	25.5
	Deaths/1,000 population (1983)	3.8
	Infant mortality/1,000 live births (1986)	23.0
	Population density (per sq km) (1985)	27.7
	Life expectancy at birth (1986)	72.0 yrs
	Access to safe water (1980)	90.0%
	Access to excreta disposal	80.8%
	Population per physician (1978)	1,130.0
	Population per hospital bed (1983)	3.2

Source: Evaluación de la estrategia de salud para todos en el año 2000, OMS; Priority Health Needs in Central America and Panama, WHO, 1984.

**Health Care System:** The major entity of the Panamanian health care system is the Ministry of Health, which puts into practice the pertinent policies. The structure of the system is divided between the planning level, comprising Social Security, the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewage, and the Metropolitan Sewage Agency, and the operational levels, consisting of regional and local health care providers. In 1983, there were 161 health centres. In 1983, there were 6,733 hospital beds, of which 754 were in the private sector. Doctors are concentrated in Panama City and Colón.

**Common Illnesses:** Enteric diseases, typhoid fever, tuberculosis. Poliomyelitis and tetanus are being controlled. Malaria is endemic in certain areas.

#### M. Housing

Brick and cement houses provide shelter for urban inhabitants, with poorer populations living in mud houses. In rural areas, houses are made of brick and mud.

#### N. Transportation

##### Roads:

In 1984, there were about 9,535 km of roads, of which approximately a third were paved or asphalted. The two most important highways are the Pan-American Highway and the Boyd-Roosevelt or Trans-Isthmian, linking Panama City and Colón. The trip between these two cities takes about one hour. The Pan-American Highway to Mexico City runs through Panama for 545 km. The Inter-American highway runs between Panama City and the United States, but has not yet been extended through the jungle of the Darien Gap to the Colombian border. There is a highway to San José, Costa Rica. In 1981, a US\$ 31.7 million road rehabilitation project was begun, aided by a \$19 million loan from the World Bank.

##### Railroads:

Two railways serve the western region of the country. A third serves the central region between Panama City and Colón.

##### Ports:

There are deep-water ports at Puerto Armuelles, Bocas del Toro, Almirante, Balboa, Vacamonte, Cristobal, and Aguadulce. Panamanian ports handled 2.2 million tonnes of cargo in 1983. The shipping fleet registered 40.4 m tonnes in 1983, mostly foreign owned. The Centropuerto project, which envisages the development of Cristobal, Balboa and eight other adjacent ports into a massive trans-shipment centre, is still at a very early stage.

##### The Canal:

The Panama Canal opened in 1914, and in 1981 handled 4.7% of all the world's seaborne trade. It is 82 km long and ships take between 8 to 9 hours to pass through the Canal. Terminal ports are Balboa on the Pacific and Cristobal on the Caribbean. A major project to enlarge the Gaillard Cut, in order to allow unrestricted two-way traffic, is currently under consideration.

##### Airports:

Domestic and international airlines serve the country. Air Panama International provides services from Panama City to Colombia,



Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, the USA, and Venezuela. Pan American Airlines operates flights from the USA to Panama. Compañía Panameña de Aviación has services from Panama City to Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Guatemala, Jamaica, and Nicaragua. Internacional de Aviación provides passenger and cargo services between Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, USA, and Venezuela. The Omar Torrijos International Airport, 11 km east of Panama City, is the main airport. Flight time between Panama City and Miami is approximately two and a half hours.

#### O. Communications

In 1984, there were 213,400 telephones operating in an automatic telephone system. The telephone system in Panama City and Colón is good, as is the long-distance telephone service to the US and other points abroad. There are approximately 100 radio stations, and seven daily newspapers. There are two commercial Spanish-language television stations, as well as cable television in Panama City.

#### Further Reading

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NB: For information on current events in the region consult the periodicals: Latin America Regional Reports and Latin America Weekly Reports.

## II. Infrastructural Resources of Panama as Concern Refugees

### A. Health System

**Structure:** The Ministry of Health holds primary responsibility for the implementation of public health policy. Other government agencies include Social Security, the National Institute of Aquaducts and Sewage, and Metropolitan Sewage. Health care providers are organized on regional, sub-regional and local levels. The private sector, which includes hospitals, clinics, and private consultations, provides health services to approximately 15% of the population. Responsibility for the planning and provision of services is organized on a regional basis. It is estimated that 70% of the population has access to primary health care.

For more than a decade the basic strategy in health care planning has been the promotion of community involvement. Indeed, the Constitution expressly mentions the participation of the community in the planning, practice, and evaluation of health services. The last 15 years have seen significant improvements in health care. Professional presence at childbirth rose from 68.9% in 1973 to 83.3% in 1983. Life expectancy increased from 67.8 years in 1973 to 71 years in 1981. Maternal deaths decreased from 33.3 per 1,000 in 1973 to 20 per 1,000 in 1983.

**Medical Supplies:** Most drugs and medical supplies are imported. Responsibility for the import of drugs rests with the Departamento de Farmacia y Drogas, Division of Pharmacy, Food and Drugs at the Ministry of Health.

**Cold Chain:** Cold storage facilities are available at the Ministry of Health. Social Security hospitals have refrigeration facilities. Health centres have domestic refrigerators.

**Vulnerability to Disease:** Malaria is the most serious tropical disease in the region in terms of the number of cases registered, its potential for epidemics and its effect on the rural population, refugees and displaced persons. Tuberculosis, intestinal parasites and gastro-intestinal

illnesses, as well as chagas disease, dengue fever, yellow fever, and pesticide poisoning are other risks to the population. The high incidence of childhood malnutrition increases the severity of all attacks of illness.

Source: Priority Health Needs in Central America and Panama, PAHO, 1985.

## **B. Transportation Resources**

**Note:** Details on the logistical aspects of refugee emergencies can be found in the UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies, chapter 5, and in the UNHCR SFAS Field Handbook.

**Road Network:** In 1984, the road network totalled 9,535 km, of which approximately one third was paved or asphalted. The principal roads are the Trans-Isthmian Highway linking Panama City and Colón, and the Pan-American Highway which runs from the Costa Rican border through Panama City, to Chepo. The extension of the latter towards Colombia, will expand the potential for overland transport development in Panama. There were 125,000 cars and 50,000 commercial vehicles in use in 1985.

**Railway Network:** There is a limited railway system. Two railways serve the banana plantations and other agricultural areas in the western parts of Bocas del Toro and Chiriquí, which border Costa Rica. On ratification of the 1977 Canal Treaties, Panama also acquired control of the Panama Railroad, which connects Panama City and Colón.

**The Canal Area:** The Canal area (known as the Canal Zone until 1979) is a strip of land, 16 km wide, between the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, running north-west to south-east. The Canal itself is 82 km long, and raises or lowers ships through 26 m by means of six pairs of locks. An average passage takes about nine hours. The Canal can accommodate ships with a maximum draught of 12 m and beams of 32.3 m, and about 90% of the world's cargo ships can use it. Under the Canal Treaties of 1977, which came into force in October 1979, the neutrality of the former Canal Zone is guaranteed, so as to ensure the continuous and clear transit of traffic. Panama will administer the Canal itself from the year 2000 (although the USA will reserve its right to protect the Canal by military force if necessary), after assuming a majority on the nine-member Canal Commission

in 1990. In 1983, the activities of the Panama Canal Commission contributed 7.1% to Panama's total GDP, collecting US\$ 321 million in tolls. Most cargoes are of bulk type; petroleum and related products constituted 31.8% of tonnage in 1982, with grains accounting for 20.3%, and coal products 12.1%.

**Port Facilities:**

**Aguadulce:**

Situated on the Palo Blanco inlet in Parita Bay, on the Pacific coast. Approach: channel 13 km long from sea buoy with widths ranging from 75 m to 200 m, marked by light buoys and beacons. Depth at low water only 1 metre in places. Pilotage: compulsory for vessels over 150 gross registered tonnage. Largest vessel: 2,500 gross registered tonnage, maximum length overall 100 m, maximum depth 6.4 m. Accommodation: Pier 70 m long with depths alongside ranging from 2.4-3.3 m. Storage: open storage for general cargo available. Cranes: mobile cranes can be arranged from the town. Towage not available. Airport: Chitre, 60 km; connecting flights to Panama City.

**Almirante:**

Situated in Almirante Bay, on the Atlantic coast. Approach: minimum depth in channel is 9.2 m. Anchorage can be obtained in the bay in depths up to 27.4 m or in front of the quay in depths up to 18.3 m. Pilotage is compulsory. Accommodation: Pier 205 m long with a depth alongside ranging from 7.3 m to 9.7 m. The port is connected to the national rail system. Towage is not available. Airport: Changuinola, 21 km; connecting flights to Panama City.

**Balboa:**

The Pacific terminal port of the Panama Canal. Approach: the channel from entrance of the Canal to the wharves is 14 km long, 12.19 m depth and vessels of any length or beam can be berthed at Balboa. Lock chambers are 304.8 m by 33.52 m. There is one-way traffic when large vessels are entering or departing. Pilotage is compulsory. Accommodation: four open wharf-type concrete and steel docks, having a combined length of 983 m, and one covered steel and concrete pier, 304.8 m by 60.95 m. Storage: covered storage at pier 18 only, 9,290.22 m<sup>2</sup>. Airport: General Omar Torrijos Herrera International, Tocumen, Panama City, 32 km.

Chiriquí Grande  
Terminal:

Situated in the Chiriquí Bay, on the Atlantic coast. Approach: the terminal is approached from the north-east between the Valiente Peninsula and Cayo Agua through the Canal del Tigre. Depth in channel 36.6 m. Pilotage is compulsory. Weather: winds predominantly from the north and north-east, strongest during November to March; also experienced from the east during the summer months. Accommodation: tanker terminal linked by pipeline to the Puerto Armuelles oil terminal at Charco Azul on the Pacific coast.

Christobal:

The Atlantic terminal port of the Panama Canal, incorporating Colón. Approach: depth of channel is 13.72 m. Pilotage is compulsory. Weather: season of northers between October and March. Accommodation: harbour protected by breakwaters running from Toro Point to Margarita Point, the extremities of Limón Bay, providing safe anchorage in depths ranging from 10.7 m to 16.8 m. Two large concrete and steel covered piers, and three open piers, having a combined length of 2,308 m of berthing space. Coco Solo: the port is restricted to vessels with a maximum length overall up to 100 m engaged in coastal trade, and also trade with other Central American countries. Depth at quays ranges from 2.6 m to 6.1 m. A Free Trade Zone is located within Colón town. Storage: 49,548 m<sup>2</sup> of covered storage on dry cargo piers. Limited refrigerated space available by special arrangement. Container and roll on/roll off facilities: Piers 9 and 10 have recently been converted for use as a container terminal. The container yard covers 7.5 ha and there are 40 points for refrigerated containers.

Panama Canal:

The Panama Canal connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean. The Atlantic entrance is at Cristobal, and the Pacific entrance at Balboa. Length from deep water in Atlantic to deep water in Pacific, about 83 km from ocean to ocean. The channel is maintained to a minimum width of 152.4 m and a depth of 12.8 m at mean low water. The lock chambers are 304.8 m long and 33.53 m wide, with depth of water over mitre sills of 12.4 m at the most restrictive point, the southern end of Pedro Miguel Locks. All locks have two parallel lanes. Vessels are towed through the locks by electric locomotives assisted by ships' engines and rudders. A vessel of medium size can pass through the Canal in about 9 hours. The Canal capacity is now about 42 vessels per day.

The convoy system is not employed. Vessels are dispatched for transit under a fairly complex system, resulting from the need to schedule traffic in accordance with vessel type, size and/or cargo; which governs pilot and equipment requirements, and restrictions on transit time and conditions. Large vessels and dead tows which require clear cut and/or daylight passage, are usually dispatched during the early morning, with smaller vessels commencing transit later in the day and during the night. Maximum length of vessel is 274.3 m, except passenger and container ships which may be 289.5 m overall. The maximum beam acceptable is 32.30 m. Pilotage is compulsory.

Pedregal:

Situated at the estuary of the River Garibaldo on the Pacific coast. Port for the City of David. Pilotage is compulsory. Accommodation: quay 86 m in length, depth alongside ranging between 3.4 m and 5.2 m. Airport: David Airport, 5 km from port.

Puerto Armuelles:

Situated in Charco Azul Bay, on the Pacific coast. Pilotage is compulsory for berthing operations. Accommodation: banana loading port operated by Chiriquí Land Co., part of United Brands Co. Pier 460 m long with a berthing face of 137 m, having a minimum depth alongside of 12.2 m. Vessels must always berth starboard side to quay and are secured about 3 m off the quayside by three mooring buoys. Berthing takes place during daylight hours only and bad weather usually prevents mooring. The port is connected to the national rail system. Towage not available. Airport: local airstrip available for light aircraft only. David Airport, 100 km from port has connecting flights to Tocumen International Airport at Panama City.

Charco Azul:

Located approximately 6 km south of Puerto Armuelles. Approach: the terminal is approached from a southerly or south-easterly direction. Anchorage can be obtained in the north-east of Charco Azul Bay. Pilotage is compulsory. Accommodation: tanker trans-shipment terminal designed to transfer North Slope Alaskan crude oil from VLCC's by pipeline to the Chiriquí Grande Terminal on the Atlantic coast.

Puerto de la  
Bahía las Minas:

Situated on a peninsula 8.8 km east of the Atlantic entrance to Panama Canal. Alternatively known as Payardi Island. Weather: winds from south-west.

Approach: Channel about 1.6 km long, minimum depth 14.32 m. Harbour channel 91.43 m wide. Pilotage is compulsory. Accommodation: dry cargo dock, length of quay 90 m, depth alongside 7.31 m, maximum length of vessel 161.5 m overall. No cranes available. Airport: Tocumen International, Panama City, 72 km.

Source: Ports of the World. Lloyd's of London Ltd., Essex, 1988.

**Airport Facilities:** Bocas del Toro: International airport. Runway 4,921 feet made of asphalt. Non-instrument. Aircraft capacity: DC3.

Cap. Manuel Nino: International airport located at Changuinola. Runway 3,609 feet, made of asphalt.

Enrique Malek: International airport located at David. Runway 5,981 feet, made of asphalt. Non-instrument.

General Omar Torrijos: International airport located at Panama City. Runways: 8,800 feet made of concrete/asphalt, and 10,006 feet made of concrete.

Marcos A. Gelabert: International airport located at Panama City. Runway: 4,257 feet, made of asphalt/concrete. Day landing length runway 17: 4,175 feet; day landing length runway 35: 4,205 feet.

Puerto Armuelles: International airport. Runway: 2,362 feet of grass.

Penonome: Airport for light aircraft.

Source: Jeppesen Airport Directory. 1988.

### C. Water Resources

**Overview:** Average annual rainfall is about 1,500 mm in the eastern part of the Azuero peninsula on the Pacific and 5,500 mm in the Mosquito Gulf on the Caribbean. In the east (Darien), rainfall averages 2,000-3,000 mm and in the Chiriquí province, near the western border with Costa Rica, the rainfall reaches 5,000 mm.

There is practically no dry season in the Caribbean area; however, a decrease in rainfall is noted during the period from February to March. A dry season occurs in the Azuero peninsula from December to April, with the highest rainfall occurring from October to December.

National Water  
Authority:

There was, as of 1985, no government service which specialised in groundwater exploration. Many shallow tube-wells (less than 50 m deep) have been drilled by the Ministry of Health through its Department of Sanitary Engineering for the water supply of rural communities. Very little hydrogeological information was collected during this operation.

The National Institute for Water Supply and Sewage (DAAN) has been constructing hundreds of wells, most of which are small in diameter and shallow, for drinking and domestic water. The Commission for Agrarian Reform operates some small well-drilling rigs in the Pacific Area and has sub-contracted other small-scale well-drilling operations to private firms. Groundwater sources are used only in rural areas. The water supply in Panama City, Colón, and David is potable.

Ciudad Romero:

The water for domestic consumption in this rural UNHCR settlement is obtained from a surface source 5 km away from the settlement and distributed by gravity using a PVC pipe to different watering points in the settlement. There is an average of one watering point per five houses. The water is collected in a sedimentation tank, filtered using a sand filter and then distributed. Maintenance is carried out by two attendants who are responsible for the repair and operation of the system. Drinking water is not chemically treated and there have been no reports of water-borne diseases.

Further Reading:

Binnie and Partness. The irrigation of the Llanos de Coclé. Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería, 1970.

Callajam, J.T. Groundwater program for Panama. 1962.

Natural Resources/Water Series No. 4. Ground Water in the Western Hemisphere. United Nations, New York, 1976.

SSU Mission Report. Ciudad Romero, Panama. Rural Settlement Review. UNHCR 1985.



D. Storage Facilities

Port Storage: Open storage for general cargo is available at Aguadulce. Balboa has 9,290.22 m<sup>2</sup> of covered storage space. At Cristobal there are 49,548 m<sup>2</sup> of covered storage space on dry cargo piers. Limited refrigerated storage is available by special arrangement.

Note: Further information on supply storage can be found in the UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies, chapter 5.

### III. Description and Requirements of Affected Populations

#### A. Salvadorians - General

Housing Customs: Rural housing is typically a one-room adobe structure with dirt floor and tile roof. Bajareque (mud supported by a framework of small tree branches, split bamboo, adobe, straw or grasses), with roofs thatched with sugarcane leaves or grass is another frequent alternative. Rural kitchens are generally separated from the rest of the house. Urban building materials are debris or scrap, plastic, bajareque or adobe, wooden structure and walls, cement floor, asphalted cardboard or aluminium roof, cement and bricks with asbestos, cement roofs.

Food Preferences: Basic staples for the Salvadorian (both rural and urban) population include corn, sorghum, rice, and black or red beans. These account for approximately 60% of caloric intake, which is supplemented by bread, fruit, fish, and vegetables. Meals tend to be vegetarian and high in starch content, with meat, poultry, and dairy products only a minor part of the diet.

Health Status: El Salvador ranks among the countries in the western hemisphere most seriously affected by malnutrition. Intestinal and respiratory infections are the most common and serious threats to health.

#### B. Salvadorian Refugees in Panama

Refugee population: In 1989 it was estimated that there were 1,400 displaced Central Americans in Panama. Most of the refugees are Salvadorians, with 1,250 receiving assistance as of 30 April 1989.

Language: Spanish.

Previous Occupational Activities: Most refugees are of rural or semi-rural origin.

#### IV. Institutional Resources/Programmes

##### A. Relief Machinery of the Government of Panama

Policy Towards Refugees:	In 1973, Panama began providing support as an asylum country to seekers of political asylum from South America (Chile, Argentina, Colombia). Since the late 1970s the refugee population has also included Central Americans, mainly from Nicaragua and El Salvador. Panama has upheld the provisions of Law 5 of 1977, which recognizes the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and the 1967 Protocol.
Government Organization:	Organismo Nacional para Atención de los Refugiados (ONPAR) [National Commission for Attention to Refugees] was created in 1982 to provide assistance to refugees. UNHCR supplementary assistance to urban refugees was continued through ONPAR, while responsibility for the rural settlement for Salvadorians, transferred to Ciudad Romero in 1981, was originally that of PROESA (Proyectos Especiales del Atlántico). At the beginning of 1988 ONPAR assumed the implementation of the Ciudad Romero project. The National Eligibility Commission is the organism which reviews requests for refugee status.
Relationship with UNHCR:	During 1988, ONPAR became UNHCR's only implementing partner for both the urban and rural programmes. The agency entrusted with the implementation of small productive activities among urban refugees (IYSMUN - International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations) has left Panama, and an alternative implementing agency has yet to be found.

##### B. UNHCR Presence (as of March 1990)

There is no UNHCR Office in Panama. The country is covered by the UNHCR Regional Office in Costa Rica.

Regional Representative:	Werner Blatter
Mail address:	Apartado Postal 12 Ferrocarril Pacifico 1009 San José Costa Rica
Street Address:	Los Yoses Del Automercado 175 Este San José Costa Rica

Cable Address: HICOMREF  
San José (Costa Rica)

Telex: 2395 ACNUR  
San José (Costa Rica)

Telephone: 24.87.97 - 34.20.21 - 34.20.22  
34.23.03 (direct to Regional Representative)

Working Days: Monday to Friday  
0800-1230; 1330-1630

C. UN Agencies (as concern Refugees)

ONPAR is currently the only implementing partner for HCR projects in Panama. While several United Nations agencies have projects within the country, UN-sponsored development projects have been adversely affected by a lack of capital and by the political situation prevailing in Panama in the second half of the 1980s.

International Labour Organization: Support is provided to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in the design of programmes and projects for the creation of productive employment for the disadvantaged population.

United Nations Children's Fund: Projects include: the establishment of more than 200 centres for child and family care, and provision of teaching materials and recreational equipment for more than 150 rural primary schools.

Five tanks have been constructed for fish farming, with the aim of improving the nutritional status of the population.

Five water projects have been initiated and 1,300 latrines constructed.

As part of a programme to produce food and improve nutrition in poor urban areas, a home garden project has been established providing horticultural advice.

Minimum basic services are provided such as nutrition education, the promotion of breast-feeding, diarrhoea control, sex and family education, child growth and development, latrine construction, and support to income-generating activities for women.

United Nations  
Development  
Programme:

In coordination with other technical cooperation institutions (World Food Programme, UNICEF, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and United Nations Fund for Population Activities), support is provided for activities in the following areas: (a) productive employment in non-agricultural, informal economic activities; (b) housing and services for the underprivileged population; (c) education programmes; (d) and technical cooperation in health matters, particularly primary health care programmes.

United Nations  
Fund for Population  
Activities:

Support is given to the development of maternal and child health activities and sex education. In addition, advisory services are provided for the 1990 national population and housing censuses and related population studies.

D. Voluntary Agencies

There are no non-governmental organizations implementing UNHCR programmes in Panama.

## Annex I

### A. UNHCR Programme

#### Refugee population

According to Government estimates, the refugee population in Panama, at the end of 1987, stood at 1,600. At the end of 1989, the total number receiving UNHCR assistance was 1,400. Of these, there were 843 Salvadorians, 341 Nicaraguans, and 216 other nationalities. The living conditions of these refugees, most of whom are of rural or semi-rural origin, are comparable to those of low-income nationals.

#### Aims and achievements of past assistance programmes

The Ciudad Romero rural settlement project on the Atlantic Coast, designed to assist 545 Salvadorian refugees, showed some progress towards self-sufficiency through the marketing of initial cash-crop production (cocoa and coconut). Assistance, nevertheless, continues to be provided, pending a larger production of cash crops. Although UNHCR assistance to Ciudad Romero is to be phased out, it is expected that assistance will still be required in 1990 for education, health care and technical support. Half the self-sufficiency projects of the urban integration programme led to the achievement of a certain degree of self-sufficiency in respect of seven beneficiaries.

#### Current programmes

UNHCR has made a special effort to strengthen the new implementing agency for Ciudad Romero, the National Commission for Attention to Refugees (ONPAR), and to provide on-site technical support. For urban refugees in Panama, new implementing arrangements are being sought with the aim of improving the design, implementation and follow-up of small productive projects.

The political climate has caused some delays in the implementation of the urban integration programme. The 1989 appropriation covered, in addition to activities related to integration, secondary education, scholarships, assistance to handicapped refugees, as well as supplementary aid for new and needy refugees. It was proposed to further decrease the overall allocation for 1990 in order to reflect the expected progress in phasing out UNHCR assistance to Ciudad Romero.