

Respuesta de la OIM ante el COVID-19 en Panamá

Interventions in La Peñita and Lajas Blancas



INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

This document brings insights on IOM Panama's efforts in its interventions in La Peñita and Lajas Blancas, two migrants reception centers that were key in the provision of assistance to stranded migrants in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. For further information on the topic, consult the [main knowledge product](#) covering IOM Panama's experience.

During 2020, as the government of Panama closed borders to curb the spread of COVID-19, many extra-regional and extra-continental migrants, transiting from Colombia to North America, became stranded. In this context, IOM Panama coordinated with other stakeholders to provide a comprehensive response to assist beneficiaries on the ground.



OVERVIEW OF GOOD PRACTICE

IOM Panama already assisted migrants in La Peñita, a southern location where people on the move arrived soon after crossing the dangerous Darien jungle. With the sudden increase in stranded migrants, this station soon became overcrowded. With support from the coordination mechanism, IOM Panama decided to firstly, **habilitate a second reception center (exclusively for migrants testing positive for COVID-19), called Lajas Blancas**, and secondly, to implement some improvements in La Peñita to ensure some level of comfort and safety to beneficiaries as they waited for more suitable solutions. These interventions focused **mainly on expanding water supply in the area to secure adequate health protocols were being followed**.



IOM Panama provides humanitarian assistance to migrants stranded at the migrant reception centers Lajas Blancas and La Peñita.



LESSONS LEARNED

- The WHO provided valuable support the layout in Lajas Blancas, deciding how to **organize the multiple sectors in the reception center according to epidemiological trends** and the unique characteristics of stranded migrants attempting to access the structure.
- **The partnership with WHO also allowed IOM to provide comprehensive health support** to beneficiaries in Lajas Blancas, facilitating the application of specific health protocols as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The fact that Lajas Blancas was located on private property meant its implementation required an extra layer of negotiation and administrative tasks that ended up delaying the experience. For similar initiatives, **the project team recommends prioritizing public areas to erect such structures.**

