## REGIONAL CONTEXT

During the third quarter of the year, Latin America, including countries under UNHCR's Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama, experienced significant political changes. Despite some positive developments, these changes continued to impact mixed movements' responses and asylum policies.

In Panama, José Raúl Mulino was inaugurated as the 2024-2029 President and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the US to curb irregular entries in Darien. By 30 September, 263,296 individuals had crossed the jungle, a 36 percent decrease from last year's figures. Authorities attribute this drop to the Government's stricter security measures and the start of a repatriation plan. By the end of September, officials had repatriated some 600 people from Colombia, Ecuador, and India. Following Venezuela's elections, Mulino also suspended diplomatic relations with this country, questioning Maduro's win and advocating for a results review.

Suriname voted in favor of a resolution urging the revision of Venezuela's election results during the special meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council. Guyana advocated for a transparent verification process of the Venezuelan elections and supported the proposed resolution. At the fifty-fourth OAS General Assembly, Guyana encouraged all member states to work together to maintain the region as a zone of peace.

Aruban authorities announced that election results had severed diplomatic ties with Venezuela. The aerial border closure will be extended until November. A new policy for managing temporary residency and work permits took effect on 1 August, addressing labour shortages. In September, the coalition between Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP) and Raiz collapsed, with new elections scheduled for December 2024.

Curaçao is officially an associate member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The Government coalition fell in August, allegedly due to a disagreement between the Movement for the Future of Curaçao (MFK) and Partido Nacional di Pueblo (PNP) on unpaid tax exemptions.

In Nicaragua, Ortega's Regime revoked the legal status of 1,500 NGOs and ordered the transfer of their assets to the state. Since the start of the 2018 protests, authorities have shut down more than 5,000 civil society groups, private universities, and media outlets. OHCHR stated the country faces a significant escalation of human rights abuses and calls authorities to respect fundamental freedoms.

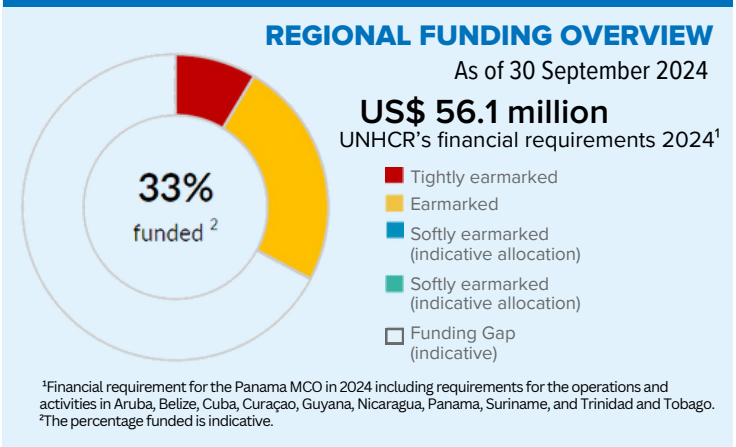
In Cuba, the National Assembly approved new immigration and citizenship laws, introducing a humanitarian resident category for refugees, stateless persons and asylum-seekers.

Three UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteurs urged removing Cuba from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism, as it hinders the country's access to financial and humanitarian aid. In September, Hurricane Helene impacted thousands, damaging infrastructure and agriculture and worsening power and water shortages.

The US State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere visited Belize and commended the country for its leadership in establishing regularization pathways for refugees and migrants. The official stated that Belize has significantly contributed to the region and highlighted Belize's involvement in the LA Declaration.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Public Security announced that the fifth tranche of Minister's Permits for Venezuelans under the Migrant Registration Framework (MRF) is ready for collection. On 2 September, 23 refugee and migrant children enrolled in the national school system, marking a historic milestone. An amendment to the Immigration Act allows Venezuelans under 18, whose parents or guardians are registered in the MRF, to enroll in national schools, subject to space availability and completion of a Student Permit Exemption. Authorities have approved 111 permits. More refugee and migrant children are expected to be enrolled in the coming months.

**MCO Panama requires USD 56.1M to continue assisting and securing solutions int he subregion**




[1]Financial requirement for the Panama MCO in 2024 including requirements for the operations and activities in Aruba, Belize, Cuba, Curaçao, Guyana, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.
[2]The percentage funded is indicative.

# UNHCR'S RESPONSE

In August, UNHCR distributed education kits to 17 refugee children and 7 local students in Trinidad and Tobago. This initiative supports the first group of refugee and asylum-seeking children joining the national schools. They received books, bags, writing materials, uniforms, shoes, and essential tools for the September 2024 term.

## COORDINATION WITH NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- In **Panama**, UNHCR met with the new Government, including the Ministry of Government, National Migration Service, and representatives from the Central American Parliament, to discuss protection and capacity-building plans.
- Under **Belize's** MIRPS Pro-Tempore Presidency, UNHCR provided financial and technical support for government meetings, workshops, and participation in the II Cities of Solidarity National Conference in Guatemala.
- In **Aruba**, UNHCR is working with authorities to discuss and analyze and review asylum adjudication policies and practices, as part of an ongoing Quality Assurance Initiative.

## HEALTH

- In **Curacao**, through Salú Pa Tur, UNHCR provided health services to refugees and migrants not covered by health insurance. The services included 1,028 primary health consultations.

## PROTECTION

- UNHCR registered 117 people in **Suriname**, enabling access to essential services and documentation.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained 100 government officials, including national police, on international protection and the Agency's mandate.
- UNHCR interviewed 32 people in **Curacao**, for potential resettlement opportunities.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR and the Ombudsperson Office visited the Puerto Lara and Boca de Cupe communities in Darien, providing 170 people with information on international protection and identifying 30 people who needed to renew their residency documents.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR, through its partners, provided legal assistance to 200 forcibly displaced people, and supported 17 of them through a legal clinic.

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR supported 94 people with cash-based assistance to cover basic needs. With UNICEF, UNHCR handed backpacks and school materials to 22 refugees and asylum-seekers enrolled in the national education system.
- In **Guyana**, Region 1, UNHCR donated a boat to the Regional Chairman as part of an MoU to enhance access to remote Indigenous communities and provide humanitarian and protection services.

## LOCAL INTEGRATION

- In **Panama**, UNHCR and the City of Knowledge Foundation launched a livelihood programme to promote the economic integration of some 100 refugees and asylum-seekers through entrepreneurship and employment opportunities.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR participated in an official Amnesty ceremony where seven asylum-seekers received permanent residency IDs. As of September, UNHCR assisted over 100 Amnesty beneficiaries in obtaining their residency cards.

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD

## DREAMS FROM A TEENAGE REFUGEE

Cristina*, like any other teenager, dreams of a future where she can accomplish all her goals. Her dream is to own a beauty parlor and help her mother financially. "My biggest dream is to have my own business, and I have been longing for it since I was little. I know that someday I will have it, but takes time". Not long ago, Cristina dreamt of living safely and peacefully. Like many asylum-seekers, she was forced to flee her country because her life was in danger. She fled with her mother and younger brother to Belize where they found an opportunity to rebuild their lives in the village of Bella Vista.

Moving to a different country was difficult for Cristina. Her father and two siblings stayed behind.
"It is tough to adapt to a new country where you don't know anyone and you have to start from scratch" - she said. Despite her challenges, Cristina remains hopeful and determined to achieve her goals.

Language was one of the main barriers when she arrived in Bella Vista. However, at sixteen, she learned English and continues her daily studies through distance learning. During the day, Cristina and her mother work together selling fruits and vegetables —a venture they started with the help of UNHCR and Humana People to People. As refugees in Belize, they are rebuilding their lives and proudly own a home.

Belize is a country of destination for many asylum-seekers and refugees fleeing armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights abuses, and persecution in Central American countries mainly from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. UNHCR seeks to protect Refugees like Cristina and her family so she can worry less about living in peace and focus more on having big dreams like any other teenager.

***Name changed for protection reasons.***

**UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama thanks the contributions from our donors in 2024**

**Private donors from Italy, the Republic of Korea and the Netherlands, Australia for UNHCR, España con ACNUR, Japan for UNHCR, Sweden for UNHCR, the Dutch Postcode Lottery, and UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe.**

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