

Panama Multi-Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional Context

In October, countries under the **UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama** faced political disputes and social unrest and observed judicial and legislative changes, including some related to refugees, asylum-seekers, and other vulnerable groups.

In **Curacao**, the Court of First Instance ruled that the Minister of Justice's (MoJ) immigration detention procedure was unlawful, as it did not meet international standards. The Court criticized the MoJ's lack of proportionality assessments and emphasized that it must conduct a hearing with foreign nationals to assess their needs and justify the grounds for their detention.

In **Belize**, the Government proposed changes to the Belizean Nationality Act. The amendments seek to address any potential vulnerabilities in the process of acquiring Belizean nationality while ensuring that the pathway for its acquisition is not subject to abuse through the discontinued Economic Citizenship Programme.

Following the border dispute between Venezuela and **Guyana** over the Essequibo region, Venezuela's National Assembly approved a consultative referendum on the defense of this territory. In response, Guyana reiterated its stance of seeking a resolution through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and filed a motion requesting the ICJ indication of provisional measures, as the Referendum raised concerns over a possible annexation. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the US, and Brazil supported Guyana and called on Venezuela to fully engage in the ICJ procedure.

The Organization of American States (OAS) 's Permanent Council unanimously approved a resolution condemning Ortega's Regime's repressive measures against educational institutions and the Catholic Church in **Nicaragua**. The resolution highlights that the Government's actions constitute a severe attack against freedom and calls for the restitution of fundamental rights and the provision of support to those affected.

The UN General Assembly re-elected **Cuba** for a second term to serve in the Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Cuba secured the vote of 146 Member States, scoring the highest number of votes in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In **Suriname**, law enforcement officials arrested five individuals allegedly involved in a human trafficking

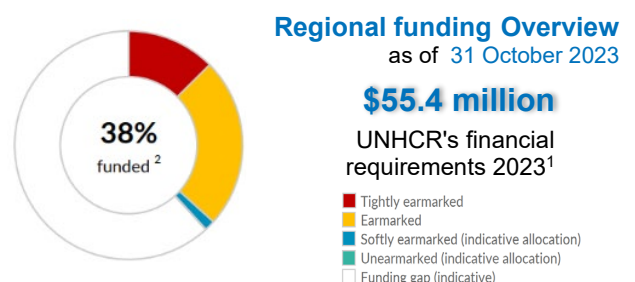


network. The Trafficking in Persons Unit rescued 13 Venezuelan and Cuban women and transferred them to a shelter. The criminals lodged the victims in rooms adjoining a bar in Nickerie, where they were obliged to pay for their accommodations and forced to engage in survival sex.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the Ministry of Public Security announced that the fourth tranche of approved permits granted to Venezuelans under the Migrant Registration Framework (MRF) was ready for collection. Moreover, a High Court Judge denied an injunction to a former Venezuelan mayor, who fears political prosecution and execution if deported from Trinidad. The judge referred to his previous decision stating that the 1951 Refugee Convention cannot be enforced in the country, as it has not been incorporated into local domestic law.

Panama and Costa Rica agreed to transfer refugees and migrants directly from Darien's reception points (ETRM) to Costa Rica's Temporal Centre for the Attention of Migrants (CATEM). On 20 October, the Government ratified Law 406, which confirmed a concession contract with Minera Panama, S.A., causing nationwide protests and social unrest. This situation hindered overall mobility in the country, forcing many refugees and migrants to continue on foot due to blockades along the road.

MCO Panama requires USD 55.4M to continue assisting and securing solutions in the subregion.



¹ Financial requirement for the Panama MCO in 2023 including requirements for the operations and activities in **Aruba, Belize, Cuba, Curacao, Guyana, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.**

² The percentage funded is indicative.



In Cuba, UNHCR liaised with the Ministry of Education to implement a Spanish course for 23 refugees and asylum-seekers starting in November. The course has two levels, basic and advanced.

UNHCR's Response

Updates on Country Activities



Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Belize**, UNHCR trained 16 officials of the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC) and the Refugees Department on refugee status determination (RSD), international protection guidelines, and the refugee definition.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained nearly 100 police officials on international protection, psychological first aid, border screening techniques, and mechanisms to communicate with GBV survivors.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR trained 25 people on UNHCR's mandate and international protection, including officials of the Ombudsman Office, the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR), and high school students.
- In **Aruba and Curacao**, UNHCR trained 45 government officials and local NGO staff on child protection and best interest determination procedures.



Health

- UNHCR, through *Foundation Salù pa Tur*, provided primary health services to 552 people in **Curacao**, including mental, sexual, and reproductive health services, for 1,120 consultations.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR and GSWC hosted support group sessions with the participation of over 230 people. Topics discussed included HIV/AIDS prevention, family planning, human rights, and gender equality.



Protection

- UNHCR in **Suriname** registered 72 people, enabling them to access essential services and documentation.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR, the Caribbean Media Institute, and the T&T Publishers and Broadcasters Association trained 25 journalists on reporting techniques to protect refugees and asylum-seekers.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR reached out to 114 refugees and migrants through its monthly protection monitoring exercise.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR agreed with the Vital Statistics Unit to conduct a mobile Birth Registration Clinic in November, providing free registration services to reduce the risk of statelessness.



Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR provided cash-based assistance to 91 people to cover rent and basic needs.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR donated over 3,500 core relief items to the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) to support its disaster preparedness response.



Local Integration

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR and HIAS held a Kickingball Tournament for refugees, migrants, and host community members. The initiative seeks to foster local integration and enhance participants' well-being through sports.
- In **Guyana**, the Ministry of Education's Migrant Education Support Unit hosted its second annual Spanglish Bee Competition for forcibly displaced children. UNHCR donated two electronic tablets and three trophies for this activity.
- In **Belize**, seven asylum-seekers completed the Belize Trade and Investment Development Service's entrepreneurship training. Moreover, the refugee-led organization "I Hope" completed its first project financed through UNHCR. It included a ten-session workshop on professional development for group members.



Stories from the Field

Fostering integration one new (English) word at the time.

Nandanie has spent the last 20 years facing the challenges every teacher in the world confronts every day: one pupil who is a bit undisciplined, another one who is not so keen to study, or someone else who maybe has a bit more trouble learning even though they want to. Little did she know that her path would have taken her to teach children whose first language was not English.

Nandanie is one of the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in Guyana. Established by the Ministry of Education and UNHCR, the ESL is an after-school programme aiming at helping forcibly displaced children in Guyana to overcome the language barrier. The programme runs now in twenty schools in Regions 1, 2,3,4 and 7, with over seven hundred children enrolled.

“Children are very welcoming and warm. Since they cannot communicate with the Guyanese children, the programme has been very impactful, because we will do the basic English so that the children will be able to communicate and be very effective in the classroom” says Nandanie.

But the ESL does not stop at school. To promote inclusion, showcase their skills, as well as overcome the language barrier, the Ministry also held an annual “Spanglish Bee” competition for forcibly displaced children across the regions. Fostering integration in one new (English) world at the time.

UNHCR’s Multi-Country Office in Panama thanks the contributions from our direct and unearmarked donors in 2023



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