

# Panama Multi-Country Office

## Monthly Operational Update

### Regional Context

In November, countries under the **UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama** observed several policy changes in favor of refugees, asylum-seekers, and others in need of international protection.

In **Aruba**, the justice system restricted the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) discretion in applying measures that limited the return of individuals following a deportation. The Joint Court ruled that although the MoJ is responsible for monitoring and controlling border entries, it lacks the authority to establish inadmissibility intervals following an expulsion. Moreover, in **Curacao**, the Justice Minister announced that the entity will translate migration forms from Dutch into Spanish to facilitate the process for applicants and combat those who charge excessive fees for the procedures and translation.

In **Belize**, the Government announced that Amnesty's vetting period will continue until 31 March 2024, and clarified that applicants can use the Amnesty receipts as legal proof of their right to stay and work in Belize until a final decision is made. A total of 12,765 people from 32 different countries applied to the Programme seeking permanent residency. The Cabinet has approved removing all fees charged in public hospitals, eliminating financial barriers to access healthcare for all Belizean citizens, especially those from low-income families.

The UN General Assembly approved for the thirty-first time a resolution condemning the US embargo against **Cuba**. A total of 187 countries voted in favour. The Cuban Government also organized the IV National Conference on Immigration in Havana. Over 370 Cubans who live in 56 different countries attended, with one-third of the participants coming from the United States.

In **Guyana**, the Vice-President urged the population to cease xenophobic acts against Venezuelans amidst a surge due to the tense environment over the Essequibo border dispute. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also stated that 80 per cent of the Venezuelans displaced in the country have Guyanese ties and reiterated that the Government is condemning the current rise of xenophobia.

The Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council approved a resolution reaffirming its commitment to monitoring **Nicaragua's** situation after its official exit from the organization on 19 November. The OAS emphasized that Nicaragua's departure does not absolve it of its legal obligations, particularly those related to human rights protection.

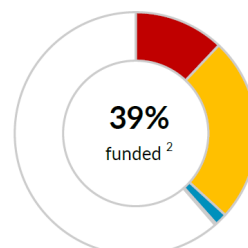


**Suriname** formally joined the Samoa Agreement, a comprehensive partnership accord between the European Union (EU) and the Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific Nations (OACPS) member states. This agreement seeks to strengthen cooperation to address pressing challenges in human rights matters, democracy, climate change, sustainable growth, and migration.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, A High Court Judge ruled in favour of compensating two dozen Venezuelans detained in July 2020 for entering irregularly. The ruling established a compensation of TTD\$ 2.4 million to this group, as they faced harsh detention conditions, labelled as inhumane and degrading. At least 16 children would benefit from the judge's assessment and receive TTD\$1,760,000 in damages.

In **Panama**, following more than five weeks of protests against Minera Panama's mining contract, the Supreme Court of Justice announced on 28 November that Law No.406, which approved the contract, was unconstitutional. Civil society groups, labour unions, and indigenous communities welcomed the decision, and demonstrators opened the blockages along the Inter-American Highway.

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



#### Regional funding Overview as of 15 December 2023

**\$55.4 million**

UNHCR's financial requirements 2023<sup>1</sup>

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

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

<sup>2</sup> The percentage funded is indicative.



## UNHCR's Response Updates on Country Activities

In Panama, in the framework of the 16 Days of Activism, UNHCR liaised with the Municipality of San Miguelito to host a community fair. The activity included gender-based violence prevention sessions, sports and storytelling activities, a vaccination booth, and asylum-seeking and refugee entrepreneurs' stands.



### Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Belize**, UNHCR trained 22 Refugee Department staff members and Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC) members on RSD techniques related to international protection considerations for Nicaraguan nationals.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR conducted a two-day training for 54 officials of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security on the identification of sexual misconduct and GBV prevention and response.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR, HIAS, and the Ministry of Education held a community workshop with the participation of 34 asylum-seekers and host community members. Participants discussed integration dynamics in the country.



### Health

- UNHCR, through *Foundation Salù pa Tur*, provided primary health services to 569 people in **Curacao**, including mental, sexual, and reproductive health services, for 1,066 consultations.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR assisted the Lethem Hospital in conducting a vaccination outreach in the Indigenous community of Bon Success. Authorities vaccinated 45 forcibly displaced Venezuelans, mainly Waraos and E'ñepas. UNHCR participated in a mental health fair organized by the Health Ministry and briefed attendants on UNHCR's mandate.



### Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR provided cash-based assistance to 89 people to cover rent and basic needs.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR distributed core relief items to ten families in the La Romaine community.



### Protection

- In **Suriname**, UNHCR conducted a field mission to Nickerie and Paramaribo to assess the protection needs of groups residing in these cities and carry out focus group discussions and registration exercises.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR registered 447 people and provided a UNHCR card to 246 individuals. The Agency identified 43 cases meeting the criteria for RST or RSD.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR conducted its Results Monitoring Survey in three host communities in southern Belize. The survey identified people needing international protection who have not yet applied for asylum. The Agency also participated in the Vital Statistics Unit's birth registration mobile clinic. A total of 644 people participated.



### Local Integration

- In **Panama**, UNHCR held an integration workshop as part of the Talents Without Borders employability programme. Thirteen refugees and two host community members participated in the activities to strengthen their professional skills.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, over 150 attended the screening of the UNHCR's Starting Over documentary on the integration and resilience of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the country. Several representatives of the humanitarian community in Trinidad, including embassies and government officials, attended the screening.





# Stories from the Field

## 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

In **Aruba**, UNHCR and partners hosted an **"Orange the World" march**, a GBV prevention poster campaign named **"Paving the Pathway to Gender Equality,"** and a flyer distribution.

In **Curacao**, UNHCR co-organized two **screenings of the movie "In the Time of the Butterflies,"** which narrates the story of the Mirabal sisters during the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. UNHCR also supported Venex Curacao in organizing two **multimedia workshops** related to movie screening for adolescents and adults.

In **Belize**, UNHCR conducted a **session on GBV response** in collaboration with the Belize Family Life Association in Belmopan. Nine asylum-seeking women from El Salvador and Honduras participated. UNHCR also provided **health screening services**, including blood sugar and blood pressure testing, STI testing, and pap smears.

In **Cuba**, UNHCR participated in the activity **"Masculinities for nonviolence towards women and girls"**. The initiative focused on challenging harmful gender norms and promoting positive masculinities.

In **Guyana**, UNHCR organized a **movie screening and a sensitization session on GBV** for forcibly displaced people and host community members. The Agency also hosted an **art workshop** for 21 forcibly displaced and local adolescents. Participants were invited to use their creativity to initiate discussions on GBV and its prevention through the workshop.

In **Panama**, UNHCR launched its **visibility campaign *Todas y Todos Podemos Prevenir la Violencia*** (We all can prevent violence), displaying 14 banners across the city with messages on GBV prevention. The Agency organized a **community fair** to raise awareness against GBV. Over 100 people participated, including local authorities, UN agencies, local NGOs, host community members, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR hosted the **Spotlight Initiative Transition Conference** in the framework of the 16 Days of Activism. The Agency participated in the launch of an **art and jewelry exhibition** made by GBV survivors. The event was a result of the Women Mentorship Programme, which provided entrepreneurship opportunities to the GBV survivors.

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



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