

Panama Multi-Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

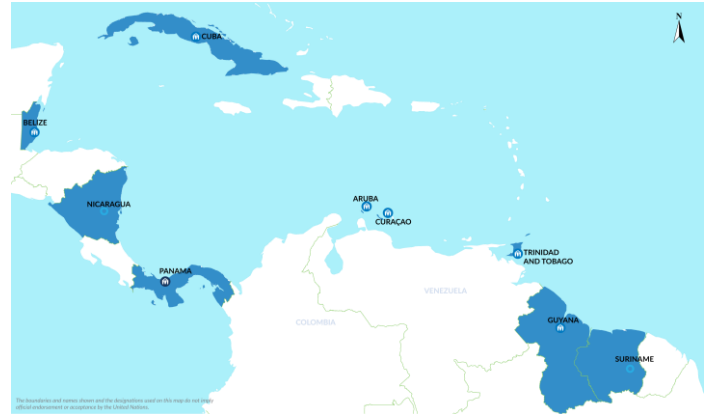
Regional Context

The rise of social unrest in Latin America, has impacted countries under the **Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama**. Economic strain, caused by the impact of COVID-19, is being reflected in the growing inflation rates, food insecurity, and rising prices across the region. This situation affects not only nationals but particularly refugees, migrants, and other vulnerable populations, who see their income generation further reduced.

Panama experienced its worst social unrest in the last three decades, with labour unions blocking main roads and the proclamation of a national teachers' strike. The high living costs, lack of access to food and medicines, corruption scandals, and high gas prices, propelled the protesting climate that hindered mobility within the country, including the transit of buses from Darien to Chiriquí, overpopulating border areas and Migrant Reception Stations (ERMs).

In **Cuba**, ongoing electricity cuts are putting a toll on the population, institutions, and economic entities alike. The country continues to be affected by the socio-economic crisis that has been hitting the island since mid-2019 further exacerbated by the fallout from the COVID pandemic. Countries like **Belize**, and **Trinidad and Tobago**, registered inflation record numbers, standing over 5.3 per cent and 8.7 per cent, respectively, which worsen food and life security for asylum seekers.

Human rights continue to be a concern with unlawful detentions and deportation of vulnerable populations being reported in **Aruba**, **Curacao**, **Guyana** as well as in **Trinidad and Tobago**. In **Nicaragua**, the government closed over 770 NGOs, which together with forceful raids, resulted in the flee of journalists, photographers, and other media staff for the fear of being arrested.



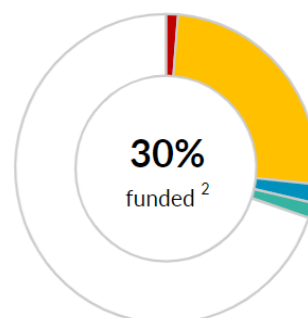
Between January and July of the present year, the National Migration Service of Panama reported over 71,000 refugees and migrants crossing the Darien Gap, reflecting Venezuelans as the largest crossing group (63 per cent). Several countries in the Americas have established new visa restrictions, resulting in the increase of irregular mixed movements and the creation of new routes where official registration is lacking.

UNHCR continues to work alongside governments, partner organizations, civil society, and other UN Agencies to protect refugees, asylum-seekers and vulnerable population while sensitizing authorities on the needs and challenges faced.

MCO Panama requires USD 54.3M to continue to assist, and secure solutions in the subregion.

See more [here](#) on how you can support UNHCR and the forcibly displaced.

Regional funding Overview as of 3 August 2022



\$54.3 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2022¹

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

¹ Financial requirement for the Panama MCO in 2022 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.



UNHCR staff during the monthly data collection exercise in ERM San Vicente

UNHCR's Response: Updates on Country Activities



Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR provided counselling to **53 persons** and accompanied 11 individuals to government services. A total of **34 refugees** benefited from **access to vaccines** including against HPV, polio, and COVID-19 during an outreach with clinicians from the Port Kaituma Public Hospital.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR provided **training on statelessness** and its recognition process to **46 officials** from 12 governmental institutions and four NGOs present in Darien.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained **66 officials** on **international protection**, through virtual and in person sessions. Officials inquired about UNHCR's Refugee Status Determination process (RSD) and UNHCR work to improve the refugee system.



Protection (including community-based protection and gender-based violence)

- In **Belize**, UNHCR and partner Human Rights Commission of Belize (HRCB) conducted a mission in Belize City to assist a total of **71 persons** with their **application** for the Government **amnesty program**.
- In **Curacao**, UNHCR co-facilitated Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Case Management and GBV Safe Shelter training with HIAS. In total, **20 persons** participated in the training, including social workers and representatives from organizations directly working with GBV survivors.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR distributed **food hampers** and **core relief items** to a total of **1,144 people**, most of them Venezuelans.
- In **Suriname**, UNHCR conducted a one-day mission to Nickerie with the objective to register new asylum applications, as well as to issue and renew certificates. In total, **21 certificates** were issued, out of which four were renewals.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR conducted its monthly Protection Monitoring in Darien, reaching **100 people** in four days, and referring several cases to partner Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for legal counselling in refugee status determination procedures.



Durable Solutions and Livelihoods

- In **Belize**, UNHCR partner HUMANA hosted skills and livelihood courses reaching **11 refugees** and asylum seekers in southern Belize, with sewing classes and an English course. Also, partner Help for Progress (HfP) started a small business program where eight women and eight men received their seed capital to start their businesses.



Stories from the Field

Fostering education opportunities in Southern Belize

In Belize, thanks to UNHCR and partner HUMANA People to People, 10 young asylum seekers had the opportunity to further their studies at a technical/vocational institution.

Joe*, a 20-year-old asylum seeker from El Salvador, opens his eyes as he hears his alarm ringing. It's 4:00 am, and he gets up to get ready for school. He walks for twenty minutes on a quiet dirt road, grateful for the opportunity to experience peace in his new community. When he gets to the bus stop, his other classmates are waiting for the buses that will get them to [Stann Creek's Institute for Technical and Vocational Education and Training \(ITVET\)](#). It's about a two-and-a-half-hour trip each day, but it's a sacrifice that they are happy to make.

Joe is one of [10 asylum seekers](#) who have been given the [opportunity to go back to school](#). Many of them couldn't complete their high school education when they were suddenly forced to flee their homes from violence. "We couldn't stay there because it was totally unsafe," Joe recalls. "When a threat like this arrives, the only thing that follows is death. It is something serious. It's not easy. I was in my last year of high school, and I wasn't able to finish because we just couldn't survive in that place anymore."

Selena*, a 17-year-old asylum seeker from Honduras, couldn't finish high school after surviving a violent home invasion from gang members, which resulted in the murder of her brother. Following this, both she and her other family members received numerous threats to their lives. "I feel very happy to have been able to go back to school" shares Selena. "[I didn't think I would be able to study anymore until I received this opportunity, and I am very grateful for it.](#)"

After a year of overcoming the challenges of learning in a new schooling system and in an unfamiliar language, the students are graduating with a technical diploma that is the equivalent of a high school degree. "For me, this should be an opportunity that all asylum seekers are able to receive in order to have a better future and to be able to find a good job," says Selena.

Close to half of the world's refugee children – 48 per cent – remain out of school. [UNHCR in Belize](#), along with Government and local partners, works to [ensure education is accessible](#) for all children and young people, including asylum seekers.

*All names have been changed to protect the asylum seeker students' confidentiality

UNHCR's Multi Country Office in Panama thanks the contributions from our direct and unearmarked donors in 2022:



Private donors including those in Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, and the United States