

# Panama Multi-Country Office

## Monthly Operational Update

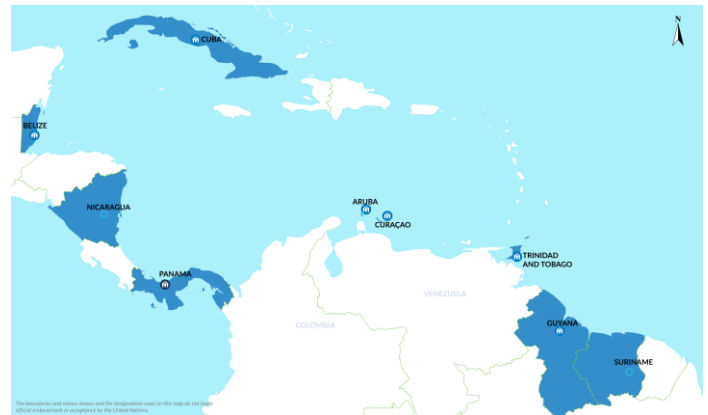
### Regional Context

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including those under **UNHCR Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama**, are facing a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented dimensions, where violence, conflict, and complex political situations continue to force hundreds of thousands of people to flee or leave their homes, looking for protection and dignified life. People in need of international protection face increased risks and are particularly vulnerable to violence, robbery, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

In **Guyana**, according to the latest Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) research, Venezuelan women are at high risk of intimate partner violence, harassment, and sexual exploitation. The research showcases survival sex remains as a negative coping mechanism. The 2022 US State Department's Report on Trafficking in Persons (TiP) also shows that almost 77 per cent of the identified victims are Venezuelan girls and women. This situation, alongside the precarious housing conditions, water and sanitation, as well as exacerbated food needs, further affects the safety of refugees and other vulnerable groups in Guyana.

In **Aruba**, the Ministry of Justice introduced a new policy on detention and deportation, while the media continue to report human rights violations and illegal detentions of refugees and other vulnerable groups of people. In **Belize**, even though the Ministry of Immigration estimates that 60,000 undocumented persons living in the country could benefit from the Amnesty program, as of 30 August 2022, only some 10 per cent have applied. Additional costs and translation of documents required to apply continue to be a challenge for asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups.

In **Panama**, by the end of September, a total of 151,582<sup>1</sup> people crossed the Darien Gap irregularly. **This month alone the number of people crossing surpassed all records, with more than 48,000 crossings in total.**



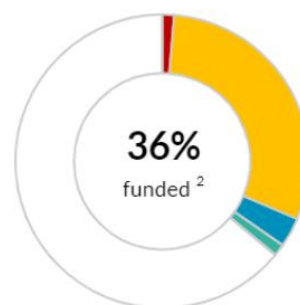
Venezuelans represent some 80 per cent of those in transit, with most lacking the means to continue their journey north. Security incidents along the route continue, making refugees and migrants in mixed movements, an easy target of violence, rape and human trafficking.

In **Cuba** category 3 hurricane Ian, caused extensive damage across the country, with a great impact on the national electric system. A new Family Code was submitted to a popular referendum, approving among other aspects same-sex couple marriages and adoptions, surrogate pregnancies, and broader rights for older people, children, and women, including additional measures against gender-based violence. The measures benefit refugees and asylum seekers on the island.

**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 29 September 2022



**\$54.3 million**

UNHCR's financial requirements 2022<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Financial requirements 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.**

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

<sup>1</sup> Source: National Migration Service



# UNHCR's Response: Updates on Country Activities



*In Cuba, UNHCR distributed approximately six tons of food to 100 refugees affected by Hurricane Ian.*



## Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Panama**, UNHCR, conducted a joint mission with the Minister of Interior and the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) to hard-to-reach indigenous communities in Darien. The Agency together with the Ministry of Interior organized the high-level forum “Rights and Dignity of Persons in Search of International Protection”. More than 100 people attended the event.



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

- In **Curacao**, UNHCR trained 27 lawyers from the Antilleans Jurist Foundation on international protection mechanisms.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR reached over 1,300 people with information sessions about the Government's Amnesty Program. UNHCR assisted over 800 asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups in their application and provided legal services and cash support to 200 persons.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR counselled 432 people, accompanied 124 persons to government services, and provided cash assistance to 62 individuals. Through Guyana Sex Work Coalition (GSWC), UNHCR held knowledge-sharing sessions on sexual reproductive health and HIV/STI prevention with 67 sex workers and 84 sex workers attending support group sessions.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR trained 186 National Border Service (SENAFRONT) officers and other 53 officials from diverse Ministries on international protection mechanisms. UNHCR co-facilitated a workshop on access to rights of refugees and migrants for 43 officials from the Ministry of Health and trained 42 service providers on Gender-Based Violence case management and referral, including officers from ONPAR and the Ombudsman's Office.



## Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR distributed soap bars, sleeping mats, jerry cans, mosquito nets, face masks, hygiene kits, baby kits, food baskets, and solar lamps to 195 beneficiaries.
- In **Cuba**, amid the situation caused by hurricane Ian, UNHCR distributed food hampers to 102 refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Iran, and Haiti among others.
- In **Trinidad**, UNHCR distributed core relief items, including sleeping mats, kitchen sets, blankets, mosquito nets, and solar lamps to 61 families in the Moruga Poverty Reduction Centre based in South Trinidad.



## Community-engagement

- In **Trinidad**, UNHCR's short documentary film “The Challengers”, featuring a refugee volleyball team fighting for inclusion, premiered on 21 Sept 2022, at the inaugural Caribbean International Film Festival in Birmingham.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR organized a business breakfast to raise awareness of the financial inclusion of refugees. The event counted with the active participation of 15 representatives of the private sector.



## Inter-agency coordination

- In **Trinidad**, UNHCR, IOM and the Resident Coordinator's Office hosted the first leg of the UN in Trinidad and Tobago's Amazing Race, focusing on refugees and migrants and on the Sustainable Developing Goal: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.



# Stories from the Field

## Young Leaders: The future of integration

In Panama, 13 locals and 11 refugees and asylum seekers students (aged 12-16), are participating in a Youth Leadership and Mentoring Program for the development of youth-led projects, which focuses on the integration of refugees and other vulnerable groups in local communities.

“It was nice to feel accepted and get to know new perspectives” – said a young asylum seeker participating in the programme. This stage of the project aims at raising awareness of the discrimination and difficulties asylum seekers and refugees face when moving to another country, promoting new pathways of integration through empathy, and mutual understanding.

“The interaction has been spontaneous. These boys and girls are excited to meet other people outside their circle, and learn about their culture and their life” – said one of the mentors of the project. “Everyone is welcome to share their point of view, even if their opinion is different from the rest of the group's, and that's truly important”.

At the end of the project, these young leaders will prepare and develop projects that reflect the learnings and experiences of the sessions with their local communities, to advocate for a more inclusive environment in Panama.



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



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