

Panama Multi-Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional Context

In September, countries under the **UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama** contended with multiple issues, including increased insecurity, economic challenges, displacement crises, and limited access to education.

In **Curacao**, the Public Prosecutor's Office warned of an increase in the **trafficking of children** aged four to fifteen between Venezuela and this island. The Office highlighted that these children are often transported in small vessels carrying drugs and firearms, increasing their protection risks. Likewise, in **Suriname**, the President highlighted the country's alarming insecurity and law enforcement situation and announced **reorganizing the police force**, including appointing a new chief of police.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the Minister of Education stated that **refugee and migrant children** cannot enter public schools until the authorities sort out the problems with their student permits. **Local NGOs** report that no refugee or migrant children have been enrolled in the national education system, as the current requirements make most refugee and migrant children ineligible. On 4 September, 1,000 Venezuelan children returned to Equal Place's virtual educational system.

The **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights** addressed the Fifty-Fourth Session of the Human Rights Council, expressing his concern over the continued and widespread deterioration of human rights in **Nicaragua**. He appealed for the release of those detained arbitrarily and urged the international community to support Nicaraguan refugees and asylum-seekers. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (**OHCHR**) in Central America also called on the Nicaraguan Government to allow OHCHR and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) missions to enter the country.

In **Cuba**, the Ministers of Economy and Energy and Mines addressed the country's complex **energy situation**, explaining the Government's difficulties in supplying fuel, which also affects the family basket. The officials reiterated that Cuba is working to improve energy and food shortages and said the Government expects to see progress in October of this year.

In **Belize**, the Statistical Institute of Belize announced that **general inflation** rose 3.4 per cent in the first eight months of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. The Government met with a high-level US delegation to discuss

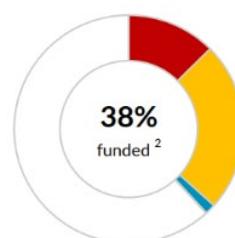


further cooperation related to migration policies, local integration, and climate change mitigation strategies. The delegation referred to the Amnesty exercise and categorized it as a model to solve some of the challenges related to increased migration in the region.

In **Guyana**, the President announced that more than 1,000 **Spanish-speaking children** are enrolled in Region 3 national school system and reiterated the Government's commitment to ensure Spanish classes. Moreover, addressing its border controversy with Venezuela, he reaffirmed at the **seventy-eight UN General Assembly** that the country hopes for a peaceful resolution in accordance with international law.

As of 30 September, **over 400,000 people** had crossed the Darien jungle in **Panama**, surpassing the Government's initial estimates for 2023. Officials made public the **new measures to address the mixed movements**. These include relocating reception points in indigenous communities, using charter flights to deport those who enter the country irregularly, and reducing the number of days some profiled groups are allowed in the country from 90 to 15.

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



Regional funding Overview as of 4 October 2023

\$55.4 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2023¹

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

¹ 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.**

² The percentage funded is indicative.



In Panama, UNHCR and the French Alliance held the "Los Que Pasan" (Those Who Cross) exhibition by the photographer Tito Herrera. Over 400 people attended the inauguration, which showcased pictures of refugees and migrants on their journey through the Darien.

UNHCR's Response

Updates on Country Activities



Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Panama**, UNHCR and HIAS co-hosted a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention workshop for 23 government officials and staff of humanitarian organizations with a presence in Darien.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained six police officials on international refugee protection and participated in the Ministry of Labour's First National Consultation on addressing child labour.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR met with the recently appointed Attorney General to discuss statelessness prevention and UNHCR's support for the State's Vital Statistics Unit.
- In **Aruba**, UNHCR met with the Governmental Committee for the Prevention of Informal Labour Market and briefed participants on the Agency's main activities.



Health

- UNHCR, through *Foundation Salù pa Tur*, provided primary health services to 529 people in **Curacao**, including mental, sexual, and reproductive health services, for 1,111 consultations.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR and GSWC hosted support group sessions with the participation of over 200 people. Topics discussed included HIV/AIDS prevention, family planning, human rights, and gender equality.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR, through the Panamanian Red Cross, provided primary health care to over 1,500 refugees and migrants in Darien and Chiriquí.



Protection

- UNHCR in **Suriname** registered 37 people, enabling them to access essential services and documentation.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR resettled 91 people, registered 639, provided ID cards to 345, and recognized 29 people as refugees.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR conducted a border monitoring exercise and met with the West Border Port Commander to discuss joint sensitization sessions, population trends, and challenges faced by refugees and asylum-seekers.



Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR provided cash-based assistance to 91 people to cover rent and basic needs.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR donated office furniture and supplies to *La Casita* to support their centre. *La Casita* provides safe space, accommodation, and case management to refugee and migrant survivors of GBV.



Local Integration

- In **Belize**, UNHCR and the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) visited the refugee-led organization *I Hope* and shared with its members their experience as asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of UNHCR's livelihoods programmes.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR extended its livelihood initiative, *Hecho por Refugiados*, to asylum-seeking and refugee women in the Alto Playona indigenous community. The participants will exhibit their handcrafted creations for sale.



Omar's farewell at UNHCR's Cuba Office.

Stories from the Field

From Asia to the Americas, to Europe: Omar's journey across continents in search for protection

It was 1999 when Omar and his family fled their home country in Central Asia. The nearby nation where they sought refuge recognized them as refugees, but they were unsafe there. Threats and lack of access to basic services made him seek protection elsewhere. This time alone.

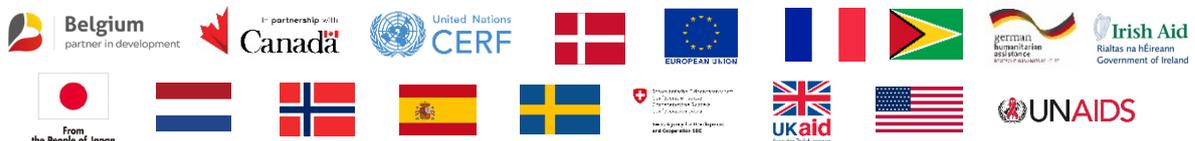
In 2014, Omar arrived in Cuba, where UNHCR recognized him as a refugee under the Agency's mandate. Upon arrival, Omar was determined to make a new beginning. He took Spanish courses in Cuba and enrolled in livelihoods programmes to learn new skills. He participated in integration activities and actively supported UNHCR's office using his background to help other refugees and asylum-seekers from his home country with translations from his mother tongue to English and Spanish. Omar assisted them in communicating their needs, earning the affection and respect of the community. Actively participating in the life of his host community, Omar donated blood to the medical organization and joined a football club.

However, despite all his efforts and due to Cuba's ongoing socio-economic situation, resettlement was the only suitable, durable solution for him. UNHCR office presented his case to several countries, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, his process was delayed or rejected in some cases. During this period, he lost his mother and could not visit his family. Omar's resilience remained strong, and he never changed his north, continuing to offer compassion and solidarity to those in need.

After a long nine-year wait, with UNHCR advocacy, a European country accepted Omar's case this year. His dream came true: reuniting with his family and finding a place he could call home. As the days of the departure approached, his friends in Cuba gathered to bid him farewell, and with heartfelt words, they expressed their gratitude for everything Omar did for them.

**All names have been changed to protect the refugee's confidentiality.*

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



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