REGIONAL CONTEXT

While countries under the UNHCR Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama faced challenges and complex situations during the first quarter of the year, positive developments in governmental policies were registered.

In Aruba, the former Minister of Tourism stated that over 20,000 undocumented people are estimated to be living in the country. The Minister of Integration suggests changes in national policies to address the labor shortage, including swifter permit processes and creating new opportunities for refugees and migrants.

The Cuban Government announced price increases for electricity, fuel, and liquefied gas. Initially planned to enter into force on 1 February, the measure was postponed until 1 March due to an alleged cybersecurity attack on the state-owned corporation CIMEX.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) released its 2023 World Report, condemning Ortega's Regime's abuse of power and widespread impunity in Nicaragua. HRW highlighted the Government's dismantling of civic spaces and intensified the repression against those perceived as opposition, including members of the Catholic Church. The US State Department announced a list of 12 countries of particular concern for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom, including Nicaragua.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Joint Select Committee (JSC) on Human Rights, Equality, and Diversity recommended that the government implement legislative changes to remove the obstacles refugee and migrant children face in accessing education. The JSC suggested a student permit waiver for asylum-seeking, refugee, and migrant children that allows them to access any educational institution with immediate effect.

Following the adoption of a law by the Venezuelan National Assembly declaring the Essequibo region as part of Venezuela, Guyana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs qualified it as a flagrant violation of its sovereignty. The Government mentioned that Guyana remains committed to peace but will not allow its territorial sovereignty to be usurped.

Belize assumed the 2024 Pro-Tempore Presidency of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions

Framework (MIRPS) and reactivated its National Technical Team (NTT). Through the NTT, the country aims to strengthen the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures and prevent statelessness through access to timely birth registration.

In Suriname, the Police Force has intensified its efforts to combat human trafficking and human smuggling. Officials conducted awareness sessions for over 400 students on how to prevent these issues.

In Panama, over 110,000 refugees and migrants crossed the Darien jungle from January to March. Security incidents marked the year's first quarter, including the detention of 12 people allegedly providing unauthorized money transfer services in Darien. This group used logos of established companies and charged a 25-30 per cent fee for services. In February, a boat carrying 27 passengers capsized near Guna Yala, resulting in the death of five people. In March, over 250 people were involved in a security incident at ETRM San Vicente, which led to the destruction of official vehicles and ten government housing units.

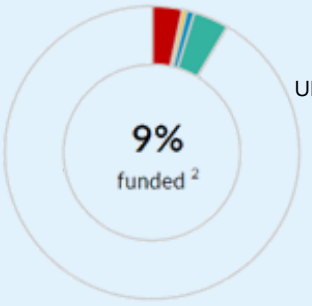
MCO Panama requires USD 56.1M to continue assisting and securing solutions int he subregion

REGIONAL FUNDING OVERVIEW

As of 31 March 2024

US$ 56.1 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2024[1]



- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding Gap (indicative)

[1]Financial requirement for the Panama MCO in 2024 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.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Through Help for Progress (HfP), UNHCR donated over **US$ 10,000** in materials and labour costs for constructing a new roof for a primary school in **Teakettle Village, Belize**, where **310 students**, including asylum-seekers, attend classes.

COORDINATION WITH NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- In **Panama**, the UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner participated in the inauguration of the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) branch office in Darien, a significant development in refugee protection in the country.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR and the Refugees Department conducted protection assessments in Bella Vista, Santa Cruz, and Toledo communities as part of a documentation campaign to identify and refer people needing international protection.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR and the Ministry of National Security discussed registration and RSD procedures and explored areas of mutual collaboration.

HEALTH

- In **Curacao**, UNHCR, through Salú Pa Tur, provided health services to refugees and migrants not covered by health insurance. The services included 473 primary health consultations and 91 house visits.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR, through partner Blossom Inc., UNFPA, and the Canadian High Commission, conducted a medical outreach in the Mabaruma Regional Hospital. The organizations distributed women's hygiene kits and held counselling sessions for forcibly displaced groups and host communities in Yarakita.

PROTECTION

- UNHCR in **Suriname** registered 160 people, enabling access to essential services and documentation.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained 16 Social Work students on international protection, the Agency's mandate, and the Age, Gender, and Diversity approach. The group works full-time with vulnerable people.
- In **Curacao**, UNHCR opened a help desk to strengthen community engagement and identify resettlement cases.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR trained 150 officials on international protection and interviewed 328 people during protection monitoring exercises.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR led a media training for 10 reporters and journalists, focusing on the asylum process and Belize's commitments with the MIRPS Pro-Tempore Presidency.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR gave cash-based assistance to 275 people to cover basic needs. Fifty-one were new beneficiaries.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR distributed lunch kits to forcibly displaced children enrolled in Hosororo and Mabaruma Nurseries and Primary Schools. Most reside in Koberimo Creek, Kumaka, and Aruka River. The Agency distributed school shoes to 100 students.

LOCAL INTEGRATION

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR and HIAS organized workshops on women's empowerment to celebrate International Women's Day. Community members facilitated the workshops, which had 54 participants.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR and the Cuban Red Cross, donated 1,000 cans of food to 500 people in 13 nursing homes. Eight refugees participated in the distribution as part of UNHCR's peaceful coexistence activities with host communities.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

JENNIFER AND THE POWER OF COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION IN CURACAO

Ever since she was young, Jennifer has felt a strong bond with her community, wherever this was. “While attending high school in Venezuela, I engaged in social activities with youth groups. Alongside other students, I would visit neighbourhoods to participate in community initiatives. I discovered my passion for social work during this time,” says Jennifer.

In 2003, Jennifer arrived in Curaçao. Like many refugees and migrants, she faced significant challenges, including language barriers, housing issues, and limited access to basic services. These experiences motivated her to act on behalf of people who have faced similar situations.

Jennifer and a team of dedicated volunteers conducted beach cleanups, supported local schools, and prepared arepas and meals to raise funds for officially establishing the FUNDASHON VENEX CURAÇAO (VENEX). The grassroots organization is committed to assisting Venezuelan refugees and migrants and the vulnerable local community on the Dutch Caribbean Island. Since 2017, Jennifer has served as the foundation's director.

In 2021, VENEX launched the project “La Casa del Venezolano” (The Venezuelan's House), through which the Foundation offers legal advice and provides mental health and psychosocial support. La Casa del Venezolano offers extracurricular support to refugee and migrant children through “La Escuela de Coquito” (Coquito School). In addition to this, the Foundation provides entrepreneurship courses such as baking, pastry-making, cosmetology, and sewing to enhance the self-reliance of refugees and migrants.

“We all have gifts and abilities, and how beautiful it would be to share our gifts and skills with the most vulnerable daily,” says Jennifer.

In VENEX, vulnerable people, including refugees, feel protected and welcome. In November 2023, VENEX helped UNHCR conduct a protection monitoring exercise to better understand the needs and difficulties refugees and migrants face in accessing basic services on the island. UNHCR reached nearly 900 people through this exercise.

UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama thanks the contributions from our donors in 2024

Australian Aid · Belgium partner in development · Irish Aid Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland · UKaid · UNAIDS

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