Panama Multi-Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional Context

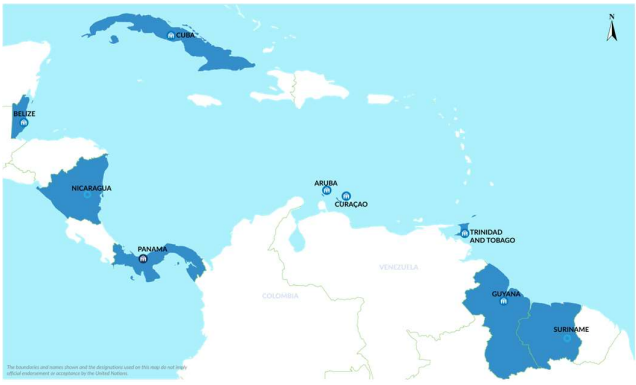
As of 31 December 2022, some one hundred million people were forced to flee conflict, violence, and human rights violations. Across countries part of **UNHCR Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama,** thousands of people in mixed movements embarked on dangerous journeys across borders, most looking for protection northwards.

In **Panamá**, nearly 250,000 people crossed irregularly through the Darien jungle by the end of December, making 2022 a record year for crossings in Panamanian history. Panama also took over the pro-tempore Presidency of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) for 2023 and committed to strengthening the Government's response to mixed movements.

By the end of 2022, over 6,000 **Cubans** were detained by the U.S. Coast Guard and forcibly returned to the island as part of bilateral immigration agreements between these two countries.

As of 31 December, some 31,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants were living in **Aruba and Curacao**. Government delegations continued to negotiate the reopening of sea and air borders with Venezuela, closed since February 2019 due to a unilateral decision of the Venezuelan Government.

Trinidad and Tobago registered alarming rates of criminal activities, particularly affecting vulnerable groups UNHCR protects. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Office reported over 600 murders throughout the year, making 2022 the period with the highest recorded toll in the country's history.



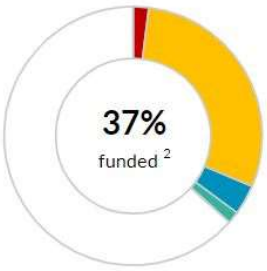
In **Guyana**, according to the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), 20 per cent of the health facilities in the country do not have electricity and only 60 per cent have a stable water supply. In Region 1, UNHCR keeps receiving reports of poor housing and WASH conditions, limited access to food, and a considerable number of out-of-school children, as well as children at risk of malnutrition and other health concerns.

The Government of **Belize** announced a three-month extension period for the registration phase of the Amnesty exercise, to reach eligible people who have not been able to complete their applications. According to the Immigration Department, as of the middle of December, over 10,000 people have applied for Amnesty, of which some 900 are asylum seekers.

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 8 December 2022



$54.3 million
UNHCR's financial requirements 2022[1]

- 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, Curaçao, Guyana, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname,** and **Trinidad and Tobago.**
[2] The percentage funded is indicative.

UNHCR's Response

Updates on Country Activities

In 2022, UNHCR in Guyana supported a total of 2,980 children with community-based English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in the communities of Yarakita, Imbotero, White Water and Farm Corps.

Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Belize**, UNHCR trained 13 officials of the Refugee Department, the Refugee Eligibility Committee, and the Refugee Technical Working Group on Refugee Status Determination (RSD).
- In **Panama**, UNHCR participated in the event "Holidays without Violence" organized by the National Institute for Women (INAMU). The Agency provided key messages to include refugees and asylum seekers in the GBV response.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR's workshop on international refugee protection reached 46 people from the Law School of the University of West Indies, representatives of NGOs, attorneys, and the judiciary, among others.

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

- To mark World Aids Day, UNHCR **Aruba** and its partner HIAS, conducted a sensitization campaign to reduce the stigma against HIV/AIDS. The Agency distributed 1,150 flyers and 3,888 condoms.
- In **Guyana,** UNHCR counselled 460 people and provided information on access to protection services. The agency assisted 116 children with community-based English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in the communities of Yarakita, Imbotero, White Water, and Farm Corps.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR supported 70 people with legal assistance related to their asylum claims and access to basic rights.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR assisted 16 asylum seeker survivors of GBV in Bella Vista with psychosocial support sessions. In collaboration with 'I HOPE', a refugee-led organization, UNHCR held the activity "Eradicating violence against women in Belize". A total of 14 asylum-seeking and national women participated.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR conducted 21 resettlement (RST) interviews for 48 individuals, as well as protection screenings for 31 asylum seekers for the identification of merged RSD-RST cases.

Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Curacao**, UNHCR together with *Foundation Salù pa Tur* (SPT), provided primary health services, including mental, sexual, and reproductive health consultations to 953 people.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR assisted 300 people with cash-based assistance to cover basic needs and distributed 111 core-relief items (CRIs), including solar lamps and powder milk, to refugees and asylum seekers.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR and public health workers went to Anabisi, Oronoque, and Green House communities in Region 1. A total of 81 Venezuelans (20 men, 26 women, 15 boys, and 20 girls) were vaccinated against yellow fever, tuberculosis (BCG), Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR), and received deworming tabs. In December, the agency assisted some 60 people with food hampers and core relief items (CRIs) and provided cash-based assistance to 185 vulnerable individuals.

Livelihoods

- In **Belize**, UNHCR together with Humana People to People and Help for Progress (HfP), assisted 53 people with access to vocational training and technical skills certification.
- In the framework of the Talent Without Borders employability program, UNHCR **Panama** and partners held "Christmas Without Borders". On this occasion, 50 refugees received their graduation diplomas, and 85 beneficiaries attended the event. The agency also conducted a virtual event called "Recruitment without borders", which 42 recruiters from 30 companies attended.

Stories from the Field

Broadcasting hope: A voice advocating for integration in Curaçao

Carlos always believed that committing to a just cause was the right thing to do. From his university days in Venezuela at the IT faculty until today, he stood out for his engagement with his community, whether to advocate for the rights of his fellow students in Venezuela or to disseminate useful information for the refugee and migrant community in Curaçao.

But how did a Venezuelan IT engineer become a radio speaker?

“I got a job offer in Curacao, and in 2012 together with other Venezuelans on the island we founded *Venex Curacao*, a local NGO to help the Venezuelan community”, he says.

Thanks to Venex, Carlos discovered the radio. “In 2020, I was organizing radio interviews with some NGOs arranging events for the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. The problem was that the broadcasting schedules did not coincide with the time the organizations could go live for interviews. So, I came up with an idea” he said.

Carlos did radio broadcasting training to equip himself with the necessary tools and set up *Refugiados Unidos*, an online radio broadcasting from Willemstad. Since June 2021, through this channel, Carlos supports the activities of the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V).

"Through the radio station, I try to convey important messages to refugees and migrants on the island, in the Caribbean as well as to the host communities. We talk about the rights and duties of foreigners as well as services provided by different organizations as part of the R4V. Also, to fight against xenophobia and promote integration, I tell the stories of resilience of refugee and migrant people in Curacao but also other countries” says Carlos.

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

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