

Panama Multi-Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional Context

Although reports of abuses involving refugees, asylum-seekers, and others on the move persist in countries under **UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama**, changes in governmental and regional policies and cooperation schemes to address mixed movements were registered in this sub-region in April.

In **Curaçao**, police officials detained 18 women from Venezuela, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic for violating immigration policies. Authorities suspect they are victims of human trafficking and are investigating to determine if they were subject to any form of exploitation.

In **Nicaragua**, Ortega's regime detained some 20 people during the Holy Week in connection to their participation in public activities by the Catholic Church. The media reports that 35 additional incidents were recorded against opponents, members of the Church, journalists, and activists during this period.

In **Belize**, the Government still needs to confirm the implementation of entry restrictions for Jamaicans. Bilateral meetings are scheduled to discuss the matter. The Prime Minister's announcement follows critics alleging that the measures violate the CARICOM treaty. Since January 2022, some 1,670 Jamaicans have entered the country through the airport, but only 788 left using official border points.

The US Government resumed its return flights to **Cuba** with individuals who had been previously deported. The measure came after a two-year pause and involved the return of 123 people who arrived irregularly to the US, mainly from Havana, Artemisa, Matanzas, and Granma.

The International Court of Justice rejected by a vote of 14 to 1 Venezuela's objections in the ongoing case filed by **Guyana** to determine the land boundaries between the two countries. The court will address Guyana's application for upholding the validity of the 1899 arbitral award. Recently, Guyana announced its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council and secured the support of all 32 Latin-American and



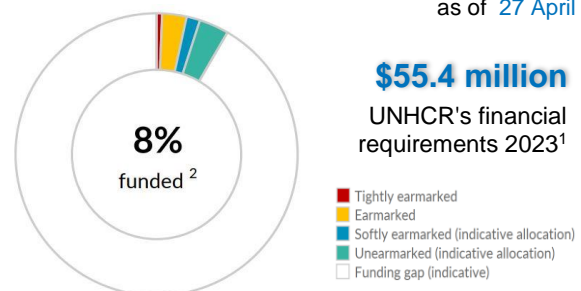
Caribbean States Group (GRULAC) members for the 2024-2025 term.

Suriname reintroduces visa requirements for 21 countries, including the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Venezuela, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Syria. Less than a year ago, the Government announced the abolition of visa requirements for all nationalities entering for tourism purposes or family visits. A recent investigation has evidenced that visa-free travel is being used for other purposes, and many travelers are utilizing Suriname as a transit point.

Panama, Colombia, and the United States agreed to implement a joint strategy to address mixed movements, including combatting human trafficking, enabling flexible legal pathways for refugees and migrants as an alternative to crossing through Darien, and promoting sustainable economic activities in border communities.

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

Regional funding Overview as of 27 April 2023



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 Bella Vista, Belize, UNHCR, Humana People to People (HUMANA), and The British High Commission spoke with asylum-seeker and refugee entrepreneurs about their local integration experience and participated in a painting activity with the community volunteers.

UNHCR's Response Updates on Country Activities



Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Panama**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs trained 60 Police officers appointed to Colon Province on international protection as part of a joint plan to prevent statelessness.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained over 90 officers of Policy Service on international and refugee protection, including Grenada and Antigua & Barbuda participants.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR trained nine officials of the Refugee Department on Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and met with the Vital Statistics Unit (VSU) to explore the implementation of birth registration mobile clinics and reduce the risk of statelessness in Belize.



Health

- In **Curaçao**, UNHCR, through *Foundation Salù pa Tur*, provided primary health services to 532 people, including mental, sexual, and reproductive health services, in 1,046 consultations.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained ten Living Water Community and La Casita staff on psychosocial first aid and basic skills to address trauma responses.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR and Guyana Sex Work Coalition (GSWC) supported 230 Venezuelan women with information sessions on GBV, HIV, and STIs prevention.



Protection

- In **Panama**, UNHCR interviewed 100 refugees and migrants during Darien and Chiriqui's monthly monitoring exercise.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR participated in the National Agriculture and Trade Show and hosted a booth with information on international protection and the activities carried out by the Agency, reaching some 470 people.



Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR provided cash-based assistance to 71 people to cover rent and basic needs.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR visited Canaan-Membrillo and Bajo Chiquito communities to discuss with local leaders the spaces to install solar panels and satellite equipment. The Agency also distributed 20 kitchen sets to Alto Playona community.



Livelihoods and Local Integration

- In **Belize**, through partner Humana, UNHCR trained 19 individuals in sewing and jewelry production and provided English as a Second Language classes. The Agency supported 14 small businesses with in-kind assistance and assisted 14 individuals with psychosocial support.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR conducted interviews to recruit 16 new community outreach members (COMs) from diverse backgrounds. The COMs, all asylum-seeker and refugee volunteers, are key to maintaining the two-way communication between UNHCR and those who require international protection.



Stories from the Field

Maira's Flowers: A Story of Courage and Determination

"Maira is a 41-year-old woman from Venezuela. She moved to Trinidad and Tobago four years ago for protection and a better life. Her decision to leave Venezuela was not an easy one. She had a good job and a comfortable life in her country, but she knew that she and her children would have a better future in Trinidad and Tobago.

When Maira moved, she did not speak English or know anyone in the country. Maira was unfamiliar with the culture and only knew basic phrases. "Good morning, good night, and thank you" – she noted. In a place with no family or friends, Maira faced many challenges as an asylum-seeking woman, mother of four, and a person with epilepsy.

She worked in several businesses, including a beauty salon, restaurant, and bar, but her employers often exploited and abused her. Maira also faced discrimination because she was Venezuelan. She was harassed by many men who took advantage of her vulnerable condition.

Despite the challenges, Maira never gave up. She learned English and started a business selling handmade paper flowers as decorations. "I felt I had no other choice. I needed a job and got this idea which I started to develop from home". "It must run in my family" – she added. "My grandma was an artisan, and all members of my extended family also made handcrafts". Maira's work also helps her cope with her health condition's hardships. "My art brings me peace. It is therapy, and I love it".

She dreams of one day opening her shop, where people can buy her work and learn about Venezuelan culture. "I received much human warmth and encountered empathetic and human people. In this country, I have learned a lot from them. I stayed focused and took the best from people. I have also learned from my bad experiences, and I will keep working because this country has allowed me to develop my art".

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



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