

# Panama Multi-Country Office

## Monthly Operational Update

### Regional Context

Countries under the **UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama** participated in key judicial actions and contributed to high-level forums in July.

The Joint Court of **Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba** granted an appeal filed by a Venezuelan asylum-seeker demanding the Government's compensation due to a prolonged stay in a detention centre. The decision was based on Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

During the Forty-Fifth Heads of Government meeting, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Chairman announced that **Curaçao** and Martinique would become associate members of CARICOM. He also announced that by March 2024, CARICOM members would allow freedom of movement within their borders, including access to health services and schooling for children. **Belize** confirmed its support for implementing the policies, although it announced the development of exceptions that include visa requirements for Haitian nationals.

The European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) calling on European Union (EU) member states, its External Action Service (EEAS), and delegation in **Cuba** to publicly condemn violations and abuses of human rights in this country. Nonetheless, 27 EU members and 32 Latin American and Caribbean countries signed a [joint declaration](#) to end Cuba's embargo at the third CELAC-EU Summit, highlighting that the country's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism hinders international transactions with the island.

**Nicaragua** was the only country out of 60 that refused to sign the CELAC-EU's joint declaration condemning the ongoing war against Ukraine. Afterward, the Government released a statement accusing the EU of violating consensus rules. The International Court of Justice rejected Nicaragua's claim to extend its continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles off Colombia, and the Government cancelled the legal status of another 25 NGOs, alleging a breach of transparency policies.

In **Guyana**, The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted precautionary measures to the Chinese Landing indigenous community in Region 1 after members alleged threats against them due to their

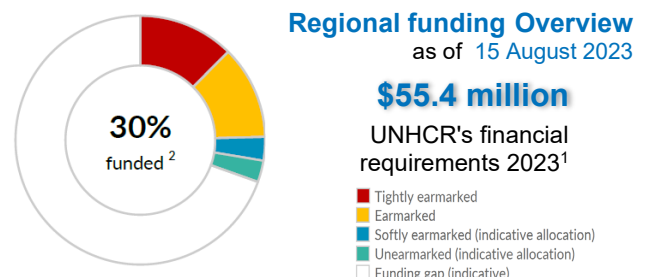


opposition to mining activities in their lands. Following the decision, the Government temporarily suspended all mining activities in the area. The President announced that Spanish classes will become mandatory in public schools starting with the new school year in September to strengthen the country's economic competitiveness.

In **Panama**, the record number of people who crossed the Darien jungle in 2022 was surpassed (251,758 people). July registered the highest number of irregular entries in 2023 (55,387 people), marking it the second-highest monthly entry in the country's history. The Government created a two-year [temporary residency permit](#) available to all foreigners who entered Panama irregularly and have stayed in the country for at least one year without starting a regularization procedure.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the Government announced its intention to grant access to primary education for refugee and migrant children by September 2023. Nevertheless, the High Court delivered a judgment stating that the 1951 Refugee Convention obligations do not apply to Trinidad and Tobago, as they are not incorporated into domestic law. Police officials detained nearly 200 Venezuelan refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants. Despite several judicial actions, many have been refouled and deported.

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



<sup>1</sup> 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.**

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



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## UNHCR's Response Updates on Country Activities

In Trinidad and Tobago, UNHCR conducted a mission to Penal Town, in the Penal-Debe Region to register 44 asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection, as well as to renew UNHCR cards for 56 individuals.



### Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Panama**, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Registry trained over 120 government officials in Colón and Chiriquí provinces on international protection and statelessness prevention.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR facilitated two workshops on international protection for 40 National Police officers and hosted the Humanitarian Breakfast Series with IOM. Over 70 people participated, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Social Development.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR and other UN Agencies conducted an awareness session on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) for 28 Government officials. Ten Government agencies participated in this session.



### Health

- UNHCR, through *Foundation Salù pa Tur*, provided primary health services to 467 people in **Curacao**, including mental, sexual, and reproductive health services, for 1,003 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 Panamanian Red Cross (CRP), provided primary health care to over 2,100 refugees and migrants in Darien and Chiriquí.



### Protection

- In **Curacao**, UNHCR and HIAS trained 17 individuals on GBV prevention and response, focusing on a survivor-centered approach and engaging men and boys in the prevention of GBV.
- UNHCR in **Suriname** registered 70 people, enabling them to access essential services and documentation.
- In **Aruba**, UNHCR organized an information session with 13 HIAS community mobilizers to discuss legal topics, including the asylum system, labour rights, tenant rights, and humanitarian parole.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR registered 980 people, recognized 22 people as refugees, and provided UNHCR cards to 643 individuals.



### Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR donated 300 mosquito nets to the Mabaruma Regional Hospital for forcibly displaced and host communities. The Agency prepared school admission letters for 128 forcibly displaced children in Region 1.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR provided cash-based assistance to 74 people to cover rent and basic needs.



### Livelihoods and Local Integration

- In **Belize**, UNHCR and partner Humana hosted a three-week summer camp for 73 refugee, asylum-seeking, and local children (ages 4-15), all residents of the Bella Vista community.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR, HIAS, and ManPower Group launched its 2023 *Talents Without Borders* programme. Bilateral meetings with the private sector are scheduled to accelerate the recruitment of refugees.



# Stories from the Field

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## Empathy in Action: Yumico's Story of Transforming Lives

Sometimes, when Yumico gets a call, on the other end, there is a woman survivor of domestic violence reaching out for help. Yumico offers her support and resources without hesitation, connecting the woman with the institutions that can assist her.

When Yumico and her family fled Venezuela in search of protection from violence and persecution, she never imagined that in Panama, she would find a group of refugee and asylum-seeking women who facilitated her integration within their newfound communities. Women like her are committed to lending a hand to people, even when facing some of the most challenging times of their lives.

Yumico is part of the Community Mobilizers, a group of over 50 volunteers dedicated to preventing and responding to situations of violence that may occur within their communities. They participate in activities that enrich their understanding of the social context and build bridges between refugees, asylum-seekers, and their host communities in Panama City. The Community Mobilizers are also part of a comprehensive Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention programme promoted by UNHCR and HIAS, which, together with the Government and non-governmental institutions, raises awareness on GBV prevention and ensures that all survivors have access to adequate, timely, and quality services.

Through training in psychological first aid, this joint programme aims to empower vulnerable women and girls, allowing them to advocate for their rights in the context of increasing rates of domestic violence and femicide incidents in Panama.

"I've connected to many women who needed someone to talk to during difficult moments," Yumico affirms, "sometimes people feel safer communicating with people like us rather than the institutions because they're afraid". Through empathy and comforting words, community mobilizers like Yumico respond effectively, extending aid to others in critical moments.

In Panama, things for Yumico and her family were not always perfect. Starting over is challenging, and the memories of what they left behind still burn bright. But she has recognized in herself the potential to make a meaningful impact in the country that offered her refuge and safety. A sense of purpose drives her, and she is hopeful for the future her family is building far away from home. "I feel like I can be free here", she shares.

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

