

# UNHCR Trinidad and Tobago

## 2023 REVIEW

In 2023, UNHCR Trinidad and Tobago (UNHCR) focused its resources on critical areas to support refugees and asylum-seekers in accessing their rights and realizing their aspirations for a better future. These areas included advocacy and stakeholder engagement, partnerships to provide support

and services to strengthen communities, capacity-building to enhance the protection environment, asylum-seeker registration, refugee status determination (RSD), and durable solutions such as voluntary repatriation, integration, resettlement, and complementary pathways.

### Key Figures



UNHCR Trinidad and Tobago supported **15,148** refugees and asylum-seekers in 2023.



**8,068** people were registered in 2023.



**86%** from Venezuela



As of December 2023, a total of **31,960 refugees and asylum-seekers** are registered with UNHCR.



**253** people underwent RSD procedures.



**917** people received legal assistance.



**653** people trained in international protection for forcibly displaced people.



**541** refugees were interviewed for resettlement, and **421** submitted for resettlement.



**239** received multipurpose cash assistance (CBI).



**2,044** accessed case management services to address specific needs.

## Capacity Building



In line with the Global Refugee Forum 2023 goals, UNHCR strengthened dialogue with the government to discuss protection issues effectively. UNHCR's collaboration with UNICEF supported twice as many children to access education compared to 2022.

The Government's approval for refugee and migrant children to enter the national education scheme was a significant achievement, with enrollment expected to occur in 2024. UNHCR supports the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago through translation services and will expand to include a case manager in 2024. The government has also shared in Parliament that it is drafting a new asylum policy, a step forward in developing an asylum system and legislation.



UNHCR organized continuous capacity-building targeting various stakeholders. These included legal/protection, registration, RSD, Resettlement and Community Based Protection training and workshops. UNHCR trained academia, partners, the Defense Force, journalists/media, judiciary, people UNHCR protects and TTPS/Police. UNHCR's legal team conducted capacity-building with the Defense Force, training **653** people to promote recognition of international refugee protection standards, access to rights, and local integration. These initiatives addressed questions raised by national security actors regarding the definition of a refugee, the protection they need, and how to balance border protection with the obligation to offer international protection for people forced to flee their homes.

## Government Engagement, Advocacy & Partnerships





UNHCR continues to work with the **USA, Canada, and Australia** to facilitate resettlement for a limited number of refugees. In 2023, UNHCR supported the resettlement of **over 400 people** to third countries. The protection team in collaboration with partners, identifies and processes new cases, enabling many to depart and paving the way for more. UNHCR's registration process changed in April 2023, introducing a new "walk-in" system and eliminating the pre-registration step: this increased registrations and shortened waiting time for refugees and asylum-seekers.

**In 2023, UNHCR registered 8,068 asylum-seekers.**

## Resettlement & Registration



## Community Engagement & Partnerships



Refugees shared their stories and advocated for inclusion, opportunities to contribute to Trinidad and Tobago's development, and the chance to build better lives through various UNHCR-supported platforms. UNHCR continuously engaged with refugees and asylum-seekers, with community outreach workers playing a vital role in communication. The R4V participatory assessment was completed, and the R4V platform organized a successful indigenous people's forum and quarterly humanitarian breakfast meetings, aimed at advocating for refugee and migrant protection with multiple stakeholders. Health, education, gender-based violence (GBV), Communication with Communities (CwC) and livelihood interventions were strengthened.



## Livelihoods

In 2023, refugees in Trinidad and Tobago achieved significant milestones in their entrepreneurial endeavours, establishing businesses in various sectors, including culinary, fitness, design, and décor. Through UNHCR, partner Pan-American Development Foundation, and the local business community in the city of Chaguanas, the EU-funded Inclusive Cities project provided livelihood opportunities for refugees, asylum seekers, and host community members.

This pilot livelihoods initiative allowed for 64 people to benefit from vocational or entrepreneurship training. Additionally, 11 participants received seed capital to support the development of small businesses, while others received assistance in securing job placements. Monitoring data indicates that participants secured subsequent employment or established businesses, contributing to their community's economic growth and development.

The Inclusive Cities project facilitated the formation of essential networks with key stakeholders, including the Mayor of Chaguanas and local businesses. These connections are crucial in advancing the rights and long-term inclusion of refugees and migrants in the region.



By providing access to vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and employment opportunities, UNHCR and its partners are creating sustainable solutions for displaced people while fostering inclusive economic growth.

The success of this initiative highlights the potential for similar projects to empower refugees and asylum seekers, enabling them to become self-reliant and active contributors to their host communities.





## Community-Based Protection

In 2023, UNHCR collaborated with funded partners La Casita Hispanic Cultural Centre and Living Water Community and operational partners, the Archdiocese Ministry for Migrants and Refugees, and WOMEN to implement a range of initiatives targeting refugees, asylum seekers and the host community. These initiatives, with case management and safe shelters, included support for **33 GBV survivors** under La Casita. UNHCR and partners organized a series of events were organized, including entrepreneurship and cultural fairs, UN Day commemorative activities, and a sports and family day event to mark World Refugee Day. UNHCR and partners focused on strengthening advocacy efforts with the government, international community, and civil society to promote the safe inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in community initiatives and support systems. As part of its efforts, **UNHCR distributed Core Relief Items (kitchen sets, solar lamps and sleeping mats)** to the national disaster management agency, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management. UNHCR facilitated the participation of refugee youth in the National Model United Nations

programme, providing valuable learning opportunities and exposure to international affairs. The organization also delivered training on international protection and safe referrals of vulnerable people to multiple stakeholders, ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers receive the support they need. To expand its community partnerships, UNHCR diversified its collaborations to include the Anglican Church and other faith and community-based organisations. This approach fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment for displaced individuals. Furthermore, **UNHCR revamped its Community Outreach Members (COMS) programme**, onboarding 16 new members from diverse nationalities, ages, and backgrounds. These COMS played a crucial role in supporting the UNHCR Community-Based Protection strategy, primarily through outreach activities and identifying the needs and potential solutions within the community.



## Health

While primary and emergency healthcare is freely available for all non-nationals, including refugees, access to secondary healthcare comes at a cost. Throughout the year, **70% of cases** supported by Case Management had severe medical needs, with some requiring surgical interventions only available in the private sector due to the existing policy. However, the costs of these interventions remain prohibitive for refugees and asylum-seekers.

To address this gap, UNHCR continued the Medical Assistance Review Committee (MARC) in 2023, a collaborative effort between UNHCR, its partners (the Living Water Community and Family Planning Association), and two volunteer medical professionals from Trinidad and Tobago who were passionate about finding solutions. The MARC supported selected asylum seeker/refugee households with lifesaving surgical interventions.

The volunteer doctors played a crucial role in the success of the MARC. In addition to providing expert medical advice that lent legitimacy to the Committee, they offered extra support through referrals, recommendations for experts in the field, and outreach to other medical practitioners to ensure well-informed decision-making.



## Key Figures

**64 people** supported through income generating activities/livelihood programmes.

**46** community group members, community leaders and outreach volunteers supported

**1,491 children** accessed education opportunities.

**44** outreach, information awareness and/or sensitization sessions conducted in communities.

## 2024 Looking Ahead



In 2024, UNHCR will continue to advocate for inclusion, asylum system development, the transition of registration and refugee status determination, and for access of asylum-seekers and refugee children to national education. UNHCR will work with four funded partners – Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago, La Casita Hispanic Cultural Centre, UNICEF, and the Caribbean Centre for Human Rights – focusing on protection and inclusion for refugees and asylum-seekers.

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