Panama Multi-Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional Context

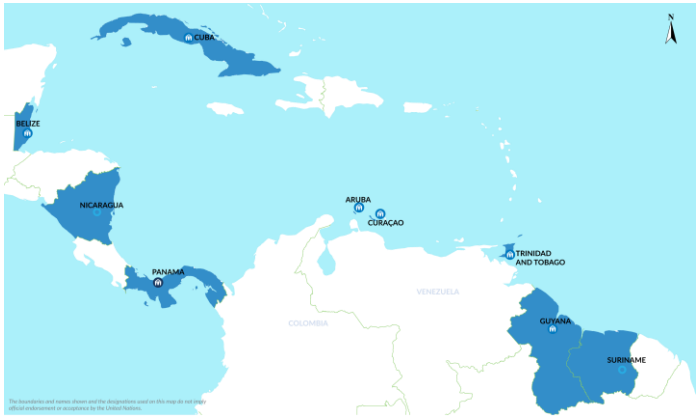
Countries under the **Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama** continue to feel the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, and the global burst in energy and food prices.

In **Guyana**, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) conducted an assessment covering 330 health facilities and found alarming gaps in the provision of health care, revealing that 24 per cent of the buildings need urgent structural repairs, 20 per cent lack power, and 94 per cent lack potable water. Less than 50 per cent of the health posts have an ambulance, and hospitals require basic medical supplies or commonly used medications, posing additional barriers to access health services for refugees and asylum seekers.

In **Panama**, small and medium-sized pharmacy owners opposed a government decree establishing a 30 per cent discount over 170 meds, as their proposal to fulfill the pledge of making medication available at a lower cost, taken after July's national protests. More than 450 small pharmacies closed their doors for several days, stating that the measure could force them to bankruptcy. Most refugees and asylum seekers report that they cannot afford the necessary medical drugs, a situation that worsens for those with chronic diseases.

In **Suriname**, protests against ongoing government corruption scandals are spreading, while in **Cuba** the economic challenges due to the fallout from the COVID pandemic continue to affect the island and its population, with extensive electricity cuts and petrol shortages.

From 1 January to August 2022, 102,067 people crossed the Darien border irregularly[1]. The month of August registered the highest number of people crossing the jungle in one month ever (31,055 people). The top nationalities on the move continue to be Venezuela and Haiti, followed by Ecuador and Cuba. This increase stands in line with the new visa restrictions established across the region,



creating higher challenges for governments and other organizations to respond to the crisis.

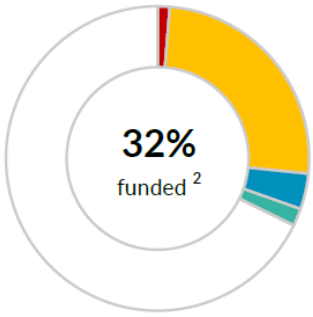
However, a step forward in terms of protection has been made in **Belize,** where the Amnesty program was officially launched on 2 August 2022. Refugees and asylum-seekers who fit the eligibility criteria, as well as undocumented migrants residing in Belize, now have the opportunity to apply for a permanent resident status with a path to citizenship, ensuring durable solutions for these vulnerable groups.

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 30 August 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 requirements 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.

[1] *Source: National Migration Service*

UNHCR's Response:

Updates on Country Activities

Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR hosted a workshop on **International Refugee Protection** for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS). More than **45 officers** serving across the country attended.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR's partner, Guyana Sex Work Coalition (GSWC), sensitized **82 sex workers** on **sexual and reproductive health** and HIV/STI prevention. A total of **77 sex workers** attended **support group sessions** and GWSC distributed **74 hygiene kits**. Some **55 persons** were tested and counselled on HIV/STI.

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

- In **Belize**, UNHCR and partners supported a total of **688 asylum seekers** and other members of vulnerable groups, in their application for the Government´s **Amnesty Program**, through the provision of documentation and appointments for application submission.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR and partner HIAS, supported five **survivors of Gender-Based Violence** (GBV) with food, shelter, and other protection services. A total of **45 persons** benefited from cash-based interventions, including victims of labor exploitation, GBV survivors, and persons with medical needs. In addition, **19 persons** and host community members participated in community-based initiatives.
- In **Aruba,** UNHCR and partner HIAS conducted an informational session **"Know your rights"** for refugees and asylum-seekers. Around **20 persons** attended the event which covered topics like the asylum process, appeals timeframes, and tenant and labor rights.

Durable Solutions and Livelihoods

- In **Panama**, around 23 asylum-seekers and refugees participated in the workshops **"Canal de Empresarias"** in the City of Knowledge (CDS in its Spanish acronym), preceding the upcoming joint UNHCR and CDS programme for **entrepreneurial refugees**. In addition, the employability programme **Talent without Borders (Talento sin Fronteras)** conducted follow-up interviews for a total of **20 participants** linked with the recruitment department of ManpowerGroup. These follow-up interviews allowed each candidate to validate their résumés and receive guidance in their pursuit of life-changing jobs.

Stories from the Field

Hard work pays off in Trinidad

When he arrived in Trinidad in search of safety, Luis*, a Venezuelan asylum seeker, did not think he would encounter so many difficulties in his quest for economic stability. Unfair employment conditions or uneven payment were on the agenda and when he thought he had finally found a stable job in a restaurant, it closed due to the pandemic. Luis was back to square one, without a stable income.

Nonetheless, Luis persevered. He continued to pursue his goal: to be self-reliant. Being a resourceful person, he began looking for occasional jobs in Cunupia, a town in central Trinidad, where most Venezuelans hoping for a daily job opportunity in agriculture and construction gather: "every day I was going to Cunupia hoping to be selected for a job" he said.

It was not easy but Luis did not give up and kept returning. He spent several months working for different companies, in part-time jobs or as a backup employee, until the turning point: a permanent contract with a warehouse.

Currently, he feels proud and satisfied, supported by his co-workers, and well integrated into his host community "Some Venezuelans think it is difficult to integrate into this society, but for me has been the opposite. We can integrate. It depends on the behaviour that we have. Good or bad treatment from others will depend on how we behave, on our attitude. In my case, I cannot complain. I have received excellent treatment from the people of Trinidad. In the social and labour spheres, the Trinitarians have been excellent to me" says Luis.

*All names have been changed to protect the asylum seeker's confidentiality.

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

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