

Panama Multi-Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional Context

After the mixed movements increase in 2022 across Latin America, in January 2023 the United States announced new migration policies to address irregular cross-border entries, that also apply to nationals of countries under **UNHCR Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama**.

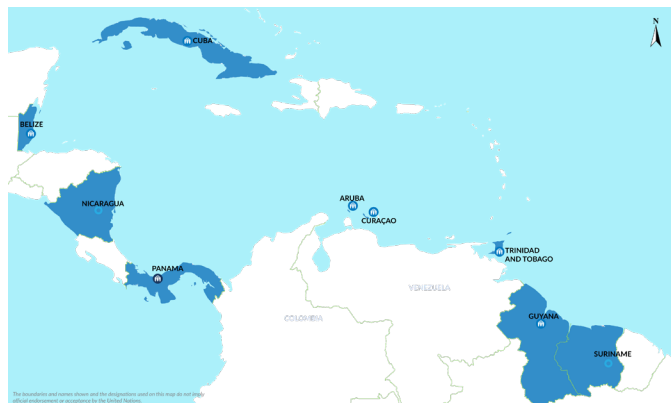
Starting on 6 January, up to **30,000** individuals from **Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela** will be able to apply for a **parole** programme to enter the US legally if they fulfil the requirements. People who have irregularly crossed the Mexican or Panamanian borders after 19 October 2022 (Venezuelans), and 9 January 2023 (Cubans, Haitians, and Nicaraguans) are ineligible.

Despite this, in January 2023, **24,643** people crossed the Darien in **Panama** irregularly, **five times** the number of people who arrived during the same period in 2022. Most were from Haiti (10,222), Ecuador (6,352), and Venezuela (2,337).

By the end of January, over **1,900 Cubans** detained in the United States, the Bahamas, and the Cayman Islands, were forcibly returned to the island. So far in 2023, **23 joint operations** to return undocumented Cubans were carried out as part of bilateral immigration agreements between these countries.

In **Nicaragua**, human rights violations continue to be a concern with unlawful detentions of civilians for political reasons. The **Inter-American Court of Human Rights** categorized the current country's status as a matter of urgent attention, advocating for the immediate release of political dissidents.

In **Aruba and Curacao**, Government delegations continued to negotiate the **reopening of the sea and air borders with Venezuela**, which have been closed since February 2019 due to a unilateral decision of the Venezuelan Government.

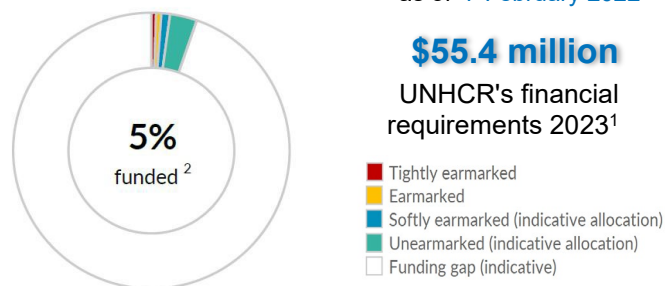


In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the Ministry of National Security extended work permits for non-nationals legally registered during a State-led Amnesty process in 2019. The Ministry approved a total of **9,133 permit renewals** and is processing another **4,710**.

In **Guyana**, the Government announced that **one billion dollars**, from the overall 94.4 billion allocated for the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the 2023 national budget, will be destined to fund education initiatives for vulnerable populations. This includes the improvement of **water supplies** in the hinterland regions and the development of an **English as a Second Language (ESL)** multi-year program for indigenous children in remote areas.

MCO Panama requires USD 55.4M to continue to assist, and secure solutions in the subregion.

Regional funding Overview as of 7 February 2022



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.



UNHCR's Response: Updates on Country Activities

As of 31 January 2023, UNHCR in Belize has reached over 2,500 people with information on the Amnesty and has assisted over 1,500 individuals with legal guidance related to the process.



Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR and partner HIAS met with the Gender Bureau (CEDEHM) and the policy advisor of the Ministry of Justice and Social Affairs, to discuss joint actions on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response.
- UNHCR and the **Belize** Immigration Department worked on a radio advertisement to inform about the extension of the Amnesty process. The ads were recorded in Spanish and English and will be aired nationally until the end of February 2023.
- UNHCR met with the Public Defender's Office and the Department of Victims' Legal Assistance of the Judiciary in **Panama** to discuss legal representation of GBV survivors and cooperation opportunities including training on international protection.



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

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR together with the Ministry of Education, conducted after-school ESL classes for 604 children in Regions 1, 2, 3 and 7. The Agency also reached out to over 150 people with GBV prevention interventions and sensitized 34 people on HIV/STI prevention.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR conducted 50 resettlement interviews with 84 people, and distributed 257 ID cards to asylum-seekers and refugees. The Agency identified 72 cases for refugee status determination and resettlement procedures.
- UNHCR and partner Human Rights Commission of **Belize**, participated in two Amnesty mobile clinics to ensure eligible asylum-seekers applied for the extension of the exercise. A total of 219 people were assisted during these activities.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR conducted training on Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) for seven staff members of partner Hogar Luisa. Together with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) UNHCR also trained 54 people on PSEA.



Humanitarian Assistance

- In **Curacao**, UNHCR through *Foundation Salù pa Tur*, provided primary health services to 1,146 people, including mental, sexual, and reproductive health consultations.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR assisted some 90 people with cash to cover their basic needs.
- UNHCR coordinated the distribution of 235 food baskets, 489 hygiene kits, 81 baby kits, 20 kitchen sets, 161 solar lamps, 556 mosquito nets, 196 jerrycans, and 38 tarpaulins for vulnerable populations in **Guyana**, Region 1. The first distribution phase started in the Mabaruma sub-region, reaching 78 vulnerable households (334 people).



Local Integration

- In **Belize**, UNHCR partner HUMANA enrolled 18 new participants in their community-based protection network of volunteers, to undertake advocacy and social cohesion activities in the Bella Vista community in 2023.
- UNHCR is developing a community-based protection program with 12 indigenous community leaders from Bajo Chiquito and Canaan-Membrillo communities in Darien, **Panama**. Most of the leaders are women and will be trained in community-based solution mechanisms and accountability strategies.



Stories from the Field

United by friendship and the desire to move forward: refugee and Panamanian children celebrate integration through art

"When I arrived in Panama, I thought I would feel a cultural gap. But when you leave your country and the bubble you knew bursts, you simply adapt," says Sebastián, a Venezuelan teenager who is a refugee in Panama.

The bubble Sebastián talks about was also felt by Guadalupe, an asylum-seeker from Nicaragua. When she arrived in Panama, she feared her accent and culture would be cause for ridicule, but little did she know *Fundación Espacio Creativo* (FEC), a local organization focused on community-based protection would change her life. In no time, Guadalupe became involved in FEC's art and culture programme that fosters integration between, asylum-seekers, migrants, and Panamanians. It didn't take long for her to realize that this was a safe space where she could be herself.

Sebastian and Guadalupe are part of a group of friends from different countries who met through FEC's activities. Among them, are Panamanians like Luis, who never had friends from other nationalities. "I've learned about their culture, they even showed me how one of our local dishes *"arroz con pollo"* is different in their cities," he says with a laugh.

They are united by a shared sense of humour, art, and the desire to take advantage of all the opportunities they got. In the end, they say: "We are from different countries, we have different traditions and cultures, but we have one thing in common: friendship and the desire to move forward".

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

