

Panama Multi Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional context

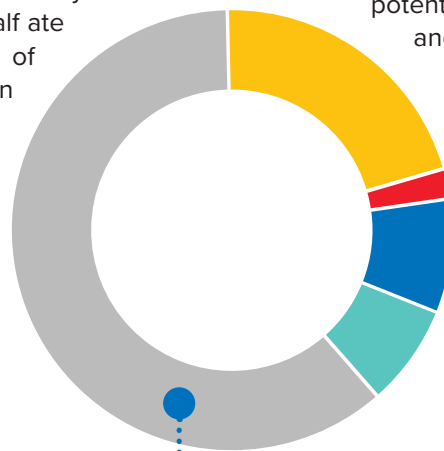
Forcibly displaced populations and their host communities continue to be affected by the pandemic, especially lack of access to basic needs and services such as food, rent, healthcare, livelihoods, and education. Prolonged school closures, virtual methodology for class delivery, and lack of resources in the household have posed additional risks for children as dropout rates rose in many countries, including Belize and Panama. Moreover, increased COVID-19 cases have led to sustained or re-introduced mobility and activity restrictions in several countries under MCO Panama, including Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba, and Curaçao. In this context, UNHCR continues to advocate for, and support the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national vaccination plans by engaging in information dissemination, as well as by assisting with interpretation services to facilitate access to COVID-19 vaccines, like in Guyana. However, the slow economic reactivation – that fails to fully include refugees and asylum seekers – remains a key obstacle in their self-reliance. In Panama, a protection monitoring exercise indicates that 51% of the people surveyed are unemployed. As a result, more than half ate two times or less a day. In addition, 51% of the respondents stated that they had been unable to pay rent for several months during the past quarter, thus increasing the risk of eviction or homelessness.

UNHCR continues to call on the international community to support displaced people in vulnerable conditions, including in countries under

the MCO, where major gaps remain, and responsibility-sharing would impact lives positively. The [countdown](#) towards the [first High-Level Officials Meeting \(HLOM\)](#) begins, part of the process of building a long-term framework for engagement of States and other actors in refugee situations, as set out in the [Global Compact on Refugees](#). Participants – senior government officials and representatives of other relevant stakeholders – will identify [progress, challenges, and where further engagement is needed](#) to increase support, self-reliance, and access to solutions for refugees, taking into consideration the challenges posed by the pandemic. The priorities for the first HLOM include expanding support for refugees and the countries who host them, advancing implementation of the pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum, and identifying areas in need of further support.

MCO Panama requires **USD 48.7million** to further strengthen access to regular quality learning opportunities that help children and adults learn, thrive, and develop their potential, build individual and collective resilience, and contribute to peaceful coexistence.

UNHCR also seeks to support governments and advocate for the conditions that lead to refugee, asylum-seeker, other displaced persons, and their host communities to access inclusive education and training in national systems.



Regional funding overview as of 31 August 2021

48.7M
required for 2021

39% funded

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

SNAPSHOT INTO THE FUNDING GAP

In 2021, displaced persons continue to face challenges to access education. With additional funding and support, UNHCR could improve **access to language education, as well as to primary and secondary education**, to support the journey of displaced people to durable solutions. [See more here.](#)

USD 1.3M

required for a comprehensive response in education in **Aruba, Curaçao, Guyana, Panama and Trinidad & Tobago**

¹ Financial requirements for the Panama MCO in 2021 including requirements for the operations and activities in Panama, Belize, Cuba, Nicaragua, Guyana, Aruba, Curaçao, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname.

For further details consult reporting.unhcr.org

Update on country activities

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

STRENGTHENING CENTRAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- In **Belize**, UNHCR trained 224 police recruits on human rights and constitutional law, police ethics and use of force, rights of refugees and non-nationals, and domestic violence. Additionally, UNHCR in coordination with the Refugee Department (RD) delivered a training session on international protection, the Refugees Act of Belize, and RSD procedures and gaps to 9 Refugee Eligibility Committee members and 3 Refugees Department staff.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR delivered a training session on statelessness and international protection to 35 instructors

from the academies and teaching directorates of local authorities, including SENAFRONT, SENAN, National Police, and the National Migration Service.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR in coordination with the Judicial Education Institute of Trinidad and Tobago (JEITT) [hosted a workshop](#) for 47 judges, magistrates, and registrars on refugee definition, protection principles, detention, and gender issues.

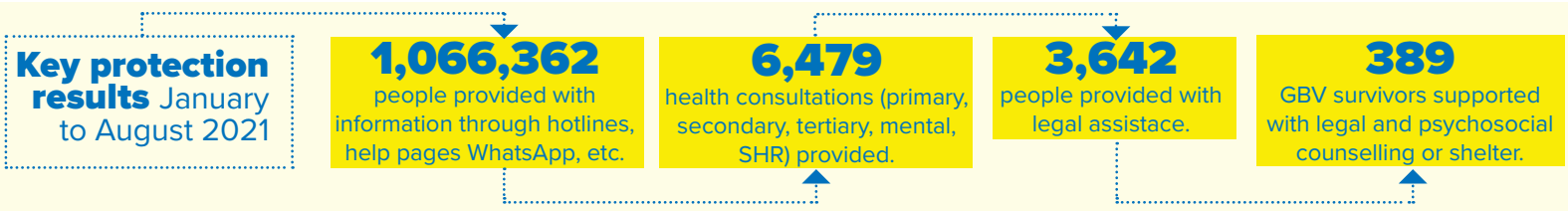
PROTECTION

INCLUDING COMMUNITY BASED PROTECTION & GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- In **Belize**, UNHCR donated a public address (PA) system, a projector, a tent, and two flat screen televisions to the Independence polyclinic to support COVID-19 related information outreach, as well as [13 bicycles](#) to facilitate the transport of community healthcare workers to remote areas in Southern Belize.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR coordinated with the Central Immigration Department and the Immigration Support Services to issue and extend the stay permits of more than 200 Venezuelans during a joint health outreach mission with the US Embassy and the Office of the First Lady. Furthermore, UNHCR offered interpretation support to 47 Venezuelans who received documents during a field mission by immigration officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR and the Ombudsman’s Office signed a collaboration agreement to jointly promote access to basic human rights for refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as

their inclusion in public policies and existing state social programmes.

- In **Suriname**, UNHCR issued and delivered registration certificates to 30 asylum-seekers. Authorities recognize the certificates, which allows persons of concern to remain in the country and apply for the residency permit while reducing the risk of deportation.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, approximately 1,700 refugees and migrants received their first COVID-19 vaccine dose at a vaccination drive organized by UNHCR through partner Living Water Community together with a local NGO. UNHCR also provided transportation and translation support. Additionally, UNHCR trained staff from community-based organizations La Casita and Helping Hearts on identification and referral pathways for vulnerable cases, including GBV, child protection, health, and legal interventions.



CHILD PROTECTION

- In **Belize**, 39 youth participated in a summer programme with activities on environment protection and recycling, arts and crafts, drug and alcohol abuse, and ESL and reading skills.
- In **Curaçao**, UNHCR is supporting the development of an information campaign for the vaccination of children in an irregular status. The campaign is being organized by the

Department of Youth Health Care Service of the Department of Public Health and the White Yellow Cross Aruba Foundation, and it offers access to a series of five vaccines for children up to 12 years old.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR conducted an awareness raising session on refugees for 25 4th-grade students and two teachers of a local school. The session was delivered within

the framework of “Migrations in the world” as part of the school’s Social Sciences curriculum.

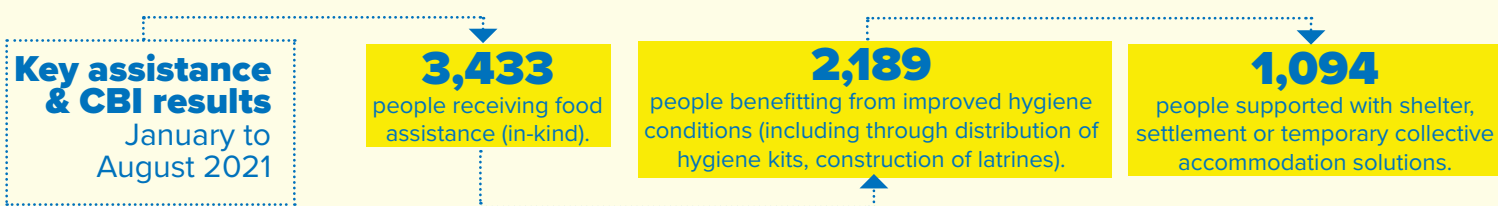
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 14 Venezuelan students graduated and obtained their worldwide recognized high school diplomas through UNHCR’s Equal Place programme.

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR, IOM and HIAS met with the Prime Minister and representatives of the government coalition parties to discuss priorities for the new government regarding refugees and migrants. The main topics addressed were regularization and inclusion in the formal labour market, as well as strengthening government engagement and coordination of assistance. Additionally, UNHCR, IOM, and HIAS delivered an awareness session on “Women in displacement” to an audience of approximately 20 persons, including on risks, challenges, and opportunities for women in displacement, GBV, and human trafficking. The session ended with an art exhibition and artistic performance focused on the difficulties that women face when fleeing their country.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR and IOM’s campaign Somos Lo Mismo launched its second social experiment, where Panamanians chose objects they would take if they were forced to flee. The [video reached](#) over 9,000 persons in the first four days.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR, UN Habitat, and IOM completed the series of ministerial meetings to present the “Inclusive Cities” project. Various participating government senior officials expressed support to design and implement the project. The following consultation will be with the Ministry of National Security to seek final approval to start the implementation.

DELIVERING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR distributed CBI to 119 individuals for food, medicines, and rent.
- In **Guyana**, 398 displaced persons and host community members received food assistance and hygiene kits.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR delivered 27 multipurpose cash transfers for food, rent, and medicine needs.
- In **Curaçao**, UNHCR distributed CBI for 11 households to support access to basic needs.



DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR through partner HIAS delivered a training to 24 staff from various agencies and organizations on mainstreaming gender in economic inclusion interventions and economic inclusion of women as GBV risk mitigator.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR through partner HUMANA continues to deliver livelihood courses on woodwork and music, in which 60 persons participated. Additionally, 14 women participated in an entrepreneurship training.
- In **Guyana**, 164 asylum-seekers participated in the second term of online English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, 19 of whom received support with connectivity and SIM cards
- In **Panama**, more than 10 entrepreneurs – both refugees and members of the host community – participated in the “Demo Day” activity of the Canal de Empresarias programme, where they showcased their projects and ventures for potential sponsors and buyers, while networking to strengthen their livelihood initiatives.



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Silenced choir singer finds new stage in Belize

After Jessica and her sister were told to join the gang or die, they had no choice but to flee from the only home they had ever known. By Aida Escobar in Camalote, Belize

Jessica* is up early confectioning purses. She uses yarn and plastic stencils to create these colourful bags of all sizes that she sells at local markets. “My mother taught my sister and me how to make beautiful bags out of yarn. We love being creative and making beautiful, unique purses.”

As she settles in to start making a new purse, she starts to sing. Doing so takes her back to her home country of El Salvador where she was part of a youth choir when she was 16 years old.

Rehearsing every day made her feel safe, until one day a gunshot outside silenced their singing. Everyone ran out and saw a well-known young man from that community lying lifeless on the street. He had just been shot by gang members. “We were shocked and scared that it happened so close to our church.”

This village had been taken over by gangs. Policemen sent to

those areas needed to use fake identities so that the gangs would not link them to their families.

“A police officer was using our surname as a fake name. So, the gangs started to get suspicious and thought we were his family and that we were giving him information about them.”

The entire family was under siege, threatened, no one in the family felt safe. The gang members then approached Jessica’s father and told him that his daughters needed to join their gang.

“My dad called us and said he wanted to talk. We were so scared and knew we needed to flee. We couldn’t be there anymore.”

Jessica was 20 years old at the time, and her sister was only 17. In that instant, they knew they all had to leave the country to save their lives. One week later, they were in Belize.

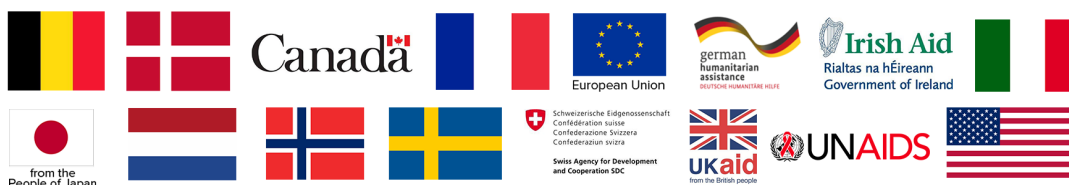


[Get to know her story.](#)

We thank the contributions of our donors

updated to 31 August 2021

UNHCR is grateful for the generous and timely support provided by donors to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, and in Belize, Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua and Southern Caribbean countries, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding.



Private donors, including Private Donors Spain, Australia, Republic of Korea, Japan, Sweden, Italy and Germany.

For more information, Philippa Candler, Representative, at candler@unhcr.org
Diana Diaz Rodriguez, Associate Communications Officer, at diazdi@unhcr.org

For media interviews, panpamedia@unhcr.org

Follow us on Facebook

Find us as [UNHCR Caribbean](#).