



# Panama Multi Country Office

## Monthly Operational Update

### Regional context

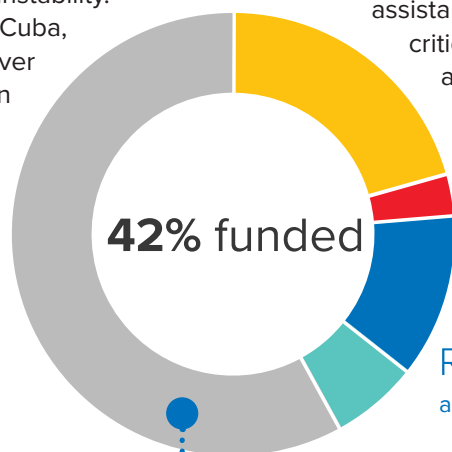
Refugees, asylum-seekers, and their host communities continue to face restrictions in accessing livelihoods, basic needs, and healthcare. In September, several countries under the Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama have experienced sharp rises in COVID-19 infection rates. In **Aruba**, with the capacity of the hospital exceeded, patients have had to be transferred to Colombia. **Guyana** has been facing the highest infection rate since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prompted authorities to impose new measures for accessing public buildings. Additional restrictions have been enforced in **Belize**, where health officials have also announced that hospitals are overwhelmed by COVID-19 admissions. Moreover, in **Cuba**, one of the areas most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, has also been hit by hurricane Ida, which caused damages and losses in agriculture, electricity supply, and telecommunication lines. Paired with the effects of the health crisis, displaced populations in countries under MCO Panama are confronted with further heightened vulnerabilities resulting from lack of access to status, regularization pathways and documentation.

Cuba and **Nicaragua** continue to be under scrutiny from both national and international critics who report human rights and civil liberties abuses, and sociopolitical instability. Two months after the July [protest](#) in Cuba, activists continue to express [concerns](#) over [repression](#) and harassment of opposition leaders, and limitations to freedom of press. On the other hand, in Nicaragua, [crackdown](#) on opposition members and independent media continues to be [reported](#) ahead of the November elections. Since May 2021, [37 people](#) have reportedly been arbitrarily arrested, seven of whom are presidential hopefuls

and 30 political, community and private sector leaders, journalists, human rights defenders, and students.

Regardless of the health crisis, restrictions, and other risks, people in the region continue to flee their countries in search for protection, better opportunities, and stability. According to **Panamanian** authorities, [some 91,305 people](#) within mixed movements have entered the country irregularly by end of September, over 70% of whom are Haitian families traveling on secondary movements with their children born in Chile or Brazil. While the vast majority wish to continue their journey north, the presence of a record-level number of people in small communities along the route surpasses the capacity to address the protection and humanitarian needs of all people. Moreover, Venezuelans continue to arrive in Aruba, **Curaçao**, Guyana, and **Trinidad and Tobago**, seeking family reunification and a more stable socioeconomic environment. Lack of access to documentation and regularization pathways continues to increase vulnerabilities and risks for displaced people, including to exploitation, abuse, violence, detention, and deportation.

MCO Panama requires **USD 48.7 million** to ensure the provision of information and counselling, legal assistance, and support networks, which remain critical in preventing exploitation and abuse and safeguarding the basic rights and well-being of asylum-seekers and refugees. Furthermore, UNHCR continues to support governments in their efforts to strengthen national asylum systems and guarantee favourable protection environments for the forcibly displaced.



### Regional funding overview

as of 28 September 2021

**48.7M**  
required for 2021

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

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](https://reporting.unhcr.org)

#### SNAPSHOT INTO THE FUNDING GAP

In 2021, displaced persons continue to face challenges to access protection and legal assistance. With sufficient funding, UNHCR could improve **access to enhanced national asylum systems and promote favourable protection environments for asylum seekers and refugees.**

[See more here.](#)

**5.2M**  
USD

required for a comprehensive response in legal assistance in Aruba, Curaçao, Belize, Panama and Trinidad & Tobago

# Update on country activities

## COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

### STRENGTHENING CENTRAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR donated 5,000 face masks, 5,000 bars of soap, 500 bottles of surface disinfectant, and 150 bottles of hand sanitizer to the Ministry of Education to support the safe re-opening of schools.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR trained 25 Human Rights Officers of the Ombudsman’s Office and 30 instructors from different academies or teaching directorates of public security institutions (including SENAFRONT, SENAN, National Police, and the National Migration Service) on international

protection. Moreover, UNHCR participated in the second CONARE meeting of 2021, where refugee status was extended via family reunification to six Venezuelans.

- In **Suriname**, UNHCR held a briefing session on the situation of displaced people, including challenges and risks, for six officials of the Ministry of Justice and Police.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR delivered capacity building sessions on international protection to approximately 70 police officers.

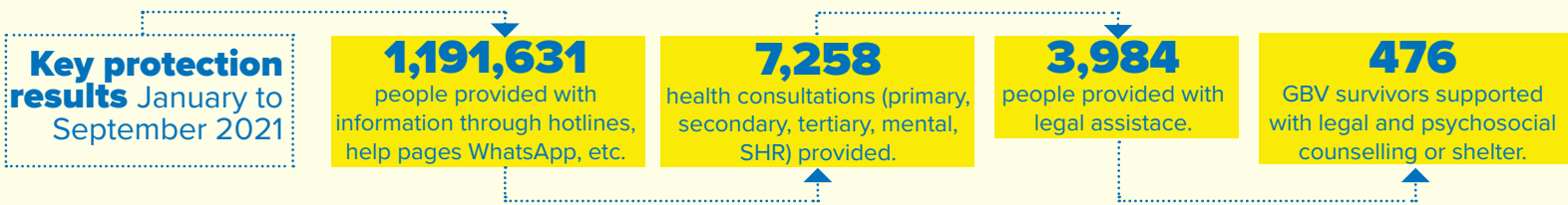
## PROTECTION

### INCLUDING COMMUNITY BASED PROTECTION & GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR and partners delivered a workshop on the prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) to over 100 participants from government institutions, (I)NGOs, and civil society organizations. Additionally, UNHCR participated in a panel discussion on human rights at the University of Aruba together with DIMAS and IOM. Approximately 60 participants joined the webinar, including students and government officials.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR through partner Human Rights Commission of Belize (HRCB) provided legal assistance to 27 persons through a mobile legal clinic. Moreover, through partner HUMANA, UNHCR held a training session on human rights for 20 volunteers of the community-based protection network Manos Unidas. Additionally, 69 persons (52 children and 12 adults) were supported with vaccination registration at the Ministry of Health and Wellness and received COVID-19 vaccines.

• In **Guyana**, UNHCR supported Charity’s Immigration Office by providing translation services during the delivery of stay permits extensions to 62 individuals.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR through partner NRC delivered a training on human rights, gender-based violence prevention, community-based conflict resolution, and leadership skills to 22 asylum-seekers and refugees.
- In **Suriname**, UNHCR issued and distributed renewal registration certificates to 50 asylum-seekers, which will allow them to remain in the country while applying for residence permits.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 48 survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) were identified, 12 of whom were referred to partners for specialized case management, mental health and psychosocial support services, cash assistance, legal and/or general support.



## CHILD PROTECTION

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR through partner Blossom Inc., together with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, the Agency for Children and Protection, and the Regional Democratic Council of Region 1, [inaugurated an Advocacy Centre for Children in Port Kaituma](#), to help children and their guardians access prevention, response, and reporting services for incidents of physical and sexual abuse. The Centre will also help them access mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) services in different languages for all children, including refugees and nationals. This is the first of

its kind in Port Kaituma. Moreover, UNHCR registered 163 out-of-school children in Region 1 for community-based ESL classes.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR through partner Fútbol con Corazón (FCC) trained 16 public-school teachers on forced displacement, human rights, basic principles of protection and timely referral mechanisms for asylum-seekers. The session sought to contribute to building safer, more inclusive environments, and peaceful co-existence school spaces.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 16 cases involving children received counselling and referrals to partner services, including cash assistance, case management, and psychosocial support.

## INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR, IOM, HIAS, and Aruba Positive Foundation undertook reproductive and sexual health outreach activities directed at sex workers and persons at risk of HIV under the UNAIDS project: awareness raising campaigns, healthcare assistance for persons living with HIV, gynaecological services for sex workers and women at risk of HIV, distribution of condoms, and economic integration.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR and IOM, through the “Somos Lo Mismo” campaign, [held a forum](#) with representatives of the private

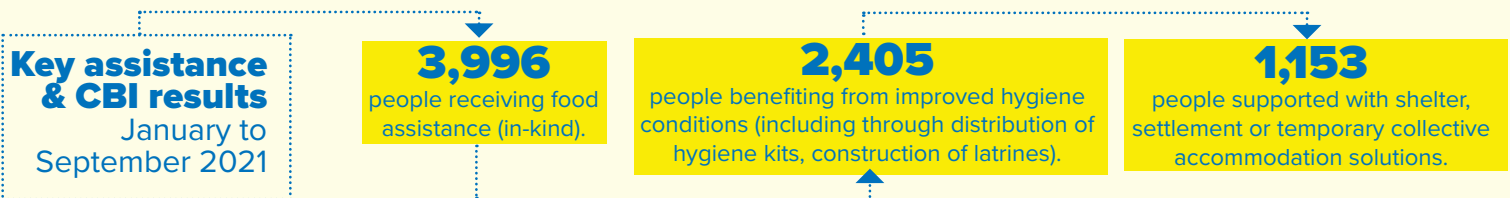
sector to raise awareness on the current situation of refugees and migrants in Panama, and challenges and opportunities for their economic inclusion. Through a short virtual theatre forum session, discrimination and unconscious biases were addressed, as part of the overall aim to sensitize participants. A total of 22 companies, part of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Panama, actively participated in the discussions and showed interest in strengthening future awareness-raising initiatives for their staff.

## DELIVERING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- In **Aruba**, seven households received multipurpose cash assistance for basic needs, including food, housing, and medicines.
- In **Cuba**, 120 individuals were assisted with cash for basic needs, including food, rent and medicines.
- In **Curaçao**, 23 households received multipurpose cash assistance for basic needs, including food, housing, and medicines.
- In **Guyana**, approximately 83 people received food assistance and hygiene kits. Moreover, 21 people received emergency shelter services.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR donated 5,000 blankets to the Migratory Reception Centre in Chiriquí for the most vulnerable people

who must stay in the shelter for a longer time due to illnesses or lack of resources to continue their transit northward.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR through partner LWC delivered 50 solar lamps, mosquito nets, and blankets to communities in the Iacos area, where there is a high presence of displaced Warao indigenous people from Venezuela. UNHCR also distributed 9,000 solar lamps, mosquito nets, blankets and PPE kits to over 20 organizations, including government agencies, potential operational partners, and other NGOs. The items will be further donated to displaced persons and vulnerable host community members. Additionally, UNHCR through partners delivered multipurpose cash assistance for food, medicine and rent to 19 households (43 individuals).



## DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Belize**, UNHCR through partner HUMANA provided livelihood courses on woodwork, sewing, and music for 25 participants, English classes for 13 students, and an entrepreneurial skills training for six attendees.
- In **Panama**, 41 asylum-seekers and refugees [graduated from the Community Management course](#), which offers them a locally recognized academic certificate. Furthermore, with support from UNHCR and PRM, HIAS presented the results of the study on the Impact of Entrepreneurship on Refugees during the Pandemic. The study concluded that granting seed capital has had a significant impact on the development of entrepreneurs, since these contributions have helped cover basic needs and strengthened or developed new skills. Moreover, UNHCR together with City of Knowledge, HIAS, and the Panamanian Red Cross held the Urban Market of Refugee Entrepreneurship, where 20 refugees and asylum-seekers showcased and sold their products.



## STORIES FROM THE FIELD

# English lessons help refugees and migrants make a new life in Guyana

*For Spanish-speaking Venezuelan children, the language barrier sometimes keeps them out of the classroom in English-speaking Guyana. Weekly language classes help hundreds remove that obstacle.*

As the clock strikes 10 a.m., Dariannys and her two sisters rush to the computer tablet that they hope will be the key to unlocking a bright new future in their new home online English lessons.

With no English when they arrived in Guyana in late 2020, fleeing widespread food and medicine shortages and insecurity in Venezuela, the girls and their parents have struggled to adapt in Guyana, Venezuela's English-speaking neighbour to the east. Dariannys, a bright 13-year-old girl who was once a top student in her school back home, hopes the lessons will help her get back into the classroom.

"We haven't been able to register in school because we don't speak the language," said Dariannys. "I want to learn English so I can integrate in the community here."

The English as a Second Language programme, run by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, with the support from the

Pan American Development Foundation, through the NGO Voices GY, is providing language instruction to some 200 children and adults from Venezuela. This September, 86 students graduated from the second term of the course.

"They were super excited," recalled the girls' mother, Katy, after she registered them in the courses in March. "They used to help around the house, but I want them to get an education, to go back to a routine."

The family are among an estimated 23,000 Venezuelans who have fled to Guyana in recent years. Darianny's father came first, and the rest of the family followed around two years later, settling in the coastal Demerara-Mahaica region, outside the capital, Georgetown.

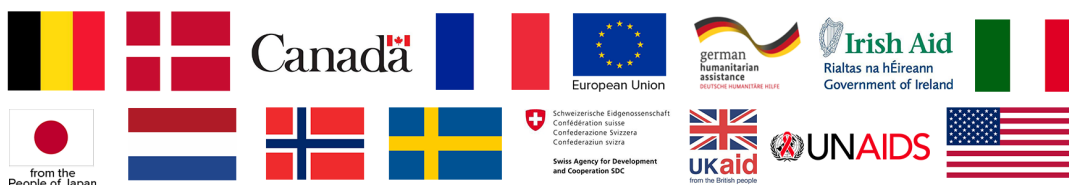


*Read the story  
in Spanish*

## We thank the contributions of our donors

updated to 28 September 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.



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