

Gender-based violence (GBV) REINFORCING PREVENTION, RISK MITIGATION AND RESPONSE INTERVENTIONS



Main risks and expression of GBV against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in MCO Panama Operations

- Domestic violence
- Sexual assault
- Sexual harassment
- Forced sex work and human trafficking
- Survival sex
- Violence against members of the LGBTI community

Context

GBV threatens displaced women, girls, boys and men in all regions of the world, and remains a particular concern in countries covered under the Panama Multi-Country Office. In addition, the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent movement restrictions have exacerbated existing risks of GBV and have revealed impacts that affect people differently depending on their gender.

In 2021, refugee and asylum-seeking women are more likely to hold precarious jobs in the informal sector and a high proportion would face burdensome unpaid caregiving responsibilities, including caring for sick family members and children who are unable to attend school. Disruption in education may further increase the risk of GBV for adolescent girls and boys. Regarding Venezuelan refugee and migrant women, prevailing social norms with regards to gender roles and perceptions are

related to incidents of intimidation and sexual harassment in host countries. People presumed to have been trafficked and/or engaged in sex work, including women, girls and LGBTI persons are also at higher risk, including further abuse and exploitation, as well as additional impacts to their mental and physical health.

UNHCR has strengthened GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response mechanisms across its operations covered under the Panama Multi-Country Office through the deployment of dedicated staff to address GBV, legal support for asylum seeking and refugee men and women affected by GBV, mental health support and access to post exposure prophylaxis kits, and safe spaces. In addition, UNHCR continues to engage the community in the identification of risks, planning responses and delivery of assistance, including the provision of GBV risk mitigation activities.

Milestones

Ensuring access to essential services and information for women and girls: In **Guyana**, UNHCR reinforced its GBV response to sex workers through outreach, establishment of virtual support groups, and providing psychosocial support and counselling services to survivors of GBV. In **Panama**, UNHCR and partners conducted online workshops focusing on services and response for GBV survivors and developed an essential services pocket guide for survivors.

Strengthening GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response: In **Trinidad and Tobago**, immediate response for survivors of incidents of gender-based violence is ensured by UNHCR through medical and psychosocial/psychological support and one-off financial assistance, when needed. In **Panama**, the SGBV Working Group established new communication channels to provide information and attention to individuals at risk of continued GBV through secure telephone lines, WhatsApp, and dedicated email accounts. In **Guyana**, the provision of shelter and NFI, food baskets and livelihood opportunities were increased to benefit GBV survivors.

Financial gaps

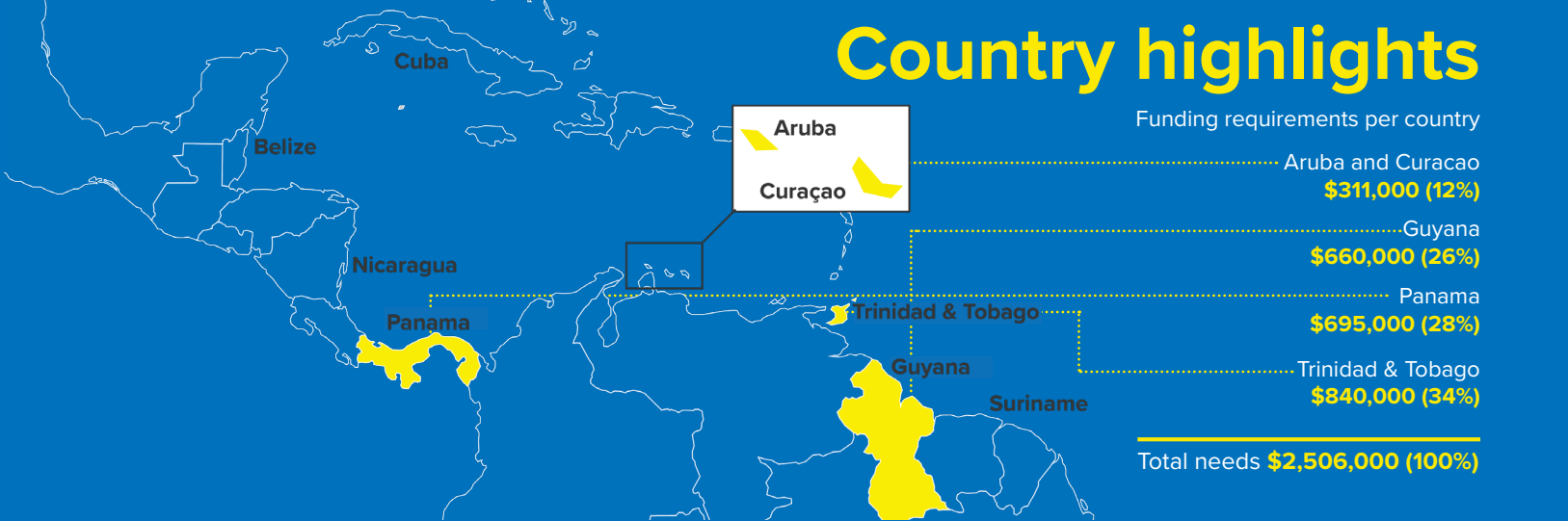
Recent [reports](#) and [studies](#) have demonstrated that GBV funding accounts for only 0.12 per cent of all humanitarian funding, negatively impacting lifesaving services like health and safe spaces for survivors. In this context, UNHCR requires additional contributions to offer a comprehensive response and to enhance support to refugee, asylum seeker and returnee GBV survivors, while promoting their empowerment. Additional funds are also required to deploy dedicated staff to reinforce prevention, response and mitigation of future risks related to GBV.

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Without sufficient funding, UNHCR cannot

- Reinforce specialized field teams in border, indigenous and in mining areas for the identification and referral of GBV survivors.
- Increase safe spaces for displaced women, girls, boys and men at risk as well as survivors of GBV.
- Foster comprehensive responses to all reported GBV survivors addressing the root causes to GBV.
- Expand access to mental health and psychosocial support, legal protection, education, sexual and reproductive health and other specialized services.
- Expand livelihood opportunities for survivors.

Country highlights



ARUBA AND CURAÇAO

Displaced people - including GBV survivors – lack documentation, and thus are more vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse, amid a widespread lack of access to rights and services. UNHCR advocates to mainstream GBV prevention and responses within health, protection, and legal assistance programmes, as well as for the strengthening of inter-agency GBV coordination and case management mechanisms. Strategic operational plans and a GBV advocacy strategy for Aruba and Curaçao have been developed, and since January 2021, UNHCR reinforced Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and safe shelter programming in Curaçao.

Prioritized specific needs

- Expand legal assistance programmes, where GBV related legal assistance needs (e.g. criminal procedures, divorce, custody, restraining orders, legal protection status etc.) far exceed current available funding.
- Engage in community-based prevention and outreach/communication with communities (CwC) activities through small-scale and quick impact projects with women-led organizations, particularly in Aruba and with a focus on persons engaged in sex work/survival sex.
- Top-up new MHPSS and Shelter programmes in Curaçao to expand capacity and ability to reach double the number of GBV survivors; include livelihoods support activities; strengthen community mental health and capacity building (including prevention); expand child protection services.

Significant numbers of women and girls travel from Venezuela to remote mining areas to engage in sex work, often compelled by debt bondage and other forms of exploitation that begin at home. The COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown of local businesses had a detrimental impact on the access to basic survival needs of these vulnerable women and girls. UNHCR focuses on outreach and community-based support to sex workers, as well as specialized case management to GBV survivors. The design and monitoring of GBV prevention, mitigation and response programming has begun as well as the creation of a GBV Working Group. In January 2021, UNHCR reinforced child protection services in remote communities, with a particular focus on sexual abuse.

GUYANA

Prioritized specific needs

- Strengthen partnership with the Guyana Sex Work Coalition, a local women-led organization, that will enable the expansion of existing geographic coverage of peer educators/outreach activities and engage in HIV counselling and testing services.
- Top-up of new child protection partnership focused on child sexual abuse, to expand the geographic coverage to additional remote communities and enable a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and adjustment approach.
- Initiate a market and labour-skills assessment for the economic inclusion of vulnerable women, followed by a livelihoods quick impact projects involving skills training and the provision of small business grants.
- Develop partnership with the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers to provide legal assistance to GBV survivors and produce various thematic “know your rights” materials.

PANAMA

Asylum seekers and refugees are frequently more exposed to situations of violence, and in the context of COVID-19, where harassment and gender-based violence increased – women and children were especially vulnerable to domestic violence. During focus group and individual counselling sessions with refugee women, they

recall being subjected to gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work yet reporting remained particularly low due to fear of dismissal. In addition, girls and adolescents are exposed to harassment in their communities, negatively affecting their perception of safety. UNHCR supports actions to reduce threats to the safety of girls, women and the LGBTIQ+ community through individual case management, provision of psychosocial services, referrals to the health system, legal protection and safe spaces. Supporting strategies to reinforce changes in the approach from “victims” to empowered survivors and supporting the development of new masculinities among men and boys on, are priorities during 2021.

Prioritized specific needs

- Develop and reinforce communication channels to provide information and assistance to GBV cases through secure phone lines, WhatsApp, and dedicated email accounts to assist cases.
- Consolidate community protection networks including displaced people and host communities through activities and workshops focusing on services and care for GBV survivors.
- Support the SGBV Working Group to develop and strengthen the referral pathway with national, local authorities, and partners, advocating for a more active government participation in the creation of adequate reception spaces.
- Enhance the capacity of key government officials to successfully implement GBV prevention and protection policies for displaced people, including effective access to the justice system and inclusion in survivor protection programmes promoting empowerment and resilience.