

Panama Multi Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

Regional context

The past years have seen complex forced displacement dynamics across the Americas, with increasing numbers of people in need of international protection, including countries covered under the Panama Multi-Country Office. 2021 is a year filled with uncertainty over the recovery of economies severely impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and where solidarity between countries as well as the protection and asylum space continue to shrink. People in the region continue to desperately flee violence, persecution, insecurity and the lack of access to basic services in their countries embarking on dangerous journeys alongside individuals seeking a better economic future.

The fate of some 400,000 forcibly displaced persons across the area of coverage remain at the mercy of host communities that are already overstretched and who, without support, will not be able to cope with the increasing pressure over their socioeconomic systems.

The Panama MCO starts the year with financial needs totaling USD48.7 million to implement programmes in sectors like protection, registration, cash-based interventions, livelihoods and local integration, shelter, health. Currently funded at only 4%, urgent support is required to address the needs of all persons of concern and their host communities. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is present across the region and also engages in inter-agency responses, particularly through the Response for Venezuelans (R4V) Platform. In addition, UNHCR also supports relevant governments in the implementation of commitments made under the Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS).

As of January 2021, COVID-19 cases continue to increase across the area of coverage, prompting the establishment of new movement restrictions, curfews and the suspension of mass activities. Additional measures have also been implemented to prevent the spread of new variants of the virus, impacting the



tourism sector in countries whose economy are heavily reliant upon it. These restrictions have affected displaced people and their host communities alike, causing job loss and increasing the risk of gender-based violence, school dropouts, homelessness and hunger. Maritime and land borders remain closed, air travel limitations are also in place, and visa requirements have entered into force, all which further restrict opportunities to flee to safety.

COVID-19 vaccination plans have been announced in several countries, with several of the countries announcing all persons, without regard to their migratory status, would have access to the vaccine. UNHCR will continue working to guarantee the inclusion of persons of concern in vaccination plans in all the countries in the region and would welcome additional support from the international community in countries struggling to enhance their plans and stock.

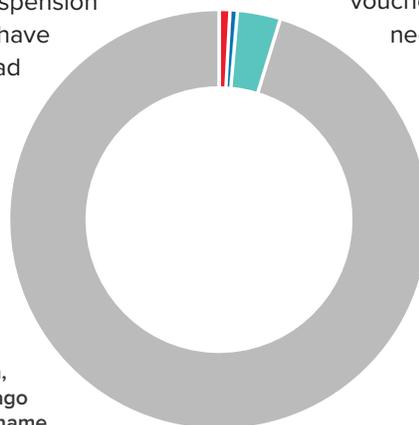
UNHCR and partners continue supporting persons of concern from Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia, northern Central America and others from Asian and African countries across the area of coverage with legal guidance, shelter, food and non-food items, vouchers, hygiene and sanitation kits to persons in need.

Regional funding overview as of 2 February 2021

48.7M

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



4% funded

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

Update on country activities

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL &

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT/

STRENGTHENING CENTRAL

& LOCAL GOVERNMENT

INSTITUTIONS

- In **Belize**, the Refugees Department will carry out trainings for immigration officers, community leaders, and Belizean soldiers who may come in contact with refugees and vulnerable individuals in need of protection.

- In **Curaçao**, UNHCR's partner Salu pa Tur, a medical clinic, has been included in the government task force to organize vaccines.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, a verification field mission exercise in Couva to renew expired documentation for asylum-seekers was held with the support of the local police and St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church. 57 individuals were verified during the field mission.

- In **Belize**, UNHCR and partners continue to provide legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. UNHCR in Belize and Izabal (Guatemala) will continue monitoring displacement dynamics along the border in order to identify protection needs.

- In **Guyana**, at least 1,500 persons of concern were provided with protection counselling, and 300 individuals were accompanied to government services.

Shortages of food, hygienic products and other basic items due to lack of regular income are the main needs identified. Two focus group discussion with indigenous women from Venezuela living in the communities of Khan Hill and Kumaka in Region 1 were held to better understand the impacts of COVID-19.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 104 individuals were and 8 persons registered for family reunification during a field mission to Penal to renew expired UNHCR documentation. Refugees and migrants who are potentially GBV survivors were registered with UNHCR and have been referred for case management, Refugee Status Determination, mental health and psychosocial support, CBI or legal assistance.

PROTECTION

(INCLUDING CBP & SGBV)



CHILD PROTECTION

- In **Belize**, UNHCR finalized the endowment of 12 primary-level schools in Belmopan and neighbouring communities with wash stations and cleaning packages such as soap dispensers, spray soap and paper towels. [See more.](#)

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR and partners held a workshop on how to register births and conducted individual assessments for 10 women who struggled to complete the registration of their children in Icacos island.

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR, in partnership with IOM and the Ministry of Health, will deliver food and non-food items in remote communities in Region 1 predominantly comprised of indigenous Venezuelans. Moreover, UNHCR will partner with the Guyana Foundation and IOM for upcoming livelihood interventions in the regions to enhance food security, access to information and economic development.

- In **Panama**, the Human Mobility Group, led by UNHCR and IOM, is preparing the work plan for 2021, including on the consolidation of timely information, support to the authorities in the response, institutional strengthening and development of inputs for high-level advocacy.

INTER-AGENCY

COORDINATION



REINFORCING SHELTERS & SAFE SPACE NETWORKS

- In **Guyana**, 29 individuals continued to be supported with shelter assistance in Lethem, region 9. UNHCR continues to engage residents of its shelters in preparation for the phase out and closure of the shelter at the end of February 2021. In addition, UNHCR offered support through provision of refugee housing units to be used as isolation centres for COVID-19 positive cases in Region 1.



DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS (CBI)



- In **Belize**, UNHCR delivered medical supplies and items to the COVID-19 community isolation center in the refugee-hosting community of Valley of Peace. To contribute to an improved first-line health defense for POC and host communities, UNHCR also provided a basic COVID field health kit each to 100 Community Health Workers, which in turn provided rural Primary Health Care to some 4,800 Belizean and refugee households. UNHCR through implementing partners also delivered humanitarian assistance to 20 persons including food, rent, and medical assistance. 2 families living in Belmopan were also assisted by providing them with water storage tanks.
- In **Cuba**, 142 persons of concern received CBI to cover their needs of accommodation and subsistence. UNHCR will slightly increase the CBI transfer value according to the estimated costs of the basic basket of food and some services, in line with inflation variance.
- In **Guyana**, 34 persons of concern were provided with food assistance and hygiene kits. UNHCR also distributed food baskets to 10 Venezuelan Warao families living in Wauna, Mabaruma subdistrict, Region 1. 100 food baskets, 55 hygiene kits, 5 baby kits, 10 jerry cans, 1,000 cloth masks and 2 tarpaulins were released from the warehouse for shipment to Region 1. In Region 2, UNHCR provided in-kind-assistance to a group of new arrivals from Venezuela, who were in mandatory quarantine.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, multi-purpose cash grants were approved for 14 individuals facing protection risks and with very limited or no ability to provide for themselves. Applications for cash assistance continued to demonstrate the heightened risks faced by refugees and asylum-seekers, with 60% of cash applicants living with chronic illnesses while another 60% stated that they were unable to pay rent and risked becoming homeless.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS



- In **Belize**, implementing partner Help for Progress continues assisting refugees and asylum seekers with their enrolment in a technical/vocational institution (CET). 12 new students received education assistance, including uniforms, school supplies, shoes, socks, belts, undergarments, and backpacks. Partner HUMANA hosted a training for 11 women asylum seekers who attended a soap-making session led by a person of concern living in the community. This partner continues to provide the electricity, sewing and ESL classes to 24 refugees and asylum seekers.
- In **Guyana**, production of cloth face masks continues across all regions and a total of 22 participants from the first group of the project have been phased out and eleven new refugees and migrants have been included. In Region 1, 500 cloths masks from UNHCR's livelihood project were distributed during a mission to White Water and Yarakita.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, a livelihoods workshop and an awareness raising session on identifying GBV for 19 Warao women living in the area was carried out by implementing partners in Icacos.
- In **Panama**, 40 asylum seekers and refugees will be able to access EdX, an online platform for higher education, thanks to vouchers received from the Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) in Qatar.

We thank the contributions of our donors

updated to 2 February 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

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

UNHCR Aid Gives Relief to Over-Stretched Polyclinic in Belize Amid COVID-19

One physician's commitment to the Hippocratic oath drove him to keep the Independence Polyclinic open around the clock, even before the pandemic. As COVID-19 ravaged the Americas, it was hard to keep afloat in this southernmost district of Toledo, an area that has seen a recent increase in COVID-19 cases.

By Aida Escobar in Independence Village, Belize

Dr. Rayford Rancharan, Medical Chief of Staff, shuffles through paperwork in the desk he has used for the last ten years. He and his team of health care providers at the Independence Polyclinic are used to stretching the last bit of supplies they have to provide the most services that they can. But since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the number of patients has soared along with the working hours, and they are now managing a separate unit for COVID treatment.

“We work 40-hour weeks on average, but with the COVID-19 pandemic, our entire team gave 50 hours a week to keep providing services to all of our patients,” said Rancharan. But he was happy to dedicate more hours to the polyclinic. “As a doctor, I am most happy when serving, especially in the rural community, with or without all of the necessary supplies.”

The Polyclinic caters for the needs of around 25,000 persons, including people forced to flee violence and persecution in other Central American countries who have sought protection in the tiny English-speaking nation. Many of them receive treatment there. “Regardless of the documents you have or status, healthcare is for all,” said Dr. Rancharan highlighting the importance of treating and assisting all who walk into to clinic. “There is no discrimination when it comes to patients accessing health care services.”

Belize hosts over 4,000 refugees and asylum seekers who mainly fled gang violence and persecution in Central America. Many are welcomed by communities like Independence village.

In support of the response to COVID, which claimed the life of a colleague and friend of these medical professionals, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, donated medical and personal protective equipment to the Independence Polyclinic, including 300 face shields, 5,000 masks, 1,700 disposable gowns, 200 pairs of gloves, and five patient monitors.

“For everyone to be safe from the virus, the most vulnerable must be protected,” said Yolanda Zapata, UNHCR’s head

of office in the country, “These donations support the government of Belize to continue fostering inclusion and solidarity even in adversity.”

The Independence Polyclinic team has not only received increased numbers of patients; through mobile clinics they go beyond their village’s limits to reach smaller, nearby villages and communities whose residents may not be able to afford transportation to Independence. “The donations saved many lives. This area of Belize suffers high rates of poverty and unemployment. Public healthcare is their only means of health and survival,” said Dr. Rancharan.

The polyclinic and its COVID testing centre are following strict safety guidelines such as the use of masks and social distancing.

The health care team is efficient as they swab their patients for COVID testing, including Kerin Jones*, a Belizean national nervously awaiting her results. “The Independence Polyclinic has a big impact on the community,” she said. “They have a Facebook page where they keep us updated on the services that are being provided. They go out to the different villages, and that’s a good thing. You don’t have to go to them, they can come to you”.

The support provided by UNHCR seeks to benefit both Belizeans and refugees, in line with spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees and its application in Central America, the MIRPS, the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework. Through the MIRPS, governments like Belize’s seek to provide a holistic response to the needs of forcibly displaced across Central America and Mexico.

These donations were made under a broader UN response and a joint effort between PAHO, ILO, UNFPA and UNHCR in Belize through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund. Through the Fund, the UN System supports national efforts to stop transmission of COVID-19 in rural areas and reduce the impact of the virus on human lives, in line with the sustainable development goals.

**This name has been changed.*