

Panama Multi Country Office

Monthly Operational Update

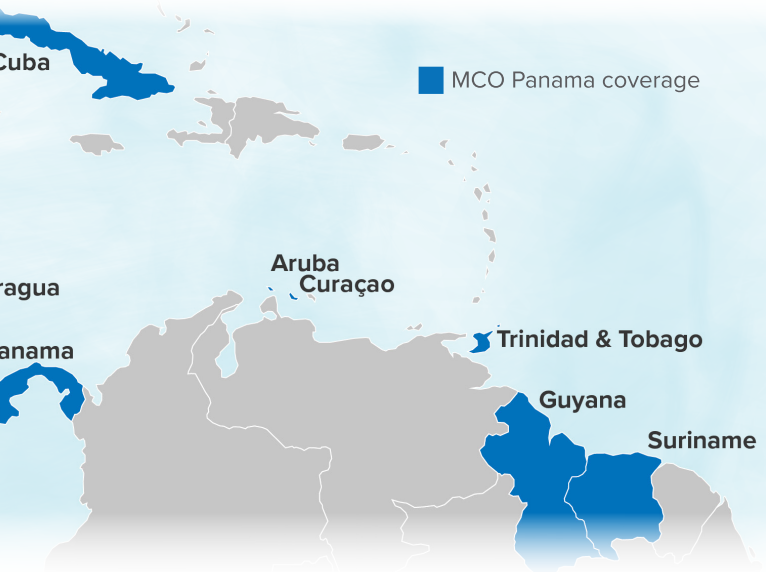
Regional context

The region and countries covered under the MCO Panama continue to face an increasingly complex context of mixed movements of asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of human trafficking and stateless persons, along with other categories of vulnerable migrants.

Increasing numbers of people are resorting to irregular border movements as many COVID-19 restrictions remain in place or are being tightened across Central America and the Caribbean. These movements include increasing flows through the Darien jungle.

The number of positive COVID-19 cases continued to increase with new variations identified across the region. In Curaçao, the hospital is at full capacity while the demand for consultations and testing for COVID-19 increased. In Panama, following the detection of the COVID-19 Brazilian variant, authorities temporarily suspended the admission of people who have stayed or travelled through South America, except for Panamanians or residents in Panama.

Vaccination roll-outs have commenced across countries under MCO Panama, with all of them announcing or confirming the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in their campaigns. However, rates of vaccine registration remain low due to widespread fear and misinformation. In the Caribbean, several countries adopted the option of “walk-in”, where registration and vaccination occur at the same time. UNHCR is working with governments and partners to reinforce communication for displaced persons, including accompanying and translating information for refugees and migrants



who express interest in being vaccinated but are unable to speak English to facilitate the process.

Crucial steps have been taken in the protection of stateless people in the region, with the first person being formally recognized as having the stateless status in Panama.

The Panama MCO requires USD48.7 million to reinforce comprehensive services and support to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Shelter remains as one of the most pressing gaps, followed by medical care, CBI to cover basic needs and livelihoods, which are severely impacted with insufficient levels of funding. Inter-agency responses are reinforced throughout R4V platform, MIRPS and the Human Mobility Group in Darien (Panama) to strengthen information sharing and responses in host communities.

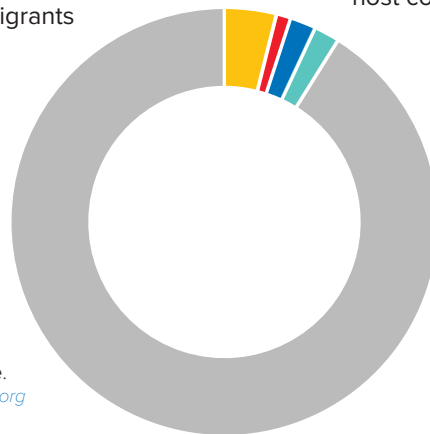
Regional funding overview

as of 6 April 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



9% funded

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



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UNHCR launched a regional Caribbean Facebook page to support engagement with Caribbean audiences and forcibly displaced persons. Find us as [UNHCR Caribbean](https://www.facebook.com/UNHCRCaribbean).

Update on country activities

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL &

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT/

STRENGTHENING CENTRAL

& LOCAL GOVERNMENT

INSTITUTIONS

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR, partners and several government institutions participated in an information session on the 2030 vision on education for refugees, seeking to promote inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all - [see more](#). Also, a webinar session was organized with support of the Department of Public Health to answer questions and encourage people to register for the vaccine.
- In **Curaçao**, UNHCR hosted a workshop on GBV for over 50 participants from government, civil society, and UN organizations, to strengthen coordination, including through the development of a GBV referral pathway.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR circulated information to refugees and migrants in region 1, 2, 4, and 7 on how to get vaccinated and have accompanied Ministry of Health officials during vaccination missions to the remote community of Puruni in Region 7.
- In **Panama**, ONPAR, UNHCR, the National Migration Service, the Civil Registry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and the Ombudsman's Office carried out a mission to renew documents and conduct other procedures for refugees and asylum seekers in Darien. 400 procedures were registered, including refugee card renewals, applications for refugee status, applications for permanent residence, work permits, assistance to people at risk of statelessness, and legal advice.

• In **Aruba**, UNHCR's helpline provided information and counselling to 50 individuals on legal and asylum inquiries, health, financial assistance, and resettlement. During March, 499 individuals visited the help.unhcr.org. UNHCR is implementing a strategic litigation plan to promote substantial advocacy and to improve the access of persons of concern to the procedures and legal remedies. UNHCR and HIAS reinforced collaboration with 'Unity in the Community volunteers', a community-based organization that provides support in San Nicolas, a town in the south-east of the island known for unfavourable socio-economic conditions and prostitution.

• In **Belize**, UNHCR along with partner HRCB continue to monitor the Belize Central Prison on a monthly basis and persons detained for immigration offenses are interviewed to identify international protection needs. Through partner HUMANA, UNHCR led a session on sexual and reproductive health with 14 women. UNHCR hosted a workshop with 10 refugees, asylum seekers and Belizean women, with activities including a counselling session on resilience and domestic violence, women issues and healthy living. In addition, 31 women participated in a group counselling session on resilience and self-esteem by a certified therapist.

• In **Cuba**, a workshop on women's safety and personal defence was conducted. Participants included 11 refugee women and adolescents. Topics about gender equality, women's empowerment and SGBV were discussed, including how to recognize and report GBV incidents - [see more](#).

• In **Curaçao**, UNHCR created different legal templates and trained partner Human Right Defense Curaçao to strengthen capacities to file requests for protection under article 3 ECHR procedure. UNHCR's helpline provided information and counselling to 52 individuals on legal inquiries, health, financial assistance, and resettlement, pending asylum process, negative decisions, family reunification and the responsible integration policy. During March, 250 individuals visited the help.unhcr.org website. UNHCR partner the Salù pa Tur provided over 1,240 medical consultations in March, including to 195 new patients. More than 500 of these consultations were related to COVID-19.

UNHCR is developing small-scale community-based projects with Famia Plania and Bos di Hubentut on GBV

prevention and sexual and reproductive education.

• In **Guyana**, at least 1,000 persons were counselled on health and documentation services, and 500 individuals were accompanied to government services. Health officials were supported with interpretation services in Cobrimo Creek, Region 1, who administer COVID-19 tests for Warao population.

• In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 5 verification missions were carried out to renew expired UNHCR documentation to persons living in Icacos, Scarborough, Siparia, Penal and Sangre Grande. 506 individuals were verified, and 22 others of concern registered during the field mission. Unaccompanied children and potential GBV survivors identified during the reporting period were registered with UNHCR and have been referred for case management support from partners, including mental health and psychosocial support, CBI and legal support. Moreover, 357 calls were received through the hotline in March.

• In **Panama**, through partners, UNHCR provided psychosocial assistance to 71 persons and assisted 129 persons in activities related to economic and social inclusion, mental health, and psychosocial support. Through NRC, UNHCR provided legal assistance and counselling to 15 persons at the reception centres in Darien about the refugee status determination process in the country. As part of GBV Working Group activities to commemorate International Woman's Day, a workshop about creating healthy relationships for a positive youth was organized and was facilitated by PROBISIDA, where 19 adolescents actively participated and discussed topics on GBV, positive and healthy dating relationships and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

PROTECTION

(INCLUDING CBP & SGBV)



CHILD PROTECTION

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR trained implementing partners on alimony requests and related interventions such as request for the determination of paternity.
- In **Belize**, through partner HUMANA, UNHCR provided school support to 20 refugee, asylum seeker and Belizean children and adolescents.
- In **Guyana**, English as a Second Language classes were launched and a total of 188 refugees and migrants from various regions are enrolled, including in the first online/in-person class launched in Mabaruma, region 1, for 15 out-of-school children. UNHCR provided logistic support on the ground for the hybrid class and distributed additional learning materials, such as pencils, notebooks and school bags.
- In **Aruba**, UNHCR, IOM and HIAS are working with the health department to support persons of concern in the registration for the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR, UNICEF, and the Vital Statistics Unit continued providing birth registration, legal and sexual reproductive health services to 500 refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups that live in the south of the country - [see more](#).
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR and IOM, in coordination with the embassies of receiving countries, organized the resettlement departure of 9 refugees to France and 5 refugees to Sweden.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR and IOM held the National R4V platform meeting for the Refugee Migrant Working Group where the

thematic Trafficking in Persons and GBV Working Groups presented developments in the Caribbean, including regional studies and shelter needs assessments in Region 1.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR facilitated a training session on international protection to 56 SENAFRONT officials assigned at border points and reception stations in Darien. The training is part of a broader programme to create a special force within SENAFRONT to deal with mixed movements in the context of the Human Mobility Working Group. UNHCR, with support from WHO, donated mobile clinics to support the health system in the country - [see more](#).

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION



REINFORCING SHELTERS & SAFE SPACE NETWORKS

- In **Guyana**, UNHCR completed the phase out of communal shelter arrangements in Lethem, region 9. All phased-out refugees and migrants received cash-assistance and were assisted in locating alternative shelter arrangements. UNHCR and its GBV partner HIAS moved to a new office in Bartica, region 7 to accommodate larger staff presence and a private space for interviews with refugees and migrants.



- In **Belize**, through partners, UNHCR assisted 200 cases with food, medical care, rent, documents and education.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR distributed CBI to 143 refugees and asylum seekers in Havana, to cover their lodging and subsistence needs. After carefully assessing the rise of the cost of living, the CBI transfer value for subsistence was increased.
- In **Curaçao**, UNHCR assessed 3 individuals for potential multipurpose cash assistance, and 2 were approved.
- In **Guyana**, food bags were distributed in regions 1, 2 and 4 to over 100 individuals. In addition, informational flyers on COVID-19 preventative measures were distributed in Region 1.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR donated 200 masks to La Casita Hispanic Cultural Centre to support activities for the Day

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

of Dignity. This event seeks to bring together the local community and promote integration. Three CBI protection referrals (one urgent) were submitted for review and 9 households (15 individuals) were approved for CBI distribution.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR assisted 186 households (521 persons) with rent payments, food, medicines, utensils and materials that help prevent school dropouts, and livelihoods activities.



DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Belize**, 14 persons were provided with seed capital to start small businesses. Livelihood courses continued in the south of Belize, including furniture/woodwork classes, cosmetology courses, music classes, electricity trainings and ESL classes with more than 50 participants. An introductory welding and mechanics class was led by an asylum seeker with 4 participants. Additionally, 5 refugees and asylum seekers participated in a baking and decoration class to produce cakes and sell from home. There was also a recycling session where 8 participants learned to make decorative items that could then be sold to the public.

- In **Guyana**, 9,237 facemasks have produced by Venezuelan refugees and migrants across all regions and 72 active participants were extended their contracts within the project.

- In **Panama**, 15 monitoring home visits were conducted to participants of the Entrepreneurship School Program, to continue providing the necessary tools for the development of the businesses, and to observe implementation. 52 asylum seekers and refugees participated in a panel on women leadership and empowerment as part of the SGBV Working Group activities to commemorate International Woman's Day.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



Venezuelan duo supports vulnerable refugees and migrants in Aruba

The dire situations of many of their compatriots led Tina and Grislynn to start a foundation. Amid the pandemic, VeneAruba Solidaria has become increasingly vital for many Venezuelans on the Caribbean island.

Tina and Grislynn spent the whole day in the kitchen, preparing delicacies from their native Venezuela. Their cooking marathon was not, however, the result of a lockdown hobby, aimed at wiling away the time during the coronavirus pandemic. The pair was cooking for a cause.

Their goal was to raise money to help Ernesto,* a 42-year-old Venezuelan father of six, cover the costs of getting the work permit he needed in order to stay in Aruba, a small Caribbean island off the coast of Venezuela.

“We are making a sancocho and some arepas to help him because he doesn’t have a single cent to pay for the papers,” said Tina Faria Ojeda, 53, referring to the hardy soup and cornmeal cakes that are staples of Venezuelan cuisine. She and the team at VeneAruba Solidaria raise funds for some of the neediest among the estimated 17,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Aruba by holding sales of food

and donated clothing they collect thanks to radio and social media campaigns and other events.

“We are a group of warrior Venezuelan women driven by the same concern and desire to help,” added her friend Grislynn Hernandez, 47, a half-Aruban, half-Venezuelan woman who, along with Tina and three other women, co-founded VeneAruba Solidaria in 2017. In addition to providing food and monetary aid to both locals and Venezuelan refugees and migrants in need, the group also offers emotional and legal support.

Over 5 million Venezuelans have left their country to escape insecurity and the lack of access to basic services. Thousands of them have sought to rebuild their lives in Aruba, which is located just 29 kilometers north of Venezuela’s Paraguaná Peninsula.



Check out the full story in [Spanish here](#).

We thank the contributions of our donors

updated to 6 April 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.

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