



# Panama Multi Country Office

## Monthly Operational Update

### Regional context

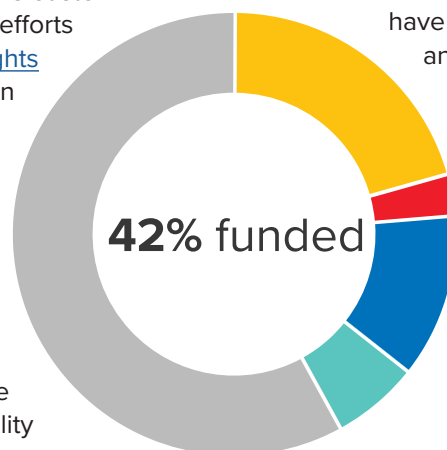
Displaced people in countries under the MCO Panama continue to face risks, challenges, and gaps in access to basic needs and services, where the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to exacerbate push factors. The ongoing use of dangerous journeys to find safe places to rebuild a life continues to underscore the dire need for regional solutions to irregular movements as well as safer pathways for entry and regularization. In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the Coast Guard engaged in a [search and rescue operation](#) in the Gulf of Paria for 20 missing people. Venezuelan authorities indicate a vessel with 25 people departed for Venezuela and has allegedly sunk in Venezuelan waters. Similarly, on 11 October, a [boat capsized on its way from Necoclí](#) (Colombia) to the San Blas archipelago (**Panama**). There were 30 people on board, 21 of whom were rescued alive. Three women died and six persons remain missing, including 3 children. Although they are not new, mixed movements through the Darien region (Panama) have increased in magnitude, level of risk, and precariousness in recent months. Between January and October 2021, more than 100,000 people have crossed the border between Panama and Colombia in an irregular manner, according to authorities. On the other hand, according to Cuban authorities, hundreds of Haitians arrived via boat on the coasts of the island's eastern and central provinces in early-October in efforts to reach the US. At least [seven return flights](#) departed from **Cuba** to Haiti, and a Cuban ship disembarked some 348 people, including 38 children, in the outskirts of the Haitian capital. At the same time, Cubans continue to risk their lives on sea journeys due to the [current conditions](#). In October alone, more than 60 Cubans have been detained by Border Patrol while trying to enter the U.S. irregularly. In this context, UNHCR continues to advocate for safe, regular, and orderly human mobility pathways to reduce the risk of loss of life.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the rising cost of basic products, slow or limited economic recovery, and increasing unemployment rates continue to be felt in many countries under MCO Panama, including [Curaçao](#), [Panama](#), [Cuba](#), [Trinidad and Tobago](#), and [Belize](#). In this context, displaced people continue to be faced with heightened vulnerabilities, especially when they lack access

to documentation and work permits to allow for livelihoods and income-generation activities. In **Guyana**, displaced Venezuelans, including indigenous Warao communities, strive to make ends meet selling what they can produce, or engaging in negative coping mechanisms, like survival sex.

In this complex context of prolonged crises and post-pandemic challenges, UNHCR seeks to create regional synergies and build alliances with different stakeholders to ensure access to protection, rights, and basic needs and services for people who have been forced to flee. In this sense, a [regional agreement was signed](#) with ManpowerGroup, a UNHCR strategic ally, to enhance inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers through employability and livelihood opportunities. In addition, a private sector working group, led by UNHCR in collaboration with ManpowerGroup, was launched and will be piloted in Panama. The Working Group will bring together renowned local and regional companies to help channel the capacities of people forced to flee for the growth and development of their host countries and communities, particularly in the current context of economic recovery.

MCO Panama requires USD 48.7 million to continue providing assistance – food, medicine and healthcare, shelter, education, and WASH – to the people of concern who have been severely affected by the pandemic and the consequent loss of livelihoods, income, and access to basic needs.



### Regional funding overview as of 1 November 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)

**“As Warao Venezuelan communities, we are struggling a lot. We have come here to contribute and help our families survive.”**

- RAFAEL FIGUERA, Venezuelan in Guyana

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# Update on country activities

## COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

### STRENGTHENING CENTRAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- Approximately 50 government officials from **Aruba and Curaçao** participated in the webinar organized by UNHCR and the University of Curacao, on Venezuelan migration patterns on the ABC islands.
- In **Belize**, UNHCR facilitated a capacity-building session on refugee law and human rights to 20 staff of the Department of Youth Services, as part of the joint MoU.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR donated over 10,000 cleaning products to the Ministry of Education, to support the reinforcement of hygiene measures in the schools that will be reopening for face-to-face or blended education.
- In **Guyana**, During Child Protection Week (20 September - 3 October), UNHCR donated over 150 food bags, 100 mosquito nets and 2,000 cloth facemasks to the Childcare and Protection Agency in Region 2. Moreover, 65 staff from Health National AIDS Programme Secretariat who will conduct the Biological Behavioural Surveillance Survey were

trained on data collection tools.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR and HIAS delivered a donation of construction materials to the municipality of La Chorrera to support the building of the municipal service centre for GBV survivors, where asylum-seekers, refugees and locals will have access to essential response services from state institutions and civil organizations. Furthermore, 74 government officials from SENAFRONT, National Migration Service, National Police, Ministries of Labour, Education and Social Development, Electoral Tribunal, SENADIS, SINAPROC, and Justices of Peace participated in an ONPAR-led workshop on international protection, delivered by UNCHR together with partners and Ombudsman's Office staff.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR and partners delivered training sessions on international protection of refugees to approximately 130 local and regional police officers, including participants from Suriname, Guyana, and Jamaica.

## PROTECTION

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

- In **Curaçao**, UNHCR through partner PSI Skuchami delivered a webinar on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) concepts, psychological first aid, and best practices in the field to 40 participants from 18 civil organizations.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR provided interpretation support to the Ministry of Home Affairs during an outreach visit in Region 2, through which 22 Venezuelans applied for their stay permit extensions and 3 persons received counselling on their eligibility for Guyanese citizenship. In addition, over 200 persons were counselled by UNHCR on access to services and legal procedures, and more than 100 were accompanied to government services.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR released the report on the protection monitoring results, highlighting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and asylum seekers.

In **Suriname**, 90 asylum-seekers received their asylum certificates and legal counseling on how to apply for residency in the country.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 9 GBV survivors were identified, 5 of whom were referred to partners for specialized case management, MHPSS, CBI, legal and/or general support.

**Key protection results** January to October 2021

**1,126,984**  
people provided with information through hotlines, help pages WhatsApp, etc.

**7,483**  
health consultations (primary, secondary, tertiary, mental, SHR) provided.

**4,266**  
people provided with legal assistance.

**554**  
GBV survivors supported with legal and psychosocial counselling or shelter.

## CHILD PROTECTION

- In **Guyana**, five children were supported with enrolment in the national education system. Moreover, 81 teachers, local authorities, and community leaders were trained to carry out identification, sensitization, and referrals for prevention and response to GBV and other forms of child abuse.

Furthermore, UNHCR distributed locally developed ESL story books to benefit 88 children in Regions 1 and 7.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 8 cases involving children received counselling and referrals to partner services, including cash assistance, case management, and psychosocial support.

## INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **Aruba**, UNHCR and ILO signed a partnership agreement for a labour market assessment in Aruba and Curaçao, in the framework of the global collaboration on Approach to Inclusive Market Systems for Refugees and Host Communities.

information on early childhood and gender-based violence through a mobile clinic to 275 persons.

- In **Belize**, UNHCR through partners HUMANA and Manos Unidas and in collaboration with UNICEF provided legal and psychosocial services, food assistance, basic healthcare, and

- In **Panama**, UNHCR and partners accompanied UNICEF, IRCF, and ECHO in a field mission to the Reception Centres in Darien, where joint meetings were held with relevant stakeholders working on the management of mixed movements, including the Ombudsman’s Office.

## DELIVERING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS

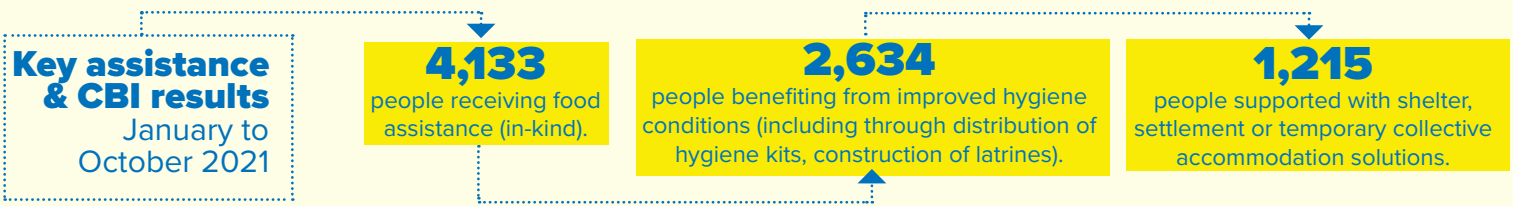
- In **Aruba**, seven households received multipurpose cash for basic needs, including food, rent, and health.

- In **Guyana**, roughly 570 individuals received food assistance, non-food items, emergency shelter support and/or hygiene kits. Moreover, to facilitate access to online English (ESL) classes, 4 persons received mobile phones and data bundles.

- In **Belize**, UNHCR through partner Help for Progress assisted 34 cases (totalling 57 individuals) with food, rent, basic needs, documents, education, and medical support.

- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, 11 households (29 individuals) received cash assistance for basic needs, including food, rent, and health.

- In **Cuba**, UNHCR delivered hygiene kits to 96 persons, including 60 refugees enrolled in universities.



## DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Belize**, 35 people have participated in livelihood courses on woodwork, sewing, baking, and music; 15 students attended English classes, and 19 children benefitted from homework assistance sessions. Two women from the livelihoods training received seed capital – one to open a produce stand and the other, a variety shop.

- In **Panama**, UNHCR through partner Panamanian Red Cross delivered cash assistance for access to education to 12 university students enrolled in different majors, including Law, International Relations, Social Work, Education, Civil and Systems Engineering, Physics, and Human Resources. Furthermore, 12 persons graduated from the three-month Beauty Course at the Maribel Technical School, and 18 people participated in a livelihoods workshop on soft and employability skills as part of Talento sin Fronteras.

- In **Guyana**, 121 students graduated from English as a Second Language (ESL) online classes and 154 students enrolled for the third period. Moreover, UNHCR resumed the “Chinchorro production” livelihoods project with the participation of 20 Venezuelan Warao women who were provided with nylon and rope to produce the hammocks, which UNHCR will procure for distribution to vulnerable individuals.

- In **Suriname**, UNHCR delivered asylum seeker certificates to 35 new applicants and counselled them on their rights, including that to apply for residency. 55 asylum seekers received their renewed certificates and were counselled on the residency permit procedure





## STORIES FROM THE FIELD



©UNHCR/Carla Bridglal. Story by Carla Bridglal | \*Names changed for protection concerns

“It hurt a little, but it was fast,” 14-year-old Isabel Salazar\* laughed about getting her vaccine. Isabel, her brother Marco, 16 and their mother, Claudia, 42, were among the many Venezuelans who turned out to vaccination drives supported by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and hosted by partners, the Living Water Community and local NGO Sewa TT.

“I wanted to get the jab, because without it I can’t do many things. It’s important that we get vaccinated because it helps you stay safe and we’ll be able to go back to our normal lives,” she said.

In Trinidad and Tobago, according to the Ministry of Health, as of 29 October, roughly 1.2M doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered, and approximately 43% of the population is fully vaccinated. Refugees and asylum seekers have been included in vaccination efforts. “UNHCR is grateful to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for allowing everyone, regardless of immigration status, access to the COVID19 vaccine,” said Miriam Aertker, Head of UNHCR’s National Office in Trinidad and Tobago. “No one is safe until everyone is safe, and inclusion of refugees and migrants is integral in order for the country – and the world – to reopen

and for life to return to normal. UNHCR stands ready to offer support in whatever way.”

The recent drives, organized by civil society, sought to make the vaccination process convenient and easy for anyone wanting their vaccines. The organisations have reached nearly 4,000 refugees and migrants. Volunteers, including UNHCR staff, offered translation and other services to people like Isabel and her family.

Isabel and her family are asylum-seekers who came to Trinidad in December 2019 because the increasing food and medical shortages as well as insecurity in their country made it difficult for her parents to care for her brother, who has Asperger’s Syndrome, a form of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

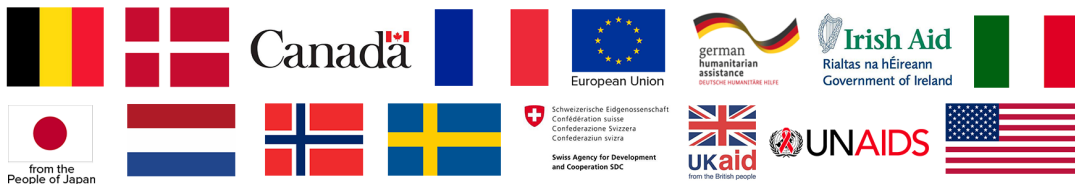
“It was impossible for us to (get) his food and medications, and there was so much we needed so we (left) to have a better life for everyone,” Claudia said.

Marco admitted he was nervous about the possible side-effects of the vaccine. “The truth is, I was a bit scared, but I am sure everything will be fine. Now with the vaccine, if you get COVID19, it’s not as strong,” he said.

## We thank the contributions of our donors

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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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