

Panama Multi-Country Office

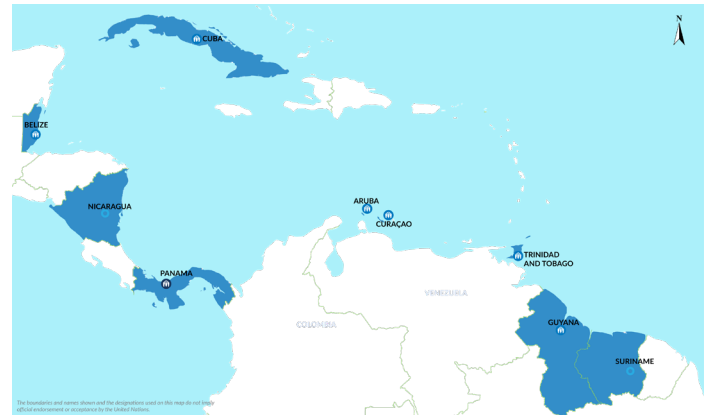
Monthly Operational Update

Regional Context

Countries under the **Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama** continue to receive people forced to flee, who seek safety and protection or search for better opportunities or family reunification. In this sense, authorities in **Aruba** and **Curaçao** have intercepted several groups of displaced people from Venezuela attempting to enter irregularly. Deportations and detentions remain common practices, which have been called out by the UN Child Rights Committee in its **concluding observations** on the situation of children's rights in the Netherlands, including the Dutch Caribbean. Moreover, the Government of Aruba indicated that the diplomatic situation which caused the stoppage of return flights to Venezuela has not yet been resolved. Deportation via third countries is no longer feasible either, as **the Dominican Republic will not accept to serve as a transit point any longer**. Voluntary returns may, however, continue to purchase tickets to Venezuela via the Dominican Republic. On the other hand, the new Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations and Digitalization visited the detention facility in the Sentro di Detenshon i Korekshon Kòrsou (SDKK) prison where refugees and migrants are held pending deportation. A joint statement was released stating the **agreement between Curaçao and the Netherlands on improving refugee reception**.

More than 2,000 Venezuelans have returned from Trinidad and Tobago since the reopening of borders on 17 July 2021, due to increases in the cost of living on the islands. On the other hand, the **Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard opened fire** on a Venezuelan vessel with 19 people on board, attempting to enter irregularly. A 1-year-old boy was fatally injured, while the mother was also shot and taken to the hospital for medical evaluation and attention. **UNHCR, IOM, OHCHR, and UNICEF expressed concern** for the incident and offered support for the forcibly displaced in a joint statement. The other 17 people found onboard were detained and taken to the Chaguaramas military heliport, from where **several deportation exercises were carried out** in February.

In **Guyana**, there are continued tensions reported between the Sindicatos and the Colombian Guerrillas on the Venezuelan side of the border, which has led to the increased presence of the Police and the Defense Forces on the Guyanese side of the border. Due to this, it was noted that individuals from Venezuela continue to face difficulty entering Guyana. In this context, Venezuelan authorities are investigating the death of **eight Warao indigenous people** (including children), whose bodies were found at the mouth of the Orinoco River, on the Venezuelan border with Guyana. It is presumed that they were trying to cross the border in a boat.



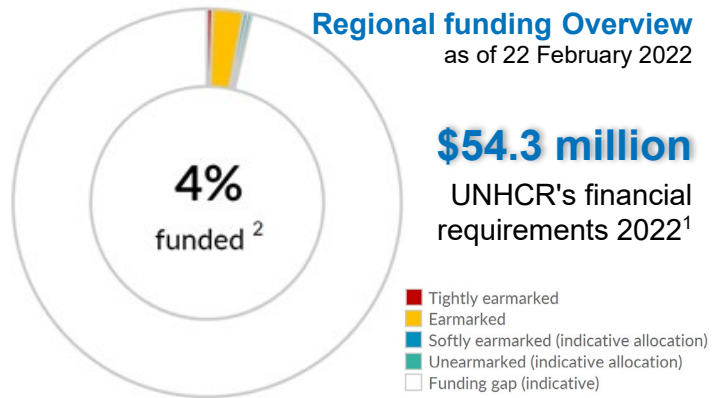
On 1 February, the Public Ministry of **Nicaragua resumed the judicial proceedings** against the individuals arrested in the context of the general elections of November 2021. **Several Nicaraguan opposition leaders were found guilty of "conspiracy to undermine national integrity."** In a press release, The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) **expressed concern** about the lack of guarantees in the trials of these political prisoners, whose hearings were held at the El Chipote facilities, privately and without access of independent media. The freedom of press also continued to be undermined, with **more than 65 journalists having fled** due to harassment and attacks since June 2021. A recent report by the regional initiative Voces del Sur states that in January 2022, **114 cases of freedom of press violations were registered** in Nicaragua. Additionally, through **Resolution 9/2022**, IACHR extended precautionary measures in favour of indigenous people in the Autonomous Region of the North Caribbean Coast, after identifying that they are at risk of violence, food insecurity, and malnutrition. **Many have been displaced by outsiders** who force their way into the area to mine for gold, graze cattle, and cut down timber. In this context, Nicaraguans continue to flee, mainly northward instead of to Costa Rica due to difficulties on the route to the south, including a militarized border and drone border surveillance. Furthermore, as of 21 February, Costa Rica began to require a **transit visa for Nicaraguans** who have flight layovers for a maximum of twelve hours.

Cubans also continue to embark on irregular and dangerous journeys, looking to escape the socio-political and economic crisis. According to US Coast Guard recent figures, **800 Cubans have been intercepted at sea since 1 October 2021**, compared to 838 in the entire 2021 fiscal year. Additionally, approximately **360 persons have been returned to Cuba from Mexico and the Bahamas**, and Cuban immigration authorities confirmed that there is an upward trend in deportations compared to the previous year. Moreover, despite the visa waiver for Cubans to enter

Nicaragua, the [new transit visa required](#) by Costa Rica has posed additional challenges for travellers, who must obtain the entry permit prior to arrival. On the other hand, **Suriname** has seen an increased inflow of Cuban asylum-seekers. The main reasons for displacement identified by UNHCR are family reunification, police harassment and repression related to the 2021 peaceful demonstrations on 11 July and 15 November, as well as basic items shortages (including food and medicines).

In **Panama**, the number of mixed movements entering through the Darien Gap remains low and unpredictable, with considerable daily variations. Most people arriving through the Darien currently are Venezuelans – some of whom are in secondary movements from Peru – although Cubans, Haitians, and people from Senegal continue to arrive as well (in addition to other nationalities to a lesser extent). As complaints of robberies and sexual assaults on the route to Canaan Membrillo started to be received, border officials from SENAFRONT are patrolling the transit routes to ensure protection and safety.

In this complex context of prolonged crises and post-pandemic challenges, UNHCR will continue to provide lifesaving assistance to vulnerable people of concern,



¹ Financial requirements for the Panama MCO in 2022 including requirements for the operations and activities in **Panama, Belize, Cuba, Nicaragua, Guyana, Aruba, Curaçao, Trinidad and Tobago**, and Suriname.

² The percentage funded is indicative.

including those who have been severely affected by COVID-19 and the consequent loss of livelihoods, income, and access to basic needs. **MCO Panama requires USD 54.3M to continue to protect, assist, and secure solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers** in the subregion.

UNHCR's Response: Updates on Country Activities



UNHCR published a regional cookbook featuring recipes made by refugees throughout the Americas region. Download the entire cookbook [here](#).

Coordination and Strengthening of Local and National Governments

- UNHCR **donated 200 tablets** to the **Ministry of Education** in **Guyana**, as well as over 18,000 leaflets on access to education for people of concern. Moreover, UNHCR facilitated a **joint mission with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Immigration officials** to four indigenous communities in Region 1. UNHCR conducted **needs assessments** of the communities for monitoring and future outreach initiatives, while Immigration officials facilitated the **issuance of stay permits**, and Ministry of Health authorities carried out **health evaluations**.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR **donated 50,000 bars of soap** to the Municipality of La Chorrera to **support host communities, asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants** living in remote areas of the municipality and will also be included in the hygiene kits for women at risk or gender-based violence survivors distributed by the Municipality's Gender Office.
- UNHCR in **Trinidad and Tobago** delivered a **workshop on "Non-Refoulement as a Principle of Customary International Law"** to approximately **30 judges, magistrates, registrars, and judicial research counsels**.

Protection (including community-based protection and gender-based violence)

- UNHCR through Human Right Commission of **Belize** provided **legal counselling** to **8 cases** regarding the Amnesty Program and RSD procedures, including appeals of negative refugee status resolutions.
- In **Guyana**, **1,027 persons** were **counselled by UNHCR** on access to services and legal procedures, 182 of whom were accompanied to government services. Moreover, UNHCR through HIAS provided **5 gender-based violence (GBV) survivors** with **case management services**, and the Guyana Sex Worker Coalition held **support group sessions** with **47 sex workers** to address key issues that affect them, including violence and harassment.
- UNHCR in **Panama** liaised with the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to provide **legal assistance and information on the access to the RSD procedure** for approximately **21 asylum-seekers from Colombia** who have recently arrived at the Tortuga and Rio Sito communities in Darien.
- In **Suriname**, UNHCR **renewed 20 asylum-seeker certificates** and **delivered other 34 to new applicants**, allowing asylum-seekers to remain regularly in the country while processing their residence permits.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR and Living Water Community (LWC) facilitated a **workshop on refugee protection** for approximately **45 students** at the Hugh Wooding Law School.



Child Protection

- Over the past month, UNHCR supported 284 out-of-school children from four indigenous communities in **Guyana** (Region 1) with access to community-based English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Moreover, through Blossom Inc., UNHCR supported 11 child victims of sexual abuse with trauma-focused therapy in January: 8 (including two Venezuelan children) were supported with child forensic interviews, and one was provided with additional court support services. 16 Venezuelans, both children and parents, were provided with child protection case management services.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR delivered 150 tablets to strategic partners for their distribution to targeted children and adolescents, as back-to-school in support. Priority in distribution has been given to recent arrivals or extremely vulnerable host community members.



Humanitarian Assistance and Cash-Based Interventions (CBI)

- In **Belize**, UNHCR through Help for Progress distributed multipurpose cash to 4 households (totalling 5 individuals), food assistance to 1 household (1 woman, 2 children) in COVID-19 quarantine, and emergency medical assistance to 2 asylum-seekers.
- UNHCR in **Cuba** provided multipurpose cash assistance to 104 individuals and delivered medicines to a refugee family of five, facilitating access to medical treatment in a context of extensive shortages.
- In **Guyana**, UNHCR facilitated the distribution of 360 food hampers to eight vulnerable communities in Mabaruma (Region 1) and reached other 249 persons with food assistance in Regions 1, 2, 4, and Georgetown; 115 individuals also received NFIs (jerry cans, solar lamps, mosquito nets, sleeping mats and hygiene kits), and 139 persons in Regions 1 and 2 received hygiene kits. More, in response to a COVID-19 outbreak in the White/Black Water Village (Region 1), UNHCR donated 800 masks, 250 bars of soap, 50 bottles of surface disinfectant, and gloves to the community. UNHCR also delivered 850 Mosquito nets, 1,700 soap bars, and 2,700 cloth masks to vulnerable local community members in Region 4 during two joint missions with the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG), the US Embassy's Military Information Support Team, and TSI Security Service. During the missions, medical assessments and services were also provided, as well as medicines. Finally, UNHCR prevented the eviction of 18 Venezuelan Waraos in Charity (Region 2) by providing cash assistance for accrued rent debt (3 months), as the individuals were unable to meet their obligations due to lack of livelihoods and income.



Health

- UNHCR donated 70 boxes of condoms to **Aruba** Positive Foundation which were given out during a two-day distribution to persons engaged in survival sex.
- In **Guyana**, 42 sex workers were sensitized on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and HIV/STI prevention, gender-based violence prevention, and gender equality. Moreover, 2,136 condoms were distributed Regions 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8. Additionally, 9 persons of concern attended a workshop on SRH and services available.



Durable Solutions and Livelihoods

- In **Belize**, UNHCR through HUMANA delivered skills and livelihood courses to 33 participants and English classes to 15 students (both adults and children) and supported 10 refugees with academic fees and related costs to access vocational training at the Stann Creek Institute, where they will be taking a 5-month course on Math, English, Basic Computer skills, and Life Skills.
- With support from UNHCR in **Panama**, the Red Cross and Microserfin delivered six virtual workshops on Financial Education for 50 participants of the Microcredit Programme for refugees and asylum-seekers.



Inter-Agency Coordination

- The health working group in **Aruba** launched the pilot project "Triage Chatgroup". Guided by the 8 members of the chatgroup (primary care doctors, doctors in training, pharmacist, and NGO staff members), protection officers and social workers seek to provide more effective counselling and referrals to the people of concern with medical issues. Additionally, the Primary Care Network committee developed a second chatgroup consisting of 8 doctors who are available to provide pro bono medical services to refugees and migrants.
- After a prolonged stay in **Cuba** as refugees, 2 persons from Iraq were resettled in Canada with the support and cooperation of IOM.
- In **Panama**, more than 50 media professionals participated in the workshop on responsible reporting and media coverage on refugees and migrants, organized as part of the Somos lo Mismo campaign.
- The R4V GBV Subsector organized the workshop on Remote Service Provision for First Responders providing support to children and adolescent survivors in **Trinidad and Tobago**. The sessions were provided to 22 attendees on topics such as remote service provision, psychological first aid, assent and consent, among others.

Stories from the Field

Hogar Luisa: A home for refugees and asylum-seekers in Panama

When persons forced to flee first arrive to a country, they face uncertainty and – with lack of a support network – one of the most basic needs, shelter, feels unattainable. In Panama, Hogar Luisa, a reception centre run by the Catholic Church and supported by UNHCR, bridges the gap for many asylum-seekers when finding a safe place to sleep while starting their new life.

The mission of the shelter is simple: to support those in need to overcome their challenges and have a safe space where they can begin to design a road map, to thrive and not just survive.

“Hogar Luisa constitutes a home where refugees and asylum-seekers can look for that first helping hand in Panama,” says Vidalina Santos, social worker for the shelter.

Upon their arrival, each person is assisted by a social worker. During the interviews, specific needs are identified, and persons are referred to other local organizations. Furthermore, those housed at the shelter benefit of psychosocial support throughout their stay, which varies depending on the specific vulnerabilities of each case.

During their time in the shelter, asylum-seekers and refugees living outside of the capital city receive counselling and support through a bigger network of organizations caring for those forced to flee through humanitarian assistance, legal counselling, access to health and educational services, livelihoods, and psychosocial programs.

“We provide the families with tools that can help them. Hogar Luisa hopes to become a more comprehensive and complete shelter,” comments Vidalina.

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https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_16324

