

# Cuba

November - December 2021

Cuba is not a State party to international refugee instruments. **UNHCR provides international protection** to refugees under its mandate. With support from the government, UNHCR ensures that refugees are **protected against refoulement** and that they have **access to healthcare** and **education** services.

As local integration opportunities are very limited, **most refugees are in need of resettlement** as their only possible durable solution. However, resettlement opportunities are limited.

**Vulnerabilities of asylum-seekers and refugees** have further increased due to the COVID-19 related social and economic downturn, among other factors, including **shortages** of basic items (like **food** and **medicine**), affecting refugees and host communities alike.

## Population of concern

**201** refugees under UNHCR's mandate  
(as of December 2021)

**53%** of refugees do not have a migratory status granted by the government; 25% of them are women and children

**106** people in need of resettlement

## Main nationalities

Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Eritrea, Sudan

## CONTEXT

With governmental consent, UNHCR processes asylum claims under its mandate. While refugees can access free healthcare and education services, they are not allowed to engage in income-generating activities, making their prospects for local integration difficult.

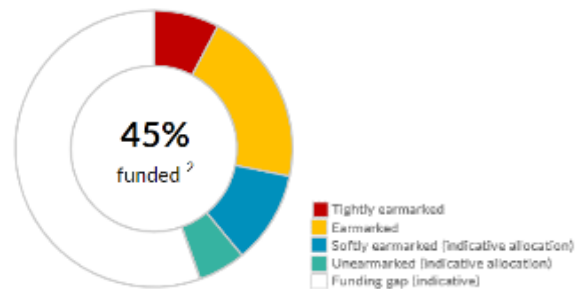
During the COVID-19 pandemic, their socio-economic situation has considerably worsened, with difficulties to access food, hygiene items, and medicines. As a result of UNHCR's advocacy, refugees and asylum-seekers were granted access to the governmental rationing system and the national COVID-19 vaccination programme, on equal footing as nationals.

UNHCR continues participating in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework signed with the Cuban government, as well as in the UN Socio-Economic COVID-19 Response Plan to protect vulnerable groups, including refugees and asylum-seekers.

## STATE OF PLAY: FUNDING RECEIVED VS. FUNDING NEEDS (AS OF 29 DECEMBER 2021)

**US\$ 48.7 M**

requested for the Panama Multi-Country Office<sup>1</sup> for 2021



<sup>1</sup> The financial requirements for the Panama MCO include requirements for the Coronavirus Emergency and the Venezuela Situation. Belize is part of the Panama Multi-Country Office in 2021 along with Panama, Nicaragua, Cuba and the Southern Caribbean

<sup>2</sup> The percentage funded includes indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions

## Cuban Yoga teacher helps refugee women heal past traumas



Refugee women in Havana, Cuba meet every Friday with Lisset – their teacher – for their weekly yoga session, which helps them cope with the stress of current challenges and provides a space for healing, self-care, and wellbeing. Zeina, a Syrian refugee, shares that the yoga experience "is very relaxing, it helps us to feel better, calmer, and to be together," referring to her classmates. Find out more under [Stories for the Field](#) below (p.2).

## Working with Partners

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the official counterpart of UNHCR in Cuba. UNHCR also collaborates with the ministries of Education, Public Health, and Foreign Trade and International Collaboration, and with the Cuban Red Cross. Moreover, several academic institutions such as the University of Havana and the Group of International Humanitarian Law Studies collaborate in the dissemination of information related to International Refugee Law.

## Main Activities

### Advocacy

UNHCR continues to promote Cuba's accession to international refugee protection and statelessness instruments, as well as the adoption of measures to improve access to rights and services. Moreover, UNHCR **raises awareness on refugee issues** through the ongoing dissemination of International Refugee Law and its principles among government institutions, NGOs, and the academia, seeking to promote a refugee-sensitive culture.

### Protection

UNHCR **provides international protection to persons of concern**, including the refugee status determination (RSD) under mandate and the search for durable solutions. In this sense, UNHCR **provides legal counselling to refugees and asylum-seekers** on RSD procedures and national regulations pertinent to their status and their protection in general, as well as durable solutions assessments and procedures, including resettlement.

### Cash-based Interventions and Humanitarian Assistance

Due to their lack of a defined status, many refugees and asylum-seekers cannot access employment, secure livelihoods, and have limited income-generating alternatives. Thus, UNHCR **carries out activities aimed at ensuring safety and access to basic needs** for persons of concern. During COVID-19, UNHCR expanded its **multipurpose cash and in-kind assistance** to support vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers cope with the economic impact of the pandemic. Since January 2021, UNHCR has supported **over 250 people**.

### Education

Thanks to verbal agreements with the Cuban government, refugees and asylum-seekers have access to free primary and secondary education. Approximately **95 young refugees**, most of them from Western Sahara, have **access to university studies**. UNHCR provides a small complementary assistance to the government scholarships for refugee students in a vulnerable situation to help cover their most basic needs while in Cuba.

## STORIES FROM THE FIELD



Lisset Galego, a Cuban dancer and yoga passionate, met several refugees through activities organized by UNHCR and *MiCompañía*, a dance company in which she takes part in her hometown of Havana, Cuba.

Sensitized by the displacement stories she heard, Lisset decided to step up and support refugee women in Cuba affected by previous traumas and current challenges through her yoga practice and now offers one-hour yoga classes every Friday to women from Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Haiti, among others.

"Through the practice of Kundalini yoga we can strengthen our body and mind, healing and preparing ourselves for a fuller life, and fostering resilience," she says.

Lisset feels enthusiastic and grateful for this unique opportunity to exchange experiences with women from different cultures and get to know each other, help them integrate in the Cuban community, overcome stressful situations together, and provide a much-needed space for self-care and wellbeing.

The UNHCR Panama MCO wishes to convey a special thank you to its donors: United States of America, Spain, European Union, France, United Kingdom, and the UN Programme On HIV/AIDS, as well as to the following donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked funds: Algeria | Armenia | Australia | Austria | Belgium | Bulgaria | Canada | Costa Rica | Cyprus | Denmark | Estonia | Finland | France | Germany | Holy See | Iceland | Ireland | Italy | Japan | Latvia | Liechtenstein | Luxembourg | Malta | Monaco | Montenegro | Morocco | Netherlands | New Zealand | Norway | Peru | Philippines | Portugal | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | Saudi Arabia | Singapore | Slovakia | South Africa | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | Thailand | Turkey | United Kingdom | United States of America | Uruguay | Private donors, including Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Spain, Sweden, and United States of America.

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