

REGIONAL CONTEXT

During this period, countries under [UNHCR's Multi-Country Office](#) in Panama experienced policy changes, including some impacting refugees and asylum-seekers. Several countries also faced adverse weather conditions. Throughout these challenges, UNHCR provided essential assistance to forcibly displaced and host communities.

[Belize](#) hosted the seventh Annual Meeting of the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions ([MIRPS](#)). UNHCR's High Commissioner attended and praised Belize's efforts to enhance protection policies during its pro-tempore presidency. The country handed over the presidency to [Costa Rica](#) to lead the regional response in 2025. Belize's [Amnesty Programme](#) provided 492 asylum-seekers with permanent residency.

In December, [Aruba](#) held [general elections](#) for the 21 members of the new Parliament sworn in January 2025. In [Curaçao](#), general elections will take place on 21 March 2025 to elect the members of the Parliament.

In [Trinidad and Tobago](#), the government extended the [Work Permit exemption](#) for registered Venezuelan nationals until 31 December 2025. This extension allows Venezuelans previously granted work permit exemptions to continue working for an additional year.

In [Suriname](#), authorities announced [general elections](#) on May 25, 2025. It will be the first time Suriname uses a nationwide voting system instead of the district-based approach.

Hurricanes [Oscar](#) and Rafael severely impacted [Cuba](#) within three weeks of each other. Hurricane Oscar affected eastern Cuba, damaging [14,300 homes](#) and disrupting essential services for 1.4 million people. The country had experienced a prolonged nationwide [blackout](#) days before the hurricane's landfall. Shortly after, Hurricane Rafael, a Category 3 storm, struck western Cuba, including Havana, affecting [3.5 million people](#) and worsening power outages. Cuba was also struck by two earthquakes of 6.0 and 6.7 magnitude on the Richter scale. Essential supplies and core-relief items, including kitchen sets, tarpaulins, mosquito nets, solar lamps, and sleeping mats were provided to the host community and refugee population affected.

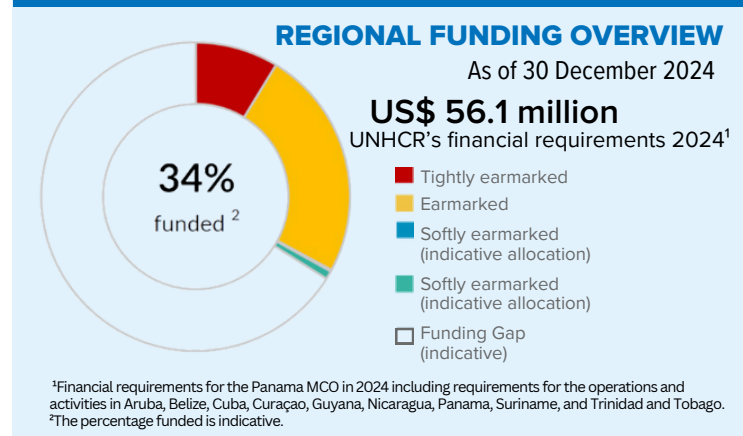
Tensions rose after [Guyana](#) announced plans to renovate Camp Tigri's airstrip, known as Camp Jaguar, in the disputed [New River Triangle](#) between Guyana and Suriname. Although internationally recognized as part of Guyana, Suriname claims the area. Officials from both countries met and discussed [policies](#) to improve social services, infrastructure, and support for remote vulnerable communities while advancing bilateral cooperation.



[Nicaragua's National Assembly](#) discussed several legislative measures, including the approval of reforms affecting over 100 articles of the [Constitution](#). The initiative allows the presidency to oversee all branches of the government. The vice-presidency, held by President Ortega's wife, would be elevated to co-presidency, and the presidential term would be extended to six years with the option for indefinite re-election. The [Assembly](#) also reformed the General Law of Migration and [amended](#) the National Criminal Code to strengthen border controls. The Assembly approved a law regulating cooperation from organizations, agencies, and [diplomatic missions](#), mandating that all must align with national priorities and plans, overseen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In [Panama](#), the Government issued [Executive Decree No.194](#) of 25 October, outlining penalties for foreigners who enter the country bypassing official immigration control points. For those entering irregularly through Darien, penalties are set from USD 300 to USD 1,000. This year marked the first significant [decrease](#) in irregular entries since 2020, with a 42 per cent reduction from the 2023 figures. In November, heavy [rains](#) affected [6,300 people](#) nationwide, causing 12 deaths and overflowing rivers near Lajas Blancas Temporary Reception Centre (ETRM), leading to overcrowded spaces.

MCO Panama requires USD 56.1M to continue assisting and securing solutions in the subregion



UNHCR'S RESPONSE



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In December, in the framework of the MIRPS annual meeting, UNHCR and the Government held a ceremony to deliver permanent residency IDs to 17 asylum-seekers who benefited from the Amnesty Programme. UNHCR has assisted 168 applicants, covering the costs of obtaining their residency cards.

COORDINATION WITH NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS



- In **Panama**, UNHCR conducted a Quality Assurance Initiative with the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) to identify gaps in refugee protection procedures and enhance case management.
- UNHCR supported **Belize's** Good Practice Implementation Project, helping 78 people with their small businesses.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR trained 166 police and immigration officials on international protection and the Agency's mandate, as part of a coordinated effort to provide regular sensitization on refugee protection.

HEALTH



- In **Curacao**, through Salú Pa Tur, UNHCR provided health services to refugees and migrants not covered by health insurance. The services included 1,470 primary health consultations.

PROTECTION



- UNHCR registered 173 people in **Suriname**, enabling access to essential services and documentation.
- UNHCR interviewed 33 people in **Aruba**, as part of a Participatory Assessment to evaluate the specific needs of forcibly displaced groups regarding access to territory, documentation, education, health, and child protection.
- In **Panama**, as part of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, UNHCR launched "[Your Voice Counts, Turn the Silence into Colour](#)," displaying art visuals in Bugaba, Chiriquí, and Panama City's Metro stations.
- In **Belize**, a Documentation Clinic in Bella Vista was held, enabling 352 people to access information from the Guatemalan Embassy and Amnesty officials.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR registered and documented 976 people and identified 166 refugees and asylum-seekers to be referred for resettlement.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE



- In **Guyana**, UNHCR distributed solar lamps and tarpaulins to 474 forcibly displaced individuals in the Smith's Creek community in Region 1.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR supported 148 refugees and asylum-seekers with cash-based assistance to cover basic needs and shelter.
- Following nationwide floods in **Panama** in November, UNHCR donated 5,400 blankets, 9,600 sleeping mats, and 428 kitchen sets to the Government for distribution to the most affected communities.

LOCAL INTEGRATION



- In **Guyana**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Education launched an English as a Second Language (ESL) programme for 60 forcibly displaced Venezuelan adults in Regions 1 and 3 to enhance English literacy and promote local integration.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR and local development projects 'Pequespacio' and 'Estudio Cimarrón', celebrated World Children's Day with games and creative activities for refugee and asylum-seeking children.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

UNHCR EMBRACES SUSTAINABILITY WITH ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN ARUBA



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Committed to reducing environmental impact, UNHCR acquired two electric Nissan LEAF vehicles to operate in Aruba, becoming the first office in the America with a fully electric fleet. This initiative aligns with UNHCR's global greening efforts to cut CO2 emissions by 30 per cent by 2030.

Zero-emission vehicles support UNHCR's missions, enabling staff to travel efficiently to towns where refugees and asylum seekers live. These new vehicles emit zero CO2 or other exhaust when driving. Aruba is paving the way for a greener future, championing sustainability through widespread charging station installations and offering tax incentives for electric vehicles. In its first month, the car's operational costs were reduced by nearly 90 per cent compared to gasoline cars. Maintenance services costs dropped to 60 percent.

"By reducing emissions and operational costs, UNHCR operation in Aruba aligns with the country's environmental initiatives and enhances our ability to provide critical protection and assistance to those in need. This initiative underscores UNHCR's commitment to sustainability and to minimizing our environmental footprint", explained Jose Egas, Representative for UNHCR's Multi-Country Office covering Aruba, Belize, Cuba, Curacao, Guyana, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname, & Trinidad & Tobago.

UNHCR's dedication to sustainable operations extends far beyond its vehicle fleet. From greening offices and supply chains to optimizing travel operations, the agency protects people forced to flee while contributing to a cleaner, more sustainable future for all.

UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama thanks the contributions from our donors in 2024



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