

# Cuba

September-October 2021

Cuba is not a State party to international refugee instruments. Thus, 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 health and education services.

As local integration opportunities are very limited, **most refugees are in need of resettlement** as their only possible durable solution. However, quotas have not been available for refugees living in the country for a considerable time.

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

## Population of concern

**253**

refugees under UNHCR's mandate

[as of October 2021]

**55%**

of refugees do not have a residency permit; 50% are women and children

**89**

people in need of resettlement

## Main nationalities

Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Eritrea, Sudan

## CONTEXT

With governmental consent, UNHCR provides the only available international protection in Cuba, processing 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.

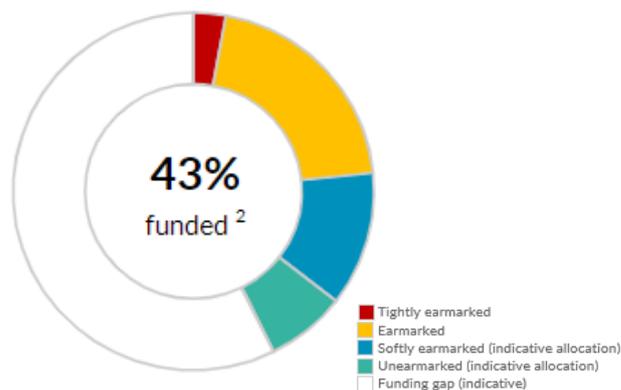
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the socio-economic situation has considerably worsened, with difficulties to access food, hygiene items, and medicines. Thanks to UNHCR's advocacy, refugees and asylum-seekers were granted access to the governmental rationing system and the national COVID-19 vaccination 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.

## FUNDING (AS OF 9 NOVEMBER 2021)

**USD 48.7 M**

requested for the Panama Multi-Country Office for 2021



1 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

2 The percentage funded includes indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions



UNHCR delivered hygiene kits to more than 65 refugees enrolled in universities across the country.

## 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.

### CBI 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**. Moreover, between September and October, UNHCR delivered **hygiene kits** with first need products to **more than 65 refugees and asylum-seekers** in 10 provinces.

### Education

Thanks to verbal agreements with the Cuban government, refugees and asylum-seekers have access to free primary and secondary education. Approximately **110 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



Mudar Jry, a young 33-year-old Syrian refugee in Cuba, sits at a hospital desk after a 24-hour shift. Though tired, he feels there is much work to do and to contribute.

Recently graduated in Medicine from the University of Medical Sciences of Pinar del Río, Cuba, Mudar joined the **Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade** and traveled to Kuwait to work as an interpreter and doctor, providing medical assistance during the pandemic. "I am ready to continue serving my profession anywhere in the world where a doctor is needed," he said.

Other refugees like him across 10 provinces are currently studying to become doctors or other medical practitioners. Many have contributed to the fight against COVID-19 in Cuba.

Thanks to donors: The UNHCR Panama MCO wishes to convey a special thank you to its donors: the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, the European Union, 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, and Sweden

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