

Cuba

January 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 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, RST quotas have not been available for refugees living in the country for a considerable period of time.

The needs of all refugees and asylum seekers in Cuba have increased as a result of social and economic difficulties related to the pandemic, among other factors. This includes shortage in availability of some basic supplies that affect both the displaced population and locals alike.

Population of concern

230

Refugees under UNHCR's mandate
[December 2020]

42%

refugees lack a defined migratory status; of them, 46% are women and children

111

People in need of resettlement by end of 2020

Main nationalities

Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Eritrea

CONTEXT

With governmental consent, UNHCR provides the only available international protection space in Cuba, processing applications for the refugee status under its mandate. While refugees can access free health care and also education services, they are not allowed to engage in income-generating activities, making their prospects for local integration difficult.

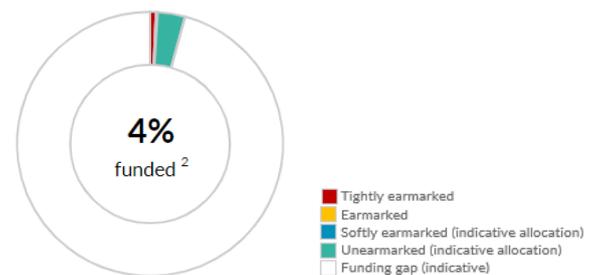
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the socio-economic situation has considerably worsened, with difficulties to access food, hygiene items and medicines. Thanks to UNHCR's advocacy, persons of concern were granted access to the governmental rationing system, on equal footing as nationals.

For the first time, UNHCR is participating in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework recently 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 2 FEBRUARY)

USD 48.7 M

requested for the Panama Multi Country Office in 2021



1 The financial requirements for the Panama MCO include requirements for the Coronavirus Emergency and the Venezuela Situation. Guyana is part of the Panama Multi-Country Office in 2021 along with Aruba, Curacao, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua and Belize.
2 The percentage funded includes indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions



To address the needs of people of concern during the pandemic, UNHCR in Cuba delivers basic goods to refugee and asylum seeker families. UNHCR Cuba

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 of Foreign Trade and International Collaboration, and with the Cuban Red Cross.
- 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 instruments on refugee protection and statelessness, as well as the State's adoption of measures to improve access of refugees to rights and services.
- The Office raises awareness on refugee issues through the dissemination of International Refugee Law and its principles among government institutions, NGOs and the academia, with a view to promote a refugee-sensitive culture.

Protection

- The Office provides international protection to persons of concern, including the refugee status determination under mandate and the search for durable solutions.
- UNHCR provides legal counselling to refugees and asylum seekers on RSD procedures, national regulations pertinent to their status and their protection in general, durable solutions assessments and procedures.



CBI and humanitarian assistance

- Due to their lack of a defined status, many refugees and asylum seekers cannot access employment. UNHCR carries out activities aimed at ensuring safety and access to basic needs for persons of concern.
- During COVID-19, UNHCR has expanded its cash and in-kind assistance to support vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers cope with the economic impact of the pandemic. Since March, UNHCR has delivered cash assistance, food and hygiene kits to 154 persons of concern.



Education

- Thanks to verbal agreements with the Cuban government, refugees and asylum seekers have access to free primary and secondary education. Approximately 100 young refugees, most of them from Western Sahara, have access to university studies thanks to bilateral agreements. UNHCR provides a small complementary assistance to the government scholarships for refugee students in a vulnerable situation to help cover their most basic needs.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Refugees and asylum seekers contribute to the COVID19 response in Cuba



With a number of refugees studying medicine on government-supported scholarships in Cuba, refugee students in their third year of medical school or above are now also able to join the emergency response to coronavirus.

Two young women from Western Sahara, in northwestern Africa, who grew up in refugee camps in neighboring Algeria were among those med students volunteering to lend a hand in the island's COVID-19 contagion prevention campaign.

Suado Zein Beljeir, 23, and Umajutha Jatri Sidahmed, 22, braved the island's tropical heat to go door-to-door to inform residents about hand washing, self-distancing and other basic steps they can take to protect themselves from the potentially deadly virus. The med students are also a key part of the island's epidemiological response, as they use their door-to-door visits to locate those presenting potential symptoms of the illness.

"This is very important work," said Suado, who, thanks to a scholarship from the Cuban government studies medicine in Las Tunas, in the east of the island.

Umajutha, who, thanks to the same scholarship program, is studying in the western city of Pilar del Río, said she saw volunteering to inform the population as a way of showing her gratitude to the Cuban people. "It's a way of thanking the people of this city and this country for having given us the chance to study to become doctors."

[Read full story here.](#)

External / Donors Relations

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding: Canada | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Italy | Netherlands | Norway | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America

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CONTACTS

In Cuba

Alberto Aragón, Assistant Protection Officer

aragon@unhcr.org, Tel: +537 204 1512, +537 204 15 13; +537 204 1514

Laura Solá, Protection Associate

sola@unhcr.org, Tel: +537 204 1512, +537 204 15 13; +537 204 1514

In the Multi Country Office in Panama

Diana Díaz Rodríguez, Regional Communications Officer

diazdi@unhcr.org, Tel: +507 304 9696, +507 66463469

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