

# Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

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## Context

In 2023, and as of 31 October, 458,228 people crossed the Darién jungle<sup>1</sup>, nearly the equivalent to the last 12 years combined<sup>2</sup>. To address this crisis, Panama and Costa Rica announced a joint agreement to transfer refugees and migrants directly from Darién's reception points (ETRM) to Costa Rica's Temporal Centre for the Attention of Migrants (CATEM). This measure expedites the transfer of those in transit to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border.

On 20 October, the Government ratified Law 406, confirming a new concession contract with *Minera Panama*. This triggered nationwide protests and social unrest by civil society groups who expressed concern over the contract's environmental impact, excessive profits, and legitimacy. Besides hindering overall mobility, the protests affected mixed movements of refugees and migrants to Costa Rica. Both ETRMs were at capacity, and buses encountered numerous blockades. Many continued their journey on foot. Occasionally, protesters allowed buses to cross, responding to the National Migration Service (SNM) advocacy for a humanitarian corridor.

In October, 49,256 persons crossed Darién, a decrease of 35 per cent compared to September. UNHCR's protection monitoring exercise<sup>3</sup> evidenced that **one out of ten** interviewed left their country of origin due to **threats or attacks** against them or their families. **Eighty per cent** left due to **fear of violence and general insecurity**. Some **38 per cent** were victims of theft, scam, or fraud during the journey through the jungle, and **78 per cent** mentioned they might face risks if they returned to their country of origin or residence.

## UNHCR's Response

### PROTECTION

UNHCR **supports the Government's response** at the ETRMs and to host communities in Darién and Chiriquí. The Agency offers legal support to people with international protection needs, referring individuals who require specialized assistance to the relevant institutions. With the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), UNHCR provides **information on the asylum system in Panama** and assists those in need of international protection with their **refugee status application**.

UNHCR trained 25 people on UNHCR's mandate and international protection, namely staff of the Ombudsman Office, the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR), the Consumer Protection Authority (ACODECO), the Ministry of Social Development, the National Secretary for People with Disabilities (SENADIS), the National Secretary for Children, Adolescents and Family (SENNIAF) and high school students.

UNHCR's protection monitoring in the ETRMs San Vicente and Lajas Blancas in Darién reached 101 refugees and migrants.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2023/pdf/TRANSITO\\_IRREGULAR\\_POR\\_DARIEN\\_OCTUBRE%202023.pdf](https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2023/pdf/TRANSITO_IRREGULAR_POR_DARIEN_OCTUBRE%202023.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/99079>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/105265>








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## LOCAL INTEGRATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In Bajo Chiquito, UNHCR distributed working gear to the refugee, asylum-seeking, and host community women in the community leaders' programme and discussed the implementation of the [Innovation Fund Project](#). The "Embera Women Mapping the Environment" project identifies the socio-environmental impacts of mixed movements, deforestation, and climate change on indigenous territories, utilizing data collection strategies and an innovative community engagement approach.

Following the livelihood initiative, *Hecho por Refugiados* (Made by Refugees), UNHCR and the City of Knowledge Foundation (CDS) will continue working together to include refugees and asylum-seekers in entrepreneurship opportunities. The CDS received 80 baskets made by Emberá-Wounaan asylum-seekers and the host community. These items complement the 2023 Christmas collection initiated by twelve refugee entrepreneurs in Panama City. UNHCR trained these Emberá-Wounaan artisans in peaceful coexistence strategies.


### Key Achievements

- 
UNHCR and NRC provided information to **2,976 people** on the asylum system in Panama and assisted two people at border points with their asylum applications.
- 
UNHCR, through the Panamanian Red Cross (CRP), provided primary health care to over **520 refugees and migrants** at the ETRMs in Darien and Chiriquí.
- 
UNHCR and HIAS provided over **7,000 people** with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and reception points in Darién and Chiriquí.
- 
UNHCR trained **75 government officials** on international protection and statelessness prevention.
- 
UNHCR Panama's **Help Page** registered **37,967 visits**, and **60 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency's **Chatbot**.
- 
In October, through its social media campaign **Confía en el Tucán**, UNHCR released **23** digital publications, reaching **419,819 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **12,146 engagements**.



**Safe and reliable information about Panama and the Darien jungle**

@ConfiaEnElTucan




**UNHCR CHATBOT IS ACTIVE!**  
For more information on protection mechanisms and the asylum system in Panama, please contact us here!

UNHCR's Multi-Country Office in Panama thanks the contributions from our direct and unarmarked donors in 2023



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