

# Panama

September - October 2023

## Key Figures

Over **13,000** **Refugees and asylum-seekers** live in Panama, mainly from Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

**458,228** People **crossed** the Darien jungle between January and October, doubling the number of refugees and migrants who entered during the **same period last year**.

UNHCR informed nearly **7,000** people about the asylum system in Panama and UNHCR's mandate.

## Context

Following the Government's campaign, "*Darien is not a route, it is a jungle*", officials announced new border measures, including the relocation of reception points in indigenous communities and the use of charter flights to deport those who enter the country irregularly.

After bilateral talks, Panama and Costa Rica announced a joint agreement designating 200 buses to directly transfer refugees and migrants from Darien's reception points (ETRM) to Costa Rica's Temporal Centre for the Attention of Migrants (CATEM).

On 20 October, the Government ratified Law 406, confirming a new concession contract with Minera Panama, S.A. This caused nationwide protests and social unrest as civil society groups expressed concern over the contract's environmental impact, excessive profits, and legal validity. Besides hindering overall mobility, the protests affected the transfer services from Darien to Costa Rica. Both ETRMs surpassed reception capacity, and buses encountered numerous blockades, causing refugees and migrants to continue on foot.

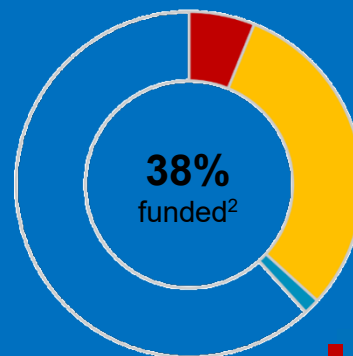
Protesters temporarily allowed some buses to cross, responding to the National Migration Service (SNM) advocacy for a humanitarian corridor.

In Chiriquí, UNHCR and HIAS organized the *Emprendiendo con arte* integration activity. Thirty-one asylum-seeking and Panamanian women participated. Through art, participants expressed their emotions and experiences. Their artworks express gratitude to Panama, where they found protection and a place they can call home.



## Regional funding Overview

as of 31 October 2023



- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

**\$55.4 million**  
UNHCR's financial requirements 2023

<sup>1</sup> Financial requirement for the Panama MCO in 2023 including requirements for the operations and activities in Aruba, Belize, Cuba, Curaçao, Guyana, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>2</sup> The percentage funded is indicative.

## UNHCR RESPONSE

UNHCR works closely with the Government, civil society, UN agencies, refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants in Panama. UNHCR and IOM co-chair the UN inter-agency group on human mobility, coordinating humanitarian support for mixed movements in Darien and Chiriquí. UNHCR has partnerships with Fundación Espacio Creativo (FEC), Fútbol con Corazón (FCC), HIAS, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Panamanian Red Cross (CRP) and the Pastoral of Human Mobility (PMH).



**Coordination with Local Authorities** | UNHCR met with Darien's Governor to expand the Agency's Field Unit and establish the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) prefabricated structure. UNHCR hosted a GBV prevention workshop for 23 government officials and staff of humanitarian organizations in Darien. Participants included the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Regional Public Prosecutor Office, ONPAR, the National Secretary for Children, Adolescents and Family (SENNIAF), and the Ombudsman Office.



**Protection** | UNHCR trained 159 Government officials on international protection and statelessness prevention. The Agency also trained 35 CRP field staff on timely referrals of people in need of international protection. UNHCR interviewed over 200 refugees and migrants during the monthly protection monitoring in Darien and Chiriquí. The Agency and partners provided information on the risks of the route, the asylum system in Panama and the Agency's mandate to over 5,000 people. With NRC, UNHCR assisted 59 people with asylum applications.



**Cash-Based Assistance (CBI)** | UNHCR, through CRP, HIAS and NRC, assisted 211 households with cash-based assistance for food, medicines, livelihoods, education, documentation, rent and temporary accommodation, reaching nearly 400 people during September and October.



**Humanitarian Assistance** | UNHCR, through CRP, provided primary health care to 3,387 refugees and migrants at Darien's ETRMs and Los Planes de Gualaca in Chiriquí.



**Advocacy** | UNHCR organized a donor briefing on asylum and durable solutions in Panama. Representatives from the US (PRM), Canada, France, Japan, Italy, Netherlands and Portugal participated.



### UNHCR renewed its partnership with City of Knowledge Foundation (CDS)

UNHCR met with the City of Knowledge Foundation (CDS) to renew their Letter of Understanding and continue joint actions for including refugees and asylum-seekers in entrepreneurship matters. The CDS received 80 baskets made by Emberá-Wounaan asylum-seekers participating in the UNHCR's *Hecho por Refugiados* initiative. These items complement the 2023 Christmas collection initiated by twelve refugee entrepreneurs in Panama City.

UNHCR Panama MCO wishes to convey a special thank you to its donors: the United States of America, the European Union, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), Guyana, Spain and the UN Programme on HIV/AIDS. We also thank the fundamental support provided by donors who have contributed to UNHCR with unearmarked and softly earmarked funds: Belgium | Canada | Denmark | France | Germany | Ireland | Japan | Netherlands | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | private donors in Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

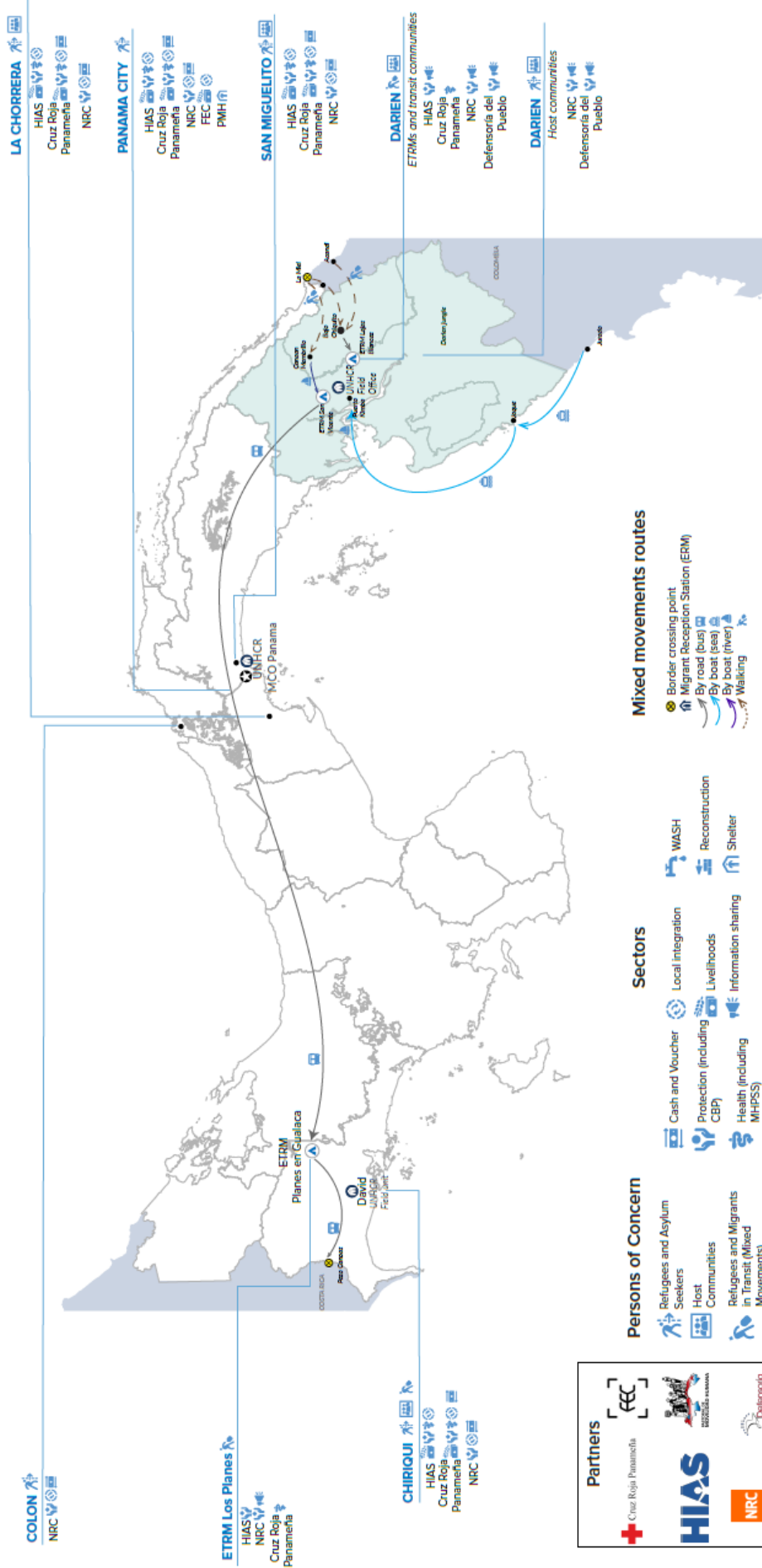
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# UNHCR Panama Operational Presence



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