

# Mixed Movements Through Darién 2022

September

## Context

Panama is facing one of the most challenging mixed movements crises of the decade. At the border with Colombia, an unprecedented number of refugees and migrants risk their lives in the inhospitable and dangerous Darien Gap, to pursue their journey northwards seeking protection and better opportunities.

As of 30 September 2022, **151,582** people have entered irregularly by this route<sup>1</sup>, surpassing the already record figure of people crossing through Darién during the whole 2021 (**133,726**). In the month of September alone, over **48,200** people in transit were registered<sup>2</sup>. Venezuelans represent **71 per cent** of the total population on the move. Most of them lack resources to continue their journey and are constantly subject to violence and crimes like theft, robbery, sexual assault and human trafficking. By the beginning of October, more than **8,000 refugees and migrants**<sup>2</sup> were staying at the Migratory Reception Centers (ERM in its Spanish acronym) of San Vicente, Lajas Blancas, and other informal reception points in Canaan Membrillo and Bajo Chiquito.

The last UNHCR monthly protection monitoring exercise, shows that **two out of ten** people left their country of origin due to **personal or family threats**, as well as **generalized violence**. Around **10 per cent** of those interviewed were traveling with **pregnant and lactating women**, and as of 30 September 2022, a total of **11 children** were reportedly born during the crossing of the jungle.

The Government of Panama has reiterated the country's commitment to **provide shelter and humanitarian assistance** to people in mixed movements, but has expressed concern about its **response capacity**, asking the cooperation of all international, regional and local response actors involved to find **durable solutions** and strengthen access to **protection mechanisms**.

## UNHCR's Response

### PROTECTION

Since September 2022, UNHCR leads the **local protection working group in Meteti**, providing **information on the risks of the route** and the **asylum system in Panama**, as well as coordinating the response plan and **strategies** required *in situ* with the local authorities. The group consists of UN agencies, international and local NGOs.

UNHCR monitoring exercises continued at the **Migratory Reception Centres**, as well as in transit and host communities. In September, UNHCR met with the **community leaders at Canaan Membrillo**, with other **indigenous authorities** and **officers** of the National Border Service (SENAFRONT), Ministry of Health and National Migration Service, to evaluate the protection needs of the refugee, migrant and host communities for the provision of tailored **technical assistance** to strengthen the gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, as well as the age, gender and diversity approach. UNHCR, through HIAS, is present at Los Planes de Gualaca, in Chiriquí, providing **mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** to people in need of psychosocial assistance related to traumatic experiences during the jungle crossing.

<sup>1</sup> Source: National Migration Service

<sup>2</sup> Source: Ministry of Public Security





## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

In September, UNHCR and partner Panamanian Red Cross (CRP), provided primary health care to over **1,478** men and **742** women in the ERMs of San Vicente and Lajas Blancas, making a total of **2,200** refugees and migrants who received **first aid assistance**. Of those, **230** were **pregnant women** and **354** were **children**.

UNHCR also conducted a joint mission with the Ministry of Government and the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) in Darien where core relief items (CRIs) were distributed to some **400** refugee and vulnerable families in **Metetí**, as well as hard-to-reach communities of **Yaviza** and **Riocito**.

## Key Achievements

-  In September 2022, UNHCR and partners, reached out to **1,329** persons with information on the journey risks, including an estimated **70 per cent** of the people registered at Canaan Membrillo reception point.
-  A total of **21** people who expressed an interest received **information on the asylum system in Panama**, adding up to 371 people in 2022.
-  More than **186** officials of the National Border Service in Darién were trained on **international protection** (169 men and 17 women), reaching a total of **516** persons trained in 2022.
-  **2,200** persons received **primary health care** and **first aid** in Darién's ERM San Vicente and Lajas Blancas through UNHCR and partner Panamanian Red Cross.
-  UNHCR donated and installed **14 large tents** (10 in ERM San Vicente, three in Canaan Membrillo and one in ERM Lajas Blancas) for the National Border Service (SENAFRONT) and the National Migration Service, to protect people from harsh weather conditions at reception points.
-  UNHCR supported a total of **35** persons from India, Afghanistan, and China with professional interpretation services to guarantee their access to basic services and protection mechanisms.
-  At the ERM Los Planes de Gualaca, in Chiriquí, a total of **417** persons received Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) related to traumatic experiences crossing the jungle.



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For more information on protection mechanisms and the asylum system in Panama, please contact us here!

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