

Mixed Movements Darién

January 2023

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Context

Darién is Panama's largest and poorest province. Bordering Colombia, the province hosts a **60-mile-deep jungle**, the only breaking point of the Pan-American highway, linking the continent from south to north.

Despite being one of the most **dangerous jungles in the world**, Darién is a transit location for thousands of refugees and migrants, most of them coming from Haiti, Venezuela, Cuba, African and South Asian nations. According to official statistics of the National Migration Service (SNM), from **2010 to 2020**, some **120,000 people** crossed through this area¹.

In the last two years, Panama has been facing an unprecedented **mixed movement crisis**, with nearly **400,000 people** making this perilous journey through the jungle. In 2021, a total of **133,726 people** entered the country irregularly through Darién², while in 2022, the number almost doubled to **248,284 people**³.

In January 2023, **24,643 people** crossed the jungle⁴, reaching **five times** the number of people who arrived during the same period in 2022. Currently, Haitians are the largest group (10,222), followed by Ecuadorians (6,352) and Venezuelans (2,337).

UNHCR has observed **protection gaps and needs** among those in transit. The latest UNHCR protection monitoring exercise⁵ evidenced that **three out of ten** people interviewed left their country of origin due to **personal or family threats**, and around **53 per cent** fled due to fear of **violence and general insecurity**. Many of them required medical attention, as well as psychological support due to traumatic experiences during the journey. An alarming **47 per cent** of people interviewed in the exercise, reported being affected by the number of dead bodies they saw.

UNHCR's Response

PROTECTION

UNHCR in Darién focuses on community-based protection, information management, and communication with communities to **support the State's response** at the Temporary Migratory Reception Centres (ETRM) and host communities, some of them located in remote and hard-to-reach indigenous territories.

Together with partner Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), UNHCR provides information on the asylum system in Panama in border areas and assists those with protection needs with their **refugee status application**. Moreover, through partner HIAS, UNHCR provides **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)** to those in transit and continues to inform people in both Darién and Chiriquí provinces about the **risks of the journey** through **informative face-to-face sessions**.

In January, UNHCR conducted a **monitoring mission** to the **ETRM Los Planes de Gualaca** in Chiriquí to evaluate the conditions of this Centre at the border with Costa Rica, which hosts those travelling northwards initially entering through Darién.



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¹ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1801> ² https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2021/pdf/IRREGULARES_POR_DARIEN_DICIEMBRE_2021.pdf ³ https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2022/PDF/IRREGULARES_POR_DARIEN_DICIEMBRE_2022.pdf
⁴ https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2023/pdf/IRREGULARES_%20POR_%20DARIEN_ENERO_%202023.pdf ⁵ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/98861>



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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

In January, UNHCR and RET distributed **Core Relief Items (CRIs)**, including mosquito nets and sleeping mats, to some 140 people in the host community of El Salto and the ETRM San Vicente. The Agency also distributed more than **1,000 pieces of clothing** to people in transit at the ETRMs. Furthermore, UNHCR provided nutritious **food** to families with protection needs staying in the modular complex of the ETRM San Vicente.

UNHCR donated a **log boat** and an **outboard motor** to partner HIAS, to support the monitoring missions of HIAS and other response partners to the reception points of Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo. Furthermore, UNHCR is developing a **community-based protection program** with **12 indigenous community leaders**, mostly women from Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo communities, to be trained in community-based solution mechanisms and accountability strategies.

Key Achievements

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▪ In January, UNHCR and partner HIAS, reached out to nearly **3,720 people** with information on the journey risks (**3,649** in the ETRMs and reception points in Darién and **70** in Chiriquí).
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▪ UNHCR and its partner NRC provided information to **110 people on the asylum system in Panama**, and **20** were assisted with their asylum application.
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▪ In January **16 people reached out to UNHCR through its Chatbot** asking for information on asylum applications, resettlement, and gender-based violence prevention, among other protection concerns.
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▪ UNHCR **protection monitoring exercise** in the Migratory Reception Centres of San Vicente and Lajas Blancas, as well as in other reception points in Darien, reached approximately **100** refugees and migrants.
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▪ UNHCR distributed some **1,230 Core Relief Items (CRIs)** to people in transit at the ETRMs and other reception points in Darien and donated 12 cans of milk formula and baby food to families staying in the modular complex of the ETRM San Vicente.
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▪ UNHCR and partner HIAS assisted over **500 people** with mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) related to traumatic experiences crossing the jungle in the Migratory Reception Centres in Darién. The Agency also provided support to some **580 people** with and at their safe spaces in the ETRM Los Planes de Gualaca, Chiriquí.



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 unearmarked donors in 2023



For more information | Philippa Candler, Representative at candler@unhcr.org | Viola Eleonora Bruttomesso, Associate Communications Officer at bruttome@unhcr.org