Mixed Movements Official Data

Darien Province, Panama-Colombia Border

**Context**

Darien 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, Darien 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 area. 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 2022, a total of 248,284 people entered the country irregularly through Darien.

**Key Figures**

- **Total entries in 2023**: 87,390
- **Total entries in March 2023**: 38,099
- **66%** Men, **34%** Women
- **81%** Adults, **19%** Children

Source: Panama National Migration Service

**Main Nationalities entering irregularly through the Darien in January to March 2023**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>5K</td>
<td>25K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>4K</td>
<td>25K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>5K</td>
<td>38K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>6K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
<td>14K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td></td>
<td>16K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td></td>
<td>23K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td></td>
<td>31K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td></td>
<td>48K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td></td>
<td>60K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td></td>
<td>17K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td>20K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Irregular entries through the Darien 2022-2023 (in thousands of people)
UNHCR Data Collection

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, collects monthly information on the characteristics, vulnerabilities, and protection needs of refugees and migrants who enter Panama through the province of Darien at the southern border with Colombia. The information is compiled through individual interviews conducted in Panama’s Darien and Chiriquí provinces. The preliminary results presented here are indicative only. They should not be interpreted as representative of the total population of refugees and migrants crossing the border through the Darien jungle.

Demography

- **Sex of interviewed individuals**
  - 66% Man
  - 34% Woman

- **Average age**
  - 31 Years

- **Highest education level**
  - 47% SECONDARY
  - 16% UNIVERSITY
  - 10% VOCATIONAL TRAINING
  - 23% PRIMARY
  - 4% NONE OR WITH INCOMPLETE PRIMARY

- **Nationality of interviewed individuals**
  - Other nationalities include: Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, China, Cuba, Iran, Nigeria and Yemen
  - 56% Venezuela
  - 15% Haiti
  - 9% Ecuador
  - 7% Colombia
  - 3% Afghanistan
  - 10% Other

- **Country of residence in the last year**
  - 25% Colombia
  - 17% Venezuela
  - 17% Ecuador
  - 12% Brazil
  - 6% Chile
  - 23% Other

- **Documents carried by the family**
  - 66% National ID
  - 33% Passport
  - 11% Expired Passport
  - 5% None
  - 1% Asylum Certificate
  - 7% Other
More than half of interviewed refugees and migrants were from Venezuela (56%). Most of them (69%) reported coming to Panama from their country of residence (mostly Colombia: 35%, and Ecuador: 13%) and 31% of them reported coming directly from Venezuela.

Interviewed Colombians and Ecuadorians were coming directly from their countries of origin, while Haitians came mainly from Brazil (71%) and Chile (12%).

Most interviewed people reported traveling with their national ID card (66%), and some Venezuelans and Haitians (5%) reported traveling without documentation.

At least two in ten interviewed people reported wanting to stay in Panama, although mostly temporarily. Around a quarter traveled with at least one person with special needs and vulnerabilities (pregnant, lactating women, unaccompanied children, and elders).

**Push and pull factors**

**Main reasons for leaving country of origin**

- Access to employment: 76%
- Violence and insecurity: 35%
- Access to food: 33%
- Access to healthcare: 30%
- Access to education: 27%
- Discrimination: 18%
- Family reunification: 12%

**Main reasons for leaving country of residence**

- Access to employment: 77%
- Violence and insecurity: 23%
- Access to food: 20%
- Access to healthcare: 19%
- Access to education: 16%
- Discrimination: 13%
- Family reunification: 11%

**Reasons for choosing destination country**

- Economic opportunities: 77%
- Family reunification: 40%
- Friends living there: 31%
- Other: 22%
- Job offer: 7%
- Cost to country of origin: 6%
84% of interviewed individuals reported the United States as their final destination. Followed by Canada (6%), and Mexico (3%).

6 in 10 interviewed reported receiving information about the journey and making decisions based on the information received from friends and relatives who had already made it. Also received information through social networks, mainly TikTok (42%), Facebook (36%) and WhatsApp (30%).

84% of interviewed individuals reported the United States as their final destination.

6 in 10 interviewed reported receiving information about the journey and making decisions based on the information received from friends and relatives who had already made it. Also received information through social networks, mainly TikTok (42%), Facebook (36%) and WhatsApp (30%).

Have you received information about the new entry requirements to the United States?

- Yes (41%)
- No (46%)
- Don't know (12%)

Cubans, Haitians and Venezuelans

How did you receive that information?

- 37% Friends/relatives living in the US
- 17% TikTok
- 17% Facebook
- 13% WhatsApp chains
- 7% Friends/relatives living in the country of origin

4 days is the average time interviewed individuals crossed the Darien jungle. (Min. 1.5 days and Max. 15 days).

1 in 4 experienced mistreatment or abuse during the journey through the jungle.

37% of interviewed individuals reported being victims of robbery or fraud during their journey through the jungle. (14% reported being victim of threats, intimidation, and attacks).

65% of interviewed individuals paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

Main reported needs for the continuation of the journey

- Cash: 72%
- Clothes: 33%
- Food: 25%
- Legal assistance: 24%
- Food and items for babies: 17%
- Shelter: 16%
- Medicines and healthcare: 15%

Situations that affected people the most while crossing the jungle

- Physical security (attacks from people or animals, drownings, falls): 63%
- Cadavers observation*: 32%
- Fear of getting lost: 29%
- Children or other dependants care: 26%
- Inability to cover food needs: 18%

*Most people (94%) reported seeing between 1 and 10 cadavers in the previous seven days to data collection.

During data collection, cash for the bus was reported as one of the primary priority needs, especially among families traveling with children.

UNHCR Multi Country Office for Belize, Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua and Southern Caribbean
Data Sources: UNHCR Protection Monitoring, conducted on the 3rd to 10th April 2023.
Feedback: panpaim@unhcr.org
To access all our protection monitoring products visit here