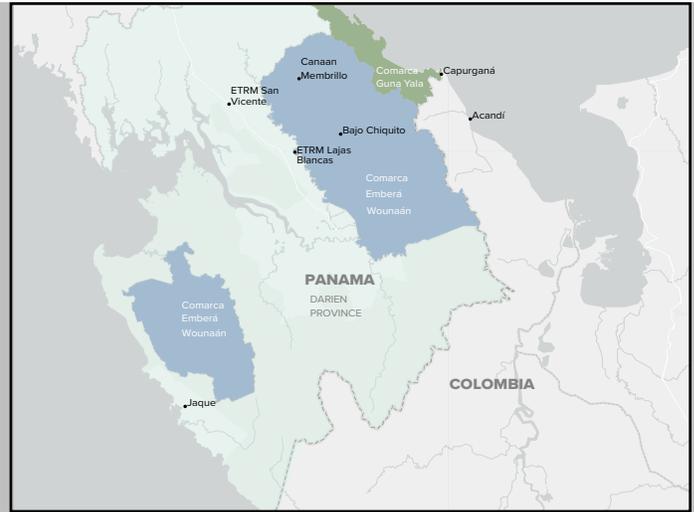


May 2023

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, and African and South Asian nations. According to official statistics from 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.

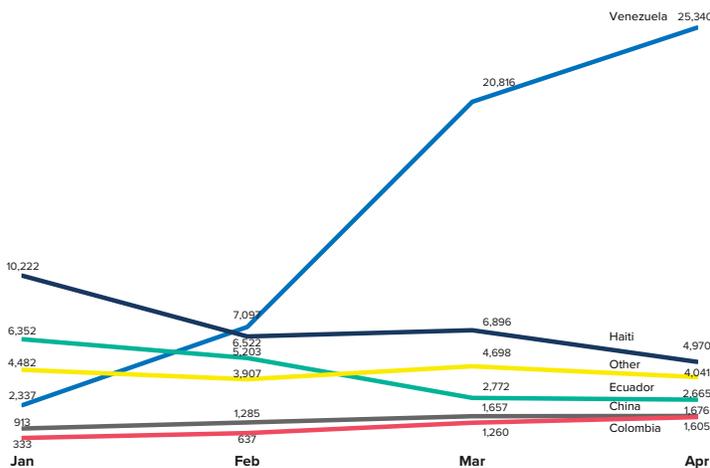


Key Figures

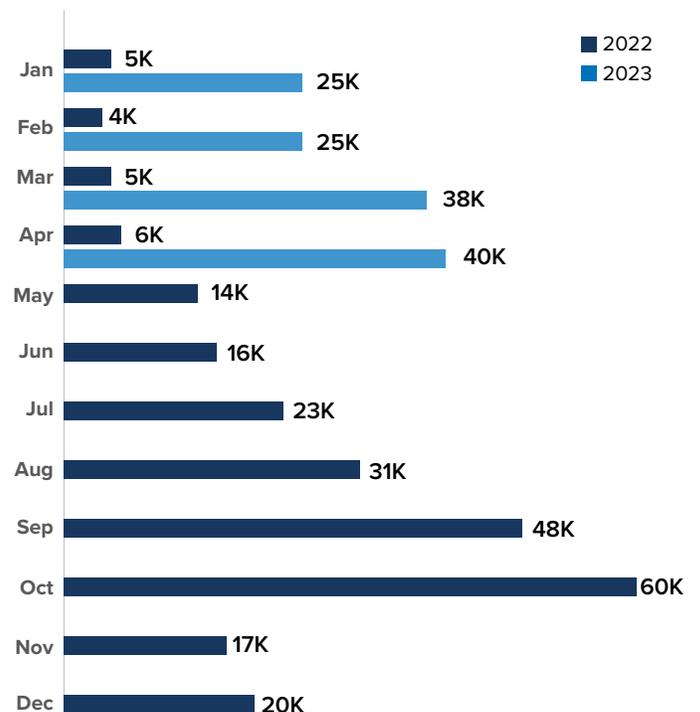


Source: Panama National Migration Service

Main Nationalities entering irregularly through the Darien in January to April 2023



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

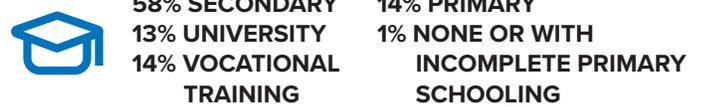
Sex of interviewed individuals



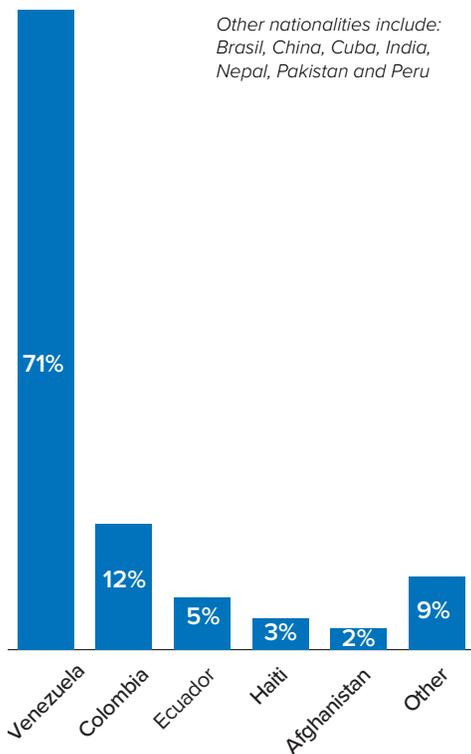
Average age



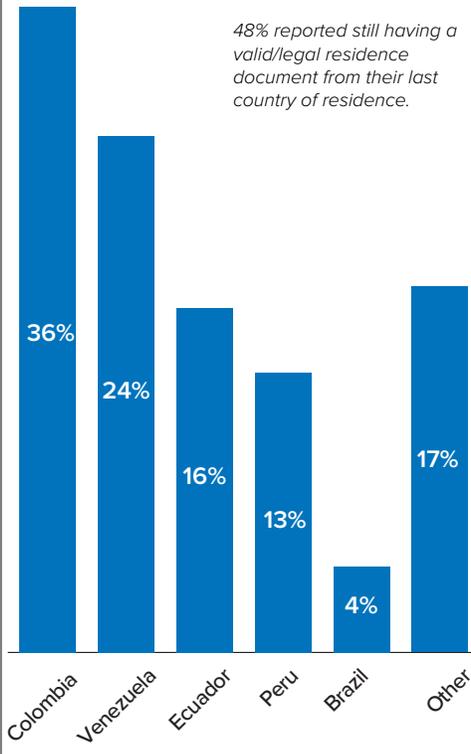
Highest education level



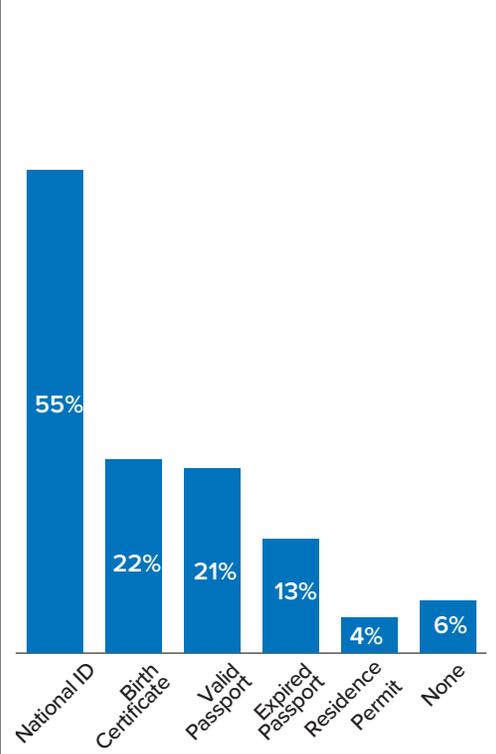
Nationality of interviewed individuals



Country of residence in the last year



Documents carried by the family



Respondent profile

Most refugees and migrants interviewed were from Venezuela (76%). They reported coming to Panama from their country of residence (mostly Colombia: 35%, Peru: 15% and Ecuador: 14%) and 32% of them reported coming directly from Venezuela.

Interviewed Colombians and Ecuadorians were coming directly from their countries of origin, while Haitians and Afghans reported coming mainly from Brazil.

Around half of interviewed Venezuelans (43%) reported having a valid residence in their country of residence. One in three Venezuelans residing in Colombia in the last year, reported leaving despite having a valid Temporary Protection Status (TPS).

More than half of interviewed participants (58%) reported being victim of threats or attacks. Most participants (87%) reported were victims of fraud, scam or robbery, during their journey through the Darien jungle.



of interviewed individuals left their country of origin/residence less than four weeks ago.



of interviewed individuals reported having the intention to stay in Panama.
Most of them are planning to stay less than a month.



of interviewed individuals had applied for asylum in another country, prior to their arrival to Panama.



of interviewed individuals reported traveling with a survivor of violence in their group (sexual, physical or psychological).



of interviewed individuals reported traveling with pregnant or lactating women.



of respondents reported traveling with someone with a critical or chronic medical condition.



of interviewed individuals reported traveling with unaccompanied children in their group.



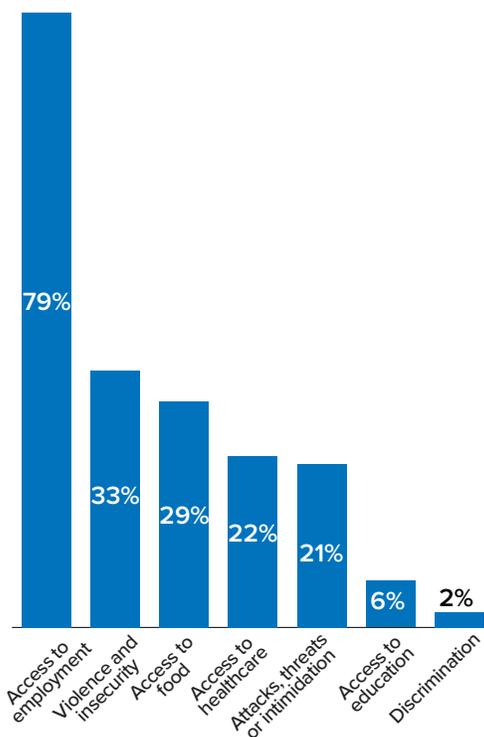
of interviewed individuals reported having a single parent traveling with children in their group.



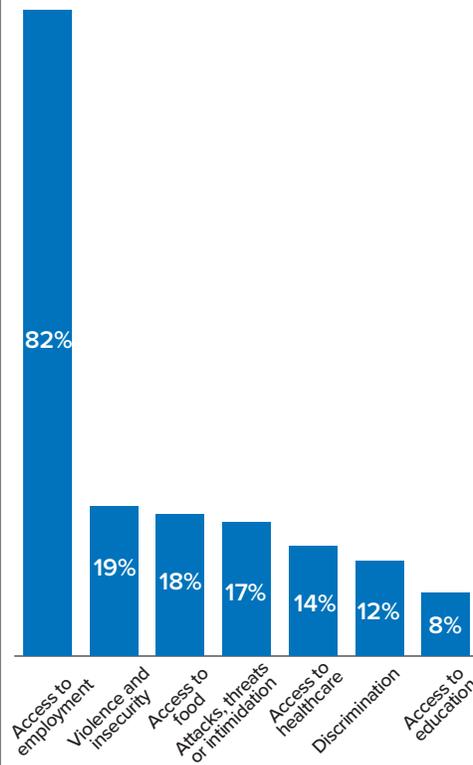
of interviewed individuals reported traveling with an elder in their group.

Push and pull factors

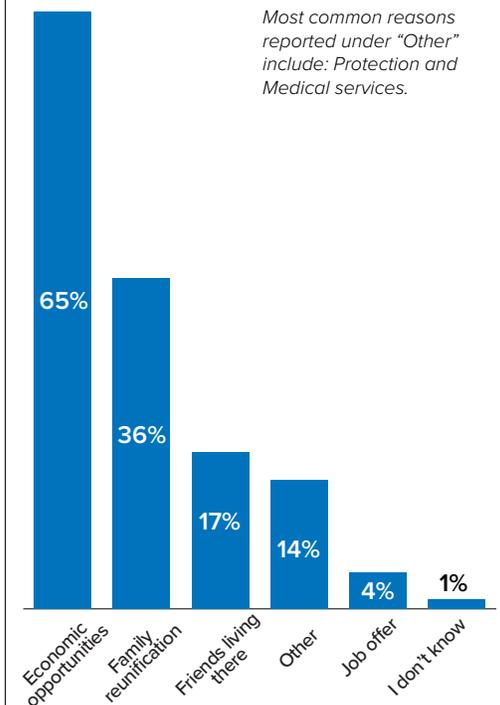
Main reasons for leaving country of origin



Main reasons for leaving country of residence



Reasons for choosing destination country



92%

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

Followed by Canada (2%), and Colombia (2%) for those with the immediate intention to not continue the journey after crossing the jungle.

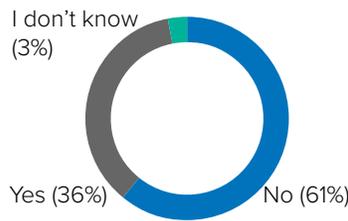
7 in 10

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 (32%), Youtube (27%) and Facebook (16%).

Cubans, Haitians and Venezuelans

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



How did you receive that information?

- 43% FRIENDS/RELATIVES LIVING IN THE US**
- 29% FRIENDS/RELATIVES LIVING IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**
- 10% TIK-TOK**
- 10% TV NEWS**
- 5% FACEBOOK**
- 5% WHATSAPP CHAINS**

Challenges during the journey

4 days

is the average time interviewed individuals crossed the Darien jungle. (Min. 1 day and Max. 12 days).

3 in 10

experienced mistreatment or abuse during the journey through the jungle.

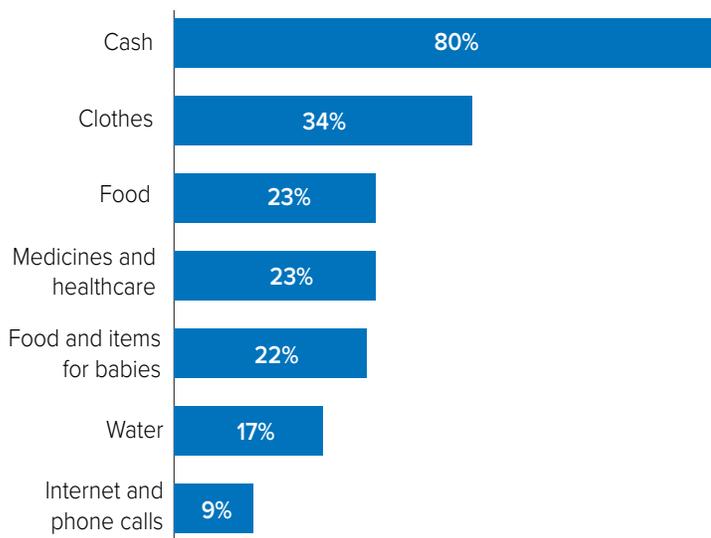
87%

of interviewed individuals reported being victims of theft, scam or fraud during their journey through the jungle. **Additionally, 58% reported being victim of threats, intimidation, and attacks.**

80%

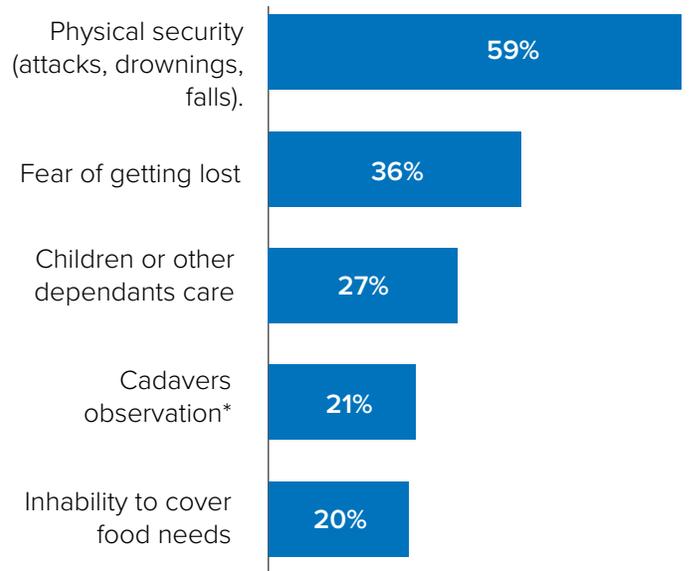
of interviewed individuals paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

Main reported needs for the continuation of the journey



During data collection, cash for the bus fare was reported as one of the primary unmet needs, especially among families traveling with children. Water for drinking and bathing was also reported as a main gap at the ETRM Lajas Blancas due to severe shortages.

Situations that affected people the most while crossing the jungle



**Those who reported seeing cadavers, reported seeing between 1 and 10 cadavers during the seven days prior to data collection.*

UNHCR Multi Country Office for Belize, Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua and Southern Caribbean

Data Sources: UNHCR Protection Monitoring, conducted on the 1st to 3rd May 2023.

Access all Border Protection Monitoring Publications [here](#)

Feedback: panpaim@unhcr.org

Special feature: Focus Group Discussions

On a quarterly basis, UNHCR complements the insights provided by individual interviews with Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for specific nationalities, providing in depth-information about their profiles and differentiated risks faced while crossing the Darien jungle. Between the 1st and 3rd of May 2023, four FGDs were conducted at the ETRMs Lajas Blancas and San Vicente, with refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, China, Colombia, Haiti and Venezuela.



Afghanistan

- **Nearly all participants reported leaving Afghanistan due to fear for their lives, threats and intimidation due to their work with the previous government.** The profiles of participants included teachers, a principal of a school for girls, an ex-military officer, and a travel agent who helped other Afghans to get humanitarian visas.
- **Participants reported their journey started from either Iran or Pakistan, from where their humanitarian visas to Brazil were processed.** The participants all stayed for one week or less in Brazil, and chose not to remain primarily because of the language barrier and low income, which would not allow them to support large families.
- **All participants reported paying an individual approximately 3500\$ to organize their movement from Brazil to Mexico.**
- All participants described the United States as their intended destination, where they had relatives and friends already established.

Nationalities eligible for CHVN parole

- Participants were women and men from **Venezuela and Haiti who were traveling both individually and as part of family groups.** Half of them had residency permits in Brazil, Peru, and Colombia, while the rest reported residing for short periods in Colombia and Chile but in irregular migratory condition.
- Participants reported leaving countries of residence or origin due to lack of jobs and high costs of living, violence and conflicts, a lack of access to medical care and medicines for long term treatments, a fear of or past persecution, and discrimination.
- Around half of the participants demonstrated knowledge about the parole programme, but **half of the participants had never heard of it, and none were eligible due to a lack of a legal or financial sponsor in the United States.**
- **Half of the individuals volunteered that they knew of the CBP One app from Facebook and Tiktok,** and understood it as a main tool to apply for asylum in the US.
- For Venezuelans, **access to passports was also an issue,** with some of them reporting that, despite the reasonable official cost of passports, no actual passport is obtained without payment of significant bribes in excess of 3,000 USD.

Colombia

- Participants reported **threats and violence as their main reason for leaving Colombia.** Other participants mentioned generalized insecurity and economic situations as motivations for leaving the country.
- Among the participants, there were two single mothers traveling with their children, one of them, with a disabled son, had been previously displaced in Colombia. Another participant was a young man that was being targeted by the same criminal group that had killed his father and grandfather.
- Participants **decided to cross through the jungle because of the perception that crossing through the jungle would be cheaper, and despite not needing visas to enter Panama, Mexico nor most of Central America, some participants had been subjected to stricter entry requirements at airports and deportations.**
- Colombians with Venezuelan spouses and/or children also reported that travel restrictions for Venezuelans led them to travel together through the Darien jungle.
- **Some participants mentioned their intention was to reach the United States, while others said they were open to consider settling in a different country as long as they find safety and opportunities.**

China

- Participants came from a **diverse set of provinces in China, as well as one individual who was previously a resident of Guayaquil, Ecuador.**
- They reported leaving their country due to difficult individual economic situations and the lack of democracy, while the resident in Ecuador reported leaving that country due to gangs extorting money from his restaurant.
- All of them reported starting their journey from Ecuador, which is a visa-free country for Chinese nationals. where they were also targeted in several occasions by criminal gangs for robbery. Their final intended destination is the United States.
- **Participants reported having paid between 250 and 500 USD each to smugglers for crossing the Darien jungle.**

To know more about the previous Focus Group Discussions (co-facilitated with WFP) conducted with Afghans, Ecuadorians, Haitians and Venezuelans, visit this site: <https://arcg.is/1niXfO>