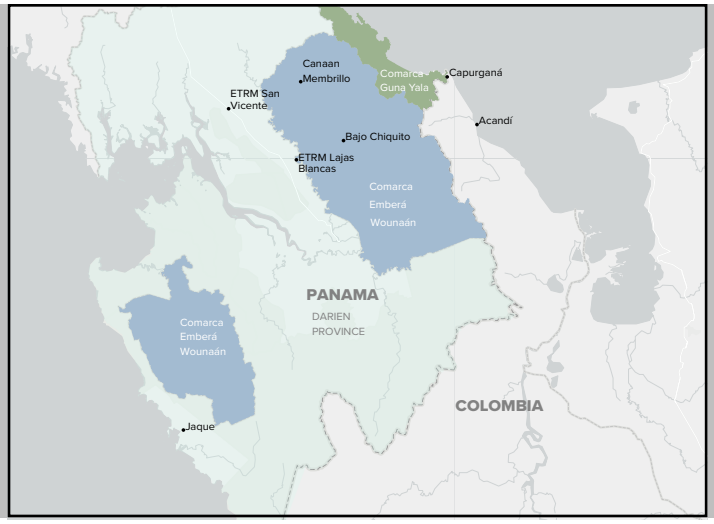
Mixed Movements Official Data

Darien Province, Panama-Colombia Border

August 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 of the National Migration Service (SNM), from 2010 to 2020, some 120,000 people crossed through this area. Panama has been facing an unprecedented mixed movement crisis in the last two years, 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

251,758 Total entries in 2023.

55,387 Total entries in July 2023.

65% Men

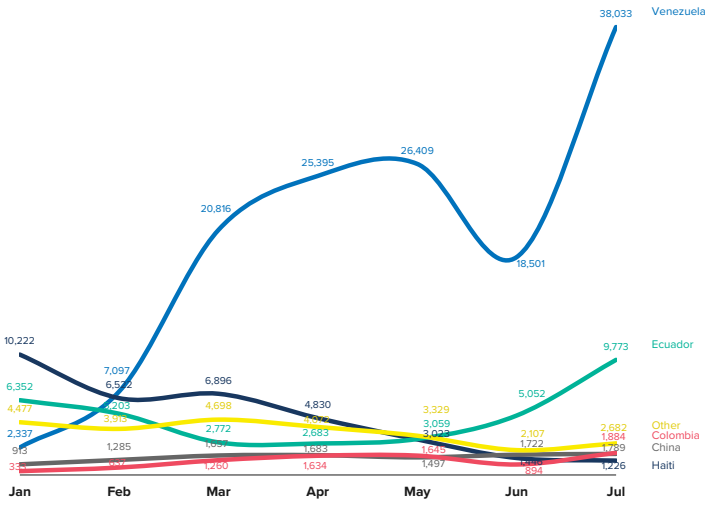
35% Women

79% Adult

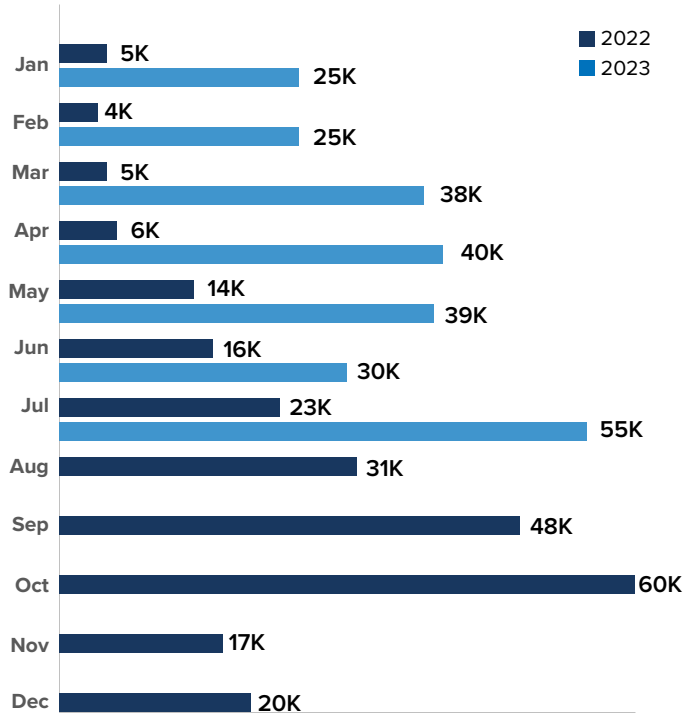
21% Children

Source: Panama National Migration Service

Main Nationalities entering irregularly through Darien from January to July 2023

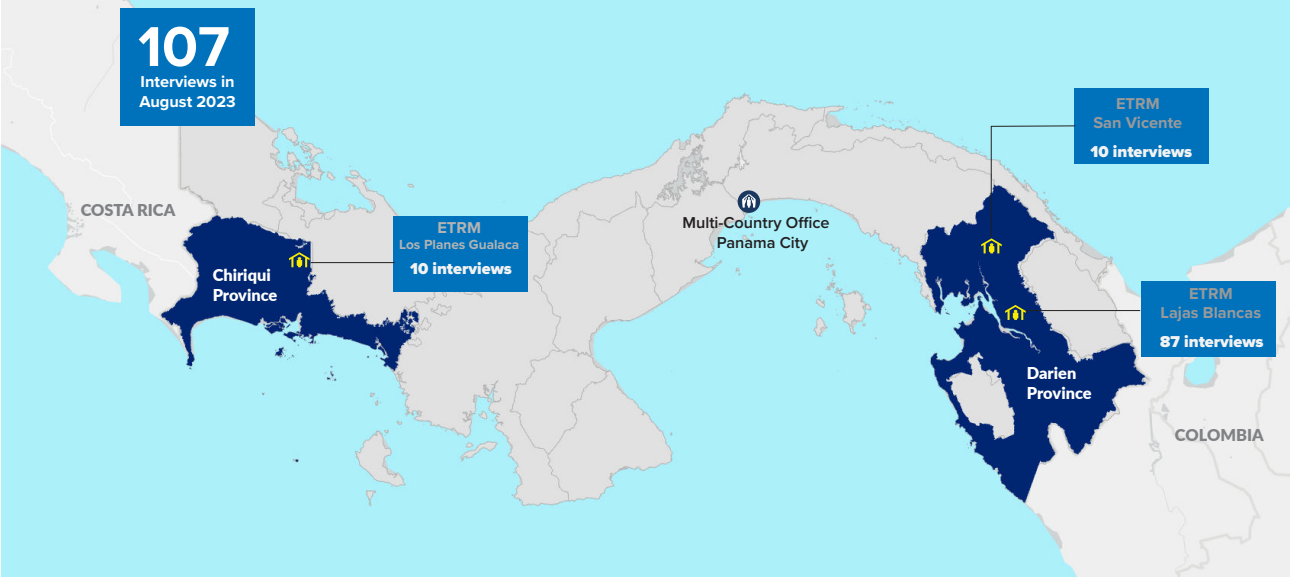


Irregular entries through Darien 2022-2023 (in thousands of people)



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

53% Men

47% Women

Average age

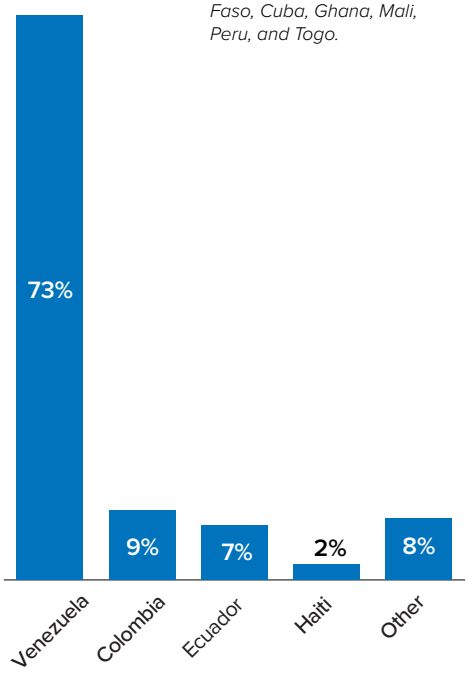
32 Years

Travel group composition

67% Entire family
7% Friends
6% Unrelated companions
17% Part of the family
9% Alone

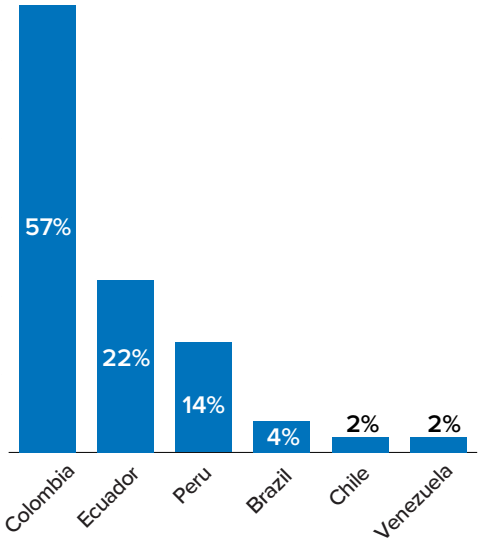
Nationality of interviewed individuals

Other nationalities include: Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Cuba, Ghana, Mali, Peru, and Togo.

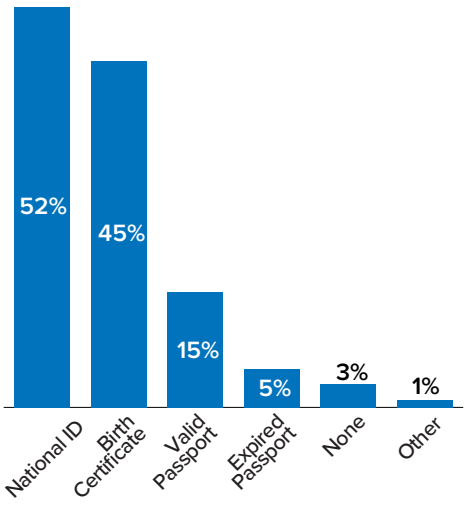


Country of residence in the last year

48% of interviewed individuals reported living in a country other than their country of origin at least 6 months.



Documents carried by the family



Respondent profile

Nearly three quarters of interviewed refugees and migrants were from Venezuela (73%). Nearly half of interviewed Venezuelans (44%) were coming directly from Venezuela, while the remaining 56% are coming from other countries of residence, mainly: Colombia (37%), Ecuador (10%), and Peru (9%). Nearly 2 in 10 reported still having valid documentation from this country of residence.

In comparison with July (77%), a higher proportion of respondents (84%) reported travelling with family, and they were accompanied by an average of three adult family members, and two children. Furthermore, 41% of respondents reported travelling with at least one child under the age of five.

The average reported time for crossing the jungle was 4 days, consistent with last month. In addition to the worsening conditions of the terrain in the jungle, one third of interviewed individuals in August reported experiencing theft, scams, or fraud in their journey.

67%

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

1%

of interviewed individuals reported having the intention to stay in Panama.

Most of them are planning to stay less than a month.

12%

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

1 in 10

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

10%

of interviewed individuals reported traveling with pregnant or lactating women.

5%

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

2%

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

9%

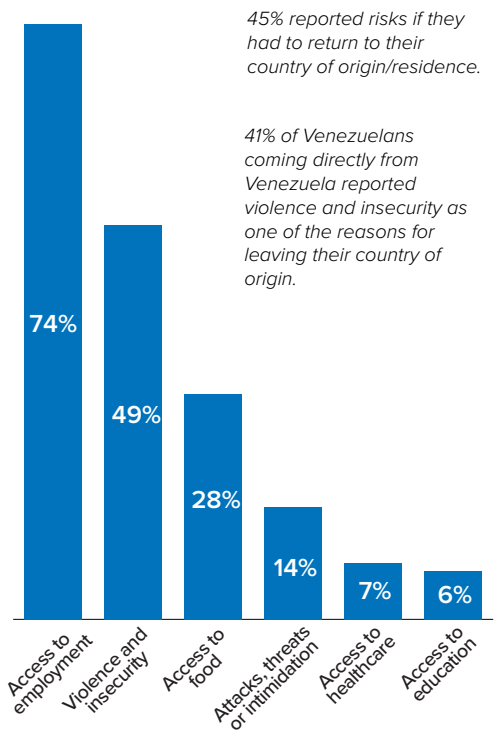
of interviewed individuals reported having a single parent traveling with children in their group.

5%

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

Push and pull factors

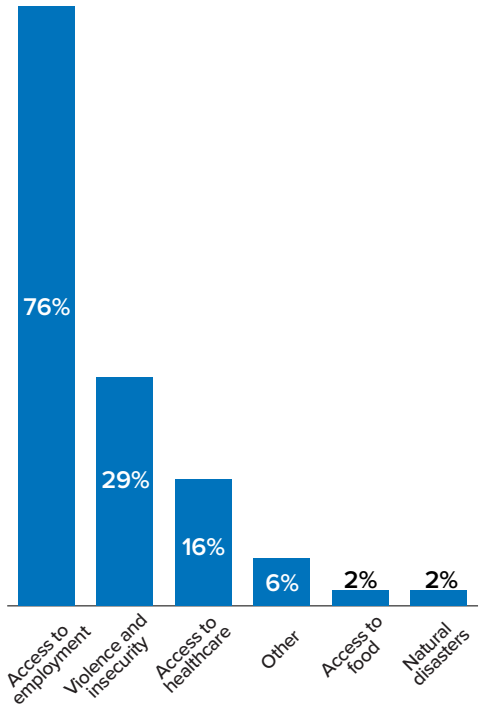
Main reasons for leaving country of origin



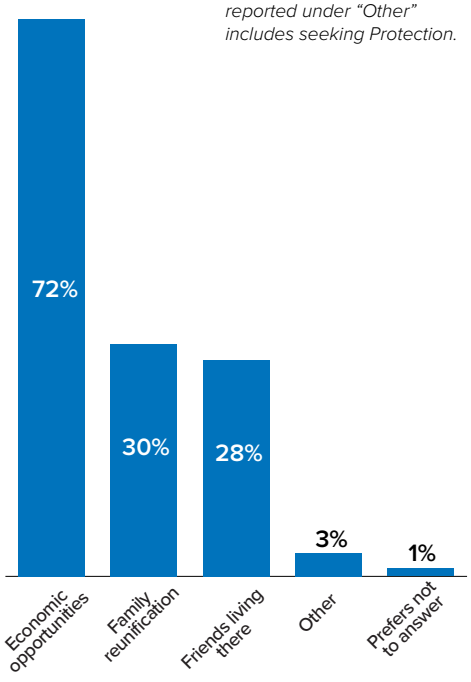
45% reported risks if they had to return to their country of origin/residence.

41% of Venezuelans coming directly from Venezuela reported violence and insecurity as one of the reasons for leaving their country of origin.

Main reasons for leaving country of residence



Reasons for choosing destination country



Most common reasons reported under "Other" includes seeking Protection.

95%

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

Followed by Canada (2%), Mexico (1%), and Panama (1%).

8 in 10

interviewed individuals reported that if they were unable to reach their country of destination, they would wait until allowed to proceed to said country.

Stating they would primarily stay in Mexico, and Costa Rica.

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 Facebook (26%), TikTok (25%) and Youtube (6%).

43%

of interviewed Haitians, and Venezuelans reported not receiving information about the new entry requirements to the United States.

Challenges during the journey

4 days

is the average time interviewed individuals crossed the Darien jungle (Min. 2 days and max. 12 days).

1 in 3

experienced mistreatment or abuse during the journey through the jungle.

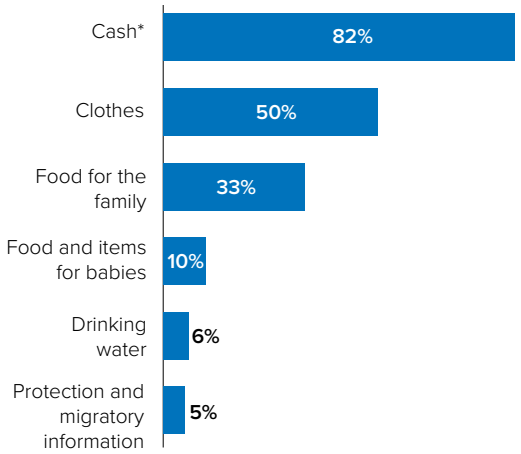
31%

of interviewed individuals reported being victims of theft, scam or fraud during their journey through the jungle. **Additionally, 15% reported being victim of threats, intimidation, and attacks.**

89%

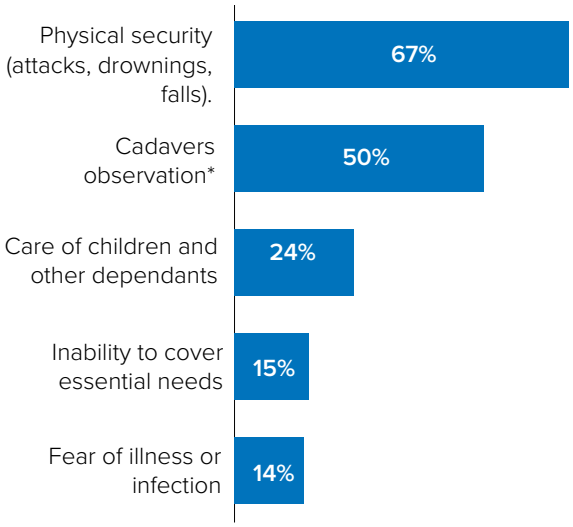
of interviewed individuals paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

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.*

Situations that affected people the most while crossing the jungle



**Those who reported seeing cadavers, reported seeing between 1 and 15 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 2nd to 10th August 2023
Access all our border protection monitoring publications here
Feedback: panpaim@unhcr.org

UNHCR ACNUR
La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados