**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**

- **333,704** Total entries in 2023.
- **81,946** Total entries in August 2023.
- **65%** Men
- **35%** Women
- **78%** Adult
- **22%** Children

Source: Panama National Migration Service

Main Nationalities entering irregularly through Darien from January to July 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>40K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>14K</td>
<td>39K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>16K</td>
<td>30K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>23K</td>
<td>55K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>31K</td>
<td>82K</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>17K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>20K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Chiriqui 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

45% Men  54% Women

Nationality of interviewed individuals

Other nationalities include: Afghanistan, Angola, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Nepal, Peru, DR Congo, and Togo.

Country of residence in the last year

45% of interviewed individuals reported living in a country other than their country of origin at least 6 months.

Documents carried by the family

National ID: 50%  
Birth Certificate: 48%  
Valid Passport: 17%  
Expired Passport: 10%  
None: 1%
Nearly seven in ten interviewed refugees and migrants were from Venezuela (68%). Nearly half of them (45%) came directly from Venezuela, while the remaining 55% were coming from other countries of residence, mainly: Colombia (50%), Peru (24%), and Ecuador (18%). Four in ten had applied for legal status in their previous country of residence, and nearly half (42%) reported still having valid documentation from that country.

Nearly half of the respondents (43%) reported travelling with the entire family, and only 22% reported traveling alone or with unrelated companions. Those traveling with children, were traveling with an average of 2 children, of which 1 was under the age of 5.

One in three respondents (34%) reported traveling with at least one person with a specific need. In September, there was an increase in the number of people who reported traveling with unaccompanied children, pregnant and lactating women, and violence survivors.

### Push and pull factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main reasons for leaving country of origin</th>
<th>Main reasons for leaving country of residence</th>
<th>Reasons for choosing destination country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to employment</td>
<td>Access to employment</td>
<td>Economic opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence and insecurity</td>
<td>Violence and insecurity</td>
<td>Family reunification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to food</td>
<td>Access to food</td>
<td>Friends living there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacks, threats or intimidation</td>
<td>Health or lactation</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to education</td>
<td>Lack of documentation</td>
<td>Job offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to education</td>
<td>Lack of access to food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55% reported risks if they had to return to their country of origin/residence.

Most common reasons reported under “Other” includes seeking Protection.
91% of interviewed individuals reported the United States as their final destination. Followed by Costa Rica (3%), Canada (2%), Panama (2%), and Don’t know (2%).

7 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.

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 (28%) and Facebook (14%).

70% 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).

4 in 10 experienced mistreatment or abuse during the journey through the jungle.

20% of interviewed individuals reported being victims of theft, scam or fraud during their journey through the jungle. Additionally, 22% reported being victim of threats, intimidation, and attacks.

81% of interviewed individuals paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

Main reported needs for the continuation of the journey

- Cash*: 64%
- Food for the family: 38%
- Clothes: 34%
- Medicines and health care: 20%
- Shelter: 13%
- Drinking water: 12%

Situations that affected people the most while crossing the jungle

- Physical security (attacks, drownings, falls): 72%
- Cadavers observation*: 30%
- Care of children and other dependants: 25%
- Inability to cover essential needs: 21%
- Fear of getting lost in the jungle: 17%

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

*Those who reported seeing cadavers, reported seeing between 1 and 8 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 22nd September 2023
Access all our border protection monitoring publications here
Feedback: panpaim@unhcr.org