

January - December 2023

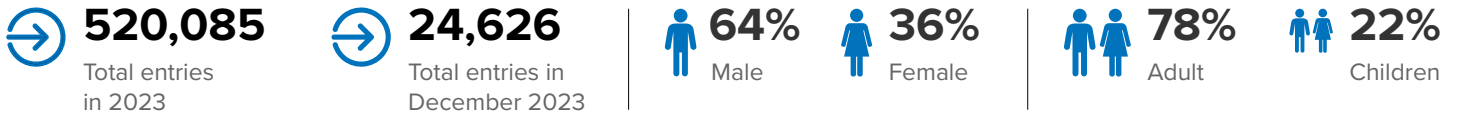
Context

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 Venezuela, Ecuador, Haiti, and African and South Asian nations.

Panama's unprecedented mixed movement crisis has been ongoing for over two years. According to National Migration Service (SNM) published statistics, from 2021 to date in 2023, nearly 900,000 people crossed through this area.

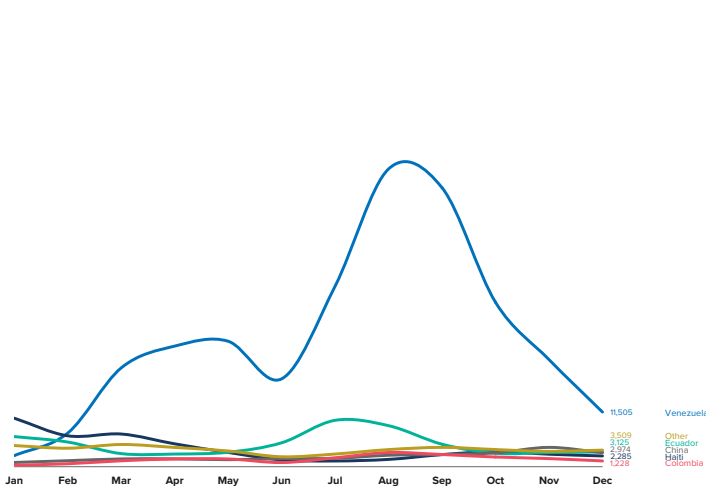


Key Figures



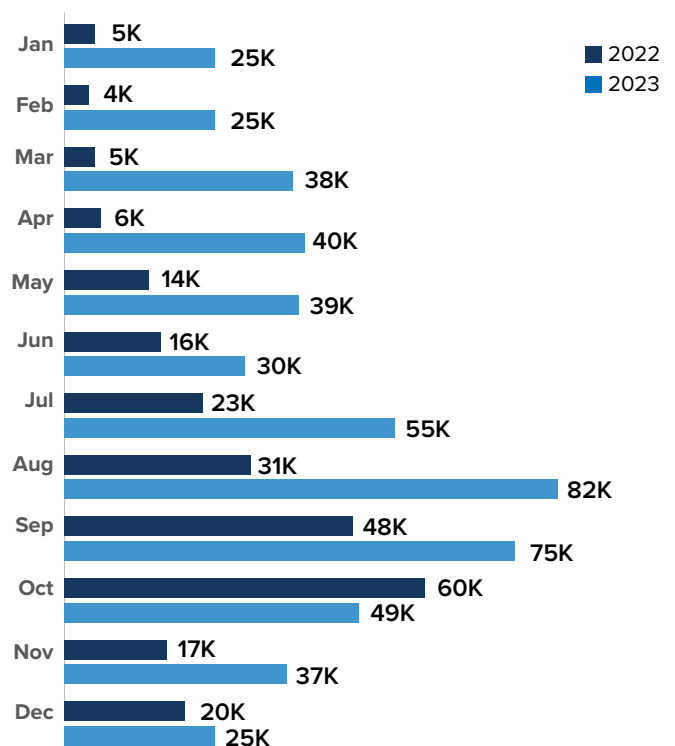
Source: Panama National Migration Service

Main Nationalities entering irregularly through Darien from January to November 2023



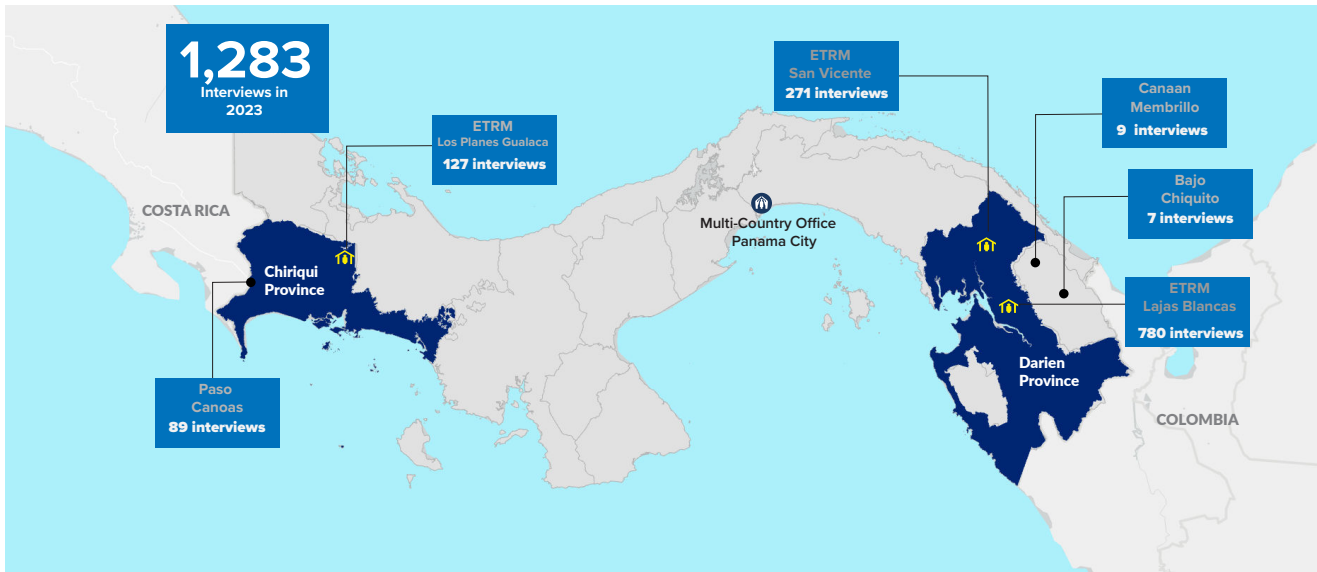
| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | TOTAL |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Venezuela | 2,337 | 7,097 | 20,816 | 25,395 | 26,409 | 18,501 | 38,033 | 62,700 | 58,716 | 34,594 | 22,547 | 11,505 | 328,650 |
| Ecuador | 6,352 | 5,203 | 2,772 | 2,683 | 3,059 | 5,052 | 9,773 | 8,642 | 4,744 | 2,849 | 2,996 | 3,125 | 57,250 |
| Haiti | 10,222 | 6,522 | 6,896 | 4,830 | 3,023 | 1,446 | 1,226 | 1,559 | 2,563 | 3,202 | 2,648 | 2,285 | 46,422 |
| China | 913 | 1,285 | 1,657 | 1,683 | 1,497 | 1,722 | 1,789 | 2,433 | 2,588 | 2,934 | 4,090 | 2,974 | 25,565 |
| Colombia | 333 | 637 | 1,260 | 1,634 | 1,645 | 894 | 1,884 | 2,989 | 2,570 | 2,051 | 1,716 | 1,228 | 18,841 |
| Other | 4,477 | 3,913 | 4,698 | 4,072 | 3,329 | 2,107 | 2,682 | 3,623 | 4,087 | 3,626 | 3,234 | 3,509 | 43,387 |
| Total | 24,634 | 24,667 | 38,099 | 40,297 | 38,962 | 29,722 | 55,387 | 81,946 | 75,268 | 49,256 | 37,231 | 24,626 | 520,085 |

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 Darien. The information is compiled through individual interviews conducted in Panama's Darien and Chiriqui provinces. The preliminary results presented are indicative and should not be interpreted as representative of the total population of refugees and migrants crossing the border through the Darien jungle.



Demography

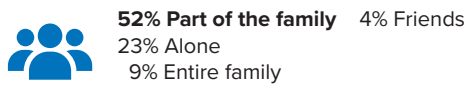
Sex of interviewed individuals



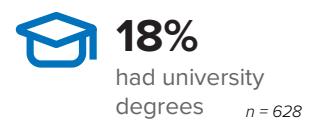
Average age



Travel group composition



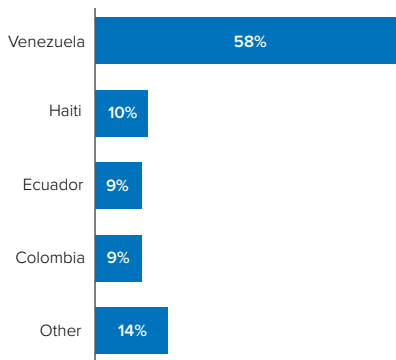
Highest education level



n = 655

n = 628

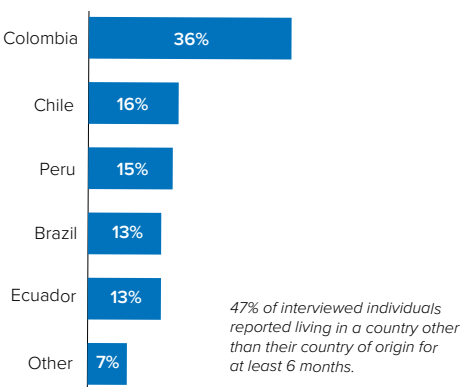
Nationality (CoO) of interviewed individuals



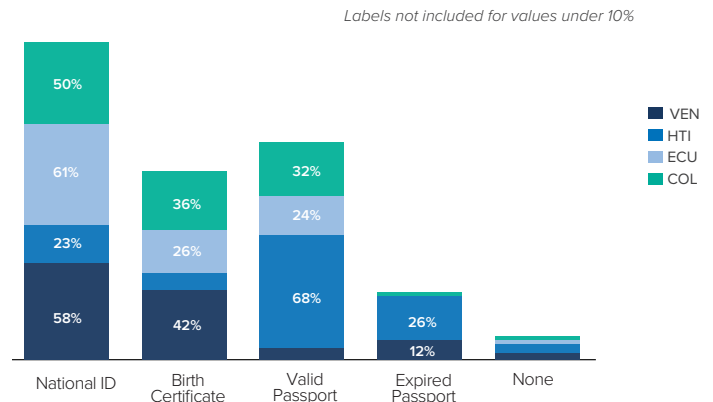
CoO vs CoR proportion



Last country of residence (CoR) for at least 6 months



Documents carried by the family



Respondent profile

Six in ten refugees and migrants interviewed were from Venezuela (58%). Nearly half (46%) came directly from Venezuela while the remaining 54% came from other countries of residence, mainly: Colombia (28%), Peru (11%), and Ecuador (10%). Unlike these nationalities, most Haitians (98%) travel directly from other countries of residence.

Four in ten participants had applied for legal status in their previous country of residence, and 22% reported having valid documentation from that country.

Over half of respondents (52%) reported travelling with the entire family, and nearly one-quarter (23%) reported travelling alone. Those travelling with children had an average of 2 children, of which 20% were under five. Additionally, 15 children were born in the jungle this year.

Three in ten respondents (32%) travelled with at least one person with a specific need. One-tenth of respondents (11%) reported travelling with survivors of violence (sexual, psychological, or physical), and a similar proportion (9%) travelled with pregnant or lactating women.



61% of interviewed individuals left their country of origin/residence less than four weeks ago.



2% of interviewed individuals reported having the intention to stay in Panama.

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



46% of interviewed individuals had applied for legal status in another country, prior to their arrival to Panama.

n = 277



11% of interviewed individuals reported travelling with a survivor of violence in their group (sexual, physical or psychological).

This figure likely represents an underestimation of these incidents



9% of interviewed individuals reported travelling with pregnant or lactating women.



9% of respondents reported travelling with someone with a critical or chronic medical condition.



3% of interviewed individuals reported travelling with unaccompanied children in their group.



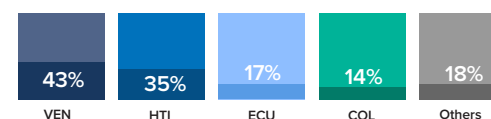
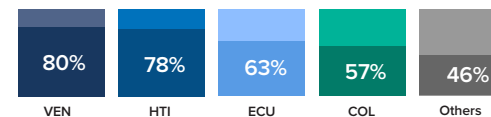
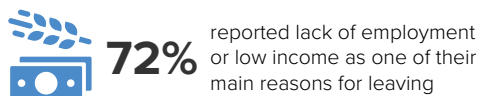
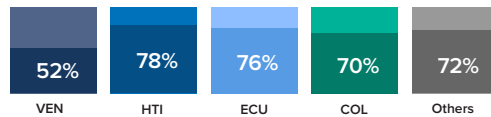
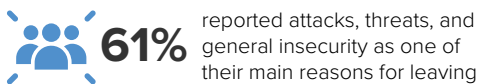
8% of interviewed individuals reported having a single parent travelling with children in their group.



3% of interviewed individuals reported travelling with an elder in their group.

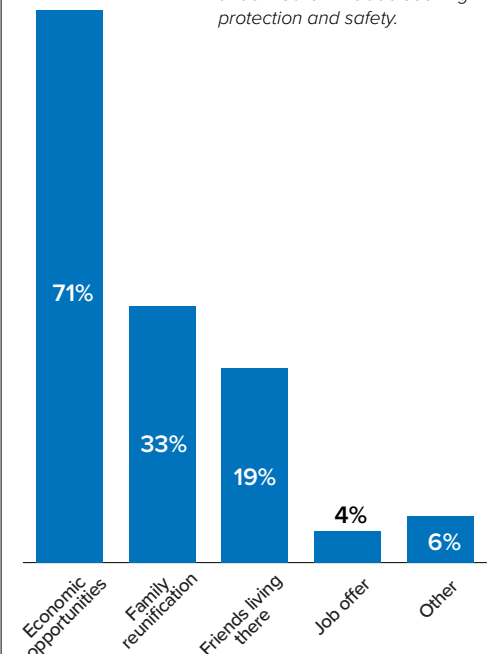
Push and pull factors

Main reasons for leaving country of origin



Reasons for choosing destination country

Most common reasons reported under "Other" include seeking protection and safety.



 **90%**

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

Followed by Canada (4%), Mexico (2%), Panama (2%), Ecuador (1%), and Honduras (1%).

 **9 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.

 **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 (34%) and Facebook (11%).

 **71%**

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

Challenges during the journey

 **5 days**

is the average time interviewed individuals crossed the Darien jungle (Min. 2 days and max. 15 days).

 **4 in 10**

experienced mistreatment or abuse during the journey through the jungle.

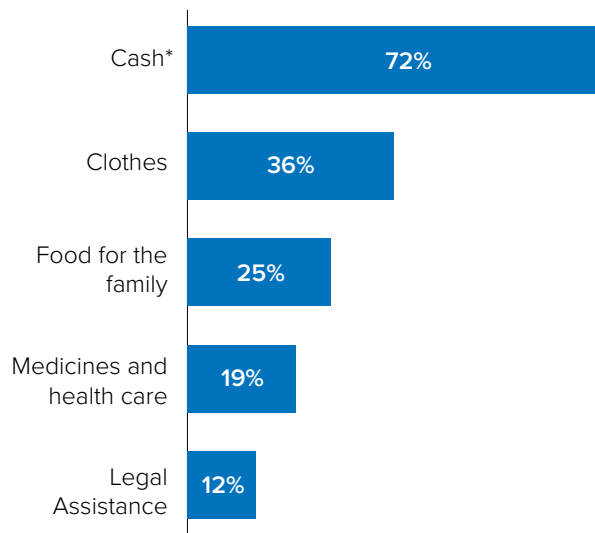
 **38%**

of interviewed individuals reported being victims of theft, scam or fraud during their journey through the jungle. **Additionally, 14% reported being victim of threats, intimidation, and attacks.**

 **84%**

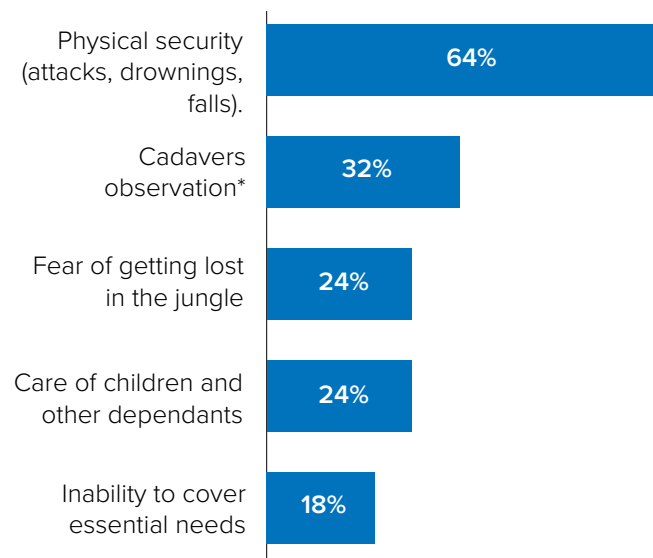
of interviewed individuals paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

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 travelling with children.*

Situations that affected people the most while crossing the jungle



**Those who reported seeing cadavers, reported between 1 and 20 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 from the 4th of January to the 13th of December 2023

Access all our border protection monitoring publications [here](#)

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