

# Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

November 2023



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## Context

Protests against *Minera Panama's* mining contract extended for over five weeks, resulting in mobility issues across the country. It affected buses transporting refugees and migrants from Darién's Temporary Reception Centres (ETRM) to Costa Rica. By the end of November, **495,459 people** had crossed the jungle in 2023<sup>1</sup>, **37,231** individuals in November alone.

Due to the blockades, many continued their journey on foot. Authorities recorded several security incidents, including the deaths of three people. Legislators in the National Assembly discussed several projects to repeal Law No. 406 and approved in an extraordinary session a Law **indefinitely suspending the future granting of concessions for metallic mining activities**<sup>2</sup>. The Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) admitted several legal actions claiming the unconstitutionality of the Law approving the contract with Minera Panama.

On 28 November, after a four-day extraordinary session, the CSJ announced that Law No. 406 was **unconstitutional**<sup>3</sup>. Civil society groups, labour unions, and indigenous communities welcomed the decision. Demonstrators opened most of the blockages along the Inter-American Highway.

UNHCR's protection monitoring exercise<sup>4</sup> evidenced that **three out of ten** interviewed left their country of origin due to **threats or attacks** against them or their families. **Sixty-three per cent** left due to **fear of violence and general insecurity**. Some **24 per cent** were victims of theft, scam, or fraud during the journey through the jungle, and **61 per cent** mentioned they might face risks if they returned to their country of origin or residence.

## UNHCR's Response

### COMMEMORATING THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

In Chiriquí, UNHCR and HIAS organized a painting workshop called "**Canvas of a Strong Woman**". Eighteen asylum-seekers participated and expressed through art how violence affects women's lives in their community. UNHCR, HIAS, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs hosted the photograph exhibition "**Un Lugar, Un Refugio**" (A Place, A Refuge). The exhibition showcased 14 photographs by asylum-seekers and refugees depicting places they now call home and where they feel protected.

In Darién, UNHCR and RET led **sensitization sessions on GBV prevention** and response for refugees and migrants staying in the ETRM San Vicente. The Agency organized **information sessions** and **sports tournaments** with **70 children and adolescents** from Colombia, Haiti, Ecuador, and Venezuela, promoting gender equality and inclusivity. As part of the campaign "**We can all prevent violence**", UNHCR distributed **banners and materials on GBV prevention** to authorities in Metetí.

In Bajo Chiquito, an Emberá-Wounaan community, UNHCR hosted a gathering of **20 refugee and migrant women** who wrote **messages of hope and resilience** in a mural. They hope their messages help other women searching for protection and a better future.



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2023/pdf/TR%C3%81NSITO\\_IRREGULAR\\_POR\\_DARI%C3%89N.pdf](https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2023/pdf/TR%C3%81NSITO_IRREGULAR_POR_DARI%C3%89N.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.pa/pdfTemp/29904/GacetaNo\\_29904\\_20231103.pdf](https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.pa/pdfTemp/29904/GacetaNo_29904_20231103.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/OJudicialPanama/status/1729473514082562233?s=20> <sup>4</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/105638>









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## UNHCR PROJECTS IN DARIEN AND EMBERÁ-WOUNAÁN TERRITORIES

UNHCR installed a **multipurpose sports court** and inaugurated it during the ETRM San Vicente opening anniversary. Over **100 people**, including refugees and migrants, authorities, and UN Agencies participated.

Despite protests and road blockades, UNHCR is finalizing its infrastructure projects in Darien and the Emberá-Wounaán territories. In Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo, the Agency is installing **solar-powered streetlights** to enhance reception conditions. In Lajas Blancas, UNHCR is assembling **two Rubhalls and a set of tarpaulins** to provide refugees and migrants with spaces to protect themselves from the harsh weather. UNHCR is also working on a Communication with Communities (CwC) initiative that provides essential information on international protection to those in transit using a **speaker system**. Due to UNHCR's efforts, **ONPAR's office** space in the Government's Villa is almost ready.


### Key Achievements

- 
UNHCR and NRC provided information to **1,654 people** on the asylum system in Panama and assisted eight people at border points with their asylum applications.
- 
UNHCR and partner HIAS assisted over **400 people** with mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) related to traumatic experiences crossing the jungle.
- 
UNHCR trained some **20 partner staff** on international protection and statelessness prevention.
- 
UNHCR Panama's **Help Page** registered **35,949 visits**, and **36 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency's **Chatbot**.
- 
UNHCR and HIAS provided over **7,000 people** with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and reception points in Darién and Chiriquí.
- 
In October, through its social media campaign **Confía en el Tucán**, UNHCR released **42** digital publications, reaching **389,979 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **6,305 engagements**.



**Safe and reliable**  
information about Panama  
and the Darien jungle

@ConfiaEnElTucan




**UNHCR CHATBOT IS ACTIVE!**  
For more information on protection mechanisms and the asylum system in Panama, please contact us here!

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