

Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

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Context

Over the last three years, the number of people crossing the Darien jungle has set an alarming trend. From 2021 up to now, [nearly one million refugees and migrants](#) undertook this dangerous journey, with the numbers doubling each year. In 2023 alone, [520,085 people](#) crossed, surpassing the Government's projections. In January 2024, authorities registered [over 36,000 individuals](#), marking a 46 per cent increase compared to the same period last year. Officials estimate that irregular entries will surpass 800,000 people by the end of December.

Cases of [Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) and sexual abuse](#) are escalating. Many are victims of robbery, fraud, and human trafficking during their journey through the jungle. To address this, the Ministry of Public Security announced the launch of the [Choco II operation](#) to strengthen border monitoring activities and protect the lives of those crossing. In 2023, through its Escudo and Choco I programmes, the Ministry detained 72 people for crimes against refugees and migrants and [rescued 730 individuals](#) in transit.

UNHCR's [latest protection monitoring exercise](#) evidenced that [66 per cent](#) of the interviewed left their country of origin due to [threats, attacks, or general insecurity](#). [Three in five](#) people experienced [mistreatment or abuse](#) during their journey, and [59 per cent](#) were victims of theft, scam, or fraud. [Half of the respondents](#) believe they [might face risks if they return](#) to their country of origin or residence.

Authorities opened an investigation into a group allegedly providing [unauthorized money transfer services](#) in the Temporary Migratory Reception Centres (ETRM). Officials detained 12 people and seized over US\$78,000 in remittances. The individuals copied the logos of established money transfer companies and charged those in transit a fee of 25-30 per cent of the amount they received. As a result, some families stayed in the ETRM for a longer period as they could not cover the cost of the bus.

UNHCR's Response



UNHCR [supports the Government's response](#) at the ETRMs and to host communities in Darién and Chiriquí. The Agency offers [legal support](#) to people with international protection needs, referring individuals who require specialized assistance to the relevant institutions. With the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), UNHCR provides [information on the asylum system in Panama](#) and assists those in need of international protection with their [refugee status application](#).

Moreover, through HIAS, UNHCR provides [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\)](#) to those in transit and continues to inform people in Darién and Chiriquí provinces about the risks of the journey through informative face-to-face sessions.

In Chiriquí, UNHCR and HIAS hosted the workshop ["Feel the Joy,"](#) focused on providing [27 asylum-seekers](#) with MHPSS and emotional regulation strategies.

UNHCR's [protection monitoring exercise](#) in the ETRMs San Vicente and Lajas Blancas in Darién reached [110 refugees and migrants](#).



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INAUGURATION OF ONPAR'S OFFICE IN DARIEN

On 25 January, the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) inaugurated [its field office in Darién](#), Metetí. UNHCR's Deputy High-Commissioner, the Minister of Government, and diplomatic representatives attended. ONPAR's field office is part of UNHCR's advocacy efforts to ensure asylum-seekers arriving at Darién's ETRMs can file [timely claims and access documentation](#) in this area. The delegation visited San Vicente and participated in focus group discussions with Ecuadorians forcibly displaced families, Haitian asylum-seekers, and Colombian refugees residing in Alto Playona.

In 2023, Panama achieved significant progress in refugee protection as part of its [commitments to the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework \(MIRPS\)](#). The National Commission for the Protection of Refugees (CONARE) held eight sessions and recognized an unprecedented number of [134 refugees](#).

Key Achievements

-  UNHCR provided **2,100** people with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and other reception points in Darien and Chiriquí*.
-  UNHCR and NRC provided **1,118** people with information on the asylum system in Panama* and assisted **seven individuals** with their asylum application in border areas.
-  UNHCR provided shelter to **1,000 people** in its Rubhalls at the ETRM Lajas Blancas.
-  UNHCR Panama's [Help Page](#) registered **13,200 visits**, **59 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency's [Chatbot](#).
-  In January, through its social media campaign [Confía en el Tucán](#), UNHCR released **21** digital publications. As of 31 January, and since its launch, the campaign reached **5,424,993 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **212,639 engagements**.

* Numbers correspond to direct implementation.



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Safe and reliable information about Panama and the Darien jungle

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For more information on protection mechanisms and the asylum system in Panama, please contact us here!

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