



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

BORDER REPORT CHIRIQUI-DARIEN

**JANUARY
2025**

295

people received legal counselling and information on asylum



679

people informed on protection rights and access to essential services



113

government officials trained in international protection and UNHCR's mandate



Situation

Panama connects two oceans and a continent. Darién, the country's largest province, with over 12,000 km², borders Colombia. To the west, the Chiriquí province borders with Costa Rica.

Some Indigenous territories, known as Comarcas, are located in these areas. In the last five years, the Americas saw an increasing number of people fleeing violence and complex socio-political contexts in their home countries.

While most came from the region, many people were forced to flee conflict from other parts of the world. At Panama's borders, particularly in Darién, hundreds of refugees and asylum-seekers have risked their lives in a 60-mile-deep jungle seeking protection and a safe place to live.

In 2024, more than half of the people interviewed by UNHCR left their country due to threats, attacks, or generalized violence.

In January, border crossings in Darién decreased by 94 percent compared to the same period last year. Changes in national and regional border policies influenced this reduction.

Meanwhile, authorities note an increase in individuals returning to their home countries through the border with Costa Rica. Chiriquí hosts over 100 refugees and asylum-seekers, including individual persecution and torture survivors and vulnerable women and girls.



Highlights

UNHCR, UN Women, the Ombudsperson's Office, the Ministry of Women, and the National Border Service (SENAFRONT) went to Jaqué, a remote and hard-to-reach community in Darién. The mission included training 20 SENAFRONT officials on refugee protection and assistance to vulnerable groups.

The Agency also held a protection awareness session for 39 women from Jaqué and nearby communities. With the Ombudsperson's Office, UNHCR provided counselling on the participants' access to rights, documentation, and asylum.

UNHCR met with the Ambassadors of Canada and Colombia to Panama in Darién to discuss forced displacement challenges and explore opportunities for improving the humanitarian response. In an event organized by the Canadian Embassy in the ETRM Lajas Blancas, UNHCR briefed Indigenous leaders (Nokos) and Emberá-Wounan's host community members on international protection principles and human rights.

Over 60 people participated, including leaders from 29 different Indigenous communities who attended the Regional Congress of Cemaco.

UNHCR trained 93 government officials on international protection and the asylum system during a virtual conference on Human Rights organized by the Public Administration Prosecutor's Office. Participants included officials from Bocas del Toro and Chiriquí provinces and Indigenous Comarcas.

Operational overview

UNHCR assists refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, and other vulnerable groups to ensure they access protection mechanisms, basic rights, and life-saving services in Panama. The Agency supports the Government's humanitarian response at Temporary Reception Centres (ETRM) and local communities hosting refugees and asylum-seekers in Darién and Chiriquí. In collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council, UNHCR provides information on the asylum system, offers legal support to people with international protection needs, refers those requiring specialized assistance to relevant institutions and assists asylum-seekers with obtaining refugee status.

Together with HIAS, UNHCR delivers mental health and psychosocial support services, information on protection rights, and access to essential services. Through the Panamanian Red Cross, UNHCR delivers primary health care at ETRMs. The agency works with Emberá-Wounaan host communities supporting the development of shelter spaces and infrastructure, and facilitating integration programmes for community members, asylum-seekers, and refugees.



In Marragantí, an Emberá-Wounaan indigenous community, UNHCR joined a community fair organized by HIAS, providing legal counselling to 50 people on accessing asylum. UN Women, IOM, RET, the Ombudsperson Office, and the Ministry of Health also participated. /©UNHCR



In Lajas Blancas community, UNHCR, UN Women, and SENAFRONT held an information session on protection awareness for 17 vulnerable women and girls to strengthen the resilience of host communities. / ©UNHCR

Life saving information

Access to life-saving information is crucial for forcibly displaced people, helping them make informed, safer decisions.

Confía en el Tucán and the UNHCR HELP Page counter misinformation, providing accurate and up-to-date information on the Darien dangers, how to access essential services and international protection mechanisms in Panama.



UNHCR's Help Page registered 8,492 visits in January 2025.



UNHCR's Confía en el Tucán campaign reached 729,059 visualizations on TikTok and Facebook, with 224,494 engagements.

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