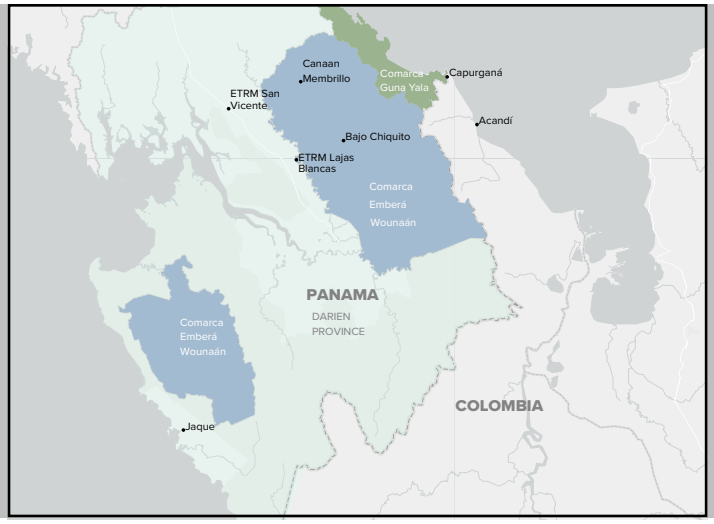
Mixed Movements Official Data

Darien Province, Panama-Colombia Border

June 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 Haiti, Venezuela, Cuba, 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. In the last two years, Panama has been facing an unprecedented mixed movement crisis, 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

166,649 Total entries in 2023.

38,962 Total entries in May 2023.

64% Men

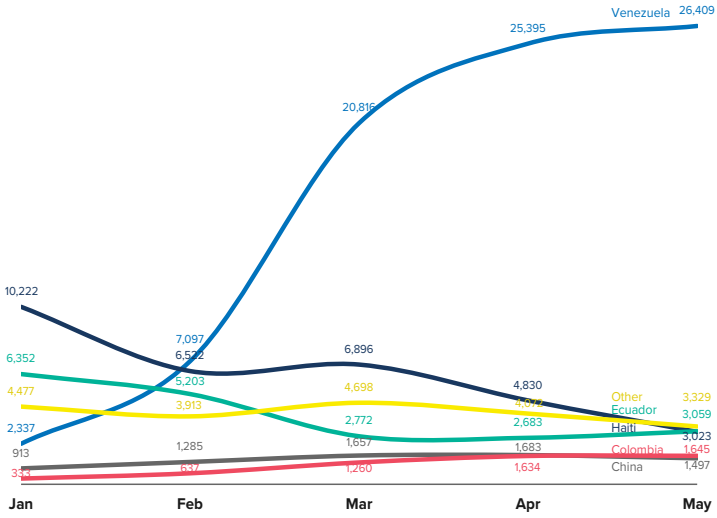
36% Women

80% Adult

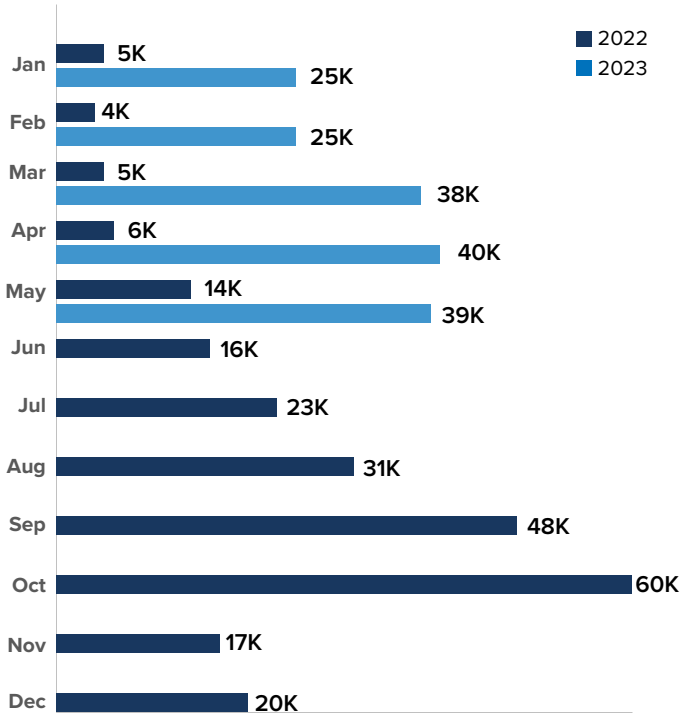
20% Children

Source: Panama National Migration Service

Main Nationalities entering irregularly through the Darien in January to May 2023

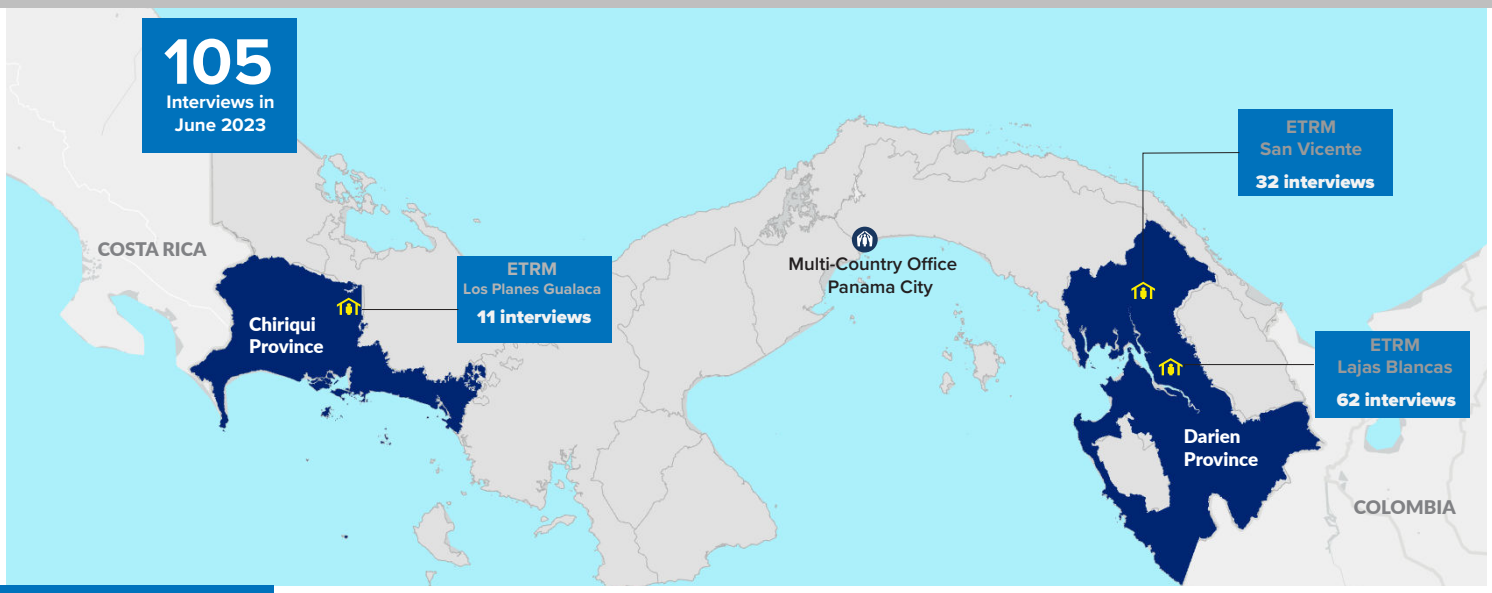


Irregular entries through the Darien 2022-2023 (in thousands of people)



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 Chiriquí 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

70% Men

30% Women

Average age

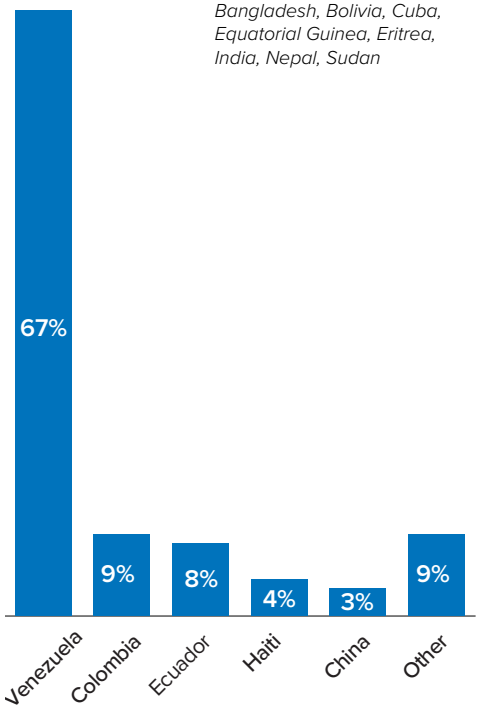
32 Years

Highest education level

61% SECONDARY
11% UNIVERSITY
6% VOCATIONAL TRAINING
20% PRIMARY
2% NONE OR WITH INCOMPLETE PRIMARY SCHOOLING

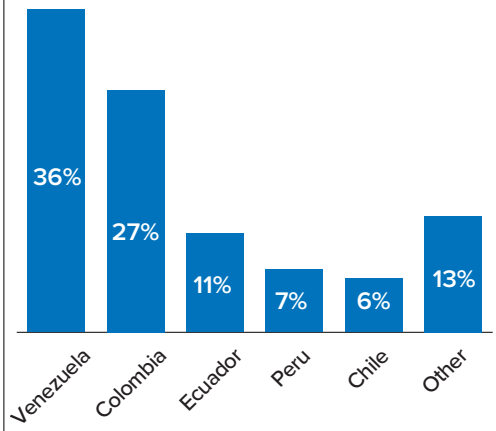
Nationality of interviewed individuals

Other nationalities include: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, India, Nepal, Sudan

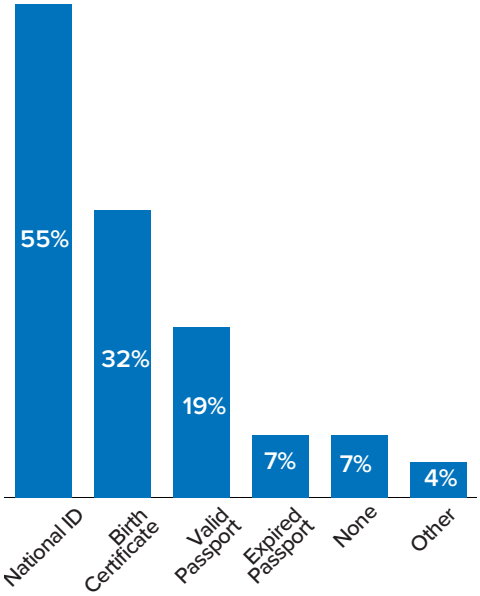


Country of residence in the last year

29% reported still having a valid/legal residence document from their last country of residence (when different to their country of origin)



Documents carried by the family



Respondent profile

More than half of interviewed refugees and migrants were from Venezuela (67%). Around half of interviewed venezuelans (53%) were coming directly from Venezuela, followed by the countries in which they reported residing in the last year, mainly: Colombia (27%), Peru (10%) and Ecuador (6%). Around one third of them reported still having current documentation from this country of residence.

In comparison to the previous month, the average reported time for crossing the jungle was higher in June (5 days). Coupled with the increased reports of incidents of drownings after river surges, flooding, and landslides,the evidence points to increasing difficulties in the conditions for crossing the jungle as the rainy season begins.

In addition to the worsening conditions of the terrain in the jungle, one third of interviewed individuals in June reported experiencing theft, scams or fraud in their journey.

64%

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

10%

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

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

10%

of interviewed individuals had applied for asylum in another country, prior to their arrival to Panama.

2 in 10

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

5%

of interviewed individuals reported traveling with pregnant or lactating women.

19%

of respondents reported traveling with someone with a critical or chronic medical condition.

2%

of interviewed individuals reported traveling with unaccompanied children in their group.

6%

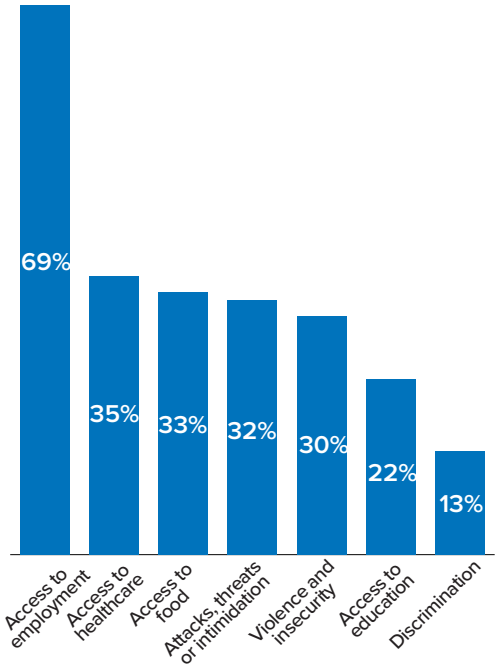
of interviewed individuals reported having a single parent traveling with children in their group.

4%

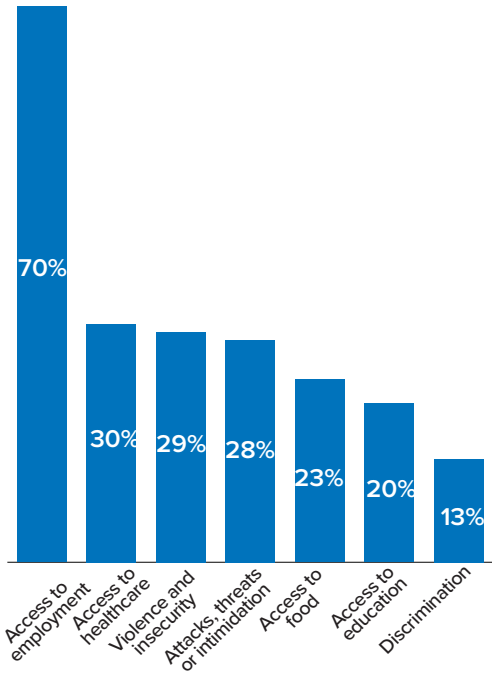
of interviewed individuals reported traveling with an elder in their group.

Push and pull factors

Main reasons for leaving country of origin

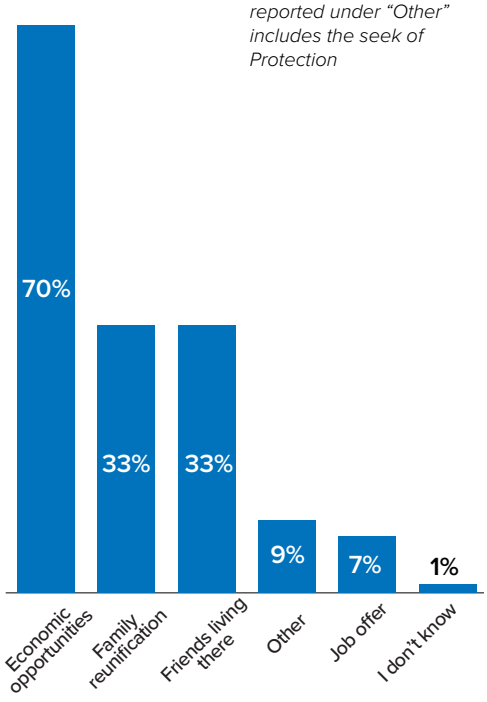


Main reasons for leaving country of residence



Reasons for chosing destination country

Most common reasons reported under "Other" includes the seek of Protection



86%

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

Followed by Costa Rica (4%), and Panama (3%).

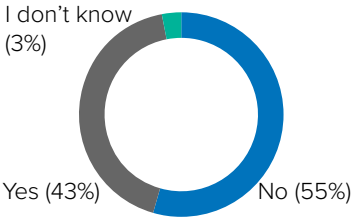
8 in 10

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 Facebook (30%), TikTok (27%) and Youtube (12%).

Cubans, Haitians and Venezuelans

Have you received information about the new entry requirements to the United States?



How did you receive that information?

22% FRIENDS/RELATIVES LIVING IN THE US
22% TIK-TOK
19% FRIENDS/RELATIVES LIVING IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
16% TV NEWS
16% FACEBOOK
6% INSTAGRAM

Challenges during the journey

5 days

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

3 in 10

experienced mistreatment or abuse during the journey through the jungle.

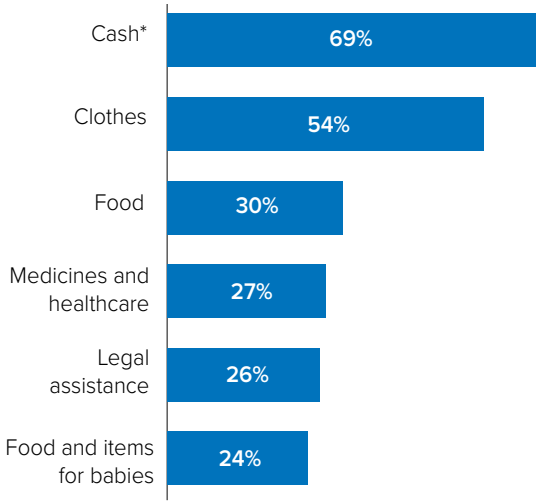
33%

of interviewed individuals reported being victims of theft, scam or fraud during their journey through the jungle. **Additionally, 21% reported being victim of threats, intimidation, and attacks.**

72%

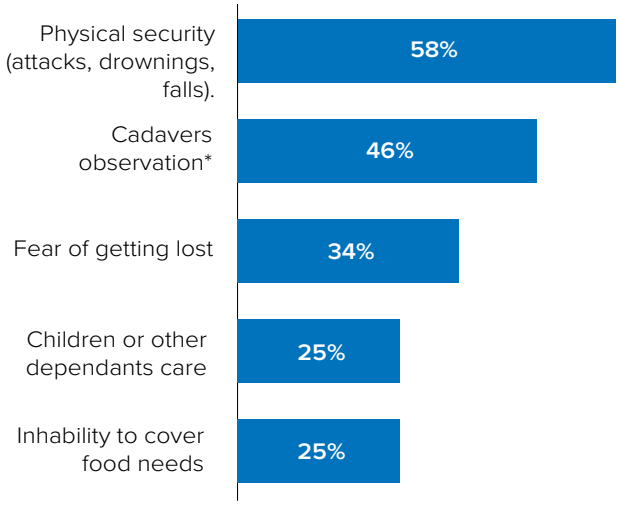
of interviewed individuals paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

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 traveling with children.*

Situations that affected people the most while crossing the jungle



**Those who reported seeing cadavers, reported seeing between 2 and 9 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 8th June 2023
Access all our border protection monitoring publications here
Feedback: panpaim@unhcr.org

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La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados