

# Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

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## Context

Panama continues to face an unprecedented displacement crisis in the recent history of the Americas. As of 30 September, **408,972 people** had crossed the Darién jungle<sup>1</sup>, surpassing the Government's initial estimates for 2023<sup>2</sup>. During this month, **75,268 people** entered irregularly, marking the second-highest monthly entry in this year.

Following the announcement of the Government's campaign, "*Darién is not a route, it is a jungle*," the National Migration Service (SNM) publicly disclosed new migratory policies to curb the mixed movements<sup>3</sup>. Authorities will relocate reception points in indigenous communities to assist those in transit in nearby spaces, reducing the environmental impact. The SNM will also use charter flights to deport people entering irregularly, particularly those with criminal records. Officials will strengthen border surveillance and reduce from 90 to 15 the number of days some profiled groups would be allowed in the country. After the respective assessments, officials will request these groups to provide proof of funds of at least US\$1,000<sup>4</sup>.

UNHCR's monthly protection monitoring exercise<sup>5</sup> evidences protection gaps and needs among those in transit. **Four out of ten** interviewed left their country of origin due to **threats or attacks directed** against them or their families and to **fear of violence and general insecurity**. Around 43 per cent reported being victims of theft, scam, or fraud during the journey through the jungle, and more than half of those interviewed mentioned they might face risks if they had to return to their country of origin or residence.

## UNHCR's Response

### PROTECTION

UNHCR **supports the State's response** at the Temporary Reception Centres (ETRM) and 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**.

UNHCR and partner HIAS co-hosted a gender-based violence (GBV) prevention workshop for 23 government officials and staff of humanitarian organizations with a presence in Darién. Participants included the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Regional Public Prosecutor Office, the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR), the National Secretary for Children, Adolescents and Family (SENNIAF), and the Ombudsman Office.

The Agency also trained 35 Panamanian Red Cross (CRP) field staff on international protection and the asylum system to ensure timely referrals of people in need of international protection.

UNHCR's protection monitoring exercise in San Vicente, Lajas Blancas, and Los Planes de Gualaca, as well as in other reception points, reached 114 refugees and migrants.



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2023/pdf/TR%C3%81NSITO\\_IRREGULAR\\_DEL\\_DARI%C3%89N.pdf](https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2023/pdf/TR%C3%81NSITO_IRREGULAR_DEL_DARI%C3%89N.pdf) <sup>2</sup> <https://mire.gob.pa/estrategia-regional-para-una-migracion-segura-buscan-panama-ee-uu-y-colombia/> <sup>3</sup> <https://www.minseg.gob.pa/2023/09/panama-pone-en-ejecucion-medidas-migratorias-y-restricciones-de-seguridad-para-la-migracion-irregular/> <sup>4</sup> <https://x.com/migracionpanama/status/1701343024452620510?s=20> <sup>5</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/104236>





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## LOCAL INTEGRATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT


Following the livelihood initiative, “*Hecho por Refugiados*” (Made by Refugees), UNHCR met with 16 indigenous Emberá-Wounaan women in Alto Playona to coordinate this new project. The initiative seeks to benefit refugee and local community women, strengthening peaceful coexistence and collaborative work. UNHCR also updated the data of 13 refugees and counselled them on access to documentation.

As part of the Refugee Housing Units (RHU) project in Alto Playona, UNHCR has trained 19 locals on RHUs assembly techniques. Community members have assembled 21 of the 22 housing units the Agency donated, employing the techniques learned.

UNHCR and the French Alliance held the “*Los Que Pasan*” (Those Who Cross) exhibition by photographer Tito Herrera. More than 400 people attended the inauguration, which showcased pictures of refugees and migrants on their journey through the Darien.


### Key Achievements

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  - UNHCR and NRC provided information to **3,576 people** on the asylum system in Panama and assisted 10 people at border points with their asylum applications.
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  - UNHCR, through CRP, provided primary health care to over **1,500 refugees and migrants** at the Government’s ETRMs in Darien and Chiriquí.
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  - UNHCR and HIAS reached out to over **8,870 people** with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and reception points in Darién and Chiriquí.
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  - UNHCR trained over **80 government officials** on international protection and statelessness prevention.
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  - UNHCR Panama’s **Help Page** registered **23,605 visits**, and over **150 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency’s **Chatbot**.
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  - In September, through its social media campaign **Confía en el Tucán**, UNHCR released **38** digital publications, reaching **771,499 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **14,274 engagements**.



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

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

UNHCR’s Multi-Country Office in Panama thanks the contributions from our direct and unmarked donors in 2023



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