

# Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

March 2024

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## Context

By the end of March, over **110,000 people** had crossed through the Darién jungle, representing a 26 per cent increase from last year's numbers for the same period. During this month alone, authorities registered **36,841 refugees and migrants** arriving at Darién's Temporary Migratory Reception Centres (ETRM).

On 2 March, the National Migration Service (SNM) announced that a **security incident** occurred in the ETRM San Vicente, destroying official vehicles and at least ten modules, including the ones where the SNM and the National Border Service (SENAFRONT) operated. The SNM alleges that two Venezuelan women were fighting for a tent, which developed into a more significant incident involving some 250 people. **Damages caused by the fire and riot** are valued at over **USD 800,000**. Officials detained at least **45 people**, and the Public Prosecutor's Office charged them with crimes against patrimony and collective security. Authorities also ordered their provisional detention during the investigation (six months minimum), closed the ETRM San Vicente, and relocated some remaining people to Lajas Blancas. Another group, which included children and 16 individuals who were seeking asylum in Panama, were deported to Costa Rica. Thanks to UNHCR's advocacy efforts, officials allowed two of them to re-enter Panama, since they had already been interviewed by the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR). The remaining were transferred to the Nicaraguan border.

On 4 March, **Doctors Without Borders (MSF)** announced that the Government ordered them to stop providing healthcare services for people who crossed the Darién Jungle due to the lack of a collaboration agreement in force. The **Ministry of Health** is evaluating working with other NGOs, as they are reviewing if MSF complied with national notification standards for sexual abuse cases.

## 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. Through 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**.

In March, UNHCR and its partners **trained 112 SNM officials** appointed to border areas on **international protection**, the **asylum procedure**, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention, and the Agency's mandate.

The Agency and HIAS hosted the workshop '**Strong Roots, Strengthening Your Resilience**' in David, Chiriquí. **Sixteen asylum-seekers and refugees** participated and were provided with tools to improve their resilience and **emotional regulation skills**.

UNHCR supported the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (**ONPAR**) in a **documentation mission** in Chiriquí. Twelve people received their ID renewals, asylum-seekers from eight cases were interviewed, and applicants from nine cases were notified of their admissibility decisions.











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## COMMEMORATING THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

On International Women's Day (IWD), UNHCR and HIAS hosted the "Proud to be a woman" workshop for 12 asylum-seeking women residing in Chiriquí. During the event, participants shared their experiences as asylum-seeking women and the challenges they face regarding local integration. The attendees expressed their reflections through paintings, leaving messages for themselves and other women. In the same province, UNHCR, HIAS, and the Ministry of Women Affairs (MIDEM) hosted the first workshop for women community leaders on GBV response and strategies for identifying people with international protection needs.

UNHCR donated over 11,000 leaflets on GBV prevention to the MIDEM. The material will be distributed among the Ministry's 17 Integral Care Facilities (CAIs). With UNHCR's support, the MIDEM's former data platform (DATAINAMU) is being updated.


### Key Achievements

- 
 UNHCR provided **4,052** people with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and other reception points in Darien and Chiriquí.
- 
 UNHCR and NRC provided over **1,450** people with information on the asylum system in Panama and assisted **over 20 people** with their asylum applications in border areas.
- 
 UNHCR, through the Panamanian Red Cross, provided primary health care to over **400 refugees and migrants** at the Government's ETRMs in Darien and Chiriquí.
- 
 UNHCR Panama's **Help Page** registered **9,175**, and **31 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency's **Chatbot**.
- 
 UNHCR donated **100 blankets** and **25 sleeping bags** to RET International to distribute to unaccompanied children and adolescents at the ETRMs and transit communities.
- 
 In March, through its social media campaign, **Confía en el Tucán**, UNHCR released **24** digital publications. During this month, the campaign's products reached **1,520,784 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **38,896 engagements**.



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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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