

### 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, and 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. Panama has been facing an unprecedented mixed movement crisis in the last two years, 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.

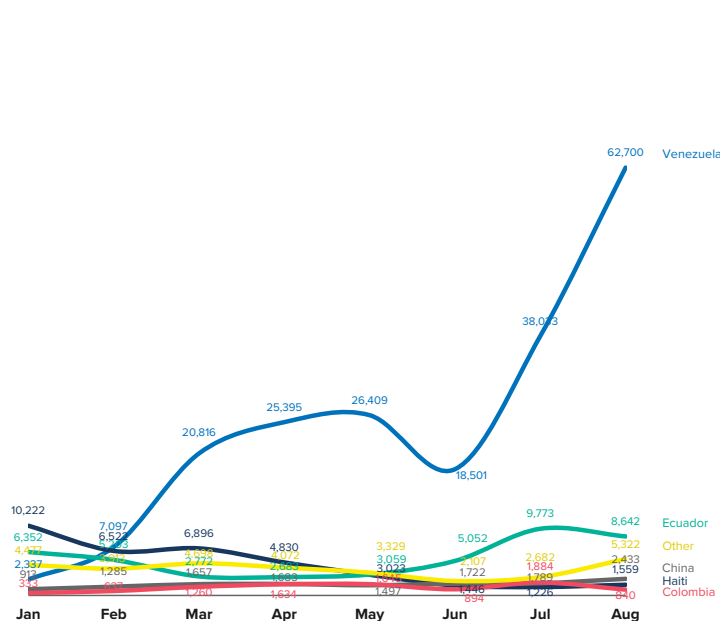


### Key Figures

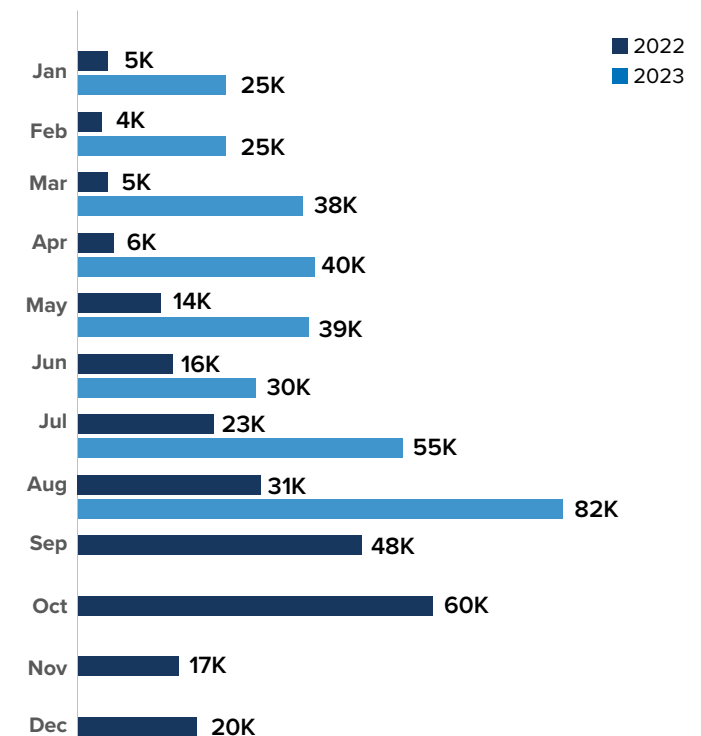


Source: Panama National Migration Service

Main Nationalities entering irregularly through Darien from January to July 2023

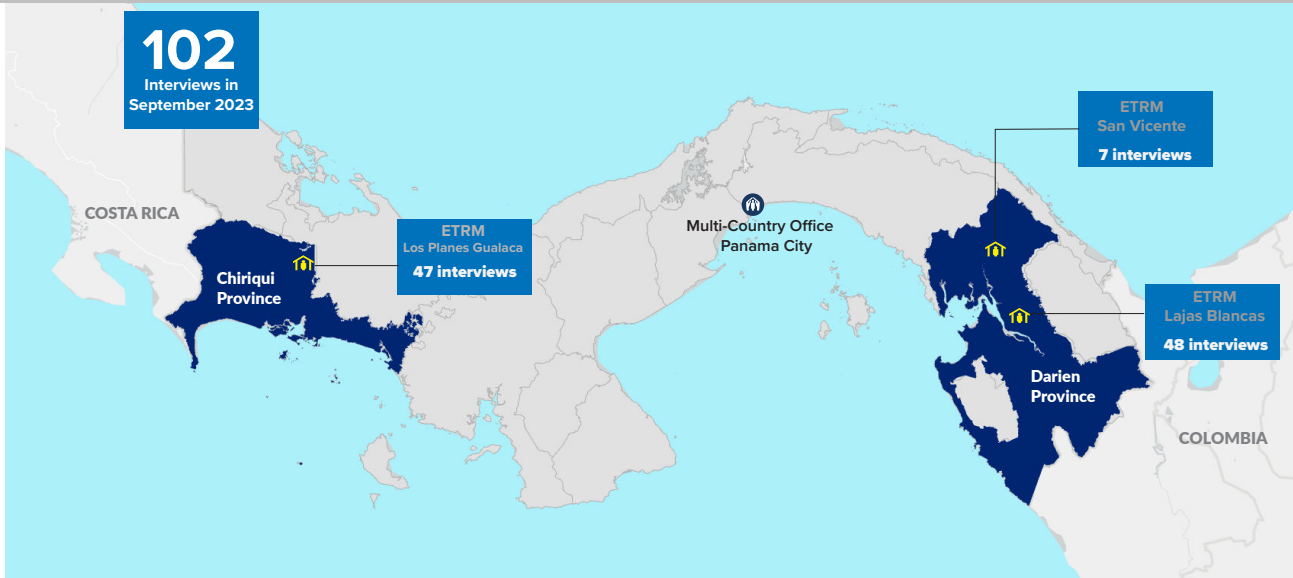


Irregular entries through Darien 2022-2023 (in thousands of people)



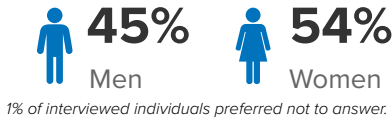
# UNHCR Data Collection

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

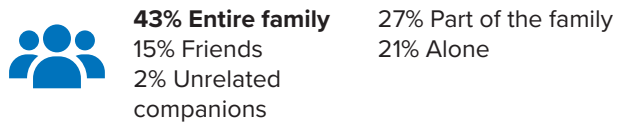
### Sex of interviewed individuals



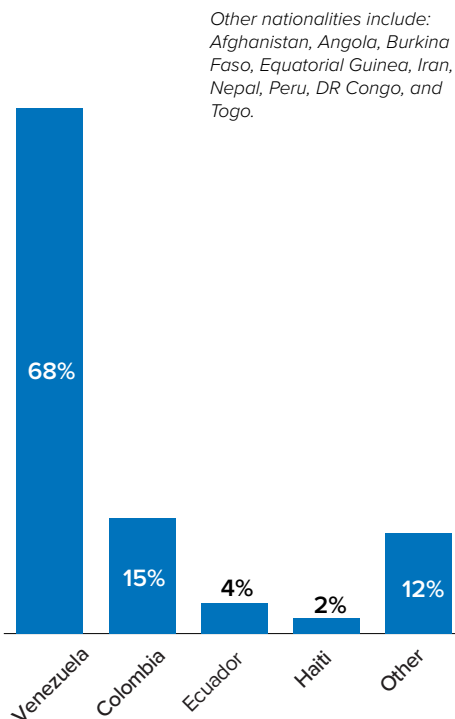
### Average age



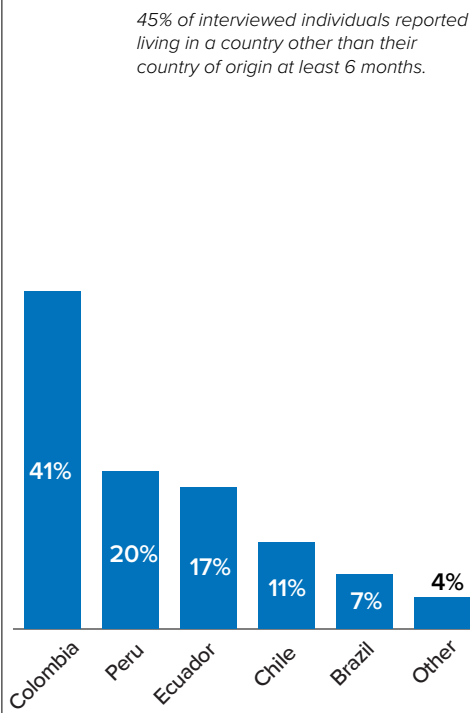
### Travel group composition



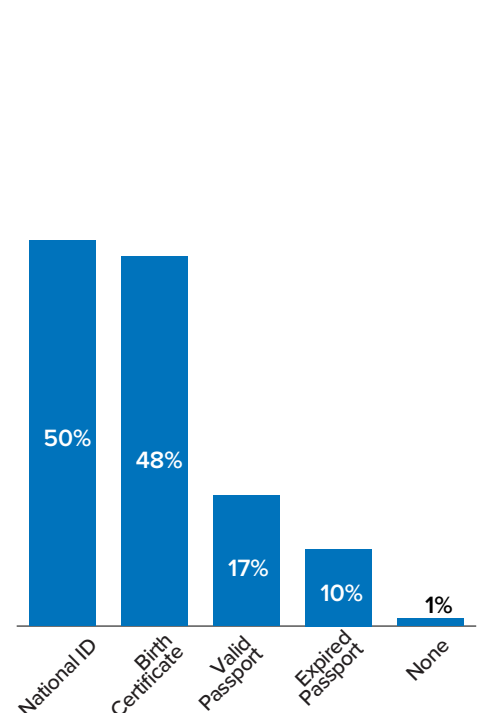
### Nationality of interviewed individuals



### Country of residence in the last year



### Documents carried by the family



## Respondent profile

Nearly seven in ten interviewed refugees and migrants were from Venezuela (68%). Nearly half of them (45%) came directly from Venezuela, while the remaining 55% were coming from other countries of residence, mainly: Colombia (50%), Peru (24%), and Ecuador (18%). Four in ten had applied for legal status in their previous country of residence, and nearly half (42%) reported still having valid documentation from that country.

Nearly half of the respondents (43%) reported travelling with the entire family, and only 22% reported traveling alone or with unrelated companions. Those traveling with children, were traveling with an average of 2 children, of which 1 was under the age of 5.

One in three respondents (34%) reported traveling with at least one person with a specific need. In September, there was an increase in the number of people who reported traveling with unaccompanied children, pregnant and lactating women, and violence survivors.



50% of interviewed individuals left their country of origin/residence less than four weeks ago.



2% of interviewed individuals reported having the intention to stay in Panama. *Most of them are planning to stay less than a month.*



41% of interviewed individuals had applied for legal status in another country, prior to their arrival to Panama.



11% of interviewed individuals reported traveling with a survivor of violence in their group (sexual, physical or psychological).



11% of interviewed individuals reported traveling with pregnant or lactating women.



9% 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.



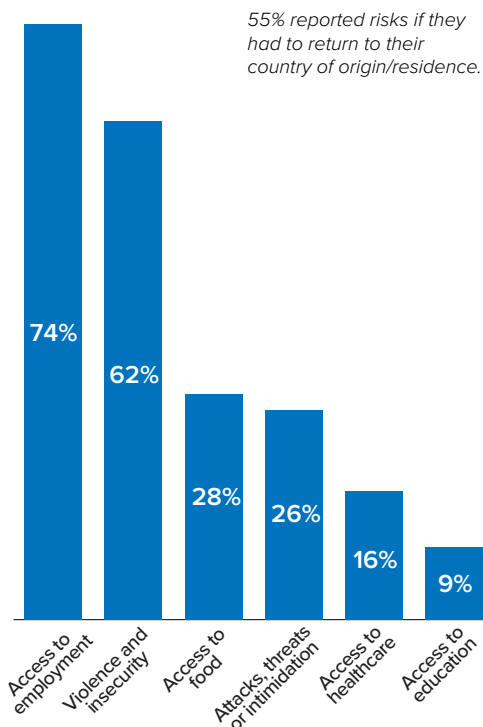
8% of interviewed individuals reported having a single parent traveling with children in their group.



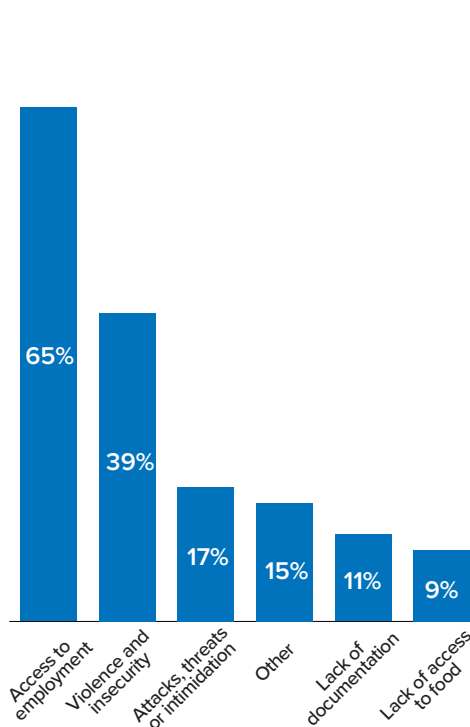
2% of interviewed individuals reported traveling with an elder in their group.

## Push and pull factors

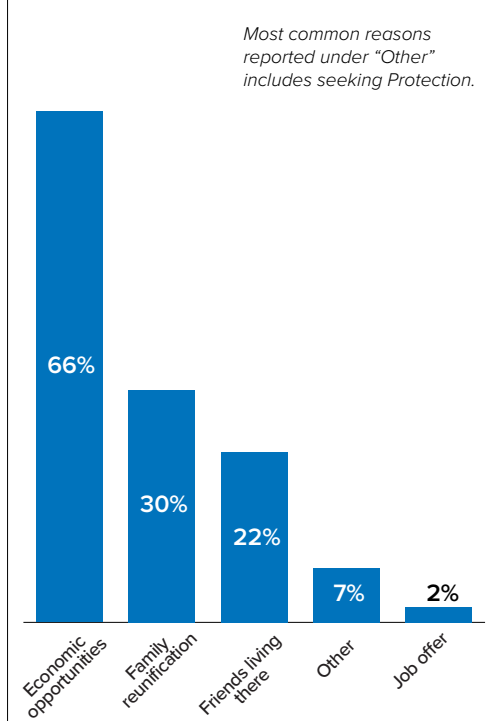
Main reasons for leaving country of origin



Main reasons for leaving country of residence



Reasons for choosing destination country



 **91%**

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

*Followed by Costa Rica (3%), Canada (2%), Panama (2%), and Don't know (2%).*

 **7 in 10**

interviewed individuals reported that if they were unable to reach their country of destination, they would wait until allowed to proceed to said country.

 **7 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 TikTok (28%) and Facebook (14%).*

 **70%**

of interviewed Haitians, and Venezuelans reported not receiving information about the new entry requirements to the United States.

## Challenges during the journey

 **4 days**

is the average time interviewed individuals crossed the Darien jungle (Min. 2 days and max. 12 days).

 **4 in 10**

experienced mistreatment or abuse during the journey through the jungle.

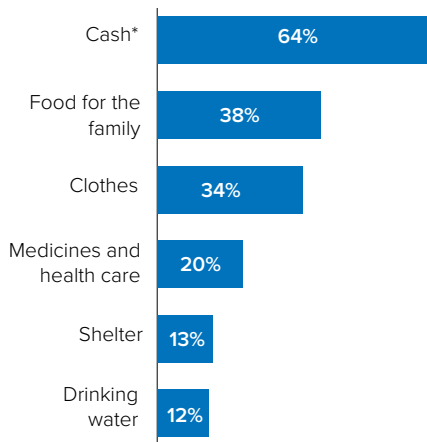
 **20%**

of interviewed individuals reported being victims of theft, scam or fraud during their journey through the jungle. **Additionally, 22% reported being victim of threats, intimidation, and attacks.**

 **81%**

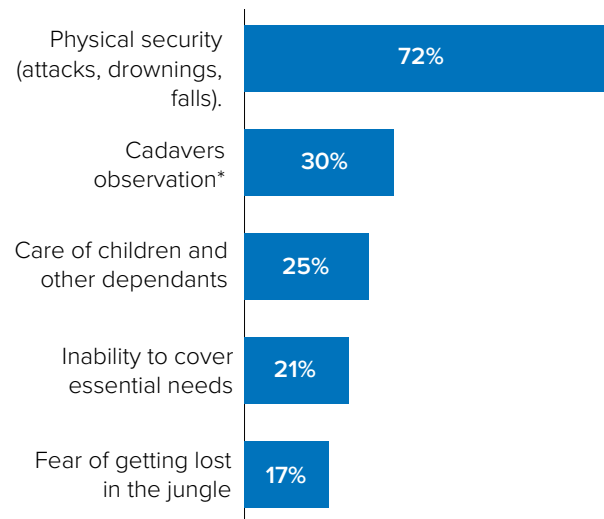
of interviewed individuals paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

### 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 1 and 8 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 22nd September 2023

Access all our border protection monitoring publications [here](#)

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