

Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

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© Ludina Berrugate - participant of UNHCR's Community Leaders Project in Bajo Chiquito

Context

As of February, **73,167 people** crossed irregularly through the Darién jungle, surpassing the figures recorded for the same period last year. Most are from Venezuela, Ecuador, Haiti, China, and Colombia. Authorities estimate that **transnational organized crime groups** might have earned over US\$820 million by smuggling refugees and migrants through the jungle.

On 14 February, a boat carrying 27 passengers, most of them Afghans, attempted to enter Panama irregularly and **capsized near the coasts of Guna Yala**. At least five people died, including a boy. Authorities transferred the survivors to hospitals for medical attention. The Public Prosecutor's Office opened an **investigation** into the boat's captain for his responsibility in the tragedy. The Minister of Public Security mentioned that although Panama has strengthened its efforts to monitor irregular boat entries, these incidents continue to occur due to the dangerousness of that stretch of sea.

The Ombudsman Office announced the opening of an **ex-officio complaint** related to the increasing cases of refugees and migrants' victims of sexual abuse in Darién and expressed its concern to the **Ibero-American Federation of Ombudspersons** regarding this matter. Panama and Colombia's Ombudspersons agreed to activate the Binational Early Alert, a measure focused on safeguarding the lives of refugees and migrants and collaborating with authorities to prevent these acts of violence.

UNHCR's latest **protection monitoring exercise** evidenced that **61 per cent** of the interviewed left their country of origin due to **threats, attacks, or general insecurity**. **Three in four** people experienced **mistreatment or abuse** during their journey, and **70 per cent** were victims of theft, scam, or fraud. **Half of the respondents** believe they **might face risks if they return** to their country of origin or residence.

UNHCR's Response

UNHCR **supports the Government's response** at the Temporary Migratory Reception Centres (ETRM) 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. 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**.

In February, through HIAS, UNHCR provided **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)** to **30 people**, and with NRC support, the Agency **trained 12 officials** appointed to border areas on **international protection**.

In Chiriquí, UNHCR participated in a **Human Mobility Group (HMG) border monitoring mission** in Paso Canoas to identify people with protection needs and refer cases to the relevant authorities and organizations. Moreover, the Agency participated in the first meeting of the **Western Working Group on Migration** (Mesa Occidental para las Migraciones), an initiative focused on coordinating humanitarian assistance to mixed movements.










UNHCR's Community Projects

Thanks to [CERF's funds](#), UNHCR finalized the construction of a [protection space](#) and [ventilation systems](#) in San Vicente, a [multipurpose sports court](#) in Lajas Blancas, and the installation of [100 solar-powered streetlights](#) and [six speakers](#) in the ETRMs and transit communities. UNHCR drafted a guideline that authorities could use to prioritize vulnerable families' access to the new protection space.

In Canaán Membrillo, UNHCR donated [250 mosquito nets](#) for distribution among community members and participated in a meeting organized by [the first female indigenous leader](#) (Noko) of Bajo Chiquito. The Agency is liaising with the Noko to implement a [VSAT initiative](#), provide [internet service](#) for the community, and launch its [waste management innovation project](#). In Metetí, UNHCR installed [36 solar panels](#) for the Agency's office, making it [100 per cent powered by sustainable energy](#).

Key Achievements

- 
 UNHCR provided **3,758** people with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and other reception points in Darien and Chiriquí.
- 
 UNHCR and NRC provided **1,400** people with information on the asylum system in Panama and assisted **three individuals** with their asylum application in border areas.
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 UNHCR, through the Panamanian Red Cross, provided primary health care to **226 refugees and migrants** at the Government's ETRMs in Darien and Chiriquí.
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 UNHCR Panama's [Help Page](#) registered **10,218 visits**, and **45 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency's [Chatbot](#).
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 In February, through its social media campaign, [Confía en el Tucán](#), UNHCR released **25** digital publications. During this month, the campaign's products reached **2,089,933 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **105,125 engagements**.


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Safe and reliable 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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