

Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

April 2024

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Context

By the end of April, nearly **140,000 people** crossed the Darién jungle, representing a 10 per cent increase from last year's numbers for the same period. This month, authorities registered **29,259 refugees and migrants** arriving at Darién's Temporary Migratory Reception Centres (ETRM). By the end of April, the increased water levels destroyed Puerto Limón's bridge, connecting Canaan-Membrillo with other communities. The community is no longer accessible by land, nor is the Bajo Chiquito indigenous community.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) released **Neglected in the Jungle**, a report criticizing Panama's and Colombia's measures to protect refugees and migrants crossing Darién. HRW highlighted that officials failed to investigate human rights violations in the jungle. The Director of the **National Migration Service (SNM)** stated that the report lacks objectivity and does not reflect the efforts made by the Government to assist those arriving at the border.

The SNM dismantled **55 camps in Darién and Guna Yala** used by smugglers and criminals for trafficking refugees and migrants. During the raid, officials seized firearms, ammunition, and drugs. The SNM announced that 682 people had been deported and 182 expelled during the **Escudo Campaign**, implemented from April 2023 to April 2024. The SNM attributes the success of detaining and identifying members of criminal groups to the Government's implementation of **biometrics** and enhancement of border security.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released an **open statement to Panama's presidential candidates**, to include policies that address mixed movements with a human rights approach. OHCHR emphasized the importance of providing legal regularization pathways for refugees and migrants and combatting xenophobia and discrimination against these groups.

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. 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 Darién, UNHCR trained **96 SENAFRONT** officials on international protection and the Agency's mandate as part of a local Human Mobility Group (HMG) initiative.

In Chiriquí, UNHCR trained 10 asylum-seeking and refugee women on **psychological first aid**. UNHCR, HIAS, and the Ministry of Women Affairs hosted a third **training session on international protection** for eight asylum-seeking and refugee women. UNHCR and NRC held a community outreach in Paso Canoas and informed **40 people on RSD procedures** and UNHCR's mandate.

UNHCR, the Ministry of Government, and the National Officer for the Attention of Refugees agreed to collaborate on improving **data collection and statistical information** related to asylum claims.











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LOCAL INTEGRATION AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE ACTIVITIES

UNHCR inaugurated a [multipurpose sports pitch](#) in the Emberá-Wounaán indigenous community of Alto Playona and celebrated the integration of refugees into the local community with an allusive mural. The Agency also inaugurated [the 22 refugee housing units](#) donated last year constructed and painted collectively by the community.

In Chiriquí, UNHCR, HIAS, and the Ministry of Education (MEDUCA) hosted an activity [commemorating World Earth Day](#). Twenty-four asylum-seekers and refugees joined MEDUCA officials to create a [community garden](#) for peaceful coexistence. The Agency and HIAS met with [14 asylum-seeking women and refugees](#) as part of monthly meetings on GBV prevention. The attendees shared their experiences and created [messages to demystify GBV](#) for their communities.

Key Achievements

- 
 UNHCR provided **5,531** people in transit with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and other reception points in Darien and Chiriquí.
- 
 UNHCR and NRC provided over **4,701** people with information on the asylum system in Panama and assisted **six people** with their asylum applications in border areas.
- 
 UNHCR, through the Panamanian Red Cross (CRP), provided primary health care to over **475 refugees and migrants** at the Government's ETRMs.
- 
 UNHCR Panama's [Help Page](#) registered **9,767**, and **32 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency's [Chatbot](#).
- 
 UNHCR donated **100 blankets** to SENAFRONT and **50 mosquito nets** to Bajo Chiquito's indigenous leaders for distribution among those in transit and host community members. The Agency also donated four computers to MIDEM's Integral Care Facility (CAI) in Meteti and 15 IT equipment, including telephones and digital devices, to partners HIAS and CRP.
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 In April, through its social media campaign, [Confía en el Tucán](#), UNHCR released **18** social media posts. During this month, the campaign's products reached **1,269,228 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **27,141 engagements**.



CONFÍA EN EL TUCÁN

Safe and reliable information about Panama and the Darien jungle

@ConfiaEnElTucan




For more information on protection mechanisms and the asylum system in Panama, please contact us here!

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Government of Ireland



Private donors from the Netherlands, España con ACNUR, and Japan for UNHCR.