

Mixed Movements Darién and Chiriquí

August 2023

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Context

In August, **81,946 people** crossed the Darién jungle, marking the highest monthly entries in Panama's history¹. By the end of this month, the 2023 record number kept increasing to **over 333,700** refugees and migrants who risked their lives seeking a new place they could call home.

The Government launched the campaign, "Darién is not a route, it is a jungle," to discourage irregular entries². Officials reiterated the allocation of US\$60 million to respond to the mixed movements. They announced the implementation of forceful measures to address this matter, now considered a national security issue.

The National Migration Service (SNM) Director called on the international community to condemn crossing through the Darién. She publicly stated that it is not a humanitarian corridor or a route and noted that although the Government has considered closing this border area, it is impossible to achieve³, as it comprises 266 km² of jungle and requires multilateral cooperation.

UNHCR's monthly protection monitoring exercise⁴ evidenced that **three out of ten** interviewed left their country of origin due to **threats or attacks directed** against them or their families, and over **60 per cent** fled due to **fear of violence and general insecurity** in their country. Over one-third of the interviewees (34 per cent) were travelling with a person with specific needs. Notably, 11 per cent were traveling with pregnant and lactating women. By the end of August, authorities registered **nearly 19,000 children and adolescents** crossing, the highest ever recorded in Panama.

UNHCR's Response

PROTECTION

UNHCR **supports the State's response** at the Temporary Reception Centres (ETRM) and host communities in Darién and Chiriquí. Through a permanent presence, 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**.

This month, through UNHCR's advocacy and government efforts, the National Commission for the Protection of Refugees (CONARE) **recognized 37 people as refugees**. This totalizes **80 people** in 2023 whom authorities granted **refugee status** as part of Panama's Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) commitments. In Chiriquí, UNHCR assisted the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR) in distributing **ID cards to 39** asylum-seekers.

UNHCR's protection monitoring exercise in the ETRMs of San Vicente, Lajas Blancas, and Los Planes de Gualaca, as well as in other reception points, reached over 100 refugees and migrants.

The Agency trained 45 government officials in Darién, Chiriquí and Panamá on international protection and UNHCR's mandate. Participants were part of ISAE's university course OIM offers on General Management of Borders, emphasizing human rights.



¹ https://www.migracion.gob.pa/imagenes/img2023/pdf/TR%C3%81NSITO_IRREGULAR_POR_DARI%C3%89N.pdf ² <https://mire.gob.pa/panama-lanza-campana-darién-no-es-una-ruta-es-una-jungla/>
³ <http://elsiglo.com.pa/panama/gustaria-cerrar-frontera-darién-pero-requiere-voluntad-dice-samira-gozaine/24233629> ⁴ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/103743>



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LOCAL INTEGRATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT


UNHCR participated in the commemoration of the Indigenous Day with the Emberá and Wounaán people in Yaviza. Local community members showcased their traditional handcrafted creations and celebrated their costumes and traditions. These communities have traditionally protected and integrated refugees over the past 20 years.

In Bajo Chiquito, the Indigenous Local Congress informed the Agency that the community decided to prohibit the use of foam tableware as a measure to mitigate pollution and waste generation. Furthermore, UNHCR trained six women on community participation and accountability as part of the Agency’s programme for community delegates. Recently, this project was selected by UNHCR’s [Data Innovation Fund](#) for its innovative community engagement approach and data management strategy. The fund is part of UNHCR’s global initiatives to develop data analysis techniques to address pressing challenges.

UNHCR extended its livelihood initiative “Hecho por Refugiados” to asylum-seeking and refugee women in Alto Playona indigenous community. The participants will exhibit and sell their handcrafted creations in Panama City.

Key Achievements


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 - UNHCR and NRC provided information to **3,094 people** on the asylum system in Panama and assisted six people at border points with their asylum applications.
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 - UNHCR, through CRP, provided primary health care to **3,179 refugees and migrants** at the Government’s temporary reception centers in Darien and Chiriquí.
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 - UNHCR and HIAS reached out to over **7,937 people** with information on the journey risks in the ETRMs and reception points in Darién and Chiriquí.
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 - UNHCR trained over **100 government officials** on international protection and statelessness prevention.
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 - UNHCR Panama’s **Help Page** registered **22,603 visits**, and nearly **96 people** contacted UNHCR through the Agency’s **Chatbot**.
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 - In August, through its social media campaign **Confía en el Tucán**, UNHCR released **32** digital publications, reaching **372,797 visualizations** on TikTok and Facebook, with **7,636 engagements**.



CONFÍA EN EL TUCÁN

Safe and reliable information about Panama and the Darien jungle

@ConfiaEnElTucan




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 unarmarked donors in 2023



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