Mixed Movements Monitoring

Panama | December 2024

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.

In the vicinity of the jungle are the *Emberá-Wounaaan* and *Guna Yala* Indigenous *Comarcas**, the territories that provide the first response to thousands of refugees and migrants, mainly from Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Haiti, and African and South Asian nations.

This humanitarian crisis has been ongoing for over two years. According to National Migration Service (SNM) statistics, over one million people crossed through this area since 2022.

Official data

302,203 Total entries in 2024

4,849 Total entries in December 2024

Source: Panama National Migration Service

62% Male

38% Female

79% Adults

21% Children

Methodology

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, collect monthly information on the characteristics, vulnerabilities and protection needs of refugees and migrants who enter Panama through Darien. The data is compiled through individual interviews conducted in Panama's Darien and Chiriqui provinces. Preliminary results are indicative and should not be interpreted as representative of the total refugee and migrant population crossing the border through the Darien jungle.

Respondent profile

132 people were interviewed in December 2024.

371 family members assessed

35% Male

65% Female

31 years Average age

Travel group composition
42% Entire family
30% Part of the family
8% Friends
1% Unrelated companions
20% Alone

Documents carried by the family
82% National ID
34% Valid passport
2% Expired passport
18% Birth certificate
1% Others
0% None

86% left their country of origin/residence less than four weeks ago.

1% intended to stay in Panama.
Most are planning to stay for less than one year.

59%* had applied for legal status in another country, prior to their arrival to Panama.
*Out of 34 respondents that had lived in another country.

2% were travelling with a survivor of violence in their group (sexual, physical or psychological)
This figure likely represents an underestimation of these incidents.

12% were travelling with pregnant or lactating women.

1% were travelling with someone with a critical or chronic medical condition.

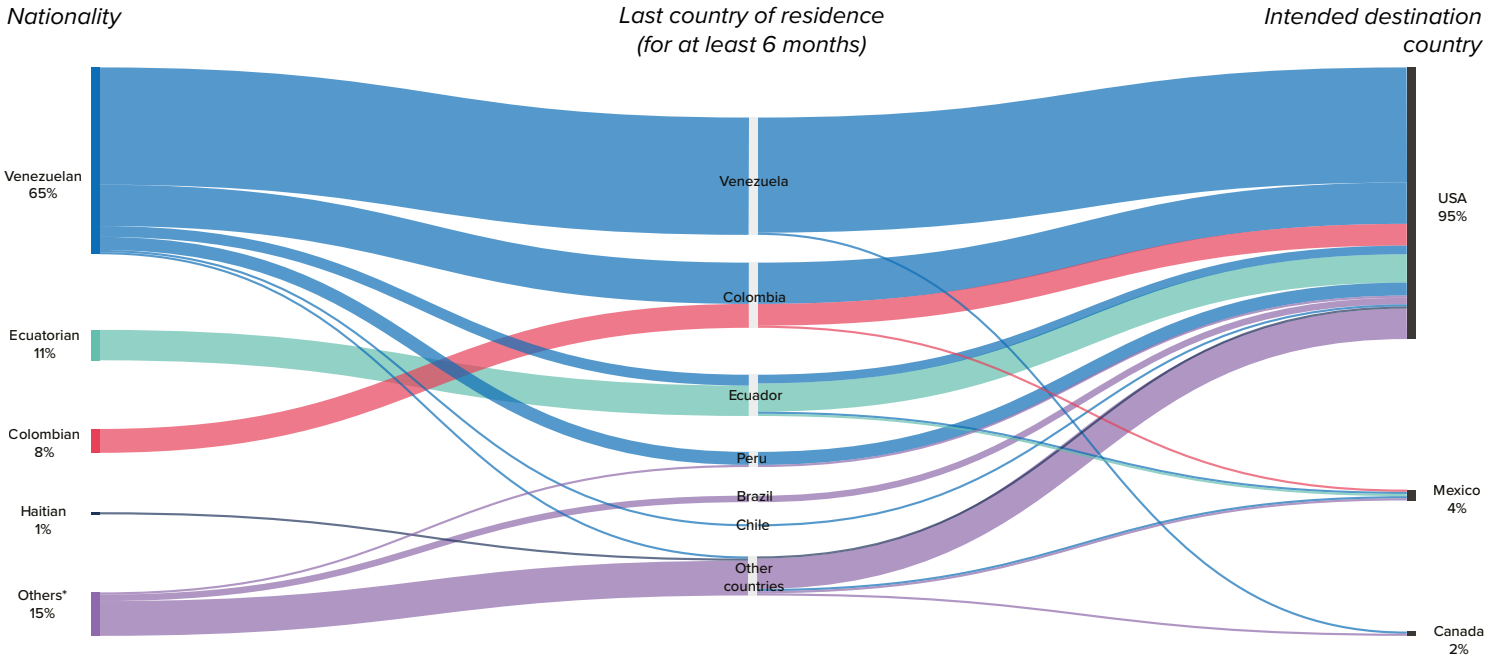
1% were travelling with someone with a physical or mental disability.

2% were travelling with children or adolescents, and did not have support from another caregiver.

0% were travelling with a person over the age of 60.

*The *comarca* is a special political division, governed by law, which creates Indigenous territories within Panama.

Interviewed individuals by country of origin, last country of residence, and intended country of destination



*Other nationalities include: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan, and Peru.

Push and pull factors

4 in 5

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

3 in 4

received information about the journey and made decisions based on the information received from friends and relatives who had already made it.

Also received information through social media, mainly Tiktok (33%), and Facebook (20%).

15%*

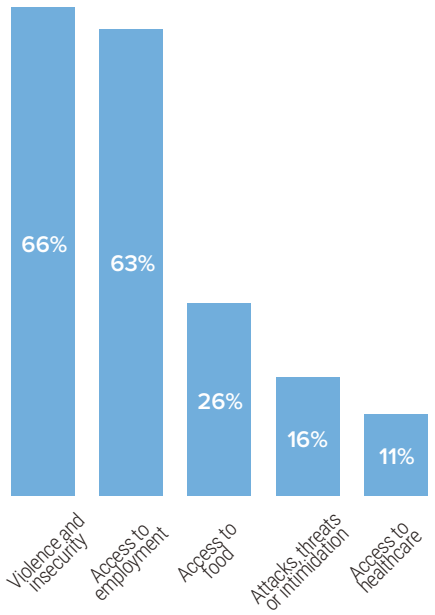
had applied for legal status in their previous country of residence, **and did not obtain it,** mainly in Ecuador.

*Out of 34 people that had lived in a country other than their country of origin for at least 6 months.

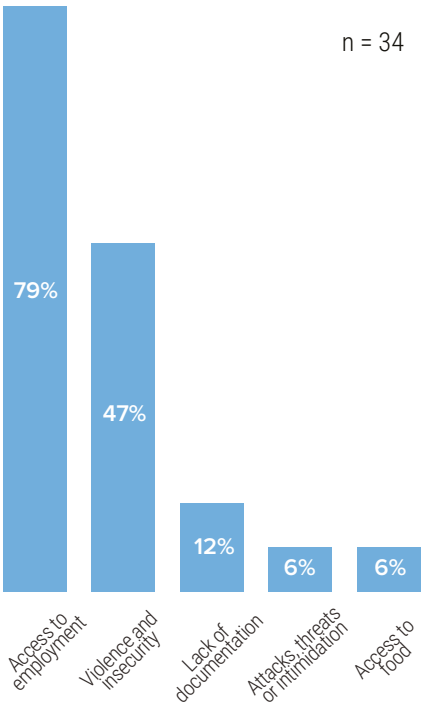
77%

consider they would face risks if they had to return to their country of origin/residence.

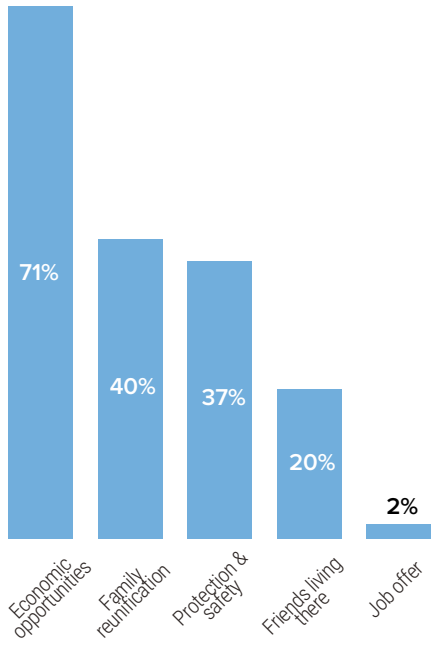
Main reasons for leaving country of origin



Main reasons for leaving country of residence



Reasons for choosing destination country



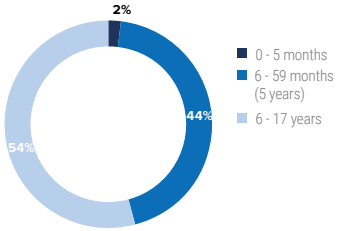
Children and adolescents

Children and adolescents in travel groups, by sex and age

63% were travelling with children and adolescents from their family.

53% Girls

47% Boys



38% of adults have observed behavioral changes or emotional difficulties in their children and adolescents after the jungle crossing.

1% travelled with unaccompanied children or adolescents.

1% travelled with children or adolescents that were separated from their parents or legal guardian during the trip and **are no longer with the group.**

clothing, food, and medical services, including psychosocial support, are the three main needs reported for children and adolescents.

Education

14% had not attended school for 4 months or more

Last educational level approved
0% Preeschool
69% Primary
31% Secondary
0% Technical
0% Doesn't know

78% do not carry documents that certify the last educational level approved

Vaccination

67% 0 - 5 months

84% 6 - 59 months (5 years)

have a complete vaccination schedule

Challenges during the journey

3 days is the average time spent crossing the Darien jungle.

(Mín.: 2 days, Max.: 6 days)

2 in 4 experienced mistreatment or abuse during their journey through the jungle.

42% were victims of theft, scams or fraud during their journey through the jungle.

Additionally, 14% were victims of threats, intimidation, and attacks.

36% paid a person to guide them through the jungle.

Access all our border protection monitoring publications here
Feedback: panpaim@unhcr.org

In collaboration with:

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency · WFP World Food Programme · unicef for every child · HIAS · RET

Note: The World Food Programme (WFP) does not have field operations in Panama. All data and information collected in this country is managed by the WFP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, based in Panama City, and are part of the regional initiative for Mixed Movements Monitoring in the Americas.