Risking it all: Refugees’ and migrants’ “journey through hell” crossing the Darien Gap

Simon Tomasi
Mixed Migration Centre

Juan Carlos Tomasi/MSF (2018)
Risking it all: Refugees’ and migrants’ “journey through hell” crossing the Darien Gap

ABOUT THIS PRESENTATION

Using our analytical framework and data to produce evidence on the magnitude of the risks and needs of refugees and migrants heading to North America and relay the key messages and findings for programming.
Agenda

1. About the Mixed Migration Centre
2. Data collection: 4Mi project
3. 4Mi data on the journey through the Darien Gap
   - Respondents profiles
   - Abuses and dangers experienced during the journey in the Darien Gap, by sex
   - Access to information before and during the journey
4. Cooperation with coordination platforms
About the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)

SOURCE FOR CREDIBLE EVIDENCE & EXPERTISE

Data and analysis to support agencies, policy makers and practitioners to make well-informed decisions in policy and programming responses to mixed migration.
Data collection: **4Mi**

**INTRODUCTION TO 4Mi**

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre’s flagship primary data collection system, conducting survey interviews with refugees and migrants on the move in more than **15 countries** to help fill knowledge gaps and inform policy and response.

- **100,000** interviews since 2014
- **120 field enumerators**
- **19 languages**
- **30,000+** interviews on our interactive dashboard since 2019
Introduction

- Migration along the Darien Gap, from South America to Central America is not a new dynamic.

- The number of people on the move irregularly crossing into Panama after embarking on the perilous Darien Gap route reached a record in 2022: nearly 250,000 people crossed into the country (133,000 in 2021).

- Between January to October 2021, 70% of the irregular entries into Panama through the Darien Gap correspond to Venezuelan nationals.

January - October 2022, SNM PANAMÁ
Mixed movements along the Darien Gap

Risking it all: Refugees’ and migrants’ “journey through hell” crossing the Darien Gap
4Mi Costa Rica

- **DATA COLLECTION SITES:** Paso Canoas, Ciudad Nelly, Rio Claro (Costa Rica-Panamá border); San Carlos, Heredia, and Alejuela (Central Costa Rica); Los Chiles (Costa Rica-Nicaragua border)
- **DATA COLLECTION PERIOD:** 24 May to 24 October 2022
- **METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION:** Face-to-face interviews
- **SAMPLE SIZE:** 554 respondents

**NOTE:** THE 4MI SAMPLE IS PURPOSIVE. DATA PRESENTED IN THIS SNAPSHOT CANNOT BE CONSIDERED AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MIXED MIGRATION DYNAMICS IN THE REGION.
RESPONDENTS PROFILES

Sex distributions of respondents

- Men 62%
- Women 38%

n=544

Nationality

- Venezuela 70%
- Colombia 13%
- Cuba 5%
- Perú 5%
- Otros 5%
- Haiti 2%

n=544

- Change in profile: People in the move cross the Darien, without economic resources.
- 49% of respondents mentioned not having used the services of smugglers.
Main findings

ABUSES AND DANGERS EXPERIENCED DURING THE JOURNEY IN THE DARIEN GAP, BY SEX

Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question

Respondents who reported the Darien Gap as the most dangerous location on their journey, n=492

1 of 6 women interviewed reported having suffered sexual violence in the Darien Gap

89% of all respondents reported that children were very or highly exposed to those risks in the Darien.

"...During the journey through the jungle we had to adopt an 8 year old boy who was lost, alone. Apparently, they had taken his mother to rape her. He was waiting for the mother for two days in a tree root, but she never appeared... She is most likely dead...". 53-year-old Venezuelan man, interviewed in Costa Rica
Main findings

DID YOU OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT ROUTES, DESTINATIONS, COSTS, RISKS ETC BEFORE THE JOURNEY?

- Yes: 81%
- No: 21%
- No contesta: 1%

DID YOU OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT ROUTES, DESTINATIONS, COSTS, RISKS ETC DURING THE JOURNEY?

- Yes: 74%
- No: 25%
- No contesta: 1%

Of the people surveyed obtained information before and during their journey through social networks and messaging applications.

- Respondents do not mention NGOs, UN organizations or institutional actors as trusted sources of information, used before or during the journey.

- Respondents report that their decision making was not (well) informed:

  - Of respondents would not have initiated their migration knowing what they know, at the time of the survey.
  - 64% would not recommend the migration route they used (Darien).
Cooperation with coordination platforms

- Presentation of those results at bilateral meetings.

- GIFMM/R4V: Identification of protection risks in the Darien Gap.

- Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2023: Priority population groups 2023 defined by the Regional Protection Sector.

- Regional Protection Sector (R4V): Regional analysis of Venezuelan protection and information needs and design of an awareness campaign for Venezuelan refugees and migrants heading to Central/North America.
RECENT PUBLICATIONS

WRITTEN BY
Lizamari Hidalgo Yamash
REVIEWED BY
Jane Linster, Meru Powell

SUGGESTED CITATION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This document uses 4Mi data to explore the profile of returnees, leading to the factors driving them to leave their host countries, and the subsequent return. The data only includes those who identified as returnees in the second wave of the 4Mi longitudinal survey.

DECEMBER 2022

Analysis of 4Mi data

- 80% of refugees and migrants surveyed on their way back to Venezuela had tried sending some money back home.
- 55% of respondents had been in the host country for between six months to two years, which could drive long-term difficulties in returning.
- 60% of all respondents had regular migration status in the host country, whereas 21% were WITHOUT legal status.
- 71% of respondents had at least one more of these factors: insufficient access to services (72%), cultural or social difficulties (60%), or retaining their migratory status (25%).
- At the same time, 69% of respondents were returning to Venezuela to reunite with family or friends.
- 63% were leaving because they were harassed.
- 69% of all respondents were also motivated by the improved economic opportunities in the country, starting a new business, or investing (39%), or job opportunities (27%).

Even before reaching Venezuela, 27% of respondents said they intend to migrate again, either to their host country or another country.
Thank you

WWW.MIXEDMIGRATION.ORG

@Mixed_Migration
@DRC_LAC
ConsejoDanesDRC
info@mixedmigration.org