



**Seth Anandram Jaipuria
Model United Nations
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**UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

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Letter from the Executive Board

"As the rights are stripped with malicious intent,
The scraped metals are continuously being spent.
As financial aristocracy controls the nation's fate,
Suffering becomes the people's tragic state."

-The Executive Board,
UNHRC SAJMUN 2025

Dear delegates,
Greetings!

We welcome you to the eleventh edition of Seth Anandram Jaipuria Model United Nations. As members of a body that is devoted to protecting and promoting the rights and freedoms of individuals around the world, the committee is tasked with one of the most urgent and morally complex issues in contemporary humanitarian discourse.

The agenda at hand—"Deliberation upon the Systematic Abuse and Non-Refoulement in the Darién Gap, with Special Emphasis on the Issue of Arbitrary Detention and Hyperinflation in the Venezuelan Crisis"—places you at the crossroads of forced migration, state responsibility, and human survival.

The Darien Gap, once a secluded and untamed stretch of rainforest between Colombia and Panama, has transformed into one of the world's most perilous migratory routes. In 2023 alone, over 520,000 people including more than 328,000 Venezuelans risked this unforgiving path in search of safety and dignity. Fleeing a homeland shattered by hyperinflation peaking at over 10,000,000% in 2019, political persecution, and widespread arbitrary detention, these migrants carry not just belongings, but the weight of desperation and hope. The Darien is a corridor of suffering where human rights are routinely trampled. Migrants, particularly women, girls, and unaccompanied minors, face horrific sexual violence, often at the hands of criminal groups who operate with impunity. Robbery and extortion are commonplace, with gangs ambushing travelers, stripping them of money, documents, and even the shoes from their feet. There is no shelter, only sodden earth and ceaseless rain. Clean water is scarce, food is rationed or spoiled, and access to healthcare is virtually nonexistent, leaving many vulnerable to dehydration, infection, and trauma.

The Darién Gap is no longer just a break in the Pan-American Highway—it is a

humanitarian void where the failures of diplomacy, governance, and empathy converge. It demands global attention not only as a migration crisis but as a profound moral reckoning. Behind each number is a name, a story, a family, a life in search of a refugee. As delegates of the Human Rights Council you are tasked with addressing the serious human rights breaches taking place in the Darién Gap, with a particular emphasis on the principles of non-refoulement, arbitrary imprisonment, and the role of hyperinflation in the Venezuelan crisis. You are required to critically examine the humanitarian effects of forced displacement, investigate states obligations under international human rights and refugee law, and provide tangible, rights-based solutions that ensure responsibility and protection. This committee will challenge you to look beyond numbers to humanize the situation, understand its underlying causes, and advocate for the dignity and safety of individuals who have been silenced. Thorough research is essential. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with applicable treaties, country regulations, past actions taken, UN resolutions. Delegates will be encouraged to vigorously defend the stance of the country they represent, regardless of how controversial it might be. This will be done in an atmosphere of utmost respect where discriminatory and derogatory language will not be tolerated. Just like there is a fine line between respecting national sovereignty and protecting human rights around the world, there is a fine line between respectfully defending one's stance (however controversial it might be).

Remember, a country's Foreign Policy is the root of its enormous tree which as diplomats, you need to preserve and protect and **read the background guide very thoroughly** because it gives you an idea of the agenda and explains what we expect from the delegates in the committee. Above all, sound and reasoned debates with a knack for originality and uniqueness are what we expect. Therefore, research well, **without Plagiarism**, so that you not only intrigue us but also take the global problem to a solution the world community needs.

We are looking forward to fervent delegates with the determination to work for the better. As soon as you step into the committee room, you're a delegate; you're a diplomat; remember that it is for the world and something more significant than all of us. We are looking forward to fervent delegates with the determination to work for the better. As soon as you step into the committee room, you're a delegate; you're a diplomat; remember that it is for the world and something more significant than all of us. Feel free to contact any of us for queries, looking forward to a fruitful conference. All the best!

Regards-

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About The Committee

The Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system that is in charge of promoting the promotion and protection of human rights around the world, as well as investigating and recommending solutions to human rights breaches. It can address all thematic human rights challenges and conditions that arise during the year. It meets at the United Nations Office in Geneva. The council has 47 members selected for staggered three year terms on a regional basis group. The Council's headquarters are in the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland. The Council reviews complaints of human rights violations in United Nations member nations. It focuses on human rights concerns such as freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, belief, and religion, women's rights, LGBT rights, and racial and ethnic minority rights. The United Nations General Assembly established the Council on 15 March 2006. The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The significant rights defined in the UNHRC are:

- Peace and security
- Human Rights
- Ensuring humanitarian aid
- Sustainable development
- International law

Understanding the Topic

The Darien Gap, a dense and treacherous jungle between Colombia and Panama, has become a critical yet deadly corridor for migrants particularly Venezuelans fleeing political persecution, economic collapse, and humanitarian crisis in their home countries. Venezuela, in particular, has experienced one of the worst economic collapses in modern history, characterized by extreme hyperinflation, widespread shortages of food and medicine, and mass unemployment, which has driven over 7.7 million people to seek refuge elsewhere. As thousands of these individuals journey northward, they attempt to cross the Darien Gap, a region infamous for its lack of infrastructure and law enforcement, making it a hotbed for criminal activity and human rights abuses. Migrants face not only the physical dangers of the jungle such as wild animals, flooding rivers, and disease but also rampant violence at the hands of armed groups and smugglers, including robbery, extortion, sexual assault, and even murder. Women often carry emergency contraception as a precaution, and entire families, including children, endure unimaginable conditions with little access to basic necessities. Despite these hardships, many countries in the region have failed to uphold international legal obligations, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the forced return of asylum seekers to countries where they face serious threats. Reports indicate that some nations have deported Venezuelan nationals back to their country without proper assessment of their asylum claims, in violation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Additionally, arbitrary detention of migrants is widespread, with individuals often including children being held without due process, in overcrowded and unsanitary facilities, and without access to legal aid. These detentions, often indefinite in duration, further exacerbate the vulnerability and trauma faced by displaced people. The systemic abuse of migrants in the Darién Gap and the legal failures surrounding their treatment represent not only a grave humanitarian emergency but also a profound breach of international human rights standards. Coordinated regional and international responses are urgently needed to address the root causes of displacement, ensure the protection of migrants, uphold legal norms, and hold accountable those responsible for violations.

Explanation of "Systematic Abuse"

Over the last year, over half a million people have crossed the Darién Gap, a swampy jungle at the Colombia-Panama border, on their journey north, often to the United States. Venezuelans, Haitians, and Ecuadorians, but also people from other regions like Asia and Africa, risk their lives in this difficult terrain, where they are exposed to

unchecked abuses by criminal groups, including sexual violence, and receive little protection or humanitarian assistance. Human Rights Watch visited the Darien Gap four times between April 2022 and June 2023 and interviewed almost 300 people to document the drivers of, and responses to, this crisis. They documented why migrants and asylum seekers flee their own countries and are reluctant to stay in other countries in South America; how criminal groups abuse and exploit them on the way; and where Colombia's and Panama's responses fall short in assisting and protecting them, and in investigating abuses against them, between 2005 and 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean witnessed an unprecedented surge in international migration, emerging as the region with the highest rate of growth globally during that period. Data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) shows that the number of migrants in the region more than doubled over those 15 years—rising from about 7 million to 15 million. This dramatic increase reflects a complex mix of factors, including economic instability, political crises, and shifting regional dynamics that have reshaped migration patterns. One of the most striking examples of this trend is the mass movement of Venezuelans fleeing their country's ongoing humanitarian emergency. Since January 2022 alone, over 440,000 Venezuelan nationals have crossed the treacherous Darién Gap, a dangerous jungle passage between Colombia and Panama, making them the most represented nationality among those undertaking this journey. This exodus is driven by severe shortages of essential goods like food and medicine, coupled with widespread human rights abuses, persecution by state forces, and violence from armed groups and criminal gangs. For many, this migration is not a choice but a desperate necessity for survival and safety.

What is “Non-Refoulement”?

Non-refoulement is a fundamental principle of international refugee and human rights law. It is most clearly outlined in the **1951 Refugee Convention (Article 33)** and reinforced by various human rights treaties, such as the **Convention Against Torture**.

Non-refoulement means that no country should send a person back to a country where they face **serious threats to their life, freedom, or safety**,

such as torture, persecution, or inhumane treatment. This principle applies not only to refugees but also to asylum seekers and migrants whose rights may be at risk if returned.

It is considered customary international law, meaning it is binding even on countries that are not party to refugee treaties. Venezuela has undergone a severe political and economic collapse marked by hyperinflation, authoritarian governance, food insecurity, violence, and the breakdown of healthcare and public services. Over **7.7 million Venezuelans** have fled the country, making it one of the largest displacement crises in

the world. The worsening conditions in Venezuela—where returning migrants may face state repression, hunger, or lack of medical care—clearly meet the threshold of “serious harm” under international law. As such, forcibly returning Venezuelan nationals without evaluating their need for international protection **violates the principle of non-refoulement** and places their lives in jeopardy.

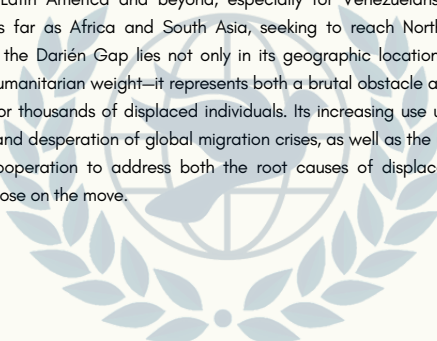
Despite these obligations, there is growing evidence that many countries in Latin America and beyond are violating this principle. Migrants fleeing through the **Darien Gap**—a hazardous jungle corridor between Colombia and Panama—are often subjected to **deportations, detentions, or push backs** without due process. Several countries in the region have been reported to **deny Venezuelans access to asylum procedures**, sometimes using detention as a way to discourage further migration. In some cases, deportation flights have returned people directly to Venezuela, even though they may face persecution or hardship upon arrival. These actions not only breach the legal requirement of non-refoulement but also expose already vulnerable individuals to additional trauma and violence, including from state or non-state actors in their home country.

A related and equally serious concern is the **arbitrary detention** of migrants and asylum seekers in transit or host countries. Venezuelan migrants in particular are frequently detained **without legal justification, access to legal aid, or fair hearings**. Detention facilities are often overcrowded, unsanitary, and lacking in basic humanitarian standards. Children, women, and elderly individuals are especially vulnerable in these conditions. Arbitrary detention not only undermines the rights of migrants but is also used as a tool to expedite deportation or prevent individuals from seeking asylum altogether—making it a direct violation of the legal protections owed to those seeking refuge. These practices have been widely condemned by human rights organizations and represent a broader trend of **criminalizing migration** rather than protecting human dignity.

Ultimately, the **systematic abuse of migrants in the Darién Gap**, the **violation of non-refoulement**, the **use of arbitrary detention**, and the **root causes of forced migration**—particularly Venezuela’s economic and political crisis—are deeply interconnected. They reflect a failure of international solidarity and legal responsibility in the face of one of the most urgent migration crises of our time. The agenda rightly emphasizes the need for comprehensive deliberation on these issues, not just from a humanitarian perspective but from a legal one. States must be held accountable for upholding their obligations under international law, protecting vulnerable populations, and ensuring that migration management is rooted in human rights, not repression or exclusion. A unified international response is essential to prevent further violations and to ensure that those fleeing crises are treated with the dignity, protection, and legal fairness they deserve.

The Significance of the Darien Gap

The Darien Gap is one of the most dangerous and strategically significant natural barriers in the Americas. Stretching approximately 100 miles (160 kilometers) along the border between Colombia and Panama, it is a dense, roadless swath of rainforest, swamps, rivers, and steep mountains that interrupts the otherwise continuous Pan-American Highway—making it the only break in the network that runs from Alaska to Argentina. Its terrain is extremely challenging: thick jungle vegetation, heavy rainfall, treacherous mud, venomous animals, and flash floods make passage perilous. On top of the natural hazards, the Darién Gap is also plagued by human threats. The region is known for the presence of armed groups, including remnants of guerrilla factions, drug traffickers, and criminal gangs that extort, rob, or abuse migrants who attempt the crossing. Despite these dangers, the Darién Gap has become a critical corridor for migrants from Latin America and beyond, especially for Venezuelans, Haitians, and people from as far as Africa and South Asia, seeking to reach North America. The significance of the Darién Gap lies not only in its geographic location but also in its symbolic and humanitarian weight—it represents both a brutal obstacle and a desperate path to hope for thousands of displaced individuals. Its increasing use underscores the growing scale and desperation of global migration crises, as well as the urgent need for international cooperation to address both the root causes of displacement and the protection of those on the move.



Brief History of The Issue



1811 – Venezuela declares independence from Spain, becoming the first South American country to do so.

1819-1830 – Venezuela became part of Gran Colombia under Simon Bolívar, then gained full independence in 1830.

1830-1958: Political Instability and Military Rule

Venezuela faced cycles of civil wars, military dictatorships, and brief democratic periods. Economy largely agrarian until the discovery of oil in the 20th century.

1958-1998: Democratic Period and Oil Boom

1958 – The dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez is overthrown; Venezuela becomes a democratic republic.

1970s – Massive oil revenues lead to economic boom, but also foster corruption and inequality.

1989 – “Caracazo” riots erupt over IMF-backed austerity measures; hundreds killed by security forces.

1992 – Failed coup attempt led by Hugo Chávez; he is jailed but gains national prominence.

1999 – Hugo Chávez becomes president, launches the “Bolivarian Revolution,” rewriting the constitution and nationalizing industries.

2000s – Initially high oil prices fund social programs; poverty temporarily declines.

2002 – Brief coup attempt against Chávez fails; polarization intensifies.

2010 – Economic decline begins with falling oil prices and state mismanagement.

2013 – Chávez dies; Nicolás Maduro assumes presidency amid growing unrest.

2014-2016 – Hyperinflation begins; GDP plummets. Shortages of food, medicine, and basic services intensify.

2015 – Venezuelan refugee crisis begins to emerge as millions flee to Colombia, Brazil, and Peru.

2017 – Protests met with brutal crackdowns; opposition-controlled National Assembly is stripped of power.

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2017 – Protests met with brutal crackdowns; opposition-controlled National Assembly is stripped of power.

2018–2020: Migration Crisis Expands – Entry into the Darién Gap

2018 – Regional visa restrictions make it harder for Venezuelans to travel legally; Darién Gap route begins to be used.

2019 – Over 4 million Venezuelans have fled. Refugee status has become a political issue in Latin America.

2020 – COVID-19 leads to border closures, pushing migrants to more dangerous paths, including the Darién Gap.

2021 – Record 130,000+ migrants cross the Darien Gap; many face death, rape, extortion, and abandonment.

2022 – UN and NGOs report alarming abuse rates; Venezuelans become the largest nationality among crossers.

2023 – Reports emerge of arbitrary detention of Venezuelan migrants in Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico.

2023 – Non-refoulement violations spotlighted as countries begin deportations without proper refugee screenings.

2024 – Number of migrants crossing Darién Gap exceeds 250,000; UNHCR urges adherence to international law.

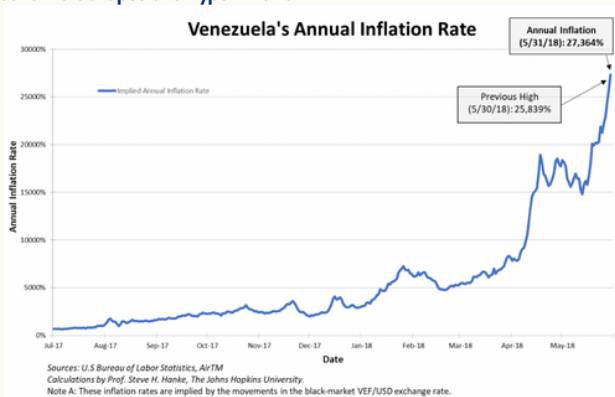
2024 – Panama and U.S. sign controversial agreement to intercept and deport migrants, drawing international criticism.

2025–Venezuela's economy remains unstable with continuing hyperinflation and authoritarian control. Regional dialogue initiated by the UN focuses on safe migration corridors and reinforcing refugee protections. NGOs and watchdogs continue documenting abuses and advocating for migrant rights.

The Venezuelan Crisis: An Overview

Venezuela has experienced one of the most devastating economic collapses in modern history, marked by hyperinflation, socio-political instability, and a mass humanitarian crisis. Once one of the richest countries in Latin America due to its vast oil reserves, Venezuela's downfall is a result of years of poor economic policies, mismanagement, and external pressures, including sanctions.

1. Economic Collapse and Hyperinflation



Source: Forbes

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevehanke/2018/05/31/venezuelas-inflation-breaches-25000/>

Between 2013 and 2023, Venezuela's living standards plummeted by 74%, marking the fifth-largest decline in modern economic history during peacetime. The collapse was the result of severely poor macroeconomic decisions made during the 2000s oil boom. Instead of preserving oil income, Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro pursued pro-cyclical fiscal policies that increased government expenditure and resulted in enormous deficits. These deficits were financed with excessive external borrowing—more than \$100 billion—and then by printing money, which triggered hyperinflation. After 2013, the country's reliance on oil earnings backfired, as global oil prices plummeted. With little savings and rising debt, the Venezuelan government was forced to reduce imports while printing

more money to fill the difference. This produced a vicious cycle: as inflation climbed, the government printed more currency to keep expenditures going, further driving inflation. By November 2017, inflation reached 50% per month, formally entering a hyperinflationary spiral that devastated the domestic economy. By 2021, millions of Venezuelans found their salaries worthless and businesses shut down across the country. Two more major reasons for hyperinflation in Venezuela is because the government implemented multiple official exchange rates alongside a thriving black market for U.S. dollars and the government heavily subsidized access to foreign currency for political allies while the broader population faced a severe shortage. This dual exchange rate system fueled corruption, distorted markets, and caused the national currency, the bolívar, to lose nearly all value. Also during the oil boom, the government maintained low prices for gasoline and electricity. This fostered smuggling and excessive consumption while depleting public funds. These unsustainable subsidies amounted to more than 10% of Venezuela's GDP in some years, contributing significantly to the country's rising budget deficit, which eventually led to its economic collapse.

2. Socio-Political Instability

The economic freefall triggered severe socio-political consequences. The government lost legitimacy among large parts of the population due to widespread poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic goods. Instead of introducing economic reforms, Maduro's regime tightened state control, doubling down on currency, price, and profit controls, and continued to allocate subsidized dollars to political allies despite collapsing reserves.

These policies, coupled with widespread corruption and mismanagement, intensified public dissatisfaction, leading to waves of protests and government crackdowns. Venezuela's democracy eroded as state institutions were weakened, the judiciary politicized, and opposition leaders persecuted. The crisis severely damaged the state's ability to maintain basic infrastructure and public services, deepening the collapse of governance and trust in institutions.

One major reason for the same is militarization of the state and repression of dissent in Venezuela because as the opposition grew, the Maduro regime increasingly relied on the military and paramilitary groups (such as the "colectivos") to maintain control. Security forces were used to suppress protests, silence critics, and intimidate communities, leading to widespread human rights abuses. According to international organizations, thousands of extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests have occurred since 2014, further entrenching authoritarian rule and pushing the country deeper into crisis.

3. Humanitarian crisis in the region

The hyperinflation problem resulted in a massive humanitarian calamity. Imports fell from more than \$80 billion in 2012 to \$10 billion in 2017, resulting in shortages of food, medicine, and other necessary products. Millions of Venezuelans could no longer afford to access basic commodities, resulting in widespread hunger, the resurgence of preventable diseases, and the breakdown of the healthcare system.

As the situation worsened, more than 7.7 million Venezuelans abandoned the nation, many crossing into Colombia, Peru, Chile, and the United States in pursuit of safety and opportunity. The migratory issue pressured surrounding countries, resulting in one of the world's greatest refugee surges in recent decades.

In recent times food insecurity has become a defining feature of the crisis. As of 2024, approximately 5.1 million Venezuelans are not receiving adequate nutrition, with many surviving on just one meal per day . A 2017 survey revealed that over 60% of Venezuelans experienced hunger due to insufficient funds for food, and about 25% were consuming two or fewer meals daily.



The Darien gap: An overview

The Darien Gap has become one of the most perilous stretches along today's migration routes. Tucked between Colombia and Panama, this remote and roadless expanse covers more than sixty miles of unforgiving jungle, steep hills, and swampy lowlands. It's the only overland link between Central and South America, yet there are no bridges or highways—just dense rainforest and difficult terrain. Over the past few years, as air and sea routes have become harder to access due to stricter immigration controls, more migrants are turning to the Darién as their only option.

The journey is far from easy. Migrants who attempt the crossing face a range of dangers. The environment itself is incredibly harsh—heavy rains, slippery mud, and thick vegetation make every step a challenge. Disease is another serious risk, especially without clean water or medical support. Then there's the constant threat of violence. Criminal groups operating in the region often target migrants for robbery, extortion, or worse. Still, people continue to make the journey, driven by the hope of finding safety and opportunity elsewhere.

In 2023 alone, more than half a million people crossed the Darién Gap—an all-time record, according to the Panamanian government. That number is more than double what it was the year before, and a dramatic rise from the mere hundreds who attempted it each year just a decade ago.

Shockingly, about 20 percent of those making the trek were children, many carried by their parents or walking for days on end through mud and rain.

The ripple effects of this mass migration are being felt in the Indigenous territories the route cuts through. These communities are often the first to encounter migrants, and their resources—food, water, shelter—are being stretched thin. Aid organizations are doing what they can, providing emergency shelters and medical help when people reach Panama. But the Panamanian government, overwhelmed by the scale of the movement, has begun cracking down on unauthorized border crossings and tightening asylum rules.

Experts from the World Bank warn that migration across Latin America is likely to keep increasing, driven by a mix of economic uncertainty, political instability, and a warming climate. And with COVID-19 travel restrictions lifted across much of the region, the pathways that were once closed have now reopened. The Darién Gap, once an impassable frontier, has become a lifeline for many—and a symbol of the lengths people are willing to go for a chance at a better life.

1. Conditions on the ground

The situation on the ground in the Darién Gap has become increasingly dire. In just a

decade—from 2010 to 2020—around 120,000 people braved the unforgiving jungle between Colombia and Panama. But things have escalated dramatically. In 2022 alone, over 248,000 migrants made the crossing. And now, the numbers are even higher.

With visa access tightening across the region and newer, harsher migration policies being enforced, many people are left with no choice but to turn to more dangerous alternatives. For thousands, that means venturing through the Darién Gap a place known not just for its wild terrain, but for the immense risks it poses to human life.

Currently, Panamanian authorities are seeing anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 people arrive at their borders *every single day*, a *staggering* sixfold increase compared to the same time last year. It's not just a number; it's the strain this surge puts on already limited resources that paints the real picture. Every day, between 80 and 100 wooden canoes, each packed with about 25 exhausted migrants, arrive at the Lajas Blancas temporary migrant center. These boats carry men, women, and children who have just endured days of hiking through thick jungle, crossing rivers, dodging criminal gangs, and surviving without shelter, clean water, or proper food.

At the landing site, officials like Rodriguez try to manage the chaos by listening to complaints, answering desperate questions, and doing what they can to restore some sense of order. But the humanitarian system is stretched thin. Sanitation is inadequate. Medical care is limited. And the sheer number of people coming in has overwhelmed local infrastructure and aid workers alike.

The Darien Gap, once known for its isolation, is now a flashpoint in a growing regional crisis. The rising numbers reflect more than just statistics they reflect human desperation, policy failures, and a lack of safe alternatives for people simply seeking a better life.

2.Human right violation

For thousands of migrants crossing the Darien Gap, the journey is not only grueling, it is deeply dangerous. Among the greatest and most heartbreaking risks is sexual violence, which disproportionately affects women and members of the LGBTI community. These individuals, already fleeing persecution and instability, are often left without protection in the lawless, jungle-covered border between Colombia and Panama.

And the dangers don't stop there. A recent report by the Human Rights Committee, published in March, revealed a disturbing range of additional threats: murders, disappearances, human trafficking, robbery, and constant intimidation by organized crime groups that operate freely in the region. In this stretch of rainforest, criminal elements exploit the vulnerability of those who are simply trying to survive.

These human rights violations are compounded by the sheer brutality of the environment itself. Migrants must contend with wild animals, venomous snakes, and fast-flowing rivers. In the dry season, the trek takes four to seven days if they're lucky. During the rainy

season, which stretches for nine months of the year, the terrain becomes a muddy trap. The journey can take up to ten days, and accidents are far more common.

Felix, a migrant from Venezuela, shared his harrowing experience: “The worst thing for me, as I don’t know how to swim, was to see people drowning and falling down ravines. I don’t know how many dead bodies I’ve seen.” His words speak to the trauma that many carry long after they’ve emerged from the jungle.

People like Benjamín Rodríguez, a human rights officer with the Panamanian Ombudsman’s Office, hear these stories every day. He listens carefully, documenting each account to ensure that the suffering is not invisible. The Ombudsman’s Office, in partnership with the UN Human Rights Office’s Regional Office for Central America and the Caribbean (ROCA), works to shed light on these violations and advocate for the protection of migrants’ rights.

Andrea Ospina, a member of ROCA’s migration team, explains that addressing these issues takes more than just documenting abuse—it requires collaboration. “Dialogue and working with officials are essential in helping migrants,” she says. Through training programs, capacity building, and on-the-ground studies, they are trying to better understand what migrants need and how to safeguard their basic rights.

Ospina also highlighted the urgent need for preparedness. “We are working with the Human Mobility Group of the United Nations System in Panama, as well as with the Panamanian authorities, to develop a contingency plan that can be activated when there is a surge in the number of migrants,” she said.

The situation in the Darién is not just a humanitarian emergency it is a crisis of human rights. And while many organizations are doing what they can, the scale of the suffering demands a far stronger, coordinated, and compassionate response from the international community.

3.Role of criminal networks

The Darien Gap, a thick, unforgiving strip of jungle connecting Central and South America, has long resisted roads, control, and the ambitions of modern states. Once avoided even by explorers, it is now being crossed in record numbers by migrants fleeing hardship and conflict. In 2023 alone, more than 400,000 people have taken this treacherous path. They come not just from nearby countries like Venezuela, Ecuador, and Haiti, but from across the globe. Increasingly, entire families with children—many without passports or papers are risking everything for the chance at a safer future.

But this surge in movement is not unfolding in a vacuum. Behind the scenes and often in plain sight—criminal networks have embedded themselves deep into the region, reshaping every aspect of the migrant journey. Chief among them is the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or the Gaitanistas, Colombia’s largest criminal organisation

Ostensibly a drug trafficking group, they now dominate the Darién region, turning migration into yet another profitable racket.

The Gaitanistas have effectively filled the void left by the absence of the state on the Colombian side of the jungle. They control the trails, the timing, and the prices. Every movement has a price tag, and every dollar a migrant spends on guides, passage, or basic survival feeds into this sprawling criminal enterprise. The group even markets itself as a kind of brutal "protector" of migrants, enforcing strict rules against violence along their routes. But this so-called protection is coercive and self-serving; their discipline isn't about safety it's about control and profit.

Meanwhile, on the Panamanian side, the landscape shifts. Here, the grip of organized crime is looser, but the physical threats are far more immediate and raw. Local gangs—many made up of desperate, disenfranchised youths prey on vulnerable migrants. They rob, assault, and rape with near total impunity. Aid groups reported nearly 200 cases of sexual violence in Panama's Darién region in just the first half of 2023. And disturbingly, even state officials working in reception centers have been accused of abusing women in their care.

The entire region operates in a legal and moral grey zone. Reporting crimes is virtually impossible, and even where justice systems exist, fear silences most victims. Corruption, impunity, and violence thrive, making the Darién not just a geographical challenge, but a humanitarian catastrophe shaped by the influence of organized crime.

For many migrants, the ordeal doesn't end once they emerge from the jungle. Private buses await at a steep price to take them to the Costa Rican border, the next leg of a journey that still stretches for thousands of miles. Every step is steeped in vulnerability, and every interaction comes with the risk of being exploited by someone whether a smuggler, gang member, or corrupt official.

Local communities, too, are reeling from the impact. Traditional ways of life are being abandoned, and fears are growing about the long-term environmental destruction brought by both the migration boom and the criminal economies that follow in its wake. Illegal logging, mining, and extortion now shadow the migrant trails.

The Darien Gap is no longer just a natural barrier. It has become a theater where organized crime flourishes unchecked, exploiting human desperation while leaving behind scars on the land, on communities, and on the people who pass through it. Without coordinated action to dismantle these criminal structures and uphold human rights, the jungle will remain not only a path of hope, but one of deep and preventable suffering.

The Venezuela economic crisis: A catalyst for mass migration through the Darién gap

The collapse of Venezuela's economy and the ensuing humanitarian crisis have been pivotal in driving the surge of migrants traversing the treacherous Darién Gap—a dense jungle corridor between Colombia and Panama that has become a critical juncture for those journeying toward North America.

1. Mass Migration Fueled by Economic Collapse

What began as a sluggish flow of persons leaving in search of food, work, and safety has developed into a full-blown humanitarian migration crisis, rooted in years of economic mismanagement and political repression.

Between 2013 and 2023, Venezuela's economy collapsed due to hyperinflation, currency devaluation, and crumbling infrastructure. With food increasingly scarce, medicine nearly nonexistent, and wages rendered worthless, survival in Venezuela became a daily battle. Millions of Venezuelans, many of whom were educated, skilled, and previously middle-class, were compelled to flee due to necessity rather than desire. Initially, many people sought asylum in neighboring nations like as Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile. These nations bore the initial brunt of the refugee wave, welcoming migrants with limited resources of their own.

However, as time passed, host countries struggled to cope with Venezuela's humanitarian crisis. Job markets tightened, social services became overburdened, and the cost of living soared in already shaky economies. As situations in host nations worsened, many Venezuelans found themselves at a dead end. Faced with the alternative of staying in poverty or risking everything for the hope of a better life, millions cast their gaze north—toward the United States. However, to get there, they would have to cross one of the world's most perilous migratory routes, the Darién Gap.

2. Venezuelans: The Predominant Migrant Group in the Region

In 2022, an estimated 150,000 Venezuelans tried the trip. That figure more than doubled by 2023, with over 328,000 Venezuelan men, women, and children risking their lives to cross the treacherous terrain. This startling growth demonstrates not just the scope of Venezuela's internal breakdown, but also the utter desperation of its people, who are willing to endure wild animals, rapid rivers, criminal gangs, and lethal conditions in order to reach safety.

By mid-2024, Venezuelans remained the single greatest nationality crossing the Darién Gap, with 158,000 people officially registered. However, the actual numbers may be greater, as many cross without papers or assistance, disappearing into the jungle's darkness.

These migrants aren't just statistics, they are vulnerable mothers with infants, teenagers forced to flee, fathers trying to feed their families and elderly people with nothing left to lose. This journey is not just a physical crossing but a humanitarian story of survival and unimaginable suffering. The scale of their migration reflects a national collapse so profound that walking through one of the world's most dangerous terrains becomes a risk worth taking.



Arbitrary Detention & Non-Refoulement

Panama has found itself at the center of a deepening regional migration crisis, especially along its border with Colombia in the treacherous Darién Gap. The massive influx of migrants—particularly from Venezuela—has overwhelmed Panama's limited infrastructure and prompted policy responses aimed at controlling the flow. Yet, these measures raise significant human rights concerns, particularly related to the principles of **non-refoulement** and **arbitrary detention**. Despite international obligations, including those established under the **American Convention on Human Rights** and the **Refugee Convention**, Panama has repeatedly fallen short, often detaining migrants automatically and for extended periods, without access to legal recourse or asylum procedures. These detentions have, in some cases, lasted indefinitely and have been exacerbated by public health emergencies such as COVID-19. The **Vélez Loor v. Panama** case, decided by the **Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR)** in 2010, is a landmark ruling that underscored Panama's duty to reform its immigration detention practices and uphold the rights of migrants. However, more than a decade later, many of the structural issues identified in the case remain unresolved.

The **Vélez Loor case** emerged after Jesús Tranquilino Vélez Loor, an Ecuadorian migrant, was arrested and detained in Panama for entering the country without authorization. He was imprisoned in 2002 in conditions that violated several basic human rights, including access to healthcare, clean water, and due process. The IACHR ruled in 2010 that Panama had violated multiple articles of the American Convention—especially **Article 7(3)**, which prohibits arbitrary detention. The court ordered Panama to adopt structural reforms and bring its immigration practices in line with international human rights standards. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, these obligations were again brought into question as Panama detained migrants—including women and children—for months at overcrowded camps like **La Peñita** and **Lajas Blancas**, citing public health concerns. The IACHR reaffirmed its concerns in 2020, issuing new resolutions urging Panama to uphold the rights of detainees, avoid indefinite detention, and ensure proper access to healthcare, legal aid, and humane living conditions—even during crises.

These detentions, often conducted automatically and without proper legal justification, constitute a clear violation of the prohibition on **arbitrary detention** and undermine the right to **non-refoulement**. Migrants are frequently held without being informed of their rights, denied access to legal representation, and not given opportunities to apply for

asylum. The overcrowding of camps during the pandemic not only endangered migrants' health but also exposed systemic weaknesses in Panama's immigration system. Although the government later closed La Peñita and opened new facilities like **San Vicente**, concerns remain about the lack of long-term, rights-based solutions. The reimplementation of the **"Controlled Flow Operation"** to manage the movement of migrants is a temporary logistical response that does not address deeper legal and humanitarian obligations. Moreover, restrictions on border crossings—though justified by safety concerns—may force migrants to take even more dangerous routes, heightening the risks of violence, exploitation, and death in the Darién Gap.

Panama has made some efforts to improve its migration system, including limiting detention periods to ten days and coordinating with Colombia to regulate cross-border flows. However, key elements of compliance with international law remain absent. Migrants often lack information about their right to seek asylum, and Panamanian immigration officers sometimes discourage them from applying—either by omission or misinformation. This undermines the **principle of non-refoulement**, as it may result in individuals being deported or moved along without adequate assessment of the dangers they would face if returned to their countries of origin. Under **Article 25** and **Article 34** of the Refugee Convention, Panama is obligated to ensure access to legal assistance and support the naturalization of refugees when possible. Yet, barriers such as language, lack of legal counsel, and cultural misunderstandings persist, often leaving migrants in prolonged limbo without recourse or protection.

Ultimately, resolving Panama's migrant detention crisis requires both national reforms and international cooperation. While Panama is bound by regional and international legal standards, it faces practical challenges that cannot be addressed without additional resources and support. The **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)** could play a stronger role in monitoring and reporting abuses, especially as they relate to **U.S. border externalization policies**, which contribute to the regional buildup of migrants in countries like Panama. If the U.S. and other regional powers were to provide meaningful aid and policy alignment with human rights frameworks, countries like Panama could better uphold the principles of **non-refoulement** and eliminate the widespread use of **arbitrary detention**. Respecting migrants' rights is not just a legal obligation—it is a moral and humanitarian necessity, especially in the face of one of the hemisphere's largest displacement crises.

1. Detention of Venezuela

Since January 2022, more than 440,000 Venezuelans—by far the largest group of any nationality—have braved the brutal crossing of the Darién Gap. They are not chasing

dreams as much as they are fleeing a nightmare. Venezuela's ongoing humanitarian crisis has left millions without access to food, medicine, or basic public services, while repression by security forces, armed groups, and gangs has only intensified the desperation. For many, walking through one of the world's most dangerous jungles seems like their only remaining chance at survival.

But what awaits them in the Darién is often another circle of suffering. Over the course of four research trips between April 2022 and June 2023, Human Rights Watch interviewed nearly 300 people to understand this crisis from the ground up—migrants, survivors of serious abuses, humanitarian workers, government officials, and migration experts. What they found was a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in silence, disproportionately affecting Venezuelans, who are now being pushed into the most perilous corners of the Americas due to restrictive visa policies.

In recent years, governments across the region—including Mexico and several in Central America—have imposed new visa requirements on Venezuelan nationals. What might appear to be routine immigration controls on paper have, in practice, shut the door on legal pathways and pushed thousands into the jaws of the Darién Gap. The sharp rise in Venezuelans making this journey directly tracks with the timing of these restrictions—a stark reminder of how policy can either protect or endanger lives.

Along the Colombian side of the jungle, the Gulf Clan—a powerful armed group deeply entrenched in drug trafficking—rules the routes migrants must take. They decide who gets to operate in the area, what services are allowed, and what price is paid. Nothing moves without their say-so. Venezuelan migrants, often impoverished and traveling with children, must pay high fees—reportedly around \$125 per person—for passage through cartel-controlled territory. The group is estimated to have earned up to \$57 million in less than a year from this illicit migration economy. If migrants fail to pay or break the clan's rules, the consequences can be brutal.

Once inside the jungle, the horrors multiply. On the Panamanian side, criminal gangs—less organized but no less dangerous—frequently rob and assault travelers. Women and girls, many of them Venezuelan, are particularly vulnerable. Some have spoken of being hunted through the trees. According to Doctors Without Borders, nearly 1,000 victims of sexual violence have been treated since 2021—most of them women, many of them Venezuelan. One Haitian mother traveling with her husband and baby recounted how armed men separated her from the group and assaulted her at gunpoint, taking even the money she'd hidden in her shoes.

Beyond the physical violence, detention looms as another threat. Even after surviving the jungle, migrants—especially Venezuelans—often face detention, deportation, or prolonged uncertainty in the countries they arrive in. While many hope to apply for

Regionally, there are important frameworks that should guide a more coordinated response. The **1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees** significantly expanded the definition of a refugee to include people fleeing generalized violence, massive human rights violations, and internal unrest—criteria that clearly apply to many crossing the Darién today. Although widely adopted across Latin America, the practical application of this expanded refugee definition varies by country. More recently, the **Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection**, signed in 2022 by 21 countries including Panama, Colombia, and the U.S., calls for a collective approach to migration management. It promotes expanding legal pathways, protecting vulnerable groups, and sharing responsibility. Yet this declaration is non-binding and lacks enforcement mechanisms, limiting its impact on the rapidly unfolding crisis.

From an international legal standpoint, multiple human rights instruments are relevant. Both Colombia and Panama are parties to the **1951 Refugee Convention** and its **1967 Protocol**, which enshrine the right to seek asylum and the principle of **non-refoulement**, meaning migrants cannot be sent back to countries where they face persecution. The **UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime** and its accompanying protocols on smuggling and trafficking also apply, especially in relation to criminal networks like the Gulf Clan, which profit heavily from controlling migration routes. Additional protections for migrants are provided under international agreements such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention Against Torture, which protect against arbitrary detention, mistreatment, and violence.

On the ground, several humanitarian organizations are actively engaged in response efforts. Agencies like **UNHCR**, the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, and **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** offer legal assistance, medical care, and psychosocial support to migrants in transit. The **Panamanian Ombudsman's Office** and the **UN Human Rights Regional Office for Central America and the Caribbean (ROCA)** are also involved in monitoring rights violations, gathering testimonies, and working with local authorities to improve conditions. While these efforts are vital, they are hampered by the limited capacity of states and the widespread presence of criminal networks.

However, significant legal and operational challenges remain. There is rampant **impunity** for crimes committed against migrants, especially in the jungle where state presence is minimal. Victims of sexual violence, trafficking, and robbery rarely receive justice, and many are afraid to report abuse due to fear of retribution or deportation. **Due process violations** are also common, with migrants often unaware of their legal rights or denied access to timely asylum procedures. Additionally, many countries in the region have adopted **deterrence-based policies**, such as new visa requirements or militarized

border enforcement, which violate international protections and drive migrants toward more dangerous routes like the Darién Gap.

To address the crisis more effectively, there is an urgent need to implement **region-wide protections** that grant legal status to displaced populations like Venezuelans and Haitians, and ensure access to fair asylum processes. There should also be a **regional responsibility-sharing mechanism** to distribute the costs and duties of refugee protection equitably among countries, with special attention to migrants' individual circumstances, such as family ties or community connections. Most importantly, states must take stronger steps to enforce the rule of law in the Darién region, dismantle the criminal enterprises preying on vulnerable people, and uphold the human rights of those in transit.

This multi-dimensional challenge calls for policies grounded in **human dignity, legal accountability, and regional solidarity**—only then can the humanitarian and legal crisis unfolding in the Darién Gap begin to be addressed with justice and care.

3. Alleged Breaches in Practice

Sexual assaults, robberies, extortion, and trafficking have become distressingly common along this treacherous route. Even after crossing into Panama, migrants continue to face abuse, sometimes even at the hands of officials stationed at state-run reception centers. The jungle itself offers little refuge, as organized criminal groups and opportunistic local gangs operate with near-total impunity, preying on those with no means of defense. The Panamanian government, while legally bound to protect migrants and refugees, has not maintained a strong enough presence in the Darién to ensure safety and uphold justice. Criminals roam freely, and victims rarely have access to safe mechanisms for reporting crimes. In many cases, there are no investigations, no arrests, and no accountability. Migrants, often unaware of their rights, are left to navigate a legal and physical minefield, with some being deported or detained without a fair chance to apply for asylum. The principle of non-refoulement meant to prevent people from being sent back into danger is sometimes ignored, raising serious questions about due process and legal protections.

Policies across the region have only made things worse. Tougher visa rules and border enforcement measures have shut safer, legal routes, effectively forcing people to risk their lives by crossing through the Darién. This is especially true for Venezuelan migrants, who have been disproportionately affected by tightened immigration controls. With few alternatives, they take on a perilous journey through thick jungle, dangerous rivers, and lawless stretches of land in search of safety and stability.

And it's not just the migrants who are suffering. Indigenous communities, whose lands

lie in the path of the migrant flow, are also facing deep disruptions. These communities were neither consulted nor compensated, yet their territories are now being used and sometimes damaged by the waves of people and the informal networks that support them. The environmental toll is growing, and the cultural fabric of these groups is under increasing strain.

While humanitarian agencies do what they can, offering shelter, food, medical aid, and psychological support the scale of the crisis far exceeds current capacities. Panama's approach has been largely reactive, lacking a comprehensive strategy that prioritizes both humanitarian needs and long-term solutions. The migration through the Darién Gap is not just a logistical challenge; it is a profound human crisis that calls for a deeper commitment to justice, safety, and dignity for those who are simply trying to survive.



Measures taken by UN

1.Measures taken by UN in Darien Gap

As the number of migrants and refugees crossing the Darién Gap topped 500,000 in 2023, more than double from the previous year, the United Nations increased its efforts to address the region's rising humanitarian crisis. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have led calls for immediate, coordinated regional action to protect the lives and rights of those attempting the risky trek. In response, these organizations have provided life-saving humanitarian relief to vulnerable people, including shelter, medical care, food, and transportation, many of whom are from crisis-affected nations including Venezuela, Haiti, and Ecuador.

HIAS' cross-border program is one of the most noteworthy UN-supported projects, having been named one of the top ten global best practices by the United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) and the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). The initiative operates in Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, and Honduras, providing psychological first aid and legal help to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), as well as specialized protection services to vulnerable women and LGBTQ+ migrants. This program is supported by AECID, UNHCR, and the Hilton Foundation. In addition to providing direct services, HIAS and its partners do regular research and field reporting to tailor their humanitarian response to the region's quickly shifting migration patterns.

Furthermore, UNHCR and IOM continue to promote for the establishment of secure, legal migratory channels, particularly to the United States, to minimize reliance on dangerous and irregular routes such as the Darién Gap. They underline the importance of a comprehensive, regional migration strategy based on cooperation, solidarity, and shared responsibility among nations. Finally, through its regional presence in 11 Latin American and Caribbean countries, HIAS, in collaboration with UN agencies, works to ensure the long-term inclusion and protection of more than 22 million displaced persons as a result of conflict, economic instability, and climate change. These joint efforts demonstrate the UN's commitment to a human-centered response that prioritizes safety, dignity, and long-term solutions for migrants and refugees in the Americas.

2.Measures taken by UN to address hyperinflation in Venezuela

Through its Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), the UN has taken a number of focused actions to alleviate Venezuela's dire humanitarian situation, especially in reaction to hyperinflation and the breakdown of vital services. With a target of reaching 1.5 million children by 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP), which started operations in 2021,

has concentrated on providing school meals to children in areas that are at risk. Additionally, it has given children under five and pregnant women nutritional supplements. In terms of medical assistance, organizations such as WHO/PAHO and UNICEF have rehabilitated primary healthcare facilities in over ten states and supplied emergency medical kits, necessary medications, and vaccines.

They additionally supplied critical COVID-19 materials, including PPE and oxygen concentrators. On the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) front, over 3.5 million people have benefited from improved access to clean water through the installation of water tanks, chlorination systems, and handwashing stations, alongside the distribution of hygiene kits in schools and health facilities. In education, UNICEF has played a key role by rehabilitating over 1,000 schools, supplying learning materials and furniture, supporting remote learning during the pandemic, and launching psychosocial support programs to help children and teachers cope with ongoing challenges. Collectively, these measures represent a vital international effort to mitigate the human impact of Venezuela's economic collapse and ongoing crisis.



Bloc Positions

1. United States of America

In response to the growing migration and humanitarian challenges across Latin America, the United States has adopted a multifaceted approach rooted in regional cooperation, humanitarian aid, and structured migration policy. Recognizing the strain on transit and host countries, the U.S. forged migration management agreements with key partners like Mexico and Guatemala to strengthen border security and streamline legal pathways. In 2023, the Biden administration introduced the “Safe Mobility” program in Colombia, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, providing migrants with access to refugee resettlement, family reunification, and work visas—offering alternatives to irregular migration. Complementing these policy efforts, the U.S. directed substantial humanitarian funding to Central America: \$209.8 million in FY 2021, \$216.3 million in FY2022, and \$139.9 million in FY2023. Acknowledging the Venezuelan crisis, the U.S. pledged \$171 million in March 2023, assisting both internal populations and displaced refugees in Colombia and Ecuador. Colombia, a key regional partner, received \$440 million annually for peace-building initiatives, though environmental support saw a setback with the freezing of \$70 million in aid. Ecuador, confronting spiraling organized crime, appealed to international donors and launched a \$1 billion conservation bond—highlighting a shared regional pursuit of sustainable development and stability. Additionally, the U.S. has worked closely with international organizations like UNHCR and IOM to coordinate aid distribution, enhance data collection on migrant flows, and promote safe, orderly, and humane migration throughout the hemisphere.

2. People's Republic of China

China has acknowledged the growing humanitarian concerns related to the migration crisis through the Darién Gap, particularly with the increasing number of Chinese nationals undertaking this perilous journey. In 2023, over 25,000 Chinese migrants crossed the Darién Gap, making them the fourth-largest nationality group and the largest from outside the Americas to do so. This highlights the broader migration trends and underscores the need for international cooperation to address the root causes of migration, such as economic disparities, political instability, and environmental factors. China recognizes that these issues are interconnected, and addressing them requires a collaborative, multifaceted approach. Economically, China has provided significant financial assistance to Venezuela, with loans totaling between \$50 billion and \$60 billion since 2007, primarily for energy and infrastructure projects. These investments aim to

support Venezuela's economic stability and development, while also fostering stronger bilateral relations. In Latin America, China's engagement includes the China-LAC Cooperation Fund, which consists of a \$2 billion co-financing facility and a \$3 billion investment fund, supporting various sectors such as transportation, technology, and renewable energy. This approach is part of China's broader strategy to strengthen relationships and promote development in Latin America through investment in key sectors.

3.South America

The humanitarian crisis in the Darién Gap and the worsening socio-economic conditions in Venezuela—marked by ongoing hyperinflation, widespread poverty, and political instability—have compelled South American nations to take a leading role in managing the resulting migration flows and humanitarian challenges. Each of these nations—Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama—has developed unique, context-specific responses, ranging from border management and refugee integration to regional cooperation and international appeals for aid.

Brazil has responded proactively to the Venezuelan crisis through its comprehensive initiative, Operação Acolhida (Operation Welcome), launched in 2018. The program provides incoming Venezuelan migrants with humanitarian assistance, including shelter, food, medical care, documentation, and pathways for internal relocation across Brazil. As of late 2023, Brazil has hosted over 500,000 Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers, making it one of the top destination countries. In addition to humanitarian aid, Brazil has implemented integration programs to facilitate access to the labor market and public services. Brazil has also advocated for multilateral engagement and international funding to support host communities. While not directly impacted by the Darién Gap, Brazil has voiced concern over regional migration trends and emphasized the need for coordinated responses rooted in human rights and development. Mexico, though geographically situated outside the Darién region, plays a vital role in the broader migration corridor from South to North America. As a key transit and destination country, Mexico has witnessed increasing arrivals of Venezuelan migrants—many of whom pass through the Darién Gap and Central America before reaching its southern border. In response, Mexico has strengthened its migration management systems, expanded shelter networks, and collaborated closely with the United States through bilateral agreements and regional initiatives such as the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. Mexico has also participated in discussions with other regional governments aimed at enhancing legal pathways for migration and protecting migrants in transit. Although Mexico does not directly host a large number of refugees from the Darién Gap itself, its diplomatic and logistical role in managing regional mobility has been significant,

particularly as migration routes have shifted due to U.S. border policy changes. Colombia has borne one of the heaviest burdens of the Venezuelan exodus, hosting more than 2.9 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees as of 2024. The Colombian government has taken a notably humanitarian approach, granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to eligible Venezuelans, allowing access to healthcare, education, and legal employment. In coordination with international agencies, Colombia has established multiple reception centers and integration programs across the country. Additionally, Colombia has become an important transit country for those continuing their journey northward through the Darién Gap. The Colombian government has conducted joint operations with Panama to monitor migration flows and provide limited humanitarian assistance along the route. Despite facing economic strain and security challenges, Colombia continues to advocate for greater international cooperation and financial support to manage the humanitarian crisis while emphasizing the importance of regional solidarity and burden-sharing.

Ecuador serves as both a transit and destination country for Venezuelan migrants and has played a key role in the regional migration dynamic. With over 500,000 Venezuelans currently residing within its borders, Ecuador has struggled to provide sufficient public services amid its own economic and political challenges, including a surge in organized crime and inflationary pressures. The government has periodically opened registration and regularization processes to help Venezuelan migrants access healthcare, education, and legal work. However, resource limitations and social tensions have complicated the integration process. Ecuador has also contributed to international discussions on human mobility, calling for coordinated border policies and increased donor funding to host countries. Although not directly connected to the Darién Gap, Ecuador's migration policies have had downstream effects on regional movement patterns, including the flow of migrants toward northern transit points.

Panama stands at the heart of the Darién Gap crisis and has faced immense pressure as the first country on the South American side to receive northbound migrants after they cross the treacherous jungle. In 2023 alone, over 520,000 migrants, the majority of whom were Venezuelans, passed through the Darién Gap into Panama—a record-breaking figure that severely strained local infrastructure and humanitarian resources. The Panamanian government, in partnership with international organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM, has provided emergency assistance at reception centers in areas like San Vicente and Lajas Blancas, including food, medical care, and child protection services. Panama has also ramped up security monitoring and anti-smuggling efforts along the migration corridor. Despite these efforts, the country has repeatedly called for increased international aid and regional coordination to manage the crisis,

emphasizing that the burden cannot be borne by transit countries alone. The scale of the challenge has made Panama a focal point in diplomatic conversations on migration management and humanitarian response in the Americas.

4.Middle Eastern Region

Middle Eastern countries have not played a direct or coordinated role in resolving the migration crisis in the Darién Gap, yet their indirect presence in the crisis has grown due to an increasing number of Middle Eastern migrants using this treacherous route to reach North America. Migrants from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, and Yemen—many of whom are fleeing conflict, persecution, or economic hardship—have been documented crossing the Darién jungle in rising numbers. While the Darién Gap was once predominantly traversed by Latin American migrants, it has increasingly become a global migration corridor, with Middle Eastern migrants now among those taking on the dangerous journey, often facing linguistic and cultural barriers, exploitation, and humanitarian risks along the way. Despite their nationals being present in this migration flow, Middle Eastern governments have not undertaken formal diplomatic or humanitarian efforts in the region to address the crisis. In relation to the Venezuelan crisis, some Middle Eastern countries have taken clear political stances, primarily in support of the Maduro government. Iran has been one of Venezuela's closest allies in the region, providing diplomatic backing and economic cooperation, including oil shipments and technical support, especially during periods of international sanctions. Turkey has also expressed political and economic solidarity with Venezuela, offering investments and reiterating support for its sovereignty and stability. While these actions align with broader geopolitical interests and opposition to Western-led intervention, they have not extended to addressing the humanitarian dimensions of Venezuela's economic collapse, including mass displacement and hyperinflation. Overall, the Middle East's engagement in both the Darién Gap migration crisis and the Venezuelan refugee crisis remains limited, characterized more by political alignment than by direct humanitarian involvement.

5.Asian Region

Migrants from Asian nations, including India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan have increasingly used this perilous route to reach North America. In 2017 and 2018, the majority of migrants crossing the Darién originated from Asia, with Indian, Nepalese, and Bangladeshi nationals among the most common. In 2023, the trend continued, with significant numbers of Chinese, Indian, and Afghan migrants traversing the gap. Despite the growing presence of Asian migrants, their home countries have not undertaken formal diplomatic or humanitarian efforts to address the crisis or provide support to their

nationals in the region.

Regarding the Venezuelan crisis, Japan has been actively involved in providing humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America. In February 2023, Japan contributed \$8.9 million to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to enhance protection, humanitarian assistance, and socio-economic inclusion for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Brazil and Peru. This funding aimed to improve access to territory, documentation, asylum procedures, temporary shelters, income-generation opportunities, and information on education and health services . Japan's support underscores its commitment to addressing global displacement crises and assisting vulnerable populations.



Recent Developments

In 2024, Panama saw a significant 42% decrease in migrant crossings through the Darién Gap, with over 300,000 migrants making the perilous journey—down from the previous year's record numbers. This decline is largely attributed to stricter immigration policies and enhanced border controls implemented by Panamanian authorities. The U.S.-Panama agreement on deportation flights, signed in July 2024, also played a role in curbing migration. This initiative, which includes U.S.-funded deportation flights, aims to discourage irregular migration. The first deportation flight, carrying 29 Colombian nationals with criminal records, departed in August 2024, reinforcing the message that the Darién Gap is no longer a viable route for migrants seeking entry into the United States.

The implementation of stringent immigration policies by the U.S. government, including the effective closure of asylum access at the U.S.-Mexico border, has further influenced migration patterns. These policies have contributed to a dramatic reduction in migrant activity through the Darién Gap, with reports indicating that the once-bustling migration route has become nearly deserted. However, Panama faces challenges in deporting Venezuelan migrants due to the suspension of diplomatic relations with Venezuela, following its disputed presidential election in July 2024. This diplomatic rift complicates repatriation efforts, leaving many Venezuelan migrants in a state of uncertainty within Panama.

The drop in migrant numbers has also led to the withdrawal of key humanitarian aid organizations, such as the Red Cross and UNICEF, from areas like Lajas Blancas, raising concerns about the well-being of remaining migrants. Many are stranded without adequate support or resources. In response, Panama has introduced humanitarian measures, including temporary permits that allow certain migrants to stay in the country for up to 90 days for security reasons. This policy targets those deported from the U.S. who do not wish to return to their home countries, offering them a chance to begin legal resettlement processes or consider voluntary return.

At the same time, Panama is working to formalize reverse migration routes as more migrants opt to return to South America due to the strict U.S. immigration policies. These routes, historically used for smuggling, are now being regulated to ensure the safety of migrants and to prevent human trafficking. Through these combined efforts, Panama aims to manage both the decline in migrant numbers and the humanitarian challenges posed by the evolving migration crisis.

Challenges to Policy-Making & Enforcement

1. Humanitarian Concerns and Resource Limitations: The Darién Gap has become a perilous route for migrants, exposing them to life-threatening conditions, including treacherous terrain, disease, and violence from criminal groups. In 2023, over half a million migrants, including a significant number of children, undertook this journey . The UN's capacity to respond is hampered by insufficient funding, as global crises divert resources away from the Americas .

2. Legal and Policy Framework Challenges: The UN must navigate complex legal landscapes, balancing the principle of non-refoulement with the sovereignty of nations. Panama's under-resourced asylum system and recent policy shifts, such as the suspension of Médecins Sans Frontières' operations, raise concerns about the protection of migrants' rights . Additionally, restrictive migration policies in transit countries push migrants towards dangerous routes like the Darién Gap.

3. Operational and Coordination Difficulties: The UN faces operational challenges in coordinating with national governments and other stakeholders. Efforts to provide humanitarian aid are complicated by limited access to remote areas and the presence of organized crime groups controlling migration routes . Moreover, inconsistent policies among countries in the region hinder the development of a cohesive response strategy.

4. Protection of Vulnerable Populations: Ensuring the safety of vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children and victims of sexual violence, is a significant concern. Reports indicate that crimes against migrants in the Darién Gap often go uninvestigated, with limited accountability for perpetrators . The UN must advocate for stronger protection mechanisms and legal recourse for affected individuals.

5. Political and Diplomatic Constraints: The UN's efforts are further complicated by political dynamics, including Panama's recent pledge to shut down the Darién Gap route . Such unilateral actions can undermine regional cooperation and the development of comprehensive migration policies. Diplomatic tensions and varying national interests pose additional hurdles to the UN's policy-making endeavors.

6. Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Constraints: The UN must work within the legal boundaries of national sovereignty. This makes it difficult to enforce international humanitarian or refugee laws without the full cooperation of the Panamanian and Colombian governments. Even when human rights violations are reported, UN agencies cannot take direct action without state permission, limiting their ability to protect migrants effectively or enforce standards like **non-refoulement**.

7. Lack of a Unified Regional Migration Framework: The migration crisis through the Darién Gap is a **regional issue** involving multiple countries—primarily Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, and the U.S. The absence of a **coordinated legal migration framework** across these nations leads to inconsistent asylum policies, detention practices, and migrant treatment. This patchwork approach undermines the UN's ability to implement cohesive, continent-wide solutions.

8. Difficulty Ensuring Accountability for Human Rights Violations: Migrants often report abuses, including **arbitrary detention, extortion, sexual violence, and forced returns**. However, weak institutional accountability mechanisms in the region make it difficult for the UN to pursue justice or reforms. Countries may deny violations or lack the infrastructure to investigate and prosecute offenders, even when international human rights norms are clearly breached.

9. Political Sensitivities and Diplomatic Barriers: The migration crisis is often politicized—both domestically and internationally. Countries like Panama are under pressure from both the U.S. and local populations to restrict migration, even if it conflicts with human rights obligations. The UN faces challenges navigating these **diplomatic sensitivities**, especially when migration is framed as a **security threat** rather than a **humanitarian issue**, limiting its influence on national migration policies.

10. Lack of a Unified Regional Migration Framework: The migration crisis through the Darién Gap is a regional issue involving multiple countries—primarily Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, and the U.S. The absence of a coordinated legal migration framework across these nations leads to inconsistent asylum policies, detention practices, and migrant treatment. This patchwork approach undermines the UN's ability to implement cohesive, continent-wide solutions.

11. Difficulty Ensuring Accountability for Human Rights Violations: Migrants often report abuses, including **arbitrary detention, extortion, sexual violence, and forced returns**. However, weak institutional accountability mechanisms in the region make it difficult for the UN to pursue justice or reforms. Countries may deny violations or lack the infrastructure to investigate and prosecute offenders, even when international human rights norms are clearly breached.

Suggested Topics for Moderated Caucuses

- 1) Deliberating upon the role of regional and foreign actors in addressing the migration crisis caused by hyperinflation in Venezuela, with special emphasis on the debt burden imposed by the Belt and Road Initiative
- 2) Deliberation upon the Role of Migration Agreements and Border Policies in Mitigating Abuse in the Darien Gap, with Special Emphasis on the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis.
- 3) Formulating Sustainable Solutions to Prevent Migrant Abuse in the Darien Gap with Addressing the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis through International Cooperation, Migration Agreements, and Border Policy Reform
- 4) The Dilemma of Sovereignty vs. Humanitarian Obligations: Balancing National Border Control with the Protection of Venezuelan Refugees in the Darien Gap
- 5) Deliberation upon whether the United States should Grant Amnesty to Venezuelan Migrants Crossing its Border in Light of the Humanitarian Crisis.
- 6) Exploring economic cooperation for conflict resolution-Asserting trade incentives, investment programs and economic integration as a tool of peace.
- 7) Evaluating the Role of International Criminal Law in Addressing Systematic Abuse of Venezuelan Migrants.
- 8) Strengthening the Accountability Mechanisms for Violations of Non-Refoulement in the Context of Latin American Transit Routes.
- 9) Strengthening the Mandate of UN Special Rapporteurs in Investigating Arbitrary Detention of Venezuelan Migrants.
- 10) Reinforcing the Responsibility of States to Uphold the Principle of Non-Refoulement Under International Human Rights Law.
- 11) Establishing Rights-Based Early Warning Systems and Crisis Response Protocols to Prevent and Address Migrant Abuse in High-Risk Transit Zones such as the Darién Gap.
- 12) Assessing the Humanitarian Toll of the Venezuelan Crisis: Quantifying Suffering, Displacement, and Abuse Faced by Migrants in Transit through the Darien Gap

External Links & Resources

<https://www.cfr.org/article/crossing-darien-gap-migrants-risk-death-journey-us>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/10/how-treacherous-darien-gap-became-migration-crossroads-americas>

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/maps-and-graphics/2024/01/15/darien-gap-migration-crisis-six-graphs-and-one-map>

<https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/press-releases/child-migration-darien-gap-panama-forty-per-cent-increase-so-far-this-year>

<https://www.cfr.org/background/venezuela-crisis>

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/02/venezuela-inflation-at-10-million-percent-its-time-for-shock-therapy.html>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/02/venezuela-hunger-punishment-and-fear-the-formula-for-repression-used-by-authorities-under-nicolas-maduro/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/02/panama-to-shut-down-darien-gap-migrants-usa>

<https://www.ifrc.org/article/echoes-jungle-unseen-human-stories-darien-gap-0>

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/mind-darien-gap-migration-bottleneck-americas>

Conclusion

The situation in the Darien Gap represents one of the most severe and perilous humanitarian corridors in the Western Hemisphere. It encapsulates the complex interlinking of human rights violations, forced displacement, and economic collapse—particularly as they relate to Venezuelan migrants fleeing hyperinflation, political instability, authoritarian governance, food insecurity, and systemic persecution. The treacherous jungle terrain of the Darién Gap has become a gauntlet of suffering, where migrants, including women and children, are subjected to arbitrary detention, extortion, sexual violence, human trafficking, and inhumane treatment, all in stark violation of international humanitarian and refugee protection principles. The principle of non-refoulement—prohibiting the return of individuals to countries where they face threats to life or freedom—is increasingly being undermined, especially in the aggressive border enforcement and deportation practices carried out by both transit and host nations, often without due process. The absence of safe, accessible, and legal migration pathways has driven countless individuals into the hands of smugglers and transnational criminal networks that exploit their desperation. These challenges are compounded by systemic failures in migration governance, insufficient international support, and a lack of political will to prioritize human rights over national security narratives. Simultaneously, the Venezuelan economic collapse—fueled by hyperinflation, crumbling public services, global economic isolation, and political mismanagement—continues to generate one of the largest and fastest-growing displacement crises in the world, overwhelming neighboring countries such as Colombia, Brazil, and Panama, and placing enormous strain on already fragile asylum and humanitarian systems. In conclusion, only through a coordinated and sustained response—encompassing humanitarian aid, robust legal protections, regional cooperation, international burden-sharing, and long-term strategies for socio-economic stabilization in Venezuela—can the international community uphold the dignity, security, and fundamental rights of Venezuelan migrants, while reinforcing the foundational principles of non-refoulement and global solidarity.