

Background Guide

UN International Organization for Migration

Darién Gap Immigration



JACKRABBIT MUN VI

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HEAD CHAIR LETTER

Hello Honorable Delegates!

My name is Alivia Seard, and I am thrilled to be your head chair for this committee! I can't wait to hear your out-of-the-box solutions and witness your collaboration.

As a third-year delegate and Vice President of our MUN program here at Long Beach Poly High, I genuinely feel that Model UN has been an invaluable experience. I enjoy the debate and love learning about international relations and current events, but what I treasure most about the program is the community that, I believe, is unlike any other. It brings me great joy to see you all becoming a part of that community for JackrabbitMUNVI!

Beyond the pantsuits and placards of MUN, I am co-president of Poly's Creative Writing Club and a member of Female Leadership Academy and book club. I love reading, writing, organizing, dancing and baking (though my decorating skills still leave much to be desired!), and you can often find me watching a political drama. In March, I also had the honor of being a girl delegate for Girl Scouts USA to the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York where I was able to take my MUN knowledge and apply it in the real world.

The topic for this room is fascinating and involves the consideration of immigration policy and the nuances of an imperfect economy in addition to the humanitarian crisis. I have complete faith that you all will address it with the creativity and cognizance that it requires. I wish you the best of luck!

Sincerely,

Alivia Seard

IOM Committee | Head Chair

alivianseard12@gmail.com



VICE CHAIR LETTER

Hello Delegates!

My name is Jack Park, and I will be your vice chair for IOM. I am currently a junior at Long Beach Poly High School, and this is my first year in MUN. Model UN has been such a great experience for me personally, and I have had so much fun interacting with fellow delegates, and I couldn't be more excited to be vice chair for the first time for everyone here. I hope you guys will grow and learn from this room, and also have fun while you're at it!

Some things that I enjoy are cooking (though I'm not the best at it!), playing board games, practicing tennis (Novak Djokovic > everyone), playing piano (Frédéric François Chopin > everyone), and going to the gym. I also enjoy camping and enjoy the wilderness by hiking, swimming, and rock climbing. My favorite spots are Big Bear, Joshua Tree, Sequoia, and Yellowstone!

I hope that you have enjoyed reading a little bit about me, and I hope to get to know you better as well. I cannot wait to meet you all, and I am so excited to chair for you all. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at jackbenjaminpark@gmail.com.

Best Wishes,

Jack Park

IOM Committee | Vice Chair

jackbenjaminpark@gmail.com



RAPPORTEUR LETTER

Esteemed Delegates,

My name is Alina Nhean, and I will be your Rapporteur for the IOM committee this year. The IOM Dais staff worked hard for this committee and I am thrilled to hear all your ideas and solutions!

I joined the Poly MUN program this school year, and it's opened my eyes in so many ways. Learning about different foreign policies and public speaking has allowed me to get out of my comfort zone and apply it to my life. Seeing the chairs, vice-chairs, and rapporteurs run committee inspires me, and now I'm excited to rap for you all!

Outside of MUN, you can probably find me listening to musical soundtracks and occasionally partake in musicals myself. I even directed a short play here at Poly! Besides from theatrical productions, I also serve as the treasurer of the Poly French Club, a volunteer at the Aquarium of the Pacific, and a "certified" web novel expert.

Growing up in a Spanish Dual-Immersion school, I spent the majority of my school curriculum learning about the Latin America region. I'm eager to see the nuances and debates you bring to the table.

I can't wait to see you all in person, happy researching!

Best Wishes,

Alina Nhean

IOM Committee | Rapporteur

alinanhean20@gmail.com



POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 19th**.
- Delegates **must** submit position papers to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers can be submitted through the google form:
 - <https://forms.gle/9Y2CJygwoAwKXPmw7>
- At the top of each paper, include your character/country name, first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.
 - Country Name
 - First Last
 - School Name
 - IOM
- Papers should be submitted as a PDF file
 - Please name the file [Committee_Country]
 - Ex. **IOM_United States**
- Papers should be 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
 - Background & UN Involvement
 - Position of your Country
 - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

Established in 1951, IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

With 175 member states, a further 8 states holding observer status and offices in 171 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.

IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

The IOM Constitution recognizes the link between migration and economic, social and cultural development, as well as to the right of freedom of movement.



TOPIC SYNOPSIS

Among the world's most dangerous migration routes is the Darién Gap. A 97-kilometer strip separating Panama and Colombia, the Darién Gap is the only land-based route connecting South and Central America. Attracting migrants everywhere from Latin America to the Middle East, the Gap has seen over 500,000 migrants pass through its jungle path, many of whom fled their country of origin due to political, economic, and social instability. While the route is relatively expeditious, crossing through the Gap is risky, as lack of the basic services, treacherous topography, and the threat of criminal activity in the region create hostility, particularly for children, who make up one-fifth of the migrants. Despite the Gap's perilous humanitarian impact, criminal organizations are simultaneously generating millions of dollars through human trafficking and strengthening the cartel's presence in Latin American governments. How can the horrific conditions of the Darién Gap be addressed? What are the most effective ways to maneuver strict immigration laws while recognizing the challenges the influx of migrants present? Is it possible to address the root causes that send migrants to the route? Delegates will have to collaborate to address these questions, keeping in mind the complexities of Latin American immigration policies as migrants' lives hang in the balance.



BACKGROUND

The Darién Gap: One of the World's Most Perilous Migration Land Routes

As military conflict, humanitarian crises, and economic downturns have destabilized countries around the world, migration rates have skyrocketed. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 281 million international migrants were recorded in 2020 compared to the 153 million international migrants recorded in 1990. While these numbers alone are cause for concern, many migrants travel through unsafe passages to reach their destination, leading to death, separation of families, injury, illness, and detention. Among the most dangerous of these routes is the Darién Gap, the only missing stretch of road in the Pan-American Highway. A 60-mile strip of land between Colombia and Panama that runs through jungle and mountainous terrain, the Gap's hazardous conditions have led to the death of over 130 migrants since 2021. Despite the danger of the journey, the number of migrants crossing the Darién has increased from under 11,000 annually from 2010-2020, to 250,000 in 2022 and more than 500,000 in 2023. While this is largely explained by the fact that the Gap is the only land-based bridge between Central and South America, the frequency of its usage has only amplified humanitarian concerns and raised questions about the desirability of such a route remaining open.

The Migrants

With economic and political crises surging, the number of migrants crossing the Gap has soared to a record breaking 520,000 migrants as of 2023. Based on recent trends, the number of migrants is expected to double in 2024. Many of the Latin



American migrants hail from Haiti, Cuba, and Colombia, with an additional recent upsurge in Venezuelans crossing. However, migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East also travel through the Gap as a means of reaching the United States. An estimated 201,000 Venezuelans crossed the Gap in the year 2023 alone. Migrants seek



an escape from poverty, collapsed social systems, and gang violence.

Despite the treacherous journey, the promise of better living conditions, economic opportunities, and safety networks in the U.S. push them to cross. Moreover, the number of children crossing the Gap has increased exponentially. In 2023,

40,000 children crossed the Gap, with half of the children crossing under the age of 5. Young children particularly are vulnerable to the environment of the Gap, facing life-threatening conditions including abuse, exploitation, malnourishment, and limited access to medical care. Children risk separation from their parents, and according to UNICEF, over 150 children arrived in Panama separated from their parents. In addition to these human rights violations, many children suffer from mental health disorders as a result of the adverse traumatic experiences.

Challenges of the Gap

The 60-mile-long Darién Gap is by no means an easy journey. Often taking more than a week to complete, the long stretch of mountainous rainforest is daunting to migrants, particularly as many lack the physical capabilities for such an extensive and treacherous trek. Mountains, swamps, and dense jungles have prevented the



construction of roads or other infrastructure. Consequently, many migrants lack basic services such as food, clean water, electricity, and medical care along their journey. With contaminated water the most available source of hydration in the Gap, migrants are exposed to various diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, and water-borne illnesses. In addition to geography, migrants have to account for the weather. As one of the wettest regions of the world, landslides are a common occurrence and can make travelers more vulnerable in the Gap. Moreover, the combination of temperatures potentially reaching up to 95°F and the extreme humidity can lead to



heat strokes. In efforts to simplify the journey, migrants often are guided through hired smugglers known as “guides,” though the protection provided by these guides varies significantly based on the amount of money migrants are able

to pay them. But with many migrants hailing from impoverished countries, they lack the means to more safely travel through the Gap. Additionally, as an area vastly unregulated by legal systems, migrants must attempt to avoid Colombia’s largest drug cartel, the Gaitanista Self Defense Force. Also known as the Gulf Clan, the group have exerted their control in the Gap, intimidating migrants and indigenous people. The adverse effects of migration only compound further for indigenous groups, with limited clean water sources polluted due to the mass number of migrants. In a similar vein to the Gulf Clan, drug smuggling is prevalent in the region, with the business relying on some migrants and indigenous communities to transport narcotics across



the border. For the migrants, the abundance of all of these challenges culminate into particular vulnerability, including sexual assault, robbery, injury, and death.

The Darién Gap and Indigenous Populations

Besides being a treacherous migration route, the Darién Gap is also home to many indigenous peoples such as the Emberá, Wunan and Kuna. These indigenous groups have lived in the region for centuries, relying on their natural resources and cultural practices for their survival. Recently, however, the influx of immigrants through the Gap has exacerbated existing challenges and threatened aboriginal communities' way of life. One significant concern is the environmental impact on indigenous territories. The increased migration flow has led



to deforestation, pollution of water sources, and disruption of ecosystems, jeopardizing the traditional livelihoods and cultural heritage of these indigenous groups. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) highlighted the detrimental effects of deforestation on indigenous lands in the Darién Gap, emphasizing the urgent need for conservation efforts and sustainable resource management to mitigate environmental degradation. In addition, aboriginal communities face social and cultural challenges due to immigration and criminal organizations in the region. Conflict with migrants and criminal activity

threatens the safety and well-being of indigenous people, including violence, exploitation and displacement. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights



(IACHR) has documented these cases of human rights violations against indigenous communities in the Darién Gap, and has subsequently called for increased protection measures and accountability for perpetrators.

Migration Policies

According to the UN Departments of Economic and Social Affairs, the US is home to the highest number of immigrants in the world– with 50.6 million coming from a foreign country. Many economically developed nations are carefully monitoring such migration rates, as record-breaking numbers of migrants put pressure on developed countries. On the other hand, tightening immigration policies make the perilous process of migrating to these countries more taxing, further threatening migrants' right to asylum. A prime example of this is a recent political agreement in the European Union (EU) that has allowed for members to issue a “crisis regulation,” permitting EU states to opt out of several asylum rules during vaguely defined times of crisis. Latin America has similarly tightened control against migrants, with several countries in the region have imposed visa restrictions on Venezuelans and Haitians, who make up most of the migrants in the Darién Gap. Regardless of region, however, shifting migration policies regularly offer new challenges and opportunities for migrants.

The Darién, Online

While severely lacking in support services and resources, the Darién Gap does not lack an online following. Social media platforms have created a space for migrants to document their journey, many dispensing warnings about the dangers of the trail through video. Information about the Gap that was not widely accessible previously



can now be disseminated with relative ease through migrants' TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube accounts, while human rights violations that otherwise may have gone unnoted are being brought to the attention of the international community.

However, others are able to profit from such exposure. Some migrants repeat their journey through the Darién Gap with the sole purpose of achieving more views and income, either to support their families or for personal gain. Human smugglers are similarly able to advertise their services online, circumventing authorities. Perhaps most dangerously, some influencers portray the route as pleasurable and simple, with viewers, too, looking forward to participating in such an “exciting journey.” With misinformation and bypassed regulations facilitated through digital forums, national authorities and the United Nations are being forced to address Darién migration in an even larger context.



UNITED NATIONS INVOLVEMENT

General UN Actions

The first significant UN action taken addressing the Darién Gap was in 1981 with the designation of the Darién National Park as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. While this declaration was made primarily as an effort to preserve biodiversity within the region, it has sparked a direct relationship between the Gap and the United Nations.

Decades later, in response to the various humanitarian concerns in the Darién Gap, multiple UN bodies have acted to address migrants' health and survival. In collaboration with local governments, the UN set up camps for migrants that served as pit-stops along the trail. Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have worked with Doctors Without Borders to create reception areas for migrants that support families making their way through the Gap. But perhaps one of the most publicized actions that the United Nations have announced is their recognition of the Cross-Border Response created by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). The plan includes the prioritization of "psychological first-aid" for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) suffered on the migration route, and its recognition expanded the potential reach of the program. HIAS estimates that over 9,000 individuals have received care, accurate migration information, and protection because of the group's efforts, a number beyond HIAS' initial predictions. Despite this improvement, HIAS and IOM acknowledge that more action needs to be taken.

IOM Involvement



IOM has been crucial primarily in the collection of data within the Gap, conducting numerous surveys that track the migrants crossing the Darién. Information about the dangers of the route and the resources established to address them is brought to migrants through IOM employees on the ground, ensuring that as many migrants as possible are able to receive support. Beyond data-based actions, in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), IOM released multiple statements calling for immediate action to address the many humanitarian crises in the Darién. Both organizations have additionally called for more legal avenues into the United States to be created, as many of the migrants pursue irregular migration paths due to a lack of accessibility to legal ones. Generally, however, IOM work to spread awareness of the Darién Gap with the intention of drawing international attention and resources.



BLOC POSITIONS

African Bloc:

Like Asian states, certain African nations are losing citizens as they are fleeing conditions similar to those many are facing in Latin America. While the percentage of African migrants in the Darién Gap is small, the motivation that sends them away needs to be addressed, either to maintain international image or prevent the necessity of migration in the first place. Regardless, many African countries already suffer high numbers of emigration and immigration, often in the form of refugees that can have significant effects on the nation. These perspectives will be crucial for African countries establishing their perspective.

Asia-Pacific Bloc:

Unlike other countries outside of Latin America, the Asia-Pacific Bloc does have a relatively high representation of migrants within the Darién Gap, with the fourth-largest demographic of migrants being Chinese. These migrants are arriving in greater numbers than before, with 40 times as many Chinese migrants in the Darién in 2023 than in 2022. The official position of Asian-Pacific governments to maintain international security and reduce irregular migration.

Western European and Other States:

Western European and Developed nations have widely condemned the humanitarian crises in the Darién Gap and sent aid and services to the region to support migrants. Nations' attempts to prevent migrants from coming through the Gap at all have been attributed to this condemnation, but the need for border security,



particularly in the United States, and the desire of reduced illegal activity within the region have proved to be equally strong motivators. However, with immigration policies tightening in nations both directly and indirectly affected by the crisis, how countries respond to migration in practice is likely to be separate from how they planned to respond to the humanitarian crisis in theory.

Middle Eastern Bloc

While nearly ten thousand miles away from the Darién Gap itself, the Middle East has a significant stake in the crisis. A small but visible percentage of Darién migrants are from Afghanistan and Iran, and the Middle Eastern and North African immigrant population in the United States—the destination for many Darién migrants—doubled from 2000 to 2019. Irregular migration of Middle Eastern individuals through the United States’ border with Mexico has also been documented, showing a commonality between Middle Eastern and Darién migrants at the southern border.

Separate from the demographic connection, however, many nations in the Middle East have strong economic ties with Venezuela, particularly in the oil sector through the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). It would be in the best interest of such parties to ensure a strong Venezuelan economy.

Latin American and Caribbean Bloc:

As the center of the crisis and home to the majority of Darién Gap migrants, Latin American and Caribbean nations are acutely aware of the situation in the Darién. However, the beliefs of countries within this region are anything but unanimous. With multiple countries losing scores of citizens, many nations aim to close the route to



prevent further migration, while others call for humanitarian assistance. The highly lucrative practice of human trafficking combined with lax visas and the prevalence of bribery create a dangerous social position for certain members, just as Latin American countries additionally face pressure from the West to reform immigration policies.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should money be invested into making the Darién Gap safer, into infrastructure, or into closing the route?
 - a. How should these methods be implemented?
2. How does the Darién Gap and its immigration and humanitarian crises impact your country?
3. Are neighboring countries' immigration policies reflective of the realities of the Gap?
4. What kind of immigration laws or regulations exist in your country?
 - a. Have they recently been changed? If so, why?
5. What are possible ways to address the vulnerable populations in the Gap, such as children and indigenous communities?
6. Does online advertising and reporting of the Gap need to be regulated or embraced?



WORKS CITED

[Click here for the complete Works Cited document.](#)

