Trust the Toucan: One year of combating misinformation about the dangerous Darien jungle

1 MAY 2024 – PANAMA CITY – UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, celebrates the first anniversary of the "Trust the Toucan" project, the initiative dedicated to challenging misinformation and false content while providing reliable information about the Darien jungle.

With more than 16 million views over the last year, the "Trust the Toucan" profiles on Facebook and TikTok reach refugees and migrants in the region, mainly Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. Through surveys, UNHCR identified that 31% of the people use TikTok to search for information before embarking on their journey, while 25% have done so on Facebook.

“Trust the Toucan” shares real testimonies about the risks of the journey, messages about preventing violence and human trafficking, and information about regular pathways and asylum systems. It also includes stories from refugees and migrants who have risked their lives on this dangerous crossing, offering insight into the real experience of the journey through the jungle.

“Every month, thousands of people risk their lives crossing the Darien jungle because social media has led them to believe it will be an easy and safe trip. The work of ‘Trust the Toucan’ countering misinformation is more important than ever. It provides a reliable space and a supportive community where people find verified content to help them make informed decisions,” said Margarida Loureiro, Acting Representative of UNHCR’s Multi-Country Office in Panama.

In 2023, more than 520,000 people crossed the Darien – the jungle that connects Panama and Colombia – in search of protection and better opportunities, often influenced by the misinformation available on social media. In 2024, some 140,000 refugees and migrants have risked their lives on this journey.

The scale of the mixed movement of refugees and migrants throughout the Americas demands strong and innovative responses that match the information and protection needs of forcibly displaced people. Through "Trust the Toucan", UNHCR is improving communication with communities providing timely and life-saving assistance to those who need it most.

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