

Migrant flow in Mobility situation through the Americas, Darien, Panama



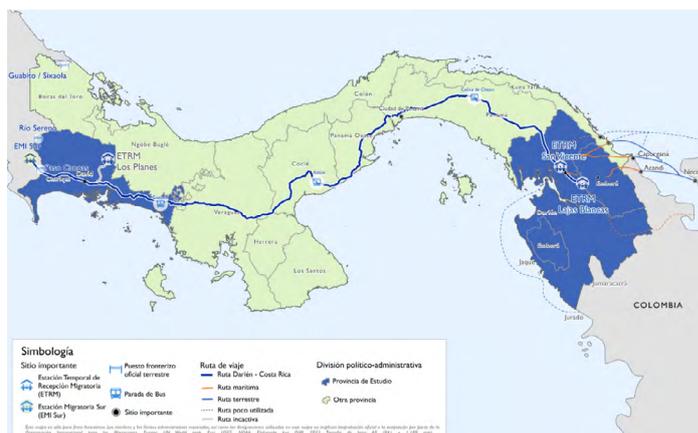
Group of migrants in Bajo Chiquito, Darien, Panama.
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INTRODUCTION

The province of Darien is located on the eastern border of Panama and its territory is one of the migratory crossings most used by people on the move through the Americas, from the south to the north of the continent. This crossing is highly dangerous due to the geographical characteristics of the Darien National Park and the presence of organized crime. People who transit it are exposed to various risks such as human trafficking, smuggling, gender-based violence, various forms of exploitation and abuse. The use of these unsafe crossings to reach temporary or final destinations poses threats to the integrity, dignity, and lives of migrants.

Currently, Panama maintains the Operation Controlled Flow active, which provides humanitarian assistance and transfers hundreds of migrants daily from the Temporary Migrant Reception Centres (hereinafter, ETRM) in the province of Darien to the Temporary Attention Centre for Migrants (CATEM) in Costa Rica. The migrants enter through the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo, located in the Embera-Wounaan indigenous region in the interior of the province of Darien in Panama, and are transferred respectively to the different ETRMs.

Between 1 and 26 May 2024, 25,761 migrants were registered entering irregularly through the Darien jungle, representing an



Map of the migration flow in Panama

average of 954 daily entries. In April 2024, the total number of entries was 29,259, a decrease of 12 per cent compared to the previous month (Chart 1).¹

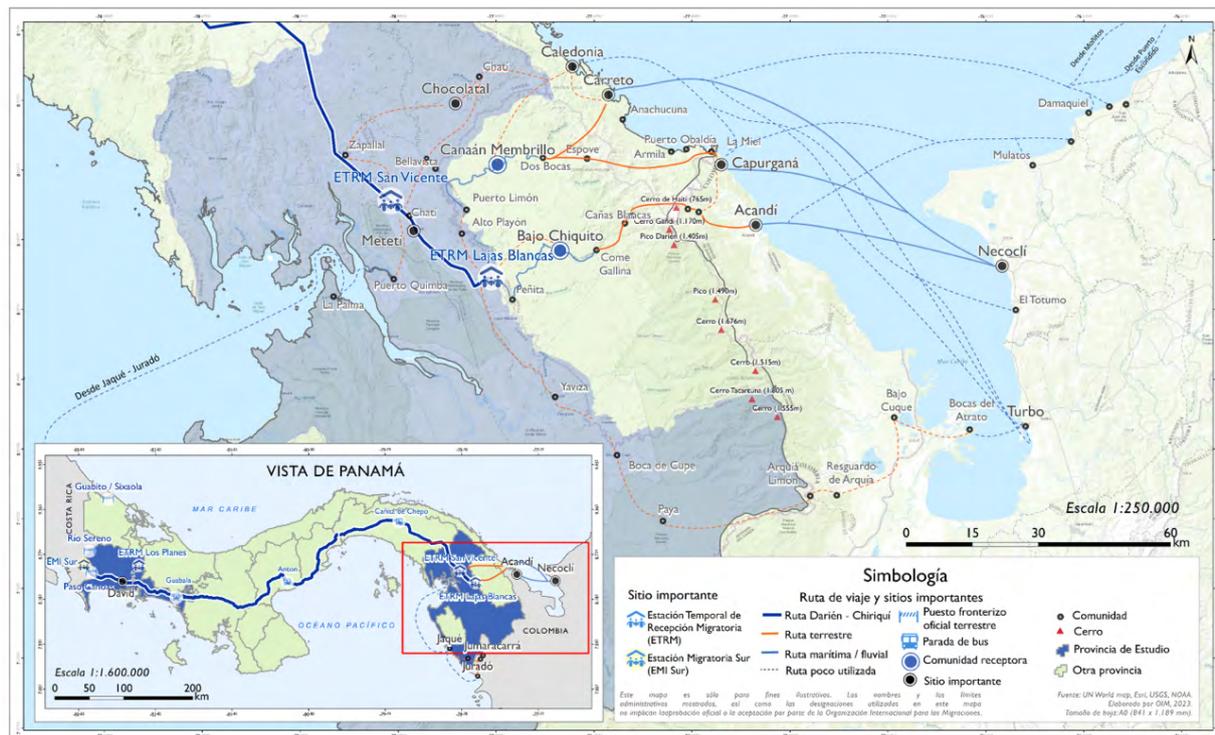
During this period (May 2024), 69 per cent of the migration flow were nationals from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (hereinafter, Venezuela), followed by Colombia (7%), Ecuador (5%), China (5%), Haiti (3%), and the remainder were people from other countries (Figure 2).

¹ Official data from the National Immigration Service of Panama, March 2024: www.migracion.gob.pa/inicio/estadisticas

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Migratory crossings in the province of Darien



Map "Migratory crossings on the Eastern Border of Panama"

Migrants enter the Darien irregularly through various points across the jungle, each with different costs, distances, and duration. The duration of each crossing is influenced by different factors, especially the hydro-climatological conditions. During the rainy season in Panama (May - November) the journey through each crossing may take longer.

Below are some of the main crossings identified by indigenous host communities and humanitarian and development actors with a presence in the province of Darien:

- Currently, the crossing most used by migrants is the one that leaves by sea from the Colombian municipalities of Necoclí or Turbo to Acandí (Colombia), from Acandí by land to Cañas Blancas (Panama) and from Cañas Blancas to Come Gallina (Panama) also by land. Afterwards, they continue by piragua (a long, narrow boat) for about three hours to the community of Bajo Chiquito, in Panama. In this community, the first registration is carried out by the National Migration Service and the National Border Service. Moreover, this is the first point where government institutions such as the National Prosecutor's Office or the Ministry of Health are located. Then, from this community, the journey continues by river on piragua, for four hours or more, to the ETRMs.
- Another crossing that is frequently used is the one that leaves by sea from the Colombian municipality of Necoclí to Capurganá (Colombia). From there, migrants travel by land to Puerto Obaldía (Panama), from there to Anachucuna (Panama), where they continue to Quebrada Mingueza and, later, they go to Dos Bocas (Campamento Tacartí in Panama) for approximately two hours. From there, they continue to Puerto Limón (Panama) by water. Depending on whether the last journey is made in the dry or wet season, the duration can range from 3 to 6 hours due to the increase in the flow of the river. From Puerto Limón, people are transferred by bus to Buenos Aires (Panama), and from there to the Southern Migratory Station (EMI Sur) in Costa Rica.
- A third crossing used is along the coast of the Pacific Ocean, from Jurado, a Colombian municipality located in the department of Choco, to the community of Jaque in Panama. This journey is made by sea and continues to Puerto Quimba, where the Panamanian authorities make the first registration. From there, people are transferred by land to the Estación Migratoria del Sur (EMI SUR).
- A fourth crossing identified is the one that leaves by sea from the Colombian municipality of Necoclí to Caledonia (Panama). It means a longer journey and, therefore, is more expensive. In addition, this crossing avoids having to travel through the Darien National Park. According to the testimony of people from the host indigenous communities, as well as observations from IOM staff on the ground, this journey is made by Asian migrants, especially Chinese and Afghans. From there, they continue by land to Chati and Chocolatal, then to Zapallal and the ETRM, and finally to the Southern Migratory Station (EMI Sur) in Costa Rica.

Since October 2023, buses departing from the province of Darien have crossed Paso Canoas, between Costa Rica and Panama, and headed to the Southern Migratory Station (EMI Sur), established by the Costa Rican authorities 17 kilometres from the border. For this reason, migrants are no longer received at the ETRM of Los Planes de Gualaca in the province of Chiriquí.

General Migration Trends

The number of migrants who entered irregularly through the Darien province between 1 January and 26 May 2024, amounts to 165,028, a decrease of one per cent compared to the same period in 2023 (166,649). Seventy-eight per cent of this population were adults (of whom 52 per cent were men and 28 per cent were women) and 22 per cent were minors (10 per cent were boys and 9 per cent were girls).

Between January and May 2024, the top three nationalities that made up the migratory flow were Venezuela (64%), Ecuador (7%), and Colombia (6%). These three nationalities account for 78 per cent of irregular entries so far in 2024.

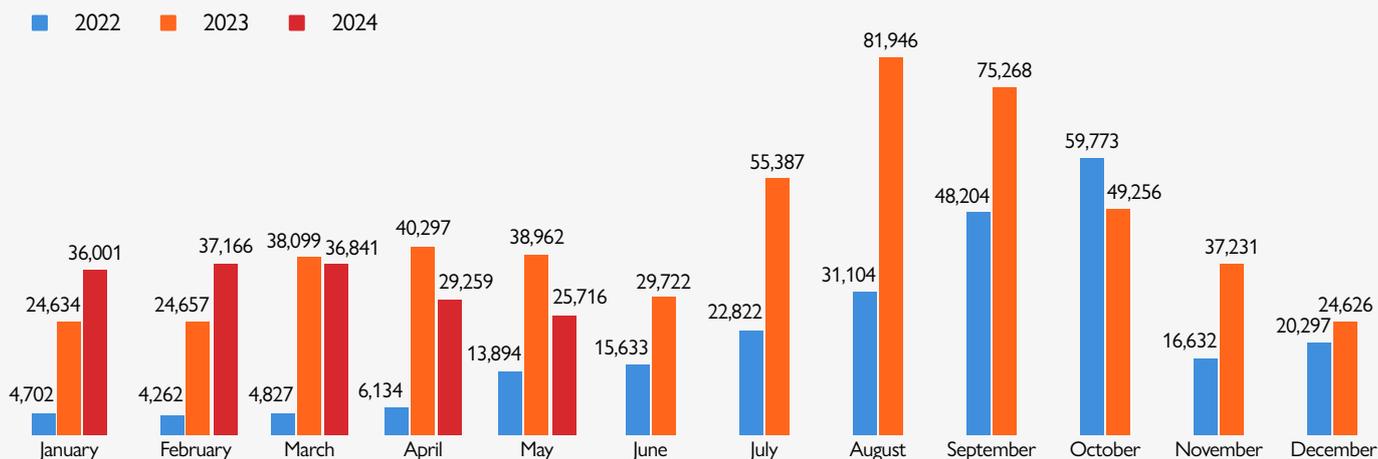
As of 26 May 2024, 25,761 migrants entered irregularly through the

Darien jungle, representing a decrease of 12 per cent compared to the previous month (29,259). Considering the figures of the three main nationalities in May and, using data from April 2024 as a reference, it is highlighted that the number of migrants from Venezuela increased by five per cent, migrants from Ecuador decreased by 18 per cent, and migrants from Colombia increased by 14 per cent. The number of migrants from Haiti decreased by 49 per cent compared to the previous month.

Likewise, taking into consideration the data for the first quarter of 2024, up to 87 per cent of irregular entries corresponded to migrants from South America and the Caribbean, and 13 per cent to extracontinental migrants (Figure 2).

Migratory Flow during February 2024

Figure 1: Registration of people entering through Darien. January 2022 – 26 May 2024



Source: Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) in Lajas Blancas, Darien province, Panama. Government of Panama, 2024. For more information, please visit: <https://www.migracion.gob.pa/inicio/estadisticas>



25,761 Irregular entries to Panama (Darien)

Decrease of **12%** per cent compared to April 2024 (29,259)



28% Women
52% Men

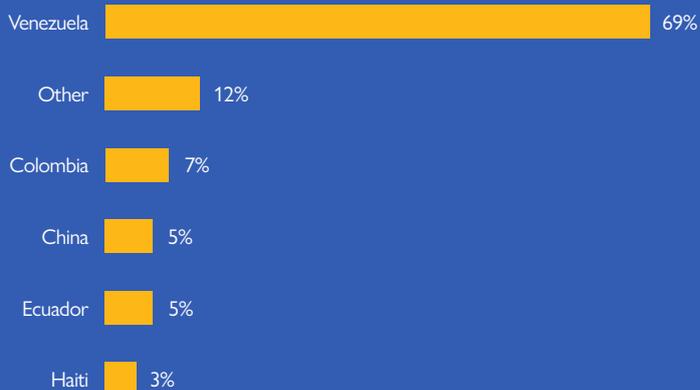
80% Adults



9% Girls
10% Boys

20% Minors

Graph 2: Record of people entering through Darien, according to country of nationality. May 2024



Note: Per centages rounded.

Source: Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) of Lajas Blancas, Darien Province, Panama. Government of Panama, 2024.

Flow Monitoring Survey

Respondents: **160** | Relatives: **268**

Data collection: 01-27 May 2024

This monitoring was carried out through individual surveys of people of legal age (18 years or older) in the ETRM located in Lajas Blancas, Darien. In total, information was obtained from 428 migrants (160 respondents and 268 family members). Regarding the nationalities of the respondents and their family members, 68 per cent were migrants from Venezuela, followed by Colombia (11%), Ecuador (6%) and Peru (4%).

Forty-nine per cent of those surveyed were male and 51 per cent were female. Sixty-four per cent of the companions (family members) were male, and 36 per cent were female. In addition, 19 per cent of the people in the travel groups were minors (17 years or younger) (Figure 3).

The average age of adults (respondents and family members) was 28 years old. The average age of younger family members is seven years. The average age of all respondents is 24 years old.

Regarding the composition of the travel groups, it should be noted that 62 per cent of the people surveyed travelled with family members, five per cent with non-family members, two per cent with family members and non-family members, and 31 per cent alone. Among the top five nationalities that make up the flow, migrants from Venezuela (73%) and Colombia (67%) travel accompanied, while a high per centage of migrants from Ecuador (54%) report traveling alone (Figure 4).

Travel Group Profile

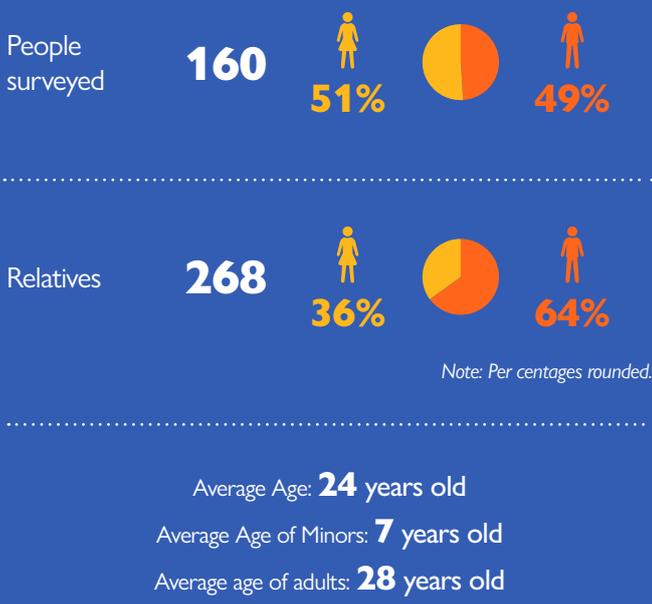


Figure 3. Gender and age of the people who made up the travel groups.

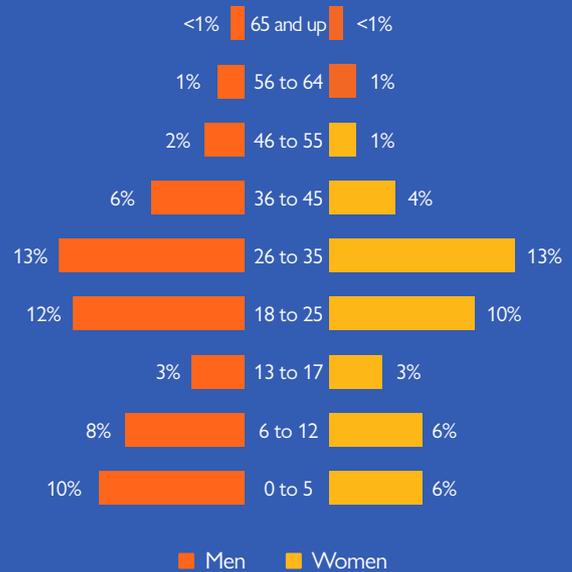
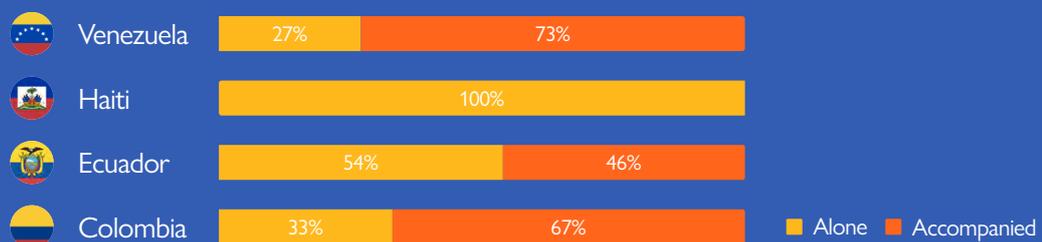


Figure 4. Type of accompaniment on the journey according to the most represented nationalities



Profile of Respondents

Upper secondary education (49%) continues to be the most reported level of education. This is followed by lower secondary education (33%), higher education (8%), and primary education (6%) (Figure 5).

In relation to the country of residence of the respondents during the last 12 months, 53 per cent of the respondents resided in a country other than that of their nationality (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Educational Level Completed

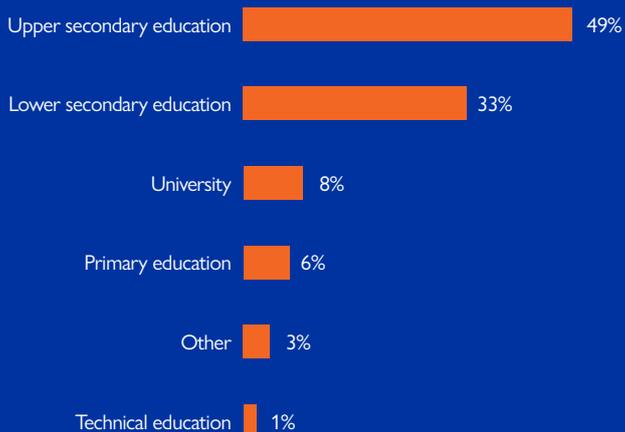
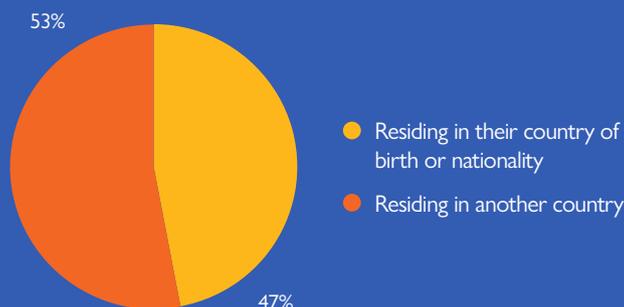


Figure 6. Country of residence



This trend continues to be different for migrants from Venezuela and Haiti, where 59 and 100 per cent, respectively, lived in a country other than their country of birth (Figure 7).

Migrants from Venezuela continue to present the greatest variety in countries of residence other than the country of nationality, having previously resided in Colombia, Chile, Peru,

and Ecuador. While the main countries of habitual residence of people from Haiti are Chile and Brazil.

In terms of possession of identity documents, 90 per cent of the people surveyed reported having an identity card, and only seven per cent reported having a valid passport (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Habitual residence of prominent nationalities

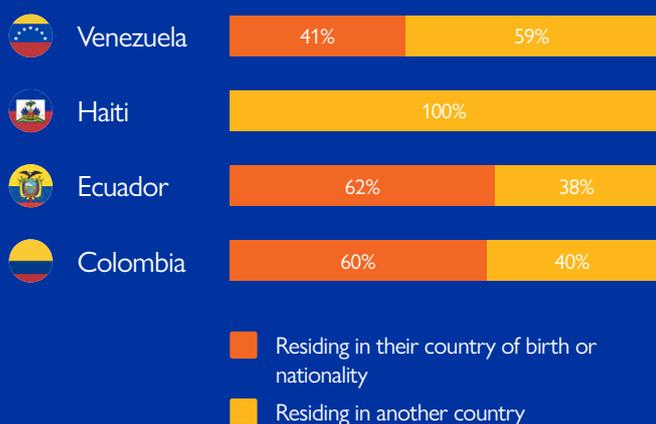
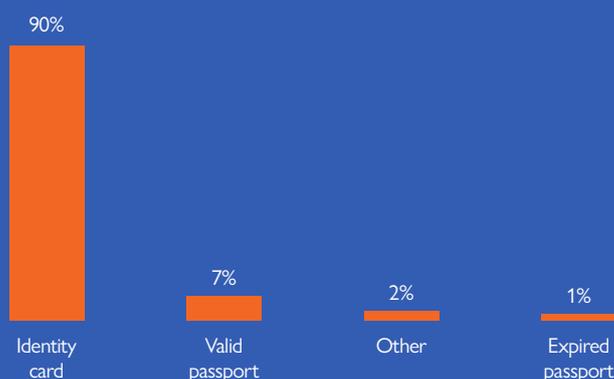


Figure 8. Possession of Identity Documents



Note: migrants could select several options regarding their possession of documents.

Profile of the people surveyed

Regarding the employment situation of the people surveyed before starting the journey, the trend of variability of the situation continues depending on whether the person lived in their country of nationality. Forty-three per cent of people living in their country of nationality were employed, while the employment rate is 78 per cent for those living in a different country. When looking at the rates of self-employment, 43 per cent of people living in their country

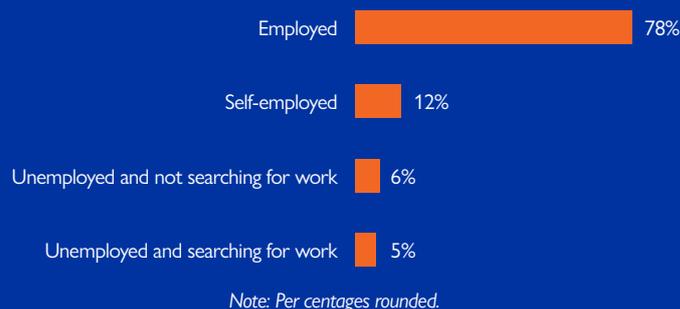
of nationality were self-employed, and 12 per cent of those living outside their country reported being self-employed.

The unemployment rate did not vary for those who lived in their country of nationality or a different country (11%), however, there is a 35 per cent variation in terms of those who reported being employed between those who lived in their country of nationality and those who lived in a different country.

Figure 9. Employment situation before starting the journey living in the country of nationality (47% of the total number of people surveyed)



Figure 10. Employment situation before starting the journey, living in a country other than the country of nationality (53% of the total number of people surveyed)



The main sectors of employment of the population surveyed before starting the journey continue to be commerce (39%), construction (14%) and domestic work (6%) (Figure 11).

cent reported not having enough income to cover their basic needs. People who lived in a country other than that of their nationality reported 14 per cent more income insufficiency to cover their basic needs (98 per cent) (Figure 12 and Figure 13).

Regardless of the high employment rate of the people surveyed, regardless of where they lived in the last twelve months, 84 per

Figure 11. Labor sector (of those who reported being employed or self-employed)

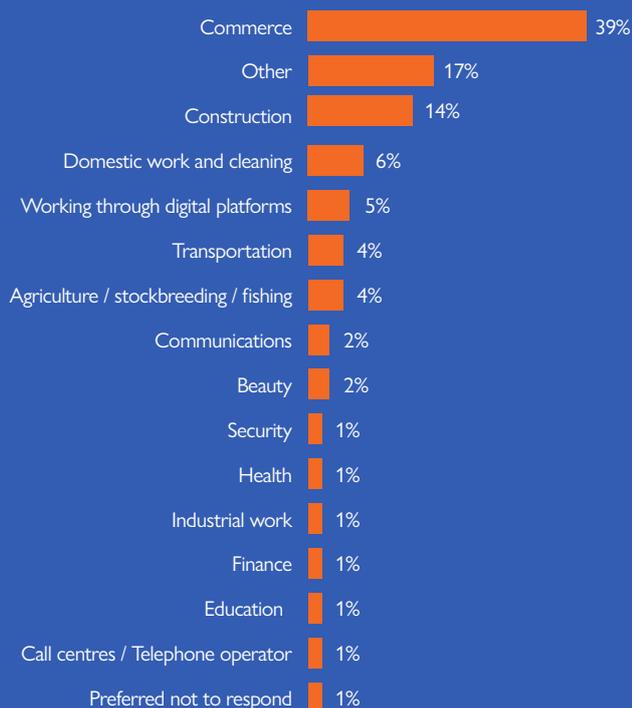


Figure 12. Income level in the country of nationality (of 47% residing in the country of nationality)

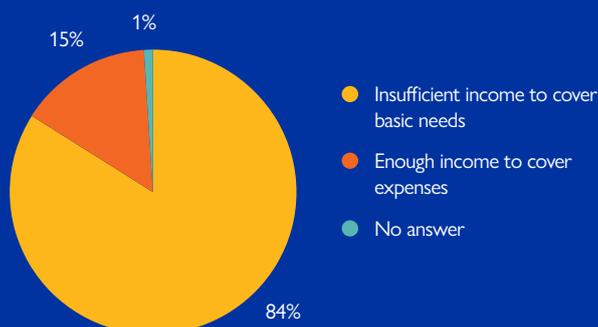
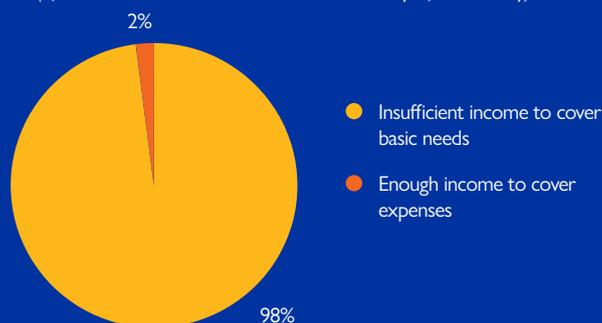


Figure 13. Income level outside the country of nationality (of the 53% who resided outside the country of nationality)



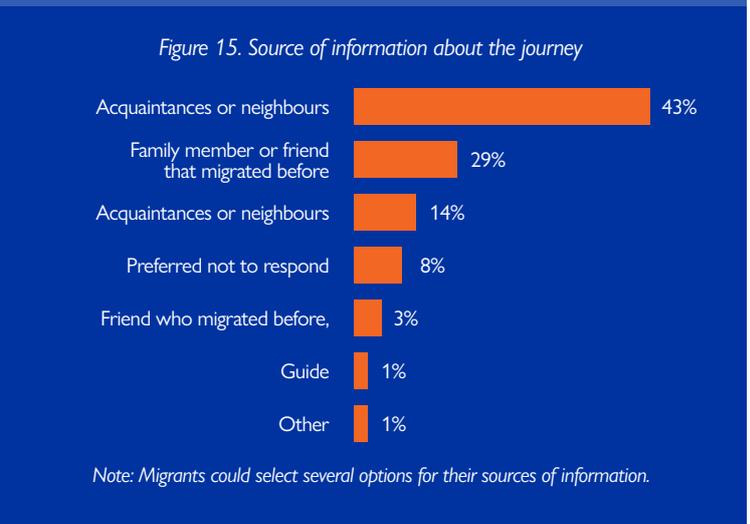
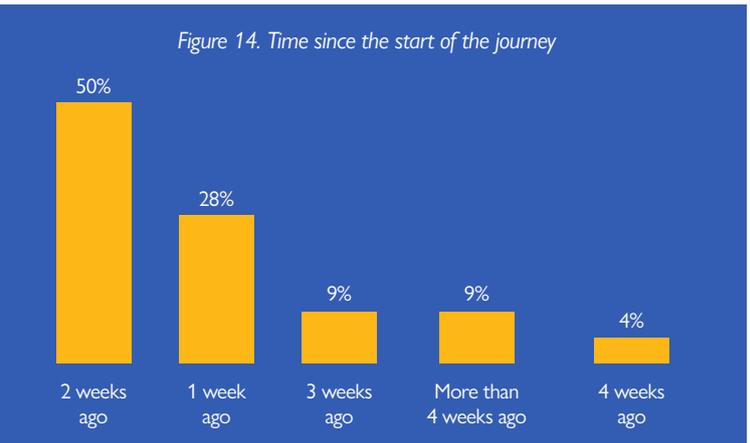
Migratory routes and access to information

Regarding travel time, 78 per cent reported a duration of one or two weeks (28% and 50%), continuing the trend of previous months; 17 per cent reported a duration of three weeks or more, which may be related to the onset of the rainy season and the difficulty of jungle crossings (Figure 14). Most people surveyed (61%) passed through only one transit country before arriving in Panama, thus shortening travel times, mainly due to the high number of reported interregional migration.

Forty-one per cent reported staying one day or less at the ETRM in Darien, 35 per cent reported staying between two and three days, and 19 per cent reported staying between four and seven days.

Forty-three per cent of respondents reported obtaining information about the journey from acquaintances or neighbours, and 29 per cent from family members or friends who had migrated earlier (Figure 15).

Sixty-one per cent of people reported not knowing the regular forms of migration to the destination country (Figure 16), while 37 per cent reported knowing them. Regarding the information, they reported having needed before starting the journey, a great need for information on the condition of violence and insecurity throughout



the journey continues. Twenty-nine per cent reported needing information on robberies, 10 per cent on the number of corpses visible in the jungle, and three per cent on sexual assaults and rapes that can occur in the jungle (Figure 17).

Figure 16. Knowledge of regular ways to migrate to the intended destination country

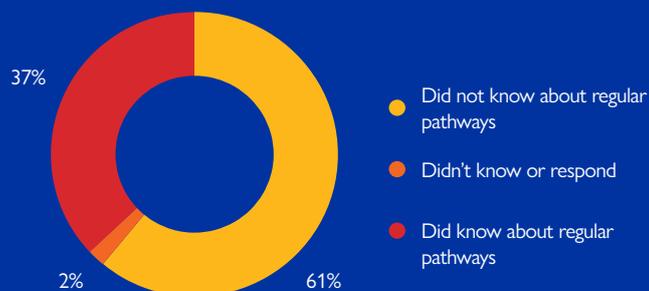
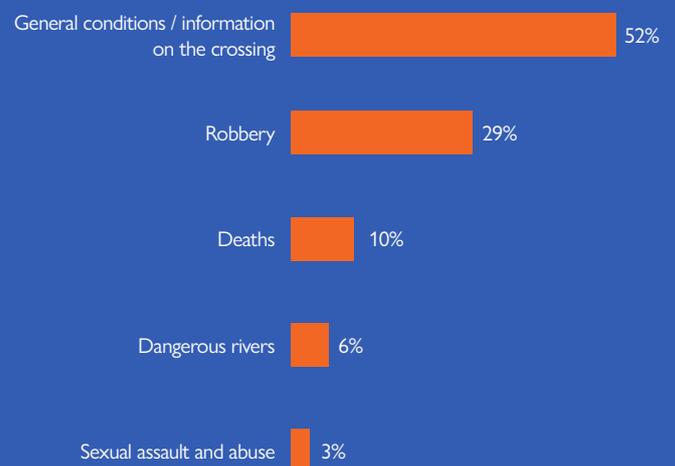


Figure 17. Information that was missing on the journey



Note: Per centages rounded.

Intention of the Journey

Ninety-one per cent of respondents identify the United States of America as their top country of destination, followed far below by Mexico (4%), Canada (2%) and Costa Rica (2%). Seventy-seven per cent of respondents do not have an alternative destination, 13 per cent consider Mexico as an alternative, and another three per cent consider Canada as an alternative country of destination. Among the main factors for choosing the country of destination, the people surveyed highlight considering that there are favourable conditions to access a job (99%) and favourable socioeconomic conditions (80%).²

In line with the data from previous months, economic and financial reasons are the main factor that motivated the migration of the people surveyed. Ninety-three per cent cited economic reasons, 39 per cent cited insecurity and violence as a factor for migrating, and 14 per cent cited political reasons. The disaggregation by country indicates that the four main nationalities that make up the flow considered the economic situation as the main motivator of migration, however, people from Ecuador (69%) and Colombia (53%) reported the situation of violence and insecurity as a main factor that motivated their decision to migrate (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Main nationalities identified according to the factors that motivated migration (May 2024)

	General Population	Venezuela 	Haiti 	Ecuador 	Colombia 
 Economic / financial reasons	93%	97%	75%	92%	87%
 Insecurity / violence	39%	32%	<1%	69%	53%
 Political reasons	14%	17%	25%	8%	7%
 Family Reunification / Marriage	3%	4%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Other	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Preferred not responding	1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
 Natural Disasters	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

Note: Migrants could select several options based on their main factors for migrating.

Twenty-seven per cent of respondents did not intend to return to their country of origin, and 56 per cent did not yet know whether they would return to their country of origin (Figure 19). The migrants from Colombia (27%) and Venezuela (26%) are the least likely to return to their countries of origin.

Regarding the intention to return to their usual country of residence (other than the country of origin or nationality), 80 per cent of the people surveyed reported having no intention of returning (Figure 20).

Figure 19. Intention to return to the country of nationality
Disaggregation of return intent by prominent nationalities

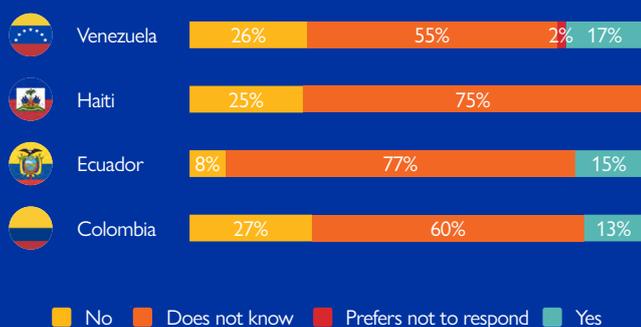
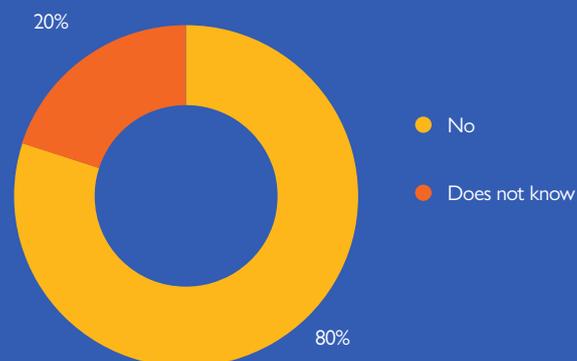


Figure 20. Intention to return to the country of habitual residence



² Respondents could choose more than one option

Needs & Assistance

Ninety-five per cent of the people surveyed reported not having a need for information on regularization possibilities in the country of destination (Figure 21), and 99 per cent reported having no need for information on regularization in Panama (Figure 22).

At the time of the survey, respondents highlighted that transport is their main need (82%), the second most prominent need is non-food items (30%), and the third most prominent need is food (25%) (Figure 23).

Figure 21. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in the country of destination

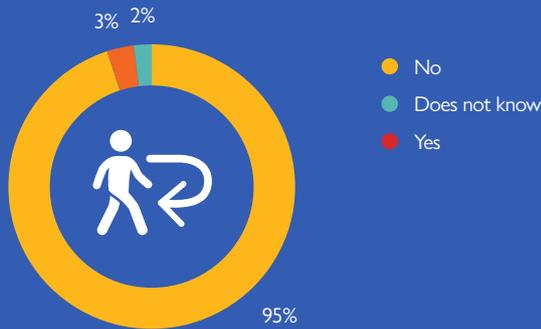


Figure 22. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in Panama

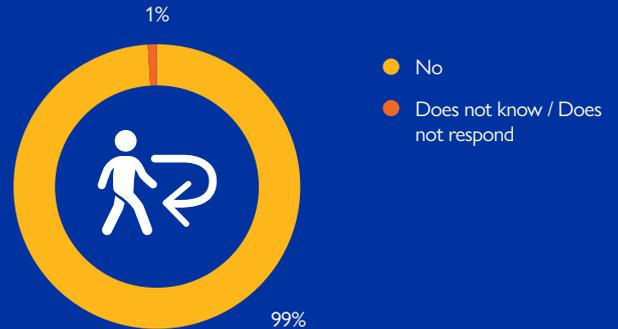
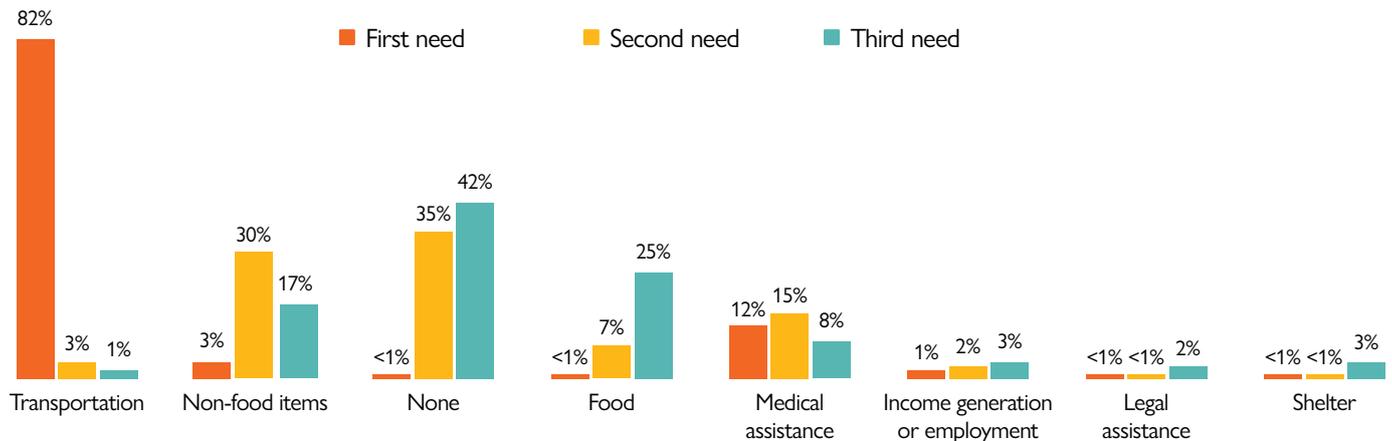


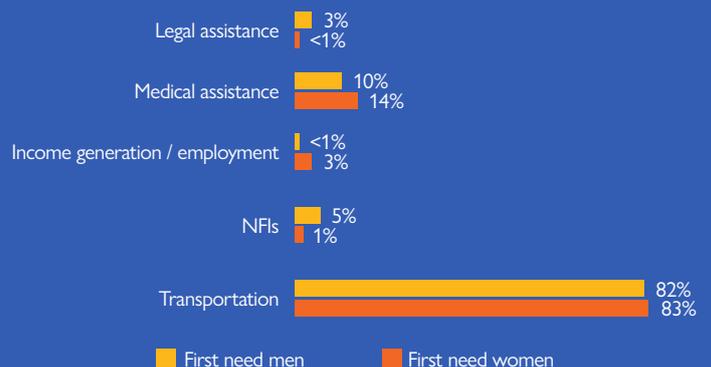
Figure 23. Top Needs at the Time of Survey



Note: Migrants could choose multiple options.

By disaggregating these data by sex, it can be observed that both men and women agreed on transportation as their main need. A greater number of women (14%) highlighted medical assistance as a primary need (Figure 24).

Figure 24. Top needs (first need) at the time of the survey, by sex



Note: Migrants could select several options based on their main needs reported.

Registration of people within the Controlled Flow

The ETRM of Lajas Blancas is located in the Darien province and receives the migrants population that crossed the border between Colombia and Panama, through the Darien Jungle. People travel from Darien to Costa Rica on buses, which offer a direct service to the Southern Migratory Station (EMI Sur), established by Costa Rican authorities 17 kilometres from the border.

The first registration of migrants takes place in the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo in Panama; these are

used as an estimate of the arrival of people at the ETRM of Lajas Blancas. People who enter the ETRM are registered once again in the databases of the National Migration Service, where they are consulted for information on age, nationality, sex, among other data.

After this process, they continue their journey to Costa Rica, crossing the border of Paso Canoas, between Costa Rica and Panama.

Methodological Note

Given the need to understand the characteristics and mobility patterns of people in transit through the Darien province, IOM implements a Flow Monitoring Survey based on the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) methodology.

The aim is to collect data on gender, age, nationality, characteristics of the journey, country of destination, as well as the number of people who make up the travel group of the people surveyed. The information on the irregular migrant population was collected between 1 and 27 May 2024 at the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) of Lajas Blancas in Darien. Due to the extreme conditions of the context, it is understood that most migrants who cross the border between Colombia and Panama, through the Darien jungle, will seek to be assisted in one of the ETRMs, for their subsequent transfer by bus to the EMI Sur in Costa Rica on their way to North America.

For this reason, the ETRMs become a meeting place or funnel, which in turn allows IOM to obtain a better picture of the migration flows across Panama. The sampling applied in this methodology is simple random probability sampling; it is used as a substitute for simple random sampling when a list of the population is not available or when the population has a more or less random order, as is the case with arrivals at the ETRMs.

This sampling has a 95 per cent confidence level, maximum allowable error of five per cent, variance equal to 0.25. The sample size is adjusted for the size of the finite population, which varies from day to day depending on the number of migrants arriving at the ETRMs.

IOM Disclaimer

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