

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

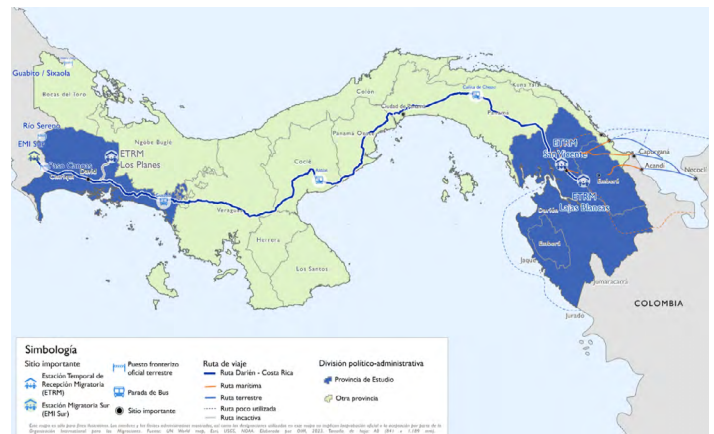


Group of migrants in Bajo Chiquito, Darien, Panama.
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INTRODUCTION

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 and refugees.

Currently, Panama maintains the Operation Controlled Flow active, which provides humanitarian assistance and transfers hundreds of migrants and refugees daily to the Temporary Migrant Reception Centres (hereinafter, ETRM) in the province of Darien. The migrants and refugees 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.



Map of the migration flow in Panama

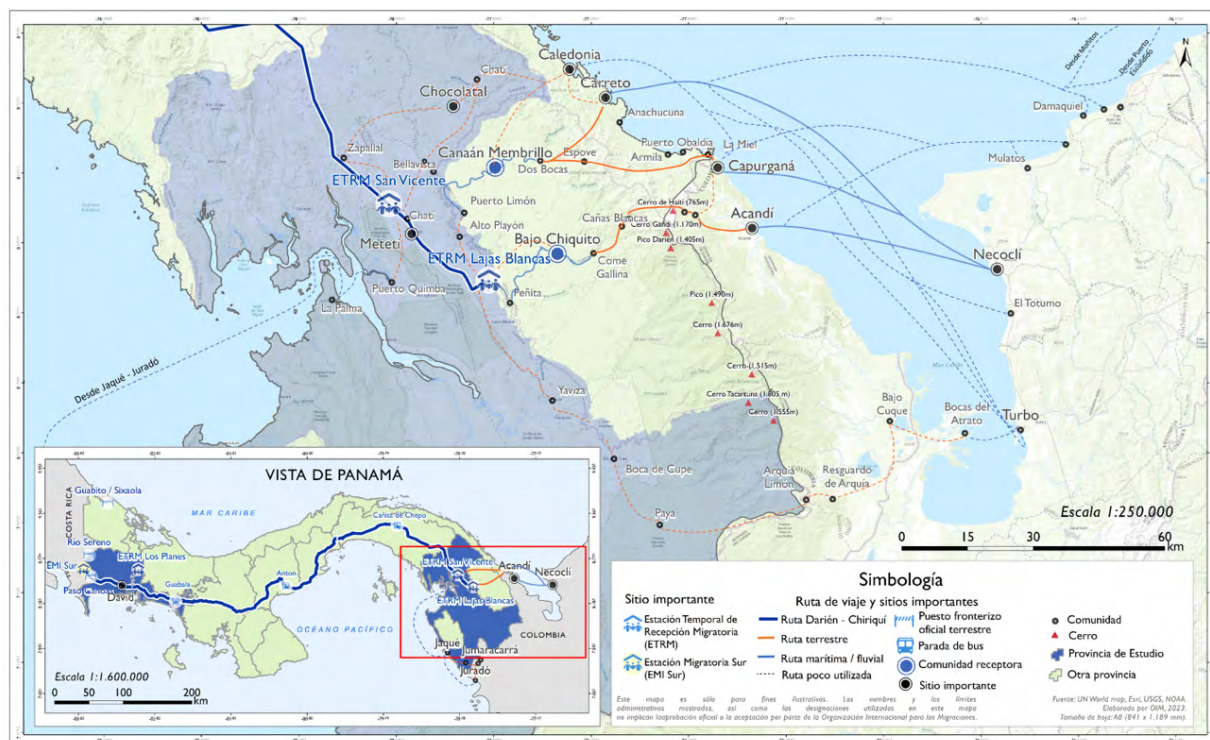
Between 28 May and 25 June, flow monitoring surveys were conducted to the migrant and refugee population in transit through the ETRM of the province of Darien. In total, surveys were conducted with 251 representatives of travel groups. In these surveys, information was obtained on 554 companions of the interviewed representatives.

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

Thanks to the support of:



Migratory crossings in the province of Darien



Map "Migratory crossings on the Eastern Border of Panama"

Migrants and refugees enter 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 and refugees is the one that leaves by sea from the Colombian municipalities of Necocli 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 Necocli to Capurganá (Colombia). From there, migrants and refugees 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 three to six 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 ETRM.
- A fourth crossing identified is the one that leaves by sea from the Colombian municipality of Necocli 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 and refugees, especially Chinese and Afghans. From there, they continue by land to Chatí and Chocotalal, then to Zapallal, and finally to the ETRM of Lajas Blancas.

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 and refugees are no longer received at the ETRM of Los Planes de Gualaca in the province of Chiriquí.

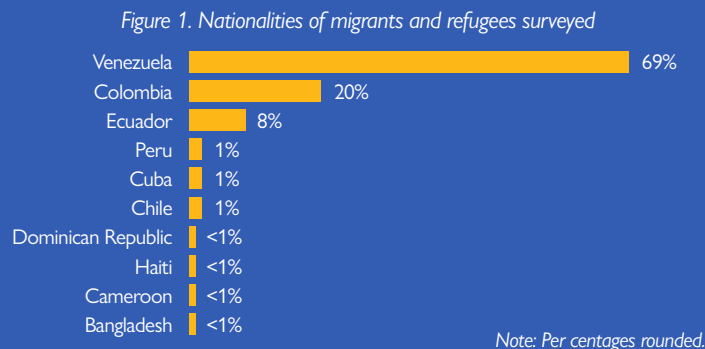
Flow Monitoring Survey²

People Surveyed: **251** | Family members: **554**

Data collection: 28 May – 25 June 2024

This monitoring was carried out through individual surveys of adults (18 years or older) at the ETRM of Lajas Blancas, Darien. In total, information was obtained on 805 migrants and refugees (251 respondents and 554 family members).

Regarding the nationalities of the people surveyed and their families, it was identified that 69 per cent corresponded to migrants and refugees from Venezuela, followed by Colombia (20%), Ecuador (8%) and other nationalities (3%) (Graph 1).



Fifty-five per cent of the total number of people surveyed (respondents and family members) were male, and 45 per cent were female. In addition, 34 per cent of the people in the travel groups are minors (17 years old or younger), which represents an increase of 14 per cent compared to the average for the first half of 2024 (Graph 2). The average age of adults (respondents and family members) is 31 years old. The average age of minor relatives is seven years. The average age of all the people surveyed is 23 years old.

Regarding the composition of the travel groups, it should be noted that 64 per cent of the people surveyed travelled with family members, one per cent with family and non-family members, eight per cent with non-family members, and 27 per cent alone (Graph 3). Among the three main nationalities surveyed, migrants and refugees from Venezuela (79%), Ecuador (86%) and Colombia (55%) travel accompanied, Colombia is the country with the highest number of people surveyed traveling alone (45%) (Figure 4).

Travel group profile

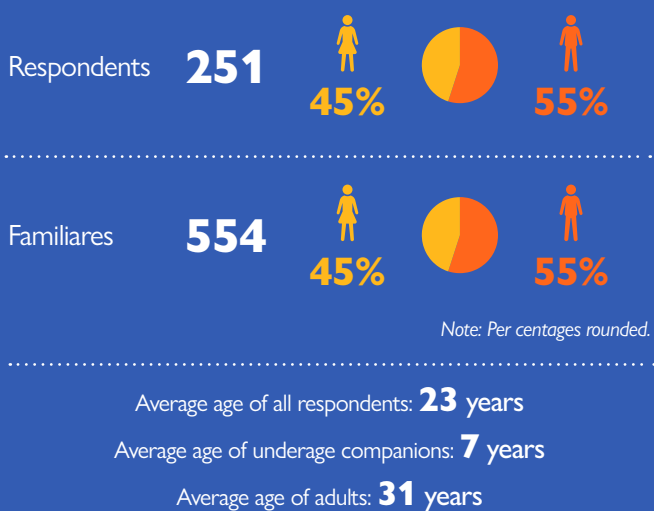


Figure 2. Gender and age of the people who made up the travel groups.

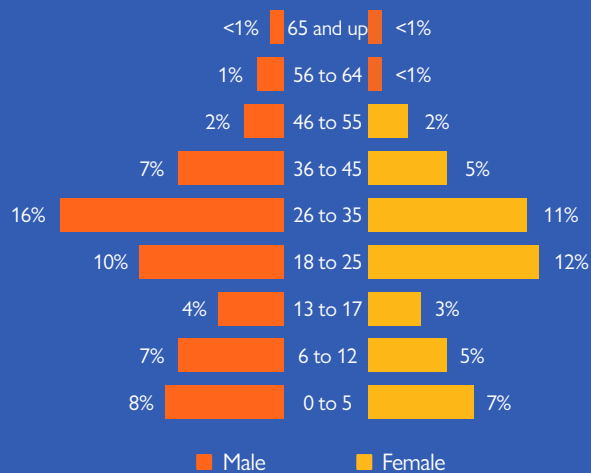


Figure 3. Type of accompaniment on the journey

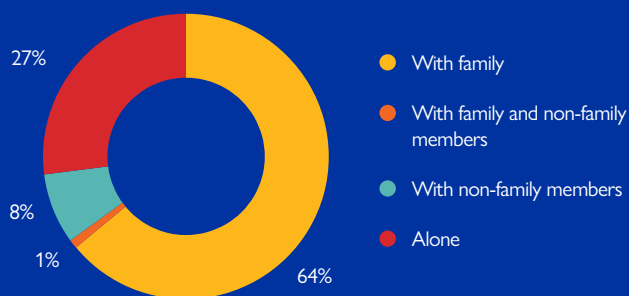
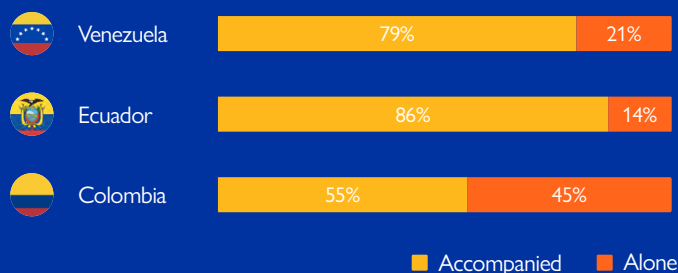


Figure 4. Type of accompaniment on the journey according to the most represented nationalities



Profile of Respondents

Upper secondary education (73%) continues to be the most reported educational level. This is followed by lower secondary education (11%), primary education (9%), university education (5%) and technical education (2%) (Graph 5).

In relation to the country of residence of the people surveyed during the last 12 months, 53 per cent reported residing in a country other than that of their nationality (Graph 6).

Figure 5. Educational level completed

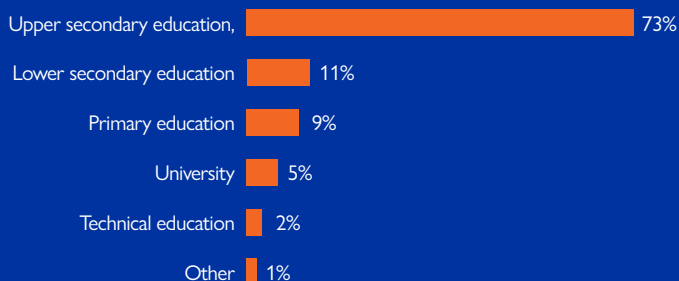
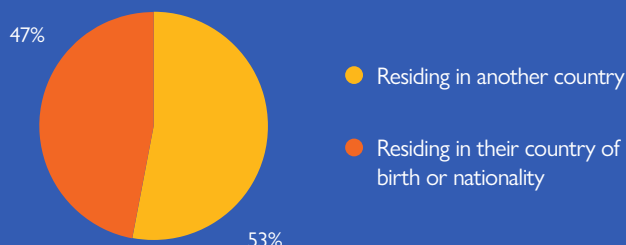


Figure 6. Country of residence



Migrants and refugees from Venezuela (56%) are the ones who most reported having resided in a country other than their country of nationality (Graph 7).

In terms of possession of identity documents, 100 per cent of the people surveyed reported having an identity card, and only eight per cent reported having a valid passport and four per cent have an expired passport (Graph 8). The identity card is the most common document carried by the people surveyed regardless of their nationality.

Migrants and refugees from Venezuela continue to present the greatest variety in countries of residence other than the country of nationality, having mostly resided in Colombia (70%), followed by Peru (6%), among others.

Figure 7. Habitual residence of most represented nationalities

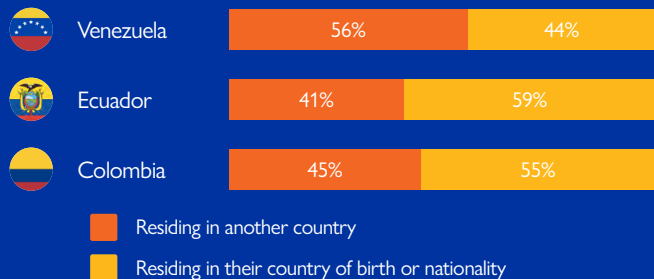
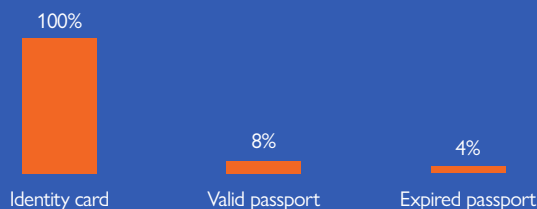


Figure 8. Possession of Identity Documents



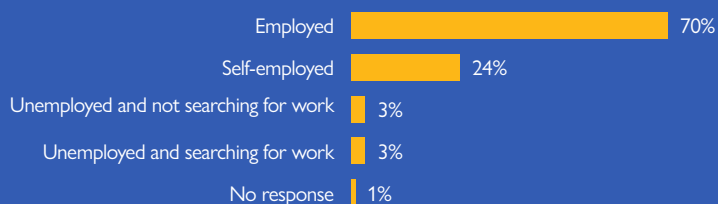
Note: Migrants and refugees could select several options regarding their possession of documents.

As for 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. Seventy per cent of people living in their country of nationality were employed, while 83 per cent of those not living in their country of nationality reported being employed. Twenty-four per cent of people living in their country of nationality were self-employed, while

11 per cent of those living in a country other than their country of nationality were self-employed.

The unemployment rate does not vary much for those who lived in their country of nationality (6%) and those who lived in a country of residence other than their country of nationality in the last 12 months (7%).

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



Note: Per centages rounded.

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)



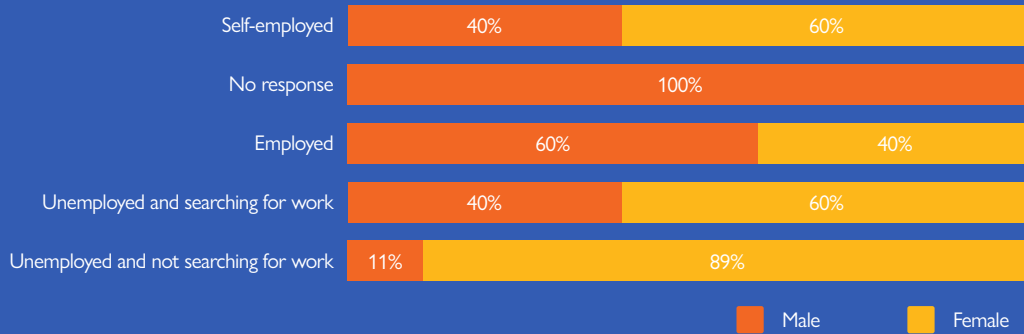
Note: Per centages rounded.

Profile of Respondents

The disaggregation by gender of the employment situation reported before migrating indicates that 60 per cent of the people who reported being employed were male, while 40 per cent were female.

Eighty-nine per cent of the people who reported being unemployed and not looking for a job were female, while 60 per cent of those who reported being unemployed and looking for work were male.

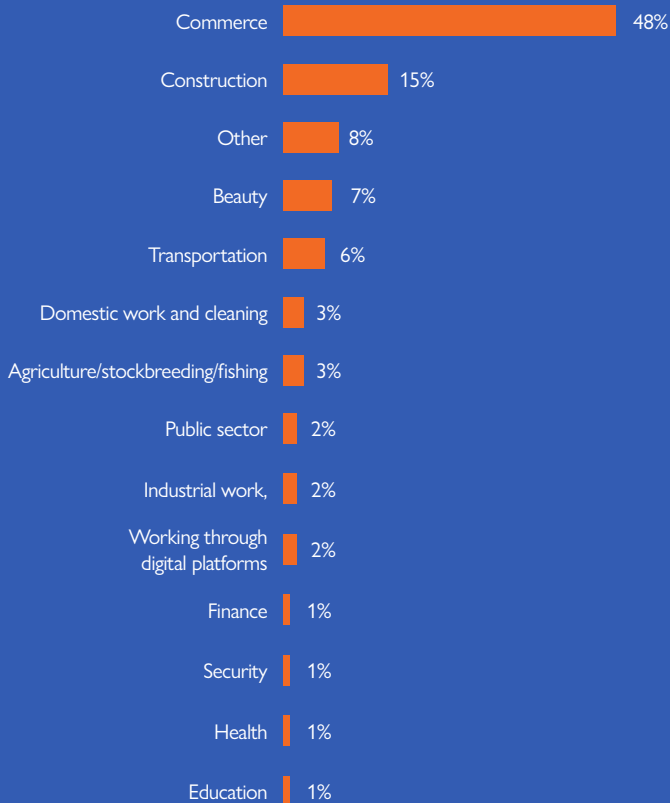
Figure 11. Employment situation before starting the trip living according to sex



The main labour sectors of the population surveyed before migrating continue to be commerce (48%) and construction (15%) (Graph 12).

Regardless of the high employment rate of the people surveyed, regardless of where they live in the last twelve months, 78 per cent reported not having had enough income to cover their basic needs (Graph 13 and Graph 14).

Figure 12. Labour sector (of those who reported being employed or self-employed)



Note: Per centages rounded.

Figure 13. Level of income in the country of nationality (from 47% residing in the country of nationality)

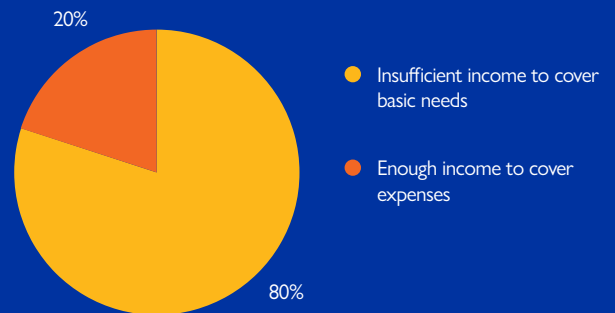
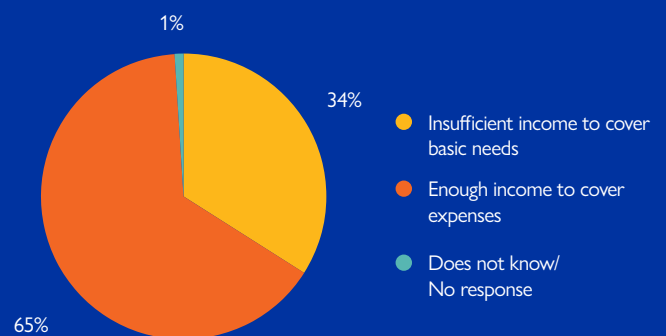


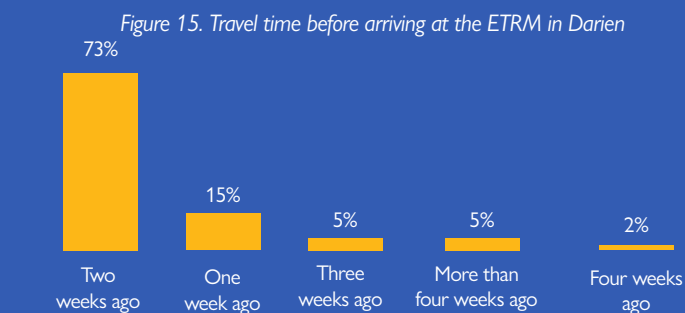
Figure 14. Level of income outside the country of nationality (from 53% who resided outside the country of nationality)



Migratory crossings and access to information

Regarding the travel time to the ETRM where the survey is applied, 73 per cent reported a duration of two weeks and 15 per cent a duration of one week (Graph 15). Most of the people surveyed crossed, on average, a single transit country before arriving in Panama, shortening travel times, and mainly due to the high number of interregional migration flows reported.

Forty-nine per cent reported having been in the ETRM for between two and three days, 27 per cent reported having been in the ETRM for one day or less, and 14 per cent reported having been in the ETRM for between four and seven days (Graph 16). Forty-seven per cent reported having obtained information about the journey



from relatives or friends who had migrated before, and 42 per cent reported having obtained it through neighbours or acquaintances. A minority of respondents reported getting information about the journey from official sources (1%) (Graph 17).

Figure 16. Length of stay at the ETRM at the time of application of the survey

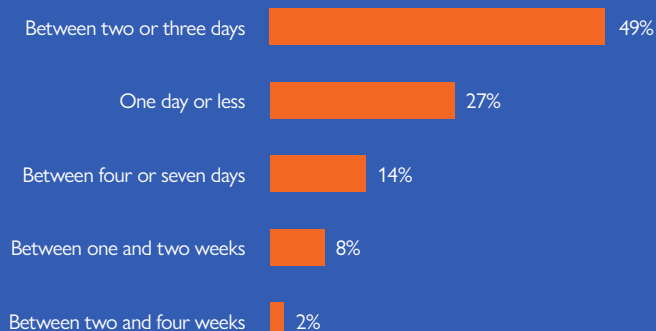
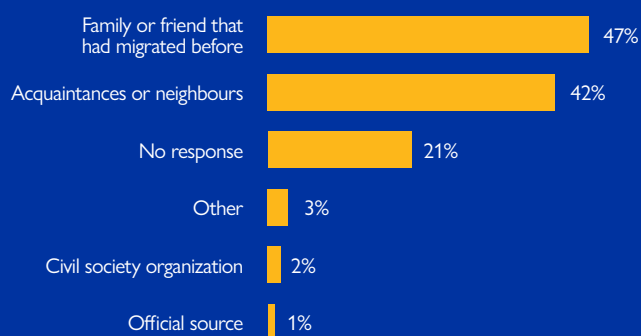


Figure 17. Source of information about the journey



Note: Migrants and refugees could select several options from their sources of information.

Fifty-five per cent of people reported not knowing about regular pathways of migration (Graph 18), a significant decrease compared to previous months. Regarding the information they reported having needed before migrating, the high need for information on the condition of violence and insecurity of the journey continues.

Thirty-seven per cent reported having needed information about robberies, 21 per cent about the danger and insecurity of the journey, 16 per cent reported having needed information about the number of visible corpses in the jungle, and eight per cent about the abuses that occur on the journey (Graph 19).

Figure 18. Knowledge of the regular pathways of migration to the intended destination country

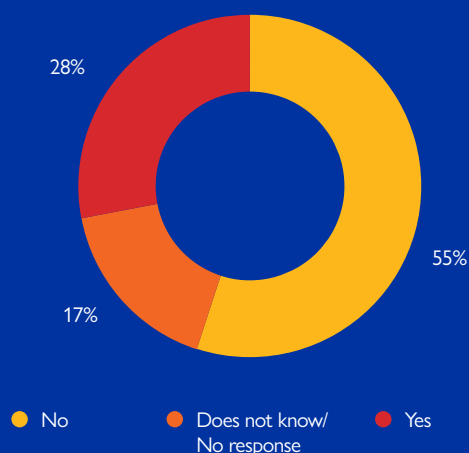
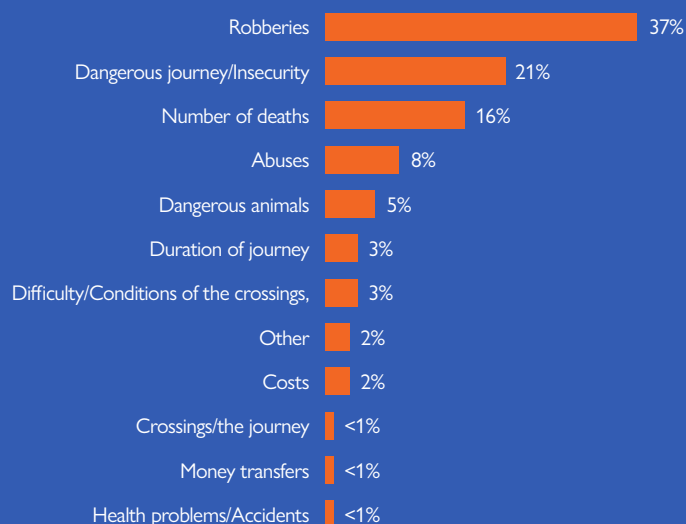


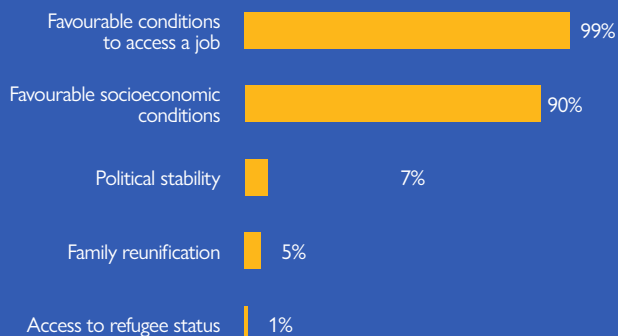
Figure 19. Information that was missing on the journey



Intention of the Journey

Ninety-eight per cent of the people surveyed identified the United States of America as their main destination country, and one per cent identified Mexico as their destination country. Eighty-four per cent of the migrants and refugees surveyed did not have an alternative country of destination, nine per cent considered Mexico as an alternative, and another five per cent considered Canada as an alternative destination. Among the main factors for choosing the country of destination, the migrants and refugees surveyed highlighted that they considered that there are favourable conditions to access a job (99%) and favourable socioeconomic conditions (90%) (Graph 20).

Figure 20. Factors or reasons that influenced their decision to migrate to the country of destination

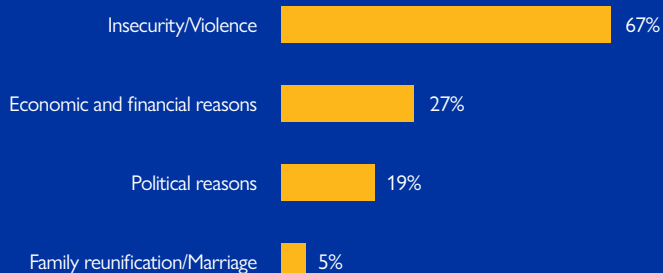


Note: Migrants and refugees could select several options.

Unlike previous months, insecurity and violence (67%) were reported as the main reason influencing the decision of the people surveyed to leave their country of origin, followed by economic and financial reasons (27%) and political reasons (19%) (Graph 21).

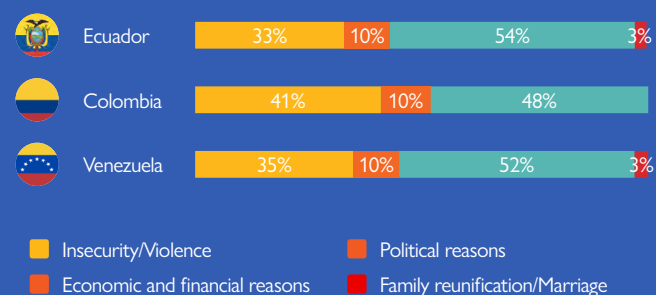
The breakdown by country indicates that the three main nationalities that make up the surveyed migration flow considered the economic situation as the main motivator of migration, followed by insecurity as the main factors that motivated their decision to migrate (Graph 22).

Figure 21. Main factors or reasons that influenced the decision to leave their country of origin



Note: Migrants and refugees could select several options.

Figure 22. Main factors or reasons that influenced the decision to leave their country of origin according to the main nationalities surveyed



Note: Per centages rounded.

Seventy-four per cent of the people surveyed did not know if they wanted to return to their country of origin, and 12 per cent indicated that they had no intention of returning (Figure 23). Migrants and refugees from Colombia (14%) and Ecuador (14%) are the least likely to return to their countries of origin (Figure 24).

Regarding the intention to return to the usual country of residence (other than the country of origin or nationality), 90 per cent reported not knowing if they would return (Graph 25).

Figure 23. Intention to return to the country of nationality

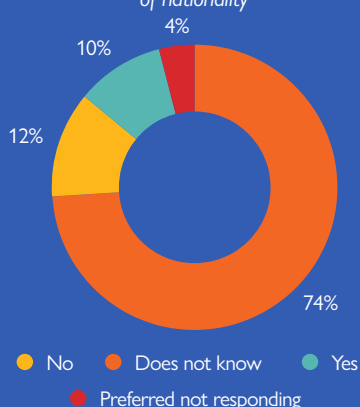


Figure 24. Disaggregation of intention to return according to main nationalities

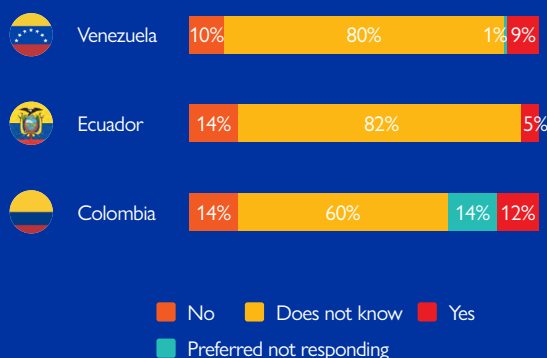
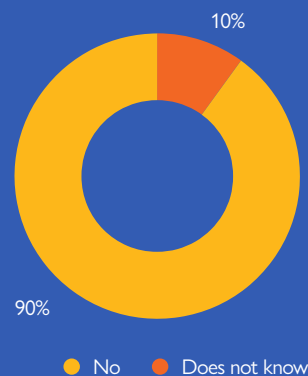


Figure 25. Intention to return to the country of habitual residence



Needs and assistance

Fifty-nine per cent of the people surveyed reported not having a need for information on regularization possibilities in the country of destination (Graph 26).

Ninety-eight per cent of the people surveyed stated that they did not need information about the possibilities of regularization in Panama (Graph 27)

Figure 26. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in the country of destination

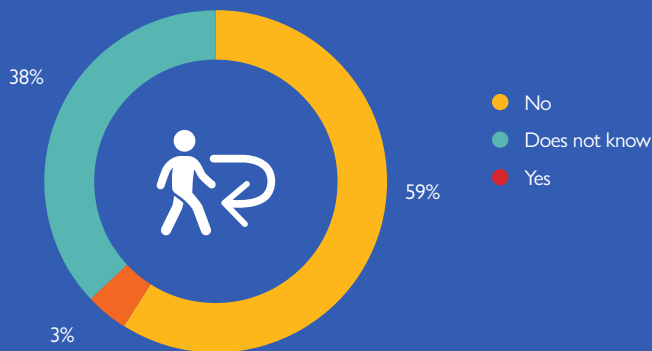
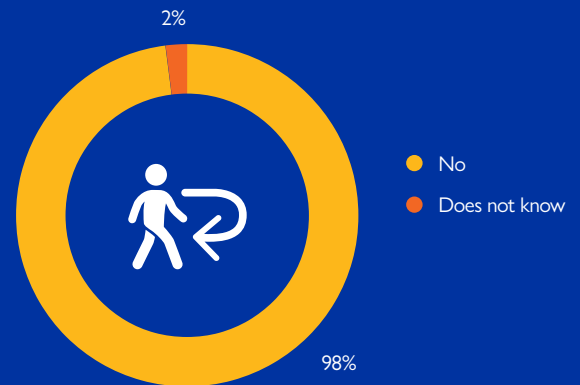


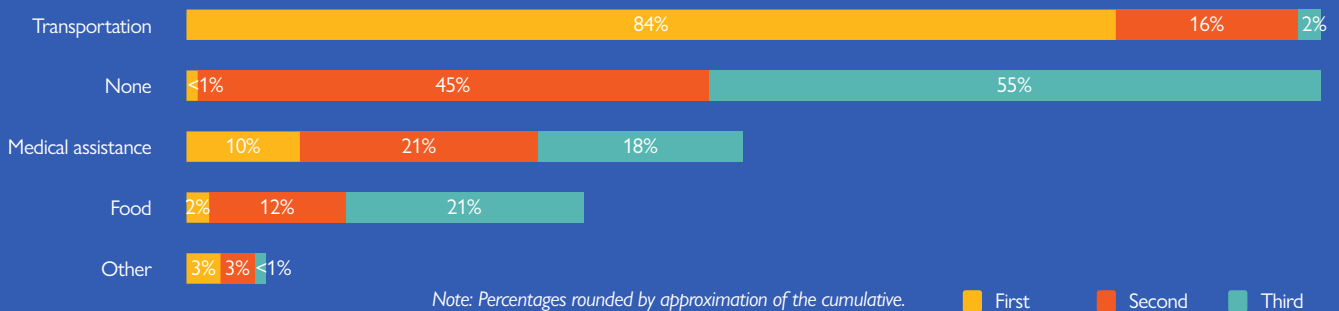
Figure 27. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in Panama



At the time of the survey, the migrants and refugees surveyed highlighted that transportation is their main need (84%), the second

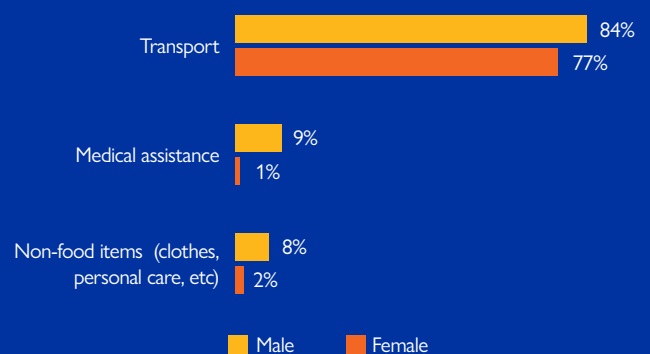
most important need is medical assistance (21%), and the third most important need is food (21%) (Graph 28).

Figure 28. Main needs at the time of conducting the survey



The breakdown by gender in terms of needs indicates that transport is the main need highlighted for both males (78%) and females (74%). Medical assistance and the need for non-food items is highlighted by women as a pressing need more frequently than men (Figure 29).

Figure 29. Main needs when conducting the survey by sex



Note: Migrants and refugees could select from multiple options on their main needs

Controlled migration flow registration

The ETRM of Lajas Blancas, which is located in the province of Darien, receives the refugee and migrant population that has crossed the border between Colombia and Panama, crossing or surrounding the Darien jungle. People move between Darien and Costa Rica using buses, which offer a direct service to the Southern Migration Station (EMI SUR), established by the Costa Rican authorities 17 kilometers from the border line within its territory.

The first registration of migrants and refugees is made in the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaán 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 again registered in the databases of the National Migration Service, where information on age, nationality, gender, among other data, is consulted. 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 and refugee population was collected between 28 May and 25 June 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 and refugees 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 and refugees arriving at the ETRMs.

IOM Disclaimer

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