

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



Darien, Panamá.
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INTRODUCTION

The province of Darien is located on Panama’s eastern border, and its territory forms part of the migratory routes most used by people engaged in human mobility through the Americas, coming from the southern to the northern part of the continent. This route is highly dangerous due to the geographic characteristics of the Darien National Park and the presence of organized crime. People who travel along this route are exposed to various risks such as human trafficking, smuggling, gender-based violence, and various forms of exploitation and abuse. The use of these unsafe routes to reach temporary or final destinations poses threats to the integrity, dignity and lives of people in a situation of mobility.

Panama is currently carrying out Operation “Controlled Flow”, which provides humanitarian assistance and transfers hundreds of people daily to the Temporary Migrant Reception Centres (ETRM, in its Spanish acronym) in the province of Darien. People enter the country through the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo, located in the Embera Wounaan Indigenous region within Darien, and are then transferred to the different ETRMs.



Map of the migration flow in Panama

Between August 27 and September 25, 2024, flow monitoring surveys were conducted among the population in transit in the ETRMs in Darien. A total of 297 people representing different travel groups were surveyed. These surveys provided information on 572 people accompanying the representative interviewed.

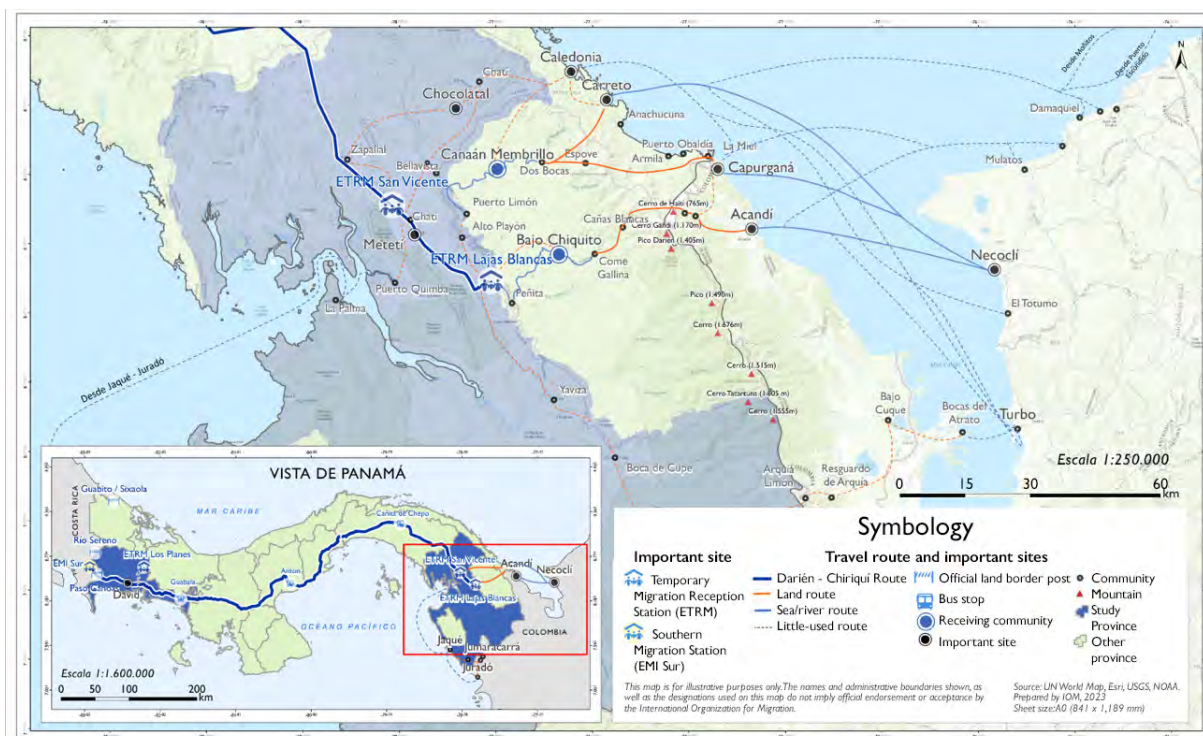
¹ Official data from the National Immigration Service of Panama, August 2024: www.migracion.gob.pa/inicio/estadisticas

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Migratory routes in the Province of Darien



Map "Migration routes on the eastern border of Panama"

People moving through the Americas irregularly enter the Darien jungle through various routes with different costs and time periods. The duration of each route is influenced by different factors, especially hydro-climatological conditions. During the rainy season in Panama (May - November) each route may take longer.

The following are some of the main routes identified by Indigenous host communities and humanitarian and development actors with a presence in the Darien Province:

- Currently, the route most used by people in mobility situations in the Americas is the one that leaves by sea from the Colombian municipality of Necocli or Turbo to Acandi (Colombia), from Acandi by land to Cañas Blancas (Panama) and from Cañas Blancas to Come Gallina (Panama), also by land. Afterwards, they continue by piragua (long, narrow boat) for about three hours Bajo Chiquito, Indigenous community in Panama. In this community, the first registration is done by the authorities of the National Migration Service and the National Border Service; this is the first point where institutions such as the Public Prosecutor's Office or the Ministry of Health are located. From this community, they continue by canoe for four hours or more to the Lajas Blancas ETRM.
- Another popular route is by sea from the Colombian municipality of Necocli to Capurgana (Colombia). From there, they travel by land to Puerto Obaldia (Panama), from there to Anachucuna (Panama), where they continue to Quebrada Mingueza and then to Dos Bocas (Camp Tacartí in Panama) for approximately two hours. From there, they continue to Puerto Limon (Panama) by river. Depending on whether the last leg of the journey takes place in the dry or rainy season, the duration can vary between three and six hours due to the increased flow of the river. From Puerto Limon, people are transferred by bus to Buenos Aires (Panama), and from there to the Estacion Migratoria Sur (EMI SUR) in Costa Rica.
- A third route 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 Panamanian territory. This route is made by sea and continues along the same route to Puerto Quimba, where the Panamanian authorities carry out the first registration. From there, the people are transferred by land to the Lajas Blancas ETRM.
- A fourth route identified is by sea from the Colombian municipality of Necocli to Caledonia (Panama). It is a longer and therefore more costly route. This route avoids having to go through Darien National Park. According to the testimony of people from the Indigenous host communities, as well as observations by IOM staff in the field, this route is mostly taken by persons of Asian origin, especially Chinese and Afghan nationals. From there they continue by land within Panama to Chati and Chocolatal, then continue by land to Zapallal and finally move to the Lajas Blancas ETRM.

As of October 2023, buses departing from Darien province cross the Paso Canoas border between Costa Rica and Panama and head to the Estacion Migratoria Sur (EMI SUR), established by Costa Rican authorities 17 kilometers from the border. For this reason, people are no longer received at the ETRM of Los Planes de Gualaca in the province of Chiriqui.

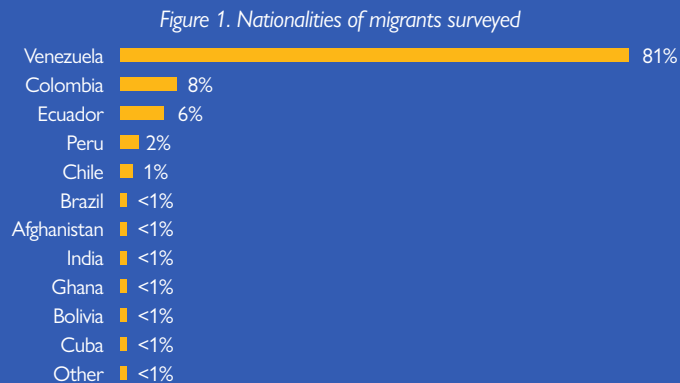
Flow Monitoring Survey

People Surveyed: **297** | People Accompanying: **572**

Data collection: August 27 to September 25, 2024

This monitoring was carried out through individual surveys of adults (18 years of age or older) in the ETRM of Lajas Blancas, Darien. Information was collected from a total of 869 people in mobility (297 surveyed and 572 companions).

Regarding the nationalities of the people surveyed and their family members, 81 per cent were from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (hereinafter Venezuela), followed by Colombia with eight per cent, Ecuador (6%), Peru (2%) and other nationalities (3%) (Figure 1).



Note: Percentages rounded.

Fifty-two per cent of the people surveyed (respondents and companions) were male and 48 per cent were female. In addition, 34 per cent of the people in the travel groups were minors (17 years old or younger) (Figure 2). The average age of adults (respondents and family members) was 31 years old. The average age of underaged family members was eight years old. The average age of all respondents was 23 years old.

Regarding how travel groups are formed, 70 per cent of surveyed subjects traveled with family members, six per cent with non-family members, three per cent with family and non-family members, and 21 per cent travelled alone (Graph 3). Among the four main nationalities surveyed, people from Ecuador (56%) and Colombia (50%) were the most likely to travel alone (Graph 4).

Travel Group Profile

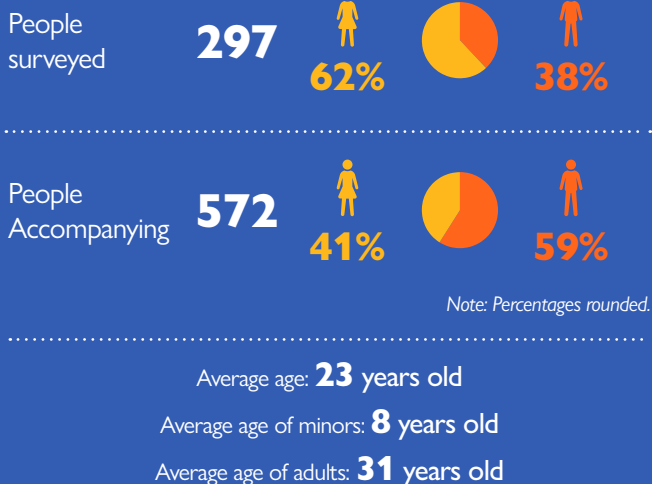
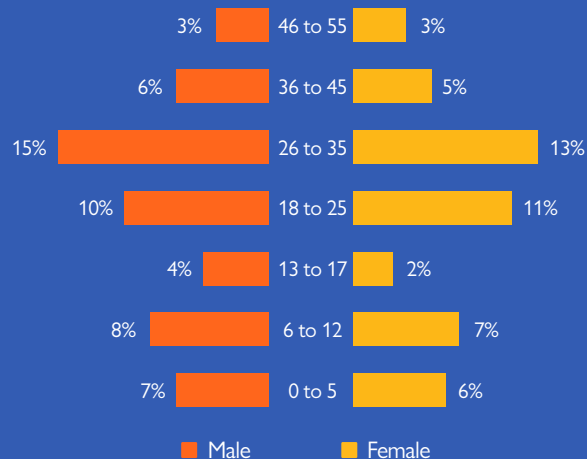
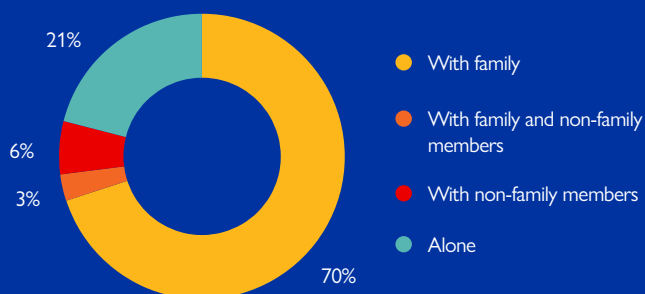


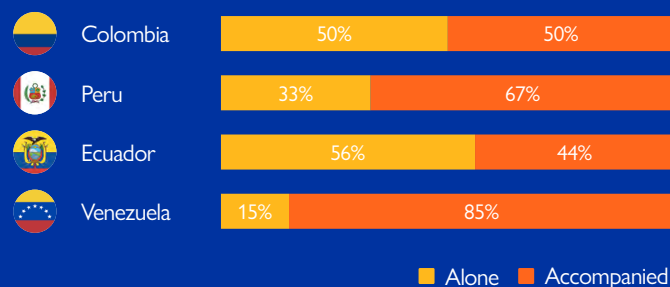
Figure 2. Gender and age of the people who make up the travel groups



Graph 3. Type of accompaniment on the trip



Graph 4. Type of accompaniment during the trip according to main nationalities surveyed



Profile of Respondents

Highschool (61%) continues to be the most reported completed educational level. This is followed by Junior High (19%), technical or vocational (9%), college or university (8%) and elementary (3%) (Graph 5).

In relation to the country of residence of respondents during the last 12 months, 30 per cent reported having resided in a country other than their country of nationality (Figure 6).

Graph 5. Educational level completed

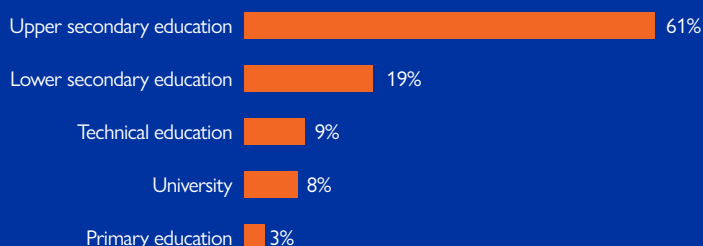
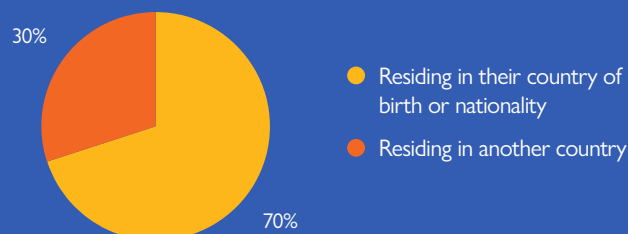


Figure 6. Country of residence



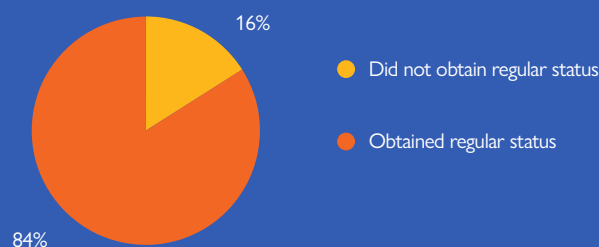
Respondents from Venezuela (35%) were the most likely to report residing in a country other than their country of nationality, while 100 per cent of the other main nationalities surveyed reported living in their country of nationality (Figure 7). The main countries of habitual residence reported by people from Venezuela are Colombia (49%), Peru (22%), Chile (18%), Ecuador (7%) and others (4%).

Regarding the regularization status of the people surveyed in countries where they usually live (different from the country of nationality), 73 per cent of the people surveyed reported not having initiated any immigration regularization process. Of the 27 per cent of respondents who reported having initiated a regularization process, 84 per cent reported having a positive outcome (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Usual residence of the most important nationalities



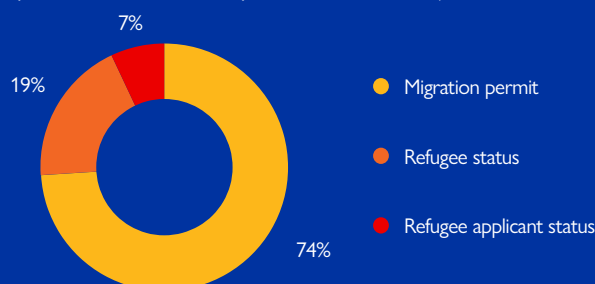
Figure 8. Obtaining regular status (of the 27% that presented a regularization process in their usual country of residence)



Of the 84 per cent of respondents who reported having obtained some type of regular status in the country of habitual residence, 74 per cent reported having obtained a migration permit, 19 per cent a refugee status, and seven per cent a refugee applicant status

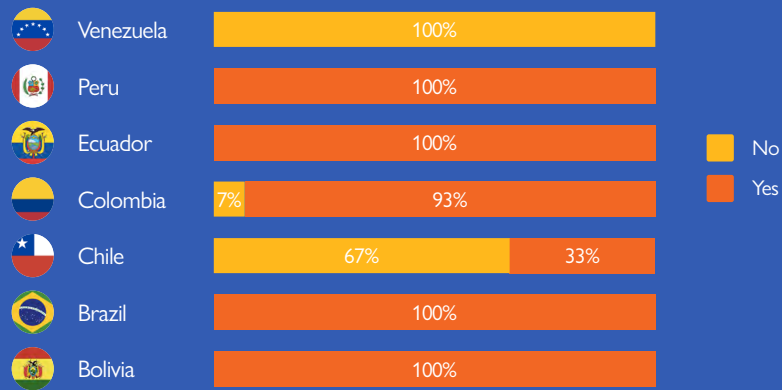
(Figure 9). It is important to note that 30 per cent of the people who reported living in a country other than their country of nationality were from Venezuela.

Figure 9. Regular migratory status obtained in country of habitual residence (of the 84% who report having obtained it)



Profile of Respondents

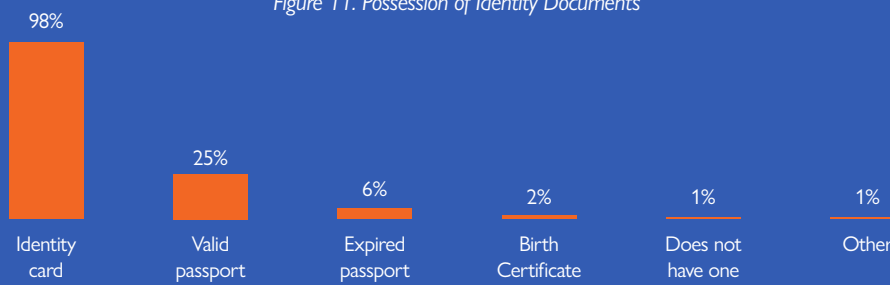
Figure 10. Obtaining regular migratory status according to country of habitual residence (of the 27% that indicated having initiated some regularization process)



In terms of having some sort of identification documents, 98 per cent of respondents reported having an identity card, 25 per cent reported having a valid passport, an increase of five per cent

compared to the previous month and the highest number reported during the first nine months of 2024, continuing a trend since July (Graph 11).

Figure 11. Possession of Identity Documents



Note: People surveyed could select several options regarding their document holding.

Regarding the employment status of the people surveyed before starting the trip, the trend of variability of the situation depending on whether the person lived in their country of nationality continues. Fifty-seven per cent of those who lived in their country of nationality were employed (a decrease of 17 per cent compared to the previous month), compared to 61 per cent for those who did not live in their country of nationality (also a decrease of 22 per cent compared to the previous month). Twenty-five per cent of those living in their country of nationality were self-employed (and 8%

increase in comparison to the previous month), while 20 per cent of those living in a country other than their country of nationality were self-employed.

The unemployment rate is lower for respondents who lived in their country of nationality at 18 per cent (up 10 per cent compared to the previous month), than for those who resided in a country other than their country of nationality at 19 per cent (up 16 per cent compared to the previous month).

Figure 12. Employment status before starting the trip living in country of nationality (70% of total respondents)



Figure 13. Employment status before starting the trip living in a country other than the country of nationality (30% of the total number of people surveyed)



Profile of Respondents

The sex breakdown of reported employment status before starting the trip indicates that 49 per cent of respondents who reported being employed were male (a decrease of 20 per cent compared to

the previous month), while 51 per cent were female. Eighty per cent of respondents who reported being self-employed were female.

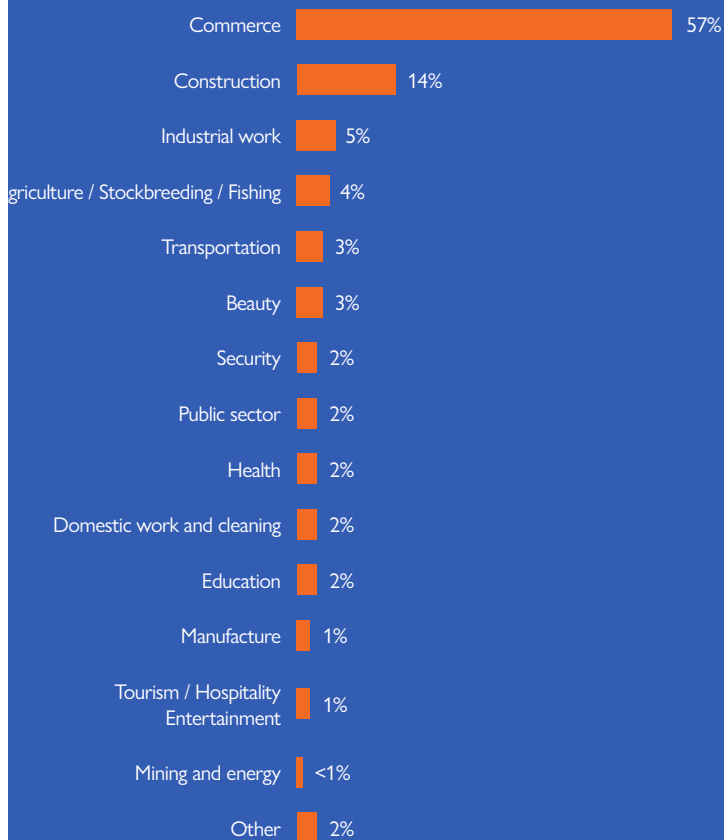
Figure 14. Employment status before starting the trip living by sex



The main employment sectors of the population surveyed before starting the trip continue to be commerce (57%), construction (14%) and industry (5%) (Graph 15). Regardless of the high employment rate of respondents and of their place of residence in the last 12 months, 93 per cent reported not having sufficient income to cover

their basic needs (an increase of more than 40 per cent compared to the previous month) (Graph 16 and Graph 17). One hundred per cent of people living outside of their country of nationality reported having insufficient income to cover their basic needs.

Figure 15. Employment sector (of those who reported being employed or self-employed)



Note: Percentages rounded.

Graph 16. Income level in the country of nationality (of the 70% who resided in the country of nationality)

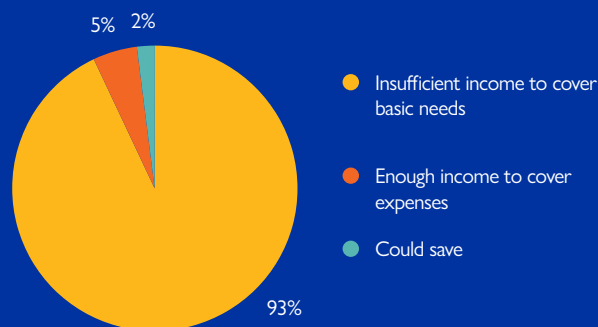
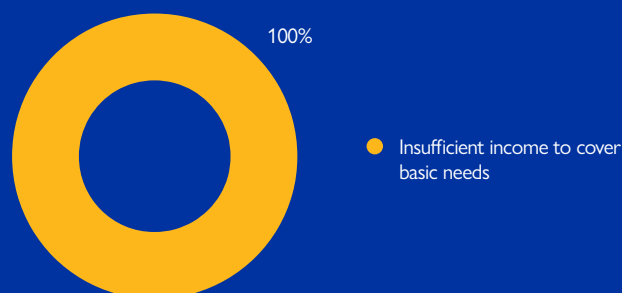
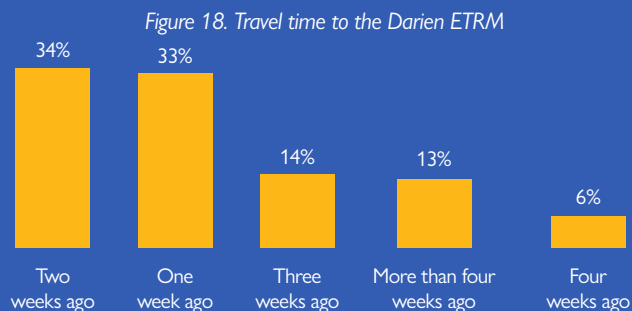


Figure 17. Income level outside country of nationality (of the 30% who resided outside country of nationality)



Migratory routes and access to information

Regarding travel time to the ETRM where the survey was applied, 34 per cent reported a duration of two weeks and 33 per cent reported a duration of one week (Figure 18). On average, most respondents crossed only one transit country (Colombia) before arriving in Panama, shortening travel times, and mainly due to the high number of reported interregional migration.



Sixty-two per cent reported spending one day or less in the ETRM, 16 per cent reported spending between two and three days, and 10 per cent reported spending between four and seven days in ETRM in Darien (Figure 19). Fifty-two per cent reported having obtained information about the route from family or friends who

had migrated before, 46 per cent reported having obtained the information from neighbours or acquaintances, and four per cent reported having obtained the information through international organizations (Figure 20). No respondent reported obtaining the information through a guide.

Figure 19. Time spent at the Lajas Blancas ETRM at the time the survey was applied

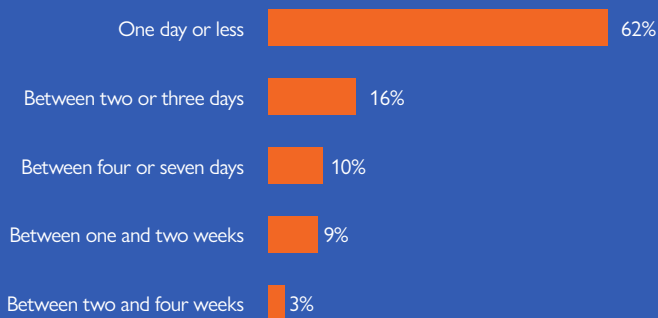
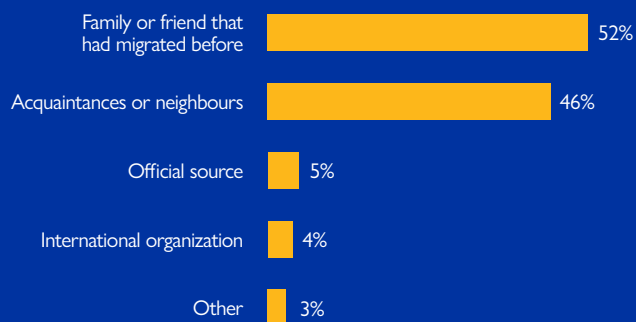


Figure 20. Source of information on the route



Note: Respondents could select several options for their sources of information.

Forty-one per cent of respondents reported not knowing about regular forms of migration, a decrease of 30 per cent from the previous month (Figure 21). Fifty-nine per cent of respondents

reported having encountered situations during the trip about which they had no information prior to departure (Figure 22).

Figure 21. Knowledge of regular ways to migrate to the intended country of destination.

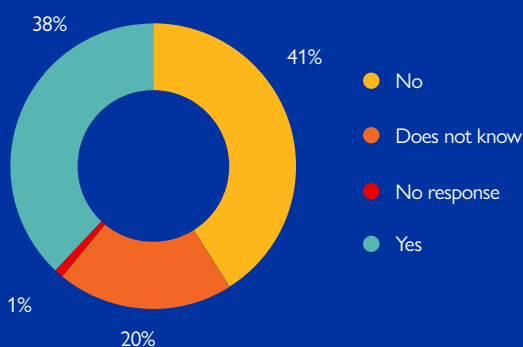
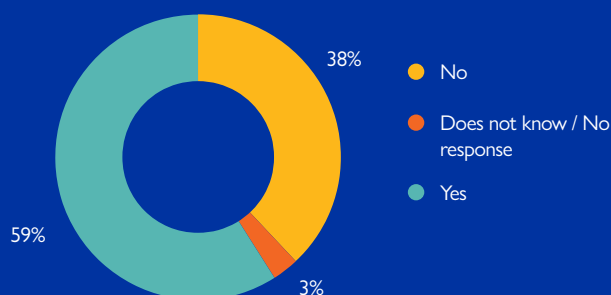


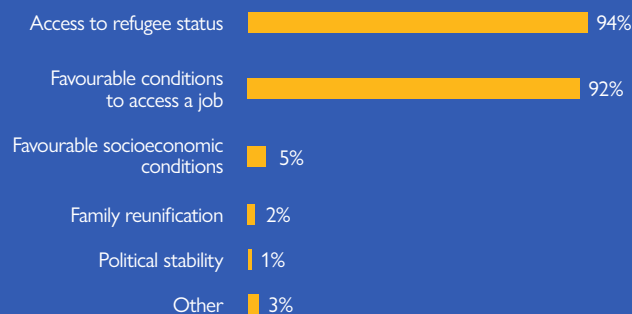
Figure 22. Report on sufficiency of information prior to trip initiation



Intention of the Trip

Ninety-five per cent of respondents identified the United States of America as their primary destination country, while two per cent identified Mexico as their destination country. Eighty per cent of respondents did not have an alternative destination, while nine per cent indicated Mexico as an alternative, and another eight per cent considered Canada as an alternative destination. Among the main factors for choosing a destination country, respondents highlighted favorable conditions for finding employment (94%) and favorable economic and financial conditions (92%) in their respective destination countries (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Factors or reasons that influenced their decision to migrate to the country of destination

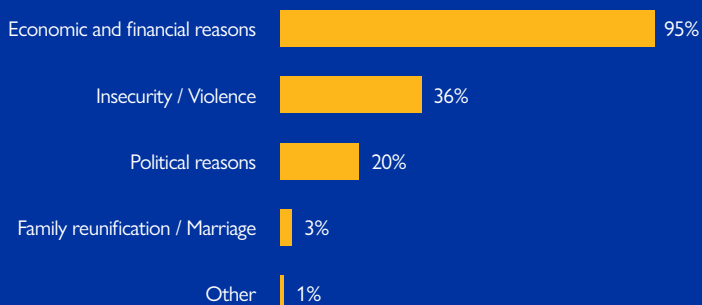


Note: Respondents could select several options for the reasons that influenced their decision.

Economic and financial reasons (95%) were the main reason why respondents decided to leave their country of origin, followed by insecurity and violence (36%) (Figure 24).

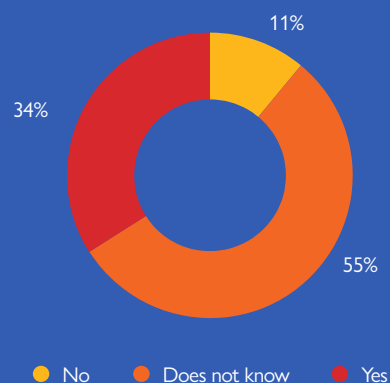
Fifty-five per cent of respondents did not know if they wished to return to their country of origin, and 34 per cent indicated that they intended to return (Figure 25).

Figure 24. Main factors or reasons that influenced the decision to leave their country of origin



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

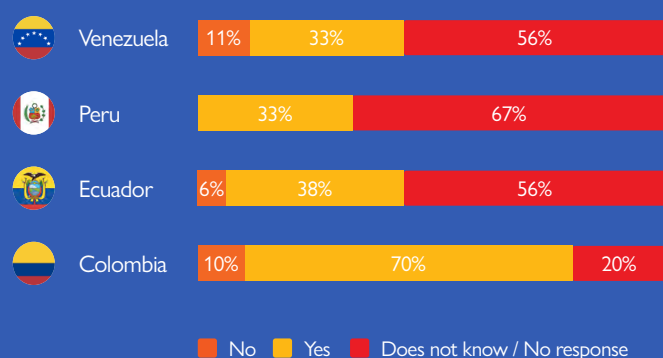
Graph 25. Intention to return to country of nationality



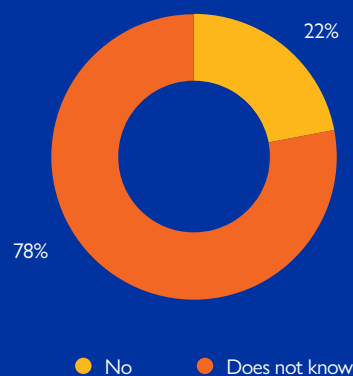
Respondents from Peru (33%) indicated the lowest propensity to return and 70 per cent of respondents from Colombia reported the highest intention to return to their country of nationality (Figure 26). Regarding the intention to return to the usual country of residence

(different from the country of origin or nationality), 78 per cent did not know if they would return and 22 per cent indicated that they had no intention to return (Figure 27).

Figure 26. Disaggregation of intention to return according to the most important nationalities



Graph 27. Intention to return to country of habitual residence



Needs and assistance

Ninety-four per cent of respondents reported having a need for information on regularization possibilities in the destination country, and six per cent reported not needing information (Figure 28).

Eighty-five per cent of respondents reported having no need for information on regularization possibilities in Panama (Figure 29).

Figure 28. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in country of destination

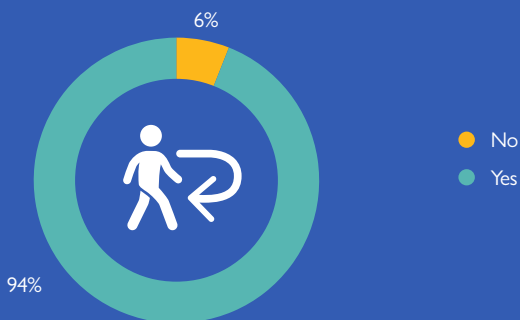
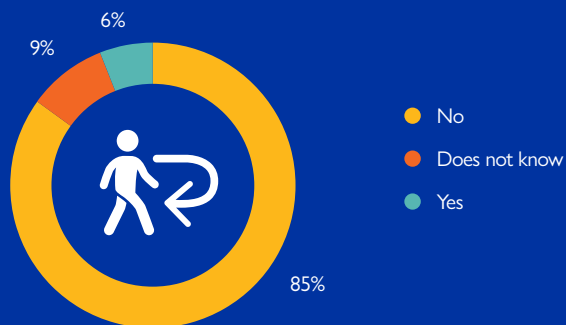
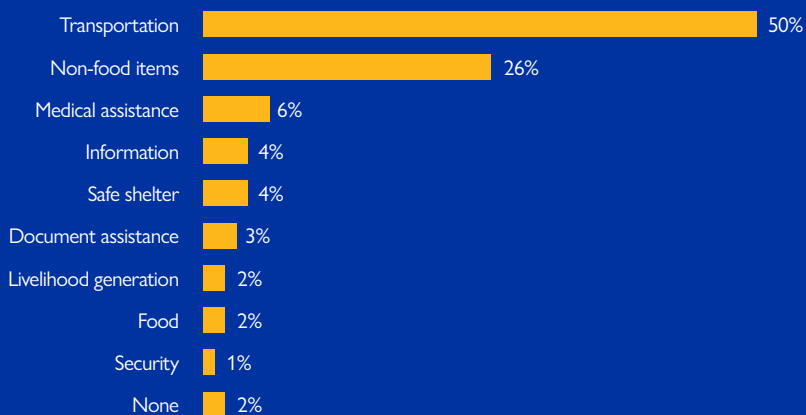


Figure 29. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in Panama



At the time of the survey, respondents highlighted transportation as their first need (50%), followed by non-food items (26%), and medical assistance (6%) (Figure 30).

Figure 30. Main needs at the time of the survey

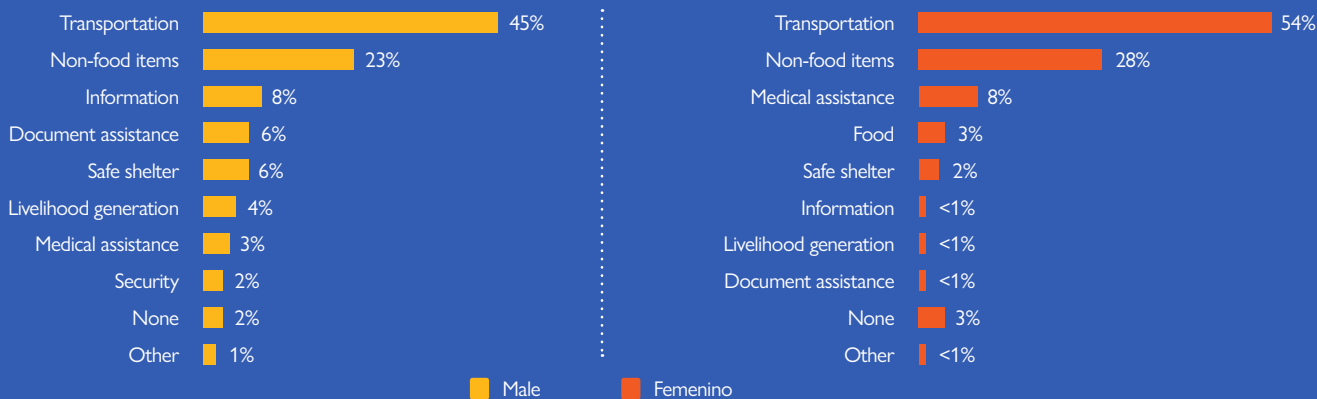


Note: people could select several options on their main needs.

The disaggregation by sex regarding needs indicates that both females and males consider transportation as a primary urgent need at the time the surveys were conducted. Males emphasize the need

for non-food items (23%) and information needs (8%) to a greater extent. Female respondents also highlight non-food items (28%) and medical assistance (8%) as their main needs.

Gráfico 31. Necesidades principales al momento de realizar la encuesta según sexo



Registration of people in the controlled flow

The Lajas Blancas ETRM is located in the province of Darien, which receives people moving through the Americas who have crossed the border between Colombia and Panama, passing through or around the perilous Darien jungle. People move between Darien and Costa Rica using buses that offer direct service to the Southern Migrant Station (EMI SUR), established by Costa Rican authorities 17 kilometers from the border.

The first registration of people on the move is made in the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaán Membrillo in Panama,

and these are used as an estimate of the arrival of people to the ETRM of Lajas Blancas. The people who enter the ETRM are again registered in the databases of the National Migration Service, where they are asked for information on age, nationality, sex, among other data.

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

Methodological Note

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

The aim is to collect data on sex, age, nationality, characteristics of the trip, migratory route, country of destination, as well as the number of people who make up the travel group of the people surveyed. The information on people on the move in the Americas was collected between August 27 and September 25 at the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) of Lajas Blancas in Darien. Due to the extreme conditions of the context and the migratory route, it is understood that the vast majority of people who irregularly cross the border between Colombia and Panama through the Darien jungle, will seek to be assisted at one of the ETRM, for their subsequent transfer by bus to the EMI SUR in Costa Rica, on their way to North America.

For this reason, the ETRM becomes a meeting place or funnel, which in turn allows us to obtain a better picture of the mixed migration flows through 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 random order, as is the case of arrivals at the ETRM. The main limitations for the implementation of this study are the conditions of constant mobility of people within the ETRM, and the language limitations for the implementation of the surveys by the collection team.

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

Descargo de responsabilidades de la OIM

This publication was made possible with the support of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State, under the Western Hemisphere Program and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, the views expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Government of the United States of America nor of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This publication has not been formally edited by the IOM Publications Unit.

Thanks to the support of:

