

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

Bajo Chiquito, Darien, Panama.
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INTRODUCTION

The province of Darien is located on Panama's eastern border, and its territory is part of the migratory routes most used by people moving northbound through the Americas. 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 on the move.

Panama currently is conducting Operation "Controlled Flow", which provides humanitarian assistance and daily transfers hundreds of people in a situation of mobility to its Temporary Migrant Reception Centres (known in Spanish as ETRM) in the province of Darien. People enter through the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo, located in the Embera-Wounaan Indigenous region in the depths of the province of Darien in Panama, and are transferred respectively to the different ETRMs.



Map of the migration flow in Panama

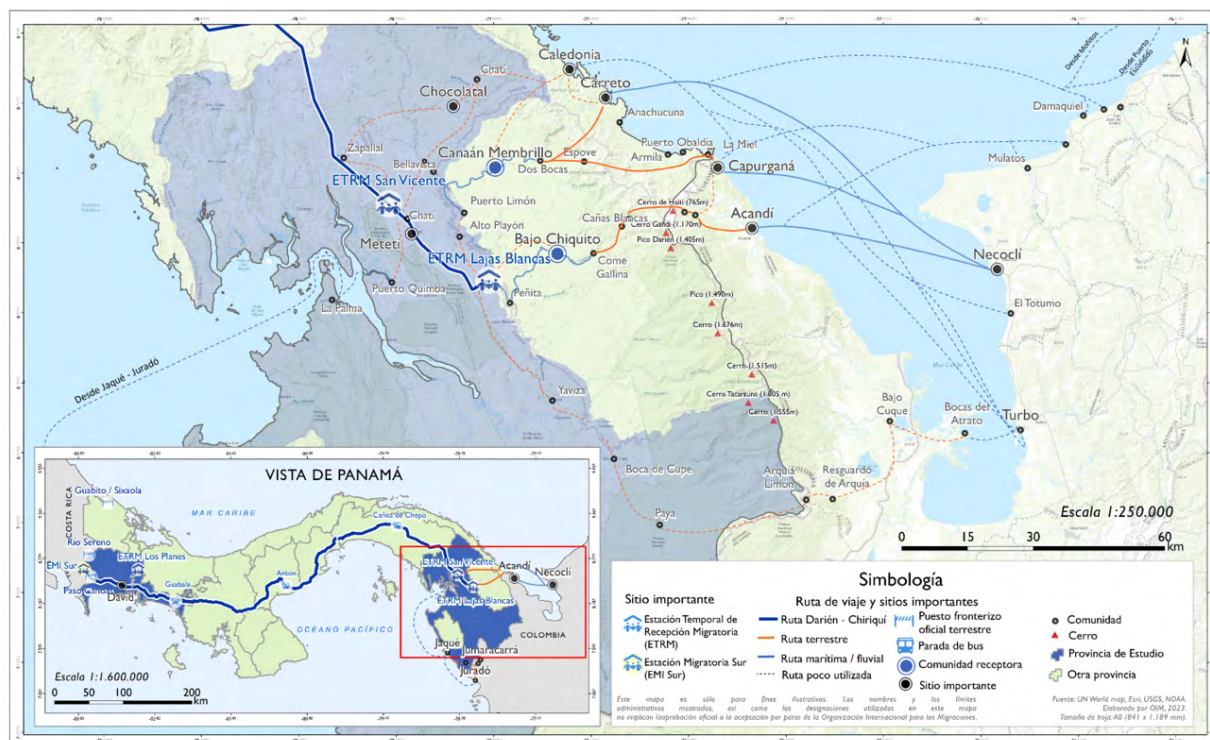
Between 26 June and 25 July, flow monitoring surveys were conducted with the population in transit through the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre in the province of Darien. A total of 264 travel group representatives were surveyed. These surveys provided information on 461 people accompanying the person surveyed.

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"

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

The following are some of the main routes identified by Indigenous host communities, as well as humanitarian actors present in Darien:

- 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 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" (long, narrow boat) for about three hours to the community on Panamanian soil, Bajo Chiquito. In this community the first registration is done by the authorities of the National Migration Service and the National Border Service (known in Spanish as SENAFRONT), in addition, this is the first point where institutions such as the Public Ministry or the Ministry of Health are located. Then, from this community, they continue by piragua for four hours or more to the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre of Lajas Blancas.
- 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 Tacarti 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 wet 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 Spanish 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 within 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. In addition, this route avoids having to go through the 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 taken mostly by people of Asian origin, especially Chinese and Afghans. From there they continue by land within Panama to Chati and by land to Chocolatal, continue to Zapallal and finally move to the Lajas Blancas ETRM.

As of October 2023, buses departing from Darien cross the Paso Canoas border between Costa Rica and Panama and head to EMI Sur, established by Costa Rican authorities 17 kilometers from the border line within their territory. For this reason, refugees and migrants in transit are no longer received at the Los Planes de Gualaca ETRM in the province of Chiriqui.

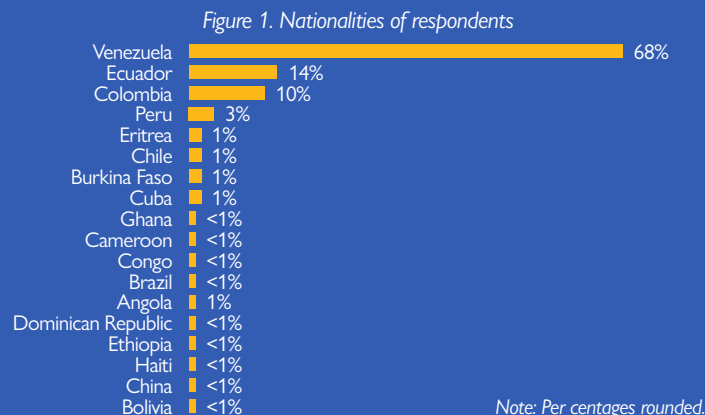
Flow Monitoring Survey²

People Surveyed: **264** | People Accompanying: **461**

Data collection: June 26-July 25, 2024

This monitoring was carried out through individual surveys of adults (18 years of age or older) in the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre of Lajas Blancas, Darien. In total, information was obtained on 712 people on the move (264 respondents and 461 people accompanying them).

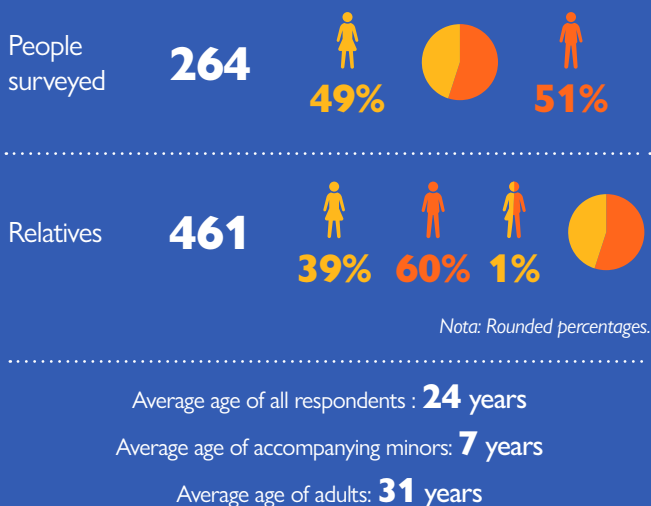
Regarding the nationalities of the people surveyed and the people accompanying them, 68 per cent were from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (hereinafter Venezuela), followed by Ecuador (14%), Colombia (10%), Peru (3%) and other nationalities (6%) (Figure 1).



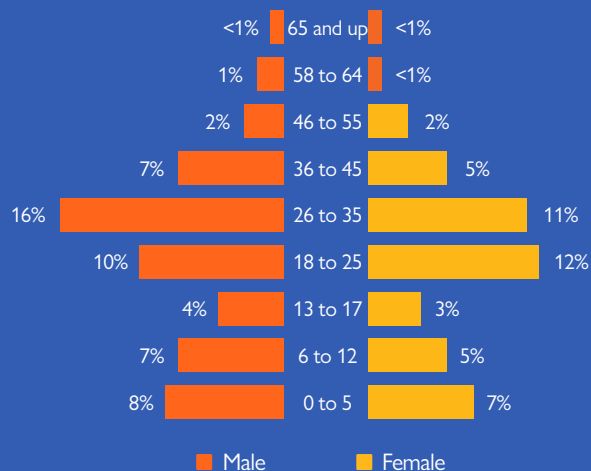
Fifty-seven per cent of the total respondents (respondents and family members) were male, and 43 per cent were female. In addition, 30 per cent of the people in the travel groups were minors (17 years of age or younger) (Graph 2). The average age of adults (respondents and people accompanying) is 32 years old. The average age of accompanying minors is seven years. The average age of all respondents is 24 years.

Regarding the composition of travel groups, it should be noted that 61 per cent of respondents traveled with family members, one per cent with family and non-family members, eight per cent with non-family members and 30 per cent alone, an increase of three per cent over the previous month (Graph 3). Among the top three nationalities surveyed, respondents from Colombia (67%) and Venezuela (25%) were more likely to travel alone, while 100 per cent of respondents from Peru traveled accompanied (Graph 4).

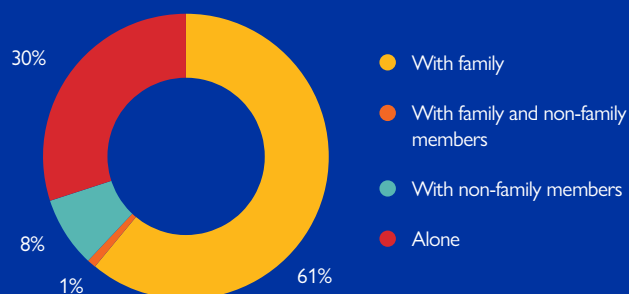
Travel group profile



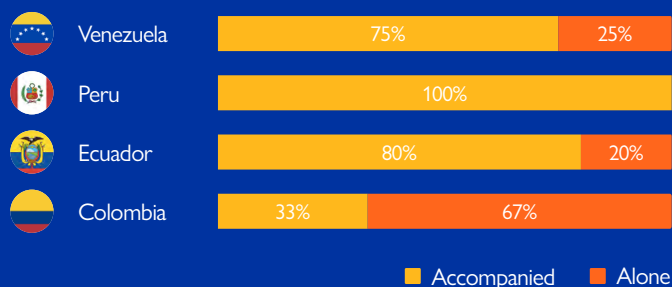
Graph 2. Gender and age of the people who make up the travel groups



Graph 3. Type of accompaniment during the trip



Graph 4. Type of travel companionship according to the main nationalities surveyed



Profile of Respondents

Upper secondary education (61%) continues to be the most reported educational level. This is followed by lower secondary education (16%), primary (7%), university (6%) and technical (6%) (Graph 5).

In relation to the country of residence of those surveyed during the last 12 months, 51 per cent reported having resided in a country other than their country of nationality (Figure 6).

Graph 5. Educational level completed

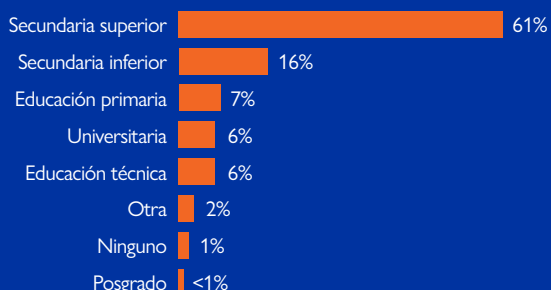
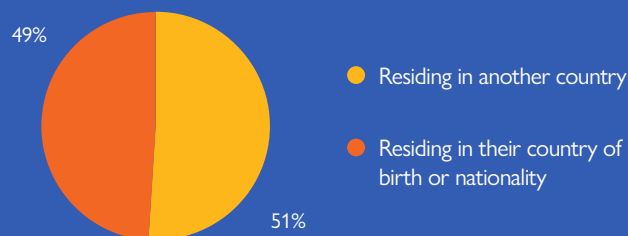


Figure 6. Country of residence

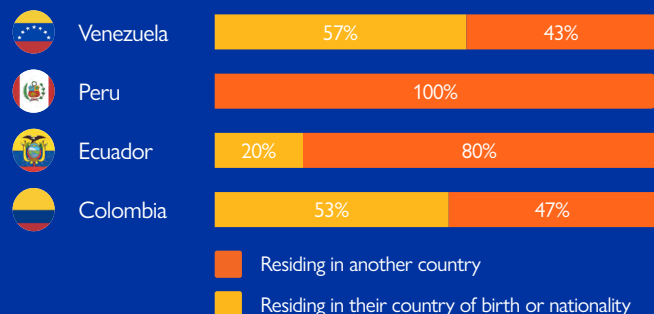


People surveyed from Venezuela (57%) were the most likely to report residing in a country other than their country of nationality, while 100 per cent of respondents from Peru resided in their country of nationality (Figure 7).

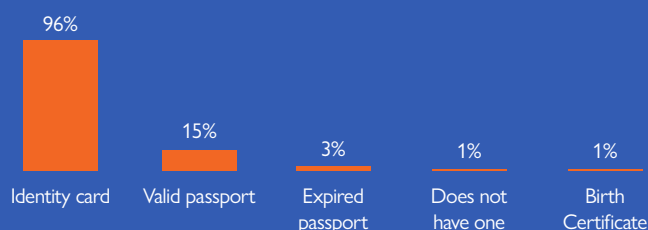
In terms of having identity documents, 96 per cent of the people surveyed reported having an identity card, 15 per cent reported having a valid passport, an increase of seven per cent compared to the previous month, and the highest number reported during the first seven months of 2024 (Graph 8). The identity card is the most common document carried by respondents regardless of their nationality.

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

Figure 7. Residencia habitual de nacionalidades destacadas



Graph 8. Having of Identity Documents



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

Regarding the employment situation of the people surveyed before starting the trip, the trend of variability of the situation continues depending on whether or not the person was living in his or her country of nationality. Sixty-three per cent of those who lived in their country of nationality were employed compared to 78 per cent for those who did not live in their country of nationality.

Twenty-eight per cent of those living in their country of origin were self-employed, while 15 per cent of those living in a country other than their country of origin were self-employed.

The unemployment rate is higher for respondents who lived in their country of origin (9%) than for those who resided in a country other than their country of origin (7%).

Figure 9. Employment status before starting the trip living in country of origin (49% of total respondents)



Note: Per centages rounded.

Figure 10. Employment status before starting the trip living in a country other than the country of origin (51% of the total number of people surveyed)



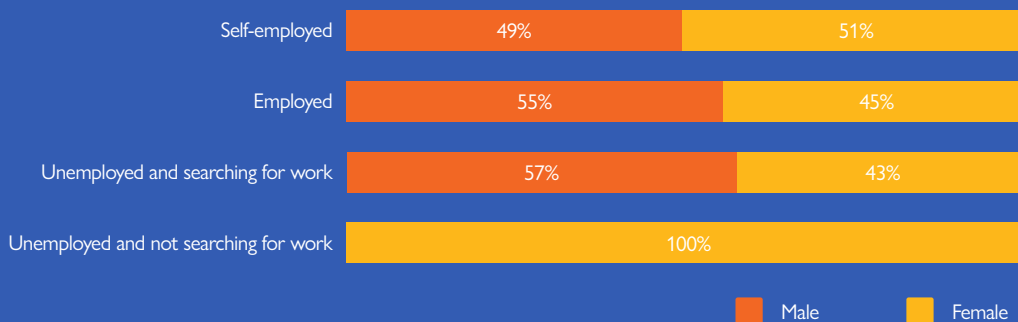
Note: Per centages rounded.

Profile of Respondents

The gender breakdown of reported employment status before starting the trip indicates that 49 per cent of the respondents who reported being employed were male, while 51 per cent were

female. One hundred per cent of respondents who reported being unemployed without looking for work were female.

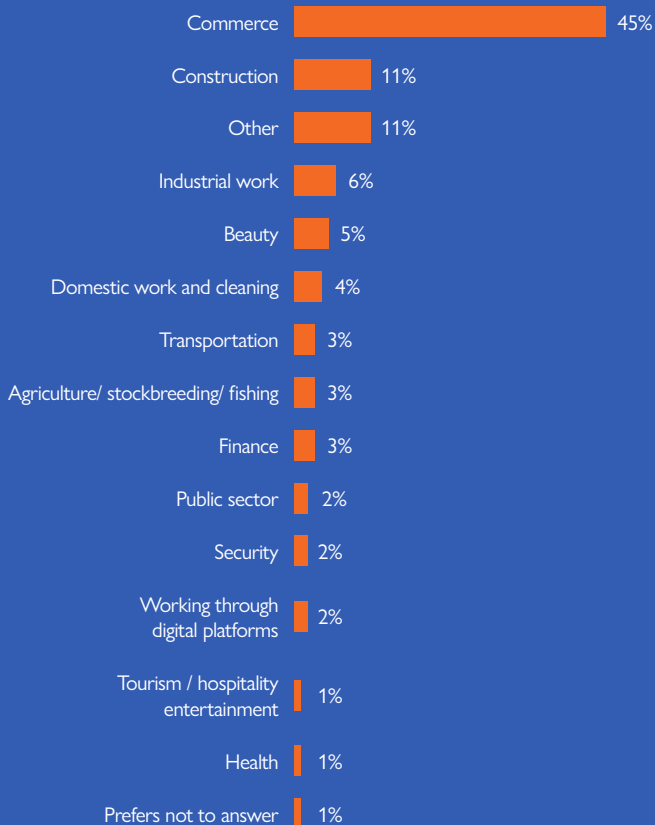
Figure 11. Employment status before starting the trip by sex



The main employment sectors of the population surveyed before starting the trip continue to be commerce (45%) and construction (11%) (Graph 12).

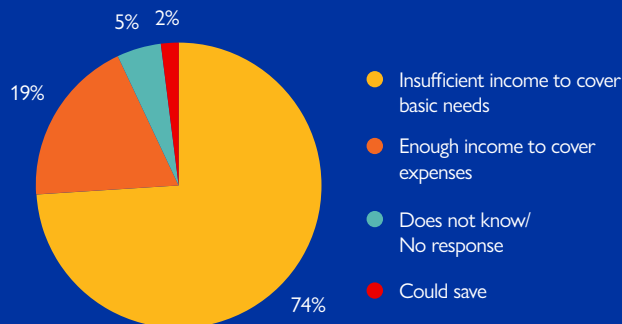
Regardless of the high employment rate of respondents, regardless of their place of residence in the last twelve months, 67 per cent reported not having had sufficient income to cover their basic needs, a decrease of 11 per cent from the previous month (Graph 13 and Graph 14).

Graph 12. Employment sector (of those who reported being employed or self-employed)

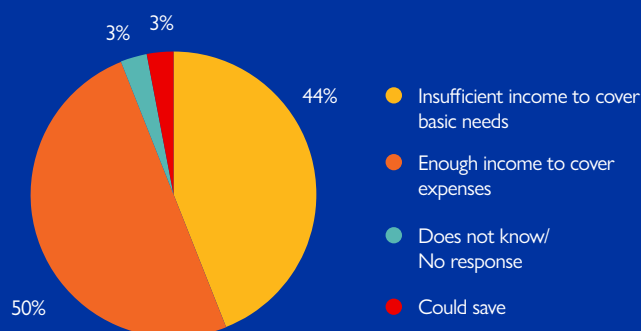


Note: Per centages rounded.

Graph 13. Income level in the country of origin (of the 49% residing in the country of nationality)



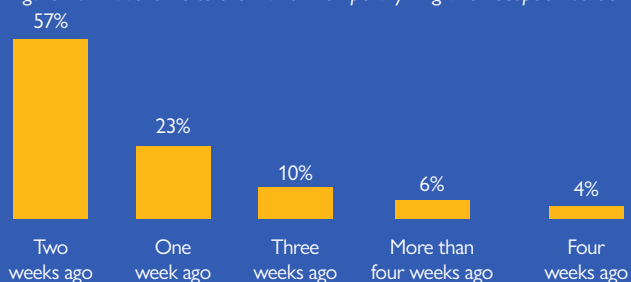
Graph 14. Income level outside the country of origin (of the 51% who resided outside the country of nationality)



Migratory crossings and access to information

Regarding travel time to the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre where the survey was applied, 57 per cent reported a duration of two weeks and 23 per cent reported a duration of one week (Figure 15). Most respondents crossed, on average, two transit countries before arriving in Panama, shortening travel times, and mainly due to the high number of reported interregional migration.

Figure 15. Travel time to the Darien Temporary Migrant Reception Station



Thirty-nine per cent reported spending between two to three days in the ETRM, 38 per cent reported spending one day or less, and 15 per cent reported spending between four and seven days at the ETRM in Darien. (Figure 16). Forty-seven per cent reported having obtained information about the route from family or friends

who had migrated before, 31 per cent reported having obtained the information from neighbors or acquaintances, and five per cent reported having obtained the information through international organizations (Figure 17).

Figure 16. Time spent at the Darien "MTRS" at the time the survey was conducted

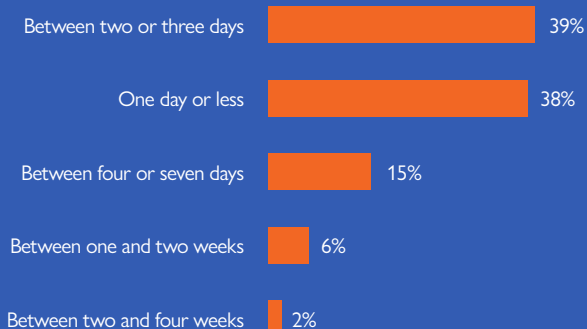
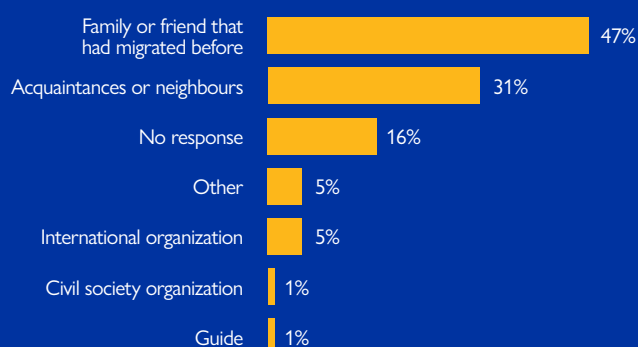


Figure 17. Source of information about the route



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

Sixty-two per cent of people reported not knowing the regular forms of migration (Figure 18), an increase of seven per cent compared to the previous month. Fifty-three per cent of respondents reported having encountered situations during the trip about which they

had no information prior to departure (Figure 18), the main lack of information being the difficulty of the route (65%), the lack of security on the route (30%) and the weather conditions of the terrain (5%) (Figure 19).

Figure 18. Knowledge of regular ways to migrate to the country of intended destination

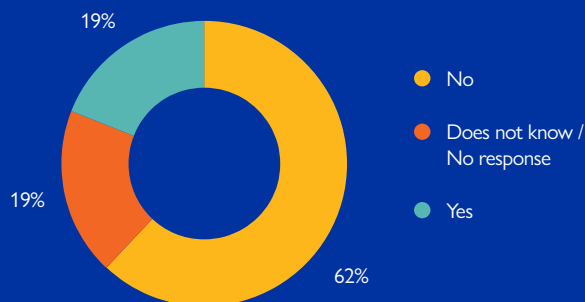


Figure 18. Sufficiency of information reported prior to trip initiation

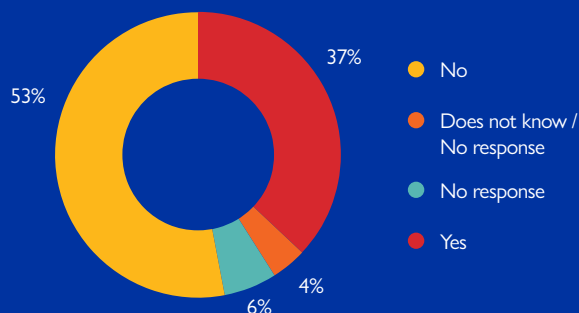


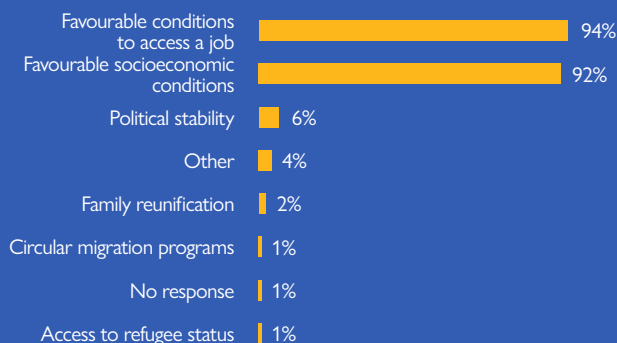
Figure 19. Main needs for information on the route



Intention of the Journey

Ninety-nine per cent of respondents identified the United States of America as their primary destination country, while one per cent identified Mexico as a destination country. Eighty-five per cent of respondents had no alternative country of destination, seven per cent considered Mexico as an alternative, and another six per cent considered Canada as an alternative destination. Among the main factors for choosing the country of destination, respondents highlighted favorable conditions for accessing employment (94%) and favorable socioeconomic conditions (92%) (Figure 20).

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

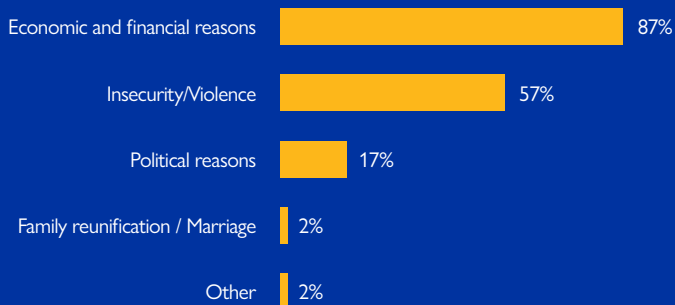


Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options.

Economic and financial reasons (87%) were the main factor why respondents decided to leave their country of origin, followed by insecurity and violence (57%) (Figure 21). The disaggregation

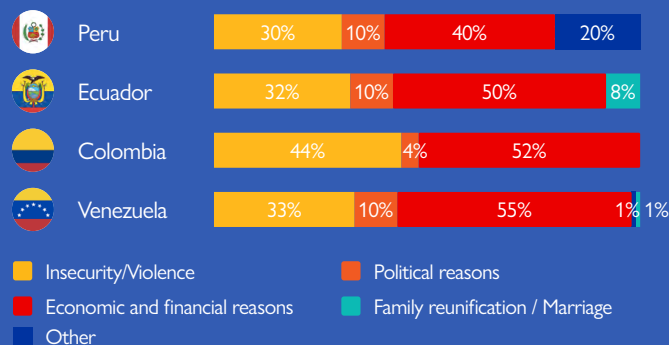
by country indicates that the main nationalities that make up the surveyed flow considered the economic situation as the main motivator for migration, followed by insecurity (Figure 22).

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



Note: People could select several options regarding their main factors for migrating.

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



Note: Percentages rounded.

Fifty-five per cent of respondents did not know if they would return to their country of origin, a decrease of 19 per cent compared to the previous month. Thirty-five per cent indicated an intention to return, an increase of 22 per cent compared to the previous month (Figure 23). Respondents from Ecuador (60%) and Colombia (39%) were the most likely to return, and respondents from Peru (50%)

were the most likely not to intend to return to their country of origin (Figure 24).

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

Figure 23. Intention to return to country of nationality

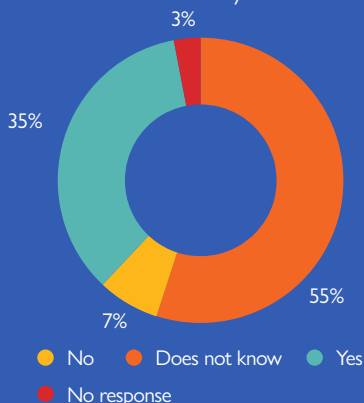


Figure 24. Disaggregation of intention to return according to the most relevant nationalities

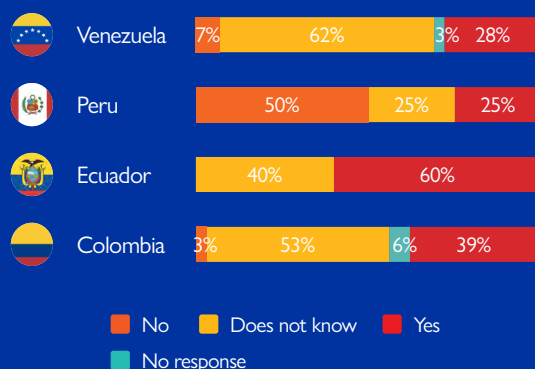
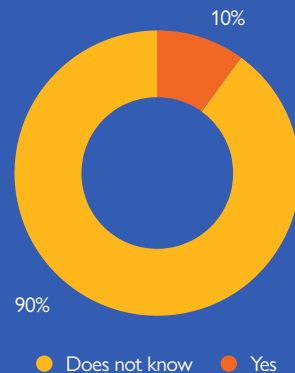


Figure 25. Intention to return to country of habitual residence



Needs and assistance

Sixty-two per cent of respondents reported having information needs about regularization possibilities in the destination country, while 37 per cent reported not needing information, a decrease

of 20 per cent compared to the previous month (Figure 26). Ninety-five per cent of respondents reported having no need for information on regularization possibilities in Panama (Figure 27).

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

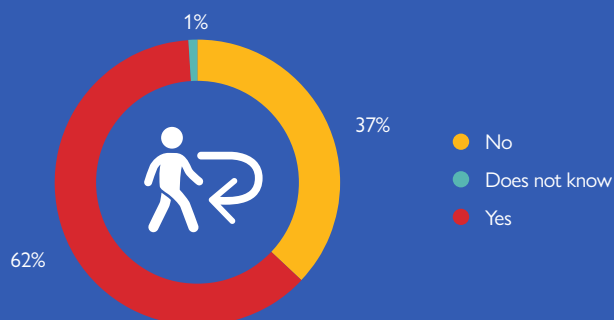
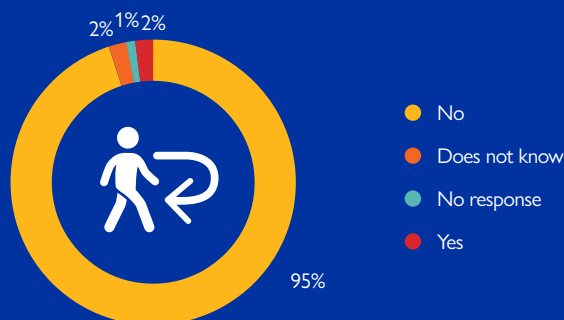


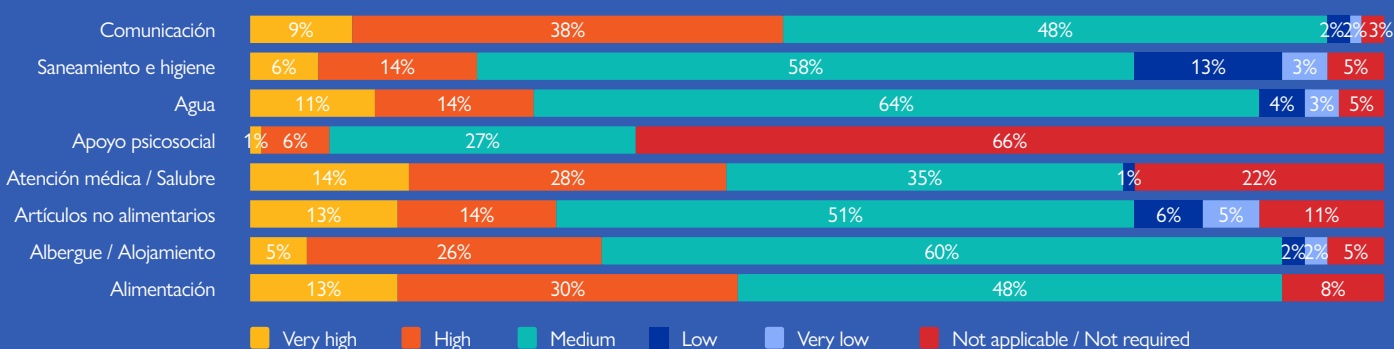
Figure 27. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in Panama



At the time of the survey, the respondents reported a high level of satisfaction regarding access to information at the ETRM (38%), food

(30%) and medical assistance (28%) (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Level of satisfaction of respondents regarding the coverage of basic needs in the shelter

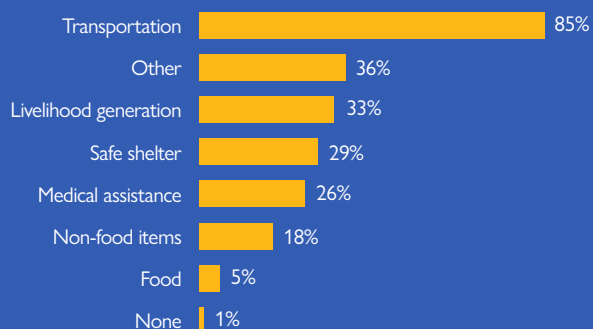


At the time of the survey, the respondents highlighted transportation as their first need (85%), the second need was livelihood generation (33%), and the third need was safe shelter (29%) (Figure 29).

Disaggregation by sex in terms of needs indicates that transportation

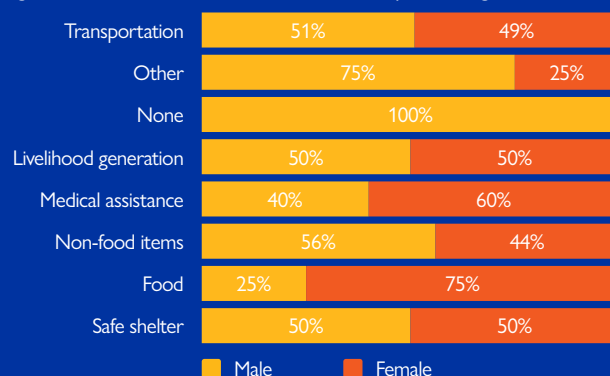
is the main need highlighted by both males (78%) and females (74%). Medical assistance and the need for improvements in food is highlighted by the females as a pressing need more frequently than the males (Figure 30).

Figure 29. Main needs at the time of conducting the survey



Note: Per centages rounded.

Figure 30. Main needs at the time of the survey according to sex



Note: People could select from multiple options regarding their main needs.

Controlled migration flow registration

The Lajas Blancas ETRM is located in the province of Darien, which receives the population moving through the Americas that has crossed the border between Colombia and Panama, passing through or around the Darien jungle. People move between Darien and Costa Rica using buses, which offer direct service to the Estación Migratoria Sur (EMI Sur), established by Costa Rican authorities 17 kilometers from the border line within its territory.

The first registration of people in mobility situations are made in the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaán Membrillo in Panama,

and this data is used as an estimate of the arrival of people to the Lajas Blancas ETRM. 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 gender, age, nationality, travel characteristics, 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 the population in transit through the Americas was collected between 26 June, 2024, and 25 July, 2024, at the Temporary Migratory Reception Centre (known as ETRM for its acronym in Spanish) 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 Temporary Migrant Reception Centre,

for 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 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 in the case of arrivals to the ETRM.

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 in the Temporary Migrant Reception Station.

IOM Disclaimer

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