

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

Darien, Panamá.
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INTRODUCTION

The province of Darien is located on the eastern border of Panama and is one of the main migratory routes in the Americas, from the south to the north of the continent. This route is very dangerous due to the difficult geographic conditions of the Darien National Park and the presence of organized crime. People who use it face numerous 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 endangers the integrity, dignity and lives of migrants, refugees and people in mobility.

Panama is currently carrying out Operation “Controlled Flow”, which provides humanitarian assistance and transfers hundreds of people on the move 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

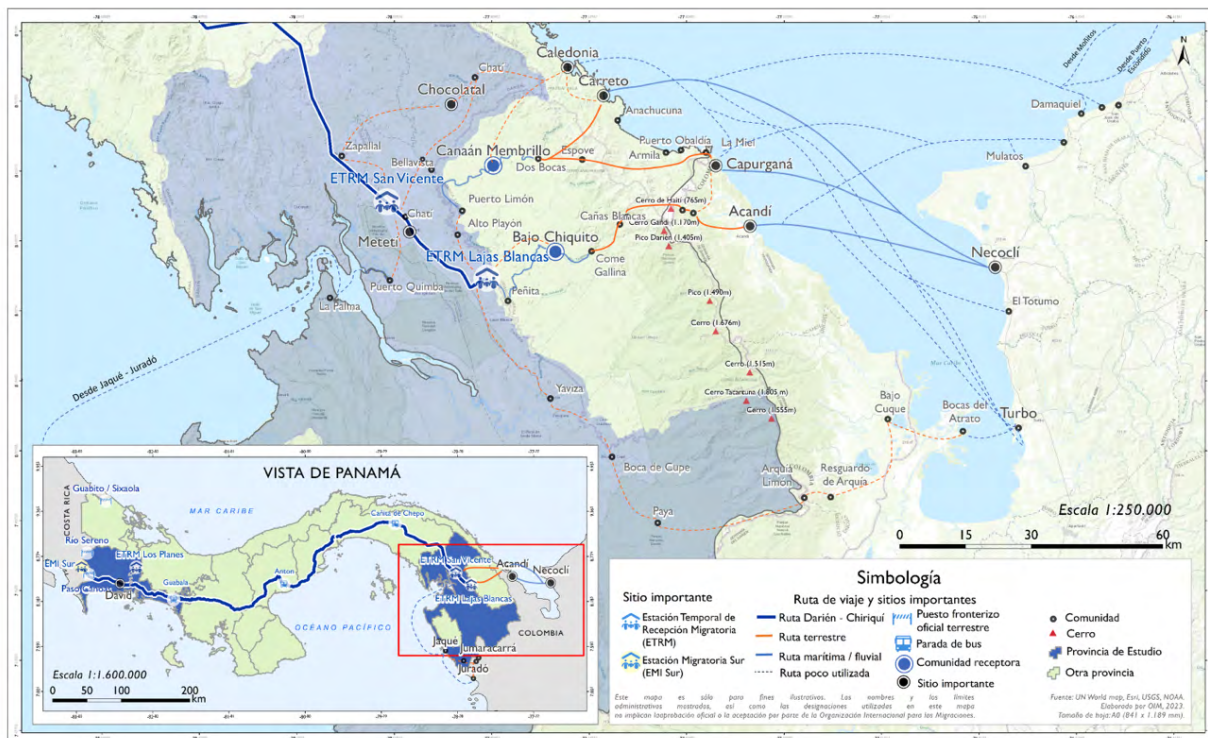
Between July 29 and August 26, 2024, flow monitoring surveys were conducted among the population in transit in the ETRMs of the Darien province. A total of 186 people representing different travel groups were surveyed and additional information was obtained on 338 people accompanying them.

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

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Migration routes in the Darien Province



Map "Migration routes on the eastern border of Panama"

People moving through the Americas irregularly enter the Darien 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 wet season in Panama (May - November), each route may take longer.

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

- Currently, the route most commonly used by people in mobility situations in the Americas begins with a maritime journey from the Colombian municipalities of Necocli or Turbo to Acandí (Colombia). From there, they travel by land to Cañas Blancas (Panama), and then continue by land to Come Gallina (Panama). Afterwards, the piragua or narrow wooden boat trip down the river takes about three hours to the community of Bajo Chiquito in Panama. In this community, the authorities of the National Migration Service and the National Border Service carry out the first registration, and there are also institutions such as the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Health. Finally, from Bajo Chiquito, they continue by piragua for four hours or more to the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) in 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 Obaldía (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 Limón (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 Limón, people are transferred by bus to Buenos Aires (Panama), and from there to the Estación Migratoria Sur (EMI SUR) in Costa Rica.
- A third route used is along the Pacific coast, starting in Jurado, a Colombian municipality in the department of Choco, and continuing by sea to the community of Jaque in Panama. From Jaque, the journey continues by sea to Puerto Quimba, where Panamanian authorities conduct the first registration. The people are then transferred by land to the ETRM in Lajas Blancas.
- A fourth identified route begins with a maritime journey from the Colombian municipality of Necocli to Caledonia in Panama. This route is longer, therefore more expensive, but avoids crossing the Darien jungle. According to testimonies from local Indigenous communities and observations by IOM staff, this route is mainly used by people on the move of Asian origin, especially from China and Afghanistan. From Caledonia, migrants and refugees continue overland to Chati, then to Chocolatal, continue to Zapallal, and finally arrive at the ETRM in Lajas Blancas.

As of October 2023, buses leaving the Darien Province in Panama cross the border at Paso Canoas and go directly to the EMI SUR in Costa Rica. This station is 17 kilometers from the border within Costa Rican territory. Due to this change, migrants are no longer received at the ETRM in Los Planes de Gualaca in the province of Chiriquí.

Flow Monitoring Survey

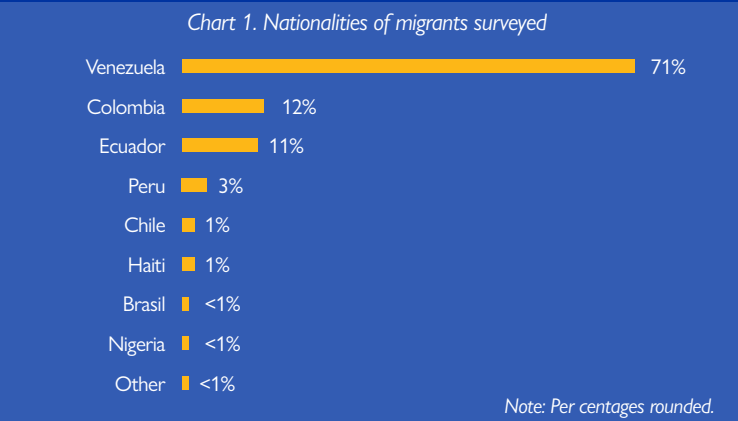
People Surveyed: **186** | People Accompanying: **338**

Data collection: July 29 to August 26 2024

This monitoring was carried out through individual surveys of adults (18 years and older) at the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) in Lajas Blancas, Darien. Information was collected from a total of 524 people on the move, of which 186 were directly surveyed and 338 were their family members.

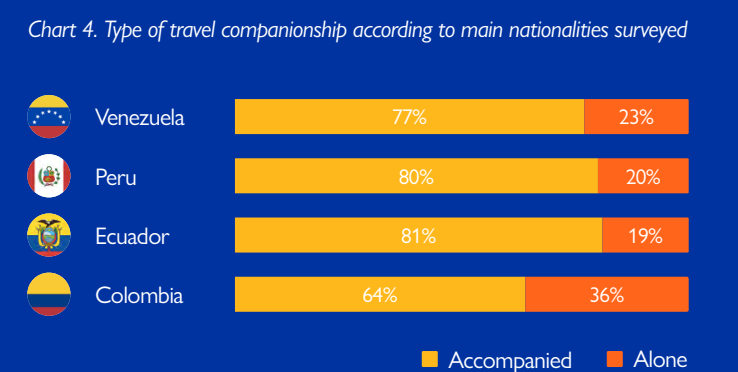
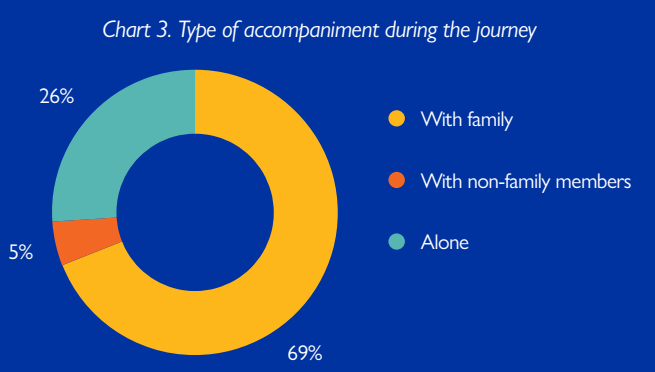
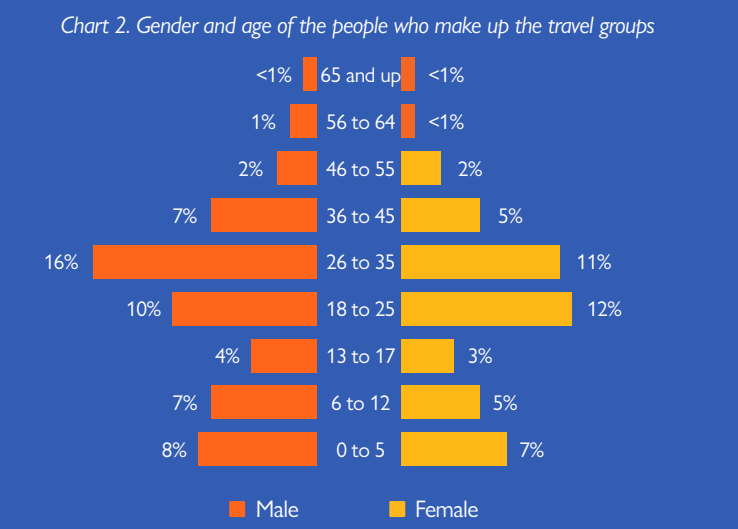
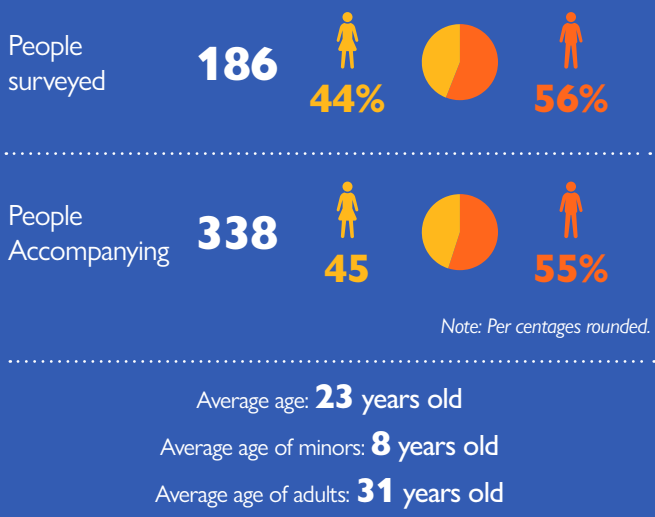
Regarding the nationalities of the people surveyed and their family members, 71 per cent were from Venezuela, followed by Colombia with 12 per cent, Ecuador with 11 per cent and Peru with three per cent. The remaining three per cent corresponded to other nationalities.

Fifty-five per cent of the respondents and their family members were male, 45 per cent were female, and the remaining one per cent identified with another gender category. In addition, 34 per cent of the people in the travel groups were under 17 years of age (see Chart two). The average age of adults (both respondents and family members) is 31 years, while the average age of minors is 8 years. Overall, the average age of all respondents is 23 years.



Regarding how travel groups are formed, 69 per cent of the people surveyed traveled with family members, which represents an increase of eight per cent compared to the previous month. Five per cent traveled with non-family members, and 26 per cent traveled alone (see Chart 3). Among the main nationalities surveyed, people from Colombia (64%) and Venezuela (23%) are the most likely to travel alone (see Chart four).

Travel group profile



Profile of Respondents

The most reported educational level continues to be upper secondary education, with 54 per cent. It is followed by lower secondary education with 24 per cent, primary education with seven per cent, and both university and technical education with

seven per cent each (see Chart five). In the last 12 months, 49 per cent of respondents reported having lived in a country other than their country of nationality (see Chart six).

Chart 5. Completed educational level

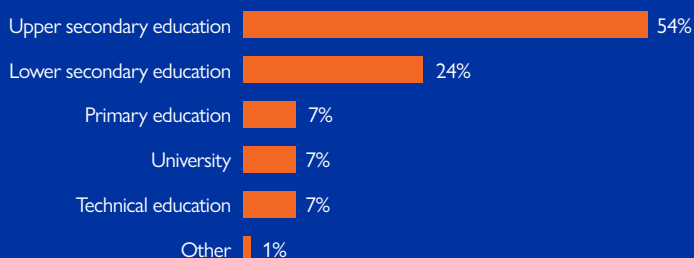
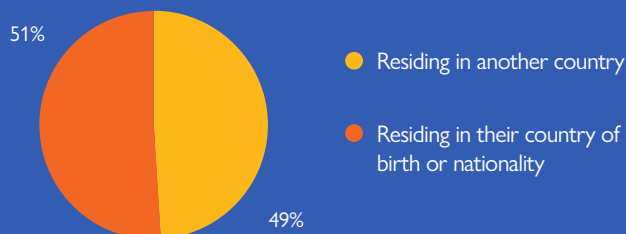


Chart 6. Country of Reference



Among respondents from Venezuela, 54 per cent reported having resided in a country other than their country of nationality. On the other hand, 80 per cent of respondents from Peru reported having lived in their own country (see Chart seven).

Regarding the possession of identity documents, 97 per cent of the people surveyed had an identity card. Twenty per cent reported having a valid passport, which represents an increase of five per cent over the previous month and the highest number recorded in the first eight months of 2024, following a trend observed since July (see Chart eight). The identity card is the most common document among respondents, regardless of their nationality, while people from Colombia (50%) are the most likely to report having a valid passport.

Venezuelan migrants continue to show the greatest diversity in countries of residence other than their country of origin. The majority have lived in Ecuador (38%), followed by Colombia (36%), among other countries.

Chart 7. Usual residence of the most frequent nationalities

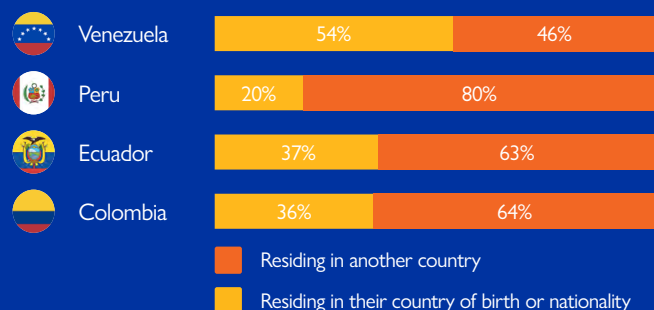
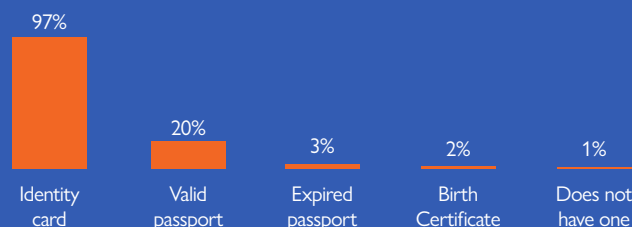


Chart 8. Holding of Identity Documents



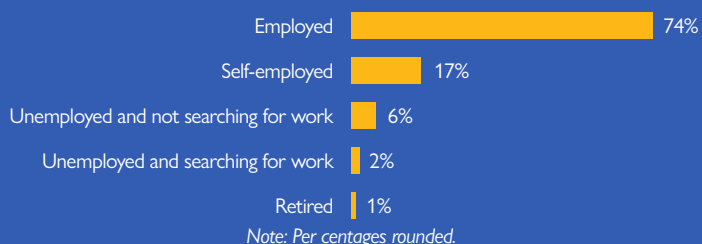
Note: People surveyed could select several options regarding their document holding.

Regarding the employment status of the respondents prior to their trip, there was variability depending on whether they were living in their country of origin. Seventy-four per cent of those living in their country of nationality were employed, an increase of eleven per cent over the previous month. In contrast, 83 per cent of those living in a country other than their country of nationality were employed. In addition, 17 per cent of those living in their country of nationality

were self-employed, a decrease of nine per cent from the previous month, while 13 per cent of those living in another country were self-employed.

The unemployment rate is higher among respondents who lived in their country of nationality (8%) compared to those who resided in a different country (4%). However, the difference is not very large.

Chart 9. Employment situation before starting the trip for those who lived in their country of nationality (51% of the total number of people surveyed)



Note: Per centages rounded.

Chart 10. Employment status before starting the trip living in a country other than the country of nationality (49% of the total number of people surveyed)



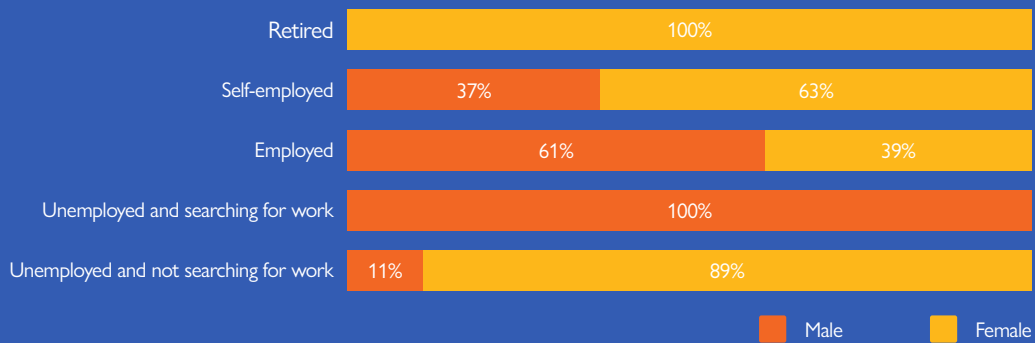
Note: Per centages rounded.

Profile of Respondents

The analysis by gender of employment status prior to the trip shows that 61 per cent of those who were employed were men, an increase of ten per cent over the previous month. On the other

hand, 39 per cent were women. In addition, all people who were unemployed and looking for work were men.

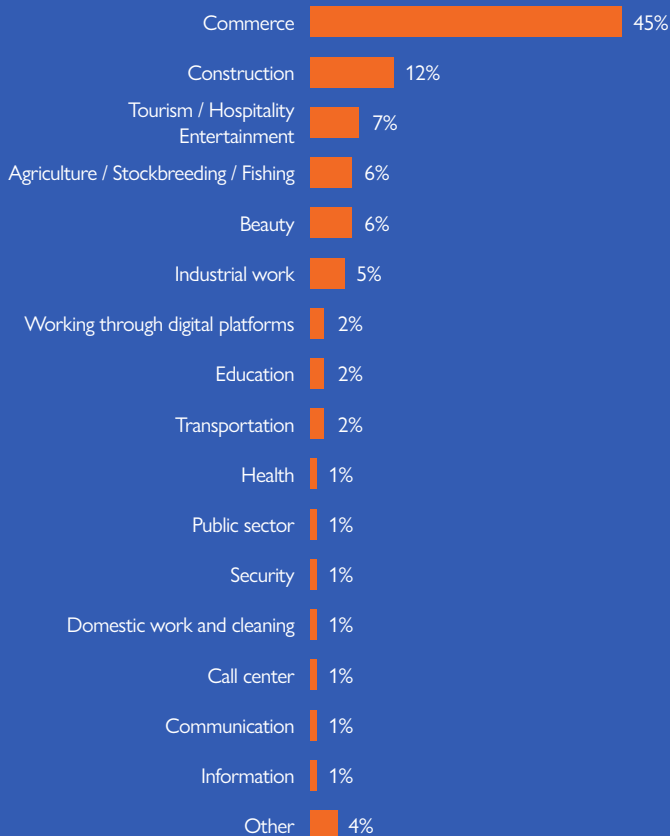
Chart 11. Employment status before starting the trip, broken down by gender



The main employment sectors of those surveyed before starting their trip continue to be commerce (45%), construction (12%) and agriculture (7%) (see Chart 12). Despite the high rate of employment among respondents, regardless of their place of

residence in the last 12 months, 52 per cent reported that they did not have enough income to cover their basic needs. This represents a 15 per cent decrease compared to the previous month (see Chart 13 and Chart 14).

Chart 12. Employment sector (of those who reported to be employed or self-employed)



Note: Per centages rounded.

Chart 13. Income level in the country of origin, (among the 51% residing there)

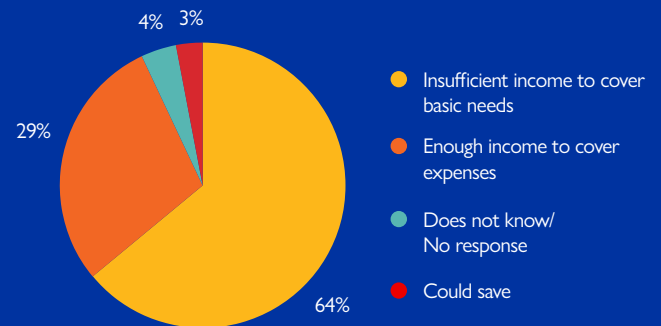
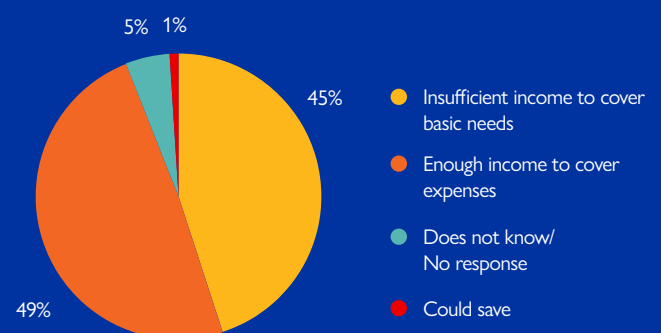


Chart 14. Income level outside the country of nationality (of the 49% residing outside the country of nationality)

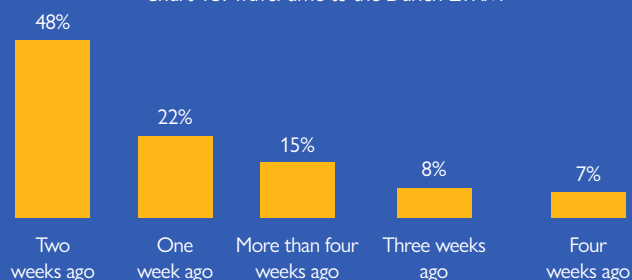


Migratory crossings and access to information

Regarding travel time to the ETRM where the survey was conducted, 48 per cent of respondents indicated that their trip took two weeks, while 22 per cent said it took one week (see Chart 15). On average, the majority of respondents went through only one transit country (Colombia) before arriving in Panama, which has reduced travel time. This is mainly due to the high level of interregional migration.

Forty-five per cent reported spending one day or less in the ETRM at Lajas Blancas, 33 per cent reported spending between two and three days, and 11 per cent reported spending between four and seven days in the ETRM. (Chart 16). Fifty-eight per cent of respondents reported that they obtained information about the travel route from family or friends who had migrated earlier, an increase of 11 per

Chart 15. Travel time to the Darien ETRM



cent compared to the previous month. Twenty-eight per cent said they obtained the information from acquaintances or neighbours, and three per cent received it through international agencies (see Chart 17). No respondent mentioned that they had obtained the information from a guide.

Chart 16. Time spent at the Lajas Blancas ETRM at the time the survey was conducted

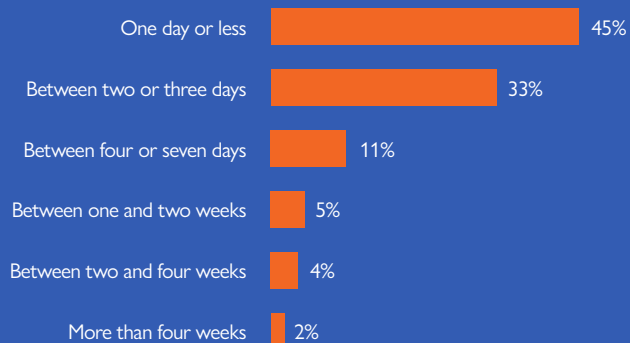
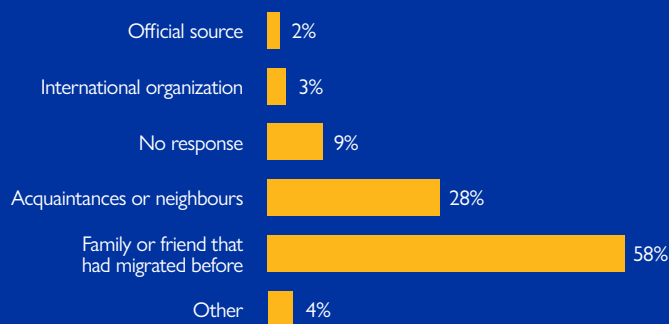


Chart 17. Source of information about the route



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

Seventy-two per cent of those surveyed indicated that they were not aware of the regular forms of migration, which represents an increase of ten per cent over the previous month (see Chart 18). In addition, 59 per cent reported having faced situations during their trip about which they had no information prior to departure

(see Chart 19). The main lack of information mentioned included the safety of the route (40%), natural hazards on the route (40%), lack of information about the route (12%), and difficulties with transportation (4%) (see Chart 20).

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

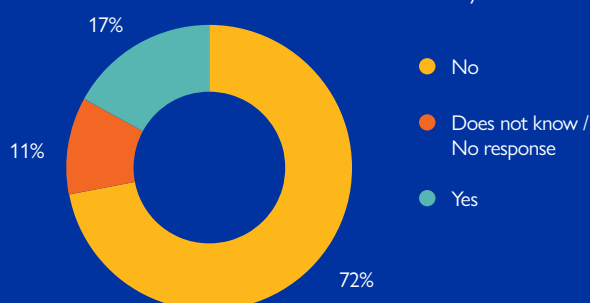


Chart 19. Report on the sufficiency of the information received prior to the start of the trip

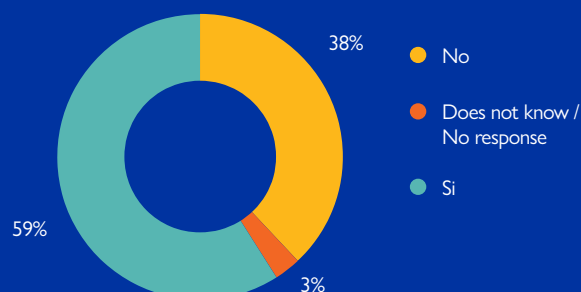
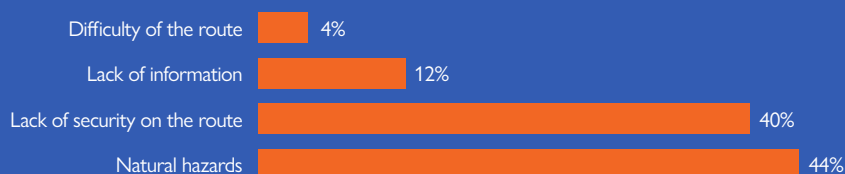


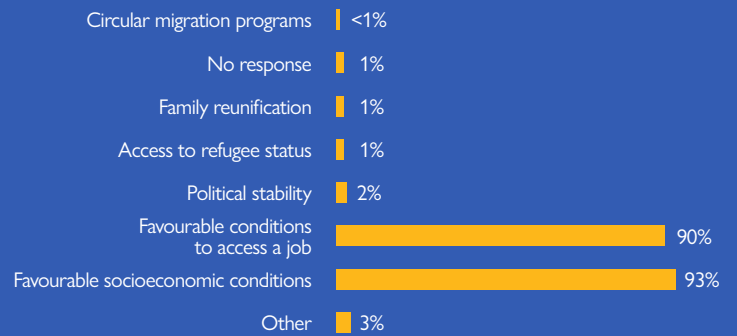
Chart 20. Main route information needs



Intention of the Journey

Ninety-nine per cent of the people surveyed considered the United States as their main destination country, while only one per cent considered Mexico. Eighty per cent of those surveyed did not have an alternative country of destination, ten per cent saw Canada as an alternative option, eight per cent consider Mexico as an alternative, one percent indicated Costa Rica, and one percent mentioned other countries. Among the main factors for choosing their destination, the people surveyed believed that there are good economic and financial conditions (93%) and favourable opportunities for finding employment (90%) (see Chart 21).

Chart 21. Factors or reasons that influenced your decision to migrate to the destination country

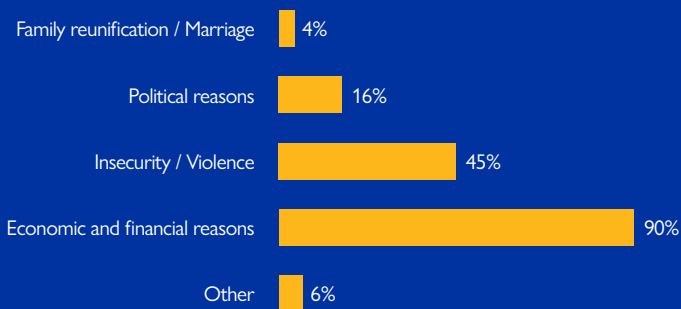


Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options.

The main reasons why respondents decided to leave their country of origin were economic and financial reasons (90%), followed by insecurity and violence (45%) (see Chart 22).

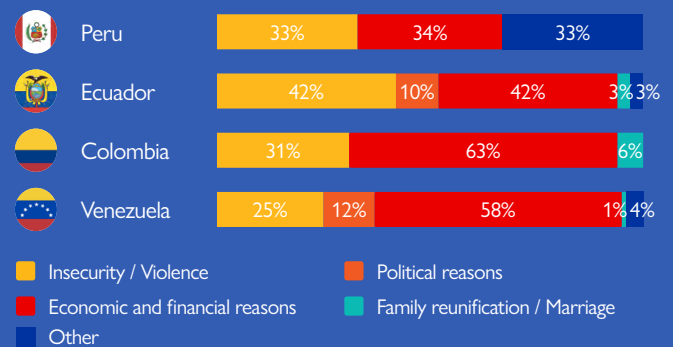
When broken down by nationality, most respondents considered the economic situation as the main reason for migrating, followed by insecurity (see Chart 23).

Chart 22. Main factors or reasons that influenced the decision to leave their home country



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

Chart 23. Main factors or reasons that led people of different nationalities to leave their home country



Note: Percentages rounded.

Of those surveyed, 53 per cent were not sure if they wanted to return to their country of origin, while 32 per cent intended to return (see Chart 24). Among the respondents, those from Peru (60%) and Venezuela (32%) showed a greater inclination to return (see Chart 25).

Regarding the intention to return to the country of habitual residence (other than the country of origin or nationality), 55 per cent of the people surveyed did not know if they would return, while 36 per cent had no intention of returning (see Chart 26).

Chart 24. Intention to return to country of origin

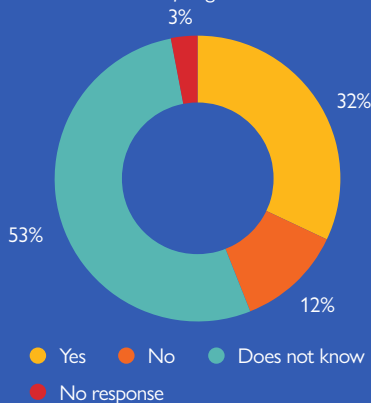


Chart 25. Intention to return broken down by main nationalities

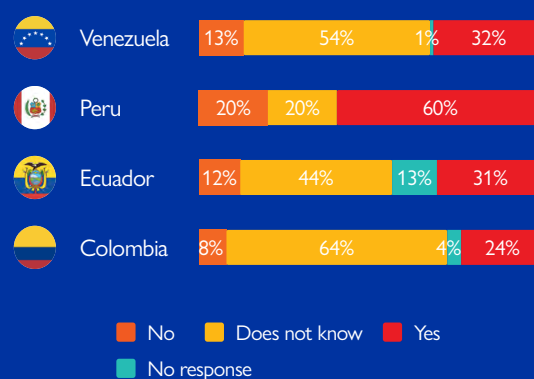
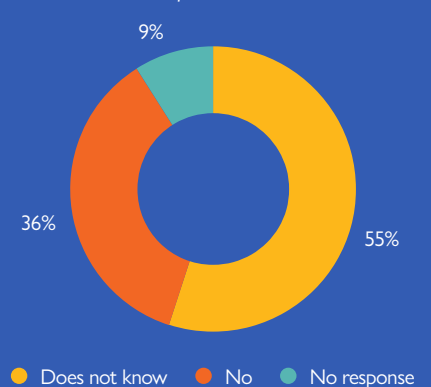


Chart 26. Intention to return to country of domicile



Needs and assistance

Sixty-five per cent of the people surveyed indicated that they needed information on how to regularize their situation in the destination country, while 34 per cent did not need this information (see Chart 27).

On the other hand, 87 per cent of those surveyed said that they did not need information on regularization options in Panama (see Chart 28).

Chart 27. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in destination country

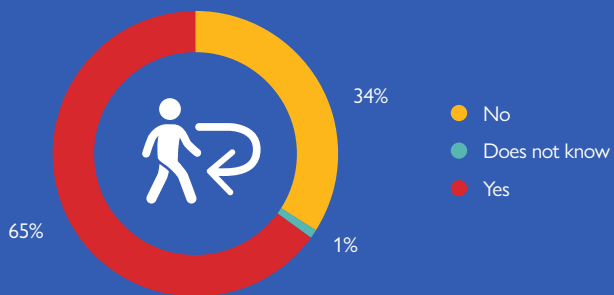
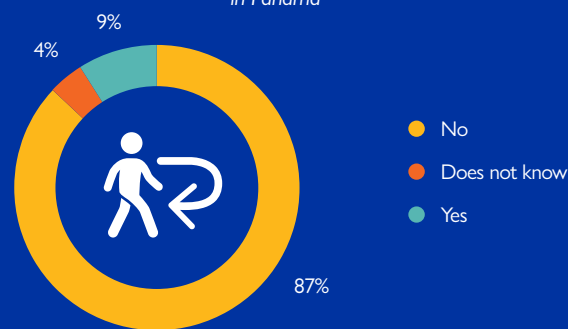
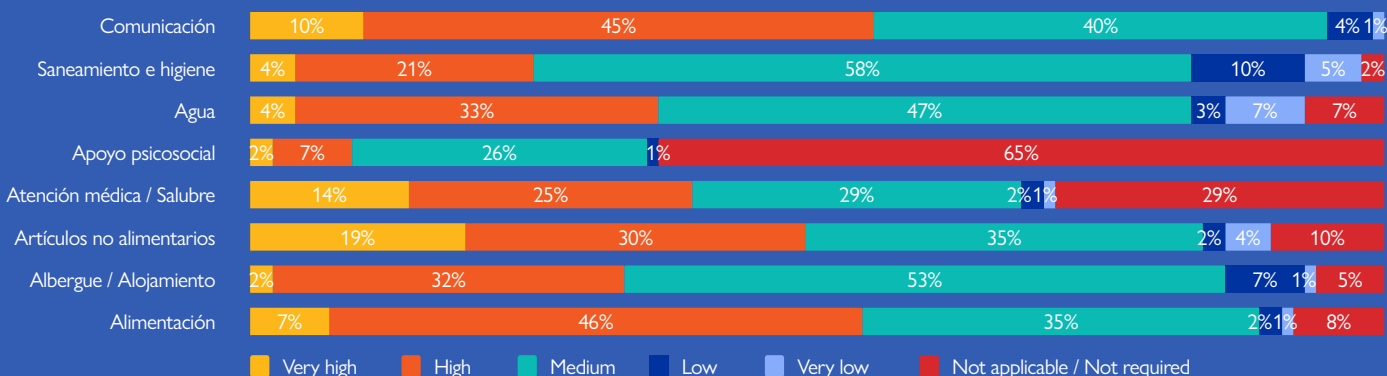


Chart 28. Need for access to information on regularization possibilities in Panama



At the time of the survey, people on the move reported a high level of satisfaction with communication at the ETRM (45%), food (46%) and water supply (33%) (see Chart 29).

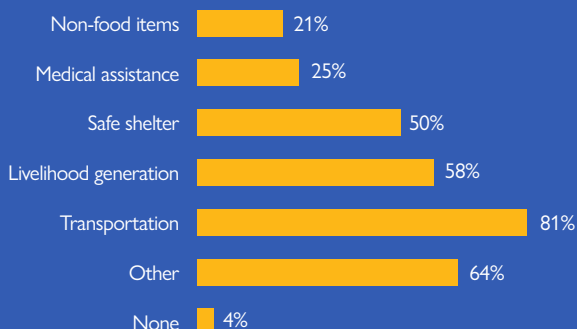
Chart 29. Level of satisfaction of respondents regarding the coverage of basic needs at the shelter



At the time of the survey, respondents indicated that their greatest need is transportation (81%), followed by livelihood generation (58%) and safe shelter (50%) (see Chart 30).

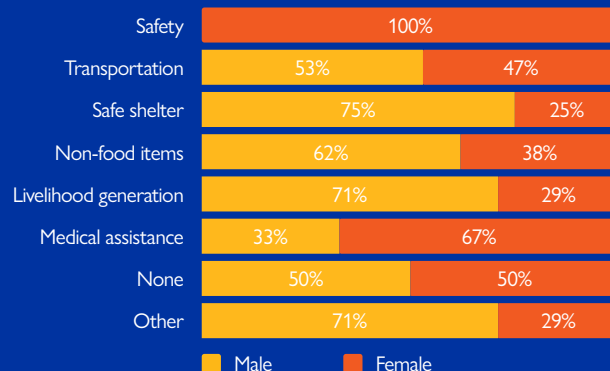
The analysis by sex shows that 100 per cent of the women surveyed considered safety to be an urgent need. In addition, women expressed more frequently than men the need for medical help and improvements in non-food items (see Chart 31).

Chart 30. Main needs at the time of the survey



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

Chart 31. 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 Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) is in the province of Darien. This ETRM receives people in situations of mobility who have crossed the border between Colombia and Panama, either through or around the Darien region. From there, people are transferred by bus to Costa Rica, where the direct service arrives at the Estación Migratoria Sur (EMI SUR), located 17 kilometers from the Costa Rican border.

People in situations on the move are initially registered in the communities of Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo in Panama.

These records are used to estimate the arrival of people at the Lajas Blancas ETRM. Upon arrival at the ETRM, a new registration is made in the databases of the National Migration Service, where data such as age, nationality and sex, among others, are collected.

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

Methodological Note

To better understand the characteristics and mobility patterns of people in transit through the province of Darien, IOM has implemented a Flow Monitoring Survey, using the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) methodology.

The objective is to collect data on sex, age, nationality, travel characteristics, migration route taken and country of destination, in addition to counting the number of people in each travel group. The information on the people on the move in the Americas was collected from July 29 and August 26, 2024 at the Temporary Migrant Reception Centre (ETRM) of Lajas Blancas in Darien. Due to the harsh conditions of the jungle and the migratory route, most of the people irregularly crossing the Colombia-Panama border through the Darien region will seek care at one of the ETRMs. They

will then be transferred by bus to the EMI SUR in Costa Rica as part of their journey to North America.

For this reason, the ETRMs become a concentration point for people in transit, which facilitates obtaining a better picture of the mixed migration flows through Panama. Simple random probability sampling is used to collect data. This type of sampling is used when there is no complete list of the population or when the order of people is random, as is the case with arrivals to the ETRMs.

This sampling has a confidence level of 95 per cent, a maximum margin of error of five per cent and a variance of 0.25. The sample size is adjusted according to the size of the population, which changes daily according to the number of migrants arriving in the ETRM.

Descargo de responsabilidades de la OIM

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