PANAMA PROTECTION MONITORING
Profiles, needs and intentions of refugees in Panama

Overview | Displacement profile | Situation in host country

UNHCR Panama implements regular Protection Monitoring exercises to collect and analyze data about the profiles, needs, and intentions of refugees and asylum seekers in Panama. The purpose is to strengthen and promote an evidence-based protection response. This factsheet represents the main results based on 613 household-level interviews conducted between 1st October and 30 December 2023.

Methodology

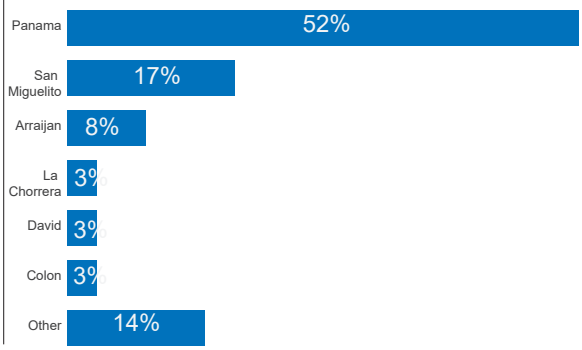
Interviews were conducted via phone calls by six trained enumerators from UNHCR and HIAS, using a digital form stored in the UNHCR server of Kobo Toolbox. Results are representative of the population of refugees and asylum seekers in Panama but not of subgroups by nationality or geographical area.

Due to the remote data collection methodology, some protection risks are likely underrepresented, such as those related to gender-based violence or child protection. The results reflect refugees' situation and intentions during data collection.

Respondents

1,856 persons (613 households)

Respondents by district



RESPONDENT PROFILE

Assessed households are mainly from Colombia, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The average household size is 3 people, and most of the household members assessed are women (52%). The average age of the head of household is 41 years.

Nationality

36% Colombia

27% Nicaragua

19% Venezuela

8% El Salvador

5% Cuba

6% have a second nationality

5% of respondents are from other nationalities including: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Ecuador, Guatemala, Equaotiralo Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Liberia, Mexico, Nigeria and Ukraine.

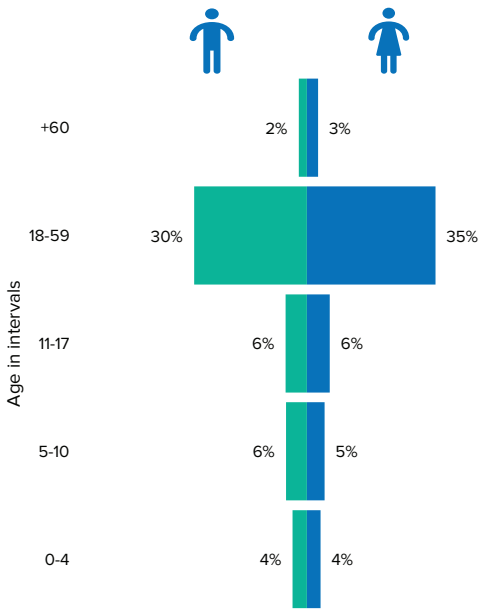
Gender

52% of respondents were women

3% of respondents identified themselves as LGBTIQ+ (3% reported "did not know")

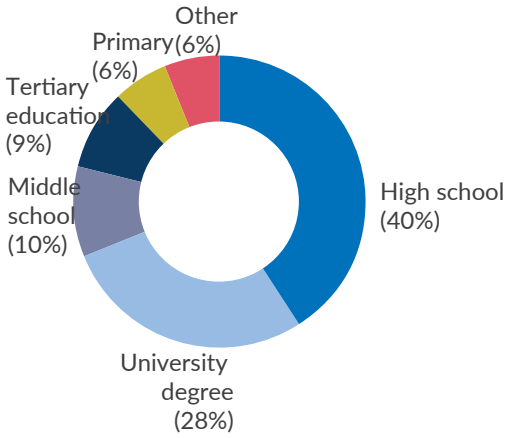
Age group and gender

Hoseuhold members



Highest education level completed

Head of household



Others include 4% who reported having a Master degree and 2% that did not have access to any formal education.

Acknowledgements

UNHCR is grateful for the support from authorities, civil society, international organizations, and donors. The Agency appreciates partners' extensive involvement and assistance.

UNHCR acknowledges the resilience and strength of refugees in Panama, who continue to share their challenges, fears, and hopes.

Disability

7% reported a visual disability

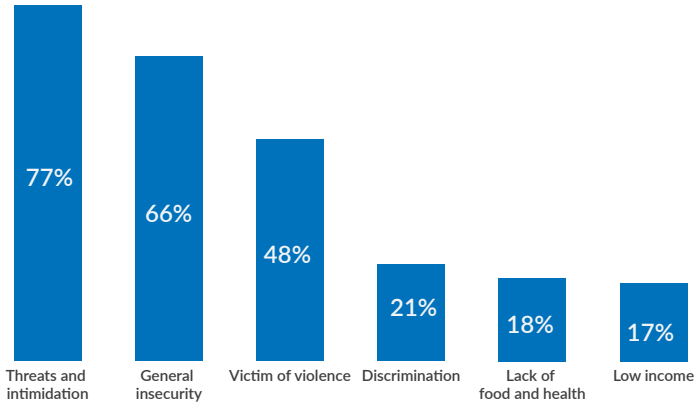
2% reported a mental disability

4% reported a physical disability

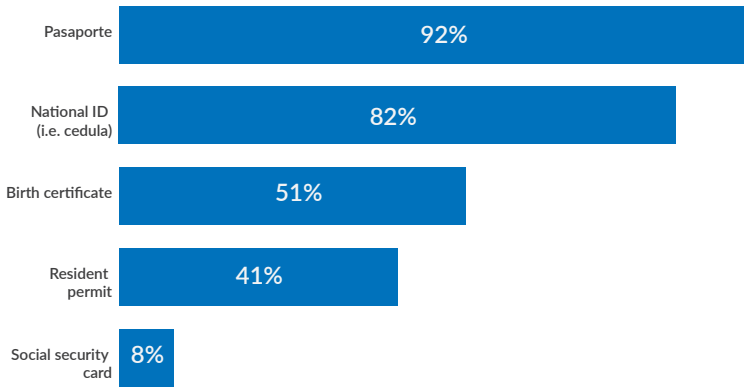
1% reported a hearing disability

Most households left their country of origin due to threats, intimidation (77%) or general insecurity (66%). Despite most of them have applied for asylum in Panama, half of the interviewed households (52%) were still awaiting a response from the National Office for Refugees (ONPAR) on the admissibility of their application. Nine per cent of the households reported not having any valid documentation to remain regularly in Panama, and only 9% of the households reported having permanent residence in Panama.

Reasons for leaving country of origin



Documentation held by household members



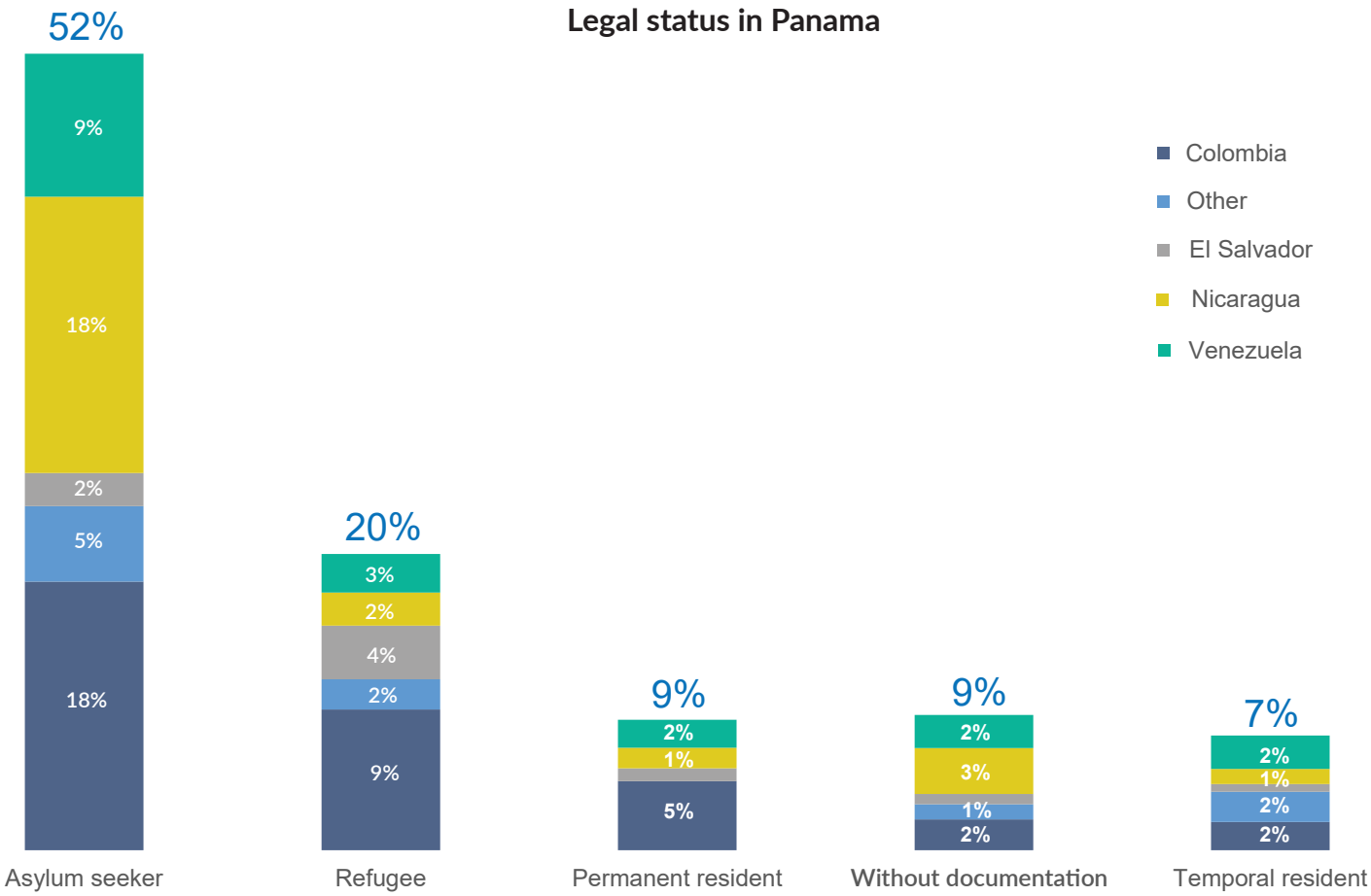
9%
does not have any documentation or legal status in Panama.

4%
of children under 5 had not been registered with civil authorities.

8%
of children under five do not have an identity document from Panama or their country of origin.

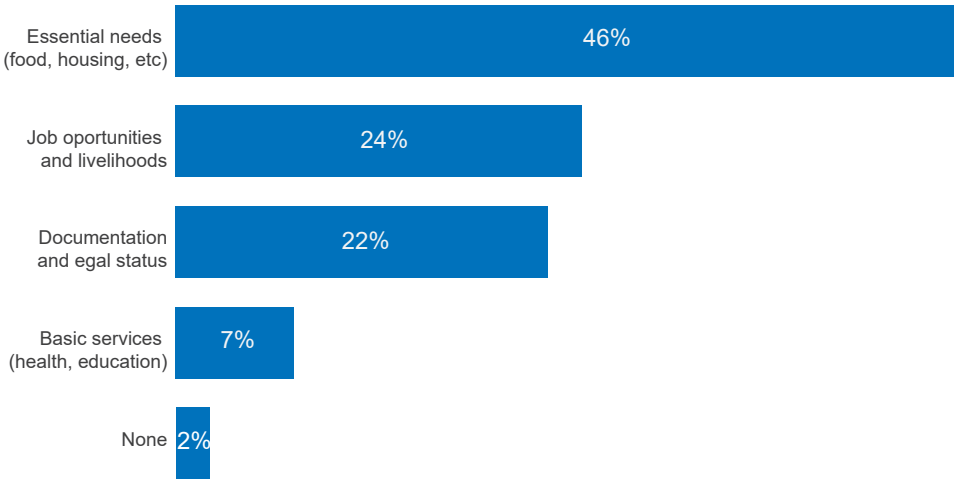
2%
persons with stateless documentation.

Legal status in Panama



Meeting the household's essential needs, including food and housing, remains the main priority of refugees and asylum-seekers in Panama. Housing is a particular concern given the high risk of eviction people in need of international protection face due to the lack of documentation and economic means to pay rent. Most households live in a rented house (84%); however more than half of them (68%), can not afford to pay rent without any major economic difficulties, and 27% of them think it is very likely or somehow likely that they will loose the right to their current house against their will.

Urgent needs



Assistance

91%
did not receive any humanitarian or social assistance in the last year.

44%
have at least one household member with a specific need.

2%
households reported living in the street (homeless).

7%
reported a child in the household benefited from a government scholarship (*beca universal*) in the last year.

Health

13%
Thirteen per cent of those who sought medical assistance in the last three months were unable to access it. The main reasons included the inability to pay medical bills (50%) and lack of documentation (13%).

20%
have at least one household member with a chronic disease and with no access to regular treatment.

7%
have at least one household member who is pregnant or currently lactating.

13%
have at least one household member who is older than 60 years and needs support.

Education

19%
of scholar-age children did not attend school in the last year.

89%
of those who secured access education last year, attended a public school (48% were enrolled in primary school while 31% in secondary school).

Housing

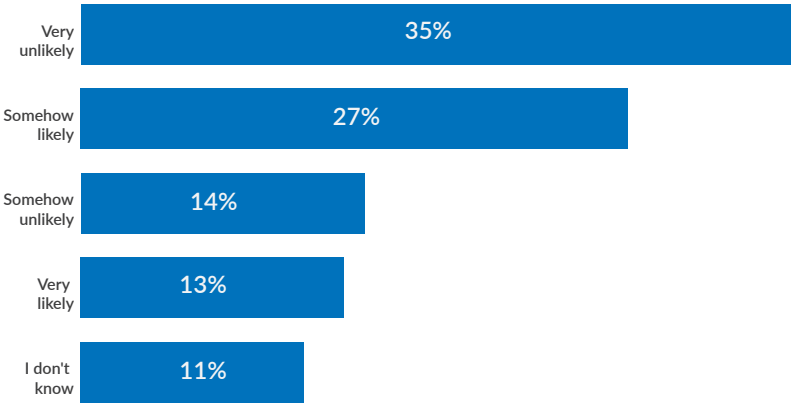
2,4%
crowding index

84%
pay rent every month

22%
share housing with other houseolds/individulas

19%
rent one single room where all the family stays together

Likelyhood of losing the right to live in the current house against your will



Access to housing basic services

3%
do not have access to safe drinking water

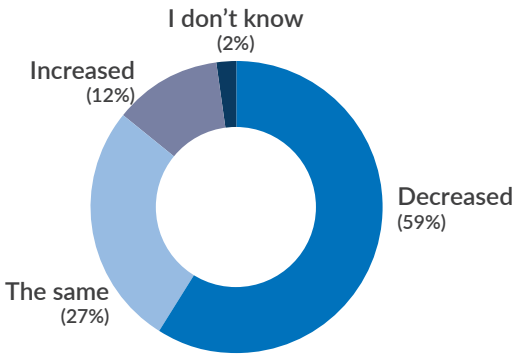
1%
do not have access to electricity

Livelihoods

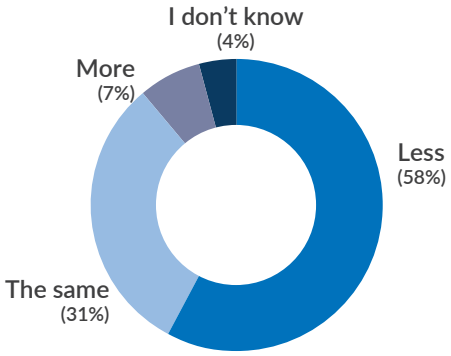
57% received payment for work performed in the last week.

68% of asylum seekers do not have any bank account or mobile money.

In comparison with last year, your household income has:



In comparison with last year, can your household afford more goods and services?



Security

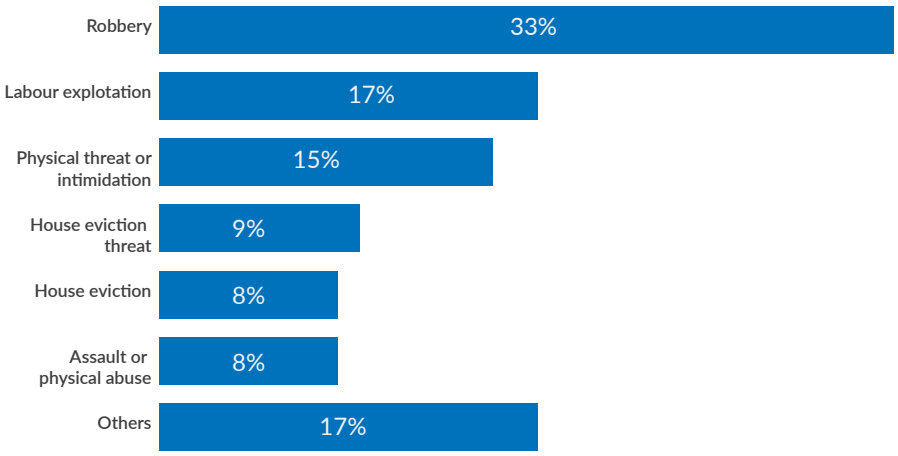
39%

feels insecure walking in their neighborhood at night.

8%

have at least one household member who is a survivor of violence or abuse, including sexual or psychological abuse.

Incidents experienced in Panama

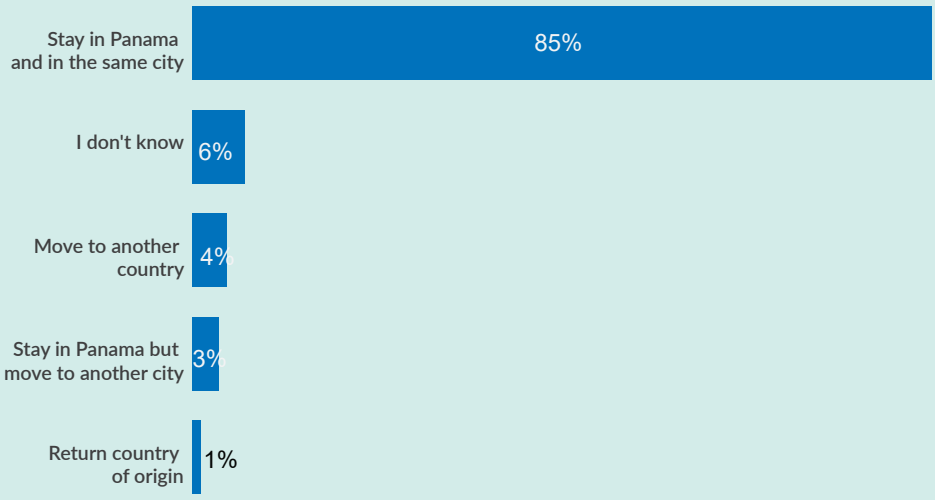


Intentions

Most households (85%) intend to stay in Panama within their current district of residence. About 9% reported the intention to move.

One per cent expressed their intention to return to their home country, while 4% reported their intention to move to another country, primarily the United States.

Intentions in the near future



Multiple responses were possible, so percentages can go over 100% when added.