

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 the country.

The monitoring aims to strengthen and promote an evidence-based protection response. Since 2019, UNHCR has interviewed over 3,000 households with 7,000 members in Panama.

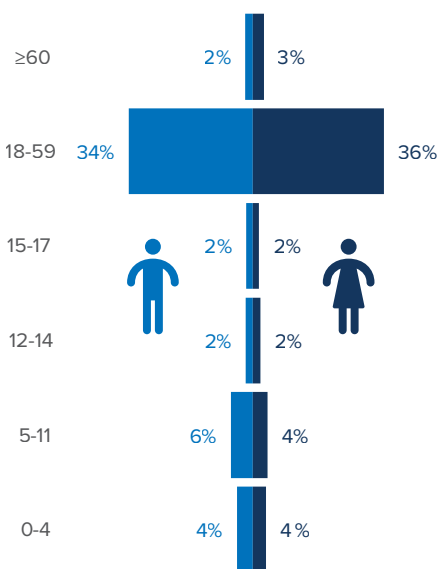
This factsheet showcases the main results of **491 household-level interviews**, representing **1,012 persons**, conducted between 23 April and 30 December 2024.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Assessed households were predominantly composed of persons born in Colombia, Nicaragua and Venezuela, among a total of **16** countries represented. **98%** were born in Latin America. The average household size was **two people**, and half of the household members assessed were male (**52%**). The average age of the head of household was **38 years**. **55%** of household heads were either married or in a domestic partnership, and **22%** were living with a son or a daughter.

Age group and gender

Household members



Nationality

Household members

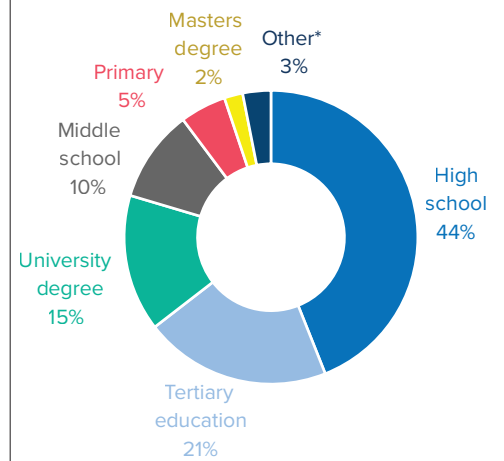


5% of respondents are from other nationalities: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Ecuador, Guatemala, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Liberia, Mexico, Nigeria and Ukraine.

2% had a second nationality

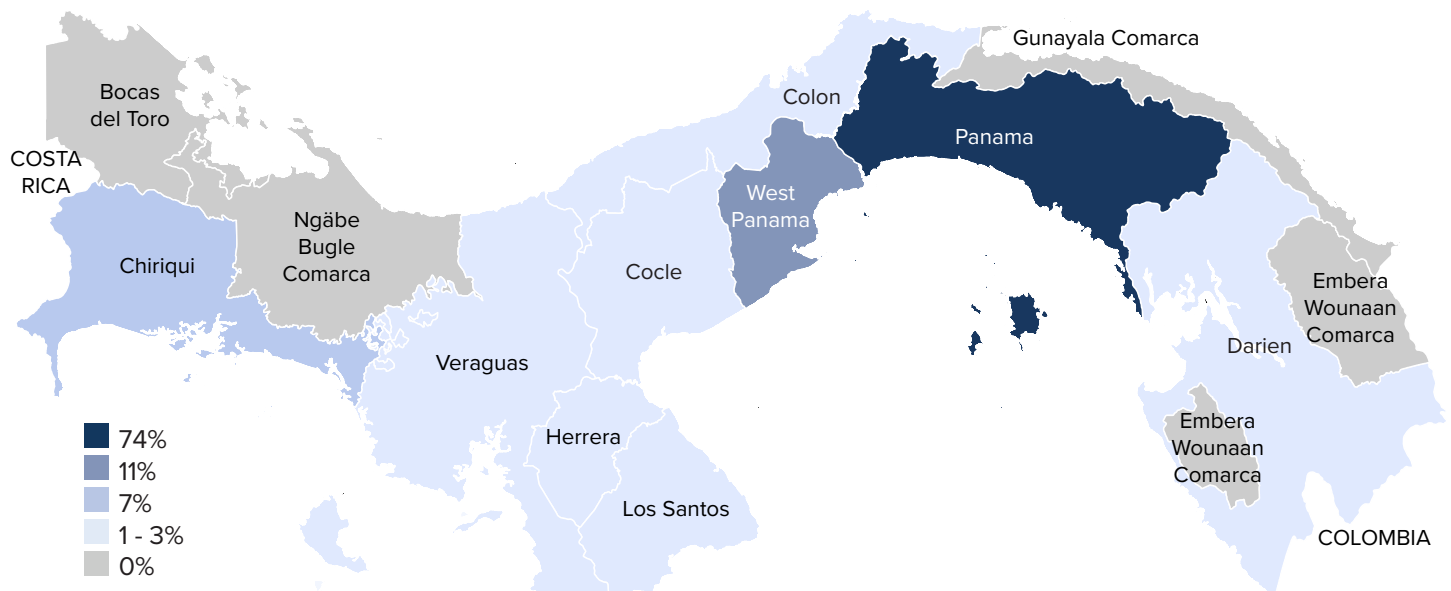
Highest education level completed

Head of household



*Includes people with less than primary education, informal schooling only, and no formal education.

Assessed households, by province of residence

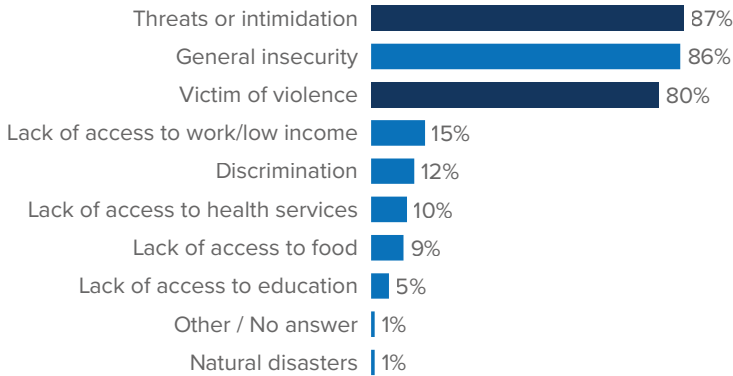


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Reasons for leaving country of origin



Most families left their country of origin due to threats, intimidation (**93%**), or general insecurity (**86%**).

9 out of 10 families expressed an asylum claim consistent with the Cartagena Convention (lack of access to rights, security, or stability) in their country of origin or residence before coming to Panama.

One third of households interviewed were recognized refugees, and **56%** were asylum seekers pending decision on their claims' admissibility.

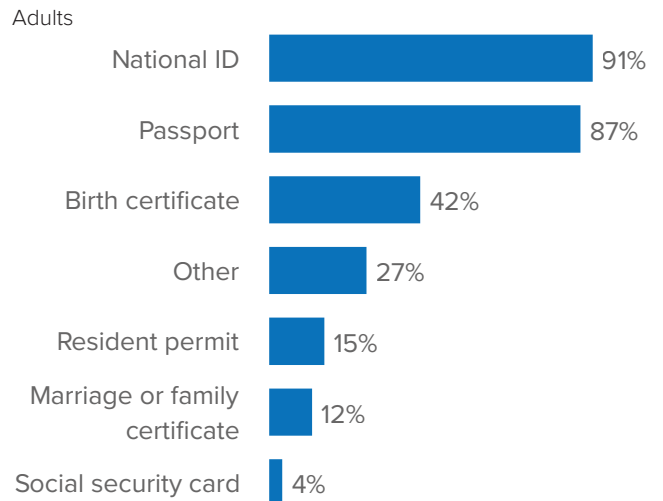
62% of asylum seekers pending a decision had not received documents from authorities that certified their status, meaning that thousands of asylum seekers experience limitations in freely moving and accessing certain basic rights; which hinders their opportunities to integrate locally.

Former asylum seekers (after having either withdrawn or been denied their claims), comprised **11%** of the sample, of which **43%** remain irregular in the country. In comparison, the rest **57%** did manage to obtain a temporal protection status or a residence.

11% of children under five did not have birth certificates with them

30% of children under five did not have their births registered by any civil authority. **Those who are foreign-born at a higher risk of statelessness**

Documentation



1 in 3 respondents entered the country irregularly.

Those who had the highest likelihood of having had to enter in an irregular way were nationals of Venezuela (**59%**) and Nicaragua (**41%**).

All persons from outside of the Americas entered regularly.

Almost half of Venezuelans interviewed have entered through the Darien jungle from Colombia; and most Nicaraguans through the land border with Costa Rica.



56% arrived on a plane

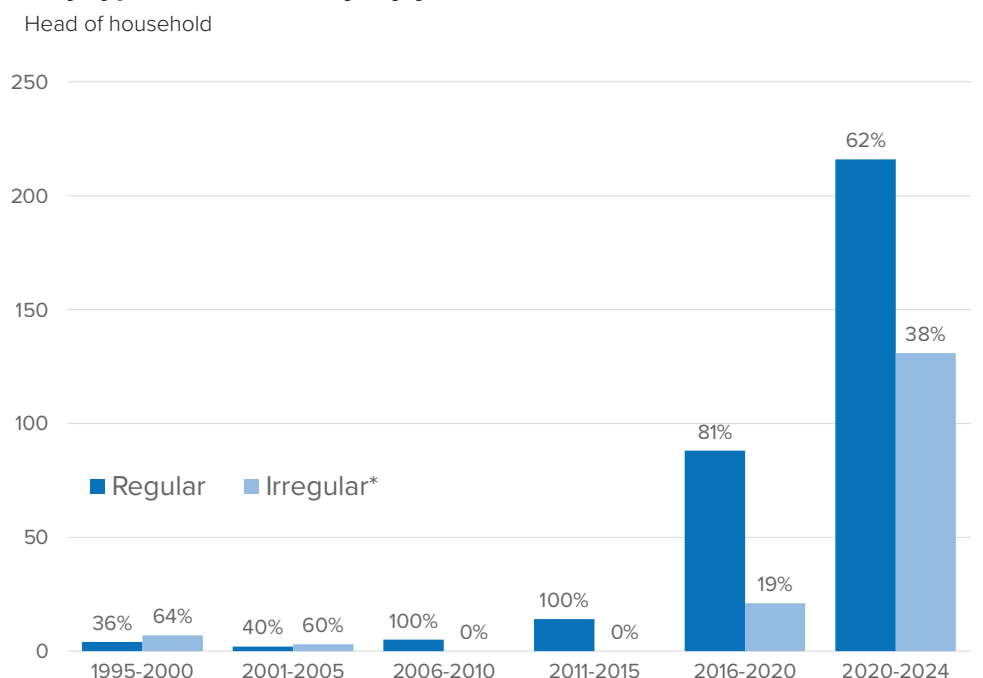


1% arrived by sea



41% arrived by land
 64% through Costa Rica
 36% through Colombia

Entry type to the territory, by year



*1% indicated they did not know if their entry was regular or irregular, but it is presumed as irregular for this calculation, inferred by the declared port of entry.

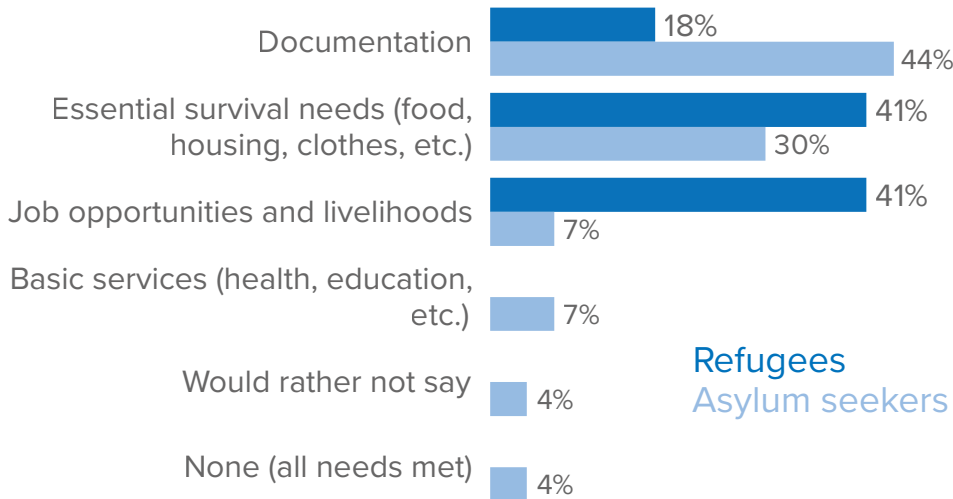
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Asylum seekers' primary needs derive from lack of official documentation (especially a work permit), while recognized refugees prioritize job opportunities and livelihoods.

In Panama, the Law only confers asylum seekers a right to a work permit if and once their case is admitted to the procedure by the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (*ONPAR*), which occurs to only less than 1% of applicants, and around twenty cases per year, on average, since 2020.

The most urgent needs for you and your family during the last 12 months:

Assistance
98%

did not receive any humanitarian or social assistance from the Government

94%

 of households with children did not benefit from the government scholarship (*Beca Universal*)

30%

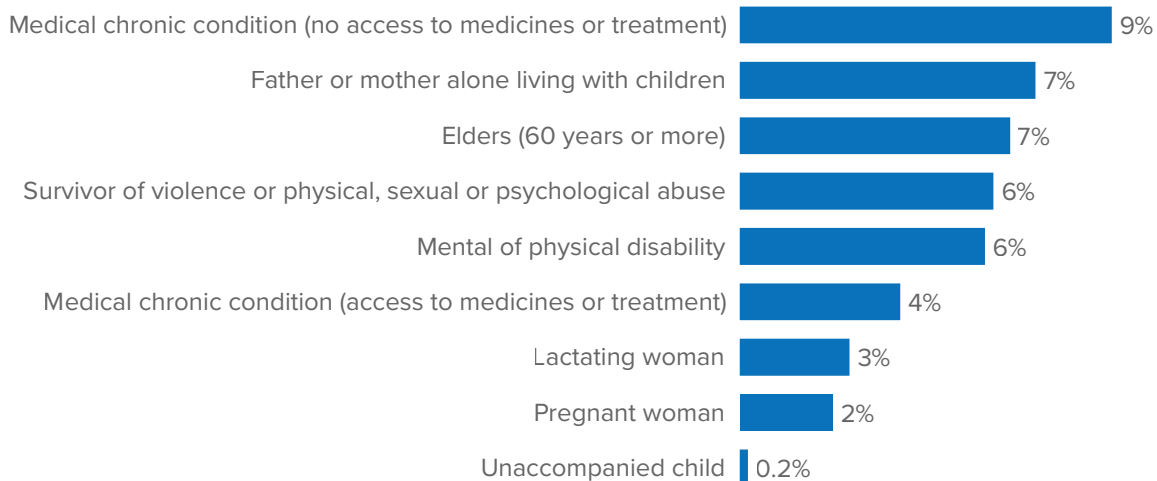
of households live with at least one person with a specific need

2%

of households where a person needed access to healthcare during the last three months did not receive care

Vulnerabilities

Households with at least one member that presents any of the following:


Access to education
44%

of primary education-aged children did not attend school during the school year

66%

of secondary education-aged children did not attend school during the school year

84%

of enrolled children attended a public school

18%

of children between 5 and 17 years have never been to school, and 16% who did could not attend the current school year

73%

of young people between 18 and 24 years of age did not attend the current school year for tertiary or post-secondary education.

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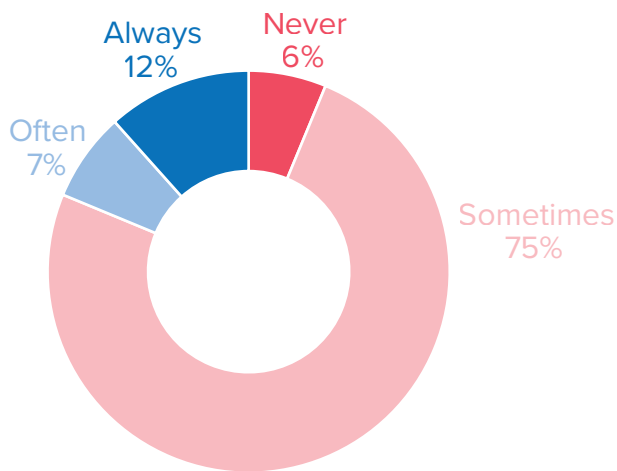
Situation in host country

Housing

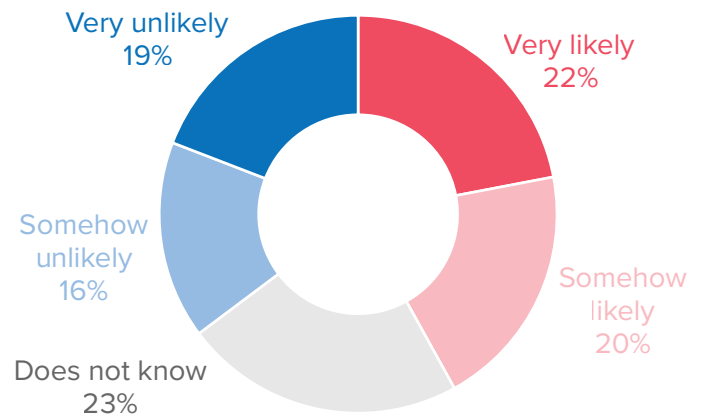
Over the years, refugees and asylum seekers struggle to make ends meet in Panama, due to the legal and documental limitations to generate enough income, despite most being able and willing to participate more actively in the economy. Therefore, **most of their monthly expenses go to housing costs**, food and essentials, and little remains as disposable income. As foreigners, they are often excluded from Government aid programmes, incentives or subsidies.

72% of interviewed people indicated their household pays rent, but only **one in five** say they can do so **without any major financial distress**. This is why most households share living spaces with other households or individuals.

Can your household generally afford to pay the rent without any major financial distress?



In the next 12 months, how likely or unlikely is it that you could lose your right to this housing and/or land, against your will?



Type of dwelling

59% lived in a house	2% lived in a shelter	1% were unhoused
36% lived in an apartment	3% lived in a place of business	

Living conditions

59% shared housing with other households or individuals	49% lived alone (single-headed household)	4% slept crowding (three or more people per room)
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Habitability

34% resided in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	5% did not have access to safe drinking water
24% had secure tenure rights to housing and/or land	3% did not have access to electricity



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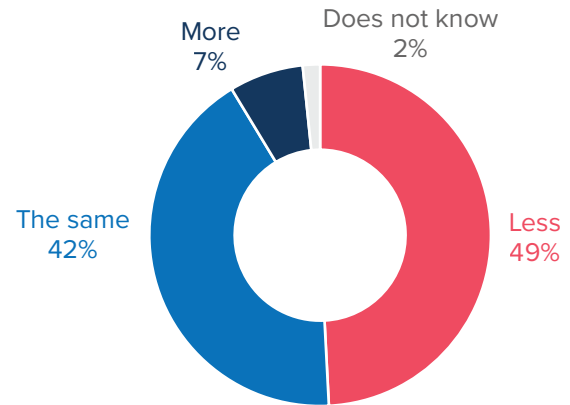
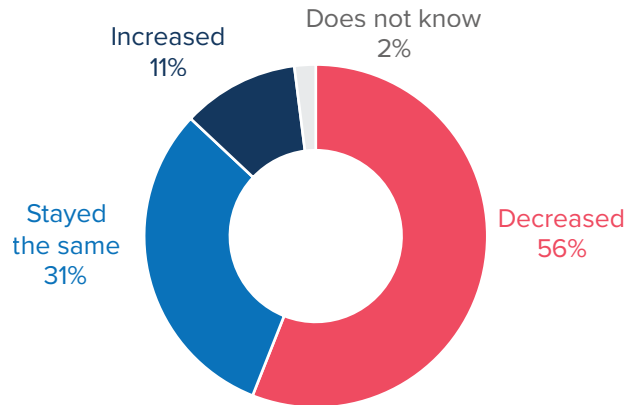
Livelihoods

56% received payment for work performed the previous week

73% of asylum seekers did 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

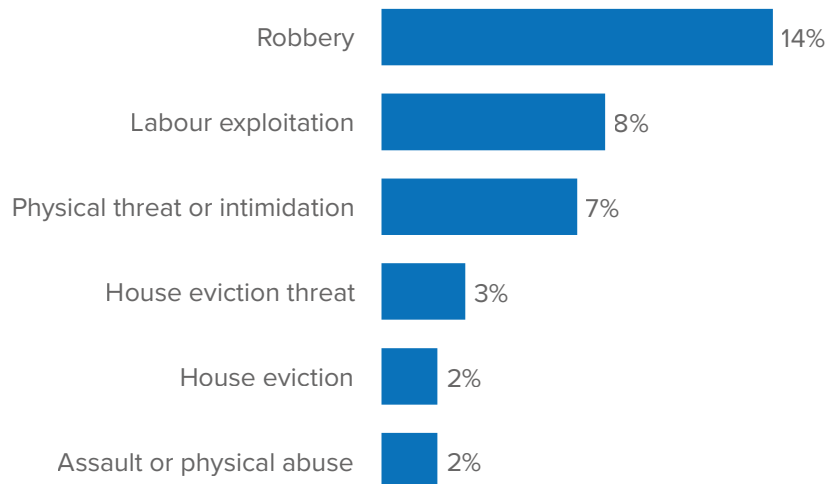
43%

felt insecure walking in their neighborhood at night.

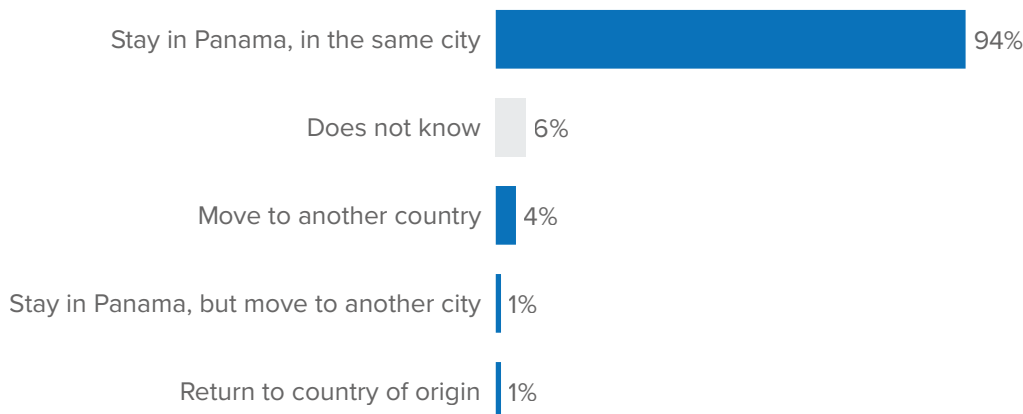
6%

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

Incidents experienced in Panama



Intentions in the near future*



Most respondents (**95%**) intend to stay in Panama in their current district of residence.

About **5%** reported having the intention to move.

One per cent wants to return to their home country, while **4%** intend to move to another country.

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

Acknowledgements

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

UNHCR is grateful for the support from authorities, civil society, international organizations, and donors.

The Agency appreciates partners' extensive involvement and assistance.



Methodology and limitations

Remote interviews were conducted via telephone by enumerators from UNHCR and HIAS, using a structured questionnaire hosted in Kobo Toolbox. Due to the remote data collection approach, certain protection risks are likely underrepresented, such as those relating to gender-based violence or child protection. These findings reflect the situation and intentions of asylum-seekers and refugees at the time of data collection. Results are indicative of the asylum-seeker and refugee population in Panama that has arrived since 2018, and are not fully representative of all refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

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