

COLOMBIA PROTECTION MONITORING

January - June 2019



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COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

*Protection Monitoring conducted during Health Care Services in Marinilla,
Antioquia, Colombia. UNHCR / J. Gómez*

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Protection Monitoring conducted at Botero's Park, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia. UNHCR/ J. Gómez

Context

Due to the political and humanitarian situation in Venezuela, arrivals of persons with specific protection needs, including the need of international protection, have been increasing throughout 2019. According to the Government's figures, the number of Venezuelans in Colombia rose to 1,408,055 by June 2019, out of which only some 60% have regular migratory status. Colombia is the main receiving country for Venezuelans, although many transit through Colombia to other countries. Almost 600,000 Venezuelans have been able to obtain the Special Stay Permit (PEP, for its Spanish acronym) valid for two years, allowing them to access basic services and the labour market, including some 46,000 whom did so with UNHCR's direct support.

The Colombian Government is in the process of renewing the first generation of PEP (68,000 beneficiaries) for another two years. Meanwhile, the restrictive measures for Venezuelans

introduced by some countries in the region caused temporary sharp increases in the number of Venezuelans rushing to reach these countries by transiting through Colombia.

The number of asylum claims in Colombia remains low; however there has been a progressive increase during 2018 and the first semester of 2019. According to the official figures, 2,592 individuals from Venezuela presented their asylum claims in 2018, and 2,134 between January and April 2019.

According to the Government, a cumulative 4,888 asylum claims remain pending for decision as of April 2019, most of them from Venezuelan nationals.

Additionally, as of April 2019, there were 320 recognized refugees, mainly from Venezuela (30%), Cuba (22%), Ethiopia, (5%), Nicaragua (4%) and El Salvador (3%).

Colombia has issued 251,600 new transit permits (PIP-PTT, for its Spanish acronym) and border mobility cards (TMF, for its Spanish acronym) for 3.5 million Venezuelans, and there have been 596,056 Venezuelans who have transited through Colombia, with 349,693 exiting through Rumichaca International Bridge at the border with Ecuador.

Colombia continues to be an entry point and area of transit for those fleeing Venezuela. According to Migración Colombia, more than 1.4 million Venezuelans stay in Colombia until 30 June 2019. Bogotá has the highest concentration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants (313,528), followed by the departments of Norte de Santander (185,433), La Guajira (163,966), and Atlántico (125,075).¹

In this context, the Quito Process and the Quito Plan of Action are opportunities to promote the responsibility-sharing approach in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, with a substantial focus on admission, reception as well as responding to specific needs, supporting communities, and socio-economic inclusion. The Quito Process IV meeting on 5-6 July 2019 in Buenos Aires brought together 14 countries, including Colombia, to discuss challenges in addressing the Venezuela situation including registration, data collection and management, documentation and human mobility, as well as protection and socio-economic conditions of refugees and migrants. The next Quito meeting, Quito V, will take place in Bogotá on 14-15 November 2019.

¹ Radiografía from Migración Colombia 30 June 2019

1,585 interviews **4,301** individuals



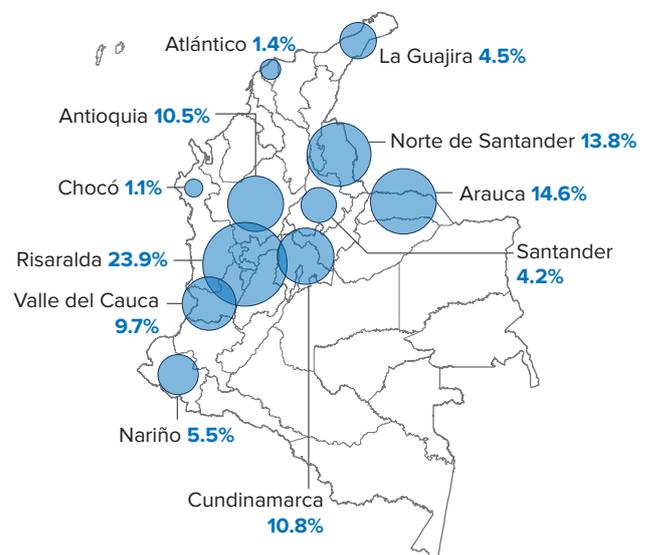
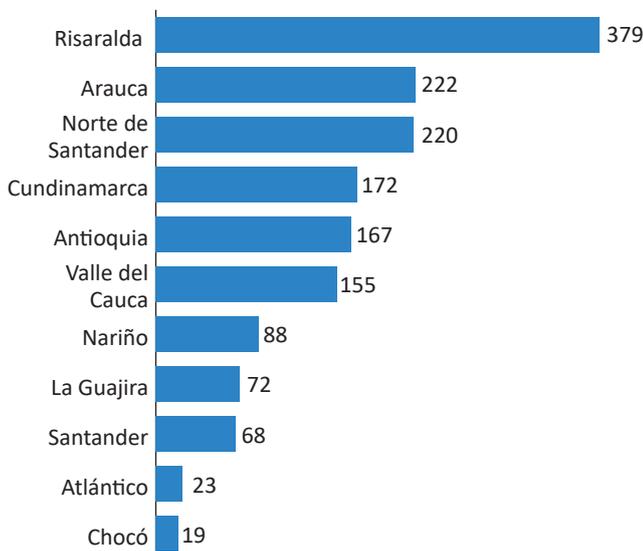
Methodology

Protection Monitoring in the Americas is a UNHCR initiative that seeks to ensure an adequate and timely understanding of the protection situation of Venezuelan nationals out of their country. The questionnaire in the tool, includes questions aimed to identify protection incidents, priority needs, future intentions and potential risks of persons of concern in returning to Venezuela.

Protection monitoring analysis in this report is mostly based on household interviews, and the primary data analysis is complemented with information available to UNHCR through other means, including thematic assessments and reports from the Government, partners, and other stakeholders.

Between January and June 2019, UNHCR and its partners carried out a total number of **1,585 protection monitoring interviews** with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the departments of La Guajira, Atlántico, Norte de Santander, Santander, Antioquia, Arauca, Chocó, Risaralda, Valle de Cauca, Nariño, and Cundinamarca. The questionnaire addressed individuals and their family members (totaling **4,301 individuals**).

The interviews were conducted at border entry points, in urban areas and city centres, as well as at UNHCR premises, including at the Information and Orientation Centers (PAO, for its Spanish acronym) where there was a reported concentration of persons of concern. The distribution of the population surveyed is shown in the map and graph below:



Highlights

Persons at risk and protection incidents

- **20%** of the individuals were identified as persons with **specific needs**, among whom were **396** persons with critical or chronic medical conditions, **290** pregnant or lactating women, **142** persons with disabilities, **21** separated children, 6 unaccompanied children, and **26** elderly persons at risk.
- Serious **negative coping mechanisms** were reported, including survival sex (8 cases), begging (124 cases), and sending children under 15 years-old to work (10 cases). It should be noted that the methodology used for protection monitoring has limitations to sufficiently capture the dimension and prevalence of Sexual and Gender Based Violence SGBV-related incidents. This information is indicative and should be read in conjunction with other sources as well as quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- **15%** of the respondents reported **one or more protection incidents**. In total, **237** protection incidents were reported. The most commonly reported incident was **robbery** and **theft**, followed by **physical assault**, **killings**, and **torture**. Overall, **64 % of the incidents reported took place in Colombia**, **35%** in Venezuela and **1%** in Peru.²

Access to territory and asylum

- **69%** of the surveyed population **did not have any type of regular stay permit**, either because they entered irregularly or their temporary permits expired. **10%** referenced having the temporary stay permit (PEP), **4%** said they had a tourist permit or visa, while **3%** were holding permanent residence permits or visa.
- **Only 2%** of those interviewed had **applied for asylum**. Among those who had not applied, **24%** expressed their intention to apply for asylum either in Colombia (**21%**), or in another country (**3%**). Of those who did not apply, the majority were unaware of the existing procedures or entitlements.

Health

- Regarding **health**, all the individuals who had a medical-related issue said they had approached public hospitals or public health centres for assistance, but only **79%** received medical attention. The remaining **21%** claimed that they were not assisted, mainly due to a combination of lack of documentation and lack of health insurance.

² Please note that respondents are asked to report protection incidents in country of origin, transit, and asylum during the monitoring exercise.



Protection Monitoring conducted in the neighborhood of Carpinelo, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia. UNHCR/ Á. Hurtado

Coping mechanisms

- With regards to **coping mechanisms** used while in Colombia, the main ones highlighted by respondents were **reduction of essential non-food or basic needs expenditures**, money loans to purchase food or basic goods, and restriction of food consumption by adults in order to prioritize providing food to children.

Prospects for integration and discrimination

- Regarding plans to settle, **64%** responded they wished to stay in Colombia (among which **6%** mentioned would like to relocate within the country), **24%** wished to go back home, **8%** intended to move to a third country, and **5%** responded they did not know.
- Interviewees reflected on the attitudes of Colombians towards Venezuelans: **49%** of the respondents stated they have experienced discrimination, mostly due to their nationality. However, **78%** of those interviewed said they felt safe in Colombia. Additionally, **82%** reported that they perceived their interactions with the host community as “good” or “very good”, **17%** described the interactions as “regular”, and only **1%** mentioned that their relationship was either “bad” or “very bad”. This final figure shows the existing socio-cultural ties and the relative openness of the Colombian population to receive Venezuelans.

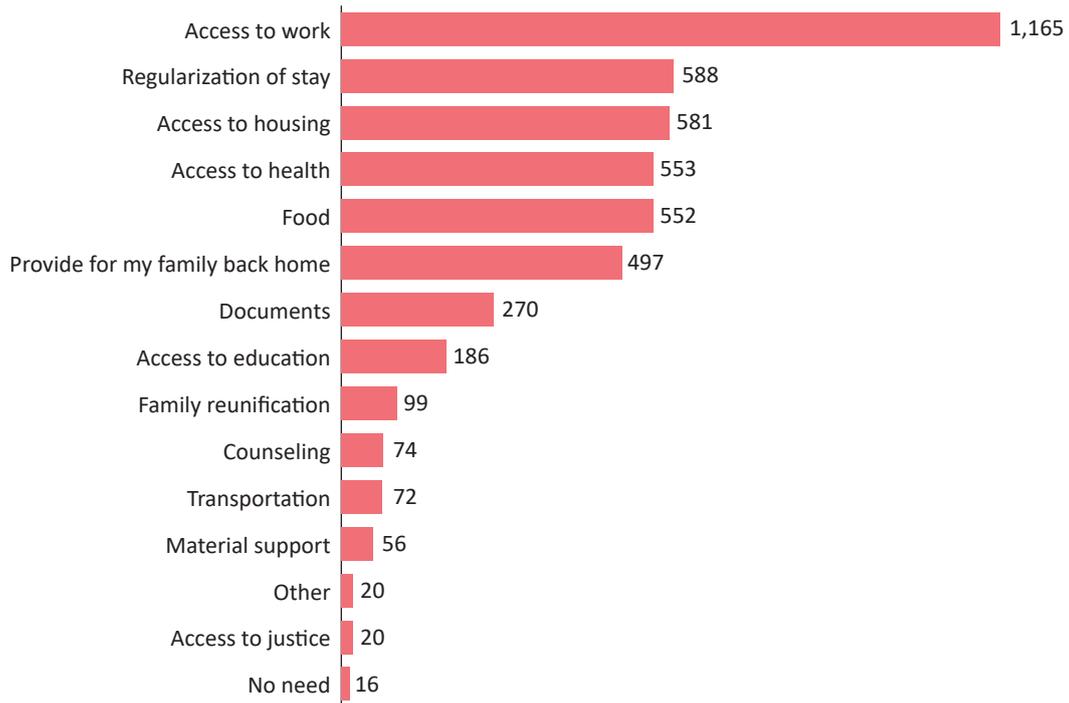
In light of the continued arrival of the Venezuelan population and the pressure that this puts on access to basic services such as health and employment, there is a risk that the tendency to not support integration processes for Venezuelans will increase unless comprehensive and effective responses are provided, according to recent results reported by Sayara International³ and Semana.⁴

³ *Los venezolanos en Colombia: comprendiendo las implicaciones de la crisis de refugiados en Maicao, La Guajira*. Sayara International & UNIMINUTO, 2019.

⁴ <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/encuesta-invamer-aumenta-el-rechazo-a-los-venezolanos/626177>

Priority needs

Priority Needs



Access to labour

Access to the labour market is the first priority need expressed by respondents. **28%** of those interviewed engaged in informal employment (other than street vendors), **27%** were unemployed, **19%** were street vendors, and **only 6% were working formally**.

Regularization of stay

Regularization of stay is the second priority need. Associated risks with irregular entry or irregular stay include serious negative coping mechanisms explained before.

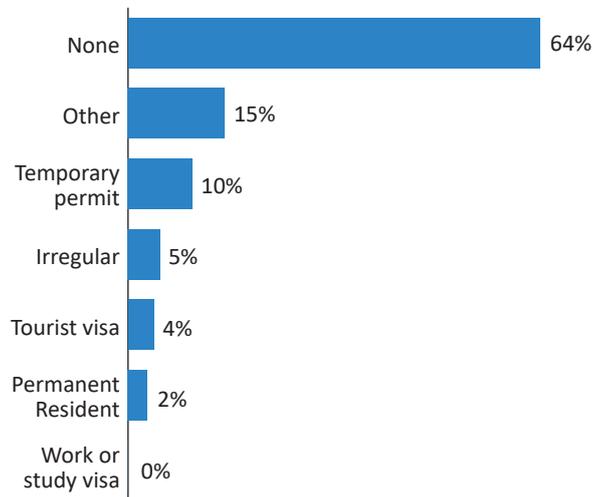
The Colombian Government has made considerable efforts to introduce regularization measures, including the **Special Stay Permit (PEP)**, for its Spanish acronym),⁵ ensuring the regular and safe movement of Venezuelans in the country and granting access to health,

⁵ Additionally, Venezuelans can enter, transit through, and leave Colombia with a passport that has been expired for up to two years. At border localities, they can also obtain the Border Mobility Card (TMF) for a maximum of seven days, during which this card allows them to cross the border into Colombia and return to Venezuela. Resolution 0872 of March 05 2019

education, and the labour market. However, these measures benefit only half of the Venezuelan population in the country, leaving many at risk of irregularity or limited access to basic services.

69 % of the population surveyed **did not have any type of residence or stay permit**. This figure includes 64% of the population surveyed that stated that they did not have any residence permit or visa, and 5% who are staying irregularly or overstayed their visa or permit.

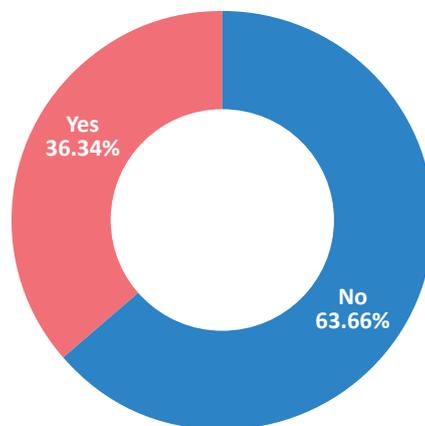
Type of residence permit or visa



Regular entry⁶

During the reporting period, **64%** of the surveyed persons entered **irregularly** to Colombia through informal routes. These informal routes can be extremely **dangerous due to the presence of numerous illegal armed actors** at the border areas of Venezuela and Colombia. People in transit are at risk of extortion, violence, theft, forced recruitment, sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking, among others.

Regular vs non regular entry



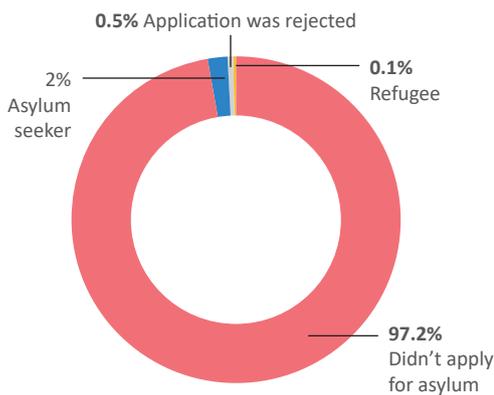
⁶ This section includes information from secondary sources, including observations from specific thematic assessments and reports from partners and other stakeholders.

Asylum and international refugee protection considerations

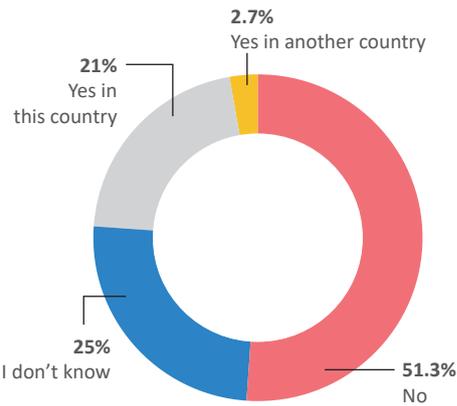
In line with the UNHCR Guidance Note on International Protection Considerations for Venezuelans – Update I, issued in May 2019, UNHCR considers that **“the majority of Venezuelan nationals are in need of international protection under the criteria contained in the Cartagena Declaration** on the basis of threats to their lives, security or freedom resulting from the events that are currently seriously disturbing public order in Venezuela”⁷.

A very low percentage of surveyed persons have applied for asylum in Colombia (33 cases or **2%**). The population interviewed showed very limited knowledge of asylum procedures and their entitlements in Colombia, however **21%** mentioned to have the intention to apply for asylum in Colombia and **2.7 %** in another country.

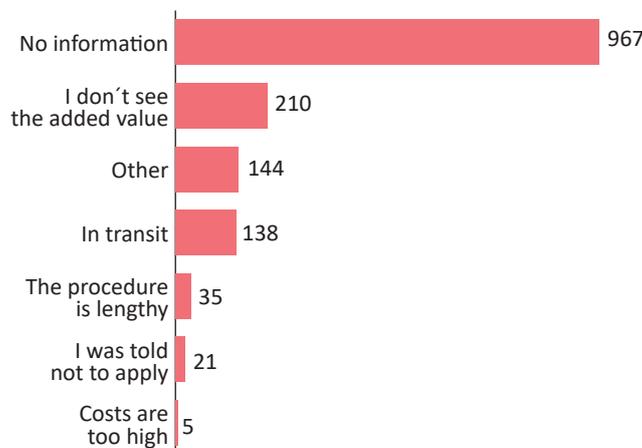
Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Colombia



Intention to apply for asylum



Reasons for not applying



⁷ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Guidance Note on International Protection Considerations for Venezuelans – Update I, May 2019, para. 4 & 5, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cd1950f4.html>

Protection incidents

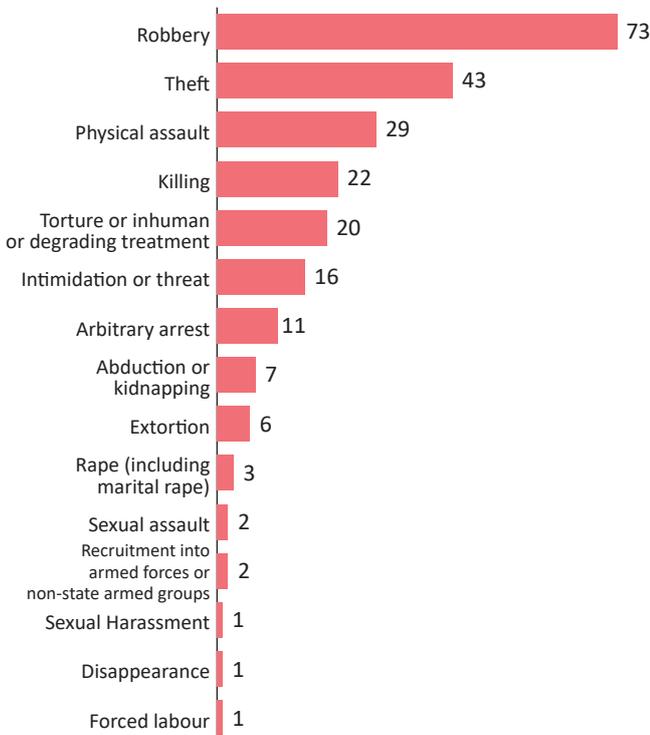
1,585 interviews **237** incidents

Persons were asked to report incidents suffered or witnessed by themselves or their family members. **15%** of the respondents reported **one or more protection incidents**. In total, **237** incidents were reported. Overall, the most commonly reported incident was **robbery** and **theft**, followed by **physical assault**, **killings**, and **torture**.

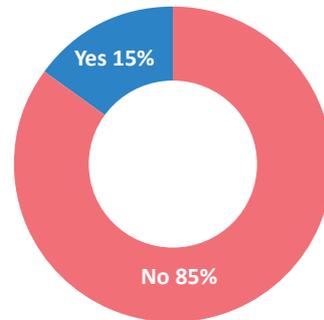
58% of the incidents reported were suffered by the interviewed person themselves, **34%** were witnessed, and **8%** were either suffered or witnessed by a family member.

It was observed that the highest number of incidents in Colombia were reported in Bogotá, D.C. (41), followed by Santander (19), Norte de Santander (15), and Valle del Cauca (12).

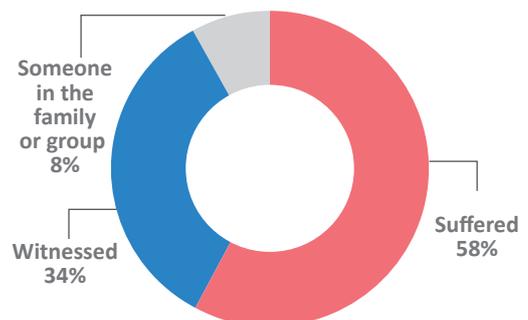
Incident by type | Multiple choice



Families who suffered or witnessed any incident



Incidents witnessed or experience by self or family member

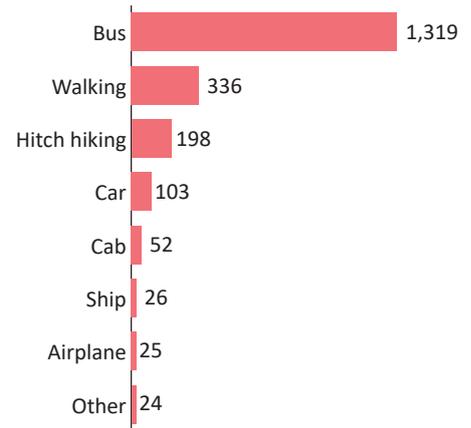


Characteristics of the movement

Means of Travel

The majority of the surveyed persons had travelled by bus, walking, and/or hitch hiking. Besides walking, the “caminantes” (walkers) often used a combination of means of travel.

Means of travel



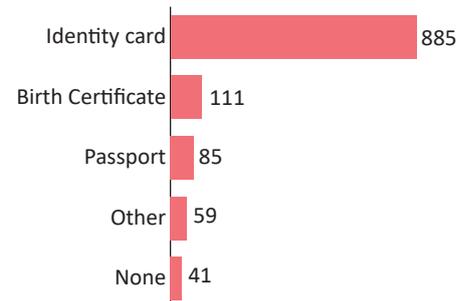
Documentation

Regarding the documents held by those who had to cross the border irregularly, most respondents said they only held the Venezuelan identity card, birth certificates, or nothing.

Passports: respondents have shared serious obstacles in obtaining and/or renewing their national passports. According to legislation in Venezuela, a passport’s validity can be extended for two years, as long as the passport is still valid for at least six months. However, according to the respondents, such a process is lengthy or not accessible, and they face difficulties to meet the documentation requirements.

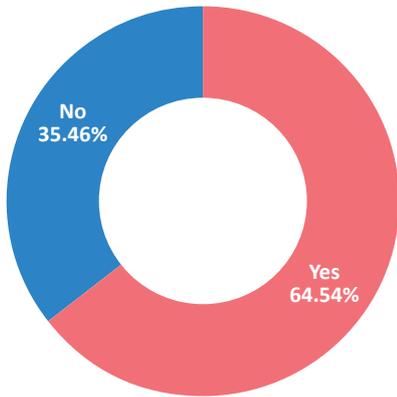
Travel authorizations for children: Authenticated travel authorizations are only issued in Venezuela if both parents are present. If one of the parents is abroad, he/she will have to approach a Venezuelan Consular Representation and mail the authorization to Venezuela. Such procedures are lengthy and require an attorney. In addition, children travelling alone or with another person who is not their parent or legal guardian require a notarized authorization from both parents. All Venezuelan Consular Representations are closed in Colombia since February 2019.

Documents held by those who did not enter regularly



Birth Certificates: Foreign parents of children born in Colombia need to prove their residence in the country in order to obtain the nationality for their children. This is not always possible for Venezuelans. The Colombian State adopted exceptional and temporary measures to prevent the risk of statelessness. The children of Venezuelan parents born between January 1, 2015 and up to two years from the date the measure was implemented (August 2021) are recognized as Colombian nationals.

Family size changed due to displacement



Family size changes

64% of the respondents said their family size changed due to displacement, reporting they have been separated from one or more members of the family with whom they were living in Venezuela.

The reasons for the separation include family members left behind due to their physical or socio-economic conditions, family members looking for opportunities in other countries, and, in some cases, separation affecting family unity (divorce), arbitrary detention, and/or arrest.

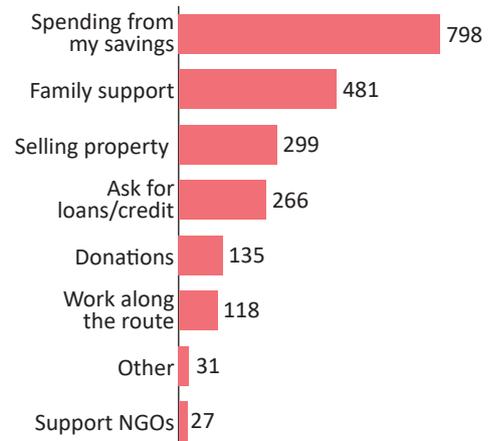
Negative coping mechanisms

Coping mechanisms related to displacement and reported by the interviewed persons include spending savings, requesting family support, selling property, asking for loans, and working along the travel route. **Serious negative coping mechanisms** were also reported and included **survival sex** (8 cases), **begging** (124 cases), and **sending children under 15 years-old to work** (10 cases).

As reported by several stakeholders, the risks connected with survival sex and exploitation are extremely high for the Venezuelan population, and contributing factors include: i) the precarious economic situation of families or single women prior to departure, ii) the inability to cover the costs of the trip, iii) the limited availability of formal employment, iv) the temporary nature of residence permits issued to Venezuelans, and v) the stigma associated with Venezuelan women, girls, and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).⁸

As mentioned previously, this methodology does not allow for in-depth assessment of SGBV-related risks, and additional data is required to complement the protection monitoring findings.

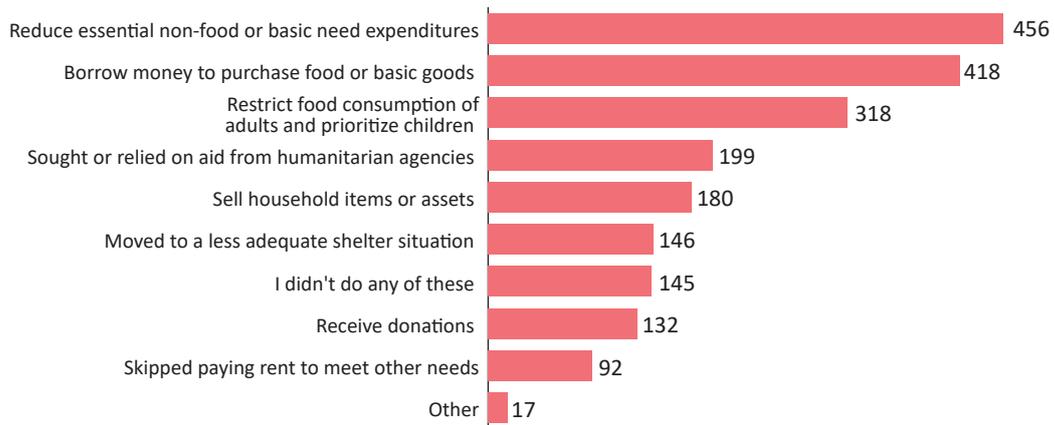
Coping mechanisms on the route



⁸ Women Refugee Commission, *The Time to Act Is Now: Addressing Risks of Exploitation for Venezuelan Women and Children Seeking Refuge*, April 2019, <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/resources-refugee-protection/1716-the-time-to-act-is-now>

Once in Colombia, coping mechanisms reported by respondents include the reduction of essential non-food or basic needs expenditures, borrowing money, restriction of food consumption, and search for humanitarian aid.

Coping mechanisms at the country of monitoring

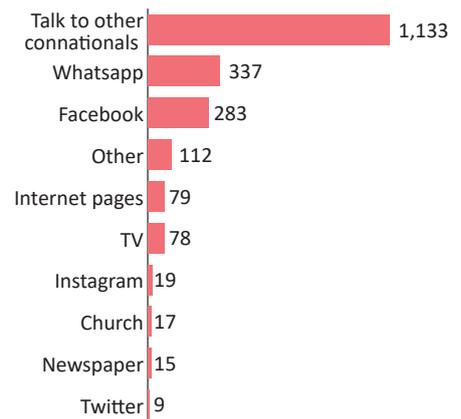


Access to information

Regarding the type of information used to plan their trip, **1,133** respondents reported that their main source of information was **talking to fellow nationals** along the route, followed by **WhatsApp** shared information and checking **Facebook, Internet browsers**, and **others**.

These results show the potential of social media use for planning and conducting Communication with Communities (CwC) interventions and referrals to the Regional Safe Spaces Network (RSSN),⁹ particularly regarding alerting people about risks, providing information on procedures and essential services for SGBV survivors, children at-risk and victims of trafficking, and countering misinformation and fraud.

Access to information



⁹ UNHCR, *The Regional Safe Spaces Network in the Americas: Lessons learned and toolkit, 2018*, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/es/docid/5c50c4b54.htm>



Protection Monitoring conducted during a Health Care Services in Carpinelo, Medellín, Antioquia. UNHCR/ A. Hurtado

Employment

27% of those interviewed confirmed that they are employed informally and **19%** are street sellers. In addition, **26%** were unemployed at the time of the interview. In total, this indicates **72%** of the people interviewed are **either unemployed or in a precarious job-related situation.**

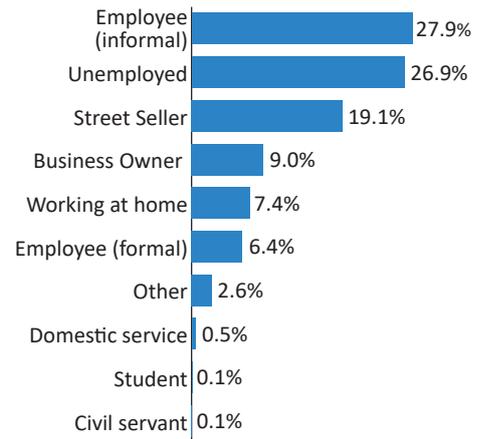
Reported risks related to **labour exploitation** are often connected to the type of documentation held by Venezuelans, the educational and professional profile of those interviewed, and the number of months they have stayed in the host country.

Respondents were asked about their employment in Venezuela, and **53%** reported they were working in their country of origin as **formal employees (25%), business owners (19%), or civil servants (8%) in Venezuela prior to departure.**

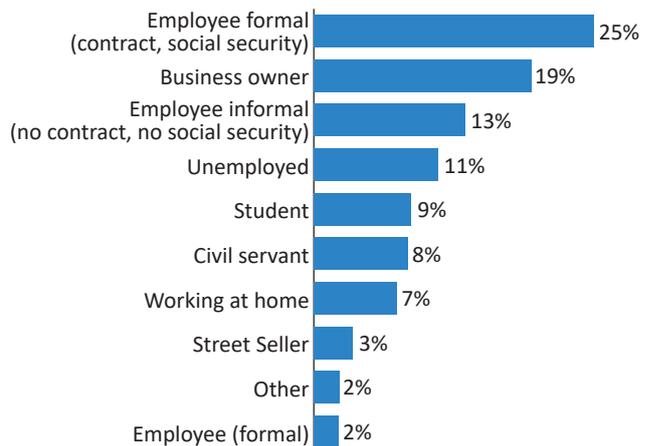
When analyzing the type of jobs which Venezuelans had access to in their country of origin, it is evident that displacement has a negative impact on skilled workers' access to the labour market in Colombia.

Access to employment for Venezuelans has proven to be an area where stronger interventions are needed. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) “whole of society” approach, a multi-partner effort is required to identify opportunities, match the needs of the labour market with the capacities of asylum- seekers and refugees, and create opportunities and joint efforts/collaborations.

Current employment



Employment in country of origin

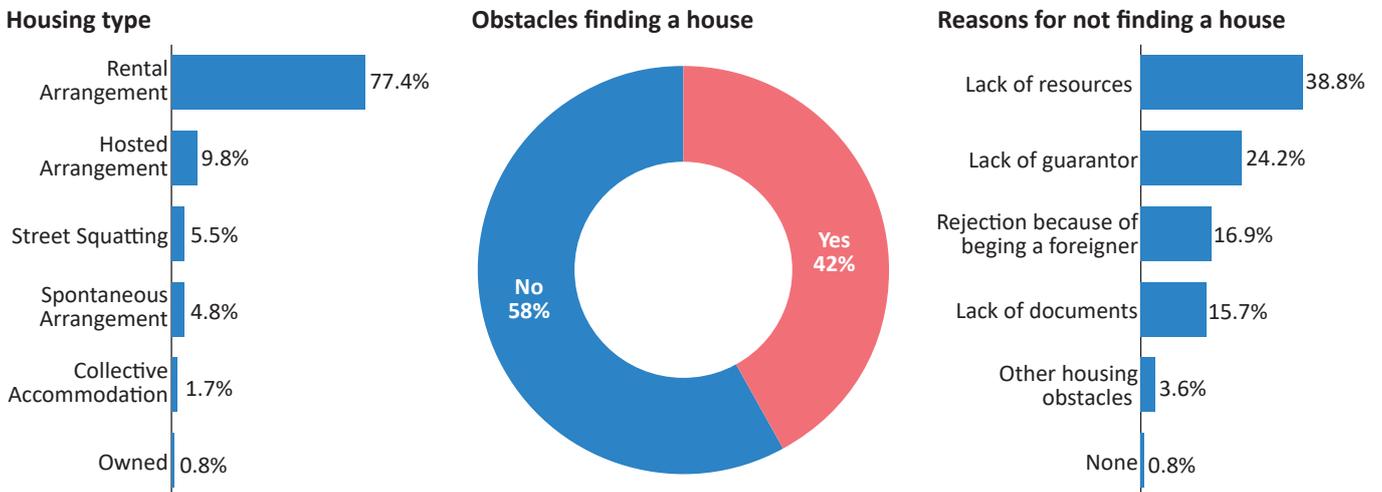


Housing

77% of the respondents referred to rental arrangements for their housing (including those who pay a **daily amount for a room**), **10%** reported being hosted by family members, friends, or others, **5%** referred to spontaneous housing arrangements, **5%** were living in the streets, **2%** were at a reception or transit facility, and only **1%** mentioned that they own property.

90% of those with accommodation have regular access to **water and electricity**.

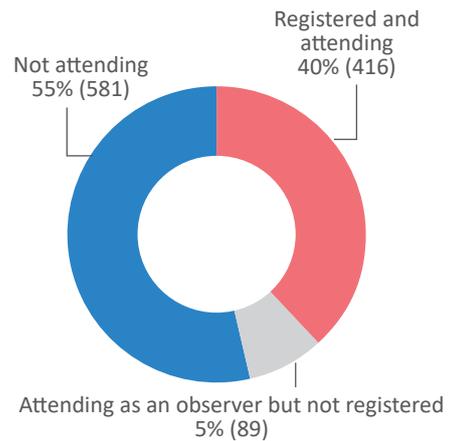
As to the main **obstacles** to finding housing, **42%** of those interviewed said they had faced problems when looking for accommodation, mostly due to lack of economic means and lack of guarantors, followed by discrimination based on nationality and lack of required documentation.



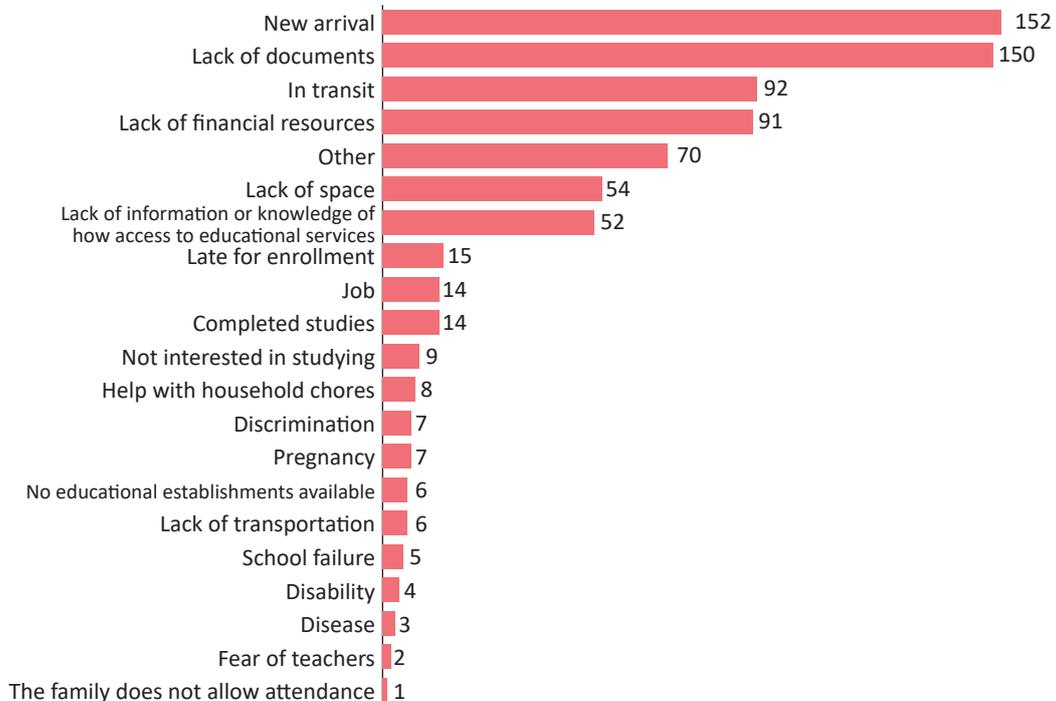
Education in Colombia

55% (581) of the children were reportedly **not attending school**, mainly since they have recently arrived, because the lack of required documentation to enroll, or because they were in transit. **Limited space in public schools** is a barrier to access education as well as lack of financial resources to cover school materials and uniforms.

School attendance



Reasons why they are not attending school | Multiple choice

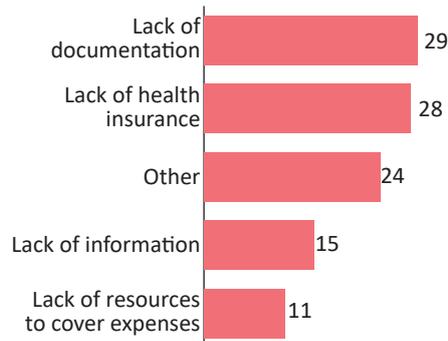


Health

Critical or chronic medical conditions

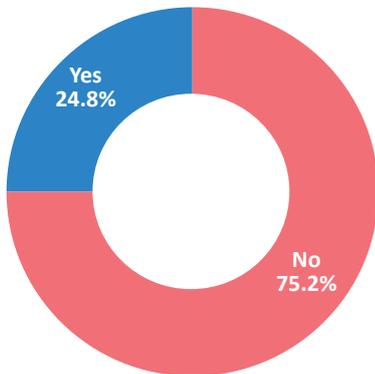
Given the very limited access to medical services in Venezuela, there are groups that are at heightened risk and need urgent treatment after their departure from Venezuela. During the protection monitoring interviews, **396** persons with **critical or chronic medical condition** were identified, as well as **290 pregnant or lactating women** and **142** persons with **disability**.

Obstacles accessing medical attention

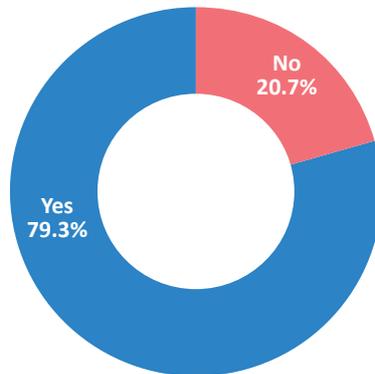


25% of the people interviewed said they have had some health-related issue since arriving to Colombia. Of those respondents, **79%** went to a health facility and **received medical attention**. The remaining **21%** claimed that they were not assisted mainly due to a combination of lack of documentation, lack of health insurance, and lack of information.

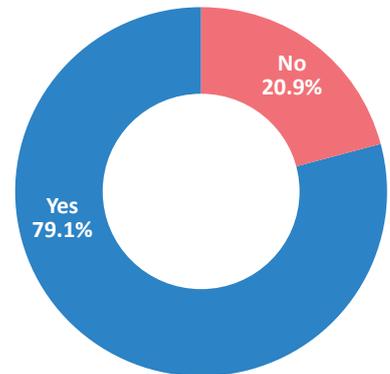
Had a health issue since arriving to Colombia



Went to a health facility



Received medical attention

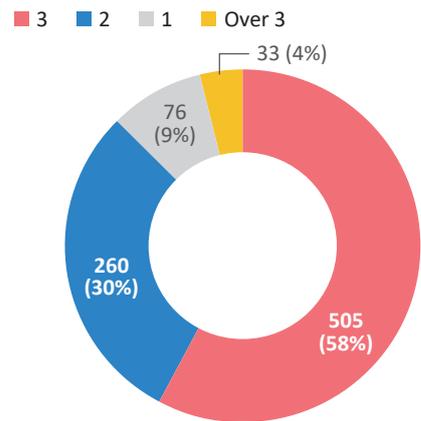


Food Security

The respondents were asked about their average daily food intake. **58%** said they had an average of three meals a day, **30%** two meals a day, and **9%** one meal a day. Most of the respondents commented how the situation has drastically changed in terms of access to food as compared with that in Venezuela.

In **318** cases, it was reported that the adults of the family had to **reduce their food intake** and prioritize their children, and **418** reported to have borrowed money to purchase food and basic goods.

Number of meals

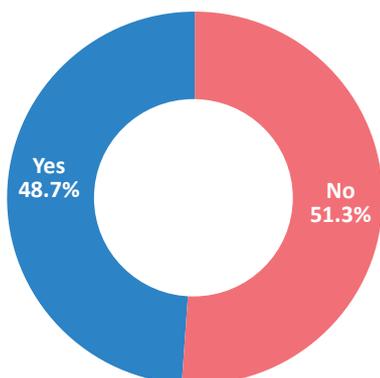


Prospects for security and discrimination

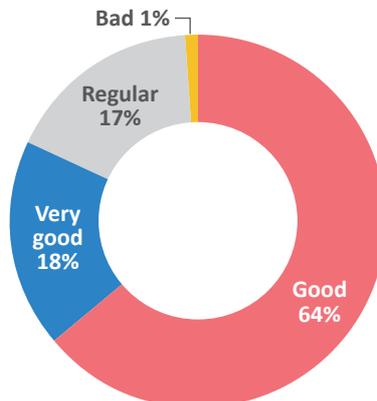
78% of the respondents said they **felt safe** where they live and **82%** evaluated their relationship with the local community as **very good or good**.

However, **49%** of those interviewed said they had felt **discriminated against** while living in Colombia, mostly due to their nationality (411 cases), and in some cases for being a woman (26 cases).

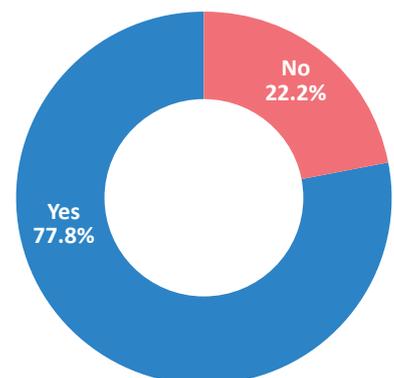
Discrimination



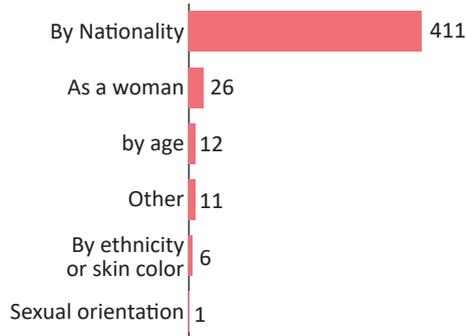
Interaction with the local community



Feeling of safety



Reason for discrimination



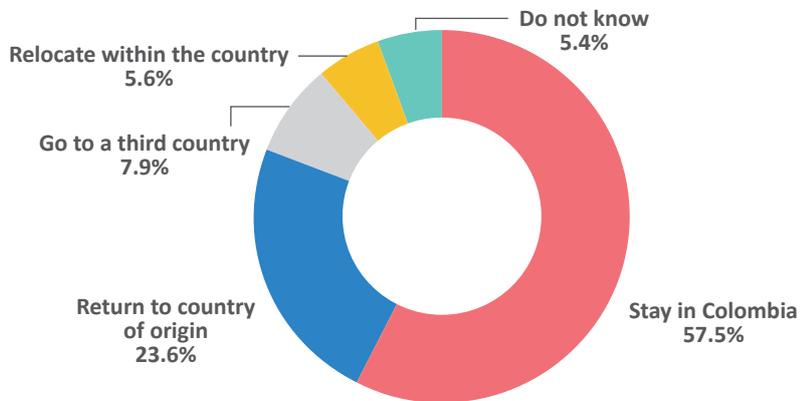
In terms of feelings of safety, interviewees referred to the neighborhood where they live and/or the environment at work and relationship with their workmates. Cases of discrimination often were the result of specific negative experiences and/or the general work atmosphere, in some instances fueled by media and social media reactions.

UNHCR and partners have observed that the multiple incidents of discrimination that Venezuelan women often face have sexual connotations, are stigmatizing, and can result in resorting to negative coping mechanisms (i.e. survival sex).

 **Intentions**

58% of the respondents said they would like to stay in Colombia, **24%** wished to return to Venezuela, **8%** were planning to move on or return to another country, and **6%** wanted to relocate inside Colombia.

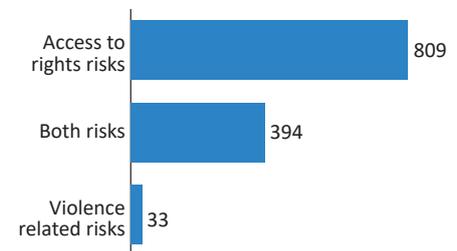
Plans to settle



Potential risks upon return

When asked about the risks they could face if they returned to Venezuela, respondents most often cited a **combination of causes**, including violent incidents that may affect themselves individually, their families, or their communities. They also referred to serious obstacles to **access the minimum standard of living and rights**, including access to health, food, and the labour market. The graphic shows that the deterioration of the situation in Venezuela is multi-faceted and affects most aspects of the lives of individuals and communities, including safety.

Risk upon return



COLOMBIA PROTECTION MONITORING

January - June 2019

