# PROTECTION MONITORING PANAMA 2025

Profiles, needs and intentions of refugees and asylum-seekers in Panama

Summary | Displacement profile | Situation in host country

UNHCR Panama regularly monitors the protection situation of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country, collecting and analyzing data on their profiles, needs, and intentions. This factsheet presents findings from **271 telephone household interviews**, representing **734 people**, conducted between 15 July 2025 and 14 January 2026.

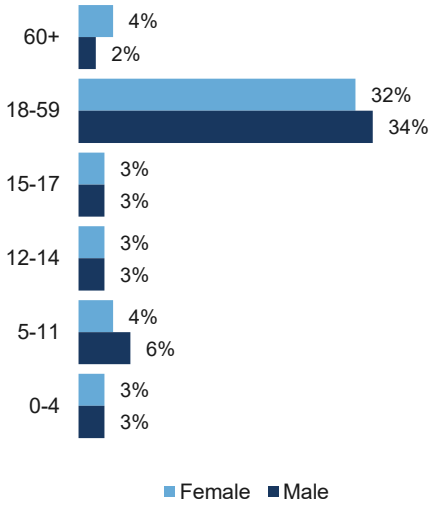
| 271 | 734 | 14 | 35% \| 65% |
|---|---|---|---|
| households interviewed | total people assessed | countries of nationality | recognized refugees \| asylum-seekers |

## RESPONDENT PROFILE

Respondents were mainly nationals of **Colombia** (38%), **Venezuela** (22%), and **Nicaragua** (19%). Almost all **(99%)** were born in Latin America and the Caribbean. Households averaged **2.7 people,** and one in three (34%) consisted of one person. Nearly half of household members were women and girls (49%). Heads of household averaged **40 years of age**; half (50%) were married or living with a partner, and 51% were women. **42%** of households included at least one child under 18.

### Age group and sex

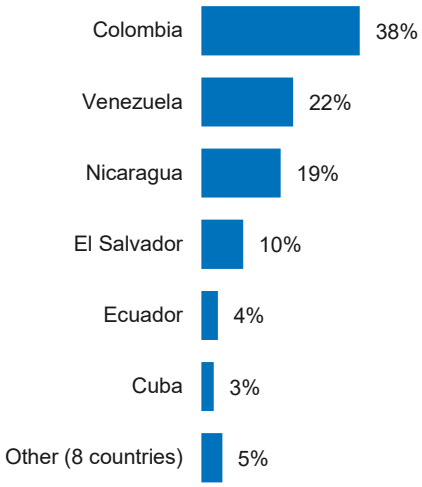
*Household members (% of all members)*




*1 member reported as intersex is not shown.*

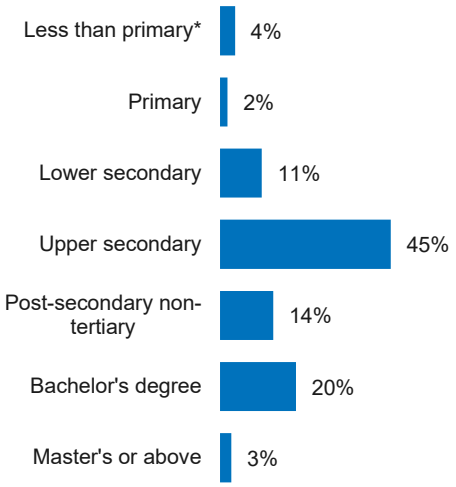
### Nationality

*Respondents*




### Highest level of education

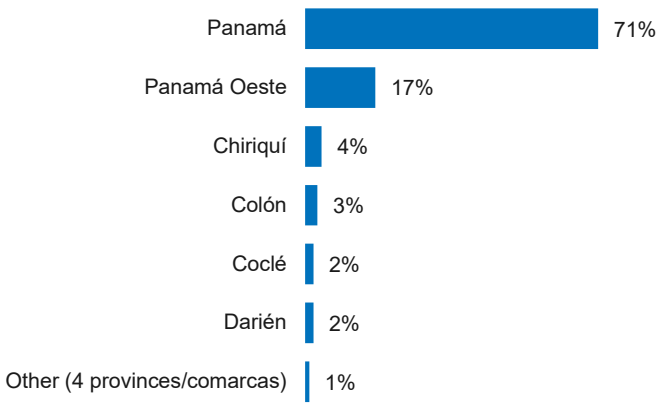
*Respondents*




**Includes less than primary, informal schooling only, and no formal education. 1 respondent preferred not to answer.*

### Households by province of residence

*% of households*




**43%**
of respondents arrived in Panama between 2024 or 2025

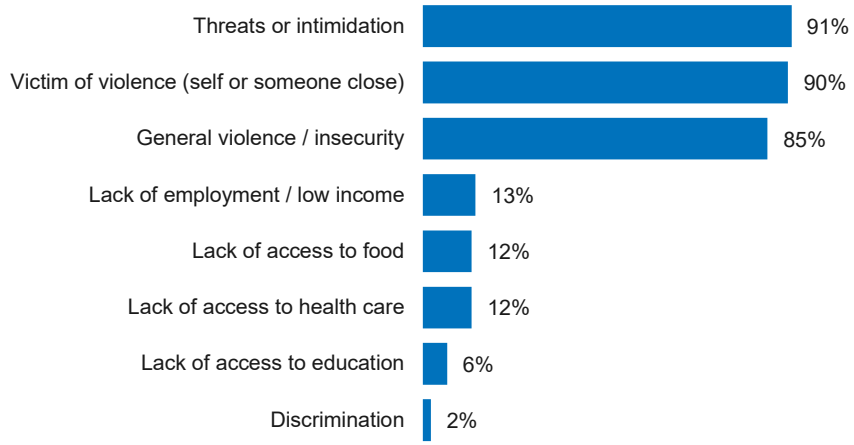
**37%**
completed post-secondary or university education

**15%**
have a physical or mental disability

**1%**
held a second nationality

## Reasons for leaving the country of origin

*Respondents, multiple answers possible*




*Natural disasters, other, and don't know less than 1% each. 4 respondents preferred not to answer.*

Almost all households left their country because of **threats, violence or insecurity (97%)**. A minority of respondents cited economic reasons and lack of access to services.

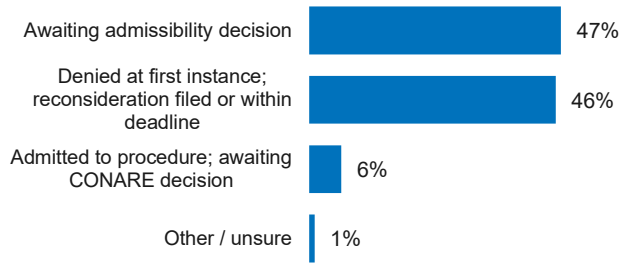
**65%**
of respondents were asylum-seekers and 35% were recognized refugees

**63%**
of asylum-seekers arrived in Panama in 2024 or 2025

## LEGAL STATUS AND DOCUMENTATION

### Stage of the asylum procedure

*Asylum-seekers (n=177)*

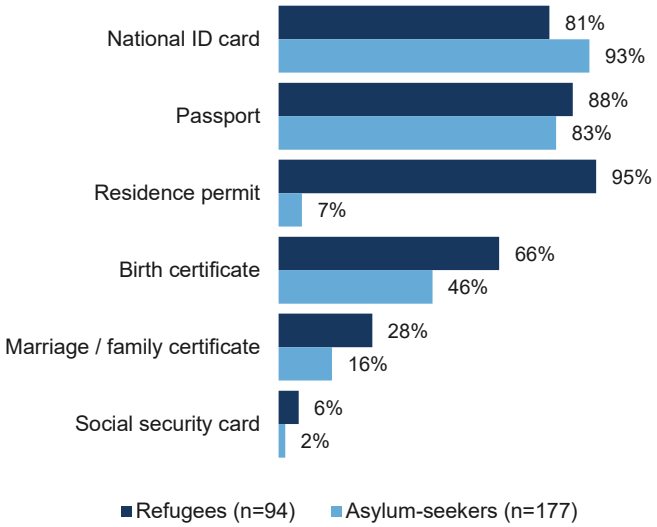



**29%** of asylum-seekers had filed claims **three or more years ago**, and 23% five or more years ago.

Among recognized refugees, **64%** held permanent and **35%** temporary residence; **11%** had not yet received their residence card or held an expired one.

### Identity and civil documents held

*Respondents, by population group*




### Documentation of the asylum claim

*Asylum-seekers asked about the document received from the authorities (n=176)*




63% hold an asylum-seeker ID card

30% only a paper certificate, case number, or stamped appeal

5% no document received

Without a valid ID card, asylum-seekers face restrictions on movement and on access to basic rights and services, which limits their prospects for local integration. Of the 168 asylum-seekers who had received a document, 158 (**94%**) still held it at the time of the interview.

## ENTRY TO THE TERRITORY

**1 in 3**

respondents (33%) entered Panama irregularly, without a migration stamp in their passport

Irregular entry was most frequent among nationals of **Venezuela** (64%) and **Nicaragua** (42%).

### Route of entry

*Respondents*

**50%**

**arrived by air**

All entered regularly.

**33%**

**by land from Costa Rica**

Through Paso Canoas, 57% entered irregularly.

**15%**

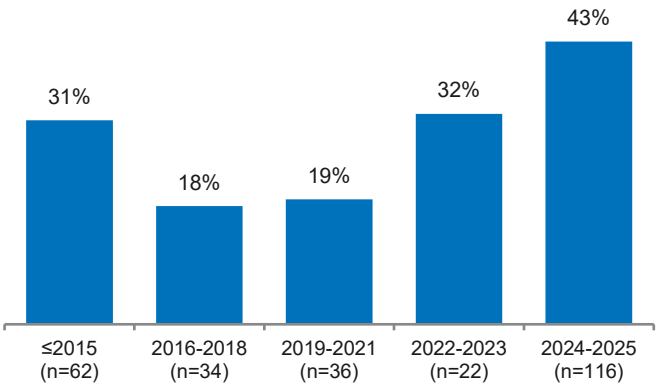
**via Darien / Colombian border**

Through the jungle, by river or by sea; 88% entered irregularly.

*6% did not know or could not name their point of entry.*

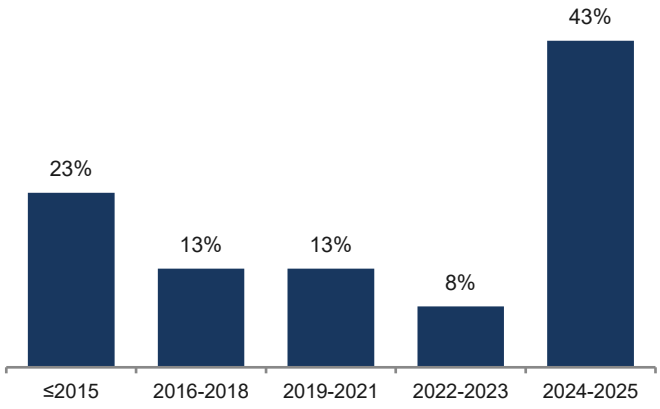
### Irregular entry, by period of arrival

*Respondents (% who entered irregularly)*




### Period of arrival in Panama

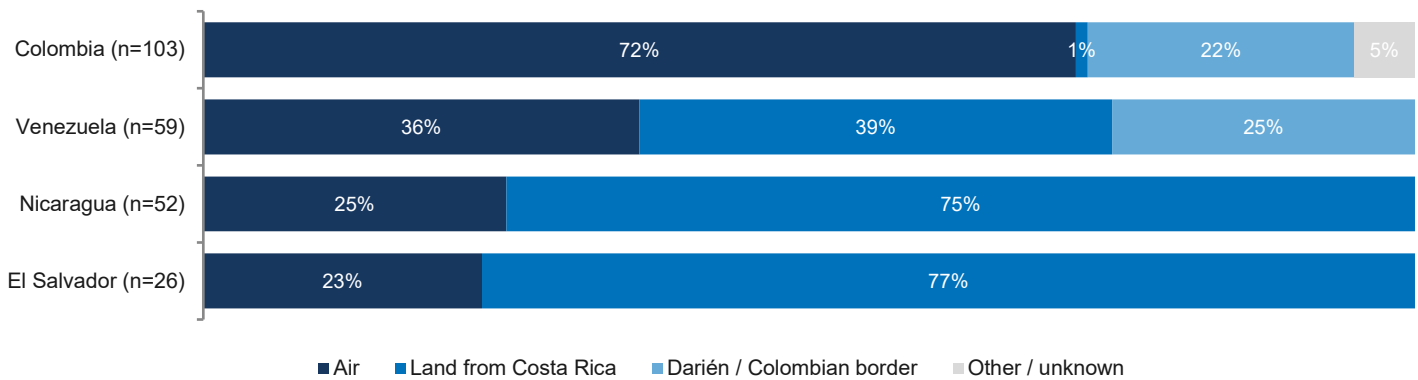
*Respondents (% of all)*




*Year of first arrival as reported by the respondent. Entry status unknown for 1 respondent. Percentages for periods with fewer than 40 respondents should be read with caution.*

### Route of entry, by nationality

*Main nationalities (% of respondents of each nationality)*



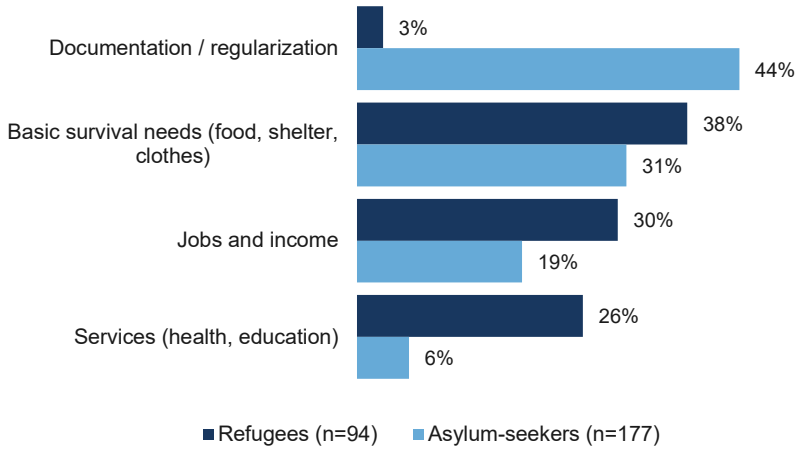

## SHORT-TERM INTENTIONS

**268 of 271** households **(99%)** intend to **stay in their current city, in Panama**. Two plan to move to another city in Panama, and one did not know. No respondent plans to move to another country or return.

Asylum-seekers' most urgent needs stem from the **lack of documentation and regularization**, while recognized refugees prioritize **basic needs, employment, and access to services**.

## Most urgent needs for you and your family in the past month

*Respondents, one answer*




*"No need (all met)": 3 respondents; "Don't know": 1.*

## Assistance

**92%**

of households received no monetary assistance from the State in the past 12 months

**46%**

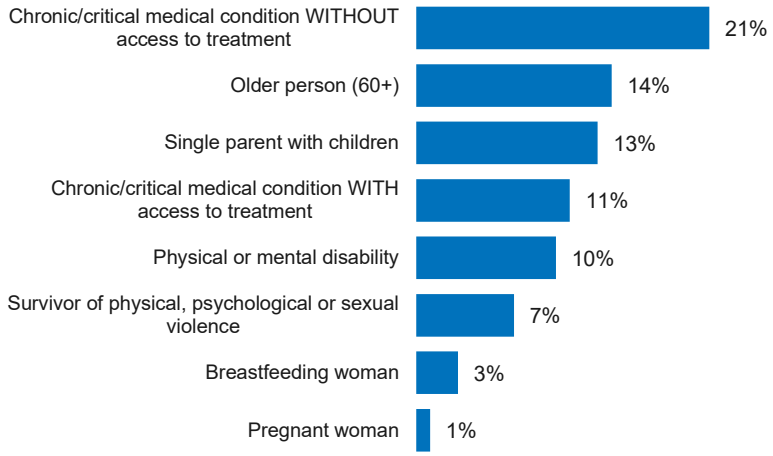
of eligible households with children aged 5-17 did not receive the Beca Universal scholarship* (n=35; 45% of refugee households in Panama for 10+ years)

**Eligible: asylum-seeker households with Panamanian children (proxy: child born in Panama) and refugee households in Panama for 10 years or more. Beca Universal and school feeding were the only State benefits reported.*

## SPECIFIC NEEDS AND HEALTH

### Households with at least one member with:

*% of households (n=271)*




*No unaccompanied children were reported.*

**51%**

of households have at least one member with a specific need

**41%**

needed to see a health professional in the past 3 months; 108 of 110 received care

**15%**

have significant difficulty in at least one functional domain (seeing, hearing, mobility, cognition, self-care, or communication) (20% of refugees, 13% of asylum-seekers)

## ACCESS TO EDUCATION

**15%**

of children aged 5-17 did not attend school during the current school year (n=89)

**4%**

of children aged 5-17 have never attended school (n=89)

**60%**

of young people aged 18-24 were not enrolled in any education this year (n=50)

**83%**

of children and youth attending education go to a public institution (n=96)

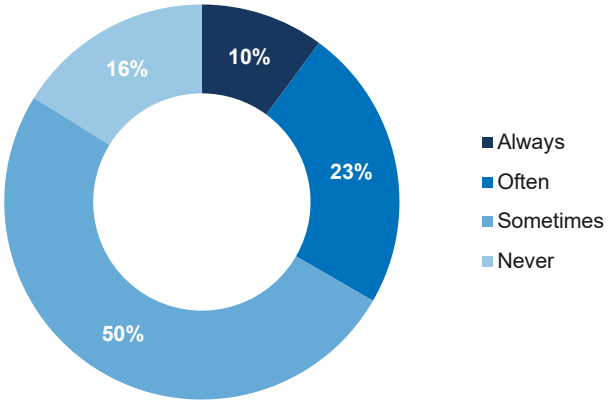
*Education questions refer to one household member aged 5-24, randomly selected in each household with members in that age range. Reasons for non-attendance included lack of places on arrival, arriving after the school year had started, costs and lack of documents.*

## HOUSING

Refugees and asylum-seekers in Panama face legal and documentation barriers to earning a sufficient income. Most of their monthly spending goes to housing, food, and basic needs. Of the **77%** that pay rent, only **one in three households (33%)** can consistently afford it without major financial hardship. Another **37%** share their dwelling with other households.

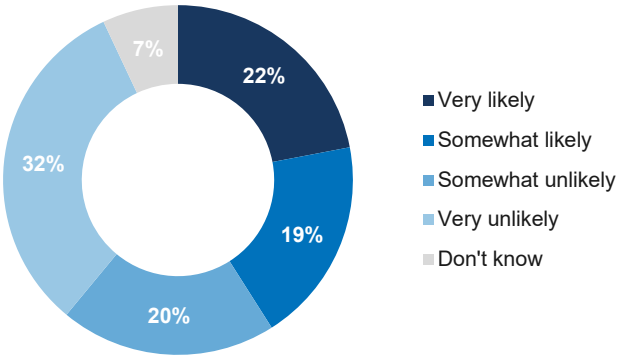
### Can your household generally afford rent without major financial hardship?

*Households paying rent (n=208)*




### In the next 12 months, how likely is it that you could lose your housing against your will?

*All households (n=271)*




**41%** of households think it is likely they could be forced to leave their home in the next year.

### Type of dwelling

*% of households*

**69%**
lived in a house

**28%**
lived in an apartment

**3%**
lived in other types of shelter, including 2 households living on the street

## LIVING CONDITIONS AND TENURE

**37%**
shared their dwelling with other households or people

**34%**
lived alone (single-person household)

**10%**
lived in overcrowded conditions (three or more household members per room)

**41%**
had official documentation of their housing tenure, mostly rental contracts

*Overcrowding counts household members only and excludes other families sharing the dwelling, so it may underestimate actual crowding. Of 271 households, 211 (78%) live in housing owned by an unrelated person.*

## LIVELIHOODS

**56%**
of respondents worked in the past 7 days (65% of refugees, 51% of asylum-seekers)

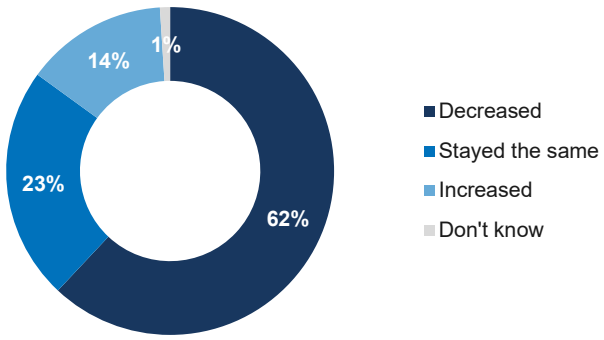
**23%**
unemployment rate among respondents in the labour force (18% refugees, 27% asylum-seekers)

**85%**
work in a different occupation from the one they had before leaving their country

**64%**
of asylum-seekers have neither a bank account nor used mobile money (27% of refugees)

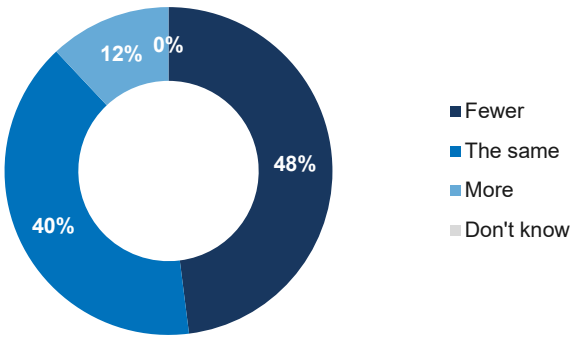
### Compared to last year, your household income has:

*Respondents (n=271)*




### Compared to last year, can your household afford more goods and services?

*Respondents (n=271)*




*Employment follows the ILO definition (any work for pay or profit in the past 7 days, or a temporary absence from a job). Unemployed: not working, looked for work in the past 30 days and available to start within two weeks.*

## SAFETY

**49%**
of respondents feel unsafe walking alone in their neighborhood after dark

**50%**
of households experienced at least one incident since arriving in Panama (71% of refugee, 41% of asylum-seeker households)

**96%**
could name at least one service to refer a survivor of gender-based violence

### Incidents experienced in Panama

*Any household member, multiple answers possible (n=257)*




*Other incidents (extortion, sexual assault, destruction of property, killing, kidnapping, dispossession) were each reported by fewer than 2% of households. Incidents refer to the whole period of stay in Panama, which is longer for refugees.*

## METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

UNHCR and HIAS enumerators conducted remote telephone interviews using a structured questionnaire hosted on KoboToolbox. Respondents were drawn from contact lists of refugees and asylum-seekers known to UNHCR and partners. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent.

Data were collected from 15 July 2025 to 14 January 2026. Results are statistically representative with 95% confidence and an 8% margin of error for asylum-seekers, and indicative for the refugee population.

Questions on nationality, documentation, education level, employment, financial inclusion, safety perception, and disability refer to the respondent. Questions on needs, housing, assistance, vulnerabilities, and incidents refer to the household. Education indicators refer to one randomly selected household member aged 5-24. Some questions allowed multiple answers, so percentages may add up to more than 100%. Due to rounding, totals may not add up to exactly 100%.

Remote data collection is likely to lead to under-reporting of some protection risks, such as gender-based violence or child protection concerns. Indicators based on fewer than 100 respondents show their sample size (n) and should be interpreted with caution.




## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNHCR thanks the refugees and asylum-seekers in Panama who took part in this survey and shared their experiences, concerns and aspirations.

UNHCR thanks the authorities, civil society, international organizations, and donors for their support, and is especially grateful to **HIAS** for its close collaboration in carrying out every interview.

UNHCR MCO PANAMA wishes to convey a special thank you to its donors: Australia | Belgium | Canada | Denmark | the European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Japan | the Republic of Korea | The Kingdom of the Netherlands | Norway | Luxembourg | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | United States of America | World Food Programme | Private donors in Canada, China, Italy, the Republic of Korea, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as well as and Australia for UNHCR, the Dutch Postcode Lottery, España con ACNUR, Japan for UNHCR, Sweden for UNHCR, UK for UNHCR and UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe.