

Safe Mobility Offices: Awareness, Migrants' Interest, and Potential Influence on mixed migration dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean

This infographic presents the awareness and potential interest expressed by people on the move surveyed by 4Mi in Colombia and Costa Rica regarding the Safe Mobility Offices. Additionally, it explores the potential influence of this initiative on mixed migration in the region.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION SITES:

Costa Rica: Paso Canoas and Ciudad Neily (Costa Rica-Panama border); San Carlos and Heredia (Central Costa Rica).
Colombia: Cucuta (Colombia-Venezuela border) and Medellin (Central Colombia).

DATA COLLECTION:

December 2023 – February 2024

METHODOLOGY:

In-person surveys

SAMPLE SIZE:

204 respondents surveyed in Colombia (n=119) and Costa Rica (n=85)

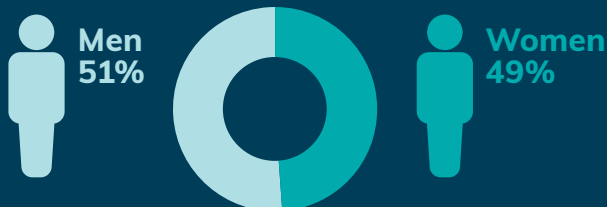
Background

- In spring 2023, the U.S. government launched the Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) as part of its regional strategy to manage mixed migration in the Americas. These centres, established in Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala (June 2023), and Ecuador (October 2023),¹ offer processing for legal pathways to the United States and other countries (Spain and Canada), aligning with the goals of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration “to create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration” in the region.²
- The SMOs are intended for “the expansion of lawful pathways to the United States [or other countries] for refugees and migrants in South and Central America”.³ At the SMOs, refugees and migrants can assess whether they may qualify for refugee resettlement, family reunification, humanitarian parole, temporary worker visas, or other legal pathways.⁴
- As of mid-January 2024, 115,000 individuals had applied to SMO processes,⁵ and 3,200 refugees resettled in the United States as part of the program.⁶
- The eligibility criteria for Safe Mobility in Colombia, Costa Rica, and Ecuador require entering the country before the opening of the offices. Additionally, in Colombia and Ecuador, possessing regular migratory status or undergoing the migratory regularization process is required.
- These criteria, along with the exclusion of certain nationalities that are common within mixed migration in the region (e.g., Ecuadorian), make the program’s applicability highly specific, targeting only particular profiles of migrants.

Respondents profiles

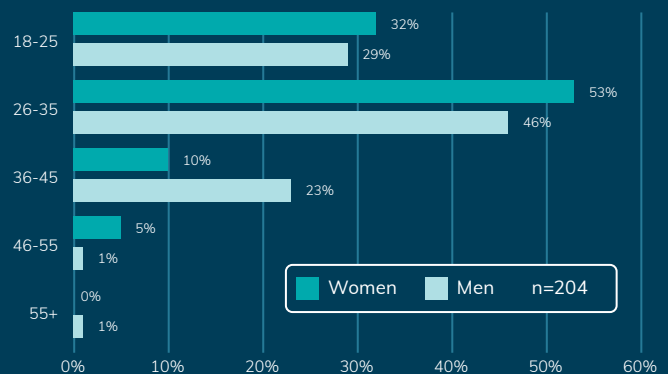
- This document presents the results of surveys conducted in Colombia and Costa Rica to **migrants of nationalities eligible to apply to the Safe Mobility Offices’ processes** (Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, Haitian and Cuban)⁴ in these countries, **who were en route to the United States**. These profiles were chosen in order to investigate the awareness and interest of the population on the move in the Americas regarding the SMOs.

Sex distributions of respondents



Note: The 4Mi sample is purposive. Data presented in this snapshot cannot, therefore, be considered representative of the mixed migration dynamics in the Americas.

Age distributions of respondents



1 Mixed Migration Centre (2023). [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean, Quarter 4 2023](#).

2 See: [Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection](#) signed by 20 countries in 2022.

3 Safe Mobility (2023). [General information on the 'Safe Mobility' initiative](#).

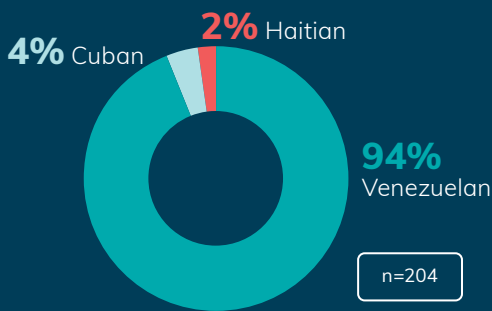
4 In Colombia, Cuban, Haitian, and Venezuelan nationals who entered the country before June 11, 2023, and have an approved or pending regular migratory status, may apply. In Costa Rica, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans present before June 12, 2023, are eligible to apply. In Ecuador, Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, Venezuelan, and Colombian nationals registered for migratory regularization or refugee status, and present in the country before October 18, 2023, may apply. Guatemalan nationals are eligible to apply in Guatemala. | For more information on the migratory procedures of the Safe Mobility Offices and the application requirements, see: Safe Mobility(2023). [General information on the 'Safe Mobility' initiative](#).

5 International Refugee Assistance Project (2024). [What we know about the Biden administration's Safe Mobility initiative](#).

6 Hartman Heretik, K. (2024). [Safe Mobility initiative registers first U.S. arrivals](#). State Magazine.

Respondents Profiles

Nationality and intended country of destination

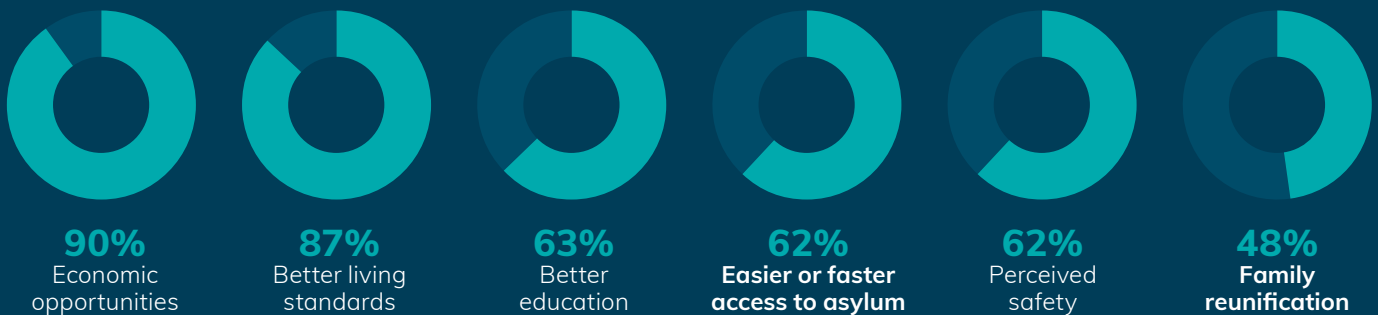


94% of all respondents were Venezuelan nationals, 4% were Cuban, 2% were Haitian, and less than 1% were Nicaraguan.

- In Colombia, 100% of respondents were Venezuelan nationals.
- In Costa Rica, 85% were from Venezuela, 9% were from Cuba, 5% from Haiti and 1% from Nicaragua.

All respondents were migrating north towards the United States.

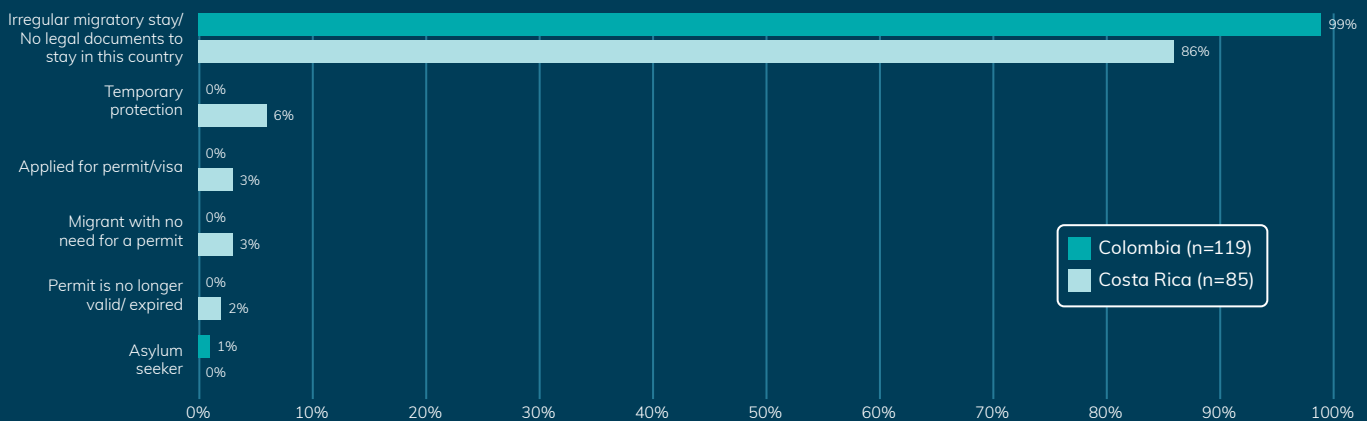
Primary reasons cited for choosing the U.S. as destination



Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

n=204

Migration status of the respondents in Colombia and Costa Rica

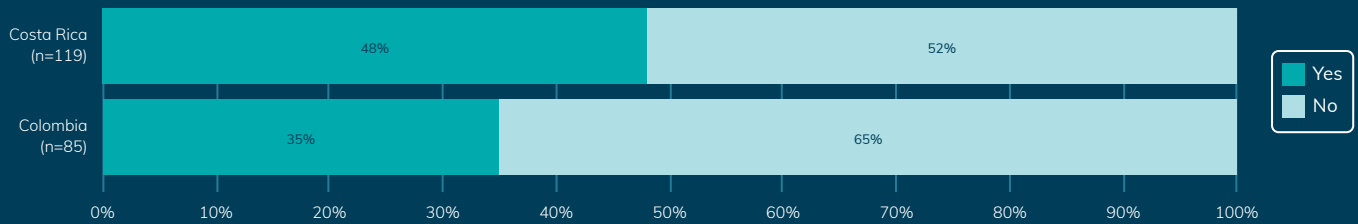


SMOs in Costa Rica and Colombia

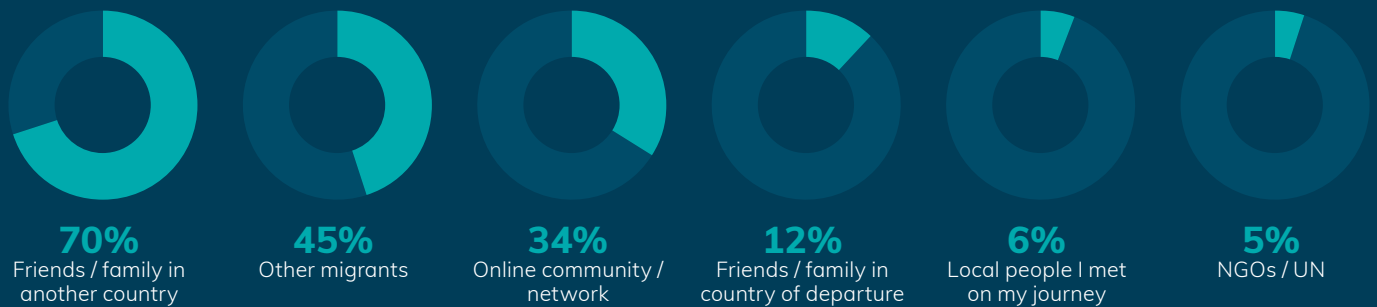
- **Almost all respondents** (98% in Colombia and 99% in Costa Rica) **would not be eligible** for the Safe Mobility Offices' processes because they reported having entered the country after the required date.
- In Colombia, the program is open to Cubans, Haitians, and Venezuelans who were in the country before June 11, 2023, and who have a **regular migratory status or are in the process of regularization**. However, most surveyed migrants passing through Colombia (86% of respondents) did not have regular migratory status and were not in the process, making them ineligible for the program in the country.⁷ **Migrants already established** in Colombia, especially Venezuelans, are **more likely to fulfil the criteria** for applying to the program.
- In Costa Rica, the program is aimed at Venezuelans and Nicaraguans who were in the country before June 12, 2023, **excluding migrants of other nationalities who transit through the country in large numbers, such as Ecuadorians, Haitians, and Colombians**, among others.⁷ Moreover, many migrants heading northwards cross the country in a very short time and don't settle in Costa Rica, **making them ineligible based on the specified date criteria**. **Migrants already established in the country**, especially Nicaraguans, are **more likely to fulfil the criteria for applying to the initiative**.

Awareness about the Safe Mobility Offices

Have you heard about the Safe Mobility Offices?



What was the source of information regarding the SMOs?

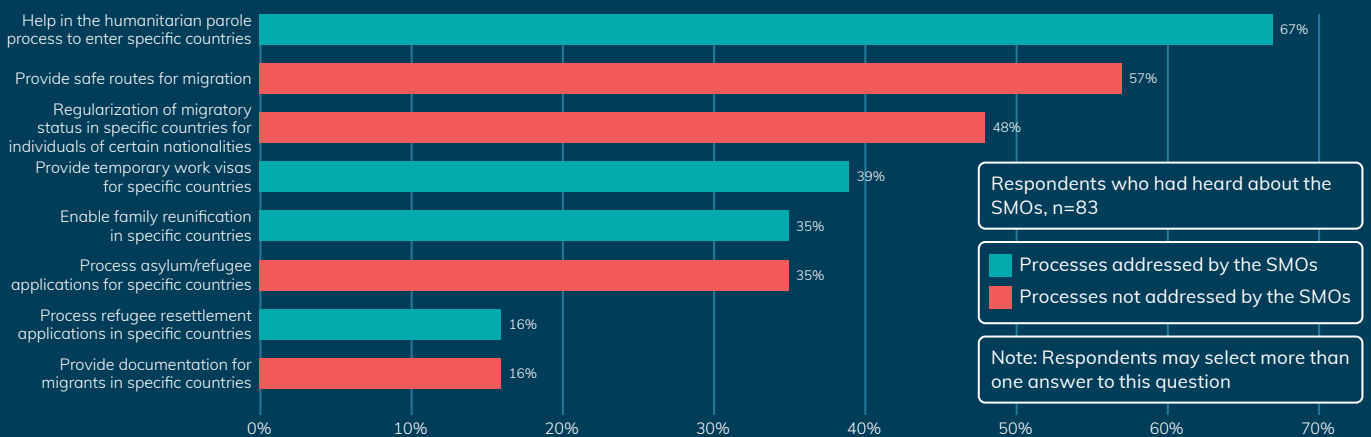


Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

n=204

- There is a general lack of knowledge about the Safe Mobility Offices among the surveyed migrants heading to the United States. Six out of ten respondents had not heard about the initiative (121 out of 204).
- The primary information sources of the surveyed migrants who have heard about the Safe Mobility Offices are non-official channels (friends, family, and other migrants). Just 5% of surveyed migrants had heard about the SMOs from the UN and NGOs, and no one from governmental institutions. This can be attributed to the absence of a comprehensive mass communication strategy implemented by the governments of countries hosting the SMOs or by US embassies in the region.

What do you think the SMOs do?

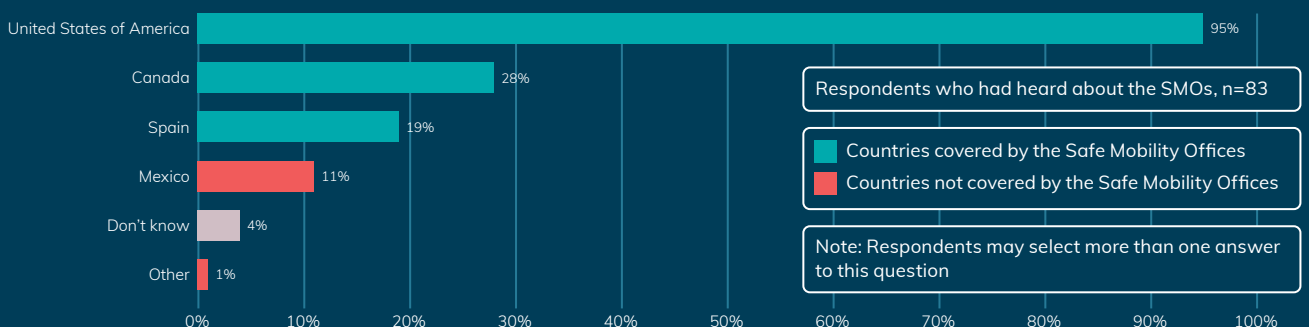


Respondents who had heard about the SMOs, n=83

Processes addressed by the SMOs
Processes not addressed by the SMOs

Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question

For which countries of destination do you think the SMOs can do these processes?



Respondents who had heard about the SMOs, n=83

Countries covered by the Safe Mobility Offices
Countries not covered by the Safe Mobility Offices

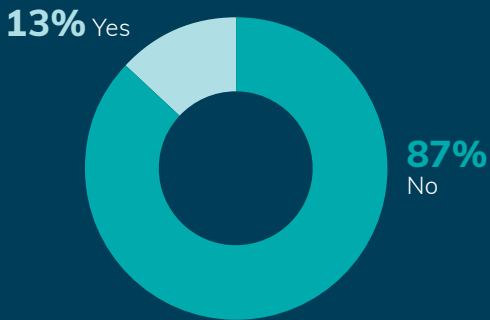
Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question

Key findings on awareness of the SMOs

- There is a **considerable level of disbelief** about the purpose and scope of the Safe Mobility Offices. When migrants surveyed were asked what were the processes addressed by the SMOs, of the 83 respondents, **15 (18%) selected processes that were not actually part of the initiative**, 58 (70%) chose both processes that are covered and that are not covered by the program, and **just 10 respondents (12%) mentioned only procedures that are part of the SMO**.
- However, when people were asked about the countries involved in the SMOs, the United States was widely recognized (95%) as a destination covered by the program, **only 3 respondents** said they did not know, and 10 respondents mentioned –among others- countries that are not considered in the program (Mexico and Australia).

Interest in the Safe Mobility Offices

Have you registered to make an application at the Safe Mobility Offices?



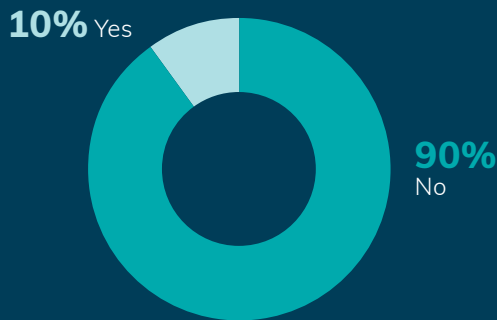
Respondents who had heard about the SMOs, n=83

Just **11 respondents** (13% of those who had heard about the SMOs) mentioned they had applied to at least one of the Safe Mobility processes at the time of the survey.

Among them:

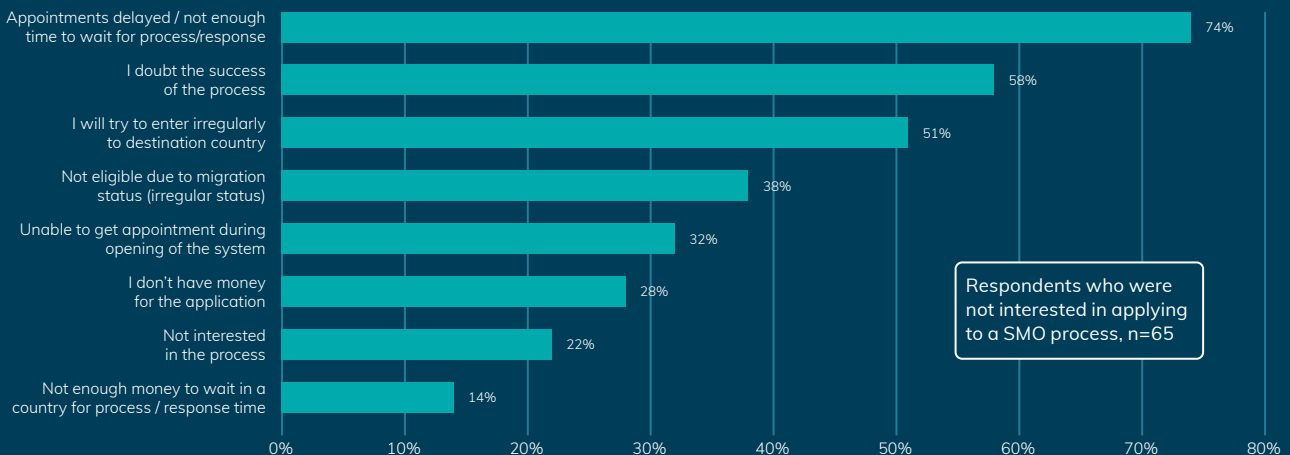
- **Eight respondents were awaiting a response** regarding their procedure in the country where they applied (five in Colombia and three in Costa Rica).
- **Three respondents opted not to wait** and proceeded with their journey northwards.
- Three persons had applied for a temporary work permit, three to the humanitarian parole program, two for refugee resettlement, one for family reunification, and two for more than one process.

Would you like to register to submit a request at a Safe Mobility Office?



Respondents who had not registered in a SMO process, n=72

Why are you not interested in the SMOs' processes?



Respondents who were not interested in applying to a SMO process, n=65

Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

Conclusions

- **Nine out of ten respondents who had not applied to a SMO process mentioned they had no interest in doing it.** The primary reasons were that they had heard about **delays in the appointments** (67%) and that **they did not expect the process to be successful** (53%). About half of the respondents (51%) mentioned that they would try to enter the USA irregularly, four out of ten (38%) reported that they were not eligible due to their migration status, and **almost a third of them (29%) said they had tried to apply to an SMO but had not been able to get an appointment.**
- **Regarding the participants' lack of interest in applying to the Safe Mobility processes, misbeliefs also play a role.** A quarter of respondents who were not interested in applying to an SMO process (25%) believed they had to pay for the procedures and would not apply because of this. All services related to the Safe Mobility initiative are free of charge.⁸
- **SMO's first results for refugee resettlement are promising:** In seven months, up to mid-January 2024, **3,200 refugees entered the United States through the program.**⁹ **Over 10,000 refugees had been referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)** until mid-December 2023 and were undergoing refugee processing, with a significant number expected to be resettled in the United States within the next months. In comparison, 6,000 refugees were resettled from those regions in fiscal year 2023.¹⁰
- **However, at the time of writing (February 2024), the influence on regional mixed migration remains limited.** To effectively fulfil the stated objectives of providing lawful pathways and safer alternatives for additional prospective migrants in the Americas,⁸ **it's crucial for the initiative to expand its eligibility criteria.** Additionally, enhancing communication strategies and expanding screening and processing capabilities are also imperative steps to "help more vulnerable migrants and other forcibly displaced persons" in the region.¹¹



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4Mi data collection

4Mi is the primary data collection system of the Mixed Migration Center (MMC), an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps and inform policy and response on mixed migratory movements and protection risks for refugees and migrants in migration situations. 4Mi surveyors are collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Please note that the sampling approach implies that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide detailed information, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. For further consultation on the 4Mi analysis and details of the methodology, please visit the page: www.mixedmigration.org/4mi



⁸ Safe Mobility (2023). [General information on the 'Safe Mobility' initiative.](#)

⁹ Hartman Heretik, K. (2024). [Safe Mobility initiative registers first U.S. arrivals.](#) State Magazine.

¹⁰ La Core, M. [Early signs of success: 2,500 refugees resettled in the U.S. through the Safe Mobility Office \(SMO\) initiative so far.](#) Niskanen Center.

¹¹ Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (2023). [Safe Mobility Initiative.](#)