

RANGER PERCEPTIONS: CENTRAL AMERICA



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SURVEY RATIONALE

Although Central America is one of the most biodiverse regions of the world, biodiversity is vanishing at a rapid rate as the result of an increase in habitat loss, poaching and trafficking within protected areas. Rangers are on the frontlines protecting nature from these direct threats, but little is known about their welfare, concerns, job satisfaction, and working conditions.

There is a great need to spark greater interest in the working conditions and wellbeing of rangers working in the field and to raise public awareness to influence and improve government policy protecting those on the frontlines of wildlife conservation.

This Ranger Perceptions: Central America survey is part of a series of reports that aim to shed light on these issues around the world. The intent of this survey is to provide a snapshot of rangers' personal views of their working conditions, and thereby gain a deeper insight into the factors that affect their motivation.



METHODS

This survey used a similar set of questions to those employed in the previous Ranger Perceptions: Asia and Africa surveys (see list of questions and complete results below) to gain an insight into the issues that may influence ranger motivation in Central America. By standardizing in this way, we are better able to compare studies across the series.

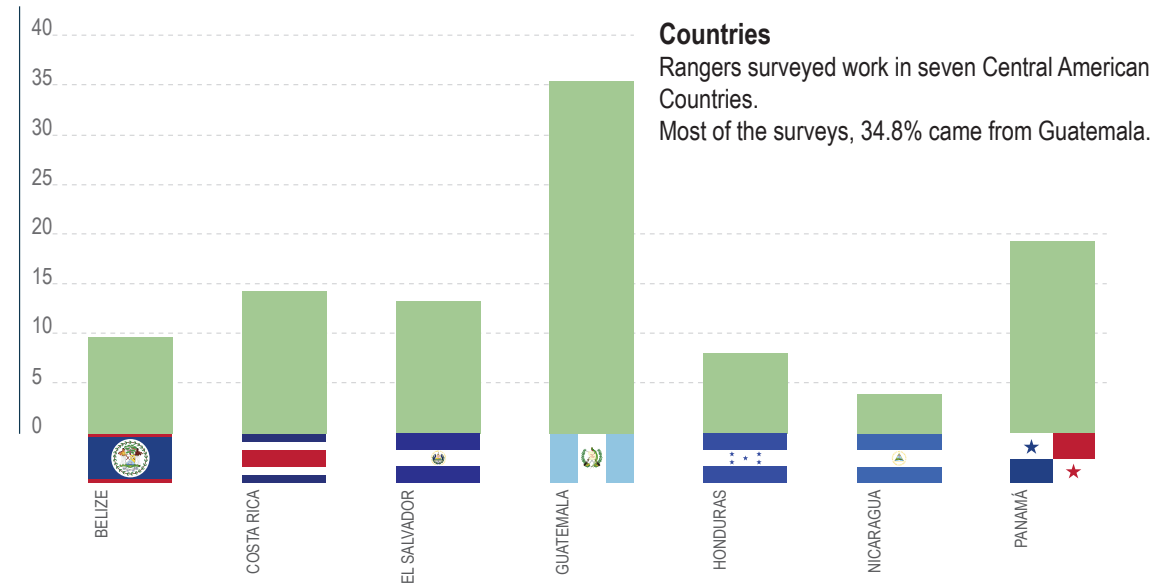
The survey incorporates elements of the work that rangers find most discouraging and ranks factors identified as important to rangers on a day-to-day basis, such as facilities, equipment, training, infrastructure, hours worked, and pay. Other data collected look at additional issues such as degree of authority, work/life balance and perception by local communities, and main threats to rangers.

A total of 331 rangers from 101 protected areas in seven Central American countries were surveyed. Participants included individuals from Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. The vast majority of data were gathered through personal interviews conducted by researchers within each country. Each researcher was briefed on the survey guidelines prior to conducting interviews to ensure that data were collected in a uniform and error-free manner.

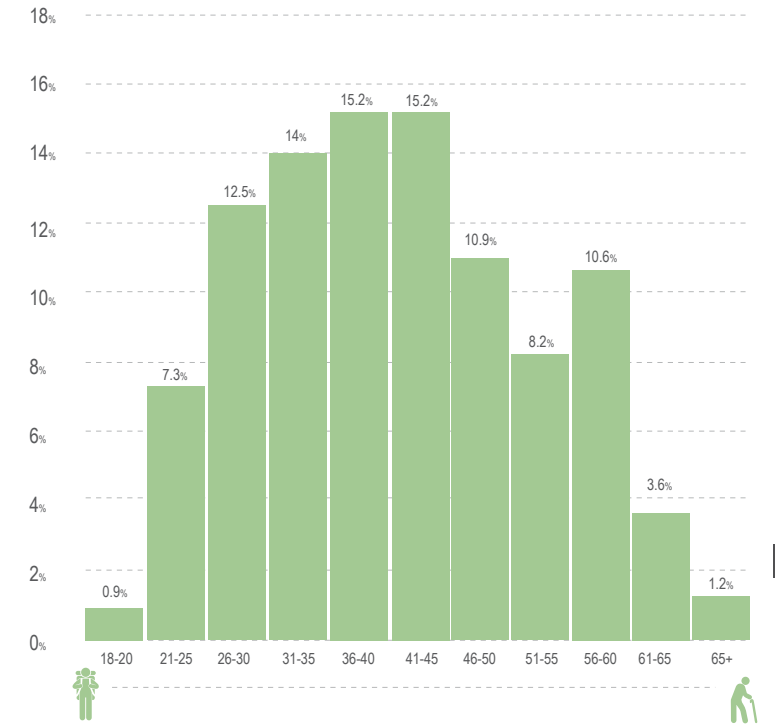
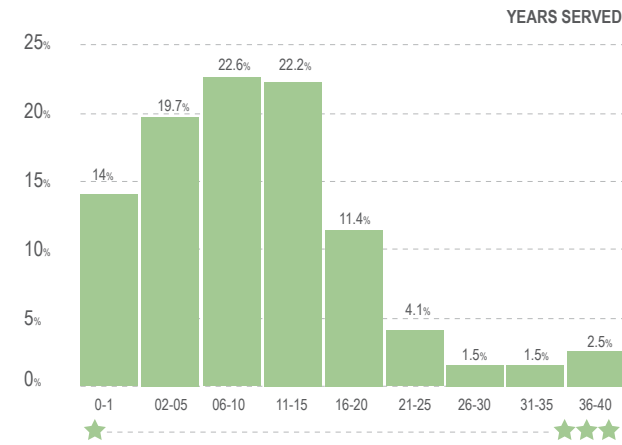
The survey is a rapid assessment, and as such the findings should not be viewed as representative for any individual country, nor should they be extrapolated to the Central American continent as a whole. The survey does not include armed forces posted in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, nor indigenous rangers.



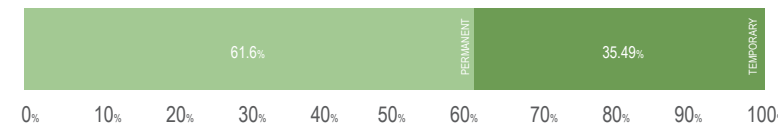
331 TOTAL RESPONSES



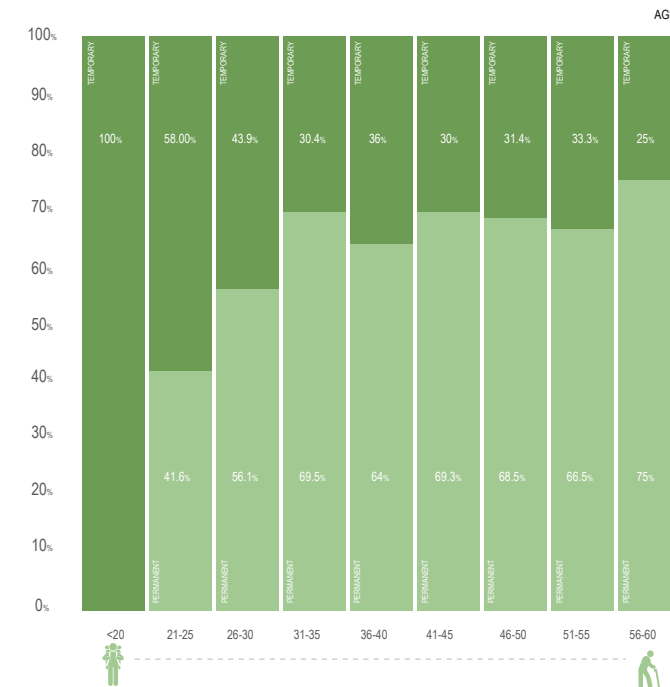
Years served
56.3% of the rangers surveyed have served for 10 or fewer years.



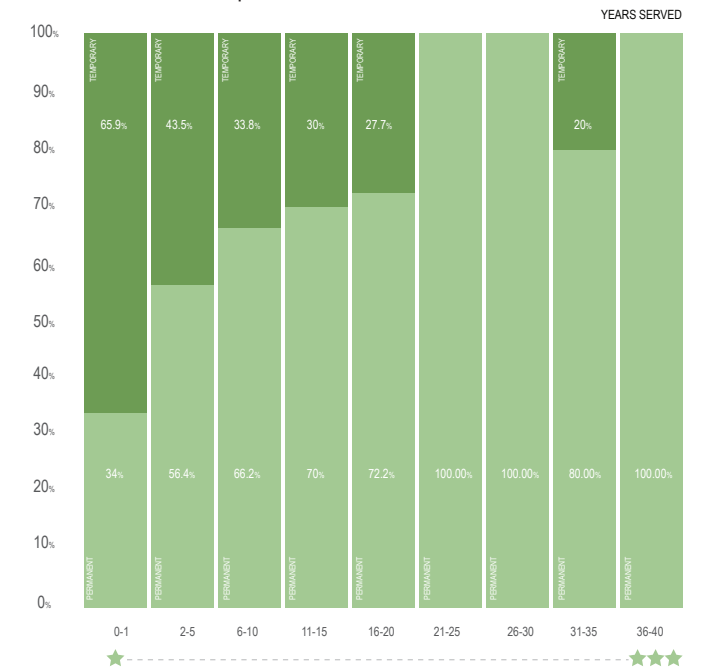
Contract
61.6% of the rangers surveyed were permanently employed



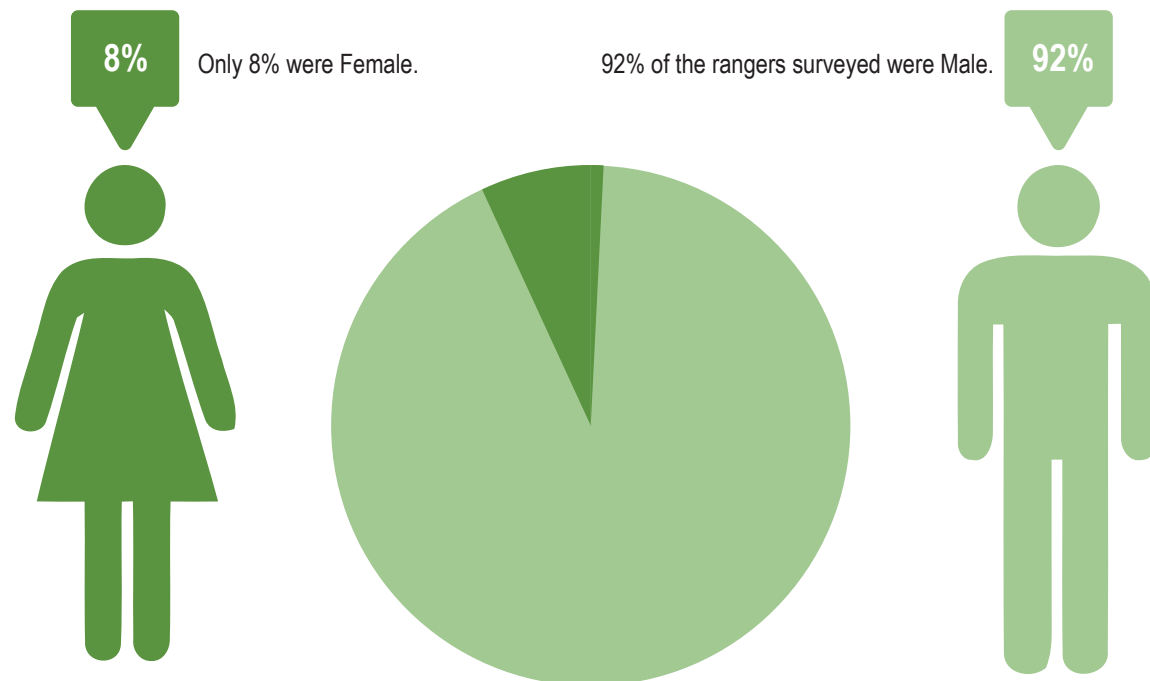
Contract – Age
Most young rangers (Age 20 - 25) work under temporary contracts. Most rangers above 30 years old work under permanent contracts.



Contract – Years of Service
Most rangers with less than 5 years of service work on temporary contracts. Nearly all of the rangers surveyed who have at least 25 years of service work on permanent contracts.



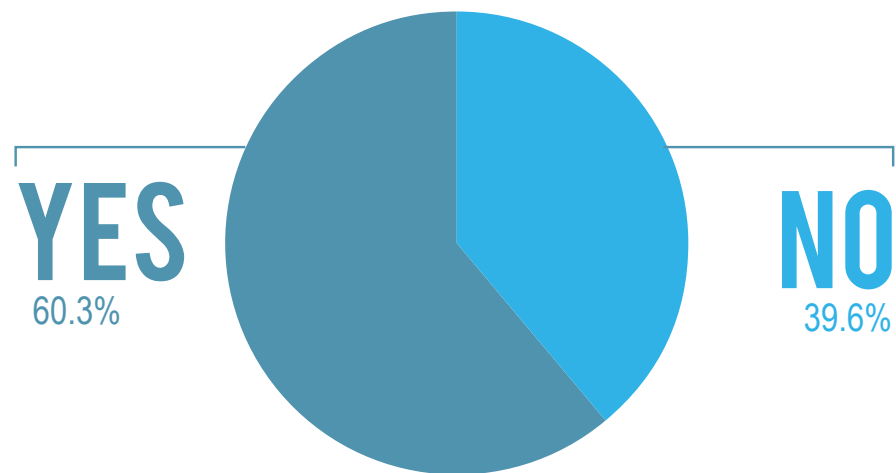
Gender



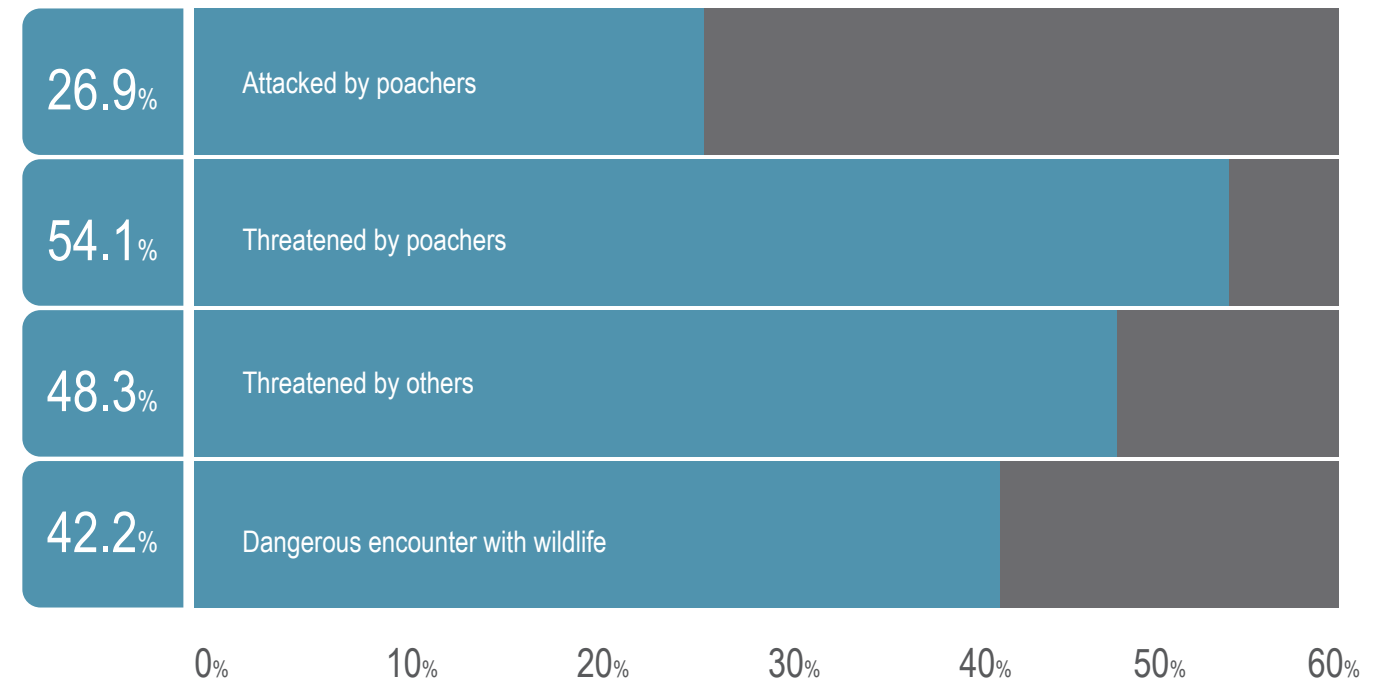
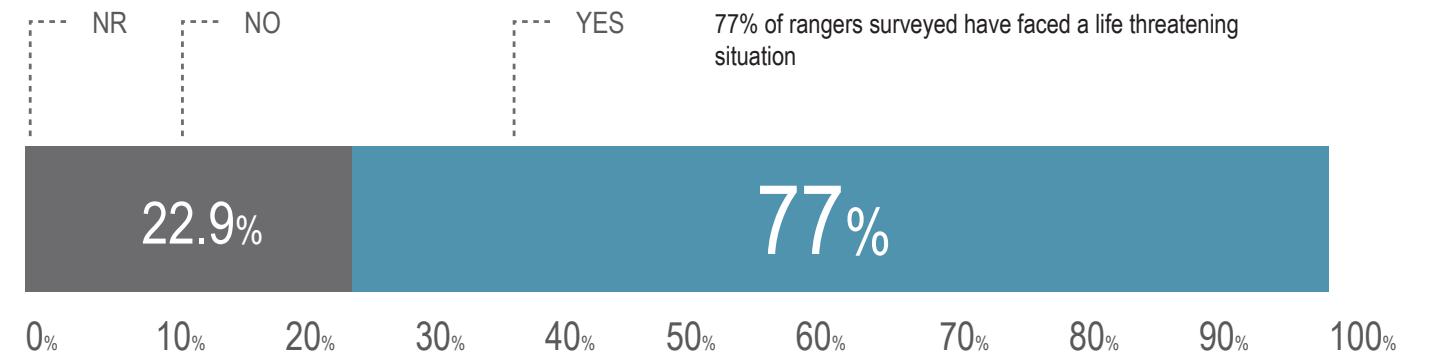


HAVE YOU BEEN THREATENED DUE TO YOUR WORK AS A RANGER?

60.3% of rangers surveyed have been threatened due to their work.

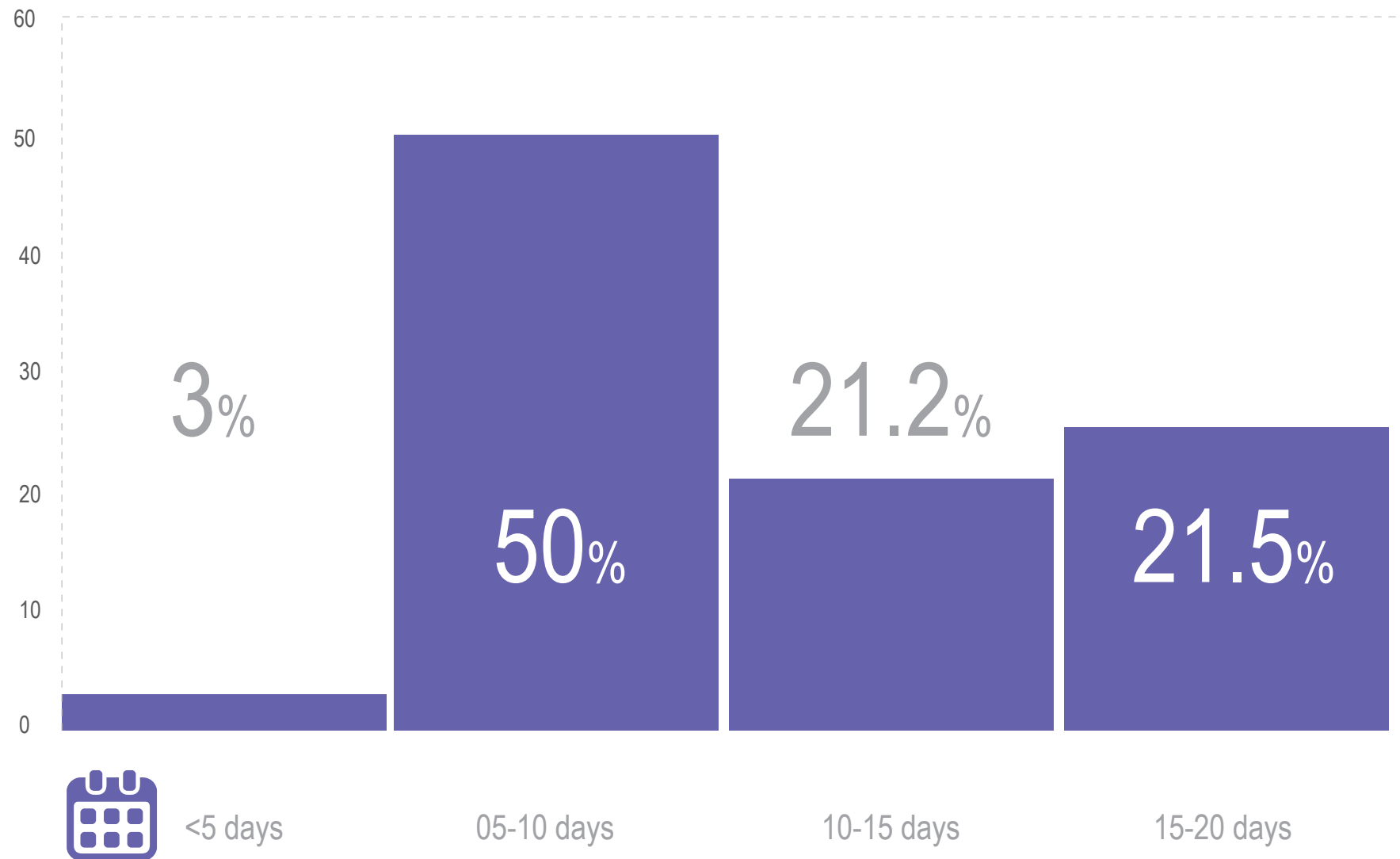


HAVE YOU FACED A LIFE THREATENING SITUATION?



HOW MANY DAYS A MONTH DO YOU GET TO SEE YOUR FAMILY?

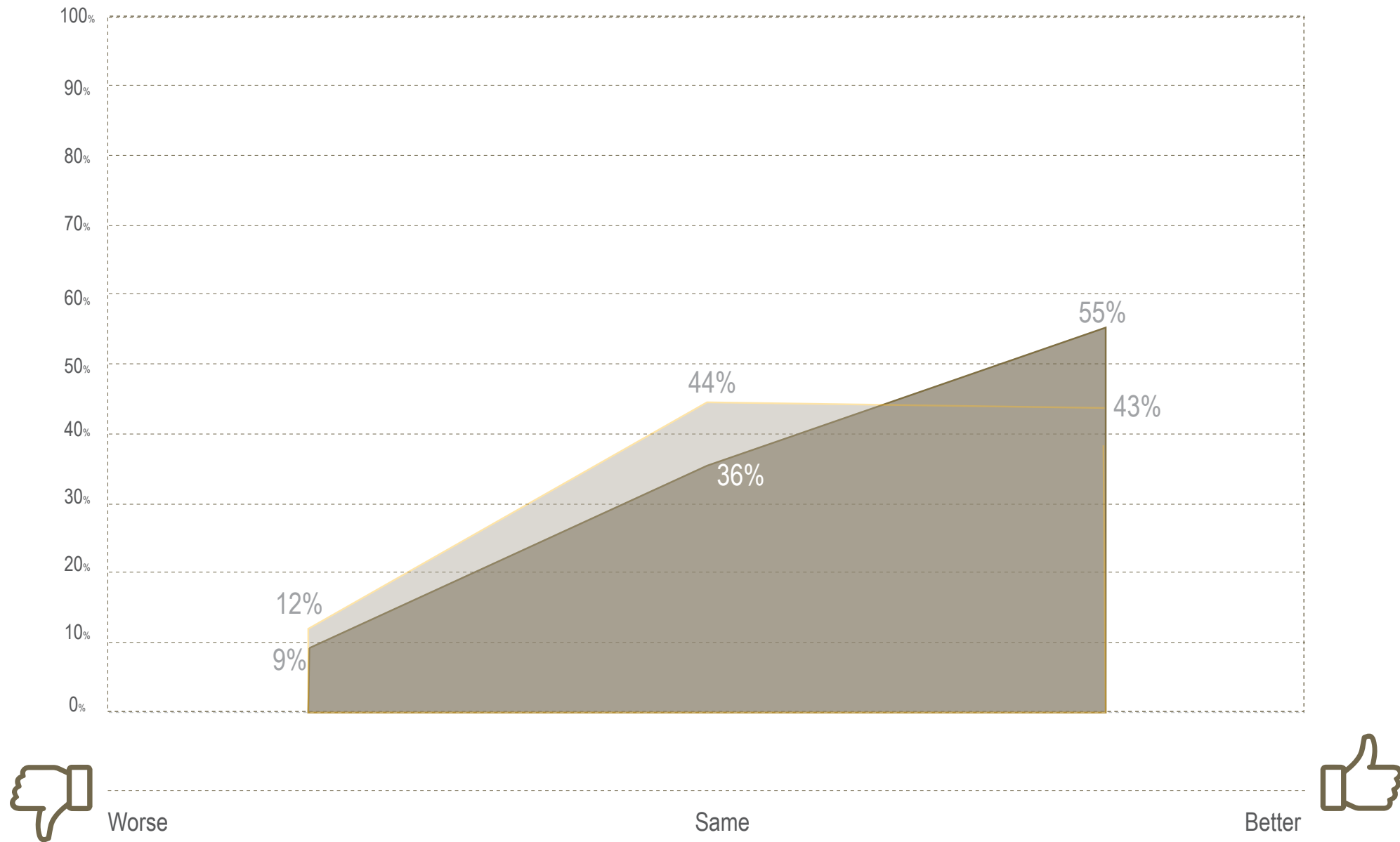
Half of the rangers surveyed get to see their families from 5 to 10 days a month.



HAVE WORKING CONDITIONS BECOME BETTER OR WORSE?

SINCE BECOMING
A RANGER

LAST 3
YEARS

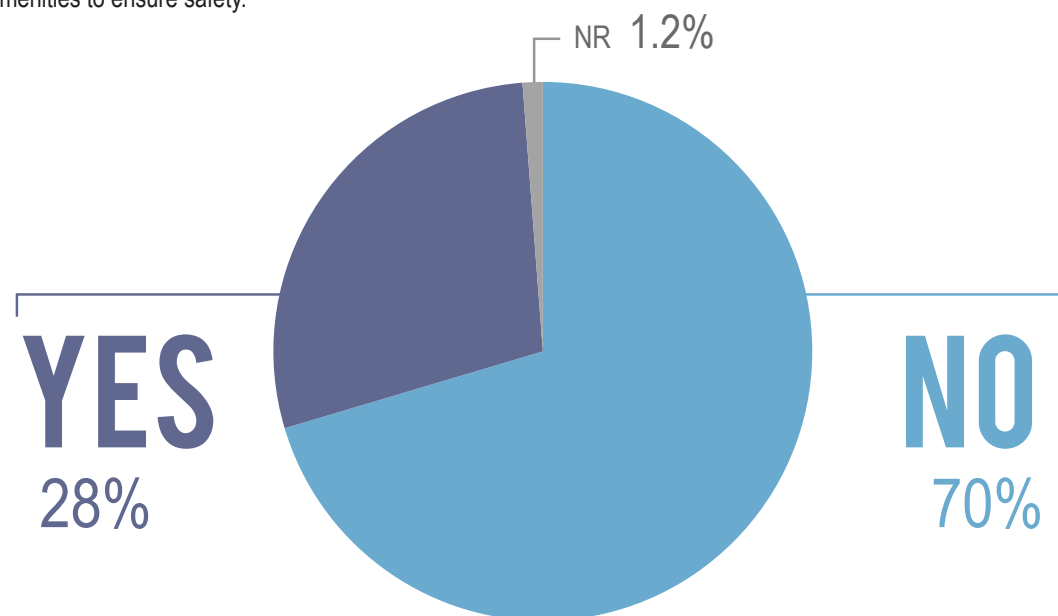


ENABLING CONDITIONS



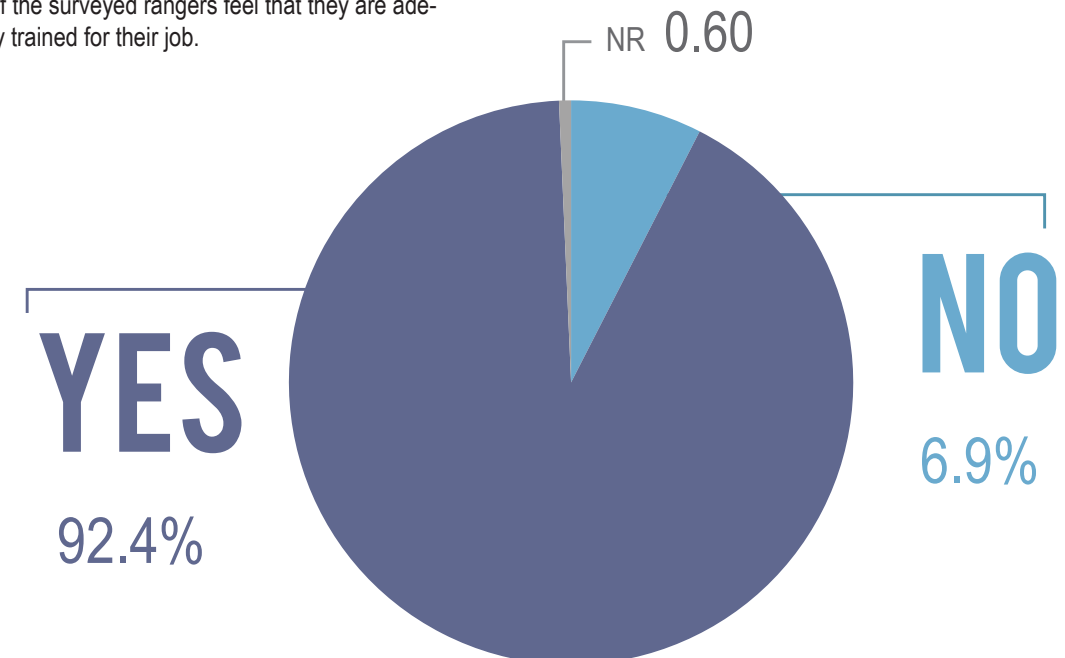
DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE PROVIDED WITH PROPER EQUIPMENT AND AMENITIES TO ENSURE SAFETY?

70% of the rangers surveyed feel that they are not provided with proper equipment and amenities to ensure safety.



DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE ADEQUATELY TRAINED TO DO YOUR JOB?

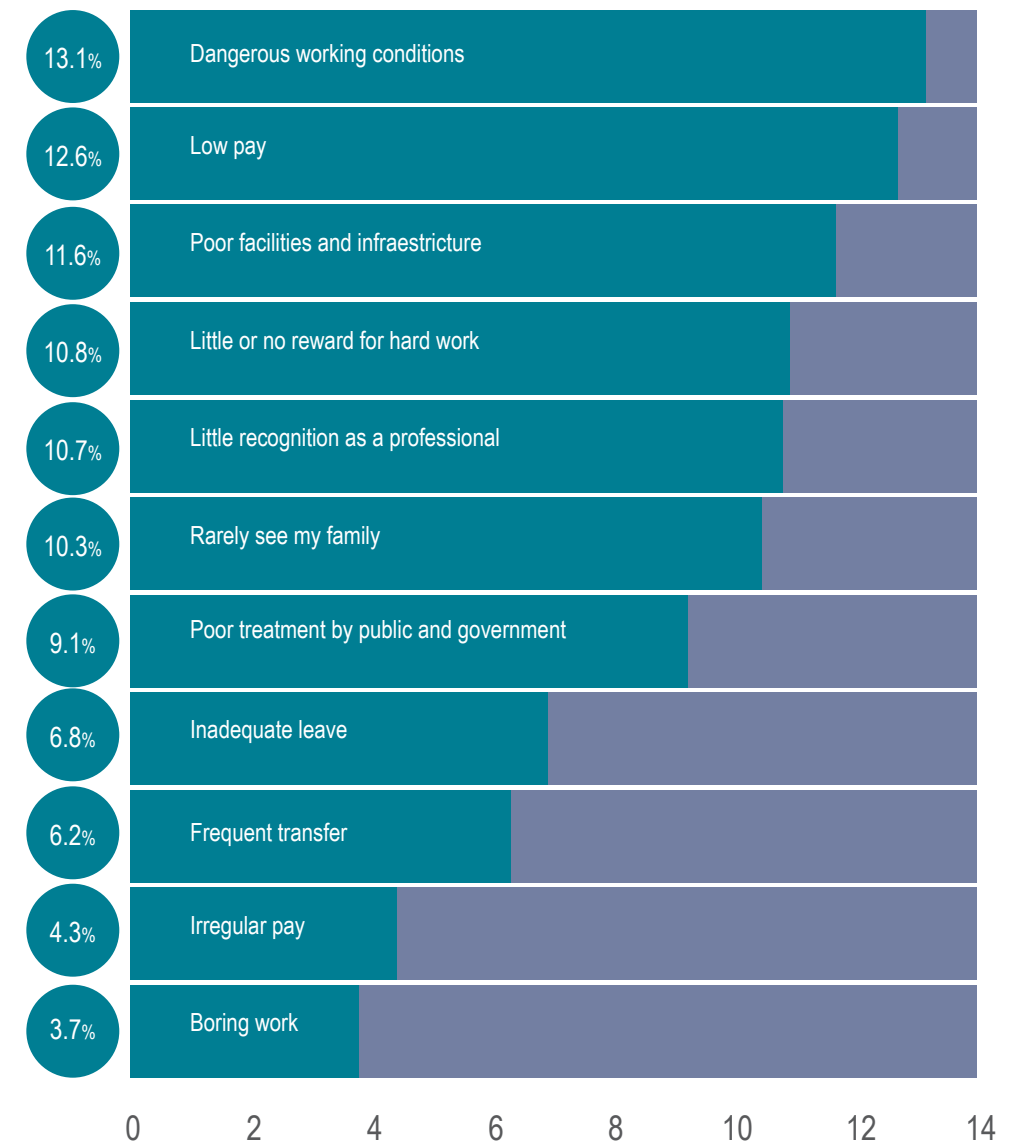
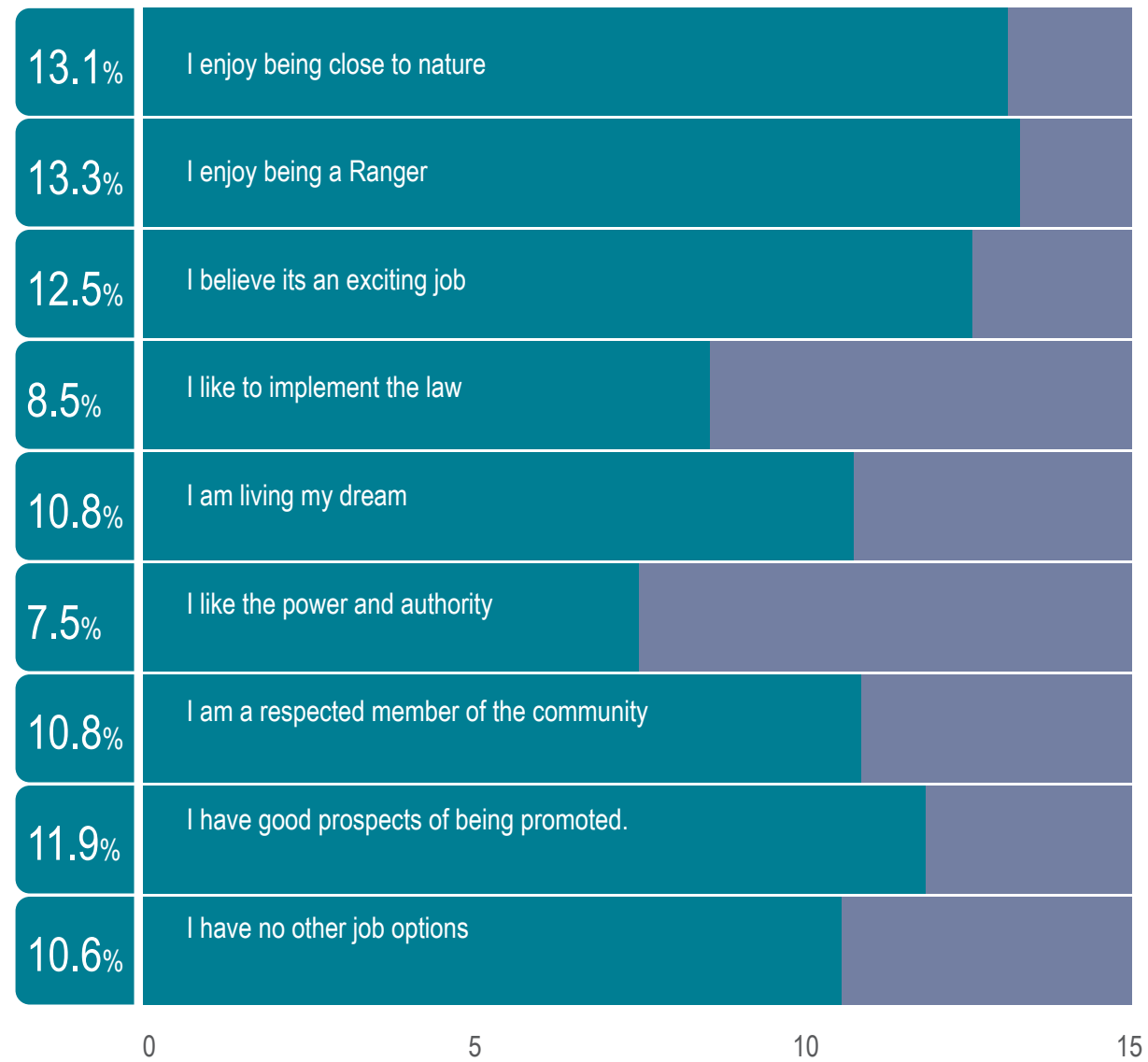
Most of the surveyed rangers feel that they are adequately trained for their job.



WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR CONTINUING AS A RANGER?

WHAT IS THE WORST ASPECT OF BEING A RANGER?

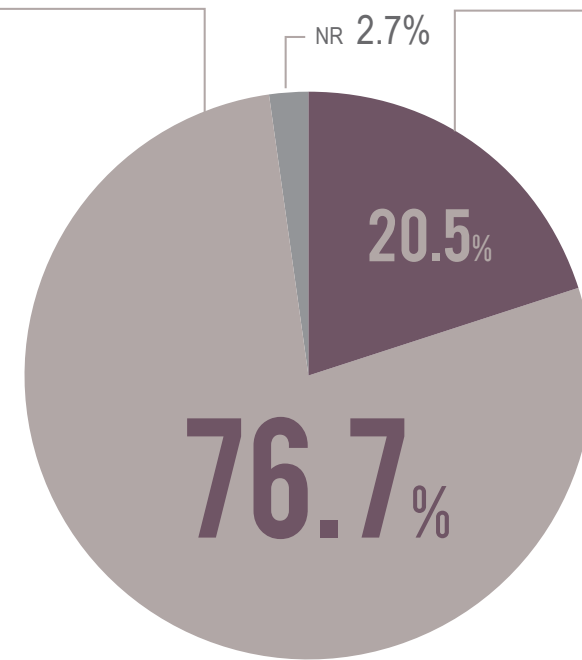
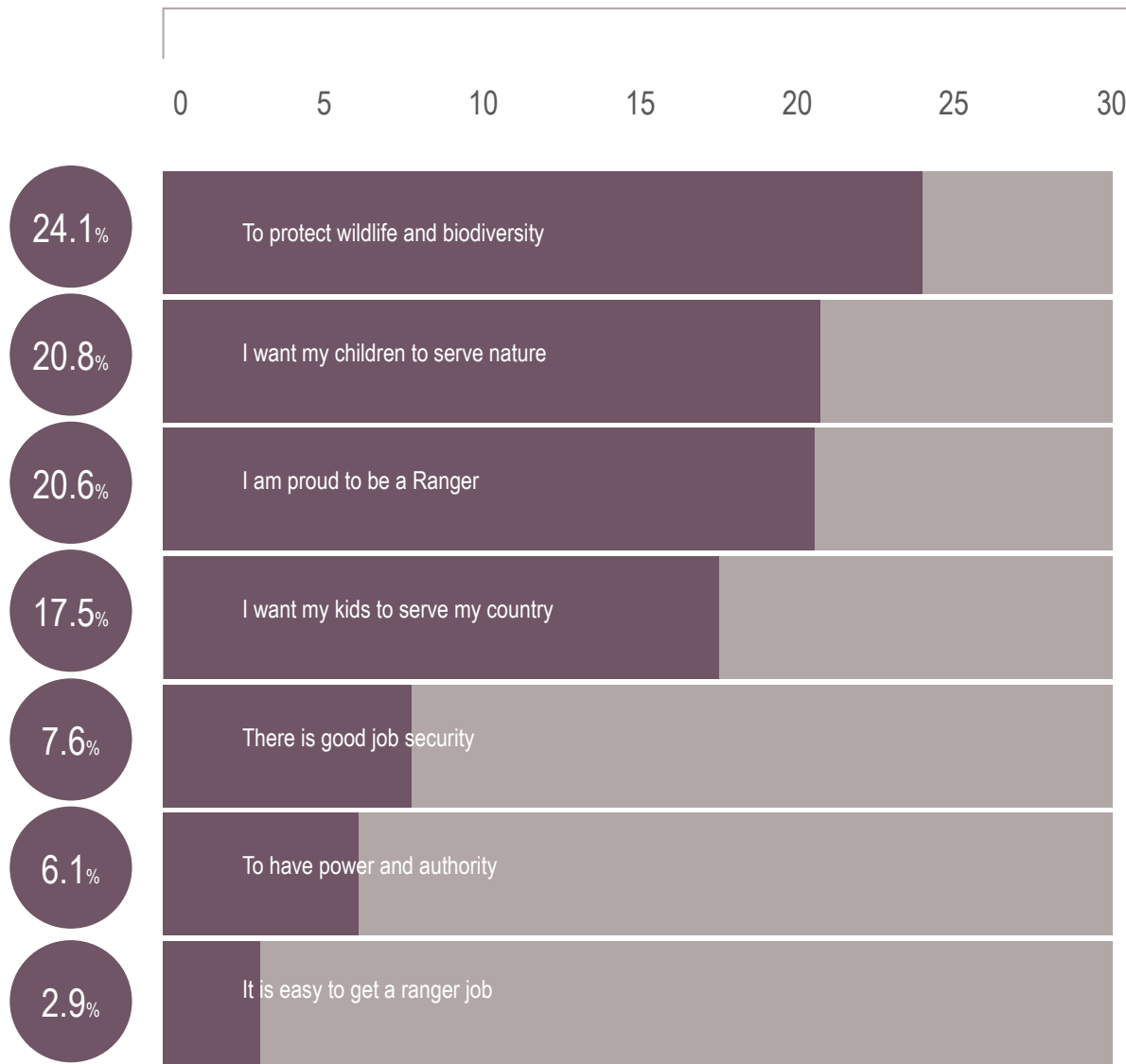
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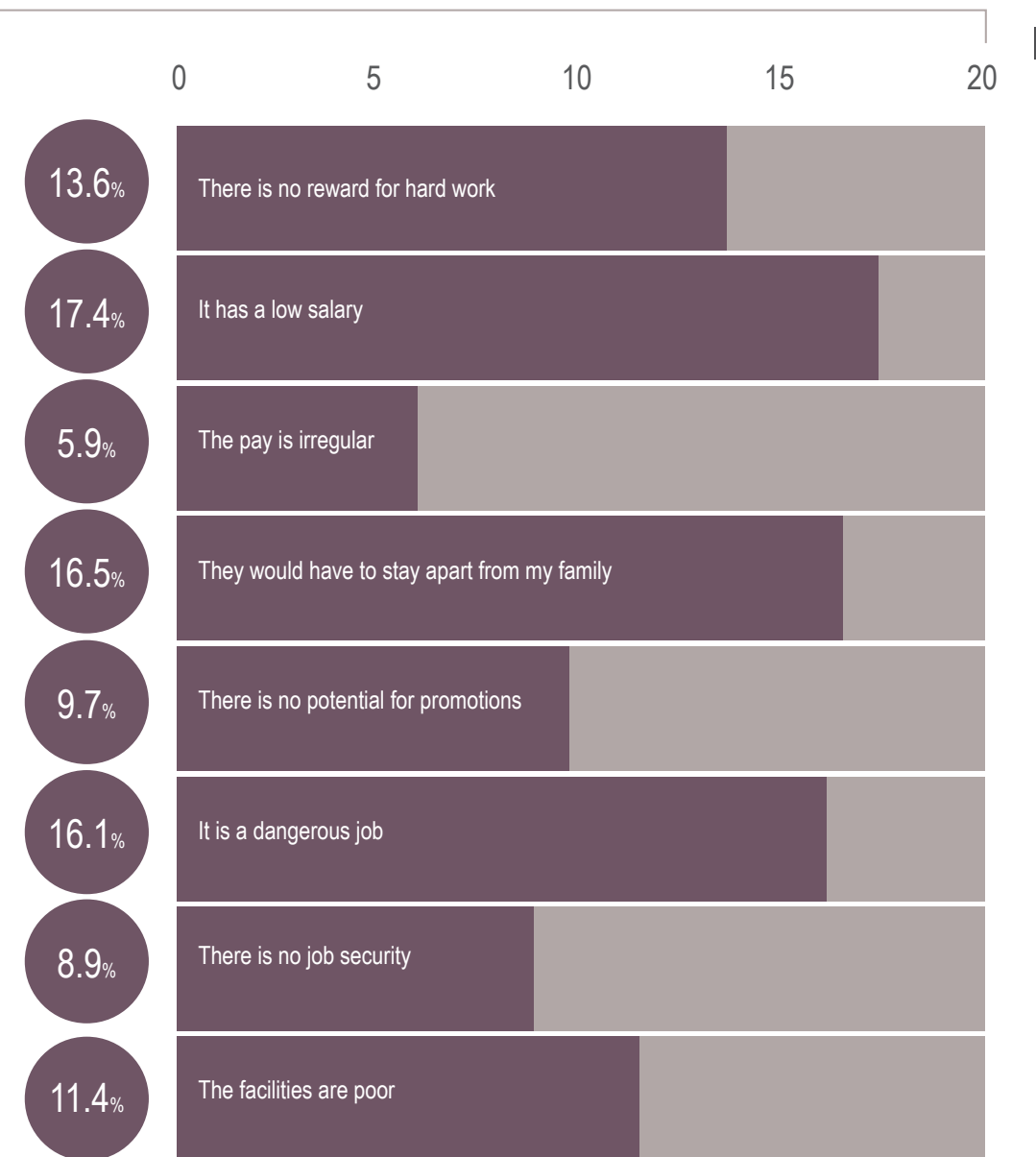
DO YOU WANT YOUR CHILDREN TO BECOME RANGERS?

YES

NO



76.7% of the surveyed rangers want their children to become rangers.





RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey of ranger wellbeing and working conditions covered 101 locations from seven Central American countries. Central America's rangers work hard to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the region that allow wildlife and human cultures to flourish by providing clean water, clean air, health benefits, carbon sequestration and more. Rangers are a critical component of our collective efforts to live sustainably and to ensure the planet thrives for centuries to come.

Given this, the following priority recommendations based on survey results should be implemented by governments and all those responsible for ranger work in the region in order to ensure that our rangers enjoy the conditions required for them to conduct their work successfully. This document is meant to be shared with authorities, journalists, communities, and general audiences to raise awareness about the current situation of rangers in Central America.

Recommendation 1: Ensure job security and clear career progression opportunities for rangers.

Despite the importance of their work, rangers feel that they are not adequately supported by the relevant authorities in a number of ways. Perhaps the clearest example is the lack of job security for rangers.

Almost 36 percent of rangers surveyed work under temporary contracts; which means that a significant percentage of rangers lack job security. This pattern is most prominent for rangers under the age of 25, where 63 percent do not have a guaranteed, permanent position. In addition, on average 30 percent of rangers who have up to 20 years of experience work on temporary contracts. Combined with good working conditions and adequate support from employers, job security through permanent positions combined with clear promotional prospects can help to improve both wellbeing and encourage rangers to work harder.

The job instability under the status quo likely affect rangers' motivation performance on the job, especially when considering the dangerous working conditions to which they are exposed.

Given this, we recommend that

- Governments recognize the tremendous value of the profession by ensuring that governments offer permanent contracts to rangers when good working conditions and clear career progression opportunities can be guaranteed.

Recommendation 2: Improve the safety of Central America's rangers through professionalization and training.

Rangers consider the worst aspect of their profession to be the danger they face on a regular basis. Sixty percent said they had suffered threats related to their work and 77 percent have faced a life-threatening situation on the job. Threats from humans, such as poachers, and dangerous encounters with wildlife were among the main threats listed in the survey. One-third of rangers who have experienced threatening situations have been attacked by poachers or others.

Given this context, we suggest that governments recognize the risk faced by rangers and consult with existing resources such as the IUCN Global registry of competencies for protected area practitioners to ensure that security assessments and strategies have been carried out and are ready to be implemented respectively. This includes:

- Developing standards and operating procedures for the safety and security of protected area staff, including rangers, and ensuring that staff adopt them
- Ensuring that rangers and associated law enforcement personnel have adequate resources and training to conduct operations professionally and safely using standard operating procedures
- Ensuring that protected areas and ranger posts are adequately staffed to conduct operations professionally and safely

Recommendation 3: Ensure that rangers have adequate health, life, and long-term disability insurance coverage.

While we were unable to collect comprehensive data from all Central American countries, not all countries within the region provide health, life, and long-term disability coverage for forest rangers. Given the significant risk associated with the profession, rangers deserve to know that they and their families will be taken care of in the event of injury, sickness or death.

Given this, we suggest that:

- It is imperative that all government's throughout the region provide health, life, and long-term disability coverage for all forest rangers.

Recommendation 4: Improve access to equipment for rangers.

70 percent of the rangers consulted say they do not have the critical equipment to carry out their work effectively. The access that poachers and wildlife traffickers have to current technology and basic resources such as vehicles and gas means that many of the rangers are at a disadvantage to prevent illicit acts. The most commonly listed essential pieces of equipment that Central American rangers do not have access to are:

- 1) Firearms
- 2) GPS units
- 3) Uniforms
- 4) Proper footwear

In addition to being inadequately equipped, rangers identified poor facilities and infrastructure as one of the worst aspects of their profession. Most rangers see their families 15 days or less every month, so ranger stations become a second home. Proper facilities and adequate equipment at ranger stations are thus fundamental to the wellbeing and success of rangers.

Given this, we recommend that governments:

- Improve the facilities and infrastructure that rangers use, including both sleeping quarters and work-related infrastructure. Ranger posts and sleeping quarters should have electricity, running water, adequate communications, and sufficient food.
- Increase access to critical equipment, including basic supplies such as adequate fuel and vehicles, in addition to the aforementioned four most frequently cited items that Central America's rangers do not currently have access to. The provision of firearms should be decided on a case-by-case basis and only when warranted, sensible, legally possible and when rangers receive adequate training.

their jobs. While regional level surveys can be helpful, we nonetheless recommend a national level focus.

Other interesting topics of study include the gender bias of Central American rangers. Only 8 percent of the rangers consulted were women. Additional research is needed to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind this and to make recommendations for what can be done to enable more women to be a part of the ranger workforce.

We have a long way to go to truly understand all of the conditions that will help rangers to succeed and thrive in their careers. Nonetheless, we hope that this initial snapshot helps to highlight some of the main deficiencies and can be used to encourage both NGOs and governments to consider the wellbeing and working conditions of rangers during budgeting processes and while drafting and debating relevant labor laws. In addition, we hope that this information helps the public to better understand the important sacrifice made by the region's rangers to protect our natural and cultural patrimony.

Recommendation 5: Conduct further in-depth studies to understand and improve the welfare, equity and job satisfaction of rangers and include them in the preparation of national plans and budgets.

Perhaps one of the most amazing aspects of this survey is that despite being inadequately equipped, frequently facing life-threatening situations, and rarely seeing their families, rangers love their job. They are inspired by nature, proud to serve their countries, and fully aware of the importance of their work. Indeed, almost 77 percent of rangers surveyed said that they would want their children to become rangers.

We owe it to these men and women on the frontlines of conservation to better understand how we can improve their wellbeing and working conditions. Thus we recommend the implementation of additional, more in-depth studies to look at the working conditions and wellbeing of rangers. Applying surveys at the national level in particular helps to bring more clarity to how national governments can translate the results into policy, and allow local NGOs and the public to help ensure that rangers are properly respected by society and that are more satisfied with and effective at





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Thanks to WWF for their assistance in creating this report

