



INT

2019



GLOBAL  
WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION



# RANGER PERCEPTIONS

LATIN  
AMERICA





# CONTENTS

<b>SURVEY RATIONALE</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>METHODS</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>06</b>
- Figure 1: Context	06
- Figure 2: Threat	08
- Figure 3: Family	10
- Figure 4: Working Conditions	12
- Figure 5: Enabling Conditions	14
- Figure 6: Mentality	16
- Figure 7: Future	18
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>20</b>

For more information please contact:  
Rohit Singh [rsingh@wwf.sg](mailto:rsingh@wwf.sg), Felipe Spina Avino [felipeavino@wwf.org.br](mailto:felipeavino@wwf.org.br),  
Barney Long [blong@globalwildlife.org](mailto:blong@globalwildlife.org)

Prepared by WWF and TRAFFIC Wildlife Crime Initiative

Published in May, 2019 by WWF-World Wide Fund For Nature. Any reproduction in full or in part must mention the title and credit the above-mentioned publisher as the copyright owner.

© Text 2019 WWF  
All rights reserved

Cover image: © Luis Fernando Gómez / WWF-Colombia  
Inside pages: © César David Martínez



# SURVEY RATIONALE

The poor and hazardous working conditions of wildlife rangers<sup>1</sup> are well known to anyone working in the field and are now appearing more frequently in the media, which is helping to raise public awareness and concern.

Yet little has been done to systemically study and report on ranger working conditions. Nor has there been an attempt to better understand how rangers feel about their work, their major concerns, challenges, and rewards, as well as their overall job satisfaction.

This Ranger Perceptions: Latin America survey is the third in a series of reports that aim to shed light on these matters. The intent of this survey – like the previous reports on African and Asian rangers – is to provide a snapshot of rangers’ personal views of their working conditions, and so gain a deeper insight into the factors that affect their motivation.

These surveys are just the start. They will be followed by two more in-depth reports: one on objective working condition indicators (pay, hours worked, access to equipment, etc.) and a second more detailed perception survey incorporating in-depth interviews with a larger number of rangers. Together these reports should spark greater interest in the working conditions of rangers and so influence and improve government policy towards those on the wildlife frontline.

<sup>1</sup> The word “ranger” or “rangers” is used throughout this report as a general term to collectively refer to all frontline staff. It is inclusive of wildlife wardens, forest guards, foresters, rangers, scouts, watchers and other frontline field staff.



© Day's Edge Productions / WWF-US



© Day's Edge Productions / WWF-US

## METHODS

This survey used a similar set of questions to the one employed for the previous Ranger Perceptions surveys in Asia and Africa to gain insight into the issues that may influence ranger motivation, and ensure that studies could be compared.

The survey incorporates elements of their work that rangers find most discouraging and ranks factors identified as important to a ranger’s day-to-day work, such as facilities, equipment, training, infrastructure, hours worked, and pay. Other data collected look at broader issues such as the degree of authority, work/life balance and perception by (or threats from) local communities.

A total of 643 rangers from 150+ sites in 17 Latin American countries were surveyed; participants included individuals from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Panama, Surinam, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The vast majority of data inputs were gathered through personal interviews conducted by surveyors within each country. Each surveyor was briefed on the survey guidelines prior to conducting interviews to ensure that data were collected in a uniform and error-free manner.

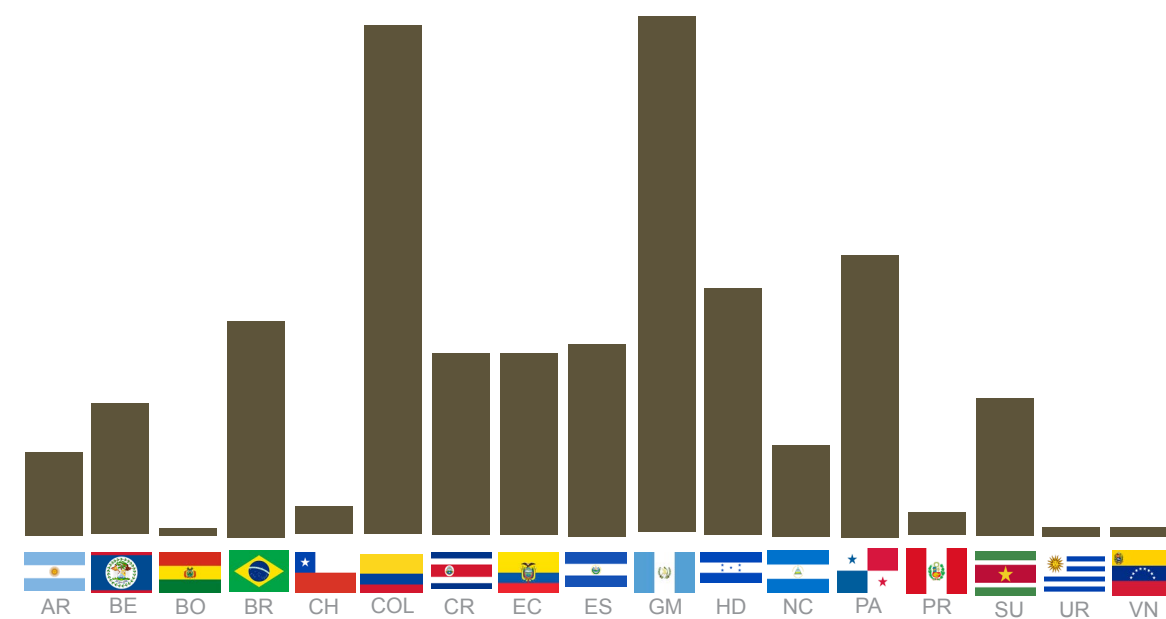
The survey is a rapid assessment, and as such the findings should not be viewed as representative for any individual country, nor should they be extrapolated to the Latin American continent as a whole. The survey does not include armed forces posted on deputation in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.



FIGURE 1: CONTEXT

643 TOTAL RESPONSES

Majority of the rangers surveyed are from Colombia and Guatemala.



AR = Argentina; BE = Belize; BO = Bolivia; BR = Brazil; CH = Chile; COL = Colombia; CR = Costa Rica; EC = Ecuador; ES = El Salvador; GM = Guatemala; HD = Honduras; NC = Nicaragua; PA = Panama; PR = Peru; SU = Suriname; UR = Uruguay; VN = Venezuela

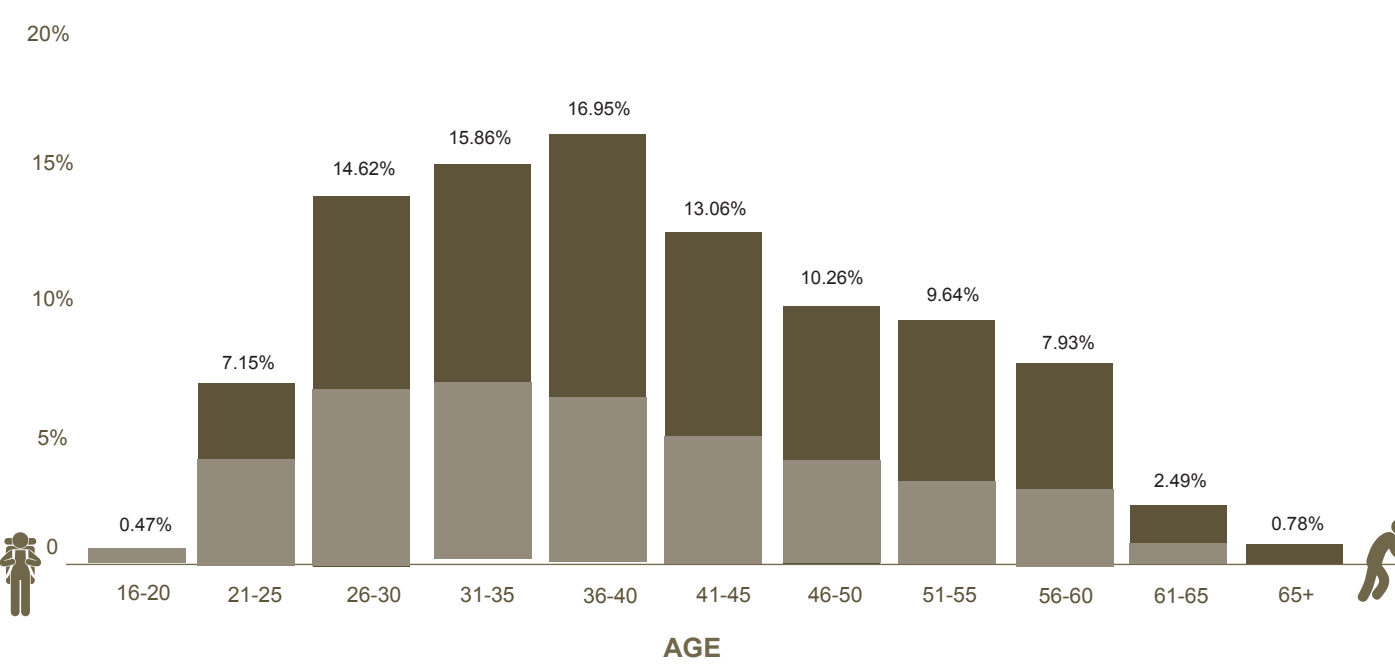
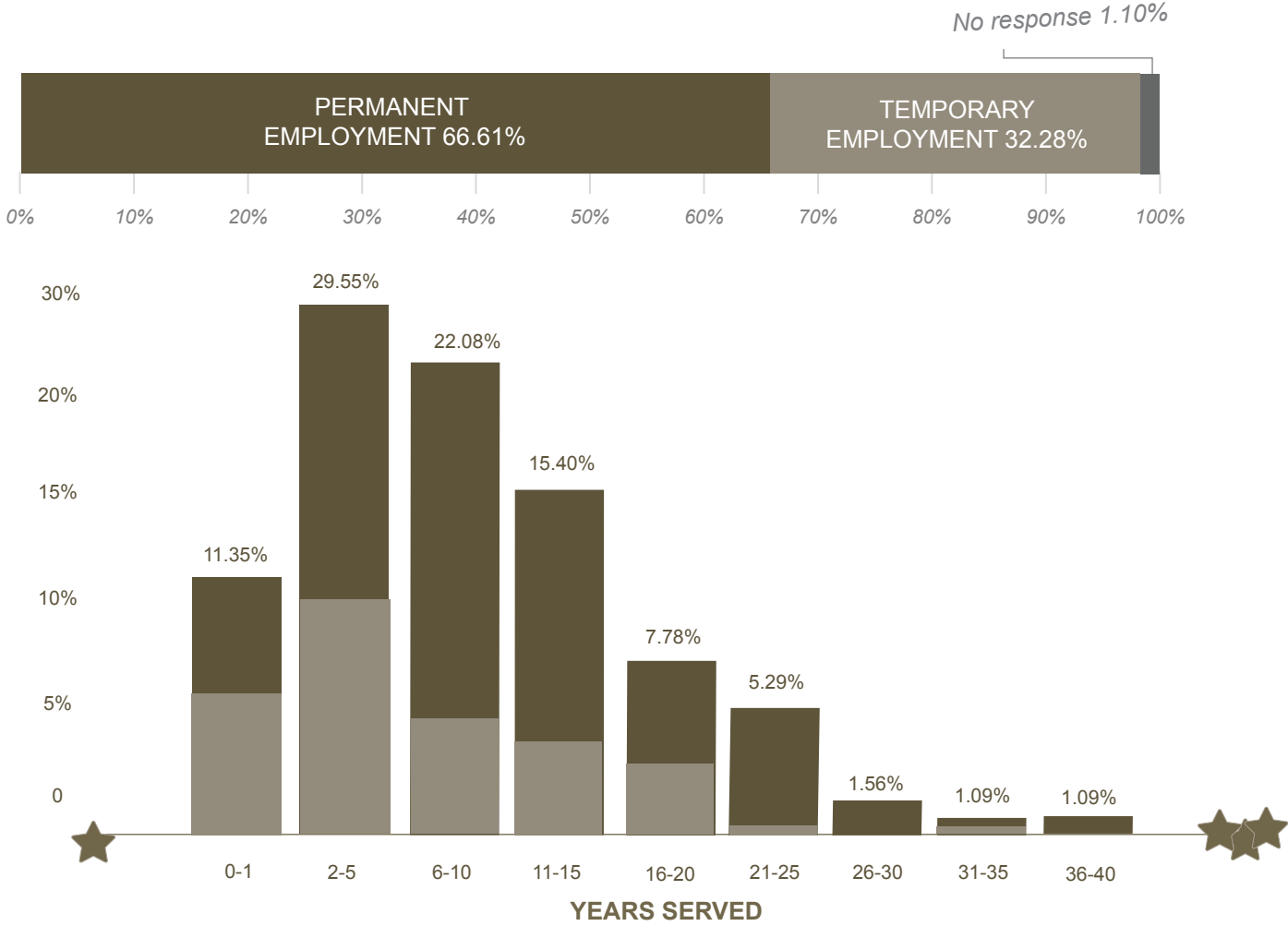
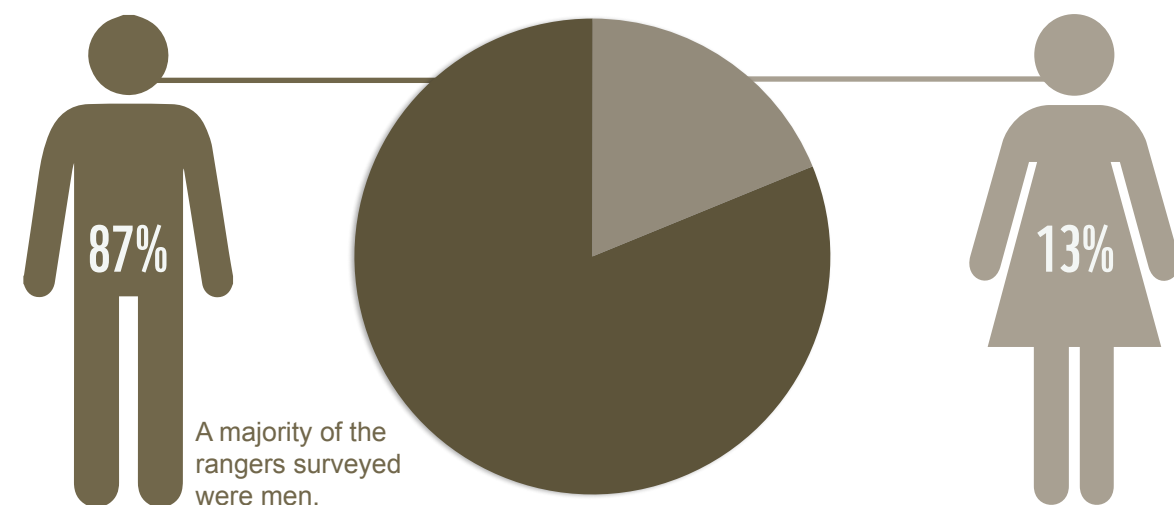
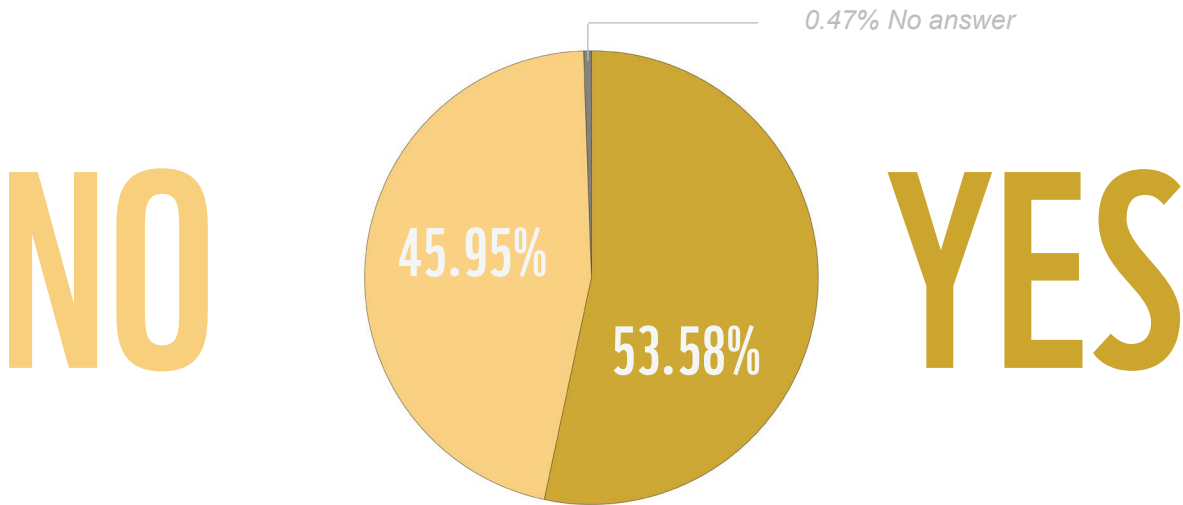


FIGURE 2: THREAT



Have you been threatened by community members or other people because of this work?



Have you faced a life threatening situation?

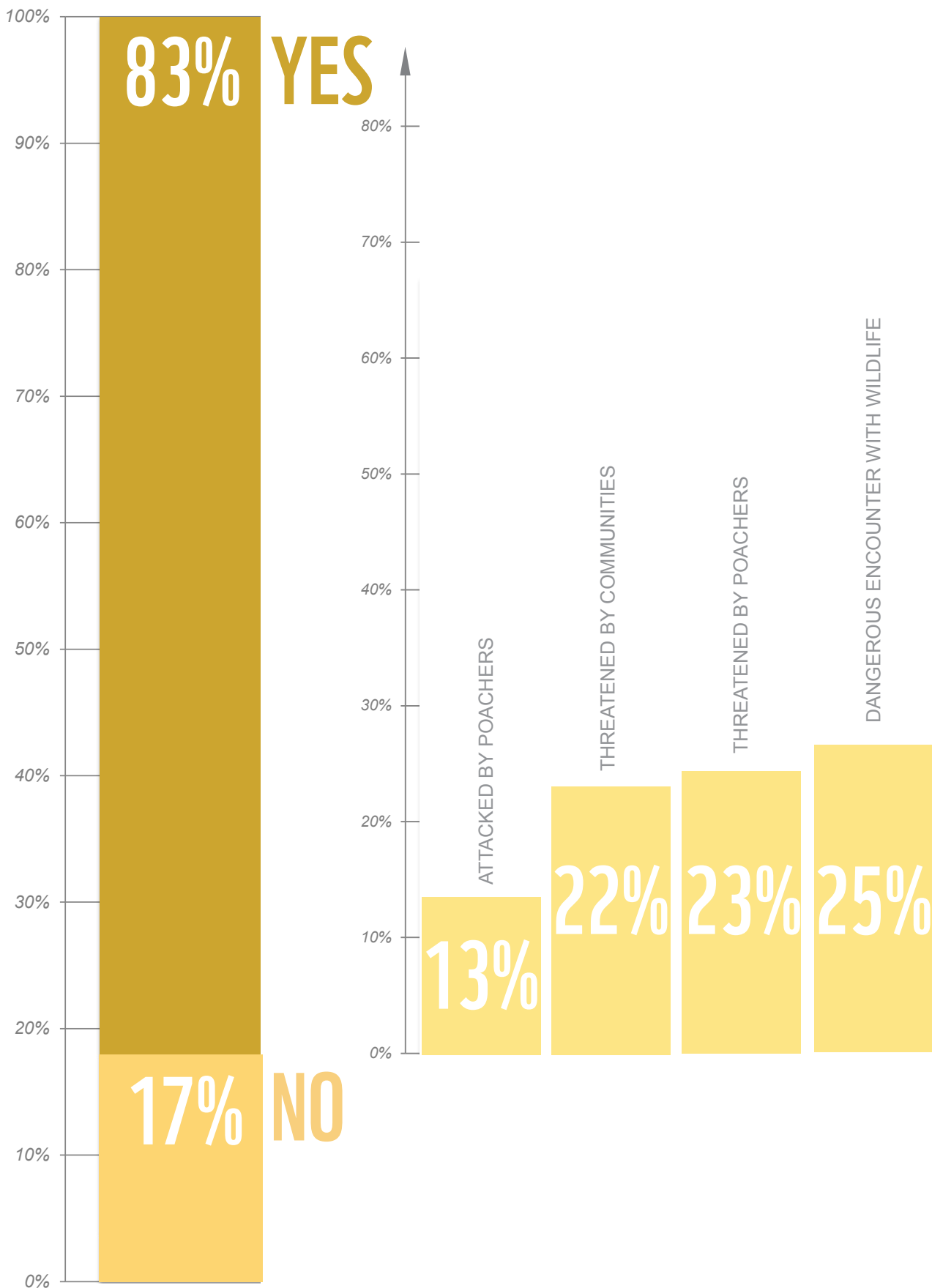


FIGURE 3: FAMILY

# How many days a month do you get to see your family?

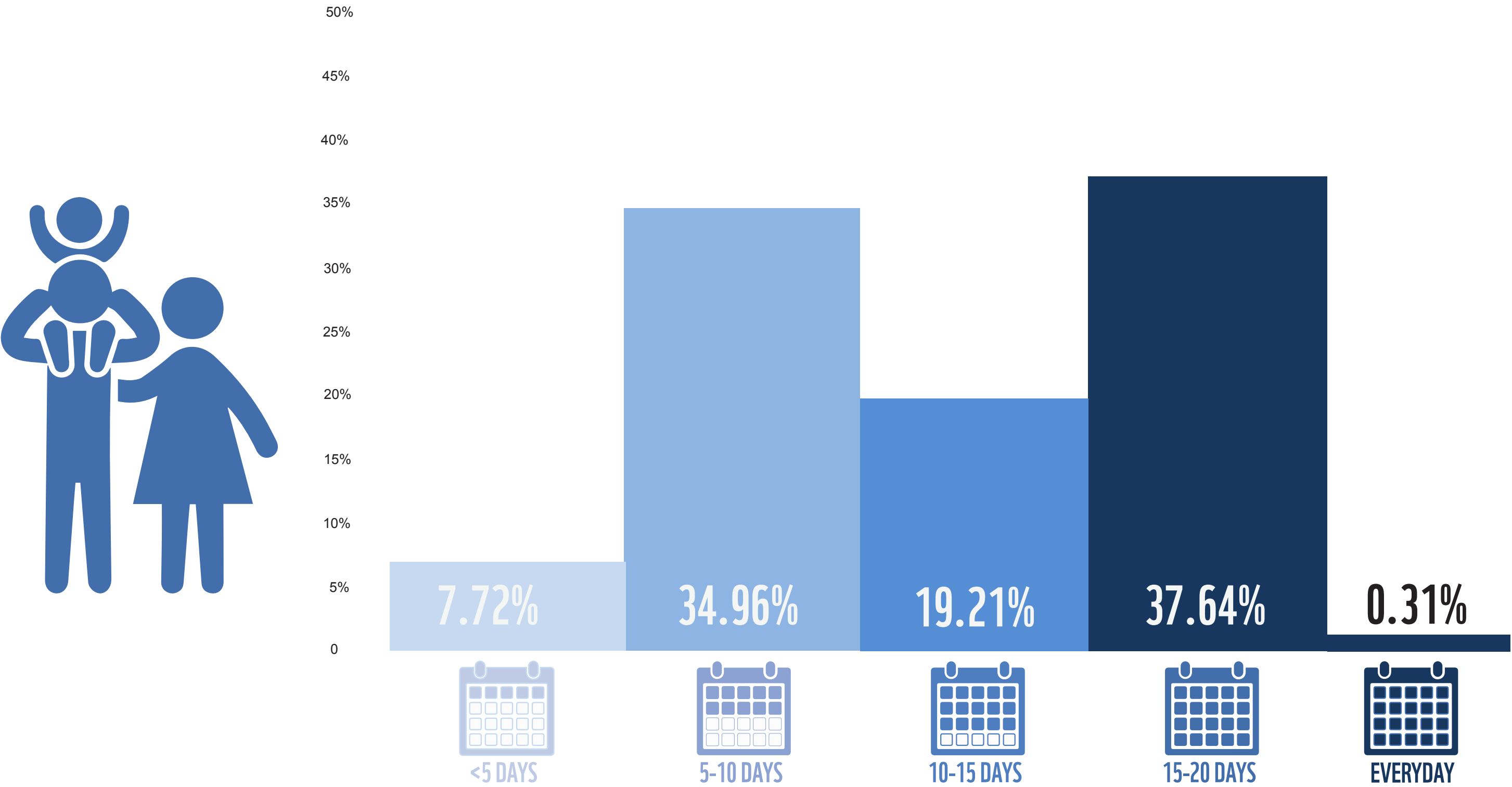


FIGURE 4: WORKING CONDITIONS

# Have working conditions become better or worse?

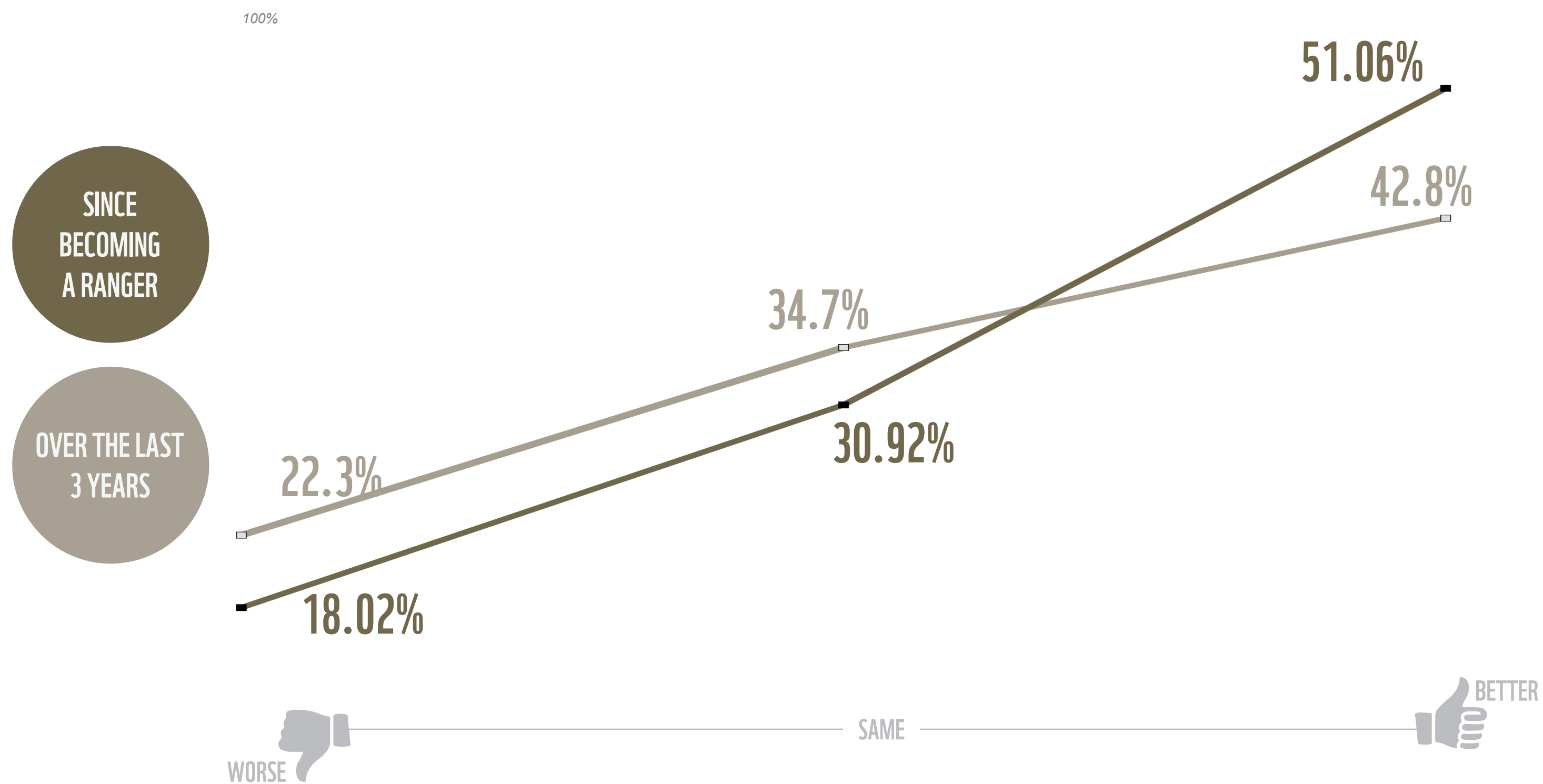
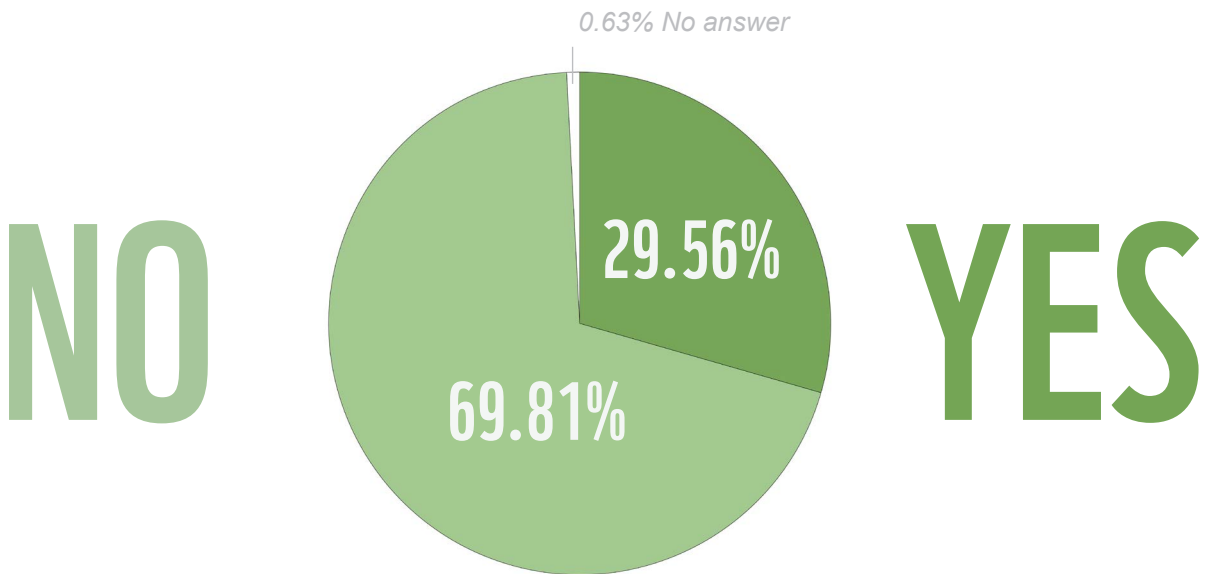


FIGURE 5: ENABLING CONDITIONS



Do you feel you are provided with proper equipment and amenities to ensure safety?



Do you feel you are adequately trained to do your job?

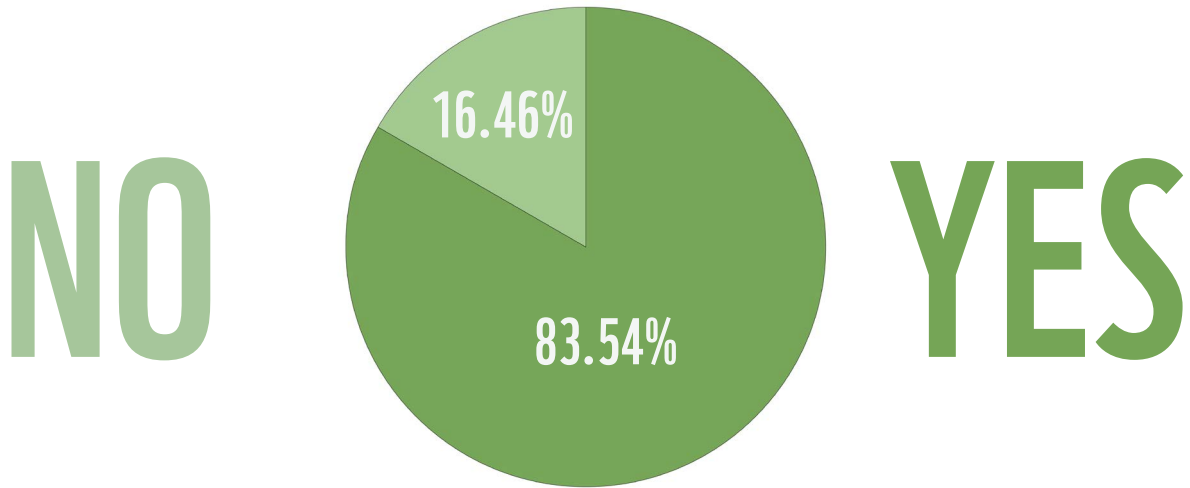
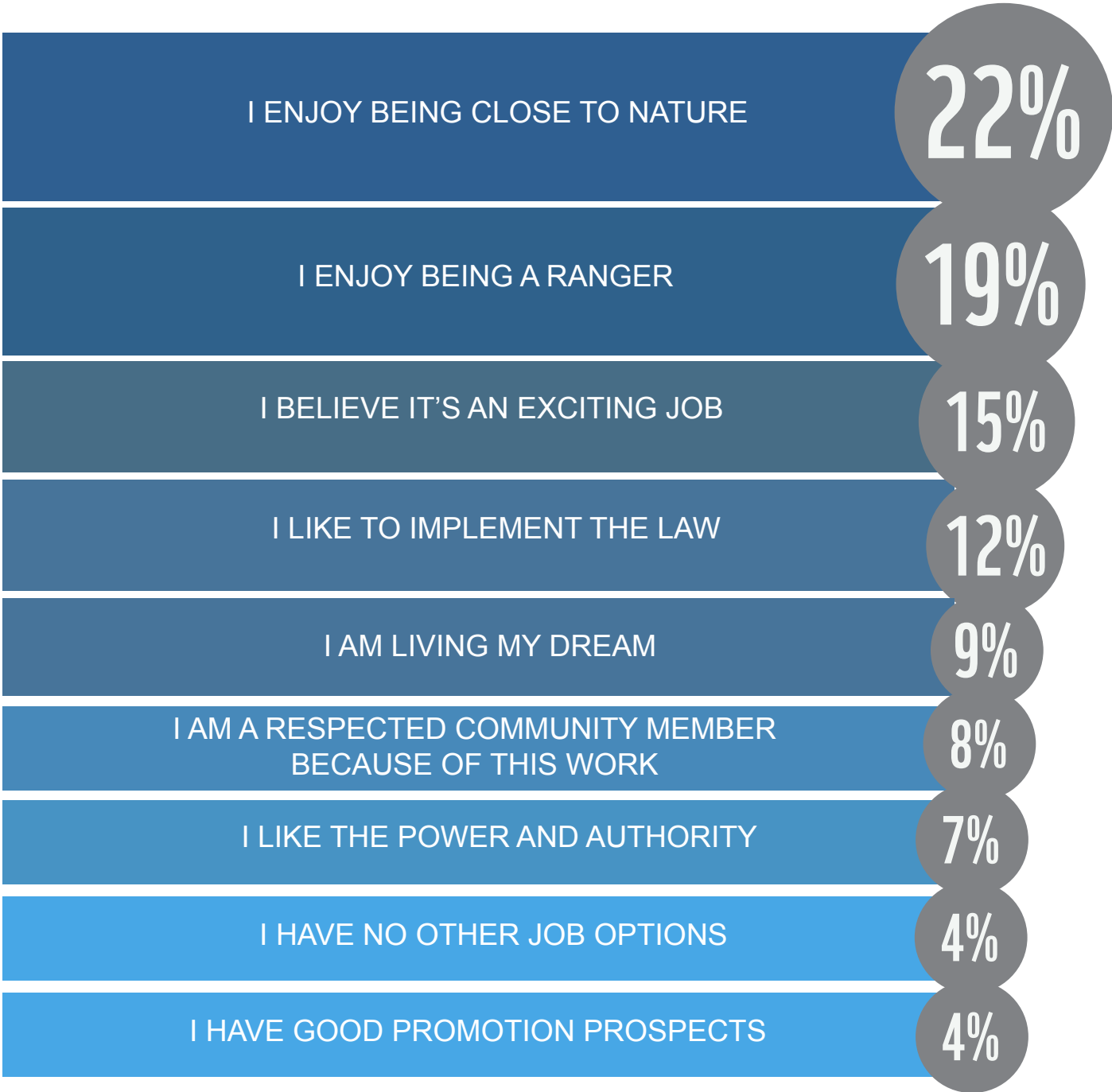




FIGURE 6: MENTALITY

# What is your motivation for continuing as a ranger?



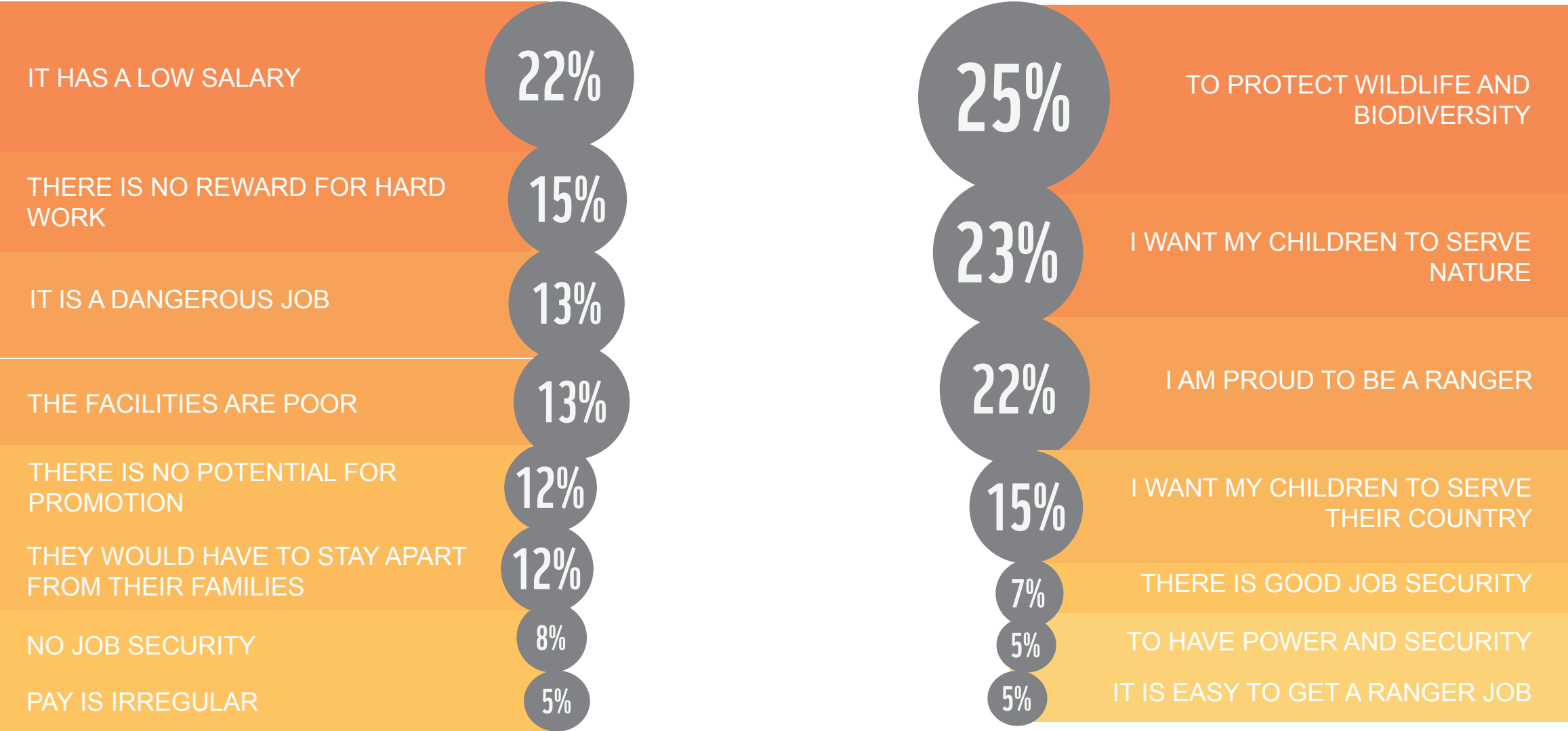
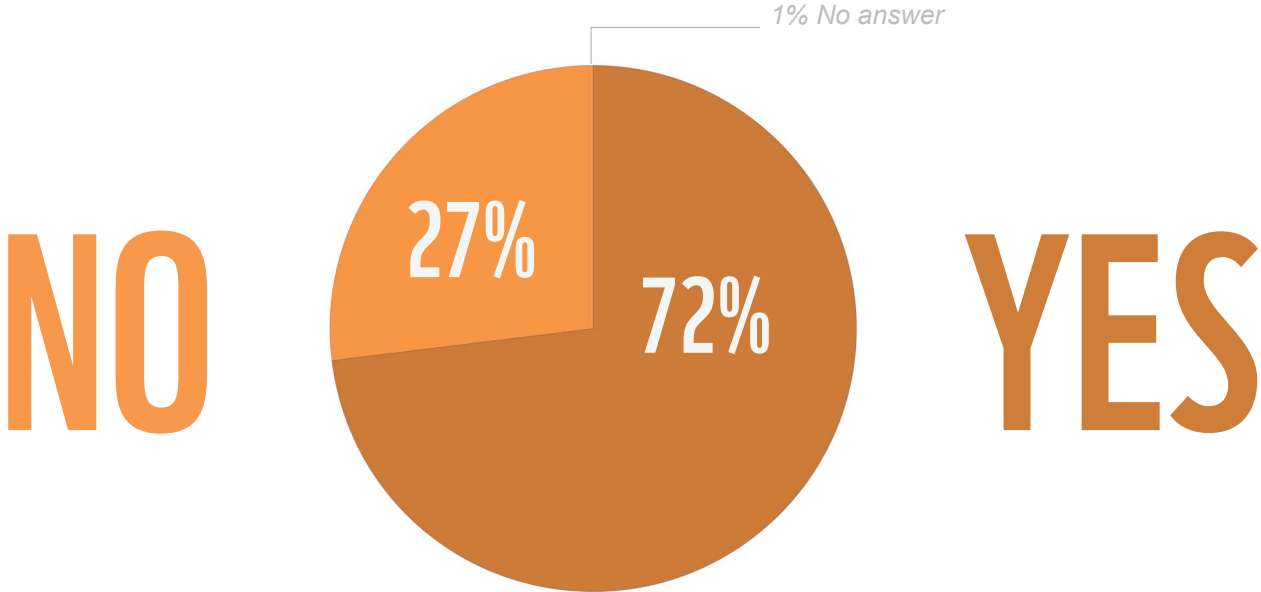
# What is the worst aspect of being a ranger?





FIGURE 7: FUTURE

# Do you want your children to become rangers?





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this survey, which covered 643 rangers in more than 150 sites across 17 Latin America countries, the following priority recommendations should be implemented by those responsible for staffing, planning, delivering and supporting ranger work on the continent. In the vast majority of cases, responsibility will rest with government agencies or departments, particularly Environment, Forestry, Natural Resources, and Finance.

## Recommendation 1: Make targeted interventions to improve basic employment conditions for rangers

With dangerous working conditions, low salary, and inadequate leave frequently topping the list of the worst aspects of ranger work, one of the greatest challenges is to improve basic working conditions throughout this sector. Additionally, there is not enough recognition by governments and the public of either the importance or the daily difficulties of ranger work.

Poaching and illegal logging, and illegal occupation of protected areas for activities such as cattle-ranching and illegal mining, are serious crimes that should be a national priority since it:

- (i) degrades or irrevocably destroys valuable biological resources and ecosystems;
- (ii) renders ineffective the millions of dollars governments invest annually in conservation spending;
- (iii) weakens the local perception of rule of law; and
- (iv) allows foreign criminal syndicates to violate the territorial integrity of the state and poses a serious threat to frontline staff.

Considering this, rangers should be treated similarly to other valued public employees who risk their physical well-being to protect the interests of the state – such as police, border officials, firefighters, military, and emergency response specialists.

## Recommendation 2: Ensure equipment levels and training are adequate to improve ranger effectiveness

Despite 84% rangers indicating that they feel they have been adequately trained to do their job (in many cases thanks to partnerships between NGOs and Governments), almost 70% believe they do not have the proper material provision to work and stay safe in the field. There is clearly a pressing need to rectify these shortcomings.



© Luis Fernando Gómez\_WWF-Colombia

There are two critical components:

### (1) Improve ranger access to critical equipment

There is a huge shortfall in the provision of the health supplies, vehicles, weapons, boots, shelter and potable water required to keep rangers safe and ensure their effectiveness. Countries must allocate greater budgets for such items in the vast majority of landscapes where rangers work.

### (2) Institutionalize capacity building programmes for rangers

Although many NGOs have been trying to fill this gap, there still remains a shortfall of adequate training. The most efficient way to achieve this is through the establishment of specialized colleges and institutions and strengthening of existing institutions, which can develop and deliver a tailor-made curriculum based on best available practices, as well as adapt it to any emerging threats. While a few training centres exist in LAC, more need to be established to provide adequate and practical training for new recruits as well as on-job-the training.

## Recommendation 3: Conduct further studies to improve ranger welfare, job satisfaction, and motivation, and help facilitate attempts by other organizations to do the same

Additional surveys that go into greater detail have the potential to provide a more complete picture of the challenges and conditions that impact rangers and their effectiveness. In particular, there is an urgent need to conduct a detailed survey on the employment conditions of rangers working in LAC.

Along with a more comprehensive analysis, there is a need to involve a larger number of rangers. As governments often have the final authority to approve such studies, they should do so, and without hesitation – viewing them as an opportunity to gather more actionable information that their wildlife conservation operations can benefit from.

The survey results clearly show that in LAC Rangers are motivated professionals with a true commitment to work and protect nature despite the harsh working conditions, and lack of public recognition. Governments should do what they can to enhance awareness among the public and civil society about wildlife conservation issues in general, and ranger welfare in particular. Governments should also consider incentive systems for frontline staff for their hard work.



A woman wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, khaki cargo pants, a brown leather belt, and a straw hat with a black band is walking through tall, dry grass. She is looking down at the grass. The background is a blurred field of trees and grass under a bright sky.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many institutions and individuals contributed to this survey. The survey team would like to thank all WWF programme offices and GWC partners in LAC, the International Ranger Federation, WCS Belize, WCS Guatemala, Panthera Honduras, Yaguará Panama, Panthera Costa Rica, Costa Rica Wildlife Foundation and Biosistemas and all the regional and national Rangers associations in LAC that supported this survey.

The survey team would also like to thank Armando Dans and Jeffrey Arana Espinoza for their support in Nicaragua and Melissa Rodriguez for her assistance in applying surveys in El Salvador.

We are also highly indebted to the hundreds of frontline staff from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Panama, Surinam, Uruguay, Venezuela, Belize who kindly contributed to this survey.



# Report in Numbers



• RANGER PERCEPTIONS: LATIN AMERICA

2014

Launch of WWF  
and TRAFFIC  
Wildlife Crime  
Initiative

17

Responses came  
from 17 countries



643

Number  
of rangers  
surveyed

150+

Rangers from 150+  
sites participated



**Why we are here**  
To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and  
to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.  
[panda.org](http://panda.org)