

**DTM**

ORGANISMO DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA LA MIGRACIÓN

Monitoring circular migration trends of Nicaraguan nationals

Cantons of La Cruz, Upala, and Los Chiles**May, 2024**

To address the need to characterize and understand the needs and patterns of the circular migration flow of Nicaraguans at the northern border of Costa Rica, the following tools from the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) methodology were combined:¹

- Flow monitoring registry: Quantification of regular and irregular migratory movements at the northern border.
- Flow monitoring surveys: Profiling of migrants crossing the northern border.

MAIN FINDINGS

MONITORING REGISTRY OF NICARAGUAN MIGRATION TRENDS IN COSTA RICA

MIGRATORY MOVEMENT THROUGH OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

May 1 – 31, 2024

Official border crossings at Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas

18,786 REGULAR ENTRIES

Entries of Nicaraguan nationals through **official** crossings points

Daily average: 605 people

22,449 REGULAR EXITS

Exits of Nicaraguan nationals through **official** crossings points

Daily average: 724 people

-Source: DGME², 2024.

MIGRATORY MOVEMENT THROUGH UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

May 15 – 31, 2024

Unofficial border crossings at La Cruz and Los Chiles

4,155 IRREGULAR ENTRIES

Entries of Nicaraguan nationals through **unofficial** crossings

Daily average: 277 people

6,056 IRREGULAR EXITS

Exits of Nicaraguan nationals through **unofficial** crossings

Daily average: 404 people

Source: IOM, 2024.

FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS OF NICARAGUANS IN COSTA RICA

OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

233 SURVEYED

227 ACCOMPANYING

50 % Women | 50 % Men
11 % Minors

Main needs

Lack of economic resources (60 %)
Medical assistance (27 %)
Help with documentation (15 %)

UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

118 SURVEYS AT CROSSINGS

103 ACCOMPANYING

49 % Women | 51 % Men
15 % Minors

Main needs

Lack of economic resources (74 %)
Help with documentation (34 %)
Medical assistance (21 %)¹ For more information please visit: www.dtm.iom.int/methodological-framework² Statistics from the DGME

Mixed migration movements of Nicaraguan nationals towards Costa Rica have been constant in Central America for years. However, these have recently intensified due to political, economic, and social factors. These movements present continuous challenges for both countries, affecting migration policies, employment, and access to basic services.

In 2023, the official border posts of Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas in northern Costa Rica recorded 526,271 regular migration movements of Nicaraguan nationals (50 % arrivals and 50% departures), representing a 33 per cent increase in comparison to 2022. Additionally, between January and May 2024, 236,963 regular movements of Nicaraguan nationals have been recorded (53 % arrivals, 47 % departures).

On the other hand, According to DTM³, between October 2021 and 2022, out of 2,506 surveyed individuals 87 per cent entered through unofficial crossings, with Los Portones in Santa Elena, La Cruz being the most frequent entry point

Understanding the border dynamics of those who cross it is fundamental in comprehending the needs of the migrant population and formulating proposals for their attention. Given these challenges, it is essential to have updated information on the sociodemographic profile, migration motives, needs, and dynamics of Nicaraguan migration movements at the northern border of Costa Rica.

³ For more information please visit: [Monitoring the Flow of Nicaraguan nationals in the Northern Zone of Costa Rica including La Cruz, Upala and Los Chiles](#)

The IOM's DTM is a tool used for monitoring and tracking migratory flows. In Costa Rica, information was collected in three cantons bordering Nicaragua (La Cruz, Upala, and Los Chiles) using local-level DTM methodologies.

Using the Flow Monitoring Survey (FMS) tool in May, 351 valid surveys were conducted (with a response rate of 92 % and a non-response rate of 8 %), gathering information on 681 migrant individuals (351 surveyed and 330 accompanying persons). The surveys were conducted in person and were voluntary for Nicaraguan adults, representing family groups. Non-probabilistic sampling was used, so the results obtained are not generalizable to the entire studied population.

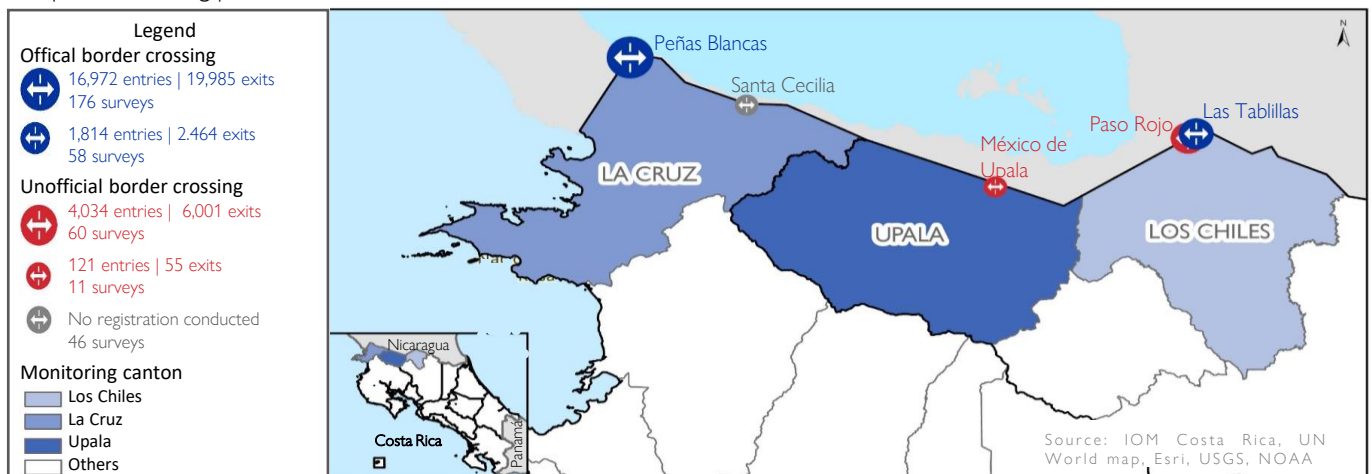
The Flow Monitoring Registry (FMR) tool utilized official data on entry and exit movements through Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas, and counts at Paso Rojo in Los Chiles, conducted daily from Monday to Sunday, with timings from 07:00 to 17:00. In México de Upala, counts were conducted from Monday to Sunday from 07:00 to 12:00.

Limitations:

In May, some comparisons were not possible due to differences in data collection periods: official data represent the entire month, while DTM monitoring started on June 15, and there were no data available for Santa Cecilia for this month.

Moreover, the porosity of the border, as well as the hours when there is no personnel (e.g., nighttime), makes it difficult to fully monitor entries and exits and, therefore, to collect information.

Map 1. Monitoring points in northern Costa Rica

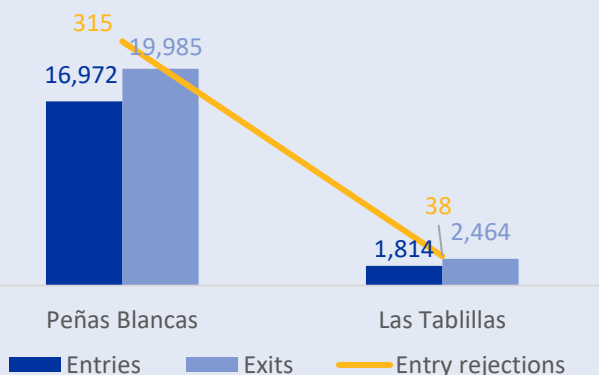


This map is solely for illustrative purposes. The boundaries, names, and designations shown on this map do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Migratory movements through official border crossings

Figure 1 shows the official records of entries, entry refusals, and exits of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, specifically at the official border posts of Peñas Blancas (La Cruz canton) and Las Tablillas (Los Chiles). In May 2024, there were 18,786 entries (90 % at Peñas Blancas and 10 % at Las Tablillas) and 22,449 exits (89 % at Peñas Blancas and 11 % at Las Tablillas).

Figure 1. Regular migration movements of Nicaraguans at the northern border of Costa Rica. May, 2024.



In comparison to April 2024, when there were 22,828 entries (89 % at Peñas Blancas and 11 % at Las Tablillas) and 19,527 exits (90 % at Peñas Blancas and 10 % at Las Tablillas), May saw an 18 per cent decrease in entries and a 15 per cent increase in exits. This reflects a shift in migration dynamics, possibly influenced by specific events such as Mother's Day in Nicaragua.

353 cases were refused entry into Costa Rica in May, a 59 per cent decrease compared to April. Of these, 96 per cent occurred at Peñas Blancas (315) and Las Tablillas (38).



The reasons for denying entry are associated with the lack of legal and/or regulatory requirements, or due to specific offenses determined by the General Law of Migration and Aliens, which prevent access to the country⁵.




Migratory movements through unofficial border crossings

Figure 2 shows records of entries and exits of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica at two irregular border crossing points between May 15 and 31, 2024. During this period, there were 4,155 entries (97 % at Paso Rojo and 3 % at México de Upala) and 6,056 exits (97 % and 3 %, respectively). 59 % of the migratory movements were exits and 41 % entries.

Figure 2. Irregular migration movements of Nicaraguans at the northern border of Costa Rica. May 15 – 31, 2024



For irregular movement records, there is more detailed information available compared to regular registration data, allowing for a more in-depth analysis.

-  43 % Women | 57 % Men
-  2 % Elderly adults (65 years or older)
-  12 % Minors (17 years or younger)
-  2 % Pregnant women (out of total women)

The use of different means of transportation by migrant individuals varies considerably: 40 per cent of surveyed migrants traveled on foot, followed by taxis or cars (25 %) and buses (23 %). In smaller proportions, seven per cent used motorcycles and five per cent bicycles. In México de Upala, motorcycles are the primary means of transportation (35 %), while at Paso Rojo, walking was the primary mode (46 %), and in Santa Cecilia, taxis or cars were predominant (65 %).

⁴ Official statistics from the DGME

⁵ General Law on Migration

Surveys at official border crossings

Between May 15 – 31, 2024, **233 surveys** were conducted among Nicaraguan nationals of legal age at official border crossings in Costa Rica. The surveys were distributed as follows: 175 in Peñas Blancas and 58 in Las Tablillas.

Gender and age

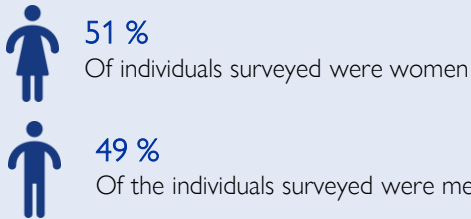
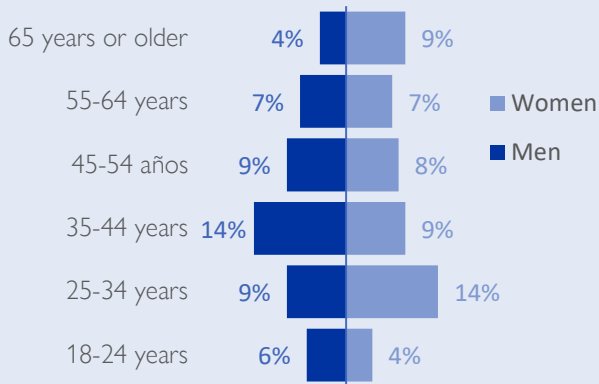
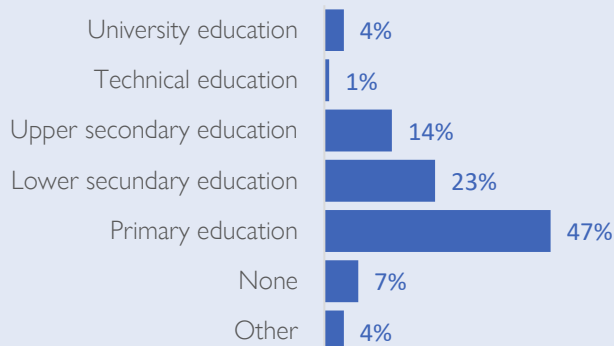


Figure 3. Age and gender of individuals surveyed at official border crossings (n=233)



Level of education

Figure 4. Education level of individuals surveyed at official border checkpoints (n=233)



Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Between May 15 – 31, 2024, **118 surveys** were conducted among Nicaraguan nationals of legal age. 47 were conducted in Santa Cecilia, 60 in Paso Rojo (Los Chiles) and 11 in México of Upala.

Gender and age

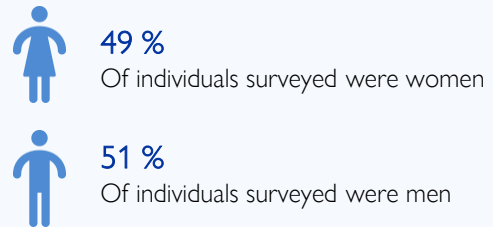
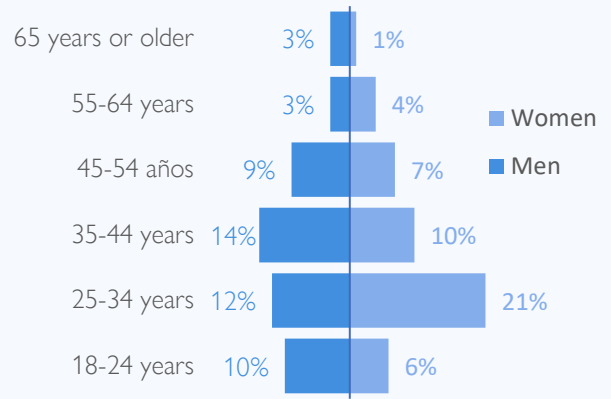
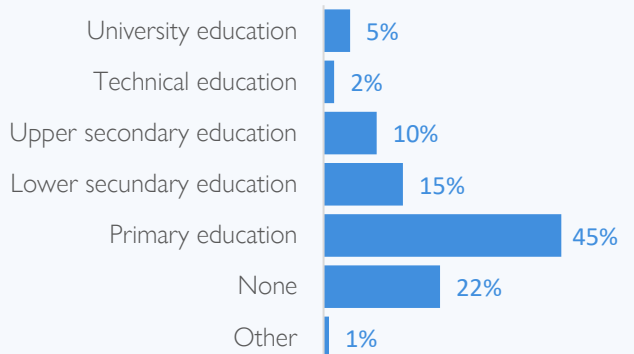


Figure 5. Age and gender of individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)



Level of education

Figure 6. Education level of individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)

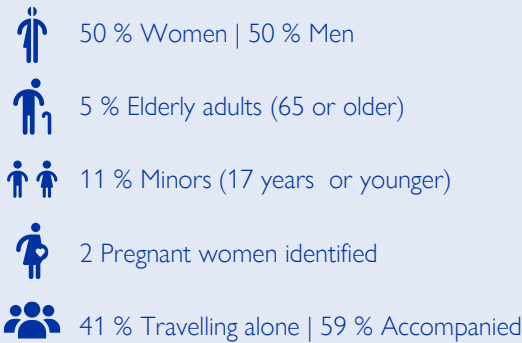


Surveys at official border crossings

Accompaniment during the trip

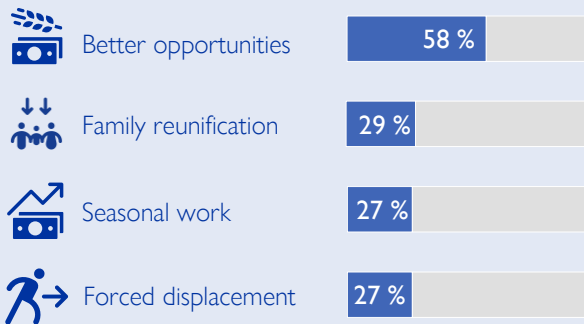
Of the **233 persons surveyed** at official border posts (Entering and leaving), additional information was obtained on **227 travel companions** totaling **460 people** and an average of **3 people per travel group**.

Figure 7. Composition of travel groups surveyed at official border crossings (n=460)



Motivation for mobility

Figure 8. Reasons for mobilization according to individuals surveyed at official border crossings (n=233)



Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option.

Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Accompaniment during the trip

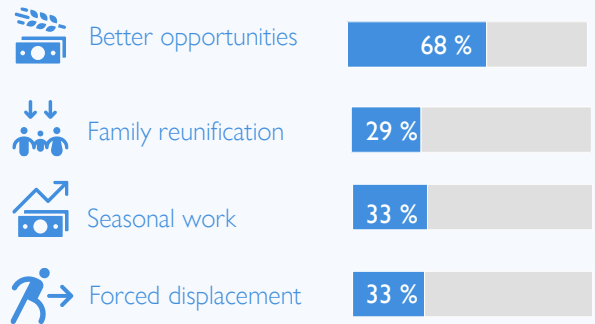
Of the 118 people surveyed at unofficial border crossings (Entering and leaving), additional information was obtained on **103 travel companions**, for a total of **221 people** and an average of **3 people per trip**.

Figure 9. Composition of travel groups surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=221)



Motivation for mobility

Figure 10. Reasons for mobilization according to individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)



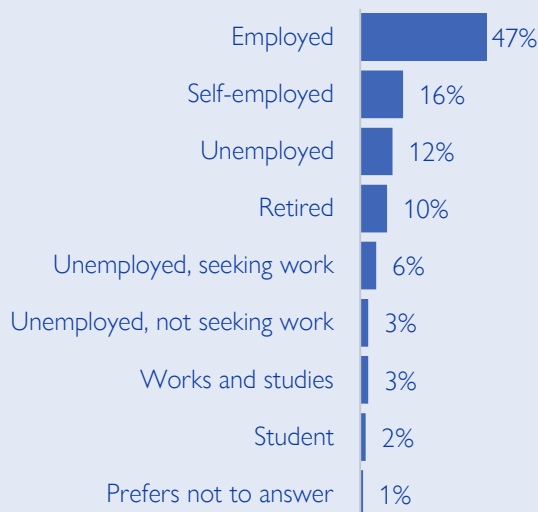
Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option.

Surveys at official border crossings

Employment status

The employment status of those surveyed at official border posts (Figure 11) shows that 66 per cent had some type of work, which could include employment, self-employment or in combination with study.

Figure 11. Percentage of persons surveyed at official border posts by employment status (n=233)



80 % of the men surveyed were employed.



54 % of the women surveyed were employed.

Note: Work category includes employed, self-employed, and work-study.

Regarding the individuals who already had work, 59 per cent indicated formal employment and 34 per cent indicated informal employment. The remaining seven per cent preferred not to respond.

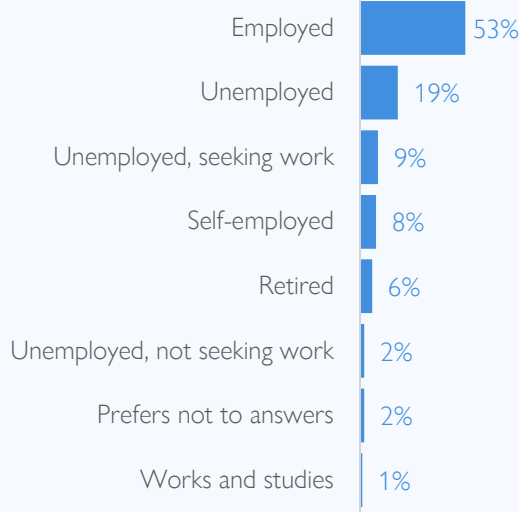
Analyzing the information by gender, women who are employed, their percentage in the informal sector (43 %) is slightly higher with respect to the formal sector (41%), the opposite case with men who had higher levels of formality (71 %) than informality (28 %).

Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Employment status

The employment status of those surveyed at unofficial border crossings (Figure 12) reveals that 62 % had some type of work, which could include employed, self-employed or in combination with study.

Figure 12. Percentage of people surveyed at unofficial border crossings by employment situation (n=118)



72 % of the men surveyed were employed.



49 % of the women surveyed were employed.

Note: Work category includes employed, self-employed and work-study.

In the formality section, 75 per cent indicated that they were employed informally and 24 per cent formally. Less than one per cent preferred not to answer.

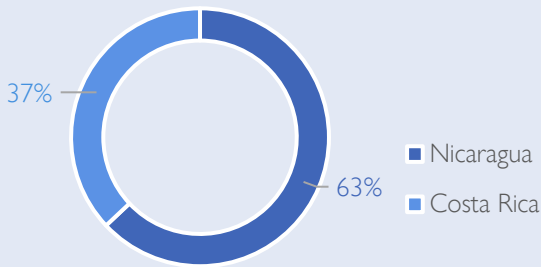
Disaggregating by gender, the share of formality for employed women had 75 per cent for informality and 25 per cent formality. In the case of men, the percentages are similar with 74 per cent and 23 per cent formality.

Surveys at official border checkpoints

Economic dependents

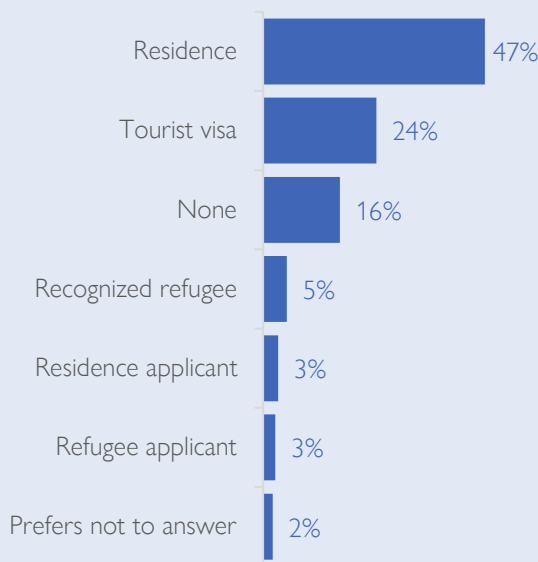
Fifty-eight per cent of those surveyed at official border posts mentioned having an economic dependent in Costa Rica or Nicaragua: of those who indicated having economic dependents, 63 per cent of the dependents were identified as usually residing in Nicaragua and the remaining 37 per cent in Costa Rica (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=233)



Migratory status

Figure 14. Migratory status of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=233)

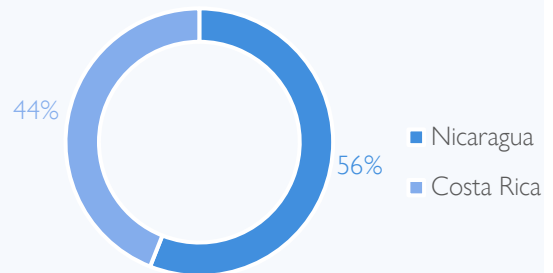


Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Economic dependents

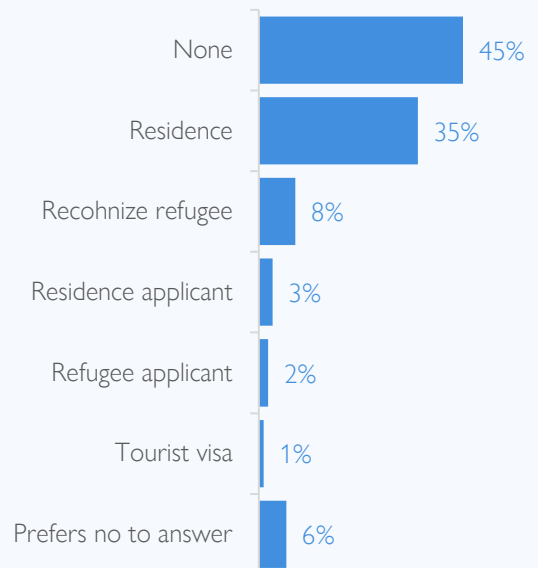
Sixty-four per cent of Nicaraguan migrants surveyed at unofficial border crossings mentioned having an economic dependent in Costa Rica or Nicaragua: of those who indicated having economic dependents, 56 per cent of the dependents were identified as usually residing in Nicaragua and the remaining 44 per cent in Costa Rica (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)



Migratory status

Figure 16. Migratory status of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)

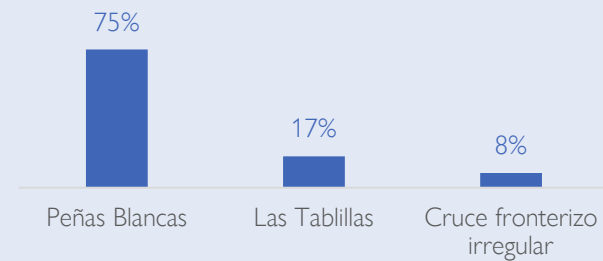


Surveys at official border crossings

Entries into Costa Rica

Of the total number of people surveyed at official border posts, **92 per cent** indicated that they had entered Costa Rica through an official border crossing (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Last point of entry into Costa Rica of persons surveyed at official border posts (n=233)

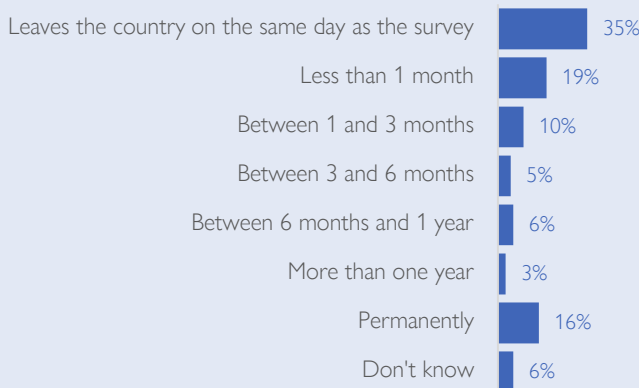


Residence in Costa Rica

According to Figure 18, **35 per cent** of the people surveyed indicated that they left the country on the same day of the survey, while only 16 per cent indicated that they intended to remain permanently in Costa Rica.

However, it has been identified that this figure changes depending on the border post. Twenty-five per cent of the people who entered through Las Tablillas indicated their intention to stay permanently, while in Peñas Blancas, this value represented 13 per cent:

Figure 18. Percentage of time planned to stay in Costa Rica according to individuals surveyed at official border posts (n=233)

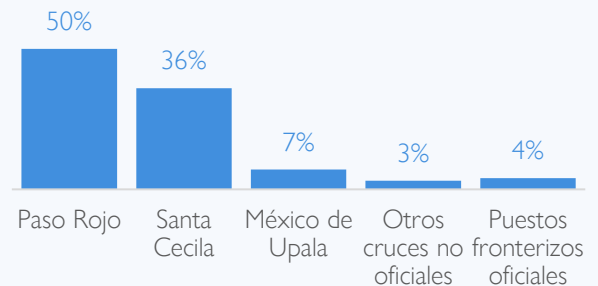


Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Entries into Costa Rica

Of the total number of people surveyed at unofficial border crossings, **96 per cent** indicated having entered through an unofficial border crossing (Paso Rojo 50 %; Santa Cecilia 36 %; Mexico 7 %; other unofficial crossings 3 %). (Figure 19).

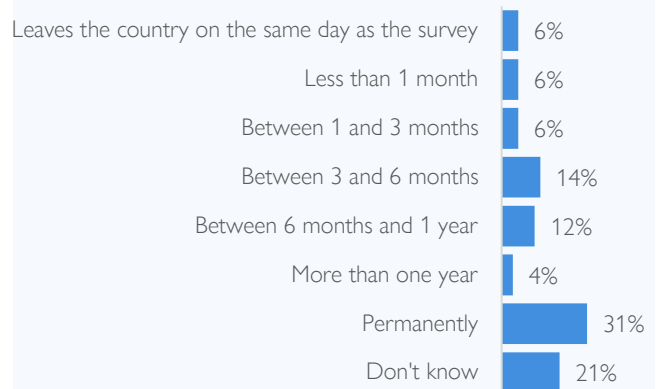
Figure 19. Last point of entry into Costa Rica of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)



Residence in Costa Rica

According to Figure 20, **31 per cent** of persons indicated that they intended to stay permanently in Costa Rica. In general terms, those who entered through unofficial crossings showed a higher intention to stay for more than a week or permanently compared to those who entered through official border crossings.

Figure 20. Percentage of planned time of stay in Costa Rica according to individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)

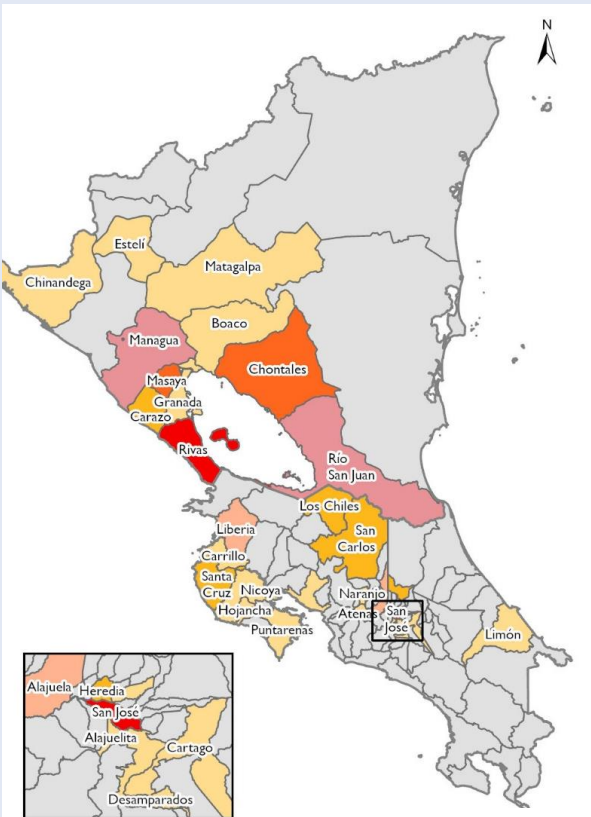


Surveys at official border posts

Map 2 shows the places of residence of the 233 people surveyed at the official border posts Peñas Blancas, and Las Tablillas in Costa Rica.

Of the total number of people surveyed at official posts, **60 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence and 40 per cent in Nicaragua**, with the main cantons of residence in Costa Rica being San José (27 %), Liberia (9 %) and Alajuela (8 %), while the main departments of residence in Nicaragua were Rivas (27 %), San Juan (18 %) and Managua (17 %).

Map 2. Persons surveyed at official border posts, by canton (in Costa Rica) or department (in Nicaragua) of usual residence (n=233).



Source: IOM Costa Rica, UN World map, Esri, USGS, NOAA

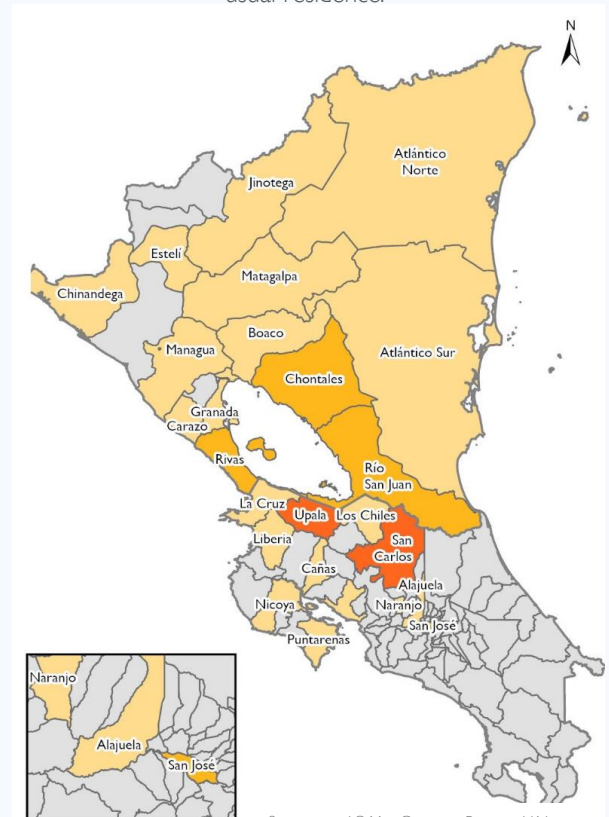
Simbología		
< 1 %	5,1 % - 7 %	16,1 % - 19 %
1 % - 3 %	7,1 % - 10 %	
3,1 % - 5 %		

Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Map 3 shows the places of residence of the 118 people surveyed at the official border crossings Peñas Blancas, and Las Tablillas in Costa Rica.

Of the total number of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings, **70 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence and 30 per cent in Nicaragua**, with the main cantons of residence in Costa Rica being San Carlos (24 %), Upala (20 %), while the main departments of residence in Nicaragua were San Juan (20 %), Chontales (20 %), among others.

Map 3. Persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings, by canton (in Costa Rica) or department (in Nicaragua) of usual residence.



Source: IOM Costa Rica, UN World map, Esri, USGS, NOAA.

Simbología		
Porcentaje de personas encuestadas		
< 1 %	5,1 % - 7 %	
1 % - 3 %	7,1 % - 10 %	
3,1 % - 5 %		

This map is for illustrative purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration..

Surveys at official border crossings

Needs in Costa Rica

Seventy-four per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Out of the 26 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 60 per cent mentioned the lack of financial resources as the main need, followed by medical assistance (27 %), and documentation (15 %) (Figure 19).

In addition, 20 per cent of the people surveyed stated that they needed information about the possibilities of regular stay in Costa Rica, highlighting the issuance or renewal of a passport (96 % of those who indicated a need), followed by access to a birth certificate (2 %), and access to a life event certificate (2 %).

Figure 19. Needs in Costa Rica among individuals surveyed at official border posts (n=233)



Discrimination in Costa Rica

Seventy per cent of the respondents indicated that they had not suffered discrimination during their stay in Costa Rica. While 27 per cent indicated that they received some type of discrimination at some point during their stay; three per cent preferred not to answer. Among some forms of discrimination, the nationality of the respondent stands out.

Access of minors to health and education services in Costa Rica

In relation to access to health and education for minors who are dependents of the respondents, only three per cent of reported having problems with access to health services and less than one per cent reported facing challenges in accessing education for minors.

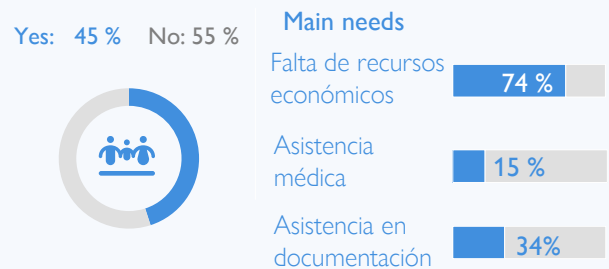
Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Needs Costa Rica

Fifty-five per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Of the 45 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 74 per cent mentioned the lack of financial resources, followed by assistance with documentation (34 %), and medical assistance (21 %) (Figure 20).

In addition, 37 per cent of those surveyed expressed needing this information about the possibilities of regular permanence in Costa Rica, highlighting the issuance or renewal of passports (95 % of those who indicated a need), followed by access to a birth certificate (2 %), access to a life event certificate (2 %), and other documents (2 %).

Figure 20. Needs in Costa Rican among individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=118)



Discrimination in Costa Rica

Seventy-two per cent of the respondents indicated that they had not suffered discrimination during their stay in Costa Rica while 26 per cent indicated that they received some type of discrimination at some point during their stay; two per cent preferred not to answer.

Access of minors to health and education services in Costa Rica

In relation to access to health and education for minors who are dependents of the respondents, only three per cent reported problems with access to health services and none of the respondent's reported challenges in accessing the education system.



According to official data from the General Directorate of Migration and Alien Affairs, during May 2024, **a total of 18,785 regular entries of Nicaraguans** (daily average of 605 persons) and **22,449 regular exits** (daily average of 724 persons) were observed at the official border posts of Peñas Blancas, and Las Tabillas.

On the other hand, between May 15 and 31, 2024, **4,155 irregular entries** (daily average of 277 persons) and **6,056 irregular exits** (daily average of 404 persons) were recorded at unofficial border crossings such as Paso Rojo and Mexico de Upala.



At both official and unofficial crossing points, the distribution by gender was very similar. However, **notable differences were found in the presence of minors (11 % at official posts and 15 % at unofficial points) and pregnant women (<1 % at official posts and 8 % at unofficial points)**. This may be associated with a need for faster and more direct access to specific health and education services for this population and, in addition, a greater number of people in specific situations of vulnerability.



On employment status, migrants surveyed at unofficial crossings showed **a more unfavorable labor situation**: 63 per cent were working (compared to 66 % of respondents at official crossings) and, of these, 68 per cent were working informally (35 % of respondents at official crossings). Nineteen per cent indicated that they were unemployed and nine per cent were actively seeking employment (12 % and 9 % respectively for respondents in official positions). **The labor informality and economic vulnerability among migrants who crossed the border irregularly highlight the need for tailored strategies to improve their quality of life in Costa Rica.**



On the other hand, the data show **an important gap in access to employment between men and women** who participated in the survey. Eighty per cent of men mentioned having some type of employment compared to 54 per cent of women. **This inequality may lead to scenarios of greater vulnerability for women due to the difficulties of finding work, especially for those who migrate irregularly, as these percentages decrease to 72 per cent for men and 49 per cent for women.**

Forty-seven per cent of migrants in official positions reported having economic dependents in Nicaragua and 37 per cent in Costa Rica (56 % and 44 % respectively for those surveyed at unofficial points). **These data highlight the potential of migrants to contribute to Costa Rica's economy, both through their participation in the labor market and through economic support to their families in both countries.**



Forty-five per cent of those surveyed who used unofficial border crossings did not have any migratory category, while 49 per cent were regularized in some way (The remaining six per cent preferred not to respond). This not only evidences the irregular conditions of a significant percentage of the flow, but also raises challenges regarding the needs of migrants in terms of access to regularization processes.



The circular flow of Nicaraguans through official border posts shows a greater dynamic of people moving more regularly between Nicaragua and Costa Rica: 35 per cent of those surveyed at official posts planned to leave the country the same day, compared to seven per cent of those surveyed at unofficial border points. In general terms, people entering through unofficial crossings showed a higher intention to stay for more than a week or permanently compared to people entering through official border posts.



There is a tendency for people who entered through unofficial points to move to cantons in the northern zone (mainly San Carlos and Upala), while people who entered through official posts went to cantons in the Greater Metropolitan Area (such as San José and Heredia) or Liberia.



The types of needs of respondents who crossed the border at unofficial points were similar to the needs of those who crossed at official posts: lack of economic resources (60 % among people surveyed at official posts and 74 per cent among people surveyed at unofficial border points), assistance with documentation (15 % and 34 % respectively), and medical assistance (27 % and 15 % respectively). These needs show factors that make the Nicaraguan population vulnerable.



Individuals leaving Costa Rica, Paso Rojo, Las Tablillas, Los Chiles, Guanacaste, Costa Rica
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