

**DTM**

THE UN MIGRATION AGENCY

Monitoring the circular migration flow of Nicaraguan nationals

Cantons of La Cruz, Upala, and Los Chiles**August, 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

- Baseline Assessment: Interviews with key informants and direct observation.
- 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 FLOW IN COSTA RICA

MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS THROUGH OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

August 01 – 31, 2024

Official border crossings at Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas

20,781 REGULAR ENTRIES

**Entries** of Nicaraguan nationals through **official border crossings points**Daily average: **670** people

21,488 REGULAR EXITS

**Exits** of Nicaraguan nationals through **official border crossing points**Daily average: **693** people-Source: DGME², 2024.

MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS THROUGH UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

August 01 – 31, 2024

Unofficial border crossings at La Cruz and Los Chiles

4,765 IRREGULAR ENTRIES

**Entries** of Nicaraguan nationals through **3 unofficial border crossings points**Daily average: **154** people

6,066 IRREGULAR EXITS

**Exits** of Nicaraguan nationals through **2 unofficial border crossing points**Daily average: **196** people

Source: IOM, 2024.

FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS OF NICARAGUANS IN COSTA RICA

OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

193 SURVEYED**165 ACCOMPANYING**46 % Female | 54 % Male
9 % Children

Main needs

Medical assistance (69 %)
Economic resources (42 %)
Safe shelter(4 %)

UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

121 SURVEYS AT CROSSINGS**441 ACCOMPANYING**42 % Female | 58 % Male
11 % Children

Main needs

Help with documentation(67 %)
Economic resources (63 %)
Safe shelter (11 %)

¹ For more information please visit: www.dtm.iom.int/methodological-framework

² Statistics from the DGME: [Estadísticas \(migracion.go.cr\)](http://Estadísticas(migracion.go.cr))

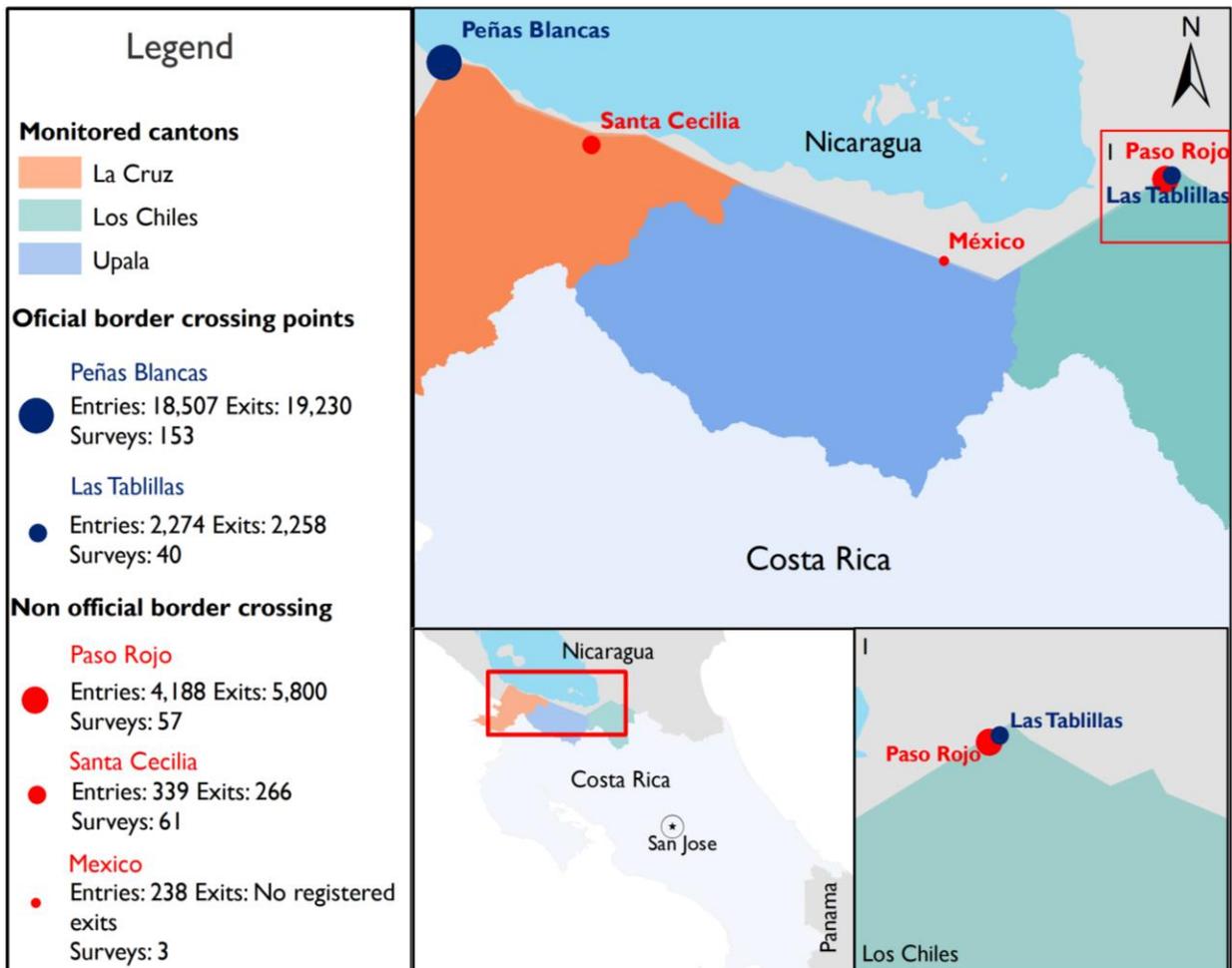
The migratory movements of Nicaraguan people to Costa Rica are a constant trend in Central America, intensified by political, economic, and social factors. **Between January and August 2024, 370,377 regular movements** of people of Nicaraguan nationality were recorded (53 % entries, 47 % exits). In the same period during 2023, 338,583 regular movements were recorded (53 % entries and 47 % exits). **This represented a nine per cent increase in 2024 compared to 2023.** On the other hand, through unofficial crossings points, **54,016 migratory movements** were recorded from May 15, 2024, to August 31, with 52 per cent being exits and 48 per cent entries.

Of the 314 surveys conducted during August, 49 per cent were carried out at the official border post of Peñas Blancas (La Cruz), 19 percent in Santa Cecilia (La Cruz), 18 percent at the unofficial border crossing Paso Rojo (Los Chiles), 13 percent at the official border post Las Tablillas (Los Chiles), and one percent in Mexico (Upala). For the Baseline Assessment, four key informants were interviewed from El Manzano (One man) and Puente de Cabalceta (Two men and one woman). The flow monitory registry took place between 01-12 and 22-31 of august. From the 13th to 21st there was no personnel in the field to conduct monitoring and surveys.

To consult the methodological note implemented in this report, you can access the following [link](#) or scan this QR code:



Map 1. Monitoring points in northern Costa Rica

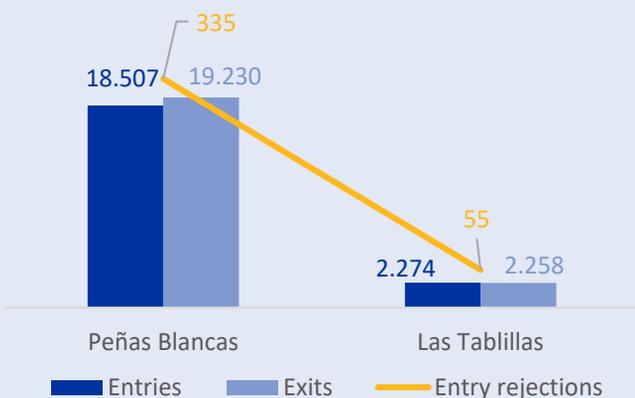


This map is for illustrative purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration..

Migratory movements through official border crossings

Figure 1 shows the official records of entries, entry rejections, and exits of Nicaraguan individuals in Costa Rica, specifically at the official border crossing points of Peñas Blancas (La Cruz) and Las Tablillas (Los Chiles)³. In August 2024, 20,781 entries were recorded (86 % at Peñas Blancas and 14 % at Las Tablillas) and 21,488 exits (89 % at Peñas Blancas and 11 % at Las Tablillas).

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



In comparison to July 2024, August saw a 14 per cent decrease in migratory movements. According to DGME records from 2022 to 2024, this is an annual behavior and can be associated with the lack of specific events that mobilize the Nicaraguan population, unlike July, when mid-year vacations occur or agricultural activities like coffee harvesting in the GAM occur in the following months.

Regarding entry rejections into Costa Rica, in August 2024, 95 percent (390 cases) of rejections at the official border crossing points of Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas were of Nicaraguan people, a 10 per cent decrease compared to July. Of these 390 rejections, 86 per cent occurred at Peñas Blancas (335) and 14 per cent at Las Tablillas (55).

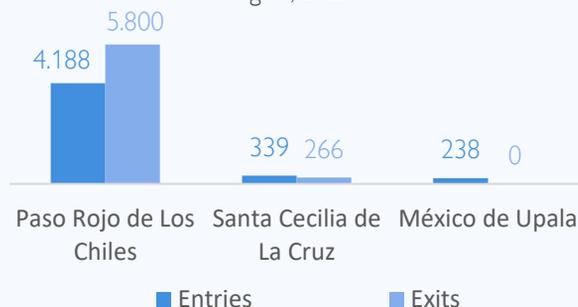


The reasons for denying entry are associated with the lack of legal and/or regulatory requirements, or due to specific offenses determined by the Migration General Law, which prevent access to the country⁴.

Migratory movements through unofficial border crossings

Figure 2 shows the records of entries and exits of Nicaraguan people in Costa Rica at three irregular border crossing points between August 1 and 31, 2024. During this period, 4,765 entries were recorded (88 % at Paso Rojo, 7 % at Santa Cecilia, and 5 % at México de Upala) and 6,066 exits at Paso Rojo (96 %) and Santa Cecilia (4 %), with no exits recorded at México de Upala. Fifty-six per cent of the migratory movements were exits, and 44 per cent were entries.

Figure 2. Irregular migration movements of Nicaraguans at the northern border of Costa Rica. August, 2024



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

- 43 % Female | 57 % Male
- 2 % Elderly adults (65 years or older)
- 11 % Children (17 years or younger)
- 1 % Pregnant Female (out of total Female)

The use of different means of transportation by migrants varied considerably: 30 per cent of the surveyed migrants traveled on foot, followed by the use of taxis or cars (24 %) and motorcycles (19 %). In smaller proportions: 11 per cent traveled by animals, 10 per cent by bicycle, and 6 per cent used the bus. In México de Upala, the main mode of transportation was the bicycle (40 %), in Paso Rojo the main form of travel was on foot (44 %), and in Santa Cecilia, the main modes were equally divided between taxis or cars, buses, and walking (25 %).

³ Official statistics from the DGME

⁴ General Law on Migration

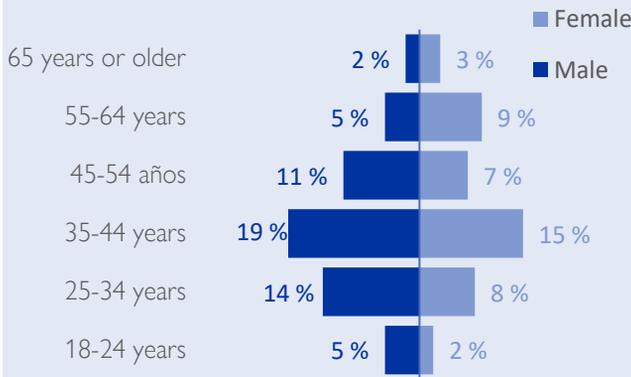
Surveys at official border crossing points

During the period from August 1 to 31, 2024⁵, **193 surveys** were conducted (85 % in Peñas Blancas and 15 % in Las Tablillas) with Nicaraguan nationals, over 17 years of age, at official border crossing points in Costa Rica.

Gender and age

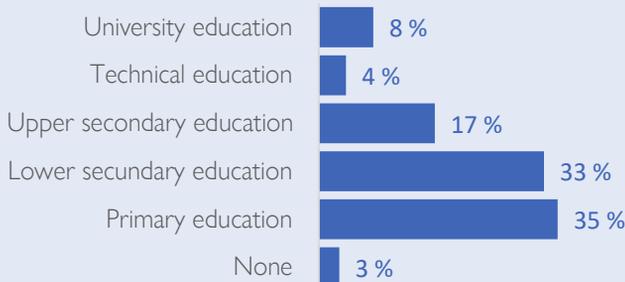


Figure 3. Age and sex of individuals surveyed at official border crossing points (n=193)



Education level

Figure 4. Education level of individuals surveyed at official border crossing points (n=193)



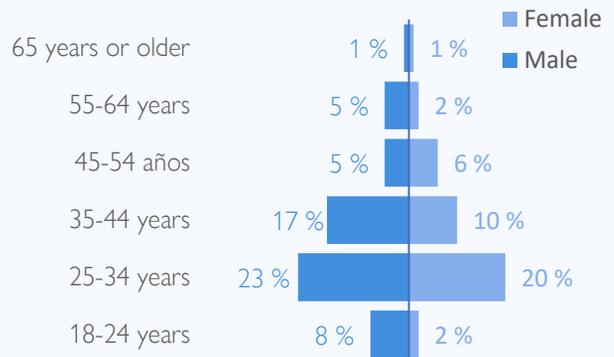
Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

During the period from August 1 to 31, 2024⁶, **121 surveys** were conducted (54 % in Paso Rojo of Los Chiles, 42 % in Santa Cecilia of La Cruz, and 4 % in México de Upala) with Nicaraguan nationals, over 17 years of age.

Gender and age

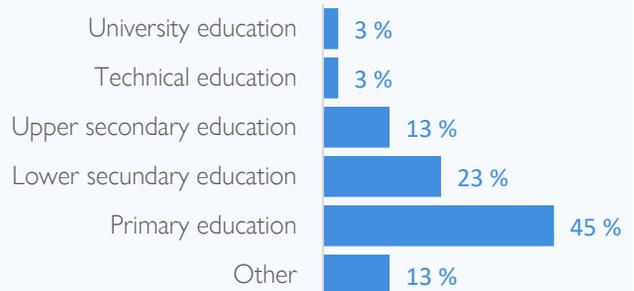


Figure 5. Age and gender of individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=121)



Education level

Figure 6. Education level of individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=121)



According to the Baseline Assessment (BAA), the composition of groups of people across the two unofficial crossings points is different but mainly consists of male. In Puente de Cabalceta (La Cruz), 75 per cent were male and 25 per cent female. In El Manzano (Upala), 60 per cent were male and 40 per cent female. In relation to minors and elderly adults, Puente de Cabalceta identified 15 per cent children under 18 years old and five per cent adults over 65 and in El Manzano, 10 per cent were minors and five per cent were elderly.



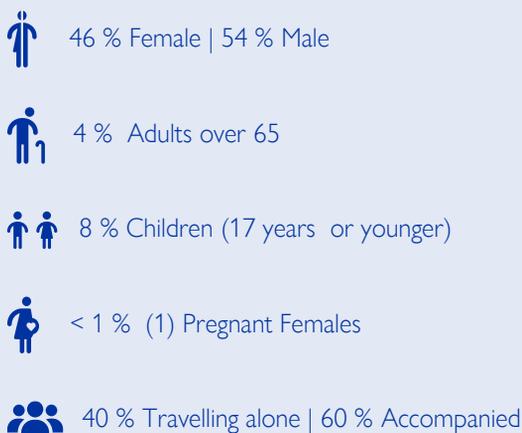
^{5 y 6} From August 12th to 21st, there was no data collection.

Surveys at official border crossings points

Travel composition

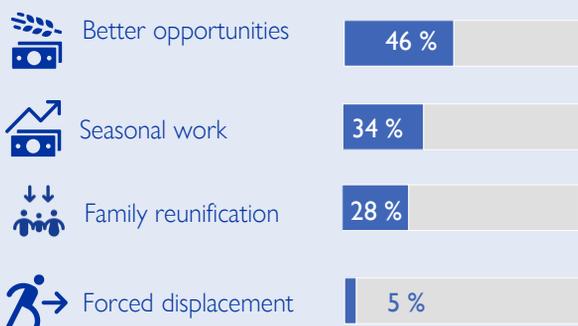
Of the **193 persons surveyed** at official border crossings points, additional information was obtained on **165 travel companions** totaling **358 people** and an average of **2 people per travel group**.

Figure 7. Composition of travel groups surveyed at official border crossings points (n=358)



Motivation for mobility

Figure 8. Reasons for migrating according to individuals surveyed at official border crossings (n=193)



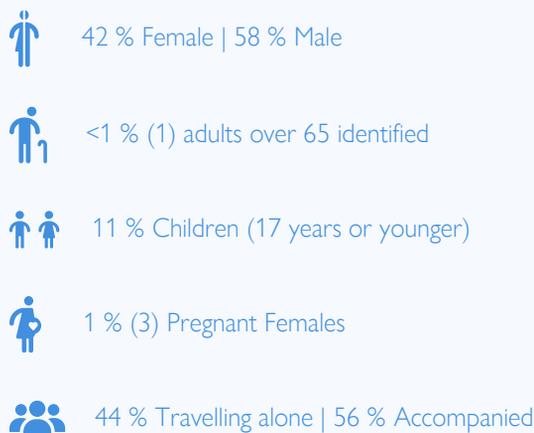
Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option.

Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

Travel composition

Of the 121 people surveyed at unofficial border crossings points, additional information was obtained on **141 travel companions**, for a total of **262 people** and an average of **3 people per trip**.

Figure 9. Composition of travel groups surveyed at unofficial border crossings points (n=262)



Motivation for mobility

Figure 10. Reasons for migrating according to individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=121)



Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option

i According to the BAA, the reasons for migration to Costa Rica identified for those using the unofficial crossing in Puente de Cabalceta were **family reunification, employment, and medical care**. In the case of El Manzano, the main reasons were **employment, medical care, and education**.

Surveys at official border crossings points

Employment status

The employment status of those surveyed at official border points (Figure 11) shows that **82 per cent had some type of employment**, which could include employment, self-employment or work in combination with study.

Figure 11. per centage of persons surveyed at official border points by employment status (n=193)



87 % of the male surveyed were employed.



63 % of the females surveyed were employed.

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

Regarding people who had jobs, **77 per cent indicated having formal employment and 15 per cent stated having informal employment**. The remaining eight per cent did not specify.

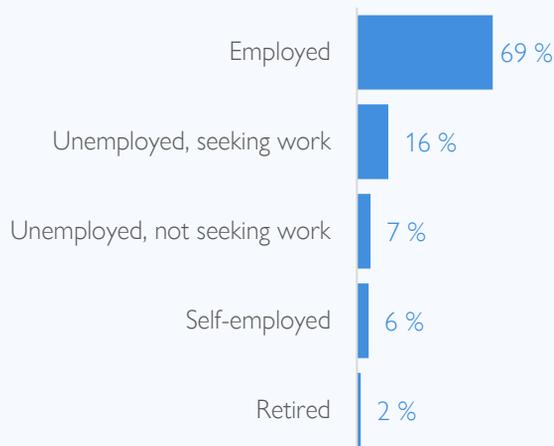
Analyzing the information by sex, women with some form of employment represented **56 per cent in the formal sector, and 26 per cent in the informal sector**. In the case of men, **91 per cent had formal employment and 7 per cent were in the informal sector**. 18 per cent of women and 2 per cent of men did not report the sector of formality.

Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

Employment status

The employment status of those surveyed at unofficial border crossings points (Figure 12) reveals that **75 % had some type of work**, which could include employment, self-employment or work in combination with study.

Figure 12. per centage of people surveyed at unofficial border crossings by employment situation (n=121)



87 % of the male surveyed were employed.



58 % of the females surveyed were employed

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

In the formality section, **77 per cent indicated they had informal employment and 18 per cent formal employment**. The remaining five per cent did not indicate the sector of formality.

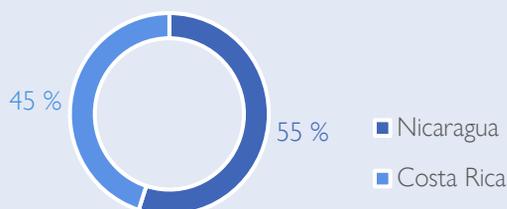
Breaking it down by sex, female with some type of employment represented **79 per cent in the informal sector and 14 per cent in the formal sector**. For male, **76 per cent had informal employment and 19 per cent were employed in the formal sector**. Seven per cent of the female and five per cent for the male respondents did not provide an answer on the formality of their employment.

Surveys at official border crossing points

Economic dependents

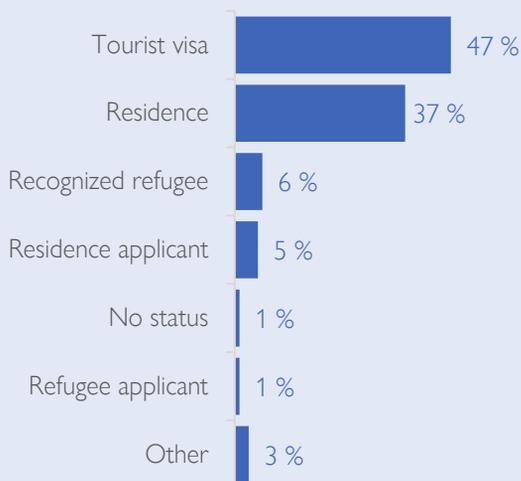
Fifty per cent of the people surveyed at official border crossings mentioned having someone economically dependent in Costa Rica or Nicaragua: 55 per cent of the dependents resided primarily in Nicaragua and the remaining 45 per cent in Costa Rica (Graph 13).

Figure 13. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=97)



Migratory status

Figure 14. Migratory status of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=193)

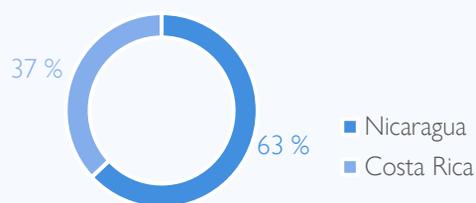


Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

Economic dependents

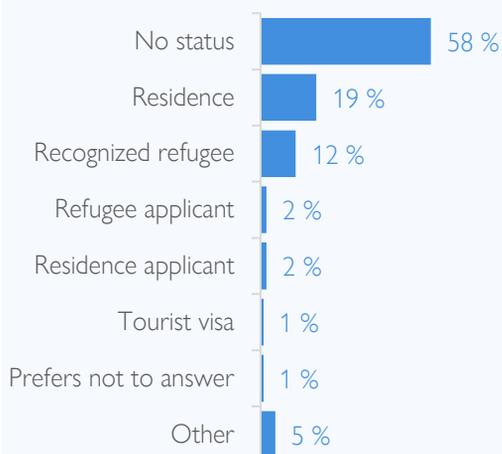
Sixty-nine per cent of Nicaraguan migrant individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings mentioned having an economically dependent person in Costa Rica or Nicaragua: 63 per cent of these dependents resided primarily in Nicaragua, with the remaining 37 per cent in Costa Rica (Graph 15).

Figure 15. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=83)



Migratory status

Figure 16. Migratory status of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=121)



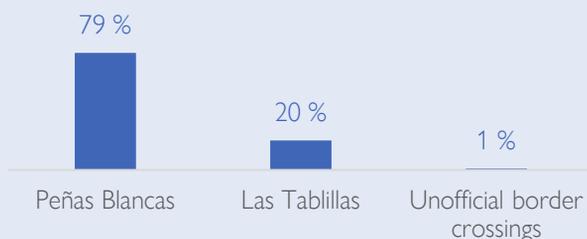
According to the BAA, the categories of migratory status of people crossing into Costa Rica are very similar. Key informants mentioned that in all cases, people are either **refugees, asylum seekers, or residents**. At the Puente Cabalceta crossing, it is also common to find people in **irregular status**.

Surveys at official border crossings points

Entries into Costa Rica

Of the total number of people surveyed at official border posts, **99 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=193)



Residence in Costa Rica

According to Figure 18, **25 per cent** of the people surveyed indicated that they left the country on the same day of the survey, while only four per cent indicated that they intended to remain permanently in Costa Rica.

However, it has been identified that there are changes depending on the border post. The main intention of stay for those who used Las Tablillas is to stay for less than a month (30 %), while for those who entered through Peñas Blancas, it was to stay between one and three months (23 %).

Figure 18. per centage of time planned to stay in Costa Rica according to individuals surveyed at official border posts (n=193)

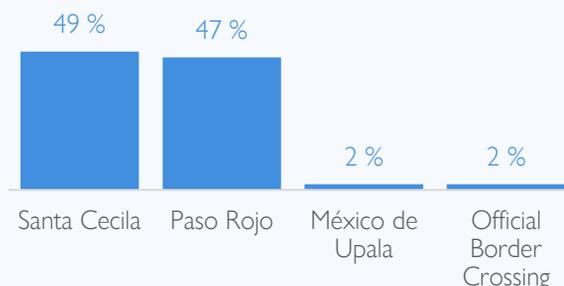


Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

Entries into Costa Rica

Of the total number of people surveyed at unofficial border crossings, **98 per cent** indicated having entered through an unofficial border crossing (Santa Cecilia 49 %; Paso Rojo 47 %; Mexico 2 %) and two per cent in official crossings points. (Figure 19).

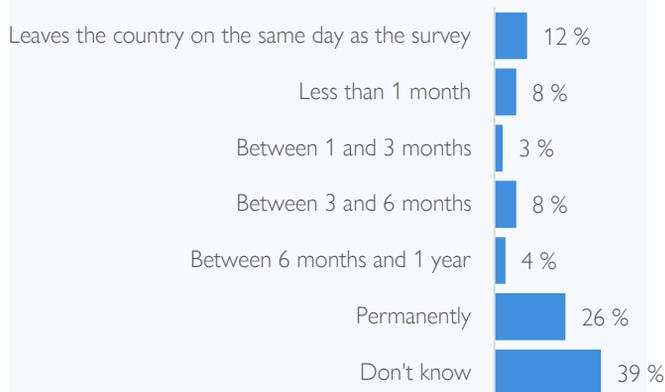
Figure 19. Last point of entry into Costa Rica of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=121)



Residence in Costa Rica

According to Figure 20, **39 per cent** of people indicated they did not yet know when they would leave Costa Rica. Of that 39 per cent, 26 per cent stated they do not know when they will leave but expect to do so at some point, while the other 13 per cent mentioned they do not know if they will leave Costa Rica. It is noteworthy that **26 per cent indicated they would stay permanently in Costa Rica**, and only 12 per cent indicated they would leave Costa Rica the same day.

Figure 20. per centage of planned time of stay in Costa Rica according to individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=121)



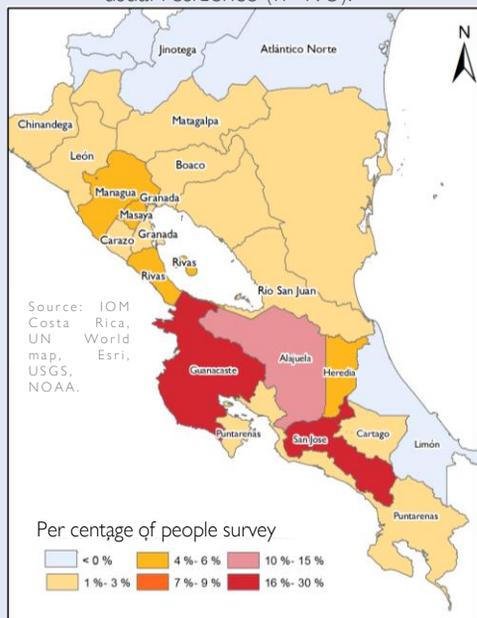
Surveys at official border posts

Map 2 shows the places of residence of the 193 people surveyed at the official border posts Peñas Blancas, and Las Tabillas in Costa Rica.

Of the total number of people surveyed at official posts, **70 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence and 30 per cent indicated Nicaragua**; main provinces of residence in Costa Rica were San José (30 %), Guanacaste (20 %), and Alajuela (10 %). At the cantonal level, San José (19 %), Liberia (12 %), and Heredia (5 %) stood out. On the other hand, the main departments of residence in Nicaragua were Rivas (6 %), Managua (5 %), and Masaya (4 %).

Regarding the type of residence where the surveyed people planned to stay while in Costa Rica, **the most common were rented house/room (57 %), own house (22 %), or provided by an employer (11 %), in their own vehicle (8 %), and 2 % indicated another type of residence**

Map 2. Persons surveyed at official border posts, by canton (in Costa Rica) or department (in Nicaragua) of usual residence (n=193).



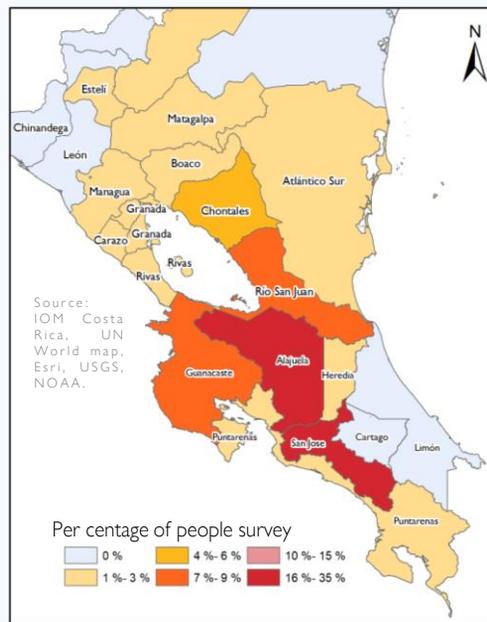
Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Map 3 shows the places of residence of the 121 people surveyed at the unofficial border crossings at Paso Rojo, Santa Cecilia and Mexico de Upala, de Costa Rica.

Of the total number of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings, **69 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence and 31 per cent indicated Nicaragua**; with the main provinces of residence in Costa Rica are San Jose (35 %), Alajuela (22 %) and Guanacaste (8%). At the cantonal level, San José (31 %), Los Chiles (7 %), and Upala (5 %) stood out. Additionally, the main departments of residence in Nicaragua were Río San Juan (9 %), Chontales (4 %), and Atlántico Sur (4 %).

Regarding the type of residence, **the most common are rented house/room (31 %), employment-provided housing (29 %) family house (20 %) and own house (13 %). Seven per cent indicated other as their place of residence.**

Map 3. Persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings, by canton (in Costa Rica) or department (in Nicaragua) of usual residence (n=121)



These maps are solely for illustrative purposes. The boundaries, names, and designations shown on these maps do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

According to the BAA, people crossing the border through **Puente Cabalceta** move more towards the **Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) and Peñas Blancas**. People entering Costa Rica through **Manzano** generally move towards the **urban area of Upala**. It has been identified that, in these locations, access is easy, but the good condition of the roads depends on weather conditions.

Surveys at official border crossings

Needs in Costa Rica

Eighty-seven per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Out of the 13 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 69 per cent mentioned medical assistance, followed by lack of financial resources (42 %), and safe shelter (4 %) (Figure 21)

In addition, nine per cent of the people surveyed stated that they needed information about the possibilities of regular stay in Costa Rica, highlighting the residency card (81 %), the issuance or renewal of a passport (13 %), and a life event certificate (6 %).

Figure 21. Needs in Costa Rica among individuals surveyed at official border posts (n=25)



Note: People could choose more than one option.

Access of minors to health and education services in Costa Rica

Regarding access to health and education for children dependent on the surveyed individuals, it was identified that only two per cent reported having problems accessing health services, and no one indicated facing challenges in accessing education for children.

Discrimination in Costa Rica

Sixteen per cent of the people indicated that they experienced some form of discrimination at some point during their stay in Costa Rica, mainly due to their nationality, while 84 per cent reported not having suffered any discrimination during their stay.

Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Needs Costa Rica

Sixty per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Of the 40 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 67 per cent mentioned assistance with documentation (53 %), followed by financial resources (63 %), safe shelter (11 %) as their main needs (Figure 22).

In addition, 49 per cent of those surveyed expressed needing more information about the possibilities of regular permanence in Costa Rica, highlighting asylum requests (34 %), passport issuance or renewal (34 %), work permits (19 %), and residence ID cards (13 %).

Figure 22. Needs in Costa Rican among individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=74)



Note: People could choose more than one option.

Access of minors to health and education services in Costa Rica

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

Discrimination in Costa Rica

Ten per cent of the people mentioned having been victims of some form of discrimination at some point during their stay in Costa Rica, while 90 percent reported not having experienced any discrimination.



- The administrative records of DGME show that during August, a total of 42,269 migratory movements occurred, representing 51 per cent exits and 49 per cent entries. 89 per cent of movements took place through Peñas Blancas, and the remaining 11 per cent through Las Tablillas. In comparison to July 2024, August saw a 14 per cent decrease in migratory movements.



- Between August 1 and August 31⁷, 2024, there were 4,765 irregular entries (a daily average of 154 people) and 6,066 irregular exits (a daily average of 196 people) at unofficial border crossings. Similarly to regular movements, a 37 percent decreased of irregular movements was identified.

- **Overall, the trends observed in previous months continue:** The surveyed individuals fall within age ranges of the economically active population: 56 per cent of those surveyed at official posts and 70 per cent at unofficial crossings were between 25 and 44 years old.

- **Individuals using unofficial crossings showed higher percentages of not having any formal education (13 %) compared to those using official crossings (3 %).**

- A gender and location-related employment gap continues to be found:
 - At official posts, 87 per cent of surveyed men reported being employed, compared to 63 per cent of women. At unofficial crossings, it was 87 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women.



- Of the total number of people surveyed at official posts with some type of job (82 %), 77 per cent had formal employment, while of the total number of people surveyed at irregular crossings with jobs (75 %), 77 per cent had informal jobs. Among those with jobs surveyed at official crossings, 91 per cent of men and 56 per cent of women had formal employment; whereas at irregular crossings, only 19 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women had formal employment.

- Of the total surveyed individuals working informally, 75 per cent used unofficial crossings while 25 per cent used official crossings.



- In general terms (both at official posts and unofficial crossings), 57 per cent of the people surveyed had economic dependents, mainly in Nicaragua (59 % of all surveyed individuals with economic dependents). This finding, along with the fact that the main reason people move to Costa Rica is to **seek better life opportunities (55 %)**, helps to understand the connection of Nicaraguans seeking better opportunities to support their families in Nicaragua.

⁷ From August 12th to 21st, there was no data collection.



- Fifty-eight per cent of the people surveyed who used unofficial border crossings points had no migratory status, while 48 per cent were somehow regularized. Additionally, 49 per cent of them expressed needing information about the possibilities of regular stay in Costa Rica. This not only highlights the irregular status of a significant portion of the migratory flow but also presents **challenges regarding the needs of migrants in accessing regularization processes.**
- **It is noteworthy that individuals without any type of migratory status (1 %) or with refugee status (6 %) were identified at official border crossing points.** Through direct observation, it was noted that these individuals cross the border irregularly near the migration post and approach the buildings to use buses heading to the interior of the country. This further reflects the highly active binational dynamics of the area.
- The circular flow of Nicaraguans through official border posts shows a greater dynamic of periodic mobility between Nicaragua and Costa Rica: 20 per cent of those surveyed at official posts planned to leave the country the same day, compared to 12 per cent of those surveyed at unofficial border crossings points. **In general terms, people who entered through unofficial crossings showed a greater intention to stay (26 %) permanently compared to those entering through official border posts (4 %).**

Individuals entering Costa Rica through Paso Rojo
Los Chiles, Alajuela, Costa Rica
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