

Monitoring the circular migration flow of Nicaraguan nationals

Cantons of La Cruz, Upala, and Los Chiles September, 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

September 01 – 30, 2024

Official border crossings at Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas

22,227 REGULAR ENTRIES



Entries of Nicaraguan nationals through official border crossings points

Daily average: 741 people

24,519 REGULAR EXITS



Exits of Nicaraguan nationals through official border crossing points

Daily average: 717 people

-Source: DGME², 2024.

MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS THROUGH UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

September 01 – 30, 2024

Unofficial border crossings at La Cruz and Los Chiles

7,157 IRREGULAR ENTRIES



Entries of Nicaraguan nationals through 3 unofficial border crossings points

Daily average: 239 people

7,147 IRREGULAR EXITS



Exits of Nicaraguan nationals through 3 unofficial border crossing points

Daily average: 238 people

Source: IOM, 2024.

FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS OF NICARAGUANS IN COSTA RICA

OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

191 SURVEYED
126 ACCOMPANYING



42 % Female | 58 % Male
9 % Children

Main needs

Economic resources (59 %)
Medical assistance (44 %)
Help with documentation (11 %)



UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

188 SURVEYS AT CROSSINGS
165 ACCOMPANYING



41 % Female | 59 % Male
14 % Children

Main needs

Economic resources (65 %)
Help with documentation (58 %)
Safe shelter (23 %)



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))

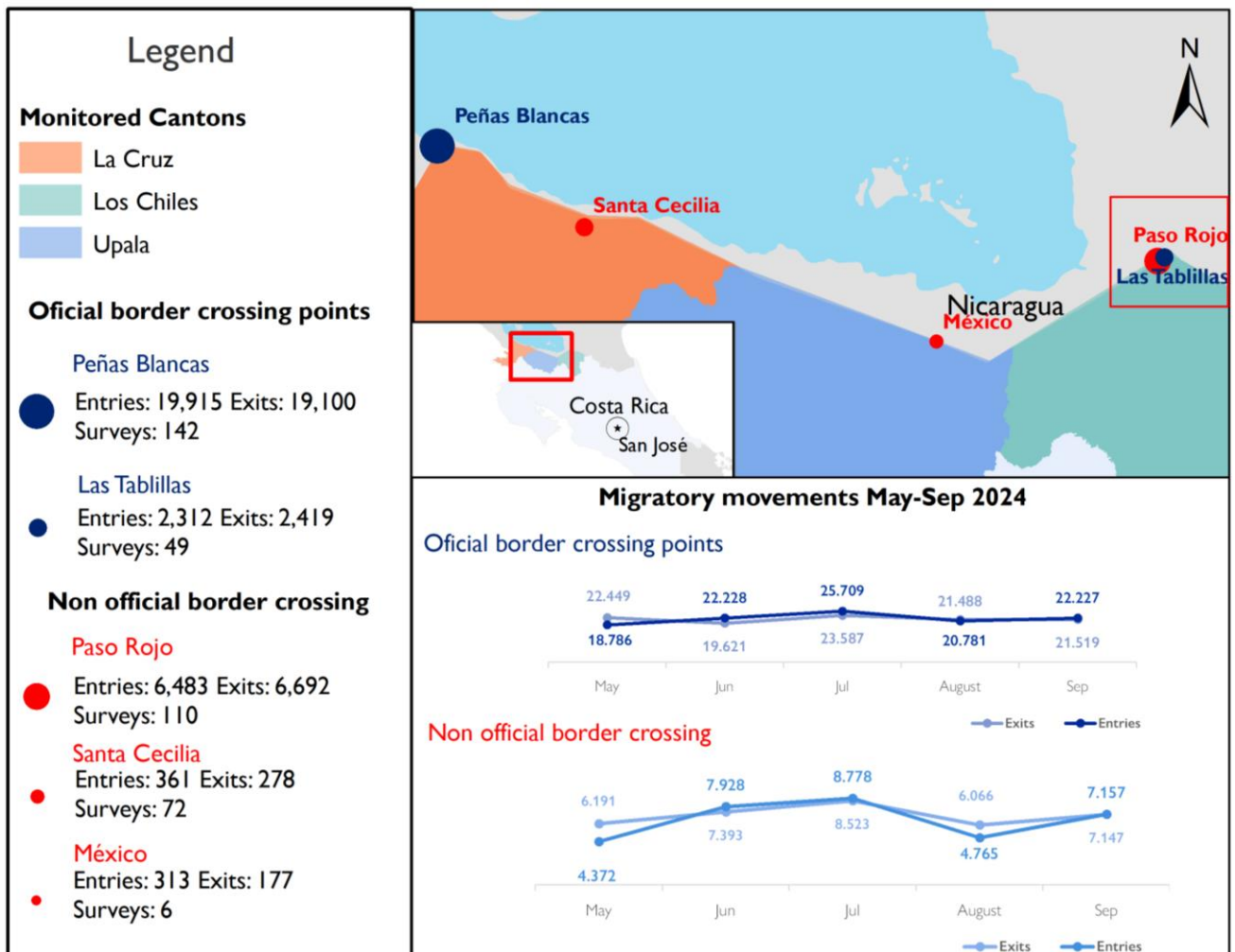
The migratory movements of Nicaraguan people to Costa Rica are a constant trend in Central America, intensified by political, economic, and social factors. **Between January and September 2024, 414,123 regular movements** of people of Nicaraguan nationality were recorded (52 % entries, 48 % exits). In the same period during 2023, 380,315 regular movements were recorded (52 % entries and 48 % exits). **This represented a nine per cent increase in 2024 compared to 2023.** On the other hand, through unofficial crossings points, **68,320 migratory movements** were recorded from May 15 to September 30, 2024, with 52 per cent being exits and 48 per cent entries.

Of the 379 surveys conducted during September, 37 per cent were carried out at the official border post of Peñas Blancas (La Cruz), 29 per cent in Paso Rojo (Los Chiles), 19 per cent in Santa Cecilia (La Cruz), 13 per cent at the official border post of Las Tablillas (Los Chiles), and two per cent in Mexico (Upala). For the Baseline Assessment, seven key informants were interviewed: from Puente de Cabalceta (2 men and one woman) and El Manzano (1 man), and from El Aceituno (2 women and one man).

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

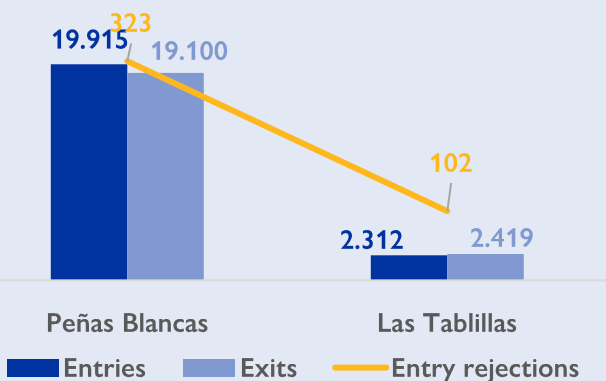
Figure 1 shows the official records of entries, entry rejections, and exits of Nicaraguan individuals in Costa Rica, specifically at the official border crossing points of Peñas Blancas (La Cruz) and Las Tablillas (Los Chiles) ³. In September 2024, 22,227 entries were recorded (90 % at Peñas Blancas and 10 % at Las Tablillas) and 21,519 exits (89 % at Peñas Blancas and 11 % at Las Tablillas).

Regarding entry rejections into Costa Rica, in September 2024, 98 per cent (425 cases) of rejections at the official border crossing points of Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas were of Nicaraguan people. This represented a nine per cent increase compared to August. Of these 425 rejections, 76 per cent occurred at Peñas Blancas (323) and 24 per cent at Las Tablillas (102). Seventy-five per cent of the entry rejections were male.

25 % Female | 75 % Male

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.

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



In comparison to August, September saw a three per cent increase in migratory movements. This three per cent increase is common behavior during September and is associated with the beginning of the coffee harvest season, which mainly involves the displacement of Nicaraguan people to farming areas in the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM).

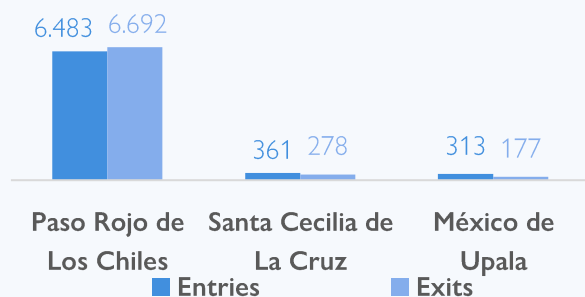
³ Official statistics from the DGME

⁴ General Law on Migration

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 1-30 September 2024. During this period, 7,157 entries were recorded (91 % in Paso Rojo, 5 % in Santa Cecilia, and 4 % in Mexico de Upala) and 7,147 exits in Paso Rojo (94 %), Santa Cecilia (4 %), and Mexico de Upala (2 %). Fifty per cent of the migratory movements were exits and fifty per cent were entries

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



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

- 46 % Female | 54 % Male
- 3 % Elderly adults (65 years or older)
- 12 % Children (17 years or younger)
- 1 % Pregnant Female respondents

The use of different means of transportation by migrants varied considerably: 32 per cent of the migrants surveyed traveled on foot, followed by the use of taxis or cars (24 %) and motorcycles (17 %) and in smaller proportions: 11 per cent traveled by bus, nine per cent by bicycle, and seven per cent by animals. In Mexico of Upala, the main means of transportation was motorcycles (37 %), in Paso Rojo the main mode of travel was on foot (44 %), and in Santa Cecilia, it was taxis or cars (65 %)

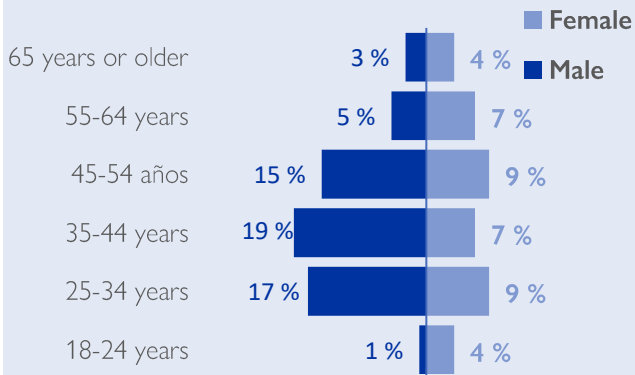
Surveys at official border crossing points

During the period from September 1 to 30, 2024, **191 surveys** were conducted (74 % in Peñas Blancas and 26 % in Las Tablillas) with Nicaraguan nationals, over 17 years of age, at official border crossing points in Costa Rica.

Gender and age

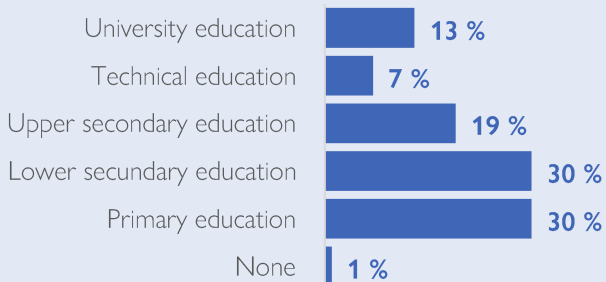


Figure 3. Age and sex of individuals surveyed at official border crossing points (n=191)



Education level

Figure 4. Education level of individuals surveyed at official border crossing points (n=191)



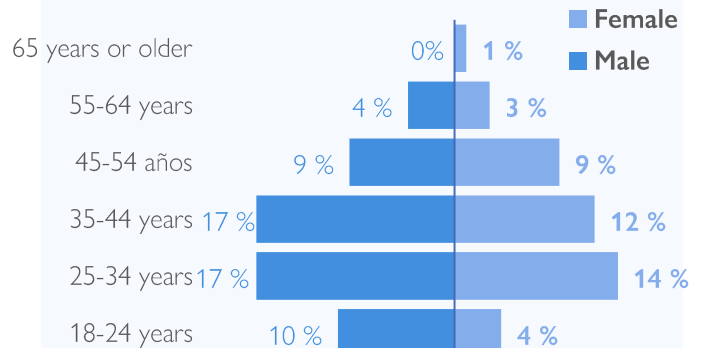
Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

During the period from September 1 to 30, 2024⁶, **188 surveys** were conducted (59 % in Paso Rojo de Los Chiles, 38 % in Santa Cecilia of La Cruz, and 3 % in México de Upala) with Nicaraguan nationals, over 17 years of age.

Gender and age

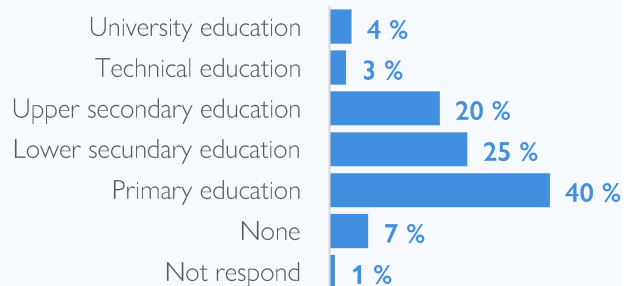


Figure 5. Age and gender of individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=188)



Education level

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



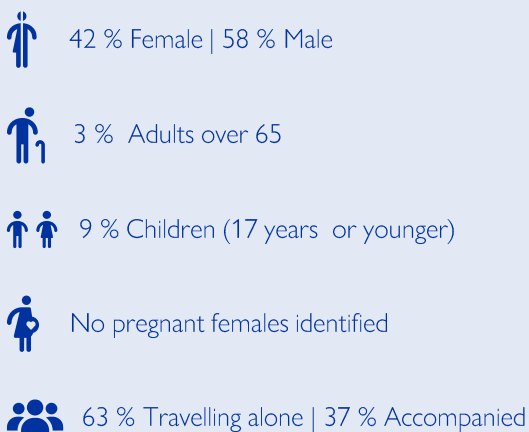
According to the Baseline Assessment (BAA), the composition of the groups of people at the three monitored irregular entry points is different, but they are mainly men. In Puente de Cabalceta (La Cruz), 70 per cent were men and 30 per cent were women, while in El Manzano (Upala) and El Aceituno, the group compositions were 60 per cent men and 40 per cent women. Regarding minors and older adults, at Puente Cabalceta, 15 per cent were minors and five per cent were older adults, and in El Manzano and El Aceituno, 10 per cent were minors and five per cent were older adults.

Surveys at official border crossings points

Travel composition

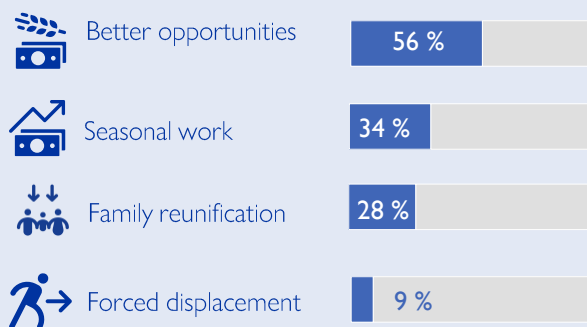
Of the **191 persons surveyed** at official border crossings points, additional information was obtained on **126 travel companions** totaling **317 people** and an average of **3 people per travel group**.

Figure 7. Composition of travel groups surveyed at official border crossings points (n=317)



Motivation for mobility

Figure 8. Reasons for migrating according to individuals surveyed at official border crossings (n=191)



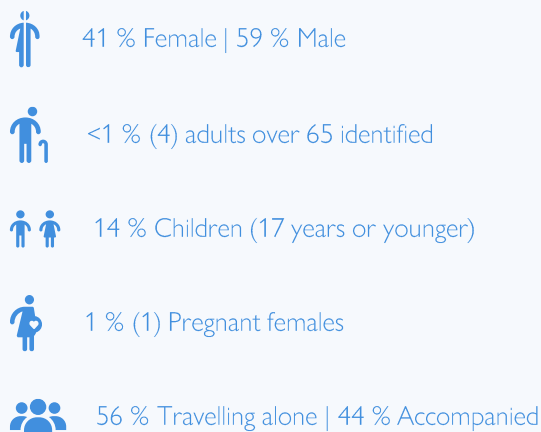
Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option.

Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

Travel composition

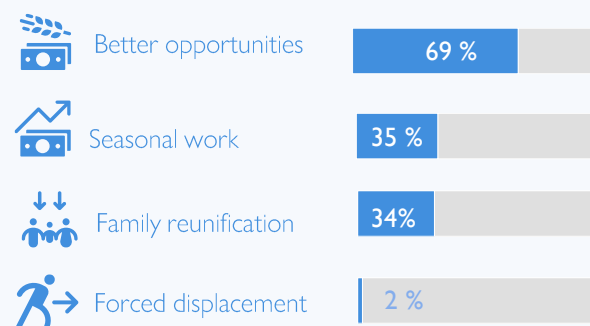
Of the 188 people surveyed at unofficial border crossings points, additional information was obtained on **165 travel companions**, for a total of **353 people** and an average of **3 people per travel trip**.

Figure 9. Composition of travel groups surveyed at unofficial border crossings points (n=353)



Motivation for mobility

Figure 10. Reasons for migrating according to individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=188)



Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option



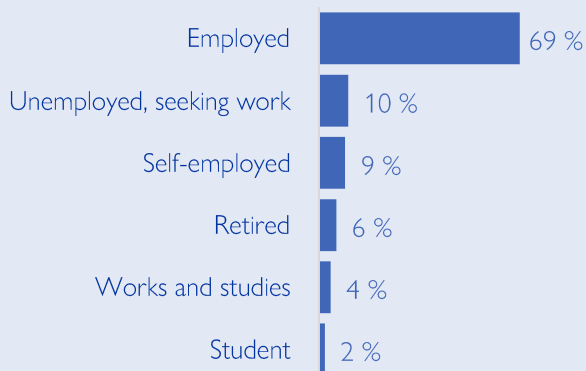
According to the BAA, the reasons for migration to Costa Rica identified for those using the unofficial crossing in Puente de Cabalceta were **family reunification, employment, and medical care**. In the case of El Manzano, the main reasons were **employment, medical care, and education**.

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. **The 3 main occupations identified were in commerce (24 %), construction (21 %), and industry (10 %).**

Figure 11. per centage of persons surveyed at official border points by employment status (n=191)



90 % of the male surveyed were employed.



69 % of the females surveyed were employed.

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

Regarding people who had jobs, **81 per cent indicated having formal employment and 18 per cent stated having informal employment.** The remaining one per cent did not specify.

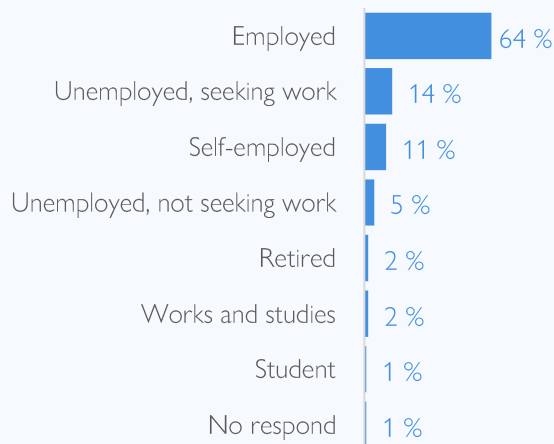
Analyzing the information by sex, women with some form of employment represented **78 per cent in the formal sector, and 20 per cent in the informal sector.** In the case of men, **82 per cent had formal employment and 16 per cent were in the informal sector.** Two per cent of women and two per cent 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 **77 % 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=188)



84 % of the male surveyed were employed.



68 % of the females surveyed were employed

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

In the formality section, **66 per cent indicated they had informal employment and 23 per cent formal employment.** The remaining 11 per cent did not indicate the sector of formality.

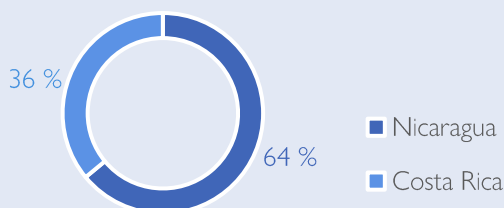
Breaking it down by sex, female with some type of employment represented **66 per cent in the informal sector and 23 per cent in the formal sector.** For male, **66 per cent had informal employment and 24 per cent were employed in the formal sector.** Ten per cent of the female and eleven per cent for the male respondents did not provide an answer on the formality of their employment.

Surveys at official border crossing points

Economic dependents

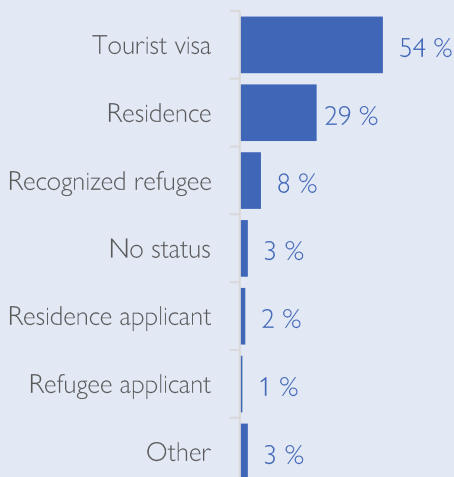
Forty-nine per cent of the people surveyed at official border crossings mentioned having someone economically dependent in Costa Rica or Nicaragua: 64 per cent of the dependents resided primarily in Nicaragua and the remaining 36 per cent in Costa Rica (Graph 13).

Figure 13. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=94)



Migratory status

Figure 14. Migratory status of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=191)

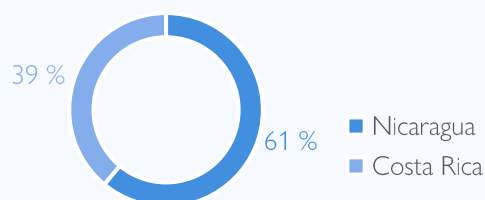


Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

Economic dependents

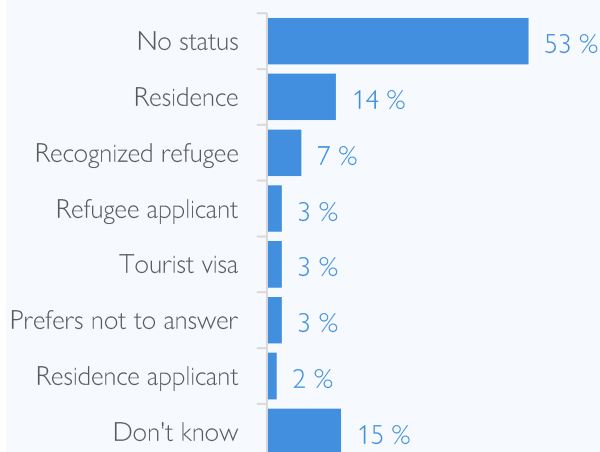
Sixty-nine per cent of Nicaraguan migrant individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings mentioned having an economically dependent person in Costa Rica or Nicaragua: 61 per cent of these dependents resided primarily in Nicaragua, with the remaining 39 per cent in Costa Rica (Graph 15).

Figure 15. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=130)



Migratory status

Figure 16. Migratory status of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=188)⁵



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 **refugees and asylum seekers**. In El Aceituno, it is also common to find people in **irregular status**. In Puente de Cabalceta and El Manzano, **residents using these crossings were also identified**.

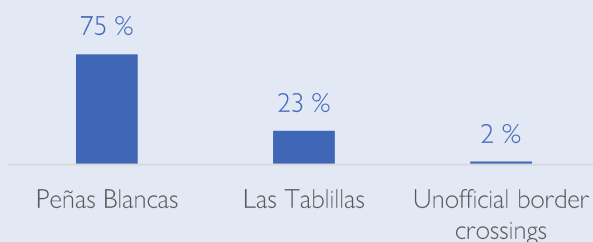
⁵ The category 'Don't know' corresponds to people who indicated they had work permission but didn't know their migratory status.

Surveys at official border crossings points

Entries into Costa Rica

Of the total number of people surveyed at official border posts, **98 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=191)

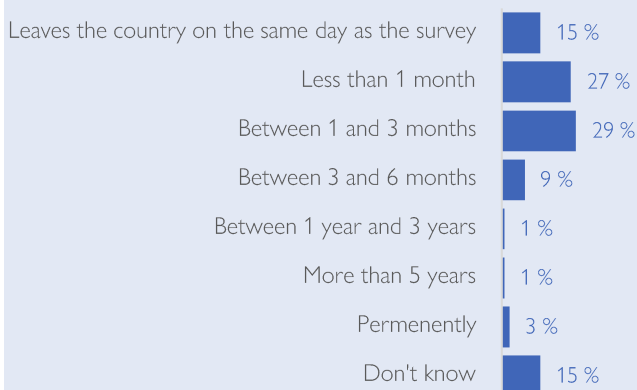


Residence in Costa Rica

According to figure 18, **29 per cent** of the people surveyed indicated that they intend to stay in the country for one to three months, while only three per cent stated that they intend to stay permanently in Costa Rica.

However, it has been identified that there are variations depending on the border crossing point. The main intention of those who used Las Tablillas was to stay for less than a month (33 %), while for those who entered through Peñas Blancas, it was to stay for one to three months (38 %).

Figure 18. per centage of time planned to stay in Costa Rica according to individuals surveyed at official border posts (n=191)

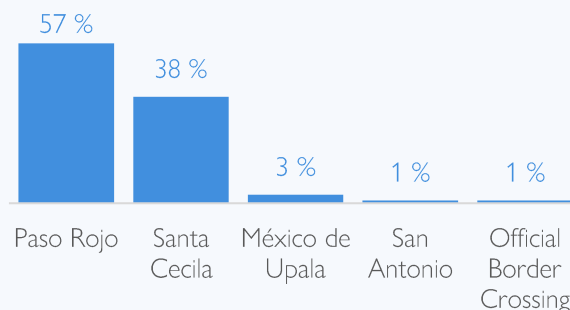


Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

Entries into Costa Rica

Of the total number of people surveyed at unofficial border crossings, **99 per cent** indicated having entered through an unofficial border crossing (Paso Rojo 57 %; Santa Cecilia 38 %; Mexico 2 % and San Antonio 2 %) and one 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=188)



Residence in Costa Rica

According to Figure 20, **50 per cent** of the people indicated that they do not yet know when they will leave Costa Rica. Of the 50 per cent, 28 per cent stated that they do not know when they will leave but hope to do so at some point, while the other 22 per cent mentioned that they do not know if they will leave Costa Rica. It is noteworthy that **14 per cent** indicated they plan to stay permanently in Costa Rica, and 11 per cent indicated they will 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=188)



Surveys at official border posts

Map 2 shows the places of residence of the 191 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, **66 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence and 34 per cent indicated Nicaragua;** main provinces of residence in Costa Rica were San José (32 %), Guanacaste (12 %), and Alajuela (11 %). At the cantonal level, San José (17 %), Liberia (7 %), and Alajuelita (6 %) stood out. On the other hand, the main departments of residence in Nicaragua were Managua (7 %), Rivas (6 %) and Chontales (4 %).

Regarding the type of residence where the surveyed people planned to stay while in Costa Rica, **the most common were rented house/room (64 %), own house (18 %), or provided by an employer (9 %) and nine per cent indicated another type of residence.**

Surveys at unofficial border crossings

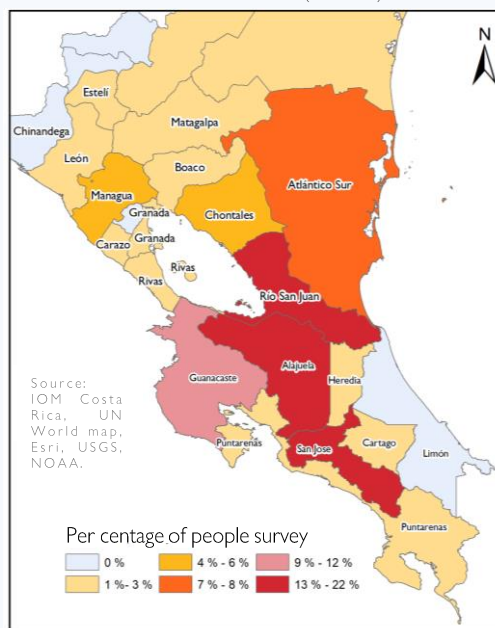
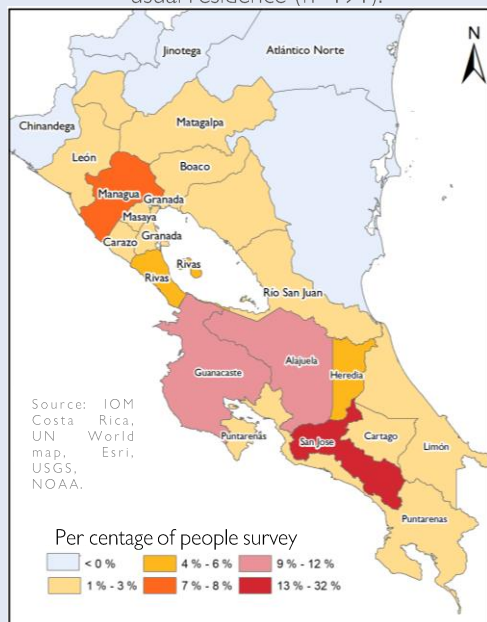
Map 3 shows the places of residence of the 188 people surveyed at the unofficial border crossings at Paso Rojo, Santa Cecilia and Mexico de Upal, de Costa Rica.

Of the total number of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings, **59 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence and 41 per cent indicated Nicaragua;** with the main provinces of residence in Costa Rica are Alajuela (22 %), San Jose (17 %) and Guanacaste (12 %). At the cantonal level, San José (14 %), San Carlos (9 %), and La Cruz (6 %) stood out. Additionally, the main departments of residence in Nicaragua were Río San Juan (16 %), Atlántico Sur (7 %) and Chontales (4 %).

Regarding the type of residence, **the most common are rented house/room (41 %), employment-provided housing (27 %), family house (14 %) and own house (10 %).** Eight 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=188)

Map 2. Persons surveyed at official border posts, by canton (in Costa Rica) or department (in Nicaragua) of usual residence (n=191).



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 tend to move more towards the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) and Peñas Blancas. Those who entered Costa Rica through El Manzano generally moved towards the urban area of Upala, while people using El Aceituno travel to Santa Cecilia de La Cruz. It has been identified that, in these locations, the good condition of the roads depends on the weather conditions

Surveys at official border crossings

Needs in Costa Rica

Eighty-six per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Out of the 14 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 59 per cent mentioned lack of financial resources, followed by medical assistance (44 %) and assistance with documentation (11 %) (Figure 21)

In addition, seven per cent of the people surveyed stated that they needed information about the possibilities of regular stay in Costa Rica, highlighting the residency card (77 %), the issuance or renewal of a passport (15 %), and a life event certificate (8 %).

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 minors dependent on the surveyed individuals, it was identified that only two per cent reported having problems accessing health services, and one per cent indicated facing challenges in accessing education for children.

Discrimination in Costa Rica

Seventeen 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 83 per cent reported not having suffered any discrimination during their stay.

Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Needs Costa Rica

Fifty-nine per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Of the 41 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 65 per cent mentioned assistance with documentation, followed by financial resources (58 %) and safe shelter (23 %) as their main needs (Figure 22).

In addition, 41 per cent of those surveyed expressed needing more information about the possibilities of regular permanence in Costa Rica, residency card (62 %), passport issuance or renewal (35 %), work permits and other (3 %).

Figure 22. Needs in Costa Rican among individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=77)



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, No problems were identified in accessing health services and education services.

Discrimination in Costa Rica

Eleven per cent of the people mentioned having been victims of some form of discrimination at some point during their stay in Costa Rica, while 89 per cent reported not having experienced any discrimination.



- The administrative records of DGME show that during September, a total of 43,746 migratory movements occurred, representing 52 per cent exits and 48 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 August 2024, September increase three percent in migratory movements.
- Between September 1 and 30, 2024, 7,157 irregular entries (an average of 239 people per day) and 7,147 irregular exits (an average of 238 people per day) were recorded at unofficial border crossings. An increase of 32 per cent in irregular movements was identified.

Overall, the trends observed in previous months continue:



- The surveyed individuals fall within the age ranges of the economically active population: 52 % of those surveyed at official posts and 60 per cent at unofficial crossings are between 25 and 44 years old.
- People using unofficial crossings had higher percentages of having no formal education (7 %) compared to those using official posts (1 %).
- A gender and location-related employment gap continues to be found:



- At official posts, 90 per cent of the men surveyed reported being employed, compared to 69 per cent of women. At unofficial crossings, 84 per cent of men and 68 per cent of women were employed.
- Of the total number of people surveyed at official posts with some form of employment (82 %), 81 per cent had formal jobs. Conversely, at irregular crossings, of the total number of people surveyed with work (77 %), 66 per cent had informal jobs. Among those with employment surveyed at official crossings, it is noteworthy that 82 per cent of men and 78 per cent of women had formal employment. However, at irregular crossings, only 24 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women had formal employment.



- Regarding labor issues, it is worth noting that people surveyed at official posts mainly worked in the services sector (commerce) (24 %), while those at unofficial crossings were primarily employed in the primary sector (24 %). The construction sector stands out for both types of crossings (official, 21 %, and unofficial, 24 %).
- In general terms, considering both official posts and unofficial crossings, 59 per cent of the people surveyed had economic dependents, of whom 62 per cent resided in Nicaragua. This finding, along with the fact that 62 per cent of the people surveyed live in Costa Rica and that the main reason for their movement is the search for better life opportunities (61 %), helps to understand the connection of Nicaraguan people seeking to improve their situation to support their families in Nicaragua.



- Fifty-three per cent of the people surveyed who used unofficial border crossings points had no migratory status, while 47 per cent were somehow regularized. Additionally, 41 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 (3 %) or with refugee status (8 %) 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: 15 per cent of those surveyed at official posts planned to leave the country the same day, compared to 11 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 (14 %) permanently compared to those entering through official border posts (3 %).** Additionally, 50 percent of the people surveyed who crossed irregularly do not know exactly how long they will stay in Costa Rica or if they plan to return to Nicaragua. Finally, it is worth mentioning that those who entered through irregular crossings are more likely to depend on their employers for housing **(27%) compared to those who used official crossings (9%).**

Individuals entering Costa Rica
 through Paso Rojo
 Los Chiles, Alajuela, Costa Rica
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IOM National Office in Costa Rica:
 Sigma Business Center, building C
 Montes de Oca, San José, Costa Rica
 Telephone: +506 4052-3500
 Email: oimcostarica@iom.int
 Website: www.costarica.iom.int