

# MONITORING THE CIRCULAR MIGRATION FLOW OF NICARAGUAN NATIONALS

Cantons of La Cruz, Upala, and Los Chiles October, 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:<sup>1</sup>

- 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

October 01 – 31, 2024

Official border crossings at Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas

**21,393 REGULAR ENTRIES**



Entries of Nicaraguan nationals through official border crossings points

Daily average: 690 people

**20,038 REGULAR EXITS**



Exits of Nicaraguan nationals through official border crossing points

Daily average: 646 people

-Source: DGME<sup>2</sup>, 2024.

#### MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS THROUGH UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

October 01 – 31, 2024

Unofficial border crossings at La Cruz, Upala and Los Chiles

**4,851 IRREGULAR ENTRIES**



Entries of Nicaraguan nationals through 3 unofficial border crossings points

Daily average: 156 people

**4,908 IRREGULAR EXITS**



Exits of Nicaraguan nationals through 3 unofficial border crossing points

Daily average: 158 people

Source: IOM, 2024.

### FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS OF NICARAGUANS IN COSTA RICA

#### OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

**169 SURVEYED**  
**53 ACCOMPANYING**



44 % Female | 56 % Male  
8 % Children

##### Main needs

Economic resources (79 %)  
Medical assistance (31 %)  
Safe shelter (13 %)



#### UNOFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS

**137 SURVEYS AT CROSSINGS**  
**185 ACCOMPANYING**



35 % Female | 65 % Male  
12 % Children

##### Main needs

Economic resources (72 %)  
Help with documentation (42 %)  
Safe shelter (17 %)



<sup>1</sup> For more information please visit: [www.dtm.iom.int/methodological-framework](http://www.dtm.iom.int/methodological-framework)

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

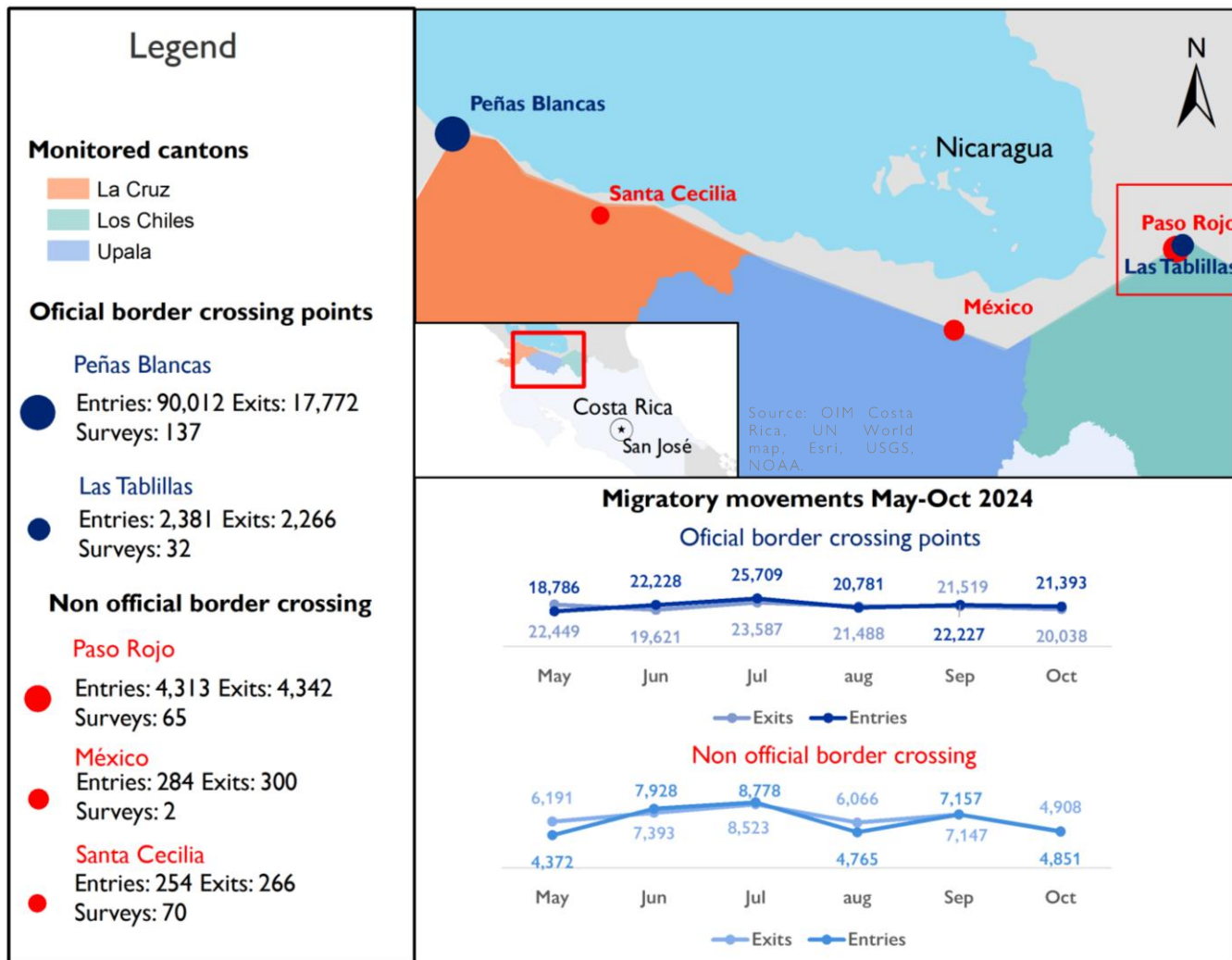
The migratory movements of Nicaraguan people to Costa Rica are a constant trend in Central America, intensified by political, economic, and social factors. **Between January and October 2024, 455,554 regular movements** of people of Nicaraguan nationality were recorded (52 % entries, 48 % exits). In the same period during 2023, 380,315 regular movements were recorded (52 % entries and 48 % exits). **This represented an eight per cent increase in 2024 compared to 2023.** On the other hand, through unofficial crossings points, **77,110 migratory movements** were recorded from May 15 to October 31, 2024, with 51 per cent being exits and 41 per cent entries.

Of the 306 surveys conducted during October, 45 per cent were carried out at the official border post of Peñas Blancas (La Cruz), 23 per cent in Santa Cecilia (La Cruz), 21 in Paso Rojo (Los Chiles), 10 per cent at the official border post of Las Tablillas (Los Chiles), and one per cent in Mexico (Upala). For the Baseline Assessment, five key informants were interviewed: from Puente de Cabalceta (two men and one woman) and El Manzano (one man and one woman). From the 19<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> 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**

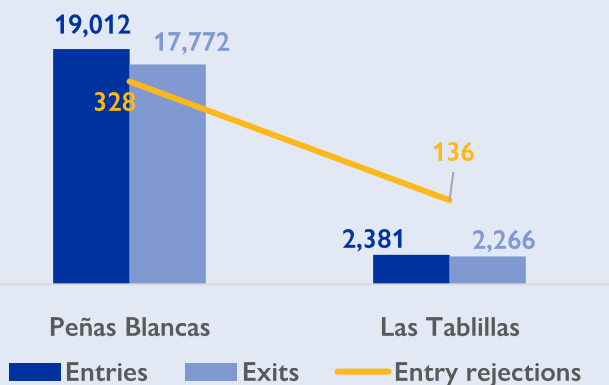
Figure 1 shows the official records of entries, entry rejections, and exits of Nicaraguan individuals in Costa Rica, specifically at the official border crossing points of Peñas Blancas (La Cruz) and Las Tablillas (Los Chiles)<sup>3</sup>. In October 2024, there were 21,393 entries recorded (89 % in Peñas Blancas and 11 % in Las Tablillas) and 20,038 exits (89 % in Peñas Blancas and 11 % in Las Tablillas).

Regarding entry rejections into Costa Rica, in October 2024, 98 per cent (a total of 464 cases) of rejections at the official border points of Peñas Blancas and Las Tablillas were directed at Nicaraguan nationals. This represented an increase of nine per cent compared to September. Of these 464 rejections, 71 per cent occurred in Peñas Blancas (328) and 29 per cent in Las Tablillas (136). Seventy-nine per cent of the entry rejections were males.

 21 % Female | 79 % 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 country<sup>4</sup>.

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

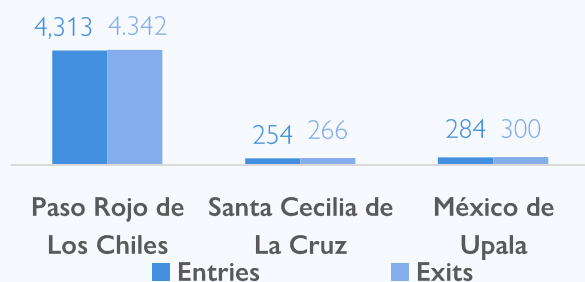


In comparison with September, October saw a decrease of five per cent in migratory movements. Some of the reasons identified by the field team may be associated with people waiting until November to mobilize due to the peak harvest season for crops like coffee, as well as some job opportunities in Nicaragua, such as the opening of a mine in Jinotega, in northern Nicaragua.





**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 01-31 October 2024<sup>5</sup>. In this period, 4,851 entries were recorded (89 % in Paso Rojo, 7 % in Santa Cecilia, and 4 % in México de Upala) and 4,908 exits in Paso Rojo (89 %), México (6 %), and Santa Cecilia (5 %). Fifty-one per cent of the migratory movements were exits, and forty-nine per cent were entries.

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



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

-  47 % Female | 53 % Male
-  3 % Elderly adults (65 years or older)
-  12 % Children (17 years or younger)
-  41 people in a period of pregnancy or lactation

The use of different means of transportation by migrants varied considerably. Thirty per cent of migrants traveled on foot, followed by the use of motorcycles (22 %), taxis or cars (22 %), and bicycles (16 %). In smaller proportions, seven per cent traveled by bus, and three per cent by animal. In México de Upala, the primary means of transportation was motorcycles (39 %), in Paso Rojo the main mode was on foot (42 %), and in Santa Cecilia it was taxis or cars (27 %).

<sup>3</sup> Official statistics from the DGME

<sup>4</sup> General Law on Migration

<sup>5</sup> From October 19th to 27th, there was no data collection.

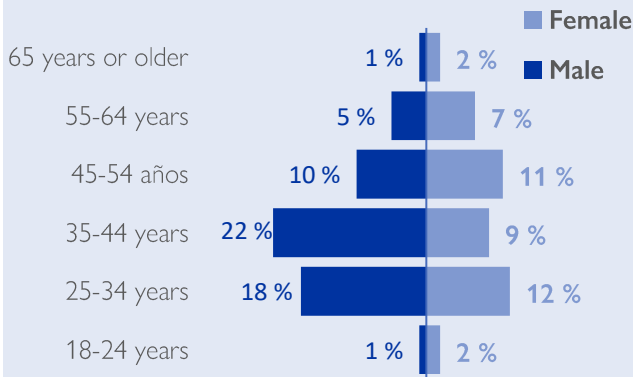
**Surveys at official border crossing points**

During the period from October 01 to 31, 2024, **169 surveys** were conducted <sup>6</sup> (81 % in Peñas Blancas and 19 % in Las Tablillas) with Nicaraguan nationals, over 17 years of age, at official border crossing points in Costa Rica.

**Sex and age**

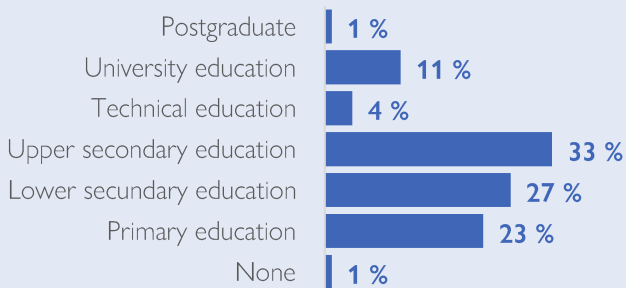


Figure 3. Age and sex of individuals surveyed at official border crossing points (n=169)



**Education level**

Figure 4. Education level of individuals surveyed at official border crossing points (n=169)



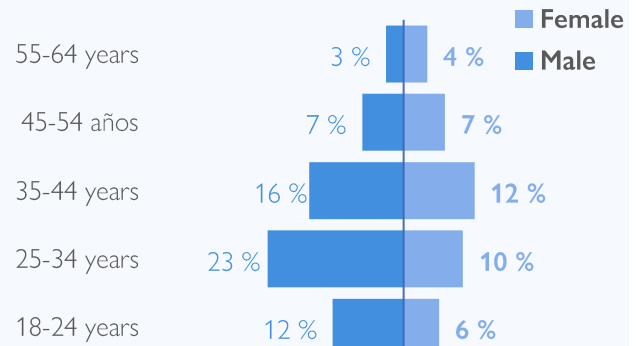
**Surveys at unofficial border crossings points**

During the period from October 01 to 30, 2024<sup>7</sup>, **137 surveys** were conducted (51 % Santa Cecilia of La Cruz, 47 in Paso Rojo of Los Chiles and 2 % in México de Upala) with Nicaraguan nationals, over 17 years of age.

**Sex and age**

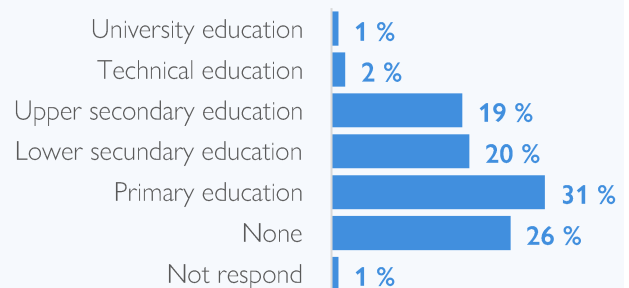


Figure 5. Age and sex of individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=137)



**Education level**

Figure 6. Education level of individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=137)



According to the Baseline Assessment (BAA), the composition of groups at the two monitored irregular entry points is different, but they are mainly men. At Puente de Cabalceta (La Cruz), seventy per cent were men and thirty per cent women, while at El Manzano (Upala), the composition was sixty per cent men and forty per cent women. Regarding minors and elderly individuals, Puente Cabalceta had fifteen per cent minors and five per cent elderly, and at El Manzano, ten per cent were minors and five per cent were elderly.

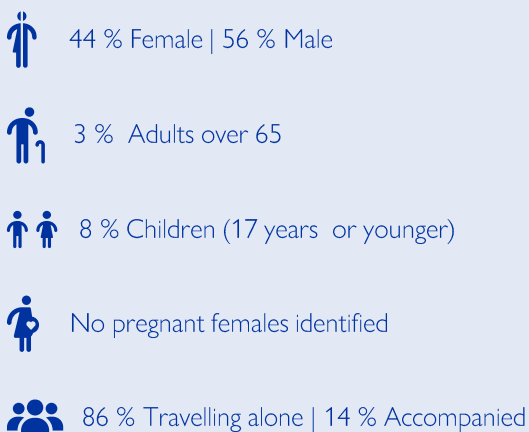
<sup>6</sup> and <sup>7</sup> From October 19th to 27th, there was no data collection.

**Surveys at official border crossings points**

**Travel composition**

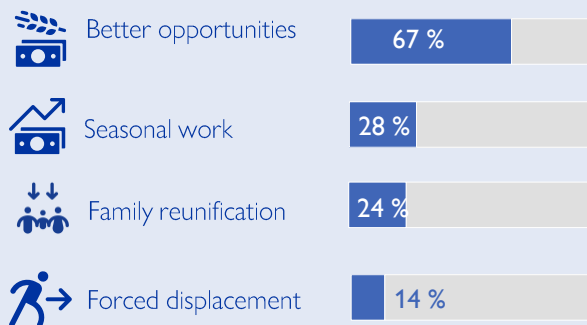
Of the **169 persons surveyed** at official border crossings points, additional information was obtained on **53 travel companions** totaling **222 people** and an average of **3 people per travel group**.

Figure 7. Composition of travel groups surveyed at official border crossings points (n=222)



**Motivation for mobility**

Figure 8. Reasons for migrating according to individuals surveyed at official border crossings (n=169)



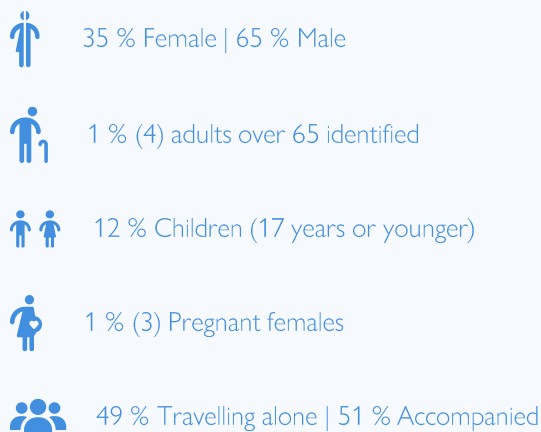
Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option.

**Surveys at unofficial border crossings points**

**Travel composition**

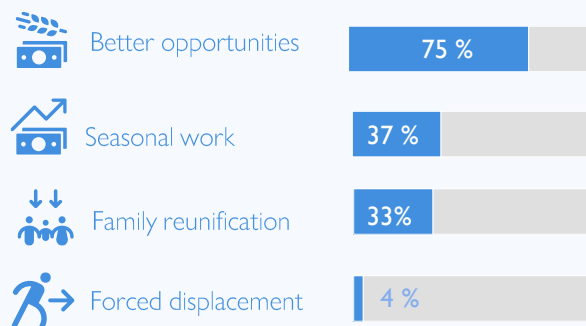
Of the 137 people surveyed at unofficial border crossings points, additional information was obtained on **185 travel companions**, for a total of **322 people** and an average of **4 people per travel trip**.

Figure 9. Composition of travel groups surveyed at unofficial border crossings points (n=322)



**Motivation for mobility**

Figure 10. Reasons for migrating according to individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=137)



Note: Individuals surveyed could choose more than one option



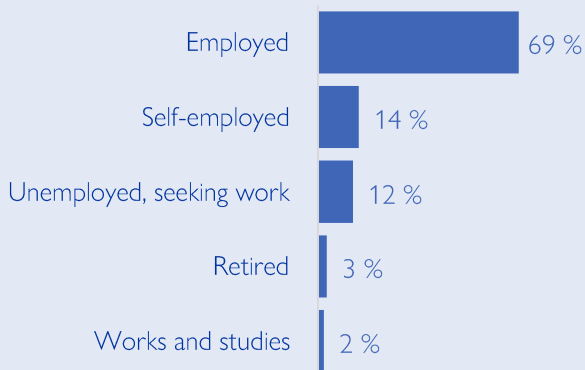
According to the BAA, the main needs for movement towards Costa Rica through Puente de Cabalceta and El Manzano are employment, medical care, and education.

### Surveys at official border crossings points

#### Employment status

The employment status of those surveyed at official border points (Figure 11) shows that **85 per cent had some type of employment**, which could include employment, self-employment, or work in combination with study. **The main occupations identified were in commerce (16 %), construction (15 %), transport (11 %), public sector (10 %), industry and manufacturing (9 %), and primary sector (8 %).** The remaining 31 per cent was in other sectors.

Figure 11. per centage of persons surveyed at official border points by employment status (n=169)



**94 %** of the male surveyed were employed.



**71 %** of the females surveyed were employed.

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

Regarding people who had jobs, **89 per cent indicated having formal employment and 11 per cent stated having informal employment.**

Analyzing the information by sex, women with some form of employment represented **84 per cent in the formal sector, and 16 per cent in the informal sector.** In the case of men, **91 per cent had formal employment and nine per cent were in the informal sector.**

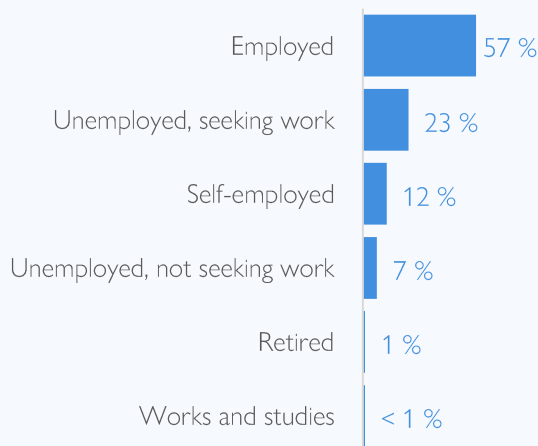
### Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

#### Employment status

The employment status of those surveyed at unofficial border crossings points (Figure 12) reveals that **70 % had some type of work**, which could include employment, self-employment, or work in combination with study.

The main identified occupations were primary sector (35 %), construction (20 %), commerce (16 %), transportation (6 %), and domestic work (5 %), with 18 per cent in other sectors.

Figure 12. per centage of people surveyed at unofficial border crossings by employment situation (n=137)



**83 %** of the male surveyed were employed.



**47 %** of the females surveyed were employed

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

In the formality section, **75 per cent indicated they had informal employment and 18 per cent formal employment.** The remaining seven per cent did not indicate the sector of formality.

Breaking it down by sex, female with some type of employment represented **60 per cent in the informal sector and 28 per cent in the formal sector.** For male, **80 per cent had informal employment and 14 per cent were employed in the formal sector.** Twelve per cent of the female and six per cent for the male respondents did not provide an answer on the formality of their employment.

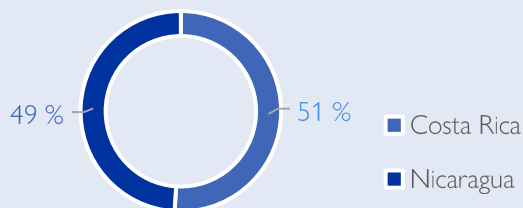


**Surveys at official border crossing points**

**Economic dependents**

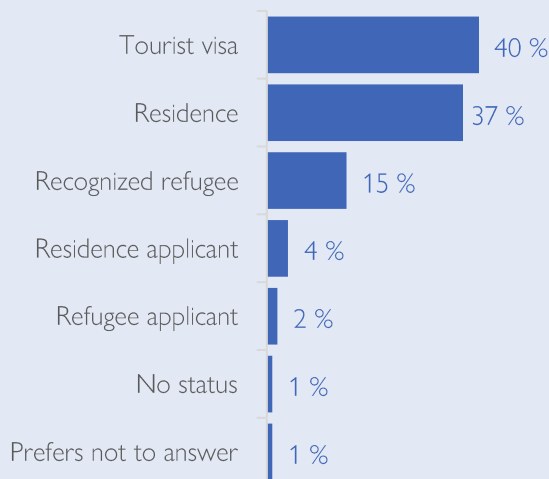
Sixty-one per cent of the people surveyed at official border crossings mentioned having someone economically dependent in Costa Rica or Nicaragua. Fifty-one per cent of the dependents resided primarily in Nicaragua and 49 per cent in Costa Rica (Graph 13).

Figure 13. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=103)



**Migratory status**

Figure 14. Migratory status of persons surveyed at official border crossings (n=169)

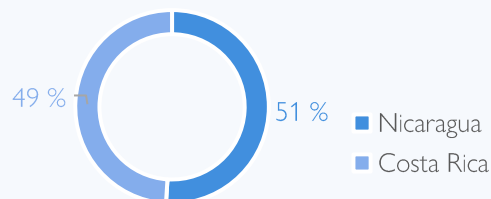


**Surveys at unofficial border crossings points**

**Economic dependents**

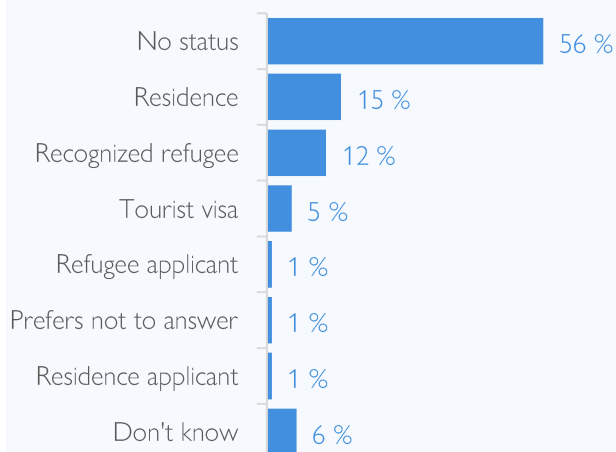
Sixty-six per cent of Nicaraguan migrant individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings mentioned having an economically dependent person in Costa Rica or Nicaragua. Fifty-one per cent of these dependents resided primarily in Nicaragua, with 49 per cent in Costa Rica (Graph 15).

Figure 15. Country of residence of economic dependents of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=90)



**Migratory status**

Figure 16. Migratory status of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=137)<sup>5</sup>



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 mainly refugees, asylum seekers, residents, or without any regular status.

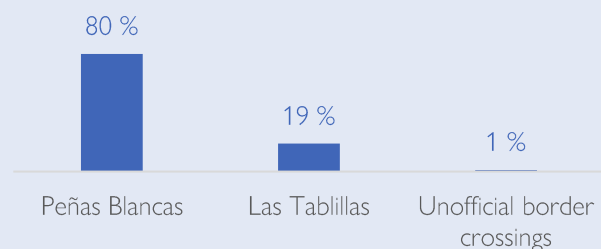
<sup>5</sup> The category 'Don't know' corresponds to people who indicated they had work permission but didn't know their migratory status.

### Surveys at official border crossings points

#### Entries into Costa Rica

Of the total number of people surveyed at official border posts, **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=169)

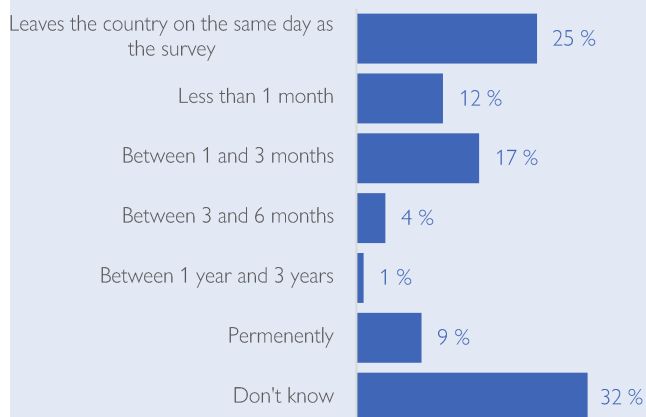


#### Residence in Costa Rica

According to Figure 18, out of the total surveys, **32 per cent** of people indicated that they did not know when they would leave Costa Rica. This group is made up of **29 per cent** who did not mention a departure date and **3 per cent** who indicated that they did not know but do expect to leave at some moment. On the other hand, **nine per cent** indicated they intended to stay permanently in Costa Rica

However, it has been identified that intentions vary depending on the border crossing point. The primary intention of those using Las Tablillas is to leave the same day (28 %), while among those surveyed at Peñas Blancas, 29 per cent did not know when they would leave

Figure 18. per centage of time planned to stay in Costa Rica according to individuals surveyed at official border posts (n=169)

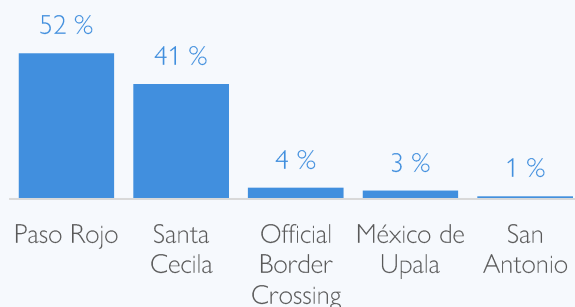


### Surveys at unofficial border crossings points

#### 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 52 %; Santa Cecilia 41 %; Mexico 2 % and San Antonio 1 %) and four per cent in official crossings points. (Figure 19).

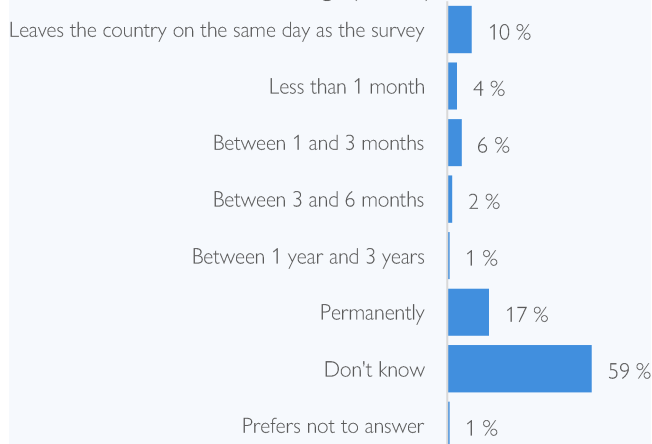
Figure 19. Last point of entry into Costa Rica of persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=137)



#### Residence in Costa Rica

According to Figure 20, Of the total people surveyed, **59 percent** indicated that they did not yet know when they would leave Costa Rica. This group is made up of **36 percent** who indicated that they did not know when they would leave but expect to do so at some point, while the other **23 percent** mentioned not knowing if they would leave Costa Rica. It is noteworthy that **17 per cent** indicated they intended to stay permanently in Costa Rica, and ten per cent indicated they planned to leave Costa Rica on the same day as the survey.

Figure 20. per centage of planned time of stay in Costa Rica according to individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=137)





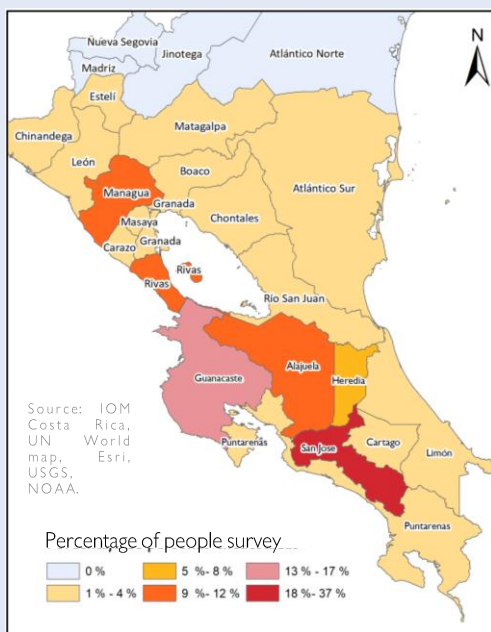
Surveys at official border posts

Map 2 shows the places of residence of the 169 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, **75 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence** (mainly in the provinces of San José: 37 %, Guanacaste: 17 %, and Alajuela: 12 %; at the cantonal level, San José: 28 %, Liberia: 7 %, and Alajuelita: 5 % stood out), **and 25 per cent stated they reside in Nicaragua** (primarily in the departments of Rivas: 11 %, Managua: 6 %, and Granada: 4 %).

Regarding the type of residence where the surveyed people planned to stay while in Costa Rica, **the most common were rented house/room (70 %), own home (14 %), or housing provided by the employer (11 %).** The remaining five per cent 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=169).



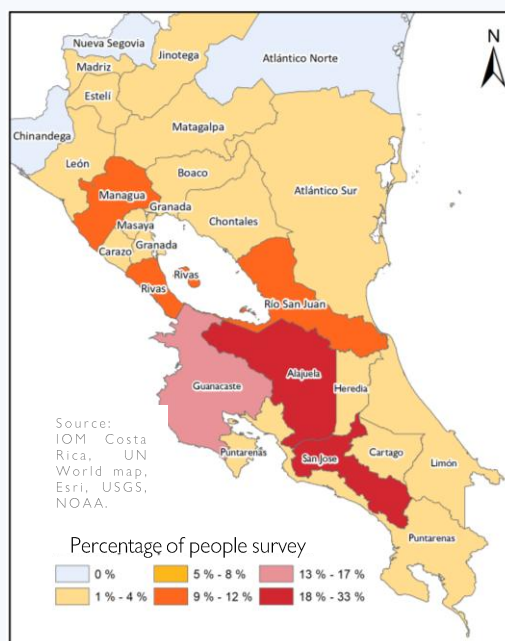
Surveys at unofficial border crossings

Map 3 shows the places of residence of the 137 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, **66 per cent indicated Costa Rica as their country of usual residence** (mainly in the provinces of Alajuela: 33 %, San José: 23 %, and Guanacaste: 14 %; at the cantonal level, San José: 18 %, La Cruz: 10 %, and San Carlos: 9 % stood out), **and 34 per cent stated they habitually reside in Nicaragua** (with the main departments being Río San Juan: 12 %, Rivas: 11 %, and Managua: 9 %).

Regarding the type of residence where surveyed people planned to stay while in Costa Rica, **the most common were rented house/room (34 %), housing provided by their employer (26 %) and staying with a family member or acquaintance (22 %)**

Map 3. Persons surveyed at unofficial border crossings, by canton (in Costa Rica) or department (in Nicaragua) of usual residence (n=137)



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 Peñas Blancas. Those who entered Costa Rica through El Manzano generally traveled towards the urban area of Upala. In October, a decrease was noted in people crossing through El Manzano due to rains that create poor road conditions, making access difficult.

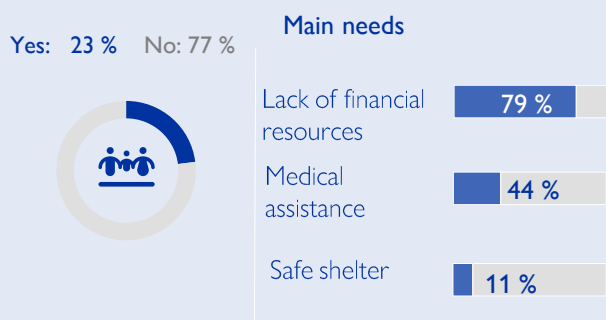
### Surveys at official border crossings

#### Needs in Costa Rica

Seventy-seven per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Out of the 23 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 79 per cent mentioned lack of financial resources, followed by medical assistance (31 %) and safe shelter (13 %) (Figure 21)

In addition, eight per cent of the people surveyed stated that they needed information about the possibilities of regular stay in Costa Rica, highlighting the residency card (65 %), the issuance or renewal of a passport (23 %), and other (12 %).

Figure 21. Needs in Costa Rica among individuals surveyed at official border posts (n=39)



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 found that only one percent reported having problems accessing health services, and no issues were identified in accessing education services.

#### Discrimination in Costa Rica

Nineteen per cent of the people indicated that they experienced some form of discrimination at some point during their stay in Costa Rica, mainly, while 83 per cent reported not having suffered any discrimination during their stay.

### Surveys at unofficial border crossings

#### Needs Costa Rica

Forty-three per cent of respondents indicated that they had no needs in Costa Rica. Of the 57 per cent who indicated having some kind of need, 72 per cent mentioned assistance with documentation, followed by financial resources (72 %) and safe shelter (17 %) as their main needs (Figure 22).

In addition, 46 per cent of those surveyed expressed needing more information about the possibilities of regular permanence in Costa Rica, highlighting access to some regular status to obtain a work permit (30 %), asylum application (28 %), passport renewal (22 %), and residence ID (20 %).

Figure 22. Needs in Costa Rican among individuals surveyed at unofficial border crossings (n=78)



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

Eight per cent of the people mentioned having been victims of some form of discrimination at some point during their stay in Costa Rica, while 92 per cent reported not having experienced any discrimination.



- The administrative records of DGME show that during October there were 41,431 migration movements (a decrease of 5 % compared to September), representing 52 % of entries and 48 % of exits. 89 % of the movements occurred through Peñas Blancas, and the remaining 11 % through Las Tablillas.
- In October 2024, 4,851 irregular entries (a daily average of 156 people) and 4,908 irregular exits (a daily average of 158 people)<sup>8</sup> were recorded at unofficial border crossings: a decrease of 31 per cent in irregular movements compared to September.

Overall, the trends observed in previous months continue:



- The surveyed individuals fall within the age ranges of the economically active population: 61 per cent of the individuals surveyed at both official and unofficial crossings were between 25 and 44 years old.
- People using unofficial crossings had higher percentages of having no formal education (26 %) compared to those using official border crossing (1 %).
- A gender and location-related employment gap continues to be found:



- At official border crossing points, 94 per cent of the men surveyed reported being employed, compared to 71 per cent of women. At unofficial border crossings, 83 per cent of men and 47 per cent of women were employed.
- Of the total number of people surveyed at official posts with some form of employment (85 %), 89 per cent had formal jobs. Conversely, at irregular crossings, of the total number of people surveyed with work (70 %), 75 per cent had informal jobs. Among those with employment surveyed at official border crossings, it is noteworthy that 91 per cent of men and 84 per cent of women had formal employment. However, at irregular border crossings, only 28 per cent of women and 14 per cent of men had formal employment.



- The individuals surveyed at official crossings worked primarily in the service sector (commerce 16 %), while those at unofficial crossings worked in the primary sector (33 %). The construction sector stands out for both types of crossings (official: 15 % and unofficial: 20 %).
- In general terms, considering both official and unofficial crossings, 63 per cent of the surveyed individuals had economic dependents, of whom 50 per cent resided in Nicaragua. This finding, along with the fact that 70 per cent of the surveyed individuals usually reside in Costa Rica and that the main reason for their displacement is the search for better life opportunities (11 %), helps understand the connection of Nicaraguan individuals seeking to improve their situation in order to support their families in Nicaragua.

<sup>8</sup> From October 19th to 27th, there was no data collection.



- Fifty-six per cent of the people surveyed who used unofficial border crossings points had no migratory status, while 44 per cent were somehow regularized. Additionally, 46 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 respondents at irregular border crossings reported having more needs (57 %) compared to those using official border posts (23 %).
- It is noteworthy that individuals without any type of migratory status (1 %) or with refugee status (15 %) 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.
- Individuals who entered through unofficial crossings showed a greater intention to stay permanently (17 %) compared to those entering through official border crossings (9 %). Additionally, 59 per cent of individuals surveyed at irregular crossings were unsure of how long they would stay in Costa Rica or if they planned to return to Nicaragua. This suggests uncertainty about their stay.
- Lastly, it is worth mentioning that individuals who entered through irregular crossings are more dependent on their employers for housing (26 %) compared to those who used official crossings (11 %).

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