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Nicaraguan Migrants in Costa Rica

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Abstract

This document is the executive summary of a detailed document entitled, Nicaraguan Migrants and Poverty in Costa Rica, which was prepared for the World Bank in 2006. The more detailed background paper from which this summary is derived was commissioned as a background paper in preparation for an upcoming poverty mission by the World Bank to Costa Rica. This summary and the larger document from which it comes provides: (1) a general overview of the socioeconomic and health situation of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica and (2) a review of the poverty characteristics of these migrants. The primary data sources for the larger paper were successive recent rounds of the Annual National Household Survey in Costa Rica and the 2000 Census. The more detailed report on which this summary is based also reviews issues of data quality, comparability, and methodological problems with respect to existing information on Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica. As a summary, the document below, does not include detailed citations, which are of course included in the larger report. Readers are thus, referred to the larger report for citations and more detailed information on the data included in this summary.

Introduction

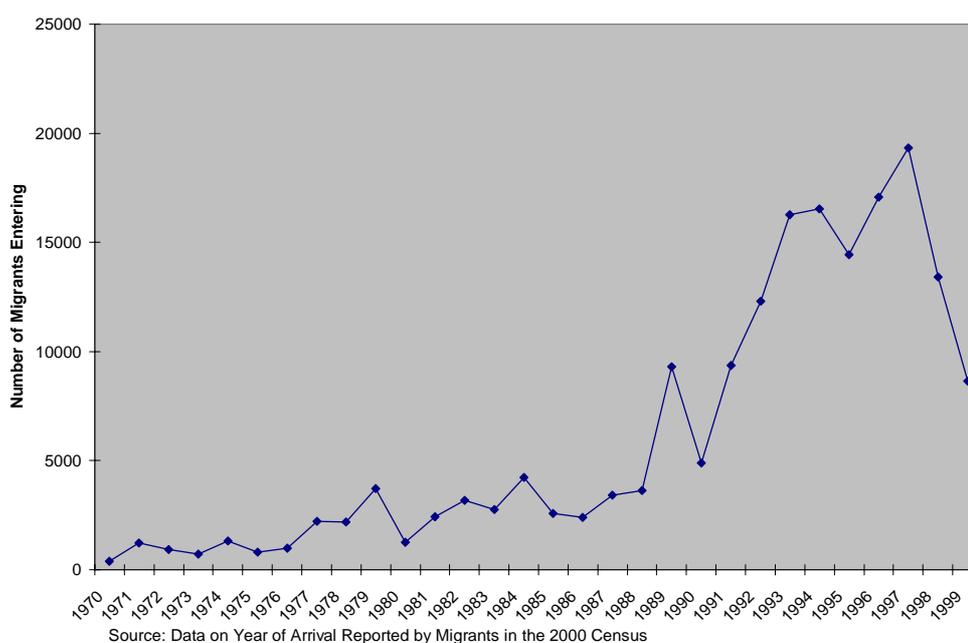
Nicaraguans comprised 6% of the population of Costa Rica in the 2000 national census. They are an important part of national labor force in agriculture, construction, and domestic service and a major subgroup using public health and education services in the country. Nicaraguan migrants are also poorer than the Costa Ricans they live and work beside and their standards of living are below the national average. This summary reviews the general and poverty characteristics of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica. The aim is to better understand why poverty is higher among them. In doing this, we identify the unique poverty characteristics of Nicaraguan migrants as well the insights they offer for better understanding poverty in general in Costa Rica. Please note, this summary derives from a more detailed report prepared for the World Bank, Latin American and Caribbean Region entitled, Nicaraguan Migrants and Poverty in Costa Rica. The views presented here, however, reflect solely those of the author. The primary data sources for this report were the National Household Surveys and the 2000 Census. The more detailed complete report discusses in detail issues of data quality, comparability and methodological problems with respect to existing information on Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica. As a summary, the document below, does not include detailed citations, which are of course included in the detailed report. Readers are referred to the more detailed report for citations.

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General Trends and Basic Characteristics of Nicaraguan Migrants in Costa Rica since 1990

Rate of migration grew in the 1990s and slowed after 2000. An unprecedented number of Nicaraguans entered Costa Rica during the 1990s in search of employment. During this period, the Nicaraguan migrant population grew from under 90,000 to over 200,000 persons or from 2% to 6% of the total population. As many as 20,000 Nicaraguans entered Costa Rica in some years during the 1990s. This era of rapid in-migration by Nicaraguans to Costa Rica had ended by 2000. After 2000, better economic conditions in Nicaragua, among other factors, had slowed in-migration rates and the number of Nicaraguans coming to Costa Rica dropped to around 9,000 persons annually. By 2005, the number of Nicaraguans in the country had stabilized at around 300,000 persons or 7% of the national population.

Figure 1. Nicaraguans by Year of Arrival 1970-2000



Negative macroeconomic conditions in Nicaragua and more positive ones in Costa Rica, resulted in an unprecedented number of Nicaraguans entering Costa Rica to find employment during the 1990s. During this time, over 10,000 Nicaraguans may have entered the country annually. From a poverty perspective, it is important to note that this influx of an unprecedented number of Nicaraguan migrants into Costa Rica during the 1990s coincided with several adverse trends in the latter including: the stalling of poverty rates and advances in education and increased stress on health services

Permanent, seasonal, and irregular migrants. Most Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica, particularly in San José, are long term permanent migrants. However, some

Nicaraguan migrants may be seasonal, temporary, or circular migrants. There may be as many as 100,000 seasonal migrants in Costa Rica at peak harvest times although the actual magnitude of seasonal migration in the country remains unknown. The 2000 census estimate of Nicaraguans in the country (200,000 persons or 6% of the total population) is underestimate by as much as a third due to the omission of seasonal migrants and irregular migrants. The actual number of Nicaraguans in the country during peak agricultural times is likely over 300,000. Illegal or irregular migration is probably also frequent among Nicaraguans, although there is no firm estimate on this either. The number of migrants legalizing their status under Costa Rica's 1998 amnesty measure suggests that more than half of the entire Nicaraguan population captured by the 2000 Census (226,000) could have been irregular.

Spatial concentration. Nicaraguans are spatially concentrated first, in San José (40%) and secondly, (over 30%) in the northern border regions of Huetar North, Chorotega, and Huetar Atlantic. Distinct from the national population which is concentrated in the San José/Central regions, Nicaraguan migrants are more evenly divided between the San José/Central regions and northern border regions. The different geographic regions in which Nicaraguans are located play an important role in determining their labor patterns and living standards.

Figure 2. Distribution of Nicaraguan Population and Costa Ricans by Region, 2000 Census

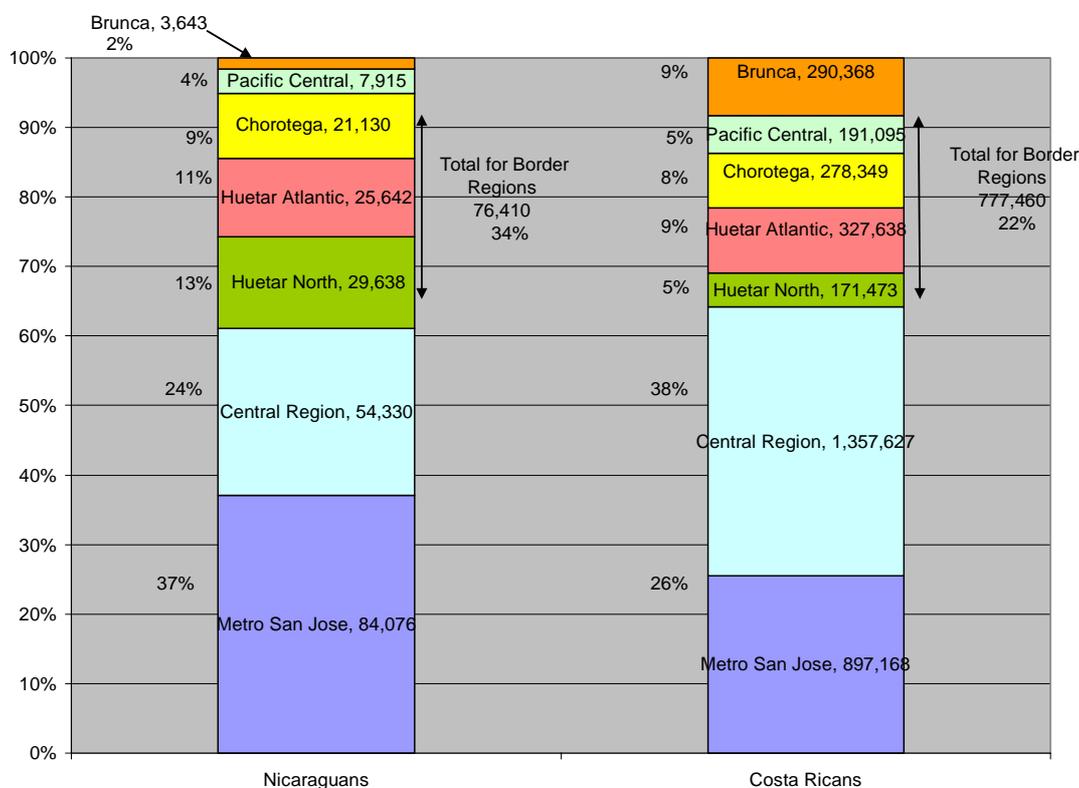
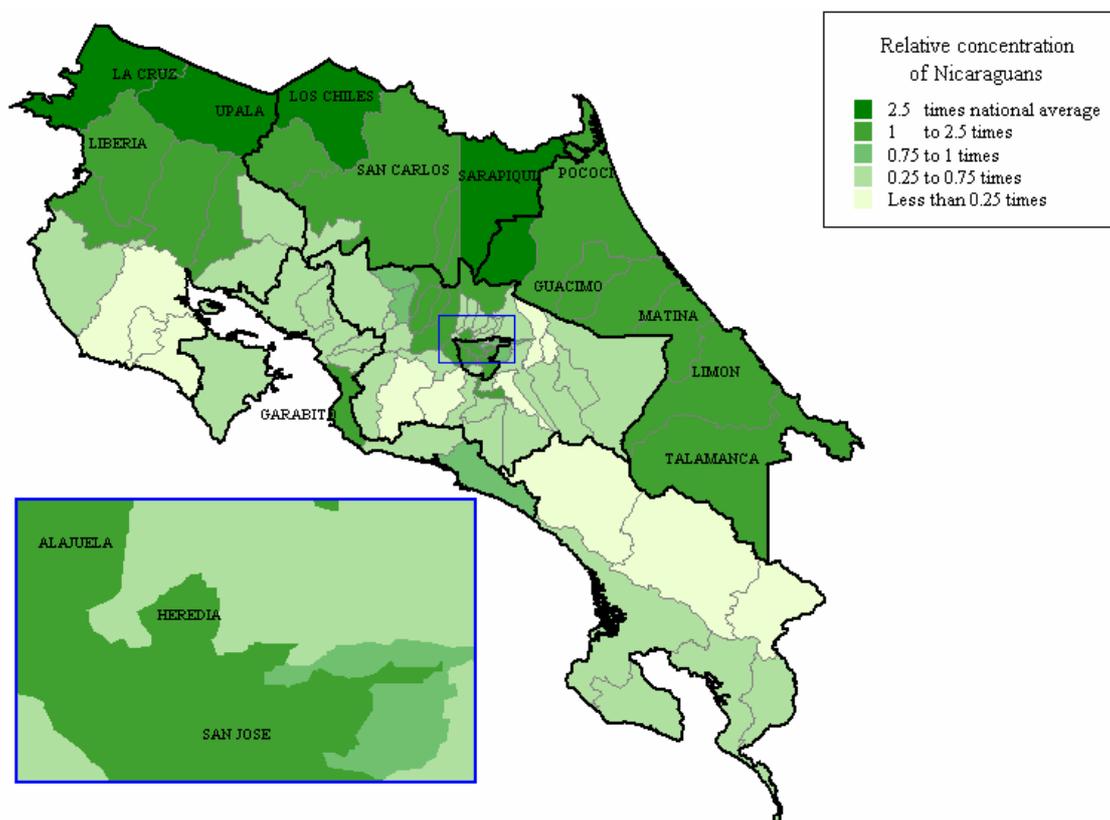


Figure 3. Relative Concentration of Nicaraguan Migrants by Region in Costa Rica and by Municipalities with Highest Concentration, 2000 Census



Map Produced by R. Bonilla and J.C.Vargas, CCP, 2005

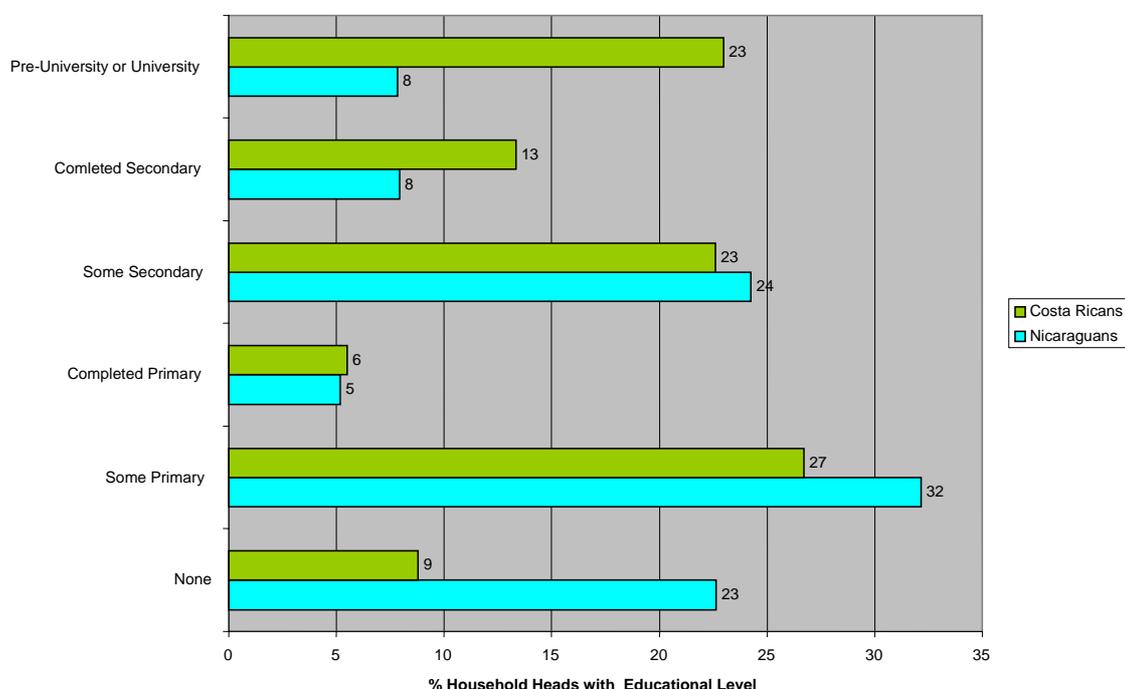
Mainly a younger working age population. Most or 70% of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica are young working age adults between age 20 and 39. Proportionally, Nicaraguans have almost twice as many adults as Costa Ricans in these age groups. Nicaraguan migrants are equally divided between men and women overall. However, there are proportionally more Nicaraguan women in the San José than there are men. This may be because San José has the greatest market for domestic workers.

Larger and more complex households. Nicaraguan households are approximately one person larger (6 persons) than Costa Rican households (5 persons). They consist primarily of family units although ‘complex’ ones with both related and unrelated individuals are more common among Nicaraguans than Costa Ricans. Nicaraguan households are more likely to have couples at their center who are in consensual rather than formal unions which may be associated with less social stability at the family level. Most households headed by Nicaraguans, have some Costa Rican members, generally children born after migrating. Most Nicaraguan headed households in Costa Rica have more children born in Costa Rica than in Nicaragua. Thus, many ‘Nicaraguan’ households in Costa Rica,

defined by having a Nicaraguan household head, are in fact, mixed nationality households due the birth of children while in Costa Rica.

Lower educational levels. Nicaraguan migrants have significantly lower educational levels than Costa Ricans but higher levels than Nicaraguans that remain in Nicaragua. Nicaraguan migrants have on average five years of education versus six years for the average Costa Rican. Most Nicaraguans have only incomplete primary education. There are significant regional educational differentials among Nicaraguan migrants. In San José, Nicaraguan migrants have over 7 years of education on average compared to only 2 years on average for migrants in Huetar North. Consistent with the trend for Costa Ricans, Nicaraguan migrants in San José have higher educational levels than other regions. The extremely low levels of education among Nicaraguans in the northern border areas, particularly Huetar North, and the wider gap between Nicaraguans in San José and elsewhere is a unique feature of this migrant population when compared to the national population. Nicaraguan women have higher levels of completed secondary education than Nicaraguan men do in all regions of the country, which is also a unique feature of this population. Lower educational levels among Nicaraguan migrants, as compared to Costa Ricans, are likely a key factor driving their concentration in lower status and lower paying occupations in Costa Rica. This may be particularly true for male migrants given their lower chance of secondary education.

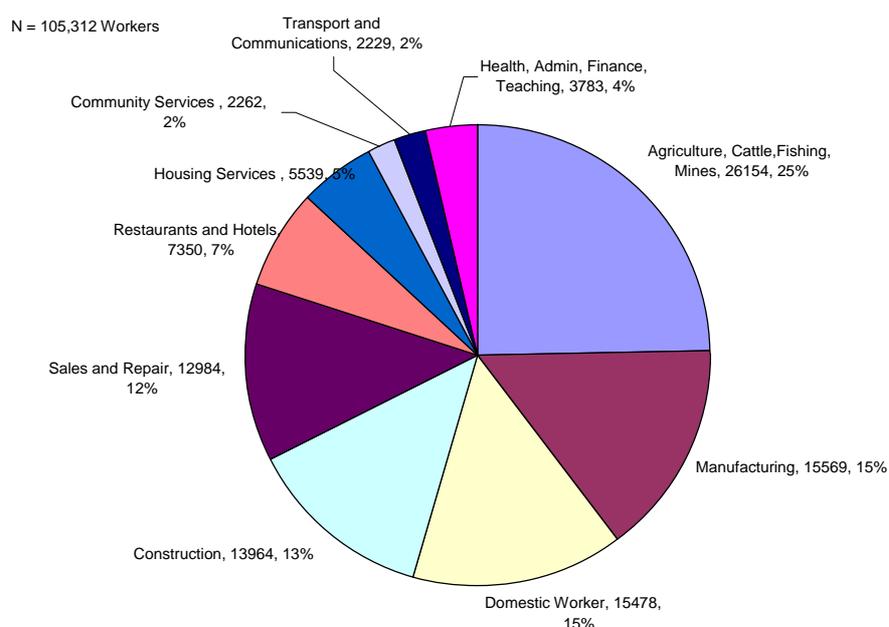
Figure 4. Completed Education for Nicaraguan Migrant Household Heads, 2000 Census



Labor Characteristics of Nicaraguan Migrants

High economic activity, concentration in low status and low paying occupations, and variation in occupation by region. Nicaraguan migrants are more economically active than Costa Ricans. There is a clear pattern of labor market segmentation in Costa Rica. Nicaraguan migrants concentrate in lower status and lower paying occupations. In San José, Nicaraguan men concentrate in construction and women in domestic service. In other regions of the country, Nicaraguans concentrate in agricultural occupations. This labor market segmentation is a major determinant of lower living standards and higher poverty levels among Nicaraguans. Lower educational levels relative to Costa Ricans are the main reason why Nicaraguans concentrate in lower paying occupational sectors in Costa Rica. Lower educational levels also keep Nicaraguans in lower paying jobs within occupational sectors (e.g. in construction they tend to work as *peones*).

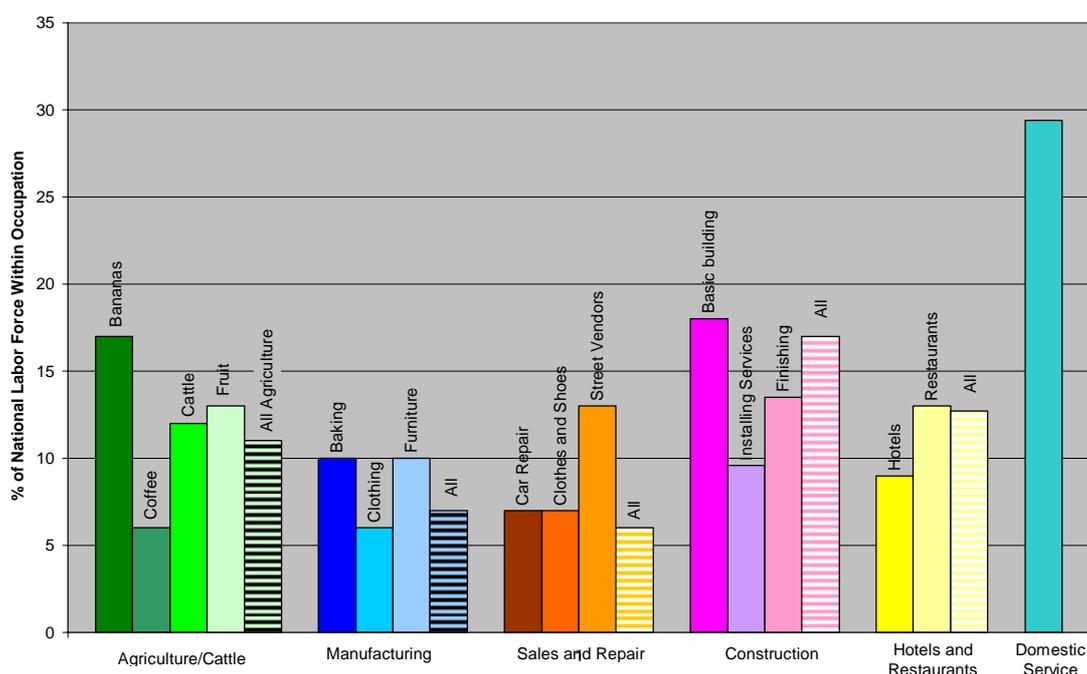
Figure 5. Distribution of Nicaraguan Migrant Labor Force in Costa Rica by Sector, 2000 Census



Importance in the national labor force. Lower relative pay, lower education and irregular status as factors limiting occupational mobility. Poorer working conditions and job stability. Nicaraguans make up a significant proportion of the national labor force in agriculture (10% of the national labor force), construction (20%), and domestic service (30%). Nicaraguans work more hours and are paid less than Costa Ricans even within the same occupation but there is no evidence of formal wage discrimination against Nicaraguan migrants. Rather, lower educational levels relative to Costa Ricans are the main cause of lower wages among Nicaraguans. Lower educational levels depress wages among Nicaraguans by keeping them in lower paying sectors

overall and by keeping them in lower paying jobs within sectors. Nicaraguan migrants also have lower returns to education with respect to wages than Costa Ricans. Although formal wage discrimination is not evident, job discrimination and social stigmatization may also adversely affect wages among Nicaraguans. The irregular status of many Nicaraguan migrants may also contribute to lower wages and concentration in lower status jobs. It may also cause them to accept inadequate working conditions since irregular migrants have no recourse to formal protection or rights enforcement in the workplace. Verbal, informal, labor contracts and those involving ‘middlemen’ may be more frequent among Nicaraguans and their employers resulting in less protection in terms of wage levels, working hours, working conditions, and job security.

Figure 6. Nicaraguans as Percentage of the National Labor Force by Sector, 2000 Census

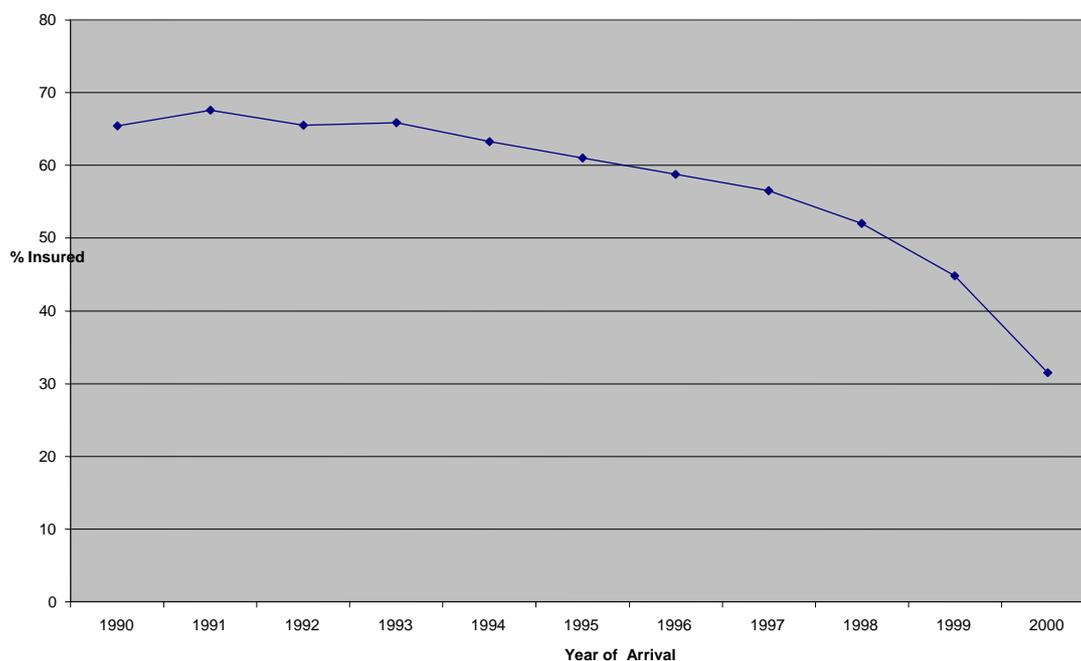


Unemployment levels are higher in occupations in which Nicaraguans concentrate and in San José. Unemployment levels overall are the same for Nicaraguans as Costa Ricans (6%). However, unemployment levels may be higher for Nicaraguan migrants than Costa Ricans within the lower skilled occupations in which Nicaraguans concentrate (construction, domestic service and agriculture). Since two of these occupations with higher unemployment levels (constructions and domestic services) are concentrated in San José, unemployment levels for Nicaraguans in San José are higher than in other areas. The large and rapid influx of Nicaraguan migrants during the 1990s has contributed to the higher levels of unemployment in low skilled occupations by increasing the overall supply of low skilled workers in the country at a time when demand was falling. However, domestic factors have also played a role in driving unemployment up in low-skilled occupations. Underemployment is higher among Nicaraguans (10%) than Costa Ricans (7%).

Health Services in Costa Rica and Nicaraguan Migrants

Proportionally fewer Nicaraguans have health insurance but this may vary by time, poverty level, occupation, and region. Half of all Nicaraguan migrants have national health insurance and half do not. There are probably more uninsured Nicaraguans than insured ones if one takes irregular and seasonal migrants into account. The longer Nicaraguans are in the country the more likely they are to have insurance and most Nicaraguans in the country for periods of several years may eventually be insured. Poverty, occupation, and region of the country affect insurance status. Nicaraguans less likely to have insurance are those who are poor, work in construction, domestic service, or agriculture, and live in Chorotega and Huetar North. Nicaraguans who are insured are more likely to be contributing workers rather than dependent family members. Nicaraguan nationality probably has an independent effect in reducing insurance coverage even when poverty level is controlled for since poverty level and region do not affect rates of insurance coverage for Costa Ricans greatly. More detailed comparison of poor Nicaraguan migrants and poor Costa Ricans is required to confirm this.

Figure 7. Percentage of Nicaraguans with Health Insurance by Year of Arrival or Time in Costa Rica, 2000 Census



Most Nicaraguans probably have access to health services but their use of services may be lower than nationals. Nicaraguans account for 4% of the total demand for

health services in the country and 5% of the total health budget, which is disproportionately less than their overall proportion of the national population in 2000 (6%). Many Nicaraguans probably have access to public health facilities in Costa Rica regardless of their insurance or legal status. However, the quality of care they receive may be lower. Nicaraguans may tend to use local public health clinics (EBAIS) and emergency services in public hospitals more often to get health care since these facilities tend to offer free care regardless of nationality or insurance status. Overall, however, Nicaraguans have lower levels of health service use than Costa Ricans in terms of their number of visits annually.

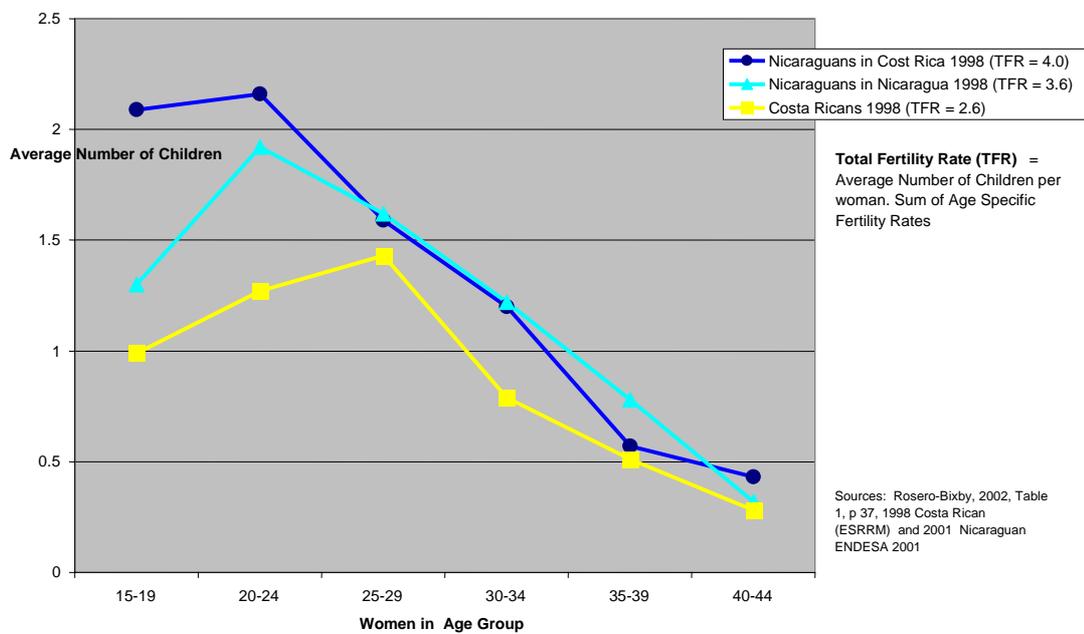
No specific data on general health profile. Possibly similar levels of health to Costa Ricans. Some gaps among Nicaraguan migrant women and children. Health institutions in Costa Rica and vital statistics on illness or death do consistently record place of birth or nationality. As a result, there is no general health data on Nicaraguan migrants as a group. Anecdotal information suggests that there is higher prevalence of infectious diseases associated with poorer living conditions among Nicaraguans and higher prevalence of work-related accidents, particularly among construction workers.

Representative survey data, however, does suggest that health indicators for Nicaraguan women and children are similar to those for Costa Ricans. This implies that levels of health may also be similar between Nicaraguan migrants and Costa Ricans in the general. Similar indicators between Nicaraguan migrant and Costa Rican women and children support the fact that the health sector has been one of the most progressive social sector areas targeting the poor in the country. Investments in health in the country have clearly benefited even marginal populations such as Nicaraguan migrants and have even reached irregular migrants who do not have insurance.

However, indicators for Nicaraguan migrant women and children are lower than those for Costa Ricans with regard to prenatal care, child immunization, and low birth weight outcomes. This is partly consistent with recent analysis, which suggests that poorer women in Costa Rica have lower levels of prenatal care and child immunization. Further research comparing poor Nicaraguan migrant women and poor Costa Ricans could shed more light on whether poor Nicaraguans are particularly likely to do so. Nicaraguan migrant women are unique, though, in having more low birth weight outcomes than Costa Ricans and this is not an effect of poverty. The high proportion of births occurring to very young Nicaraguan migrant women may be the cause of more low birth weight outcomes.

The increase in the number of births to Nicaraguan migrant women makes them an important subpopulation with regard to maternity and child health programs. Higher fertility levels among Nicaraguan women, particularly young Nicaraguan women migrants, also make them a target group for family planning programs. Young Nicaraguan migrant women 15-19 represent a particularly vulnerable group in terms of their health profile due to their relatively high levels of childbearing

Figure 8. Fertility Rates Among Nicaraguan Migrant Women compared to Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans Women in Nicaragua, 2000



Education Services and Nicaraguan Migrants

Lower overall enrollment and regional differences. Official enrollment estimates account only for Nicaraguan born children of Nicaraguan migrants. This is because children born to Nicaraguans in Costa Rica are recorded as Costa Ricans in school data. Enrollment estimates are, therefore, underestimates of actual enrollment among all children associated with Nicaraguan headed households. In any case, Nicaraguan born children of Nicaraguan migrants comprise approximately 4% of the primary and secondary school population overall in Costa Rica. If the Costa Rican born children of Nicaraguan migrants were added to this, the total proportion of primary school students alone that may be associated with Nicaraguan headed households is probably between 9% and 12%.

There are regional differentials in enrollment. Enrollment is highest in San José for both primary and secondary students. It is lowest for primary school students in Huetar North and Brunca, and for secondary school students in Huetar Atlantic and the Central Region outside San José. The fact that enrollment is highest in San José for Nicaraguan born students of primary and secondary school age is consistent with patterns observed in the country as a whole.

Enrollment levels are much lower at both the primary and secondary school level for Nicaraguans than Costa Ricans. 79% versus 95% of Nicaraguan versus Costa Rican primary school age children are enrolled. The difference in secondary school enrollment is greater. While most (70%) of Costa Rican secondary school age children are enrolled, only 45% of Nicaraguan secondary school age children are.

Lower secondary school enrollment among children in poorer households has been characteristic of the country as a whole since the 1990s and is related to decreased government investments at the secondary level. Lower secondary school enrollment among Nicaraguan born children is consistent with this general trend. But, the wide relative gap in the level of secondary school enrollment between Nicaraguan migrant and Costa Rican children (45% versus 70%) suggests that the former have been more strongly affected, possibly because they tend to be poorer.

Minimal impact on education spending. Effects of seasonal migrants. Poor infrastructure in slums. Education as a priority area over health. The quadrupling of students coming from Nicaraguan headed households during the 1990s has increased public spending on education but there are no clear estimates of how much. Calculations derived from projected enrollment based on births to Nicaraguan migrant women suggest that in 2005 costs related to children of Nicaraguan migrants were 12 million US\$ or 1% of total educational spending. The overall financial impact of Nicaraguan migrants on educational expenditures in Costa Rica is, therefore, not very large.

Seasonal migration may cause fluctuations in the numbers of Nicaraguan children attending schools, especially in Huetar North, and may place stress on school facilities in this region. In urban slums such as La Carpio in San José, schools are in bad condition, too small for the student population, and have insufficient teaching resources. The influx of Nicaraguan migrants into such slum areas in the 1990s exacerbated existing infrastructural inadequacies but did not caused them. Inadequate educational infrastructure in urban slums affects Nicaraguan migrants disproportionately since they are more likely to live in them than Costa Ricans.

The effectiveness and human capital impact of educational participation by Nicaraguans in Costa Rica are not fully known. Nicaraguans who migrate to Costa Rica may not improve their educational levels as much as those who go to the US. Since educational level appears to be a key determinant of lower wages, concentration in lower status occupations, and higher poverty levels among Nicaraguans migrants and in the country as a whole, the impact of their educational experiences in Costa Rica are important to assess more completely. Education services may not as effectively reach Nicaraguan migrants as health services in Costa Rica. Education is thus, a more critical area of concern than health in terms of improving their social service access and ultimately economic and poverty outcomes.

The children of Nicaraguan migrants are less likely to complete secondary level education and this represents a way in which 'second generation' Nicaraguan migrants are adding to the supply of less educated workers, wage inequalities, and ultimately lack

of further poverty reduction in Cost Rica. It is therefore, important to increase the opportunities for the children of Nicaraguan migrants to complete their secondary education as a means of reducing wage inequalities and ultimately removing obstacles to further poverty reduction in the country.

Social Acceptance and Social Networks among Nicaraguan Migrants

Nicaraguan migrants are subject to discrimination and stigmatization in Costa Rica but their social networks are strong. Negative perceptions of Nicaraguans are often reflected in the popular media and public opinion in Costa Rica. Discrimination in the workplace and in other settings may frequently occur. Nicaraguan migrants have been linked with an array of negative trends in the country including higher poverty levels, increased infant mortality, and stress on social services. These types of perceptions persist even though existing data do not support them. On the other hand, a recent representative national attitudinal survey suggests that many Costa Ricans also have positive perceptions of Nicaraguan migrants, particularly if they live or work alongside them.

Social exclusion has served to strengthen the development of strong social networks between Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica. These social networks facilitate migration in the first place and aid adaptation and meeting basic needs, such as housing, once in Costa Rica. The growth of social networks among Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica is also transforming Costa Rican society in very tangible ways as is evident in the revitalization of many public parks in San José, which have become gathering places for Nicaraguans on weekends. Social networks may be playing an important role in sustaining flows of migrants from Nicaragua to Costa Rica since 2000.

Poverty and Living Standards among Nicaraguan Migrants

Most Nicaraguan headed households are not poor but they do have a higher prevalence of poverty. There are regional differences and a possible increase in poverty among Nicaraguan headed households since 2000. Poverty line measures indicate that most (69%) of Nicaraguan headed households in Costa Rica are not poor. 30% of Nicaraguan headed households in Costa Rica live in poverty and 9% live in extreme poverty. The prevalence of poverty among Nicaraguan headed households (30%) is 10 percentage points higher than among Costa Rican headed households (20%) and the prevalence of extreme poverty among Nicaraguan headed households (9%) is 4 percentage points higher than among Costa Rican headed households (5%). Poverty levels differ among Nicaraguan headed households by region. They are highest in Chorotega, Huetar North, and Brunca. Nicaraguan households headed by agricultural workers tend to be poorer than those in other occupations. 40% of all Nicaraguan headed households headed by agricultural workers live in poverty. Poverty levels may have increased among Nicaraguan headed households since 2000. Increasing poverty among Nicaraguan headed households since 2000 is not unique but is a symptom of a general

national trend in increasing poverty among already worse off or poorer segments of the population in the country.

Figure 9. Trends in Poverty Prevalence for Nicaraguan Migrants and Costa Ricans, 1991-2004 National Household Surveys

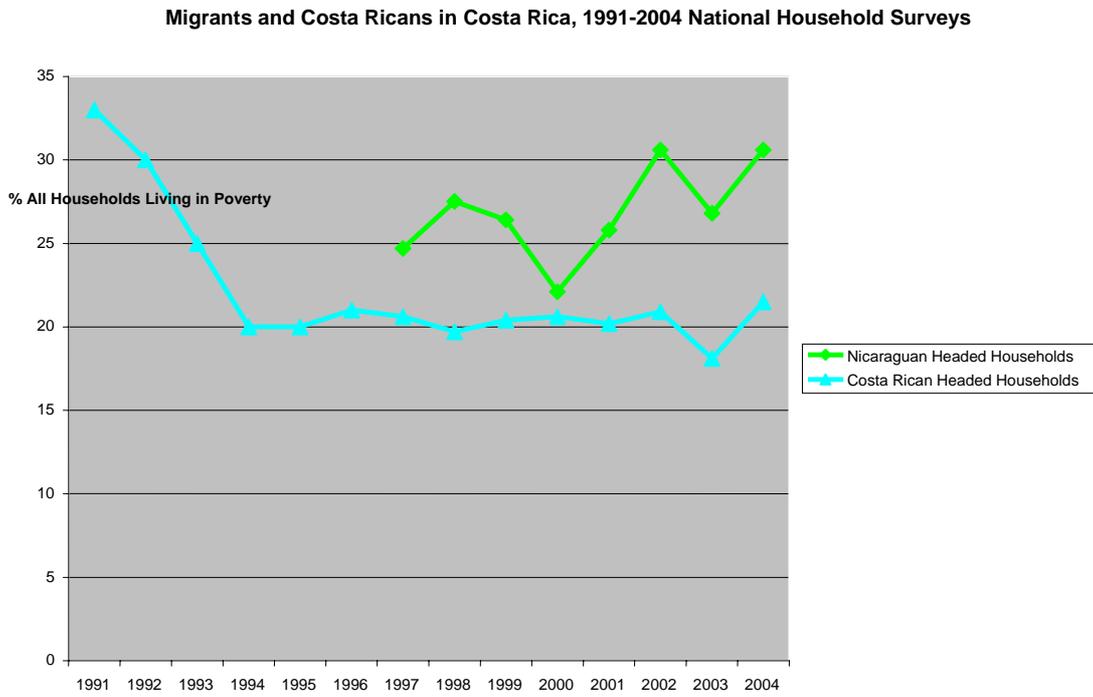


Figure 10. Distribution of Poverty by Geographic Region for Nicaraguan Headed Households in Costa Rica, 2004 National Household Survey

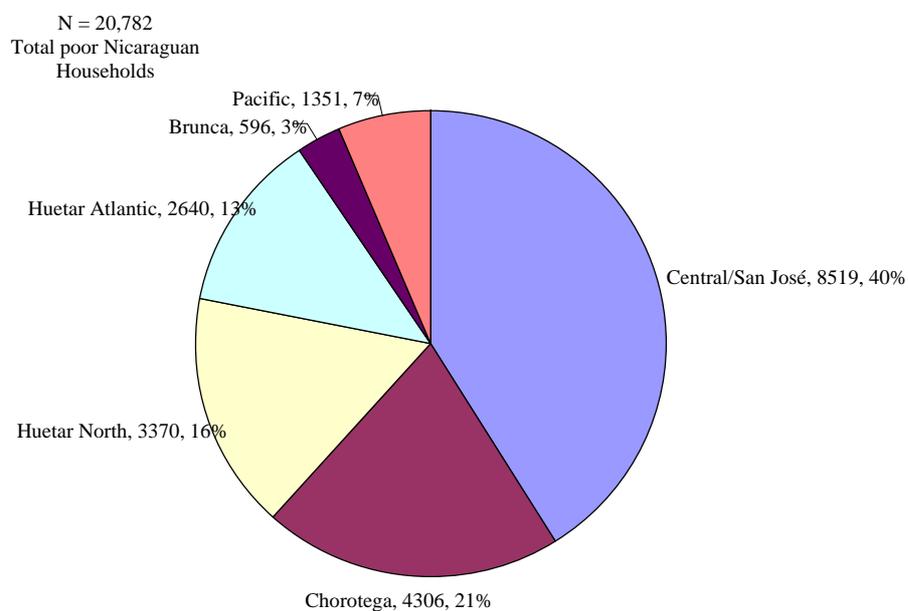
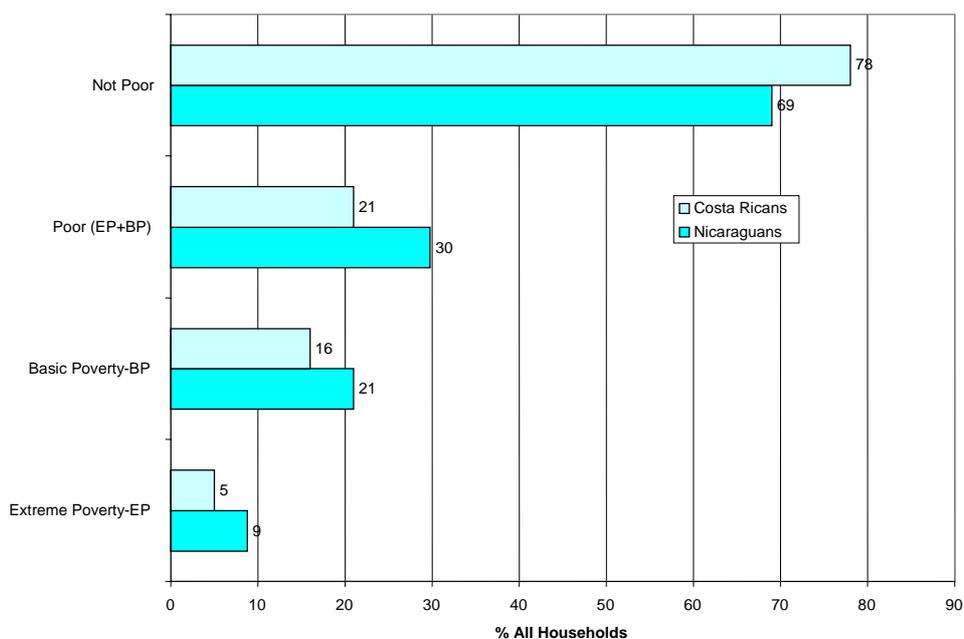


Figure 11. Poverty Prevalence for Nicaraguan and Costa Rican Households, 2004 Household Survey



Living standard indicators show wider gaps. Concentration in slums in San José.

Poverty among Nicaraguans measured in terms of living standards and fulfillment of basic needs reveals a wider gap between Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans than poverty line measures. 40% of Nicaraguans may live in inadequate living conditions compared to only 13% of Costa Ricans. Nicaraguans also have less access to basic utilities and lower ownership of basic durable goods. In San José, Nicaraguans make up a large proportion of slum populations. 20% of Nicaraguans in San José may live in slums.

No direct impact on poverty in Costa Rica but some indirect effects by contributing to wage inequalities.

Poverty levels among Nicaraguans have not directly caused any significant increase or change in overall poverty levels in the country because the size of the poor Nicaraguan migrant population is small. Nicaraguan migrants have indirectly affected overall poverty trends in Costa Rica. The influx of lower educated Nicaraguan migrants that occurred in the 1990s added to an increase in the overall supply of lower educated workers and growing wage inequalities between lower educated and more educated workers. These wage inequalities, in turn, have been a major factor generating static poverty levels in Costa Rica since the mid 1990s. The impacts of Nicaraguan migrants in this regard, though, have been minimal and secondary to domestic changes driving this trend.

Nicaraguan migrants provide a bell weather for the poor in general in Costa Rica. Like average poor households throughout Costa Rica Nicaraguan migrants:

- are concentrated in rural agricultural areas, such as Brunca and Chorotega
- may have had increasing poverty since 2000 as part of a general widening gap between the poor and non-poor in the country
- underline the fact that lower educational levels, particularly at the secondary level, have driven wage inequalities in the country and been a major obstacle to improving poverty levels
- support the observation that social services, particularly in education, may not adequately reach the very poor in Costa Rica

Nicaraguans also reflect specific characteristics that distinguish them from the general poor in Costa Rica:

- Poverty is wider and deeper among Nicaraguan migrants. The general 'pocket' of poverty among agricultural households in Costa Rica is also deeper for Nicaraguan migrants
- Poverty among Nicaraguans in border areas may be a more important phenomenon than it is among the Costa Rican population. Thus, the region of Huetar North, as well as Brunca and Chorotega, are important centers of poverty among Nicaraguan migrants.
- The unique demographic characteristics of Nicaraguan migrants may have particular adverse impacts on their economic outcomes. These include lower educational levels, higher fertility levels, larger household size, and greater prevalence of consensual unions

- Nicaraguan migrants may be disproportionately affected by slum conditions, especially in San José,
- Gaps in health services may exist for Nicaraguan migrants in terms of quality of care, prenatal care, immunization, and low birth weight outcomes
- gaps in school enrollment exist between the children of Nicaraguan migrants and Costa Ricans which can have negative effects on occupational mobility and income
- irregular status among many Nicaraguan migrants may also have unique adverse effects on income
- social discrimination and stigmatization may also have unique adverse effects on their incomes and make their economic struggle for survival more challenging
- the risks and disadvantages inherent in their 'migrant' status also present Nicaraguans with a unique set of challenges with regard to their economic welfare

Government Policy Affecting Nicaraguan Migrants and NGO activity

Policy focused on regulation and control. Costa Rica has no general strategy, integrated policy, or separate government agency for addressing issues related to Nicaraguan migrants, their welfare, or their integration. Specific government policies directed at Nicaraguan migrants have focused mainly on regulating flows into the country or controlling irregular migrants already in the country via amnesty measures. Individual ministries involved in social service provision in education, health, and housing have generally responded to the needs of Nicaraguans not as a separate group but as part of the general population and in an ad hoc way. There has also been no general strategy, or integrated or coordinated response to Nicaraguan migrants by local level authorities or municipalities. The proposed new National General Law on Migration, if enacted, will reinforce and extend the government's traditional focus on controlling and limiting migration flows.

Some moves toward an integrated policy. At the same time, several recent government efforts have moved in the direction of a more integrated social policy towards Nicaraguan migrants. These include a Program on the Improvement of Quality of Life and the Integration of Migrants in Costa Rica undertaken by the Second Vice-President of Costa Rica. In addition, the 2002-2006 National Development Plan includes a specific component addressing the welfare of Nicaraguan migrants and members of the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan government have produced a draft Binational Policy on Migration.

Numerous NGOs provide specialized support and aid to Nicaraguan migrants. These NGOs are mainly active at the local level and focus their activity in those areas of the country where Nicaraguans concentrate, such as San José, Huetar North, Chorotega, and Huetar Atlantic. NGOs working with Nicaraguans have tended to focus largely on providing legal support to migrants in obtaining residency and worker rights.

Communication, if not coordination, between the NGOs is strong and several forums exist to bring NGOs working with Nicaraguans together. One forum, the National Forum on the Migrant Population (*Foro Nacional de Poblacion Migrante*) (FNPM) brings together NGOs and government representatives involved in the provision of social services to migrants. NGOs have been strongly critical of the government's proposed new General Law on Migration on the ground that it violates international standards on migrant and human rights. Instead, they call for the development of an integrated social policy on migrants.

Policy Recommendations

Poverty Reduction Policies

Nicaraguan migrants and poverty in general in Costa Rica

The experience of Nicaraguan migrants underlines several points regarding general policies for poverty reduction in Costa Rica. These include:

- The need to continue to target poor, rural, agricultural areas, such as Brunca and Chorotega
- Although rural areas are a priority, urban slums in San José and other cities in the Central Region are also important target areas in poverty reduction efforts
- The need to address the widening gap and wage differentials between the poor and non-poor, less educated and more educated workers, and workers in lower skilled versus higher skilled occupations
- The need to increase access to and completion of secondary level education as a way of decreasing these wage inequalities and ultimately poverty
- Better targeting social services, particularly in education, so that they more adequately reach marginal groups and the very poor

Unique Needs of Nicaraguan Migrants and Poverty

The main recommendations regarding the special needs of Nicaraguan migrants with respect to poverty reduction in Costa Rica are:

- Targeting Nicaraguan migrants in rural agricultural areas in Huetar North, as well as Chorotega and Brunca and in large slums in San José such as La Carpio
- Improving educational levels

- Nicaraguan migrants seem to be less effectively reached by educational services in Costa Rica than health services. Lower educational levels among Nicaraguan migrants also seem to play a key role in shaping poverty levels among Nicaraguans and in contributing to poverty in Costa Rica as a whole. This makes education services a higher priority for attention than health among Nicaraguan migrants at present
- Education is key area for improving human capital among the first generation of Costa Rican children that have been born to Nicaraguans parents. Increasing educational levels and enrollment among this generation is vital to their integration and essential to improving standards of living among Nicaraguan families over the coming years. It is also important in order to reduce the degree to which Nicaraguan migrants may be adding to the size of the less educated workforce in Costa Rica and ultimately wage differentials and obstacles to further poverty reduction in the country.
- There is regional variation in enrollment patterns, which makes the need for increasing primary school enrollment particularly important in Huetar North and Brunca and for secondary enrollment in Huetar Atlantic and the Central Region outside San José.
- Efforts to combat discrimination and stigmatization of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica are also important. The Ministry of Education's introduction of a primary school curriculum on multiculturalism is an important example of the type of educational efforts that are needed to combat negative attitudes towards Nicaraguans.
- Seasonal migrants present schools with fluctuating enrollment and resource demands, which may particularly challenge schools in northern border areas. Efforts should be made to target areas that are affected most by these types of seasonal migrants and develop strategies and resources for dealing with them
- Needs in health
 - Developing a single or standard registration mechanism for hospitals and health service providers that records nationality, allows comparability of data between service points, and more valid assessment of the overall health profile of Nicaraguan migrants
 - Increasing health insurance levels among Nicaraguans is essential to provide them with guaranteed access to the same quality of health care Costa Ricans receive. It also important in terms of reducing the 'invisible population' of Nicaraguans who use public health services but may not contribute to the social security system. Public campaigns to raise social security affiliation rates among Nicaraguan migrants may be useful in this context.

- Nicaraguans need to be more fully integrated into existing primary care programs and perhaps be the target of specialized outreach programs in:
 - general maternal and child health
 - family planning
 - prenatal care
 - child immunization
- There is also a need to assess the need for preventative programs among Nicaraguans aimed at work-related accidents
- Given potentially high rates of transmission of infectious disease among Nicaraguan migrants, there may be a need for specialized education programs addressing sanitation and prevention in this area
- Increasing occupational mobility among Nicaraguans
 - Efforts to reduce poverty among Nicaraguans and as well as enhance their human development indicators, need to directly confront their concentration in low status low-paying occupations such as domestic service, construction and agriculture. Formal government policies like the seasonal workers card, which limited workers to agricultural work or construction, have actually reinforced this labor market segmentation rather than diminish it.
 - Occupational mobility and its poverty benefits may be best achieved for Nicaraguan migrants by improving their educational levels and those of their children. This means increasing secondary school enrollment among the children of Nicaraguan migrants and providing training and educational opportunities for older migrants, particularly male migrants who may be less likely to have secondary education than women migrants.
 - Increasing educational and occupational mobility among Nicaraguans presents a challenge in several regards. Nicaraguans moving into higher status jobs mean more competition with national workers. It may also create a shortage in key areas such as domestic service or agricultural exports in which Nicaraguans have traditionally played an important role. This in turn may contribute further to flows of unskilled labor from Nicaragua and elsewhere to Costa Rica.
 - There are ways in which these challenges may be dealt with. Efforts could be made to encourage training in higher skilled occupational areas where the labor force is expanding rapidly in Costa Rica, such as in tourism, or in new areas such as the development of ethnic products (food, restaurants, entertainment) the demand for which is generated by migrants or Nicaraguans, themselves.

- **Special Groups**

Several ‘vulnerable’ subgroups within the Nicaraguan population exist in relation to poverty and welfare indicators. These include:

- Young Nicaraguan women migrants age 15 to 19.
- Agricultural workers.
- Seasonal migrants
- Nicaraguan migrants who work under informal, verbal, or middleman contracts
- Irregular migrants.

General Social Policy

Develop an integrated policy on Nicaraguan Migrants

The Costa Rican government has no overall policy or strategy that addresses Nicaraguan migrants. Given the size, economic importance, higher poverty levels, and prevalence of permanent migrants among Nicaraguans in the country, developing such a policy is important. The era of large-scale immigration by Nicaraguans into Costa Rica observed in the 1990s had ended by 2000, leaving a significant subpopulation of over 200,000 Nicaraguans in the country. These Nicaraguans need to be recognized and treated as permanent part of social landscape. The Program on the Improvement of Quality of Life and the Integration of Migrants in Costa Rica, undertaken by the office of the Second Vice President of Costa Rica represents a significant step in this direction. This effort should be expanded and could serve as the basis for an over-arching policy on Nicaraguan migrants.

It is important for the Costa Rican government to consider the costs of not developing an integrated national policy on Nicaraguan migrants or rather, continuing in the current situation. The experience of the United States has shown that government approaches that focus solely on migration control as opposed to the social and economic integration of migrant populations can have adverse effects. One of the main consequences of this approach is that it creates a generation of disadvantaged children of migrants who experience “downward assimilation.”

Components of an ‘integrated’ policy

An integrated policy addressing Nicaraguan migrants is one that addresses in a coordinated way the social service needs of Nicaraguans in terms of health, education, and housing as well as undertakes future planning with respect to these needs. It also involves creating mechanisms for communication and coordination between government ministries that touch on the welfare of migrants. This may require creating a special agency or office or revamping existing institutions.

The interagency National Council on National Migration (CNM) is an obvious existing government agency that could be responsible for developing and implementing a national policy on migration. However, the CNM currently only brings together representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Relations, Governance and the Police, Public Security, Labor, and Justice. It does not include the Ministries of Health, Education or Housing. Inclusion of these social service ministries in the CNM would seem critical if the CNM were to serve as the main agency implementing an integrated migration policy.

The National Forum on the Migrant Population (FNPM), which brings NGOs and government agencies together, may also be an important contributor in the process of developing and implementing an integrated strategy. Formal links between the National Forum and CNM are important to develop in this context. Further developing the activities of the FNPM can enhance coordination between NGOs and between NGOs and the government. NGOs to date have played a dynamic role in addressing directly the social and special needs of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica and should continue to do so. However, given the strong focus of many of the NGOs on the legal rights of migrants, there is room for them to expand their activities into other areas.

There are significant differences between Nicaraguan migrants in different regions of the country in terms of their basic characteristics, occupation, and poverty outcomes. Social policies that address them must be sensitive to these regional differences and the regionally distinct needs of Nicaraguan migrants. This means that municipal governments need to be fully involved in any national strategy or policy. Municipalities with high concentrations of Nicaraguans but low resources need to be targeted for special attention.

Changing concepts of national identity

Developing and implementing an effective social policy for Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica requires more than government policy. It requires public support and this may require Costa Ricans to change to some extent their traditional concepts of national identity. In the past, essentialist notions of what constituted 'Costa Rica' and being Costa Rican, have played an important role in the construction of national identity. Essentialist as opposed to multicultural concepts of citizenship have been stronger in Costa Rica due to the fact that it has traditionally been a unique 'island' of democracy, peace, and economic prosperity in the otherwise troubled region of Central America. The significant population of Nicaraguans now in the country presents a challenge to these essentialist concepts of national identity. The effectiveness of government policies to integrate Nicaraguans into Costa Rican society may require a shift in the way Costa Ricans see not only Nicaraguan migrants but also themselves.

Migration Policy

While policies that integrate long term Nicaraguan migrants and their children more effectively into Costa Rican society are important to develop, the issue of migration control will inevitably persist. Nicaraguans continue to come to Costa Rica, will continue to do so in the near future, and will continue to elicit government efforts to regulate these flows. The level of irregular migration among Nicaraguans and the failed outcome of the seasonal worker program (TTE) indicate that migration policies by the Costa Rican government have not generally been effective in controlling or regulating flows from Nicaragua.

Irregular migration from a country is driven by “the clash between attempts to enforce borders by receiving states” and the existence of strong migrant motivations due to the preconditions of: (1) vigorous existing migration networks, (2) demands for low wage labor in the receiving country, and (3) the existence of clear niches for lower-skilled labor in the receiving country due to the movement of domestic labor into more skilled occupations. Costa Rica precisely meets these preconditions in relation to Nicaragua. Moreover, the proximity of Nicaragua to Costa Rica and traditional openness of their borders has probably enhanced general and irregular migration even more. Also, the traditionally high level of seasonal agricultural migration may also intensify levels of overall and irregular migration.

The proposed new General Law on Migration in Costa Rica primarily focuses on keeping government attention centered on “attempts to enforce borders” largely by enhancing border control and directing punitive sanctions against irregular migrants. The proposed new law does not address the preconditions of irregular migration and will likely do nothing to alter the structural probability of it. Moreover, its punitive aspects promise to generate issues and questions regarding human and migrant rights.

Current efforts to develop a Binational Policy on Migration, however, reflect an alternative and possibly more effective approach, which might be more efficient in terms of regulating both legal and irregular flows, dealing with the structural preconditions of irregular flows, and respecting rights. Developing an effective Binational Policy on the Costa Rican side will require the government to acknowledge the importance of Nicaraguan labor in key sectors such as agriculture (especially non-traditional export agriculture, bananas and coffee production), construction, and domestic service. This means granting the type of recognition that business leaders in Costa Rica have given to Nicaraguan labor in terms of openly acknowledging their importance in the national labor force, the quality of the labor they supply, and the ‘work’ ethic that characterizes them. This kind of recognition would lay the basis for developing cooperative mechanisms between ministries of labor in Costa Rica and Nicaragua that could align the demand for types of labor needed by Costa Rica more effectively with the profile of the Nicaraguan migrants who enter the country.

The development of bilateral migration policy approaches between Costa Rica and Nicaragua implies a shift from a national to more ‘transnational’ perspective. A

transnational approach recognizes the higher level global and regional forces that determine migration from Nicaragua, the social networks that sustain and give this migration 'a life of its own' once it is in motion, and the fact that Nicaraguan migrants and continuing migration from Nicaragua are a permanent feature of Costa Rica's economic, demographic, and physical landscape. Binational policy efforts are an important step in accepting and acting from a transnational view. This transnational and binational perspective has begun to gain ground at a local level in frontier regions where a 'Federation of Frontier Communities' (*Federación de Municipios Fronterizos*) has been established between municipal governments on both sides of the border.

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