



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Undocumented migration of Nicaraguan women to Costa Rica:  
principal reasons and strategies used to reach the “Costa Rican” dream.**

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## List of Acronyms

DFID	Department for International Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INAMU	Instituto Nacional de la Mujer. (National Institute of Women)
INEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo (National Institute of Statistics and Census)
IOM	International Organization of Migration
LDC	Least (Lesser) Developed Countries

## **Abstract**

The main objective of this research paper is to determine the reasons and strategies used by Nicaraguan women to immigrate and reside in Costa Rica as undocumented laborers and to understand why this phenomenon occurs.

The methodology techniques were gathering primary data through fieldwork, interviews, and focus group discussions with 30 undocumented Nicaraguan women living in Río Azúl San José de Costa Rica. Secondary data were obtained by reviewing literature and theories. The Push–Pull Theory and Network Theory were chosen to analyze the data collection.

The findings and analyses of data show that the main reasons for women to migrate are the bad living situations that they had in Nicaragua, as well as issues in gender relations, such as intra-household violence, change in the family structure, and family expectations.

The primary strategy used by women to migrate was the connection with migrants already in Costa Rica. They transmitted information about migration strategies, transportation, and documentation (obtaining valid or false permission or passports to cross the border). These networks also communicated information about employment and living conditions in Costa Rica. This information did create high expectations that became the pull factors to relocate. However, decision-making was influenced by family members rather than by women's autonomy.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

[First para. no indentation]

## **Keywords**

Costa Rica, Nicaragua, women migration, documented and undocumented, gender issues, net work theory, push pull theory.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Indication of Problem/Area

"We, Nicaraguan women and men, suffer persecution in Costa Rica. We work clandestinely. Moreover, if they catch us, it is the end! They give us a job, exploit us, abuse us, and pay us as little as they want. We cannot complain because no law protects us. Finding a job where you can work eight hours is not easy. However, if you do find one, it is as a domestic servant, guardian, or banana collector." (Leoncia, in Sandoval 2000:7).

From this woman's words, we can imagine the critical and challenging lives Nicaraguan labour migrants in Costa Rica lead. Leoncia is not the only Nicaraguan in Costa Rica living in this situation, for Nicaraguan migrants are the dominant migrants in Costa Rica. The National Institute of Statistics of Costa Rica indicates that 226,374 Nicaraguans live in Costa Rica (INEC 2000). According to the report, their number constitutes over 76.36% of the total population born in another country (INEC 2000: 4), while in the year 2000, the percentage of Nicaraguan women born in another country and living in Costa Rica was 77% of all migrants (INAMU 2002).

**Table 1**  
**Foreign population residing in Costa Rica by country of nationality (Percentage of total foreigners in Costa Rica)**

Country of origin	1984	2000
Panama	5.33	3.46
United States	6.06	3.21
Salvador	9.83	2.94
Cuba	3.92	**
Jamaica	0.51	*

\* There are no data because are less than 1000 people.

\*\* The publication of the census report of the year 2000 does not include details about how many Cubans are living in Costa Rica.

Source: Olivares 2006: 27, data taken from the National Costa Rican Census reports.

The final report of the Household Study of Nicaraguan women who have immigrated to Costa Rica seeking employment specifies that the average age to emigrate is between 26 and 40 years. This study surveyed a population of 202 families of Nicaraguan migrants in 2001 (Barahona, 2001).

**Table 2**  
**Age group of migrants from Nicaragua to Costa Rica**

Age Group	Gender of immigrant				Total	
	Male		Female			
	Count	perc%	Count	perc%	count	perc%
13-18	2	3.9%	9	3.6%	11	3.7%
<b>19-25</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37.3%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>23.6%</b>
<b>26-40</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>43.1%</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>58.8%</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>56.1%</b>
41-60	8	15.7%	39	15.6%	47	15.6%
61			3	1.20%	3	1.0%
Total	51	100	250	100%	301	100%

*Source:* Final report of the Household Study of Nicaraguan women who have immigrated to Costa Rica. (Barahona, 2001).

Out of the 202 families studied, some 301 family members were currently living outside Nicaragua. Of those, 16.9% were male, and 83% were female. The bias of the sample explains the predominance of women among the immigrant population: the data was taken from homes with mainly female migrants. However, some men from these families have also immigrated (Barahona, 2001: 30).

In the table above, if we compare males and females, it is evident that most females tend to immigrate after 25. Between the ages of 19-25 years, 50 females immigrated, while among the 26-40 range, 147 females immigrated. This can be explained by the situation of women being different from men in terms of gender roles. Possibly women immigrate after they have children and become the bread-winner.

In order to clarify the meaning of Migration in this research paper, the definition is presented: “*Migration* has been defined as moving internally within countries or internationally between countries (from sending to receiving country). It may be a short or long-term move for economic, political, or social reasons. It may be regular (conforming to legal requirements) or irregular (understanding it as undocumented in the case of labor because it does not have the legal requirements to live and work in the country). The migrant may have varying degrees of choice over whether or not they move- the decision may be between “forced” or “voluntary”. (Jolly and Reeves, 2005: 4)

Many of the Nicaraguan women who are in Costa Rica are undocumented<sup>1</sup>. Their main occupation is domestic servitude, or doing

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<sup>1</sup> An Undocumented person for this research paper means a person that does not have the legality procedures to work and live inside Costa Rica. The person is undocumented because:

- Does not have a resident permit
- Does not have a passport or identification ( This because they came without it or came with a false one)

housework. They are receiving some provisions and a very low wage. Most of them can not find better work because of their low education or because they are undocumented (Loria, 2002). There are not clear statistics about how many undocumented immigrants from Nicaragua are living in Costa Rica. On January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, “La Nación” (the principal newspaper of Costa Rica), reported that Public Security from Costa Rica deported 1,700 undocumented Nicaraguans in two days. And on a typical day of work on Costa Rica’s Northern border, the Police Public Secure Authorities have to deal with a number between 175-200 undocumented Nicaraguans (La Nación, 2008). However, during the first months of 2008, according to the Public Secure Authorities of Costa Rica (Published by “La Nación”, 12 January 2008) the entrance of undocumented Nicaraguans was increasing. The authorities were sending back around 530 undocumented persons every day, in the towns near the Northern border of “Los Chiles” and in “Peñas Blancas” (La Nación, 2008).

Loría cited a study made by Ariza (2000), published by the INAMU. This study states that documented and undocumented Nicaraguans women immigrants in Costa Rica are recognized as hard-working migrants, and not just associated with their migrant husbands and partners. Women displace themselves in search of work. These woman appear to emigrate voluntarily to become workers in Costa Rica, and operate in several areas in the informal sector (Ariza, 2000, cited by Loría, 2002).

The Nicaraguan population that migrates to Costa Rica is characterized by having a very low level of education, because they do not have any formal education (Morales and Castro, 2006: 156 - 157). Still, when they are displaced, they assume an intense productive activity, maintaining the responsibilities of their work and also sustaining their families. (Lerussi, 2007:36).

Their working and living conditions are some of the poorest among migrants. Nicaraguan women are recognized as poor working migrants and their living conditions differ from a large number of other immigrants who come to Costa Rica. For example, most of the immigrants arrive in Costa Rica by plane, while is well known that most Nicaraguans enter the country on the ground.

Documented or undocumented Nicaraguan migrants live in precarious zones of Costa Rica. The national scale points out 15,014 precarious houses in Costa Rica, filled by 64,070 inhabitants. 22,279 of these are people from Nicaragua, living in 4,408 houses. This means that 29% of the total precarious houses in Costa Rica are occupied by Nicaraguans (Morales and Castro 2006: 169, based on INEC, population census 2000).

- 
- Came with a “Salvo Conducto” (Permission for a month) and they stay longer than that.
  - Does not have any paper with their name, day of birth and nationality, but they work or want to in Costa Rica.
  - Some people instead of use the word undocumented use illegal, irregular. Etc.

This population of undocumented Nicaraguan women is unprotected, undocumented (unregistered) and unrecognized. The table below brings a comparative perspective of documented and undocumented migrant in Costa Rica, taken from an interview of an undocumented worker living in Costa Rica during the period of September 2006 to July 2007.

**Table 3**  
**Comparative subjective perspectives of documented and undocumented migrants in Costa Rica**

<b>Documented immigrants</b>	<b>Undocumented immigrants</b>
Health protection (insurance) and public services	Access to Public Health, only in case of emergency.
Labour in Costa Rica. Acquire work with labour protection and guarantees.	Lack of contract. No real wage. No legal protection. No guarantees.
People are more respectful. Better treated as a foreigner in Costa Rica. Employees take into account their capabilities and educational degrees.	People are disrespectful. When looking for work, many people demand 12 hour days with a low wage. Employees do not care so much about abilities or capabilities. Discrimination and exclusion.
Are not vulnerable to be deported by the authorities, because of possession resident permits.	If caught by Costa Rican authorities, people are sent to jail and deported back to home country.
Credit facilitation (Access to banks).	No possibly to open a bank account.
Documented persons can report sexual harassment to authorities.	Undocumented persons can report sexual harassment to authorities, but suffer the risk of being discovered by Costa Rican Authorities as an undocumented worker.
Documented persons receive help, in terms of orientations (legal process, practical daily functions like transport, locating important facilities like Hospitals, schools, phones, post offices, etc). Better social integration.	Undocumented persons can not receive much information. It is very difficult to be informed about certain areas like legal processes or access to Hospitals. Undocumented people have to build their own trust network. There no development of social integration (always underground, running away from authorities).

*Source:* Interview of an undocumented worker in Costa Rica. This person lived in Costa Rica during the period of September 2006 to July 2007. (Day of the interview: 3 May 2008) Table by author.

This information is useful to create a picture in our minds about the bad situation of undocumented workers in Costa Rica. Why do they keep coming to the country when conditions are so terrible? How do they manage to come if they are poor in their country of origin? Which strategies do they use to come? Economic reasons are one of the most important aspects that influence them to move, but there are more factors. It is important to determine the other main reasons and strategies used by undocumented Nicaraguan women to immigrate to Costa Rica, to understand the why of this phenomenon.

## **1.2 Main objective and research questions**

### ***1.2.1 Objective***

- To determine the main reasons and strategies used by Nicaraguan women to immigrate and reside in Costa Rica as undocumented laborers, and in order to understand why this phenomenon occurs.

### ***1.2.2 Questions***

- Why do Nicaraguan female labour migrants keep coming to Costa Rica?

### ***1.2.3 Sub-questions***

- What are the main reasons for female Nicaraguan labour migrants to travel and immigrate to Costa Rica?
- What are the main strategies used by Nicaraguan female labour migrants to travel and immigrate to Costa Rica?

## **1.3 Relevance and justification of research**

Immigration to Costa Rica is not a new phenomenon. However, the intraregional and international migration among Global South countries is not a topic that is frequently addressed seriously. Most of the time there are just comments about how bad migrants are for the receiving country. One of the clear examples of South–South migration is Nicaraguans who migrate to Costa Rica. Costa Rica and Nicaragua are two Central American countries that share a common border, but whose economic situations are quite different. Neither of them are considered what international agencies call 'developed' nations.

In the case of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, people comment on the dominance of Costa Ricans (better known in Central America as “Ticos”) over Nicaraguans (better known as “Nicas”). The media and general public tend to influence the public opinion about migration and migrants; this has negative consequences on the Nicaraguan situation in Costa Rica. It is even worse for those who are undocumented (Pickering, 2006). There is the need to collect more information and knowledge of the reality of the lives of undocumented Nicaraguan woman immigrants who live in Costa Rica, who do participate in the labor force.

The telling of ethnic jokes is a discriminatory practice from Costa Ricans against Nicaraguans. As a consequence, they produce the acquisition, confirmation, and reproduction of prejudices and racist ideologies among Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. Costa Ricans talk about

“Nicas” and make fun of them, and today it is a common occurrence that many not recognize as a racist ideology. It directly affects the Nicaraguan population in Costa Rica, independent of their social status as a documented or undocumented resident. People make fun of Nicaraguans without taking into account the reason why they come. They are not aware of these reasons, as there is a lack of information among the Costa Rican population (Sandoval, 2007: 314).

In Costa Rica there is a general knowledge about the Nicaraguan migrant's issues. Many Costa Ricans have Nicaraguan women as domestic servants (Lerrussi, 2007). It is known that in general, their motivations to emigrate are personal and are linked to a family situation. Migrants leave their country to search for resources and better opportunities. They seek protection and better living standards for their family nucleus. Their goal is to achieve their own welfare by working and reaching an economic state of self-sustainability. But the truth of the situation is that many of them don't find this reality when they arrive in Costa Rica (Pickering, 2006: 1).

Despite of all the efforts and contributions of different entities, agencies, researchers and academic papers, to show to the public all the information about Nicaraguan documented (in most of the cases) and undocumented female immigrants, still, as Gindling 2008 refers, there are few studies on the impact of South-South migration and that more than half of those who emigrate from developing countries move to other developing countries (Gindling, 2008). There is not a thorough explanation of the real reasons and strategies used by this population to immigrate to Costa Rica. Most of the studies and research are about female Nicaraguans working as domestic servants, or documented Nicaraguan migrants and their general situation in Costa Rica.

At the micro and macro levels there are always power structures which are replicated everywhere. These structures tend to undermine those that are on the bottom, and only the ones that are on the top are the heard. This research is for those without a voice, like the undocumented Nicaraguan women. These women have been ignored and have not been given recognition as a group of human beings who dream of a better life. This research is intended to give visibility to a social problem that deserves to be addressed by those policy makers for whom these women are just invisible beings and who are a burden for the Costa Rican society.

This research paper wants to provide knowledge and information about undocumented female labour workers in Costa Rica, and their reasons for and strategies to move. This provision of knowledge and information is aimed to inform trade unions, non-governmental organizations, students, academics, and the public. Also, as a policy advisor, it is aimed to contribute information to improve the protection of Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica.

## 1.4 Research method

My research employed both primary and secondary source data to analyze why undocumented Nicaraguan women migrants keep immigrating to Costa Rica, and to identify reasons and strategies used by these women to immigrate to Costa Rica.

Primary data was collected by doing fieldwork in Costa Rica. The goal of the fieldwork was to obtain as much useful information as possible pertaining to the situation of these migrant women. The location of the research was selected based on the fact that I am Costa Rican, and as a Costa Rican citizen I am aware of the present problematic situation of Nicaraguan immigrants in the country. I contacted a key informant, Quaxabel Cardenas, the leader of the “Enlace Nicaraguense”<sup>2</sup> and who is part of ASTRADOMES<sup>3</sup>. I consulted her about which Nicaraguan women population would be better to work with in terms of geographical location. She informed me that large populations of undocumented Nicaraguans were living in Río Azúl, to the East of San José de Costa Rica. She had been close with Nicaraguans who were living in this place, and she considered that this relationship would make it easier to link me with these undocumented immigrants. Another important reason taken into account was that there had not been any previous study or research of the location, according to Quaxabel Cárdenas. Because of these reasons, and after discussing the project with her, we considered that could be beneficial and helpful to do research in this region. She helped me with interviews and provided the link to groups of women to interview. I also used local contacts (introduced to be by Quaxabel) to identify people to participate in my interviews and focus group.

Río Azúl is considered a poor and precarious zone in Desamparados de San José de Costa Rica. For many years it used to be trash dump where garbage from the Central Valley used to be discarded. Nowadays it is a mountain made up of piles of covered trash, with a small community living on it and making their homes. The following map shows the research location.

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<sup>2</sup> *Enlace Nicaraguense* is an organization for Nicaraguans in Costa Rica (Nicaraguan Link).

<sup>3</sup> ASTRADOMES: *Asociación de trabajadoras domesticas* (Association of domestic workers)

**Map 1**  
**Research Location In Costa Rica**



Source: Google Maps. Modified by author.

**Picture 1**  
**Research Location In Costa Rica**



Source: Río Azul, Desamparados, San José, Costa Rica. Picture taken in July 2008 by author.

A total of 30 undocumented Nicaraguan women were involved in this study. The criteria for selecting participants was taken from my research question. The migrants had to be Nicaraguan, women, undocumented, and living in Río Azul de Costa Rica. One of the main criteria was that the respondents had to be willing to be interviewed, since these women face a lot of fears by being in an undocumented condition.

Primary data was generated by using the techniques of observation, interviews and focus group discussions.



Observation was used because it was important to better understand the context (living conditions and social environment) in which the Nicaraguan women are living.

I conducted verbal individual interviews because I knew that these women have a low level of education and many can not write or read. It was important to do the interviews verbally because I considered it best for the sake of the migrants' confidentiality. Interviews were a good technique to collect what I needed. The participants spoke of their past experiences in Nicaragua (previous social environment and work), their crossing the border from Nicaragua to Costa Rica (strategies used), and their lives in Costa Rica (jobs, living conditions, feelings, etc.). This allowed me to have a better picture of the strategies they used, and better understanding of their reasons to immigrate (see annexes).

Focus Group Discussions were conducted in order to bring out additional information and create more interaction between the Nicaraguan women. I was the facilitator of the FGD, and my role was to stimulate the group discussion and keep it on course, if necessary. It was important to use incentives to encourage people to attend these meetings. At each FGD the women were given food and drink and a token gift such as second hand clothes or hand lotion.

FGD were very important because they were a way to gather collective information based on the participants' thoughts and experiences as a group of undocumented Nicaraguan women living in Río Azúl. Every response was considered valid. I made it clear to the participants that there was no attempt to support or criticize any response, resolve any issue, address any individual problem or concern, or reach any conclusion. FGD were a good technique in terms of socializing the information. They also allowed the women to share common experiences, and let them reflect on their common situation. In the annexes the interview guidelines and focus group guidelines used in this research are attached.

As a way to enter the community and contact the possible participants, two members of the community contacted by Quaxabel Cardenas were with me during the visit of houses in the community. This was in order to present myself with someone who is familiar with and in the community, and to find participants for fit the aforementioned criteria and who were willing to share their experiences in interviews and focus groups.

A focus group discussion (FDG) was held with around 30 women, who were also individually interviewed. The FGD sessions were run over 3 days for between one and a half and two hours. Before starting, the FGD participants were briefed on the nature of the research. After each focus group I offered them some food (snacks and dinner).

The women were given a symbolic retribution. Second hand clothes were distributed to the women who were willing to contribute to the FGD or individual interviews. This was used as a compensation technique to motivate them to actively participate.

Secondary data is composed of the historical context of Nicaraguan migration, the concepts formed, and the theoretical framework for this

study. The reasons why and strategies used by undocumented Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica are linked to the different theories that are cited in this research, in order to determinate why undocumented Nicaraguan female labour migrants keep immigrating to Costa Rica.

## **1.5 Scope and limitations of research**

This research paper is focused on the analysis of interviews and focus group discussions of undocumented Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica. The research paper will look at specific reasons and strategies used by this Nicaraguans to immigrate to Costa Rica. The analysis is limited to 30 undocumented women immigrants who live in Río Azúl, San José de Costa Rica, and some interviews of an informant woman who directs “El Enlace Nicaraguense” in Costa Rica.

Concerning the limitations of this research paper, a major setback faced were the weather conditions in Costa Rica during fieldwork. There was so much rain and many interviews were conducted under wet conditions. I had to walk in heavy rain, knocking on the doors of houses. Some interview information got wet and needed to be redone. In some places there was no possibility to travel by car, and the only access was by foot. Another limitation was during the FGD: The first session I had expected only 10 participants, however 15 came, and with many children. At that moment I knew that part of my work was having to deal with the children as well, in terms of entertaining them while their mothers were participating in the discussion.

Each time after the focus groups, there were many people waiting for food outside, so it was necessary to bring extra food to each focus group.

## Chapter 2

# Theoretical Framework on the relationships between migration, gender and poverty

In this section I will present an overview of existing migration theories, including the push-pull theory and network theory on the relation with gender as an intervening factor with poverty and migration. It introduces theories linking to the case of undocumented women immigrants from Nicaragua in Costa Rica.

### 2.1 Individual values and expectations: Push-Pull Theory of Migration

Lee (1966), mentioned by Hagen (2008), was the pioneer of this theory. It claims that the choice of moving from one place to another is motivated by many factors. It is not just wages, but it involves individual values, desires, and expectations. The Push-Pull Theory assumes that people will relocate because of an expectation of finding better living conditions<sup>4</sup>. This theory points out that this could be one of the main reasons people move. A person might choose to move because they perceive that the situation in their current location has gotten worse or the situation in their place of destination has gotten better (Hagen 2008).

In terms of push factors, literature illustrates the negative circumstances of the area of origin. For example, an individual may not be able to find a job, or may have been fired from a previous one. There could be war, persecution, violence and higher crime, natural phenomenon and disasters (tsunami, earthquake), or change in family structure (Lee, 1966, cited by Hagen).

Pull factors refer to positive circumstances of the place of destination. These include family reunification, job opportunities, better schooling, and opportunities to acquire and improve knowledge, cheaper housing, and better living conditions (Lee, 1966, cited by Hagen).

#### 2.1.1 Push-Pull Theory: gender and poverty as intervening factors

The Push–Pull Theory does not take gender dimension into consideration. However, due to differing circumstances and contexts that men and women confront in their countries, gender becomes an important dimension when

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For this research paper, better living conditions are in these areas :

1. Housing
2. Earning to buy food, clothes, etc.
3. Weather
4. Social environment

considering the motivations for migration. In the following discussion, we will see how gender is both a push and pull factor, while poverty is very much a push factor.

### **Push Factors**

Poverty is a push factor, making people relocate. One of the most common types of migration for poor men and women is identified as South–South migration. This refers to the short distance movements into a neighboring country or to a country within the same region (DFID, 2007). This is the case with Nicaraguans who move to Costa Rica. In Central America, as mentioned previously, there has been a lot of South-South migration<sup>5</sup>. It is a significant way for people, who have suffered situations like poverty, war, natural phenomena, political and social struggles along their history<sup>6</sup>, to survive and improve their lives. These circumstances can be seen as push factors, that motivate both men and women move. As we can see the decisions about moving are driven by more than just wages, although wages do play an important role in migration.

*“For many poor people around the world migration is a way of life. Globalization has radically altered the scale of migration, people are now more aware of opportunities elsewhere”* -Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP. Secretary of State for International Development (Moving out of poverty-making migration work better for poor people, DFID 2007: iii).

To understand the concept of poverty from a gender perspective and poverty as a push factor, both important aspects to this research, Amrita Chhachhi suggests looking at intra-household power relations. These reveal gender as well as a generational variations in assets, vulnerability, violence, and the experience of poverty. As she states, if using this conceptualization, the notion of poverty is transformed significantly. The poverty line, that typically distinguishes poverty in terms of 'households', can often cut through a household: with women poorer than men, in terms of assets and access to resources (Chhachhi, 2007). This idea is relevant in linking gender and South–South migration of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica, taking into consideration the differences between both countries in terms of their economic situation, gender roles, and location in the Human Development Index.

The following table compares the Gross Domestic Product per capita between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The GDP is considering important because it shows how much a country produces and gives an idea to create a picture about a country's economic situation. As we see, there is a significance gap between both. This is meaning that Costa Rica has a better economic situation.

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<sup>5</sup> South – South migration: Defined as both of the societies who send and receive immigrants are from developing countries. Costa Rica is a developing country, but have better economic and social conditions than those of Nicaragua. An advantage for Nicaraguans is that they share the Spanish language with Costa Ricans (Olivares, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Brief description of historical circumstances that have made Nicaraguans move to Costa Rica in the past, chapter 3.

**Table 3**  
**GDP per capita**

Nicaragua	Costa Rica
GDP (per capita current US\$) 2006 = 5,371	GDP (per capita current US\$) 2006 = 22,145

*Source:* United Nations Data, 2008. Table by author.

The Human Development Index gives an picture of countries' situation, providing a broadened prism for viewing human progress and the complex relationship between income and well-being (UNDP, 2007 report).

**Table 4**  
**Human Development Index**

Nicaragua	Costa Rica
HDI 0.710.	HDI 0.846.
Position 110 in the world, 2005	Position 48 in the world, 2005.
GDI as % of HDI.	GDI as % of HDI.
Position 124. Nicaragua (98.1%)	Position 40. Costa Rica (99.6%)

*Source:* United Nations Development Report, 2007.

If a Nicaraguan woman is poor, vulnerable, perhaps the breadwinner of the house, a single mother, or suffers from domestic violence, she might search for a solution to her problems. She would try to satisfy her basic needs and strive for better conditions. A way to achieve these solutions under the circumstances in which she lives would be to move. For many countries in Central America, if there is no work, there is no food; and there is no social protection that helps sustain families if the breadwinner does not have an occupation. Poverty is considered a central factor for migration according to Nicola Piper. She also claims that socio-cultural vulnerability and discrimination are equally important factors (Piper, 2005: 15). Following the line of Lee's (1966) Push-Pull Theory, he states that while negative circumstances are push factors, he does not mention vulnerability or discrimination. However according to Piper (2005), these are reasons to migrate, and some may consider them 'negative circumstances' in themselves.

Migration has always existed. The fact is that nowadays existing flows are predisposed by globalization. Migration is not only for people with access to resources, but more so for those who are poor and lack access to resources in their country of origin. If in their country of origin there is no work and no money, the solution would be to migrate. The DFID came out with the argument that poor people have the possibility to migrate and find employment in low-skilled jobs, that can offer a rapid route out of poverty. Migration can be an escape from poverty, but it also carries risk for the sending and receiving countries. Poor immigrants may face harassment, exclusion, increased debt, and poverty. Under these circumstances, the rights to which migrants are entitled may be forgotten, and unable to be exercised (DFID, 2007:1).

Nicola Piper (2005), in her research paper about gender and migration, mentions that there are main forms of discrimination in the country of origin and abroad, and that it is gendered based discrimination that makes women particularly vulnerable. Gender discrimination and cultural norms, that involve the household and society, push particular groups of people to migrate in particular ways and influence others to stay put. This happens according to the different contexts and societies in which humans develop (Jolly and Reeves, 2005:11 – 12).

Women migration is often not just for economic reasons, but also because of the existence of partner, marital, or conjugal issues. They typically have to do with abusive or violent relationships (SMC, 2004, cited by Piper, 2005).

The following circumstances are examples of push and pull factors that hence are related to the Push-Pull Theory. The original list was not well adapted to gender so it has been modified and other factors added. The following presents circumstances that Nicaraguan women face in Nicaragua or in Costa Rica as undocumented labour migrants.

**Table 5**  
**Push factors**

<b>Exploitative circumstances for low skilled women</b>	In terms of work: wage (low earning for hard work), hours (many hours a day, no time to do housework), and contract. This could happen at home and abroad.
<b>Labour market discrimination against women</b>	At home and abroad, women can face a gender gap: glass ceiling, labour market segregation.
<b>Safety and health at work</b>	Dangerous and degrading working conditions for women. 3Ds: Danger, Dirty, Degrading
<b>Gender-based violence in the work place</b>	- Physical or verbal violence against women. - Gendered forms of racism and xenophobia against women workers (at home and abroad).
<b>No voice for women</b>	Restrictions on women's ability to organize for their rights (at home and abroad).
<b>Women may be expected to support the family economically (as bread winner)</b>	Women migrate to try to earn money while their family stays behind. This because there are no jobs for her in her country of origin, or that she has been fired.
<b>Move in order to follow husband or partner</b>	It may be the norm for women to move to her husband's family after marriage. Parents may see it as a duty for their daughters to migrate and send money back home to support the family. They encourage daughters to migrate.
<b>Young women migrate to find work</b>	

### **Women's independence**

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Women wanting to earn more and have more economic independence rather than stay put

### **Women escaping poor circumstances**

- Women migrate to escape sexual violence and abuse, sometimes relating to a conflict situation.

- Single women, widows, and divorcees migrate to escape social stigma or because they face bad circumstances in the separation process.

- Young women migrate to escape restrictions on their freedom, pressure to marry, or to remain chaste until marriage.

- Intra-household power relations, where a woman suffers under violence and vulnerability.

*Source:* Jolly and Reeves, 2005:11 – 12, Nicola Piper 2005: 38. Table by author.

### **Pull Factors**

Pull factors are related to the country of destination. In this case, there are important reasons to move to Costa Rica, and pull factors are related to the expectation of finding better living conditions (Lee, 1966) in Costa Rica, given the social, political and economic contexts of its society.

The following is a list of circumstances that are possible pull factors that motivate Nicaraguan women to migrate, based on Lee's Push–Pull Theory (1966) mentioned by Hagen (2008):

1. Family reunification
2. Job opportunities (For women who are low skilled, and want to have better earnings a month)
3. Opportunities for women to improve knowledge and obtain skills.
4. Cheaper housing and better services. Women and their families can find better living conditions.
5. Better future for children, in terms of education and satisfaction of basic needs.

However Lee's Push–Pull Theory (1966, cited by Hagen, 2008) does not mention other factors that Jolly and Reeves (2005: 11–12) and Nicola Piper (2005:38) do mention. The following are also considered important pull factors:

6. The expectation and promise of freedom<sup>7</sup>
7. Hope for a new life: more independence for women, control of and access to resources.

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1. <sup>7</sup> In the case of undocumented Nicaraguan women, this could be related to shift a society less *machisto* (religious and political), with more opportunities for women.

8. Empowerment for women and children, in terms of acquiring skills, knowledge, and money.

*Source:* Jolly and Reeves, 2005:11–12, Nicola Piper 2005:38.

## **2.2 Individual values and expectations: Push-Pull Theory of Migration**

Massey, et al., (1993), cited by Pedersen, et al., 2004, define a migrant by means of networks, as “*sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants, through ties of kinship, shared friend or shared community origin*” (Pedersen et al. 2004:4).

Hagen, in her working paper, identifies the network theory as the role between migrants: “*New migrants will receive help from the pioneer migrants ranging from arranging the trip to finding a job, thus making migration increasingly cost and risk free*” (Hagen, 2008: 17).

The models of migration networks stand on the network externalities theory. This indicates that positive externalities are present if the immigrant utility grows in response to an increase in the number of newcomers (Pedersen, et al., 2004).

Network theory links migration to personal, cultural and/or other social ties. “In migrant sending countries, information about jobs and living standards abroad is most efficiently transmitted through personal networks such as friend and neighbors who emigrated” (Oishi, 2002:7). Immigration within a region or community is based on individual or household reasons. Earlier migrants may support family members or friends in migration by making information on job possibilities available, or providing direct assistance such as food, housing, or transportation (Davis and Winters, 2001).

“Network connections are a form of social capital that can be drawn upon by non-migrants with access to the network (...) As migration flows from a community increase, a migrant network develops by a former migrant, current and non-migrants within the community” (Massey et al., 1993, Cited by Davis and Winters, 2001: 4).

### ***2.2.1 Network theory and gender as an intervening factor***

According to Davis and Winters (2001), it is necessary to look at the role of gender on migration in order to understand a person's decision to migrate. The network theory of migration denotes the value of direct relationship in the migration decision.

Kritz, et al., 1992 (cited by Oishi, 2007), indicate that migration system theorists argue that the expansion of such networks is dependent on historical, geographical, and political ties that existed before large-scale migration started. Oishi (2007) says that this theory does not clarify how



and why networks were developed between countries. He also states that migration theories, especially the network theory, have not addressed gender aspects adequately, because of the assumption that most migrants are men. This can be seen as a weakness of the theory in relation to gender.

However, if one looks at women's networks, where information about states is transmitted to share information on living conditions, access to resources and opportunities, it could be said that the theory does not address gender directly, but gender is an intervening factor.

### **2.3 Gender dimensions of migration: gender as an intervening factor**

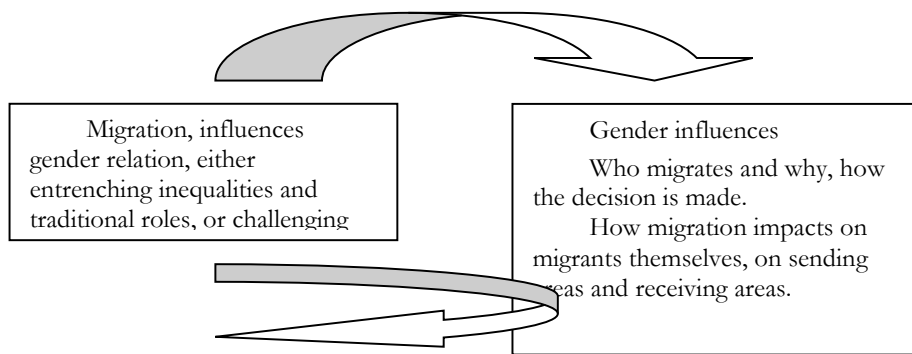
Case studies have shown that social norms regarding gender roles play an important role in promoting or hindering migration by females and males (Hondahneu – Sotelo, 1994; Massey et al., 1987, cited by Davis and Winters, 2001:6). The patriarchal family system had been accepted and highlights male migration, but excludes female migration. But nowadays, economic crises and the redefinition of gender roles have led to an opening of options for women to migrate (Davis and Winters, 2001).

The International Organization for Migration regards the awareness of gender as an element of the migration process. Men and women have different experiences as migrants; this is because of the roles, behaviours, and relationships that society assigns to and expects from each gender. The socio-cultural structures and system of a population define gender, and are present throughout the entire world (IOM, 2008).

Gender is defined as a way in which social practices are ordered. Harding (1986) (Cited by Alava, 2004:13), states that gender is individual, structural and symbolic, and it is always asymmetrical in hierarchical societies. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. (...) It is manifested in an individual life course; it is the basis of the common-sense notion of masculinity and femininity, in ideology or culture and organized in symbolic practices and institutions.

The International Organization of Migrations (2008) identifies gender relations as the relationship of women and men that vary depending on the economic and social conditions of the society, and that it is different among social and ethnic groups (IOM, 2008).

**Figure 1**  
**Gender and Migration**



Source: Jolly and Reeves, 2005

The authors of the diagram above say that inequality inside and among countries generate the motivation to migrate. The search to make money is one of the main reasons for migration for both women and men. Economic factors are considered major, but are associated with other factors like family reunification, escape from gender discrimination, and constraining gender norms. Forced migration is linked to traffickers or other displacement factors, such as natural disaster or conflict (Jolly and Reeves, 2005).

Nowadays, woman who migrate are no longer following their fathers or husbands. Many of them are moving because their capacities as workers, and women migration is greater than before. Most migrant women work at the bottom rung of the occupational hierarchy, where they are tremendously vulnerable. Under this condition, the cases of abuse and exploitation have also increased (Oishi, 2002:1).

Circumstances related to trafficking denotes that both men, women, boys and girls can be trafficked for sex work, drugs, or any other type of exploitative labour purpose.

Conflict, disaster and persecution, as previously mentioned, can be understood as a forced migration. Political, religious, cultural and ethnic persecution during conflict can explain the movement of people. *“Forced displacement is the clearest violation of human, economic, political, social rights and of the failure to comply with international humanitarian laws”*, according to Moser and Clark (2001:32) (Cited by Jolly and Reeves, 2005:16).

On the other hand, it is said that migration, especially in LDC (Least developed countries), can produce positive and empowering experiences. In LDC, women have often minimal control and access to resources, limited voices in decision making in the household or community, and so migration can be seen as a liberation and form of independence, in terms of moving to a country with better conditions than their country of origin (Piper, 2005).

## 2.4 Analytical Framework

This section will explain why these theories are the best suited to analyze the data collected in fieldwork and hence answer the research questions. The discussion below is based on the considerations of the author of this research paper, arguments of the different authors mentioned on the research paper, literature reviewed, and examples.

Davis and Winters (2001) consider that female migration falls under the same models of migration (Neoclassical, Network Theory, etc.) as male migration. The authors claim that gender may be one of the relevant characteristics that influence the decision to migrate. However, migration does differ between men and women. The following are some arguments, circumstances and examples.

### *Push–Pull Theory*

#### **Emphasis on reasons for migration**

The Push-Pull Theory is seen to be the right theory to give an explanation for the causes of migration, by looking at the push and pull factors in all the economic, political, cultural, and environmental circumstances that motivate Nicaraguan women to move. It will be linked to the data collected in the fieldwork.

#### **Push factor**

A push factor is a visible risk or bad circumstance that women perceive in their current location as threatening (Hagen 2008). Some of these risks or bad circumstances could be considered a 'push pessimistic factor', according to the Push-Pull Theory. A push pessimistic factor with gender as an intervening element might be a shift in gender relations. Piper (2005) refers to this in her argument presented in the literature review: for example, this could be change in the family structure or family issues such as divorce, separation, death, or household violence. Other negative factors are related to lack of and difficult access to resources for women. There is little or no education for women, no employment offered to women and hence they do not have economic resources. Another factor concerns political issues and the consequences of armed conflict (see chapter 3), discrimination against women (discrimination in the labour market, exploitative working conditions, restrictions of freedom, gender-based violence in the workplace). Another important factor is family expectation and influence. Families place certain pressures and roles on the women, and in retaliation they migrate to escape restrictions.

The change of gender roles in a 'macho' society is another important push factor. Nowadays in a 'macho' society, it is noted how gender roles change: the patriarchal family is becoming more and more atypical, many women are single mothers, as well as the family bread winner, and a

prevalence of divorce or separation. Instead of working at home and doing merely reproductive work as in previous generations, women now must complete the two types of work: both inside the house and outside. She must participate in reproductive work, while doing productive work to earn money. This is the case oftentimes when she is without a partner or husband. The change in gender roles can be a push factor that motivates women to migrate.

Perhaps bread-winning women without work and lack of resources would be more inclined to relocate to search for better opportunities. Women's expectations and desires transform as gender roles and societal norms change. This argument gives the explanation of an important push factor, the change in gender roles, in a 'macho' society. In a typical 'macho' society there is a social expectation that dictates that women must migrate to follow their husbands.

### **Pull factors**

Employment opportunities are pull factors. As mentioned before, the Nicaraguan economic situation is poor, and do not produce adequate employment opportunities for low skilled women. Costa Rica does offer such opportunities, due to their better economic situation. Women migrate in the search for more independence, in terms of earning money by gaining employment.

*Women are more constrained from doing certain types of work (because of labour requirements or societal constraints) and thus have more limited employment options. This lowers expected returns and increases the value of specific information (Davis and Winters, 2001:6).*

### **Network theory**

The information that a women receives via migrant networks will be key to shift expectancies and desires for the future. This transmission of information is important particularly for poor, vulnerable, and unskilled women.

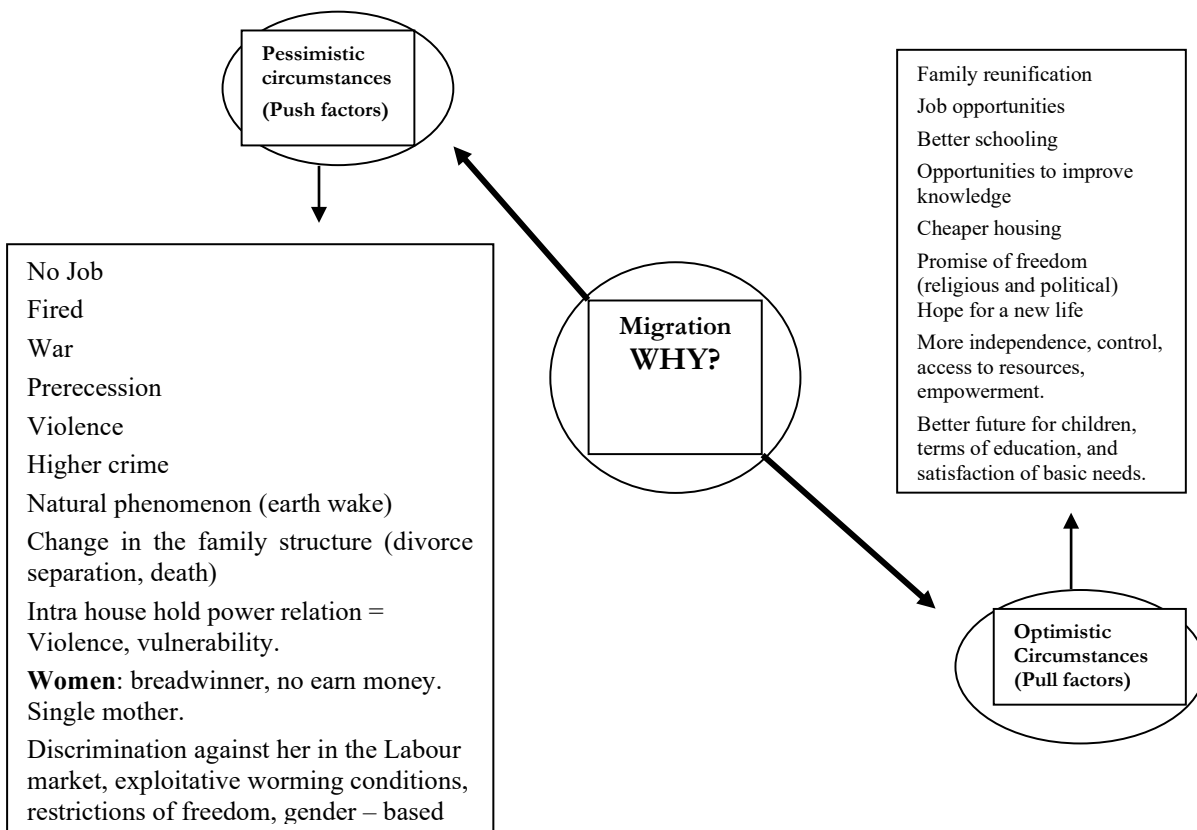
Migrant Nicaraguan women who have already established themselves in Costa Rica communicate to their country of origin their living conditions and situations. These networks of migrants are the main strategies of communication, and one of the most important influences in women's decision to come to Costa Rica. *Women will only migrate if risk can be averted or will wait until a network is more established before migrating (Davis and Winters 2001:5).*

Women may not benefit equally from male dominated networks and instead may be more dependent on women specific networks. Women are more likely to migrate if the migrant network includes a significant number of women, as they do not receive the same benefits from male dominated networks. Women may be fundamentally connected on female centred networks, as well as a network of their own kin (men included) (Hondagneu – Sotelo, 1994; Winters and Davis 2001: 7).

Female centered networks function to help Nicaraguan women make the decision to migrate or not. The information transmitted on the network will convey the positive pull factors that will motivate these women to migrate. They will hear of increased work opportunities in their occupations, better living conditions, possibilities for their children's future (education) and their own education opportunities, marriage, access to resources, etc. Networks are also useful to share ideas for other migration strategies: false documentation, transport help, contacts for a first job, etc.

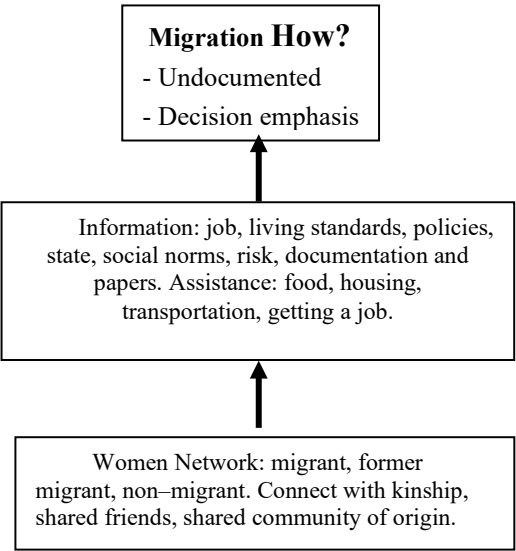
The following diagrams were constructed in order to briefly structure the main push-pull factors, which provide reasons to migrate or not, and also illustrate the network of migrants, concerning the transmission of information. It will be used as a guide for analysis to explain the findings of the data collected in Río Azúl, San José de Costa Rica, and provide answers to research questions.

**Figure 2**  
**Undocumented Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica: Reasons to migrate**



Source: Diagram by author

**Figure 3**  
**Undocumented Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica: Reasons to migrate**



Source: Diagram by author

## Chapter 3

# Contextualization: The migration phenomenon between Costa Rica and Nicaragua

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the context of Nicaraguan immigration in Costa Rica. It introduces key information about Nicaraguans, who are the largest population of immigrants in Costa Rica. This will illustrate the present situation of undocumented Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica as international labour migrants.

### 3.1 The 'macho' society

I decided to present a definition of *machismo* as a particular gender subject in Latin America. This will give a better understanding of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan society and gender relations found in these countries. This is important, first because this research has been done on location in Latin America. Secondly, these countries are extremely patriarchal and are heavily influenced by the Catholic Church. In such societies men tend to dominate women. A term like *machismo* stems from this type of society.

Machismo is a complicated term, but when referring to the social structure of Latin American families, it generally has a negative connotation. In Spanish, *machismo* simply means to be a male. But in Latin America, it also describes the family structure. *Machismo* has become associated with the patriarchal behaviour of males, often consisting of violent behaviour towards women and children. It is also associated with conservative values where men oppose women's rights, or oppose things that fall outside of their traditional gender role (Peck, 2006).

*Machismo* is the term used to describe that what is seen as a unique brand of Latin American patriarchy, which is said to have derived from the teaching of an influential Catholic Church and legacy of Spanish colonialism (Moriarty, <http://www.latinamericabureau.org/?lid=351>).

### 3.2 Nicaraguans in Costa Rica

As indicated previously, 226,374 Nicaraguans live in Costa Rica (INEC 2000). It makes them the major group of foreigners in Costa Rica. According to the report, their number constitutes over 76% of the total of the population who was born in another country (INEC 2000: 4).

The following table, made by Gindling (2008) from his study of South-South migration, presents the distribution of workers by nationality in Costa

Rica during 2000 and 2001. As one can see from the table, Nicaraguans make up the overwhelming proportion of total immigrants in the Costa Rican work force. According to the self-reported nationality of the worker, in 2001 5.7% of Costa Rican workers identify themselves as Nicaraguans, with another 1.5% classed as naturalized Costa Rica citizens (Gindling, 2008: 5).

**Table 6**  
**Proportion of Workers by nationality, According to the EHPM 2000- 2001**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
Costa Rican by Birth	<b>91.2</b>	<b>90.87</b>
Naturalized Costa Rican	<b>1.43</b>	<b>1.58</b>
Nicaraguan	<b>5.88</b>	<b>5.71</b>
Other Central American	0.85	0.81
Rest of America	0.36	0.7
Rest of World	0.26	0.32

*Source:* South-South Migration: The Impact of Nicaraguan Immigrants on Earnings, Inequality and Poverty in Costa Rica (Gindling 2008).

The main difference between Nicaraguan immigrants and Costa Rican citizens are the basic needs that Nicaraguans have to struggle for each day, such as education, housing, and health care (Morales and Castro 2006: 235). For example, Nicaraguans present a high percentage of those living in poor conditions and infrastructure, with major difficulties to access of education; much higher than the rest of the population. Nevertheless, it appears that a child's education could be one of the important motives for Nicaraguan women to move to Costa Rica.

A study published by Morales and Castro in 2006 shows the differences between being a Nicaraguan child and being a Costa Rican child with Nicaraguans parents.

**Table 7**  
**Education statistics of Nicaraguan and Costa Rican children**

	<b>Nicaraguans</b>	<b>Costa Ricans</b>
<b>Education</b>	Of children 5 – 6 years old, 44.5% of the children living in Costa Rica (born in Nicaragua) attend school.	Of children 5 – 6 years old, 65, 3% of the children born in Costa Rica attend school.
	From 7-12 years, 82.5% attend school.	From 7–12 years, 96% attend school.
	The largest	



difference is from 12–17 years, where 46.2% attend secondary school.	From 12–17 years, 69.2% attend secondary school.
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Source: Morales and Castro, 2006: 233. Table by author.

### ***3.2.1 Previous circumstances of South–South migration (Nicaraguans in Costa Rica)***

During the last century, there were three important determining movements in the migration process in Central America (Morales and Castro 2006):

1. Modernization and beginning of the formation of regional labor markets,
2. The forced migration during armed conflict,
3. Trans-nationalization of labor and globalization.

The first movement refers to the era of the 1950s, when different programs arose to transform the agricultural sector. This created an impact, and small agricultural entities became proletariats. The rural modernization was a consequence of agro-exports. This produced a phenomenon of division of social groups: for example, aborigines and farmers. At the same time, this fused the whole population in a sense, as they became a labour force receiving a salary. The demand for workers started to increase and hence the need for people in agro-exporting zones (Morales and Castro, 2006).

The second involves the time period from the 1970s to 1980s. It refers to the forced migrations during armed conflicts. This was during the revolutionary phase that Nicaraguans suffered in these years. People started to flee the country to escape violence. There are not clear numbers about how many refugees left Nicaragua, but they stayed in neighboring countries, in varying living conditions. Costa Rica was one of these refugee receiving countries. “Randal (1999) noted how in the 1980s the Nicaraguan revolution took advantage of women’s ‘willingness’ to do unpaid work” (Cited by Cupples, 2004: 316).

The last movement involves the trans-nationalization of labor and globalization in the 1990s. All of Central America was experiencing a rapid change of industry: there was an increase of supply and demand, thus generating a rise in the offer for employment, with the exception of Nicaragua (Castro and Morales 2006). During the 1990s, Nicaragua was facing the transition from a revolutionary state to a neoliberal one. Sandinistas lost the general elections, and the US-backed center-right coalition, led by Violet Chamorro, came to power. This process was dramatic, particularly in terms of its consequences for the labor market and its implications for gender roles (Cupples, 2004: 305). The public sector went through a drastic deterioration and therefore the supply of employment

fell as well. Nicaragua also affronted a crisis in the agricultural sector. Each of these factors led to great migration out of the country, making it the principal feature of this period (Morales and Castro 2006). And it seems that the situation has not improved, for in the 2005 Global Human Development Report, Nicaragua was listed as number 110 (UNDP, 2007 report).

### ***3.2.2 Features of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica***

#### **Sex**

In respect to migration, the female participation has increased. According to Julie Cupples, this is a recent tendency that appears with globalization and neoliberal restructuring. This phenomenon has increased burdens of low income women in Nicaragua, and hence the mobilizations of their search for work (Cupples, 2004). This is the formation of a new migration prototype (mobilization of women), that is becoming a 'social problem' to Costa Rican society due to the mass migration of Nicaraguan women (Goldade, in Sandoval 2007: 233). Their numbers dominate the rest of the foreign population living in Costa Rica. According to Castro and Morales, 50.1% of the Nicaraguan immigrants are women, while with the immigrant groups coming from North America and Europe, 57% are men. From the rest of the world, 53.8% of the immigrants are men. This shows that the majority of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica are female (Morales and Castro, 2006).

#### **Education**

One important characteristic that defines Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica is that their academic level is too low to compare to the level of the receiving country, according to Morales and Castro (2006). Nicaraguan-born immigrant literacy rate was 88%, while Costa Rican literacy rate was at 95%, according to Barquero and Vargas, 2004:4. There are also disparities in the children's ages at school. Child immigrants have difficulty accessing the education system, as their parents sometimes prefer to have them work and contribute to the family's income, and therefore can not achieve the same level of education that Costa Ricans have (Mentioned by Guardia, 2004).

#### **Labor**

Demand for labor could be an important factor drawing Nicaraguans to Costa Rica. The employment rate in the country is too low, and wages are minimal as well.

According to Julie Cupples (2004), the economical crisis that Nicaragua suffers has increased women's participation in the labor force, which means that increasing numbers of women have to do double shifts of both paid and domestic work. Often in Nicaragua, women enter the informal sector of the economy because it is easier to combine informal productive activities with domestic work and child care (Cupples, 2004).

Wages in Nicaragua are lower than in Costa Rica. For example, information for the year 2000 shows that in the agricultural sector the average earning per month in Costa Rica was 201.33 USD, while in Nicaragua it was only 59.90 USD (Ramirez and Valverde, 2002: 71, mentioned by Guardia, 2004).

### ***3.2.3 Nicaraguan Women and work***

According to Cupples (2004), work for Nicaraguan women is more than a strategy for survival. It is a symbol of independence. Economic and cultural circumstances in Nicaragua signify that it is not advisable to assume that economic well-being will come through marriage, or that it is possible to maintain the family on unskilled labor. For that reason, many Nicaraguan women are putting so much effort in education and increasing their skills, as a way of self-progression and as a means to increase one's income earning potential (Cupples, 2004). Nevertheless, due to the economic situation, perhaps not all can have both education and increased skills training to work.

Following in the line of education and higher skills, Loria(2007) refers that Nicaraguan woman immigrants in Costa Rica have a low level of education or no education at all, and come from the poorest zones in Nicaragua (Loria, 2007).

Most of the Nicaraguans who decide to move to Costa Rica become domestic servants, and are vulnerable to exploitation. Some conditions that this population endures are low salaries, excessive working hours, no recognition for extra hours, and no social insurance (Loria, 2007).

### ***3.2.4 Documentation and work in Costa Rica***

To work legally in Costa Rica, the person has to be a citizen of Costa Rica, have permanent resident status with identification, or have temporary working permits. For most Nicaraguans, the only way to work in Costa Rica is by holding permanent residence. The website of the General Direction of Migration and Foreigners office of Costa Rica established that the process to obtain permanent resident status requires official documents such as a birth certificate, proof of a ties to Costa Rica, and police reports from the country of origin (Lee, 2007).

The incorporation of migrants in a 'regular way' (meaning documented), is conditioned by the restrictions and requirements that the Ministry of Work and Social Security established. This ministry, in the area of labor migration, does the analyses of the demand for work in the different functional activities that Costa Rica offers. Based on this analysis, 'technical criteria' are established. With it, the General Direction of Migration and Foreigners Office approves or rejects permission for work and residence (Goldade, 2007).

In Costa Rica, the objective of the employment policy is “(...) the creation of quality employment in the Costa Rican economy. Employment that includes social security and supports labor rights” (Consejo Superior del Trabajo, 2004:36).

### ***3.2.5 Undocumented population in Costa Rica and its implication***

Nicaraguans (men and women) who work in the agricultural sector in Costa Rica are the population of immigrants with the highest rate of undocumented status. The large demand for manual labor produces a demand for immigrant employment (Lee, 2007).

Because Nicaraguans are afraid of exploitation, violence, and deportation, many Nicaraguans enter Costa Rica by using a fake passport, or a 30-day consular visa. Many of the Nicaraguans who use the consular visa think that it will give them the right to work as documented migrants in Costa Rica. This is not the case, as once their permission to stay in Costa Rica has expired, the Nicaraguans are obliged to leave the country. The reality of the situation is that many of them do not leave the country, and stay undocumented for a long period (Lee, 2007).

Being an undocumented immigrant in Costa Rica means that there is not easy access to education, and that it is very complicated to find a decent house in which to live because no one wants to rent a house to an illegal immigrant. In addition, the right to use the social health service is limited, and it is very difficult to find employment that offers good working conditions and labor rights (Castro and Morales, 2006). These are just few examples of the Nicaraguan immigrant population's unsatisfied needs.

## Chapter 4

# Data findings collected in fieldwork in Costa Rica

This chapter presents the findings of interviews and focus group discussions, of 30 undocumented women from Nicaragua in Costa Rica.

The interviews present the women's demographic profiles, the circumstances before the migration process, the work women did when they arrived to Costa Rica, and their present situation and living conditions. There is also a summary of the FGD presented.

The examples and anecdotes presented in these data findings are very meaningful to create a picture of these people's situation, but do not aim to generalize.

### 4.1 Data from individual interviews

A total of 30 undocumented women were interviewed. The majority of them came from Managua (the capital of Nicaragua) and Granada, cities next to the border with Costa Rica.

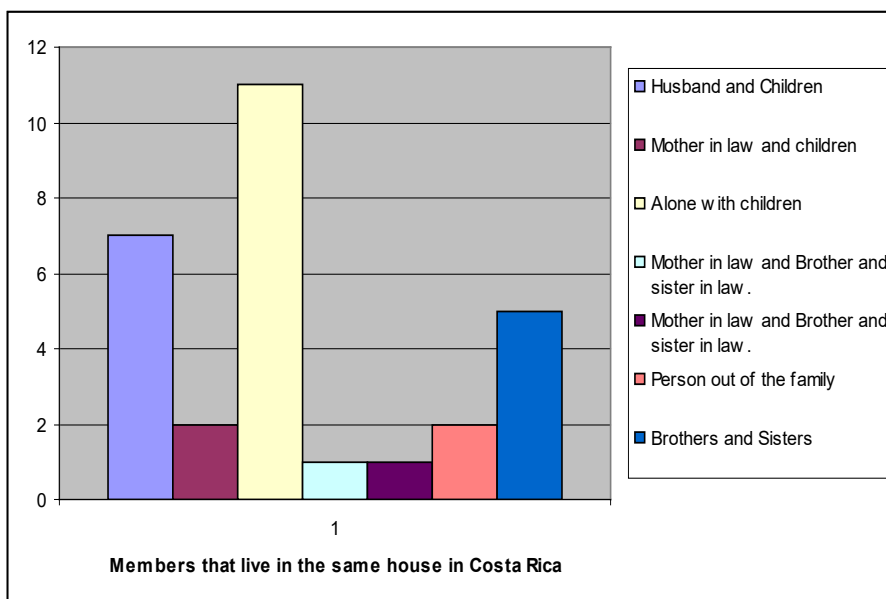
**Table 8**  
**Region of Nicaraguan origin**

Origin	Number
Granada	10
Rivas Cárdenas	2
Masaya	3
Nueva guinea	1
Managua	8
Chontales	2
Chinandega	1
Leon	2
Costa Atlantic	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>

*Source:* Author fieldwork

Their age range was 18-48 years old. Of the total, 11 lived with their children, 7 with husband and children, 5 with brothers, 2 with mother, husband and children, 2 with a person they met in Costa Rica, 1 with their mother-in-law and brothers-in-law, and 1 with mother-in-law, husband, and children.

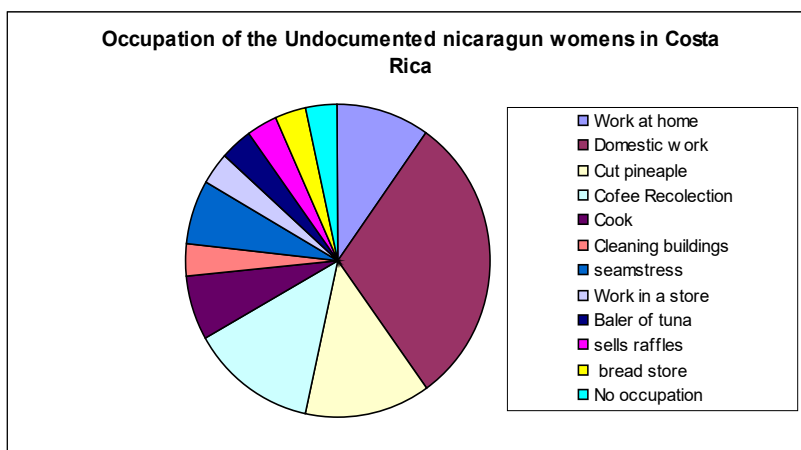
**Table 9**  
**Nicaraguan Migrant living arrangements in Costa Rica**



Source: Author fieldwork

Regarding the type of work these women do, the majority of the respondents (9) do domestic work. Eight work in agriculture, collecting coffee and pineapple.

**Table 10**  
**Nicaraguan Migrant living arrangements in Costa Rica**

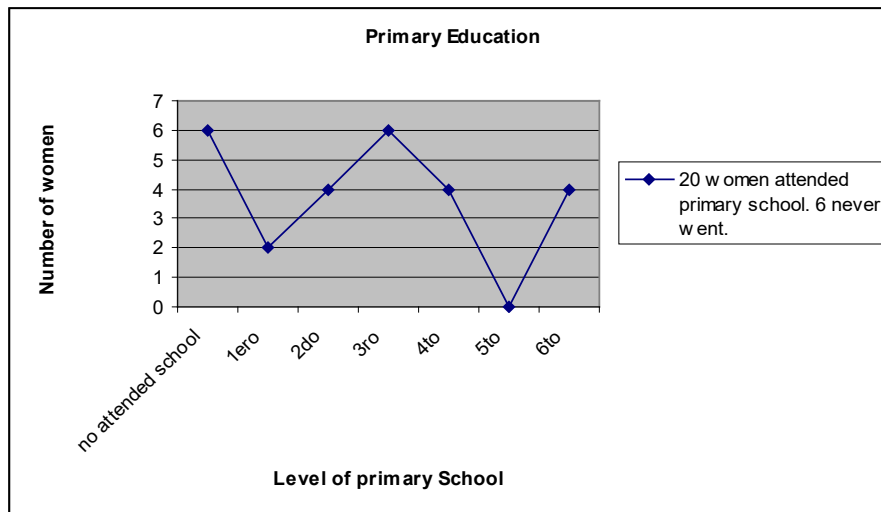


Source: Author fieldwork

Concerning these women's level of education, one started University. And three of the total attended high school, but never finished. 20 women went to primary school, and six never had the opportunity to attend school.

From all the interviews, just one woman immigrated because of poverty and studies, as the main reason to move.

**Table 11**  
Nicaraguan migrant education statistics



Source: Author fieldwork

Almost half of the Nicaraguan women knew how to read and write: 16 read, and 14 write. The rest can not read or write, or can 'somewhat'.

**Table 12**  
Nicaraguan migrant education statistics: reading and writing

Reading	Total
Yes	16
No	8
Somewhat	6
Writing	
Yes	14
No	6
Somewhat	9

Source: Author fieldwork

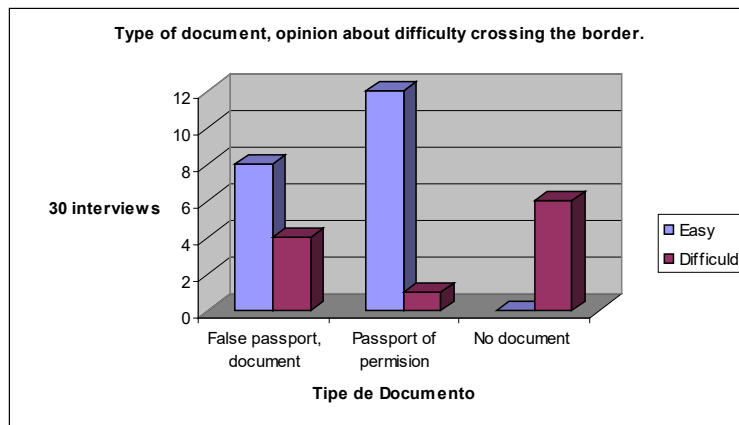
*In Nicaragua, in a big family where there are daughters and sons, parents usually prefer to send the sons to study, because in the future they have to sustain the family. Daughters are kept at home, helping with the housework and caring for other members. - Nohemi, 39 years old.*

Women are not able to finish primary school because of economic issues, as well as parents who prefer to send their boys to school rather than girl. The girls stay home and help with housework and cooking.

When coming to Costa Rica, 11 women acquired false documentation to cross the border: eight considered that it was easy to do so, while four considered it difficult. 13 women obtained passports or permission for 30 days to cross the border: 12 considered that it was an easy process, while one considered it difficult. Six came with no documentation, and considered it a difficult process.

*First I got a ride from Managua to Granada. Then I caught a bus. It was very easy. I thought the process would be more difficult, but, in the end it was just about memorizing the passport number and name. The coyote (man who helped us cross the border) sold me the passport. The first time I tried to use it the police took me out of the bus, because I got the numbers confused. But the second time I was successful.* - María Auxiliadora. 22 years old.

**Table 13**  
**Type of documentation and border crossing experience**

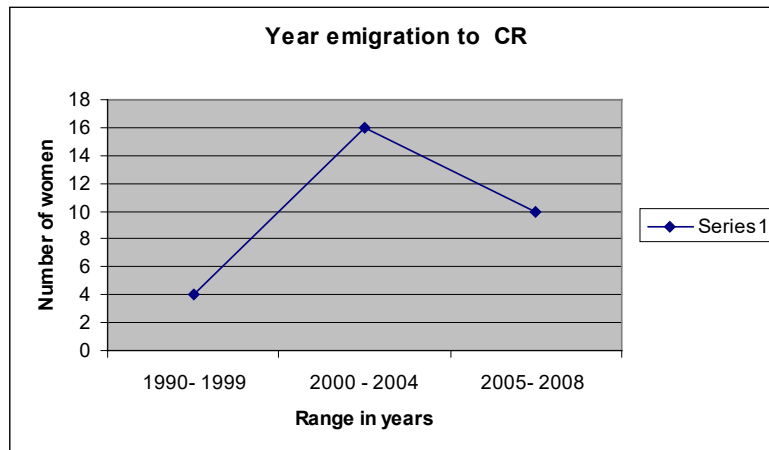


Source: Author fieldwork

The majority (16) of the women emigrated during the years from 2000-2004, 10 during the years from 2005-2008 and just four arrived before 2000.



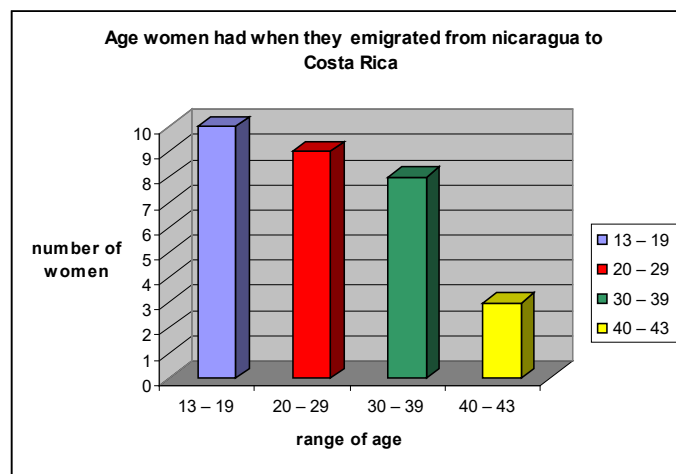
**Table 14**  
**Year of migration to Costa Rica**



Source: Author fieldwork

Regarding their age at immigration, see the graph below:

**Table 15**  
**Age of migration to Costa Rica**

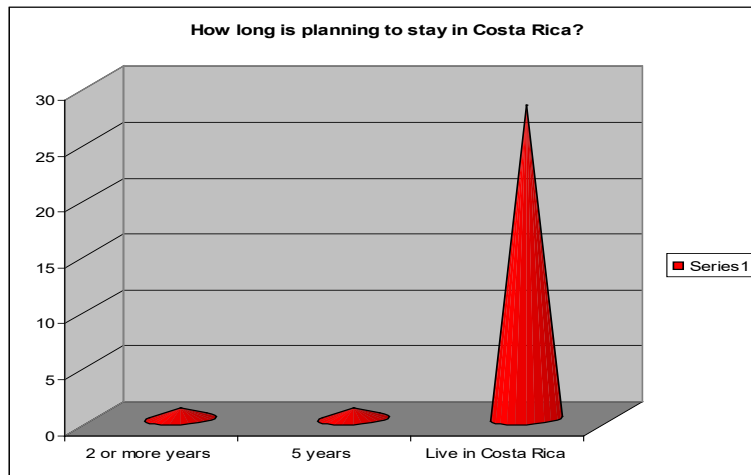


Source: Author fieldwork

The majority (19) emigrated before 30 years old. Eight of the total emigrated between 31-39 years old, and just 3 after 40 years old.

The majority of the Nicaraguan women want to live in Costa Rica indefinitely, as long as they can make it. They state that at least they have food and can find a work in Costa Rica. The women can get second hand clothes, electronics, and other things that they otherwise would not be able to find in Nicaragua. This is due to the lack of second hand markets, and because wages are low and work is hard to find, especially for unskilled women.

**Table 16**  
**Time planned to stay in Costa Rica**



Source: Author fieldwork

**Table 17**

Accompaniment to  
 Costa Rica

Accompanied or alone during migration	
Alone	11
Companion	19
Total	30

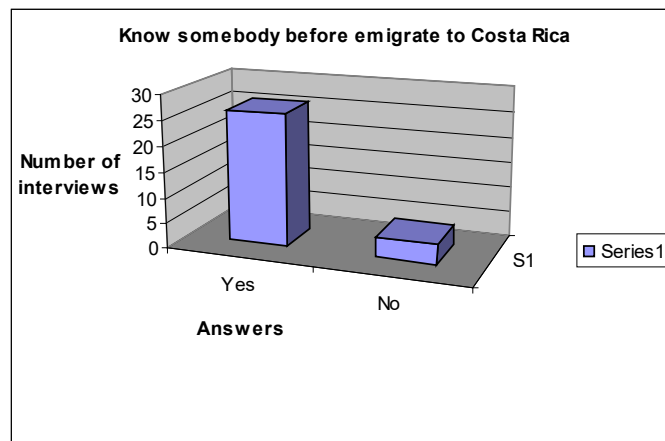
Source: Author fieldwork

The majority (19) of the Nicaraguan women emigrated from Nicaragua with a companion. 26 of the total knew someone in Costa Rica before they arrived.

*I came to Costa Rica because my mother and my aunts are here. The future for my son looks bright in Costa Rica. - Mabel, 20 years old.*

*The walk was hard, I did not have enough food and it was scary. There where many animals in the jungle. It was very dark because we walked during the night. I was scared that a snake would bites me. After the forest, we (there were other Nicaraguans) caught a bus. It was terrible because I did not know where or when we were going to arrive in Costa Rica. I had never been there before. I also was with my two children who were crying a lot. The "Coyote" helped me to cross the border and enter the country. He just asked me to pay 15,000 colones because he knew my father from before. Yasmina, 37 years old.*

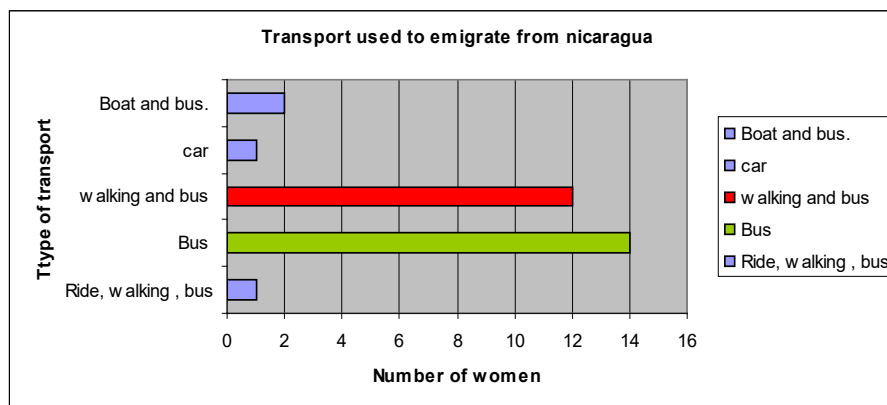
**Table 18**  
**Contact established in Costa Rica before migration**



Source: Author fieldwork

In the interviews, women were asked the transport they used to emigrate. The majority of them caught a bus (14), while others arrived by walking to the border and then catching a bus (12).

**Table 19**  
**Transport used to migrate**

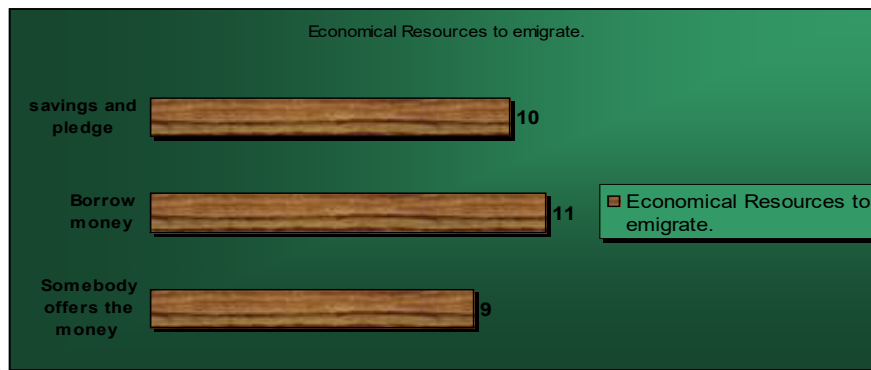


Source: Author fieldwork

Many women said that when they moved to Costa Rica, they only carried the clothes on their backs. They took a risk and came with a low budget, because nothing was secure in terms of transportation and help after they crossed the border. Some women referred to cases when women would pay the Coyote with sexual favors, in order to cross the border.

The following table illustrates the strategy used to get the economic means to emigrate from Nicaragua to Costa Rica.

**Table 20**  
**Economic resources used to**



migrate

Source: Author fieldwork

The majority (20) received or borrowed the money from family members (husband, sister, uncle, mother-in-law, father). Only ten of 30 used their savings and pledged their belongings.

*One Lady from Costa Rica needed a domestic servant. One person that I knew who was already living in Costa Rica asked me if I wanted to come to work and live with this lady. My father and husband thought that it was the best thing to do. The lady sent me the money for my passport, transportation, and food for the trip. The trade was that I had to live with her. I don't live with her any more. Now I live with my husband and my 4 children. Zaida, 27 years old.*

*My husband decided that moving to Costa Rica was the best thing to help sustain the family. He gave me the money to move, and I came here alone. Now, two sons out of four are here with me. I sent them the money to come. Before coming I did not know anybody in Costa Rica. A friend of my husband influenced the decision. Rosa, 43 years old.*

*Somebody had a debt to pay to my husband, so we used that money to move to Costa Rica. We also pledged our TV, kitchen supplies, and the iron at a place that gives you money for your possessions. After a time, if you give them back the money, they will return your belongings. If not, they will sell them. Iris, 25 years old.*

The question was asked, "How did you come up with the idea to move from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, and who made this decision?" In general, most of the motives to move were related to work, poverty, school, better opportunities for the future, and health services. Other reasons were related to divorce, separation, and death. Concerning who made the decision, the mother and husband were the predominant decision makers. Just 10 of the total made the decision for themselves. Nine women's husband made the choice, eight women's mother and father, one woman's uncle, two women's mother-in-law, and one woman's grandmother. The answers are presented below.

*Because we could not live so poorly any more, we needed to eat and sustain the family. I have some cousins in Costa Rica; they helped me in the*

*first days. My husband and I made the decision, I first came alone, and after my husband and my two kids joined me. Martzabel, 30 years old.*

*My husband's family presented us with the idea to move. We were so limited in terms of money, food, and also clothes. I was not sure about moving far from my family. My husband made the decision because he has family and friends in Costa Rica, and they helped us find jobs and a house. We have just been here 6 months. I want to go back to Nicaragua, because I miss my family, but there is no work, so probably we will stay here. Iris, 25 years old.*

*The idea to move came up because there is saying that in Costa Rica, it was easier to find better work, more clothes, and other things. Costa Rica is a more expensive country than Nicaragua, but the earnings can be higher. My mother told me to move because of my future. My mother emigrated here before me. Johanna, 27 years old.*

*My husband left me for another woman. I have many kids and I could not send all of them to work because they were babies. So my brother suggested the option to move to Costa Rica, because there I would work and sustain the family. My ex-husband does not help me with anything. There are 13 (12 children and me) in my family, but just 5 of these daughters and some of my grandchildren live with me here in Costa Rica. Socorro, 45 years old.*

*After my mother's death, we lost the house because it was ours. We did not have a place to stay. It was just my kids and I, and my sister told me that in Costa Rica someone would take care of my kids while worked, so I made the decision to move. My grandmother wanted me to live with her in Nicaragua, so I could work and take care of her as well, but the wage was too low and I could not afford to sustain my family. One more person would have been impossible. So I ran away from my responsibilities and searched for a better life in Costa Rica. Maria Auxiliadora, 22 years old.*

*In Nicaragua I used to live with my grandmother. But she kicked me out of her house, because things in Nicaragua were so difficult and she could not maintain the house any more. We were so many living in that house, around 15! I was not happy sleeping in the same room as my cousins. My grandma showed me how to be a seamstress, and so she sent me to Costa Rica, to live with my mother and to work. Ana, 24 years old.*

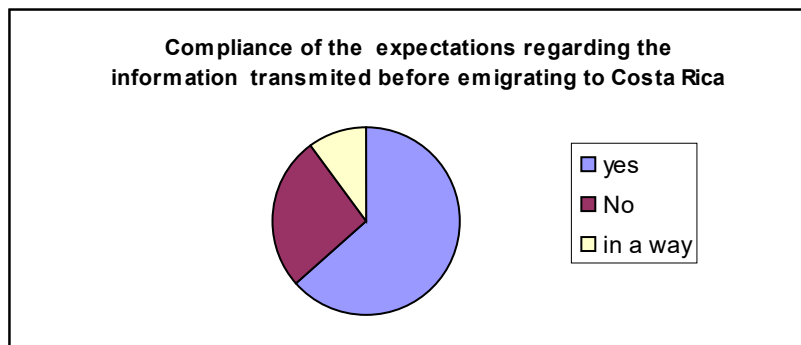
*I divorced my husband because he was having an affair with my cousin. It was a difficult family situation, and he bothered me a lot. We have 3 kids together, and he never helped me with anything, not even with the bottles of milk. I did not have a job, food, not even clothes. My bother gave me the idea to come to Costa Rica. It would be away from my family and with more possibility to survive. Rebecca, 35 years old.*

Another question asked was concerned with the information given about the circumstances in Costa Rica before migration. In general, the women heard that there was work, with higher earnings than in Nicaragua, better opportunities in terms of education and type of work, and also access to resources. However they learned that they would suffer a lot because

Costa Ricans are racist with Nicaraguans, so they had to be prepared before coming. They said that in Costa Rica “you can buy happiness”, because it is necessary to pay to get anything. Costa Rica is also considered a country with opportunities, so many Nicaraguans live there. Costa Rica is a country with less natural disasters and no army. Living there can make life easier for a single mother, for she is able to sustain the family.

From the total, 19 women correctly forecasted their situation in Costa Rica before emigrating, while eight women's expectations were not met. Three women felt that they were met in some aspects, or, “in a way”.

**Table 21**  
**Expectations met based on pre-arrival communication**



Source: Author fieldwork

*Yes, I have a job and a decent house. In Nicaragua drops of water leaked through the ceiling when it rained. We lived in a “Rancho”. Here we have electricity and clean water to cook with and drink. Nohemí, 32 years old.*

*Things here are just as my brothers told me. To live here, have to work hard everyday. There is racism against Nicaraguans: many people have humiliated me, telling me, “Stupid Nica, the only thing that you know how to cook is rice, because you don’t have anything else to eat in Nicaragua” ... In Costa Rica, there is a Anti-Nicas Club that always bothers us. However, here there is work, food, and a better life. I was told that it was easier here to find a husband, and I did find a man! But he left me and never married me. So I don't have Costa Rican papers. - Rebecca 35 years old.*

*Costa Rica is beautiful, and the place where I am working is good. I wanted to study before coming here, but I can't, since I don't have papers. Maruja, 24 years old.*

The question was asked, “How would you describe you life in Nicaragua before coming to Costa Rica?” The participant responses are are follows.

*We were many living in a small house. My parents worked, but it was not enough to afford to eat. My father repaired shoes and my mother worked as a domestic servant. I was taking care of the house and of my brothers. There were 9 of us, I am the oldest and the only daughter. My*

*father made the decision to send me to Costa Rica in order to work, send money back home, and study. Now, I don't send money because here everything is expensive. I never was able to study. Perhaps later my brothers will come here. I miss my family, but I don't want to go back. Maruja, 24 years old.*

*Nicaragua is wonderful. People are friendly. The only thing is that I had many problems with my father. The violence inside the house was making me crazy. When he was drunk he hit me and screamed all the time. My mother suffers a lot, and he was drinking the entire wage that he earned. For me, coming to Costa Rica was better to have peace from my family situation. Magdalena, 35 years old.*

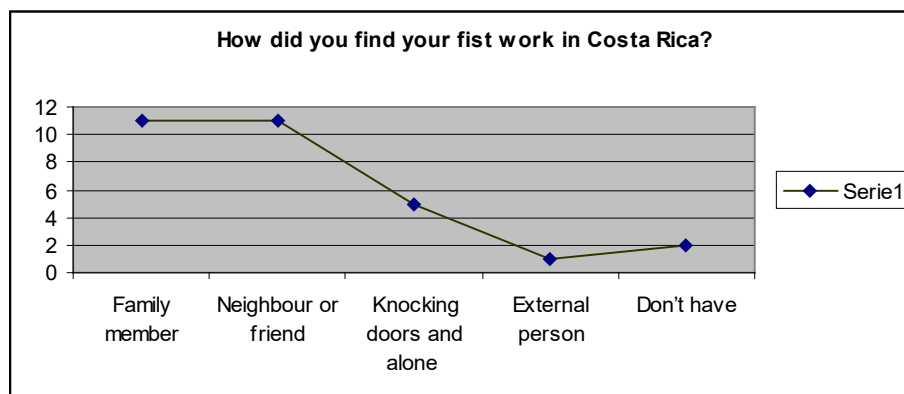
*When my ex-husband was with us, things were difficult, but at least he helped the home by bringing us food. After he left with his new partner, everything was dark. I had to sustain the family and find food for me and my children. We were living far from the city, which made it harder to find work. I never went to school, so I don't know how to read and write. The only thing I could do was work on farms where the wage was very low and irregular. We were very hungry. Socorro, 45 years old.*

*My life in Nicaragua was good; we lived in a rural zone, on a farm. Food was easy to find because we worked with cows, and made cheese and had fresh milk everyday. We also worked on the land, gathering vegetables. Basically we just had to buy rice and beans. But, my ex-husband decided to move to Costa Rica. I loved him so I decided to follow him and keep the family together. Because I wanted to make my daughter's life better, because in Costa Rica I could work in my ex-husband's friend's store, selling bread. That meant earnings and a better quality life. We can say that "love paved the way", and now it's been years living in Costa Rica. Lesbia, 38 years old.*

Not one of the women who were interviewed had gone back to Nicaragua since they arrived in Costa Rica.

### **Labour Profile**

**Table 22**  
**First employment**



Source: Author fieldwork

23 of the total women found a job with the help of somebody they knew. Just five found work by themselves. All of them found a job as undocumented workers. Mainly, the tasks that they do were low-skill jobs, such as cutting pineapple, domestic servitude, recollecting coffee, etc.

In most of the cases, the standard earning per month for migrants who emigrated before 2004 was around 120 dollars per month, working between eight and 12 hours a day. The majority were receiving a weekly payment, although sometimes irregular. It depended on the job and the number of hours worked.

Many of them changed work, for the following reasons.

- *They did not pay me a Christmas bonus in December.*

Martzabel, 30 years old.

- *The owner did not want to give me a full-time contract.*

Nohemi, 32 years

- *The boss fired me, because they did not like the way I was cleaning their house.* Yasmina, 37 years old.

- *My boss (a very old woman) fired me because she said that I did not know how to do things very well, but she never showed me how to do it correctly.* Johana, 27 years old.

- *My earnings per month were so low. I was cooking 12 hours a day, and receiving 30,000 colones (50 dollars) every two weeks.* Lillian, 38 years old.

- *I was feeling exploited when I worked in a textile factory. I was working from Monday to Saturday, 8 hours or more per day, and I was very tired and didn't have insurance. They did not pay for extra hours.* Mabel, 20 years.

All of the women interviewed would like to have the documentation to work legally in Costa Rica. Finding decent and regulated jobs is impossible without working papers. They are aware that labour rights and laws will not be on their side without proper documentation, so working conditions will not be always be good.

23 of the total have “permanent” work. Three of the women just work sometimes and four are not presently working. Their average earning per month is 200 dollars. For the majority, if they or a family member gets sick, they have to go to the drugstore and get the medicines or pay a private doctor. None of them have insurance or social security. Only the children can go to the Children's Hospital. Some of them visit the EBAIS<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding their housing conditions, 15 women claim to be pleased with their situations, saying that at least they have a house with running

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<sup>8</sup> EBAIS: Equipos básicos de Atención Integral en Salud. (Basic equipment for integral attention in health). The social security of Costa Rica offers these services in rural and urban zones. But it is just for basic health services and it doesn't offer drugs or medicine.



water and electricity. It is important to clarify that they are exceptional because some of the houses in Río Azúl do not have access to water and electricity, because of their location on top of the mountain. However, these women recognize that the location where they are living is indeed dangerous because it was once a trash dump (now there is contamination and toxicity), it is a precarious and crime-ridden neighbourhood, and also because of the high slope that they have to walk everyday. Six women state that they are semi-pleased, or “in a way”. On the other hand, nine women are not pleased with their houses. The following are some of the reasons for these answers:

*The neighbourhood is very dangerous for children: there are steep slopes and young people using drugs in the street. Houses are not secure. For example, my house is almost in a gully and risks falling in! When it is raining, the situation becomes even more terrible. You have to cross a 'river'. Also water gets stagnant and there are diseases. It is very difficult when you work everyday and you have to go out. Socorro, 45 years old.*

*The house we rent is 35,000 colones (around 60 dollars). I know that is not very expensive but that is all I can pay per month. But the house's floor becomes muddy when it is raining. It leaks a lot and becomes very cold during the night. So we get sick very easily. We don't have running water, so we have to use a hose from the neighbor's house and pay them a fee each month. We also rent the toilet. Mabel, 20 years old.*

**Picture 2**  
**Living conditions: bedroom**



Source: Author fieldwork, taken in July 2008

Regarding the women's dietary needs, 15 responded that they do not always have enough to eat. 14 consider that yes, there is food (at least rice and beans), while two said that no, they often do not have anything to eat.

The following is a general description of the food that these women can afford to have in their daily diet: rice, beans, bread, fresh cream with salt, sometimes cheap white cheese, eggs, and tuna. Occasionally a truck with chickens will pass through the community and sell them live chicken that they will have to kill, clean, and prepare to cook. The chickens are

around 1.50 dollars per chicken, and it is the only meat that they can afford to buy.

**Picture 3**  
**Living conditions: diet**



*Source:* Author fieldwork, taken in July 2008

**Picture 4**  
**Living conditions: diet**



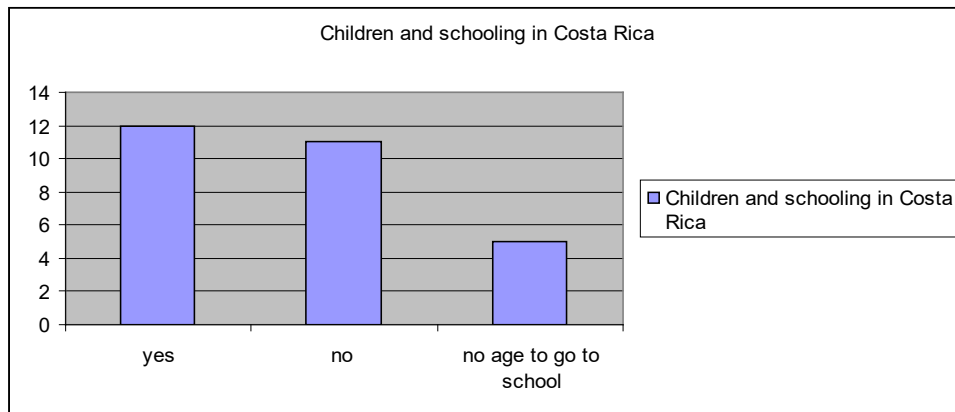
*Source:* Author fieldwork, taken in July 2008

The women were also interviewed about the nationality of the friends they have made in Costa Rica. The majority said that they just have Nicaraguan friends, while four said that they have friends of both nationalities, but the majority of them are Nicaraguan. Nine women replied that they have an equal amount of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan friends. Just one woman said that she didn't have any friends. The women also did not mention any other nationalities.

From the total, 28 women have daughters and sons living in Costa Rica. Five have not sent the children to school because they are still babies, 11 don't send them because they need them at home to help with the housework and to take care of the rest of the family, or because they don't have enough money. 12 of the women are able to send the children to school. This is illustrated in the table below.

**Table 23**

### Children and schooling in Costa Rica



Source: Author fieldwork

The women were asked if they consider themselves happier in Costa Rica than they were in Nicaragua. 25 of the total said that they were happier in Costa Rica, while five claim that they left their happiness in Nicaragua.

## 4.2 Data from Focus Group Discussions

Participants stated the following factors to support the idea that life in Costa Rica is better for them than in Nicaragua.

- More work available,
- Higher wages
- Easier to get fixed monthly earnings,
- Support (The Catholic Church plays an important role in helping the underprivileged),
- Better environment (weather),
- Children: get better food and education,
- No history of war with serious repercussions.

Participants stated the following factors to oppose the idea that life in Costa Rica is better for them than in Nicaragua.

- Lifestyle is different, and people are more materialistic,
- One must pay for happiness,
- Hard experiences due to racism,
- Lack of access to medicine or doctors.

The question, “What would you tell young Nicaraguans about coming to Costa Rica”, was asked to the women of the FGD. Their responses are as follows.

- Come to work here, you will find work and life will be better,
- You will have a better wage each month,
- You will find a job,
- You do not really need documentation to work, because Costa Ricans still contract us.
- It could be a very hard experience in terms of racism,
- There is a lack of access to medicine or doctors,
- Occasionally there is not enough money to live on,
- There is maltreatment,
- You better know somebody before you arrive,
- There are many bad things, like prostitution and easy access to drugs. It is common to see drug dealers and users, there are lots of car accidents because of alcohol,
- You should try to come with a legal passport, because it would be easier to work, rent a home, and you will be more respected,
- Try to obtain a legal working permit,
- Get well informed before coming.

The question, “Since you are already are in Costa Rica, would you want to bring your children, if they are still in Nicaragua”, was asked to the women of the FGD. Their responses are as follows.

Yes, because:

- More work,
- Better to be near children,
- More opportunities for their education,
- Better possibilities for a good future,
- More second-hand goods available to buy,
- More free public cafeterias to help poor mothers and children,
- More pre-natal care for pregnant women,
- Closest and easiest country to migrate,
- More earnings (although more expensive).

No, because:

- Sometimes suffer discrimination in schools,
- More access to drugs,
- Lots of car accidents.

## Chapter 5

### Data Analysis

This chapter presents the data analysis that answers the research question and sub questions. The analysis is based on the data presented in chapter four, collected during the fieldwork completed in Costa Rica and the literature review in chapters 2 and 3. This chapter is divided into three principal sessions of analysis. The first is concerned with the main factors that indicate the reasons, causes and motives that persuade Nicaraguan women to travel and immigrate to Costa Rica. The second is regarding the main strategies used for these women to travel and immigrate to Costa Rica. The final part of the chapter will present the answer to the main research question.

#### **Main factors that indicate the reasons and motives that make female Nicaraguans travel and immigrate to Costa Rica: Discussion**

There is information that refers to the large number of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, constituting over 76% of the total of population born in another country (INEC 2000: 4), and also it is observable based on the research observation that all the Nicaraguans who live in Río Azul de Costa Rica are living in poor conditions. This situation raises the question, “what are the main reasons for Nicaraguan women to travel and immigrate to Costa Rica and become undocumented labour migrants?”

#### ***Push factors***

During the 1990s, the public sector and economy in Nicaragua went through a drastic deterioration, and therefore the supply for employment decreased. Migration became the principal feature of this period (Morales and Castro 2006). However, it seems that the situation did not change, given that in the year 2000, Nicaraguans continued to move out of their country. There are more women immigrating to Costa Rica, and the feminization of migration is a visible fact.

It would be just easy to look at Nicaragua's GDP (per capita USD), and say that Nicaraguan women move because there is poverty in their country. The Nicaraguan GDP is 5,371 USD, while in Costa Rica it is 22,145 USD. By looking at these numbers, one can assume that people move due to economic reasons. Also, the countries' Human Development Index positions are different: Nicaragua is 110 while Costa Rica is 48 (UNDP, 2007). Nicaragua has the economic conditions that lead to migration push-factors, and the data collected during fieldwork confirms the fact that poverty is an important factor that causes women to move. In terms

of economic factors and opportunities, these reasons corroborate the central idea of the push-pull theory, “*a person might choose to move because they perceive that the situation in their current location has gotten worse or the situation in their place of destination has gotten better*” (Hagen, 2008). Costa Rica is Nicaragua's neighbor that offers better living situations. Besides economics and poverty, there are other equally valid reasons that encourage women to move, such as social factors, personal motives and pessimistic circumstances.

Regarding a woman's decision to move, mothers and husbands were predominant influences. 33% (about 10 respondents) of the total made the decision themselves, 30% (9) the decision was made by the husband, 27% (8) by the mother or father, 2.5% (1) by the uncle, 5% (2) by the mother-in-law, and 2.5% (1) by the grandmother. There is the expectation that women must support the family economically because as labor migrants, they are considered as bread-winners. They must care for their relatives and are expected to follow a husband or partner's expectations. The feminization of migration for undocumented Nicaraguans has to do mostly with the role of women being transformed into that of a bread-winner, women migrating to seek autonomy, decision-making power, and fleeing a disadvantaged position in a patriarchal society.

Lee (1966) in Hagen, 2008, was the pioneer of the push-pull theory. He states that the choice about moving from one place to another is motivated by many factors: wages, individual values, desires, and expectations. Push or pull factors in principle are not directly related to gender aspects, however, it included gender as an intervening factor. The existence of partner, marital or conjugal issues typically having to do with abusive or violent relationships can contribute to the push-pull theory. Circumstances such as incidences of domestic violence, separation or divorce, and sexual abuse are perceived to be the main reasons that push Nicaraguan women to migrate to Costa Rica. In the testimonies collected by the interviews, women emigrated in order to escape these situations. About 30% of the women refer in their testimonies to difficult circumstances in terms of issues related to gender relations. This shows that gender expectations and roles do play an important influential part in the push-pull theory.

### ***Pull Factors***

The hope for a new life is one important expectation shown in the data. Women consider that coming to Costa Rica will open for them a better future.

In terms of pull factors as positive circumstances, women said that before coming to Costa Rica the main expectation was to have job opportunities for manually skilled women, and hence earn an income. On arrival in Costa Rica, they did find a job in the informal or manual labor sector, but they also found inequity, discrimination, and racism. So

originally the optimistic expectation was there, but in reality, the situation is not so positive. The testimonies illustrate this phenomenon.

Children's education is one of the most important motives for Nicaraguan women to move to Costa Rica. This was reflected in the interviews and FGD. Nevertheless, the data shows that 37% (11) women who are mothers do not send children to school because they need to help with housework, do not have enough money for tuition or supplies, or do not have documentation required for admission. 40% (12) of the women do send their children to school, 16% (5) women do not send them because they are babies, and 7% (2) women do not have children. Schooling is supposed to be one of the major reasons to migrate, according to the data. But it seems that there is a contradiction between expectation and reality in this domain. Therefore, the pull factor is the educational opportunity expectation, conforming to the push-pull theory, but the situation is different once they arrive.

There is a high hope for a better future for Nicaraguan women and their family members in Costa Rica, in terms of living conditions. They are motivated to immigrate to Costa Rica because they can get a job and earn money, purchase food to eat, and buy second-hand clothes. However, it is important to note that their living conditions in Costa Rica are indeed precarious. They do not always have access to food or health services. Women recognize these realities, however the collective opinion is that they are still better off in Costa Rica. Testimonies show that women find themselves happier in Costa Rica (83%) than in Nicaragua (17%).

An important desire is to keep the unity of the family, and have all members together in Costa Rica. The family migration network is one of the main pull factors that motivate Nicaraguan women to move, according to the theory that family reunification is an optimistic circumstance.

### **Analysis of network theory**

The models of migration networks indicate that positive externalities are present if the immigrant utility grows in response to an increase in the number of newcomers (Pedersen et al., 2004). Newcomers to Costa Rica came following the positive arguments of migrants that were already in Costa Rica. Positive arguments communicated by networks can increase the desire of moving from Nicaragua to Costa Rica. Female-centered networking is the main strategy used in terms of informing women about the Costa Rican situation and the creation of expectations before arrival. They are commonly made up of kin, shared friends, and a shared community of origin. This confirms the argument of Hagen, "*New migrants will receive help from the pioneer migrants ranging from arranging the trip to finding a job, thus making migration increasingly cost and risk free*" (Hagen, 2008: 17). Immigrants from Nicaragua in Costa Rica did offer the women assistance during the process of migration, in terms of contacting the

'coyote', food, housing, transportation, and finding a job when they arrived in Costa Rica. This is where networks played the most important role, because previous migrants communicated to them how to reach the 'coyote', and how much to pay him or her. The 'coyote' gave the women invaluable instructions that were necessary to cross the border, such as memorizing the numbers of the passport to pass the police and immigration officers. Other information transmitted through networking was concerned with jobs, living standards, policies, social environment, risks, and documentation.

### **Critical discussion of the theories in relation to the data analyzed**

The data analyzed was supported by the Push-Pull Theory, as it explained the reasons why women migrate (denoting that many of them did not have autonomy in the decision). Push factors related to the bad situation that they had in Nicaragua, and the hope of getting better wages or work in the country of destination. The pull factors were the positive expectations of life in Costa Rica. The theory was supported by analyzing the economic dimensions as push-pull factors between both countries. But at the same time, the theory was limited and narrow in terms of providing support to understand and explain gender issues, such as changes in gender relations and hierarchies within the family context, female subordination in the social context, and the control of distribution of resources as important factors that encourage women's decision to migrate. These aspects that came out from the primary data were difficult to analyze with the Push-Pull Theory presented by Lee (1966), and the Network Theory, as it does not recognize gender differences in networking.

The Push-Pull Theory was just focused on wages, desires and expectations. It seems to be in some degree incomplete as it does not take in consideration other circumstances of real life. Migration is just an outcome of individual decisions made on the perception of worse circumstances in the current location and the expectations of improvement in the destination country. These aspects are important and realistic but gender issues are equally influential. In reality, the testimonies show that everything is relative, each social context is different, and social issues and circumstances should be taken into consideration.

Gender as an integral part of migration and should be acknowledged. It is important to point out the different experiences between men and women in the migration process. It also denotes the differences between poor migrants and rich migrants. These improvements in the theory can facilitate the analyses of the reasons, especially with the specific case of undocumented Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica. Also it is necessary to take into consideration the importance of having a clear picture of the context of the sending and receiving countries, regions, and location of migration.



Both theories do not mention anything about the differences between documented migration and undocumented migration.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

The researcher confirmed by visiting Río Azul in San José de Costa Rica that there are many undocumented Nicaraguan women living in this area and that their living conditions are precarious. Yet from their perception, life seems to be better than it was in Nicaragua.

The researcher found that a poor economic situation in Nicaragua was an important factor that influenced Nicaraguan women's decision to move to Costa Rica. Circumstances like unemployment, lack of opportunities, and insufficient income were dominant. Family members were influential in the decision making, as family expectations and family issues are culturally very important. Women became the family's breadwinner and were expected to migrate to sustain the family. Issues of gender relations such as partner, marital, or conjugal matters as well as changes in family structure were important pull factors that made Nicaraguan women migrate.

Job opportunities, children's education, better living conditions, income to purchase food and second hand clothes were dominant pull factors. Also the researcher perceived that another pull factor is the tranquillity that women could find in Costa Rica being away from family issues and gender relations.

In terms of strategies used to migrate the researcher found that information transmitted in social relations and networks indicating pull factors were very important in decision making. Female-centered networks were used as a tool to make the final decision, as they provided insight on the migration process and outcome. Acquisition of false documentation and contact with the 'coyote' were important tools provided by network relations as well.

Both theories were useful, but insufficient to explain the phenomenon entirely. The Push-Pull Theory and Network Theory did not directly address gender issues and did not consider the differences between undocumented or documented migrants.

The researcher considers that the problematic of undocumented migration could continue to grow, due to the Nicaraguan economic situation and the existence of favourable circumstances in Costa Rica. Taking action can diminish the percentage of undocumented women in Costa Rica.

#### **Policy recommendations**

##### ***Recommendation to the government of Costa Rica***

The government of Spain, in order to stop the black market and exploitation of undocumented labour migrants, opened the possibility for employees and undocumented workers to apply for a Spanish residence and work permit,

for three months. (Ministry of Labour and Immigration of Spain, 2005). The idea was that these employers would then have to offer the immigrants a legal contract, pay all the national health payments corresponding to the period of illegal employment, and face a fine. This meant that many illegal immigrants decided simply not to seek legalization because they risked being fired by their employers (Work permit news, 2005).

Living circumstances of undocumented migrants and working conditions of immigrants in Spain were as bad as Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica. Perhaps creating a policy like Spain did could be a way for Costa Rica to make undocumented Nicaraguan workers legal according to the law and to improve their labor rights. But they must consider the risk of more Nicaraguans coming if they knew that this possibility is open. They must control security at the border. It is important to make employees consider the importance of contracting foreigners who have the officially authorized documentation to work, and make public the sanctioning of employers who not offer to their workers social guarantees. This can be done by doing a media campaign.

Costa Rica and Nicaragua might have more coordination in terms of facilitating the entrance of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica during the coffee recollection season. This would be done with controlling and contracting workers on the border. The governments could create a documentation system that registers all Nicaraguans who come into the country during recollection season and report when they leave the country as well. This can benefit the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican economies as well.

Undocumented Nicaraguan women deserve to be recognized as labour migrants in Costa Rica, because they are workers and contribute to the Costa Rican economy. In making migration policies governments must take into consideration the role of the women who migrate, which perhaps is the bread-winner, and comes to Costa Rica to search for work to sustain their family.

It might be necessary to take in consideration their current situation in Costa Rica. Nicaraguan undocumented women are exposed to triple vulnerabilities:

- As female labor migrants,
- As women deprived of a number of rights and protection due to their undocumented condition, with no educational skills and live in poverty,
- As discriminated against in Costa Rica for being Nicaraguans. As was shown in the data, there is a collective opinion that there is racism and xenophobia against them.

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## Notes