**Costa Rica Rental Market Assessment**

*Translated from the Spanish*

**Executive Summary**

At the request of UNHCR - UNHCR, several price surveys were conducted in late June and early July 2018. The inquiry covered four main areas or themes:

(a) Prices for renting 2 and 3-bedroom dwellings in the cities of San José, Alajuela and Cartago were investigated.

b) The prices of hostels normally contracted by the organization and its related agencies were updated, and the list was supplemented with prices of new hostels. All this for the city of San José.

c) In the Health area, the costs of medical services, laboratory tests and medical images most commonly required by refugees were investigated. This is mainly for San José, but also for Alajuela and Cartago.

d) Prices were also found for day care services, both for children and older adults, in the city of San José.

Once the data were collected and organized, the extreme values (higher, lower), the range or difference between them and the average for each area or category were highlighted.

This document includes the conclusions and recommendations of the study carried out, without being able to relate the data obtained with the current reality of UNHCR, since it was not possible to obtain such information with certainty in any of the organizations or agencies interviewed.

**Aims and Objectives**

***General Objective***

Update reference prices in various sensitive areas for UNHCR - UNHCR, its related agencies and its populations of interest. In order to be able to compare them later against the amounts that the organization currently provides to refugees as temporary support.

***Specific Objectives***

1. Find out rental prices for 2 and 3 bedroom apartments in the cities of San José, Alajuela and Cartago.

2. Update the prices of the hostels normally contracted by the organization and its related agencies.

3. Complement the list of available hostels with prices of new hostels, within the city of San José.

4. To consult the costs of the services of Nursery, so much for children as for older adults, in the city of San Jose.

5. Find out the costs of medical services, laboratory tests and medical images, mainly for the city of San Jose.

6. Highlight extreme values (higher, lower). In the case of housing rentals, also calculate the range or difference between them and the average for each area.

7. Provide conclusions and recommendations based on the data obtained in the studies conducted (only).

***Scope***

1. Rent of dwelling or room:

a. Only houses or apartments with 2 or 3 rooms for rent

b. Only the cities of San José, Alajuela and Cartago.

c. A minimum of 40 measurements will be made: 20 in San José, 10 in Alajuela and 10 in Cartago.

2. Lodging in hostels:

a. Only the city of San José

b. At least 8 measurements shall be made. This includes updating the costs of hostels currently used by UNHCR.

c. A hostel is defined as a hostel that provides facilities for guests to cook their own food in-situ.

3. Nursing home services for the Elderly and nurseries for children:

a. Measurements will be made only in the city of San José.

b. At least 12 measurements shall be made: 8 in nurseries for children and 4 in homes for the Elderly.

4. Health services (medical, dental and optical) and basic medical examinations, including x-rays and ultrasounds.

a. Only the cities of San José, Alajuela and Cartago.

b. A minimum of 60 measurements will be made, mainly in the city of San José, but also in Alajuela and Cartago.

c. It does not include the cost of medicines or similar.

For the study on rental prices, population centers of the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) of middle and lower-middle class were included. With the exception of Heredia, a province that was considered to be less representative of the options used by UNHCR agencies and their populations of interest.

In spite of repeated mentions by the different UNHCR agencies, it was also avoided to consider the so-called "hot spots" or marginal areas such as

Tejarcillos, Aguantafilo, Los Guido, León XIII and Infiernillo, by virtue of its dangerousness and low desirability as a place of residence.

The comparative analysis was carried out considering basically two factors, namely, the location of the dwelling and the amount of the monthly rent.

**Methodology**

To effectively carry out the components of this study, a mix of methodologies and techniques was used, as follows:

a) In-depth interviews with representatives of UNHCR - UNHCR and four related organizations, in their order: CENDEROS, RET International, Jesuit Migrant Service and Women's Foundation.

Yescárleth Rodríguez Álvarez, Coordinadora de Inteligencia Productiva Proyecto Autosuficiencia Económica y Medios de Vida de las Personas Refugiadas.

Women's Foundation - Tel.2253-1661

Facebook: Fundación Mujer - www.fundacionmujer.org

Also, for fieldwork:

b) Documentary and electronic exploratory study of secondary sources AAA

c) Observation, using the Incognito Client technique: electronic, telephone and in person.

d) Comparative benchmarking for the categories of interest.

***Benefits***

1. Reliability and topicality of the information.

2. Technical study carried out by an independent specialised agency.

3. Flexibility to make adjustments on the fly.

**Results**

**HOUSING RENTAL PRICES:**

Firstly, rental prices of dwellings were investigated. The guidelines and scopes agreed for this study were as follows:

a. Only houses or apartments with 2 or 3 rooms for rent

b. Only the cities of San José, Alajuela and Cartago.

c. A minimum of 40 measurements will be made: 20 in San José, 10 in Alajuela and 10 in Cartago.

As can be seen in the table above, there is a great variability between the values observed for each of the cities of San José, Alajuela and Cartago, where the widest range is observed in the city of Alajuela.

Guided by averages, San Jose shows the highest and lowest rental prices at a time. However, the highest average is shown in the province of Alajuela.

In the province of Alajuela, the highest values were in Rio Segundo and La Guácima (¢ 280,000 each), while the lowest was in San Jerónimo de Naranjo (¢ 125,000), a much more remote location from the capital city. All prices for three-bedroom houses.

For two-bedroom houses, the highest value was given in Turrúcares (¢ 225,000), while the two lowest were observed in the districts of San Rafael and Rosales (¢ 200,000 each).

No rental apartments were located within the study period in the province of Alajuela.

A map with the locations of the data presented is presented below:

*Figure 2: Location of highest and lowest rental values, Alajuela.*

In addition, photographs of some of the places evaluated during the present price study are presented.

*Figure 3: Examples of analyzed dwellings in Alajuela.*

In the province of Cartago, the highest value was given in San Diego de Tres Ríos (¢275,000), while the lowest was given in Guadalupe de Cartago (¢ 150,000), this for three-bedroom houses.

For two-bedroom houses, the highest value was given in San isidro del Guarco (¢ 250,000), while the lowest was observed in Concepción de Tres Ríos (¢160,000).

Two apartments for rent were located within the study period in the province of Cartago, both with prices considered higher than those of the houses, that is, ¢210,000 per month for two rooms and ¢ 265,000 for three rooms.

*Figure 4: Location of higher and lower rental values, Cartago.*

The following are examples of the dwellings analyzed in the Province of Cartago for the purposes of this price study.

*Figure 5: Examples of dwellings analyzed in Cartago*

In the province of San José, the largest number of measurements were taken (33), with the results summarized below.

For 3-bedroom houses, the two highest values were given in El Carmen de Guadalupe (¢ 250,000 each), while the lowest was given in San Pedro (¢165,000 per month), which seems contrary to what is normally expected with respect to the location/amount ratio of monthly rent.

For two-bedroom houses, the highest value was given in a condominium house in San Vicente de Moravia (¢ 220,000), while the lowest was given quite far from the city centre, in San Gabriel de Aserrí (¢ 120,000).

For two-bedroom apartments, the highest value was in Llorente de Tibás (¢ 290,000), while the lowest was in the pure center of the city, in Barrio Los Angeles (¢ 140,000).

*Figure 6: Location of highest and lowest rental values, San Jose*

The following photographs correspond to some of the dwellings considered within this study:

*Figure 7: Examples of dwellings analysed in Cartago*

**PRICES OF LODGING IN HOSTELS**

The following comparative table presents the costs per night in single or double room, the scope of this study at geographical level was defined at the level of the province of San Jose, it was established the realization of a minimum of 8 measurements. This includes updating the costs of hostels currently used by UNHCR. Finally, a hostel is defined as a hostel that provides facilities for the guest to cook their own food in-situ.

*Figure 8: Price per night in a single room in a hostel*

There is also great variability here in the values observed for each of the hostels investigated, where the cheapest is Casa del Parque and the most expensive is Hostel Selina. The average prices are around ¢ 15.000.and ¢ 24.000 per night, for single and double rooms, respectively.

**NURSING HOME AND DAY CARE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN**

The price of childcare and nursing homes for older adults is presented below. In the case of day care centers, these are broken down by full or half day, while the study with older adults was based on whether the center provided day care or hospitalization. Measurements were made only in the city of San José and included a minimum of 8 nurseries for children and 4 homes for the Elderly.

The following are the results obtained in the case study of prices for day care centers:

*Figure 9: Price of childcare service for a full or half day.*

As can be seen, the lowest monthly payment for the whole day is offered by the Angelitos de Oro Children's Centre, while for the midday it is the CECUDI of Santa Marta. On the other hand, the highest monthly fee is the Bilingual Garden of Dreams and Smiles.

In turn, the following figure shows the prices per household service for the Elderly both for the entire day in monthly terms (resident) and for just one day in daily terms.

*Figure 10: Household service price for the Elderly for a full day or half a day*

As can be seen, the lowest rate for those who reside in the place is offered by the home Un Rincón para los Sueños (A Corner for Dreams), while for day care ("only day") it is Santa Clara Allegre. On the other hand, the highest rate for the resident is that of La Casona, while for day care it is that of Di'Vin.

The figures indicated under "Day only" are daily, including food and participation in activities.

**HEALTH SERVICES**

In order to establish a study of prices in health services, 89 measurements were made on the following services. In each case, the minimum and maximum prices obtained through a comparative table are presented:

a. Laboratory test: Cholesterol+Triglycerides (Hemogram), Diabetes, Sexually transmitted diseases, General urine test, Papanicolaou and Thyroid.

*Figure 11: Minimum, maximum and average prices for laboratory tests.*

The wide price ranges between the different types of examinations are considered normal, since the high prices for Urine, Papanicolaou and Thyroid are due to the fact that the entities consulted include the cost of the medical consultation or other benefits, inseparable from the cost of the examination itself.

b. Vaccines: Influenza, Yellow Fever and Pneumococcus

*Figure 12: Minimum, maximum and average vaccine prices.*

There are no major variations in price ranges.

c. Tests: Pregnancy and HIV

*Figure 13: Minimum, maximum and average prices for pregnancy and HIV tests*

The broad price ranges for HIV testing are due to "package" prices with other tests, inseparably. On the other hand, the variation of more than 50% in the cost of the Pregnancy Test is real and caused by the unusually low price of the Cartin Laboratory.

d. Medical images: Electrocardiogram, Mammography, Chest X-rays and Ultrasound of the abdomen.

*Figure 14: Minimum, maximum and average prices for medical images.*

The variations between the prices correspond to the reality of the market, except in the case of mammography where the highest price, of the Metropolitan Hospital, includes an ultrasound.

e. Medical Services: Cardiology, Endocrinology, Women's Gynecology, Infectious Diseases, Oncology, Psychiatry and General Medicine (Control of high blood pressure and other conditions).

*Figure 15: Minimum, maximum and average prices for medical services.*

The variations between the prices correspond to the reality of the market, where the highest point is for Gynecology Women, by Dr. Adriana Vallejos, Campbell Comprehensive Medical Center.

f. In addition: Dentistry (Shoes and Extractions) and Optometry (not including lenses). No medication or similar was paid for.

*Figure 16: Minimum, maximum and average prices for dentistry and optometry.*

The variations between the prices here also correspond to the reality of the market, with two relevant comments: a) In the case of shims and extractions, the price of a simple procedure is shown, without complications or special materials. b) In the case of the Optometry service, the temporary promotions were taken out of context where the eye exam is given as this royalty is normally linked to the subsequent purchase of glasses (rings and lenses).

**LOWEST TYPE OR SPECIALTY HIGHEST AVERAGE**

**Conclusions**

Housing rental prices:

As mentioned above, there is great variability among the values observed for each of the different localities, where the widest range is observed in the city of San José.

2. On the other hand, the highest average monthly rent is shown in the province of Alajuela.

3. As expected, it is generally more expensive to rent apartments or houses in condominiums than houses in neighborhoods or urbanizations.

4. Likewise, the amount of rent tends to decrease according to the location of the residence and the characteristics of the neighborhood (for lower class or unattractive areas), as well as according to the distance from population centers (the greater the distance, the lower the rent paid).

5. This rule, like all others, has its exceptions, since elements such as the characteristics of the rented property, its proximity to means of transport or other facilities in the environment or, simply, the expectations of the owner, take great importance when fixing the amount and conditions of the rent.

6. There are limitations (discrimination) towards families with foreign members, especially Nicaraguans.

7. Also towards large families, with pets and even with small children.

8. The month of guarantee deposit is an established practice and the most that is accepted is to split it in two payments.

Prices per night in hostel:

It is important to update the benchmarking regularly, for two main reasons:

Several of the hostels that are on the list of UNHCR providers are possibly no longer in operation: Isha, In&Basic, Urbano, Monkeys Tribe and 1110.

2. New and improved options can be located, even at prices lower than the market average, as is the case of Hostel Casa del Parque in La California.

*Nursing Homes for the Elderly and Day Care Centers:*

1. Elder care homes and day care centers are not cheap.

2. Price ranges are wide. In the case of day care centers, the range between the highest and lowest monthly payment is about 50% for valued day care centers.

3. This is generally due to the location, facilities and services offered by each entity.

4. Few homes for the Elderly offer the option of being only during the day and usually offer it only for packages of several days.

*Health services:*

For all the services evaluated, large variations in prices were detected, which generally correspond to the reality of the market.

However, in a number of cases, large price differences are due to joint and indissoluble pricing policies between the cost of the examination plus that of the corresponding doctor's office, or to "package" prices.

3. It is worth "walking" or probing for the best options for each case.

4. Therefore, assuming that the quality of services is similar, it is essential to expand and keep the list of providers and prices updated in order to have the best option in each case and opportunity.

**Recommendations**

1. Compare the aid currently provided to populations of interest, the specific amount of which could not be ascertained in this research, with the results of these studies.

A kind of minimum "floor" could then be established based on the information collected and a percentage could be added based on some technical criteria, such as specific locality, number of members of the family nucleus or other.

Implement an agile and simple system of search and comparison of options for rentals, since an inventory does not make much sense in this case, because of the volatile supply.

This can be done by means of a simple electronic sheet, which lists the specific sources to be consulted, including by area and type of property, so that it is easy to locate the available offer just by following the hyperlinks.

3. Maintain updated inventories of providers and prices of different medical services, while seeking to expand them with more and better options for users.

To this end, a digital file is attached that can serve as a starting point for this purpose.

4. Preserve a policy of strategic alliances with providers that have the flexibility to provide better conditions in their services for the populations of interest.