

Costa Rica

September 2022

Since 2018, Costa Rica has faced a challenging reality of displacement, mainly attributed to the political crisis in Nicaragua.

Although the arrivals of Nicaraguans have been continuous since the socio political crisis of April 2018, with a small decrease in 2020 due to COVID-19, the number of new asylum seekers increased significantly in the context of the presidential elections of November 2021 in Nicaragua.

By the end of 2021, Costa Rica was home to over 150,000 asylum seekers (mostly from Nicaragua, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Cuba and the North of Central America) and was the world's fourth largest recipient of new individual asylum claims. **As of June 30, 2022**, Costa Rica was hosting **215,933** people of concern: of these, **11,205** are refugees and **204,728** asylum seekers, the majority Nicaraguans (**89%**).

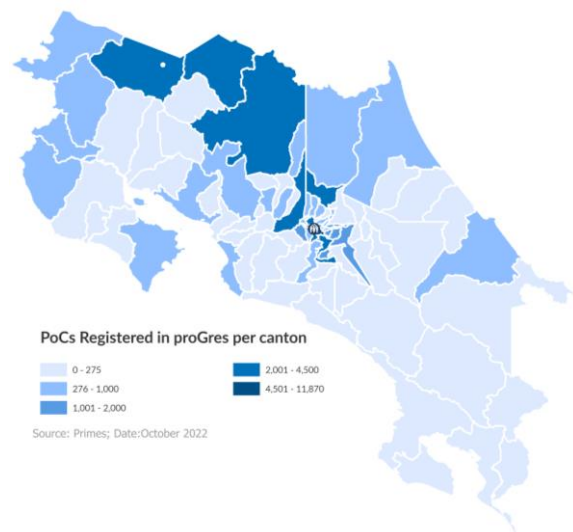
Despite the Government's efforts, these continued arrivals have posed important strains on the national systems of response including education, health, social protection, and legal assistance. UNHCR continues to assist the Government of Costa Rica in the refugee response by supporting the asylum system and by providing humanitarian aid, social protection support and livelihood opportunities to the most vulnerable.

More than 230k PoCs, who are they?

Distribution of persons of concerns by legal status (Caseload August 2022)



Source: Migration authorities
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UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

82 National Staff

16 International Staff

59% Female

41% Male

**Does not include Government staff funded by UNHCR*

Offices:

1 Country Office in San Jose

1 Field Office in Upala

1 Field Unit in San Jose

Main Activities

Protection

UNHCR Costa Rica works to ensure access to rights and enhance protection through a variety of interventions and activities for asylum-seekers, refugees, and persons at-risk or identified as stateless. UNHCR collaborates with the Government to promote safe access to territory, *non-refoulement*, effective registration and documentation, access to a fair and efficient asylum system, prevention of and response to statelessness, and access to basic rights and services. Activities implemented also help strengthen prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence, child protection, and specific interventions for other people with heightened vulnerabilities.

Asylum System Strengthening

UNHCR supports the asylum institutions to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the asylum system. To address the influx of asylum-seekers in Costa Rica, UNHCR provides support to the Refugee Unit in San Jose and Upala with human resources, infrastructure assistance and capacity building. UNHCR also provides support to the Commission on Restricted Visas and Refugees (CVRR) and the Administrative Migration Tribunal (TAM) to increase the adjudication capacity and accelerate processing times.

Legal Advice and Assistance

UNHCR's legal partners provide legal counselling, assistance, and representation to people of concern on the asylum and statelessness processes, as well as access to other rights, such as health, education, and work.

Persons with Specific Needs

UNHCR leads the Multi-Functional Team on **gender-based violence prevention and response** with the participation of partner agencies. Through its partners, UNHCR provides safe houses and psychosocial services for gender-based violence survivors, including female asylum-seekers and their children, and LGBTIQ+ people. To further expand the **child protection response**, particularly unaccompanied or separated (UASC) asylum-seekers and refugees, UNHCR provides technical assistance to national entities to ensure early identification of children-at-risk, and implementation of comprehensive responses. UNHCR supports the Government of Costa Rica in its **efforts to eradicate statelessness and support stateless persons**, in line with its Global Refugee Forum pledges. UNHCR provides staffing and assistance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the statelessness determination process and to Civil Registry to support universal birth registration and naturalization. UNHCR also conducts outreach to identify and refer persons at risk of statelessness. To address the situation of **people of concern with disabilities and older persons** respectively, UNHCR coordinates actions with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities and the National Council for Older Adults.

Community-Based Protection (CBP)

UNHCR's Community-Based Protection strategy focuses on four critical areas: strengthening protection mechanisms within communities, promoting community organization and empowerment, Communication with Communities (CwC) and peaceful coexistence initiatives. In San Jose, support continues through coordination with various community organizations, including reception of referrals and sharing of protection concerns. UNHCR began the implementation of Mobile Information Centers (CMI). The objective is to provide accurate, accessible, and timely information to the people of concern and, at the same time, to reinforce two-way communication with the people UNHCR serves at the community level. During the period, UNHCR facilitated three Mobile Information Centers in San Jose central, Guadalupe and Alajuelita and **402** HH visited and received accurate and adequate information about their rights, programs, and services available in Costa Rica. The Office also launched a new communication channel, a WhatsApp Chatbot on the 27th of September as part of the Regional chatbot initiative. During the first week of the launch, **251** persons accessed the chatbot and about **2,000** messages have been received and responded to.

Emergency preparedness

Since 2019, UNHCR participates in the Municipal Emergency Committees (CME) in Upala and Los Chiles to strengthen contingency and emergency preparedness plans. In coordination with the Municipalities, UNHCR has assisted local communities during floods and further supported the renovation and improvement of Community Centres to be used as temporary shelters. UNHCR also participates in regular meetings of the UN Interagency Emergency Group (UNETE). Overall, UNHCR has distributed **6,617** Core Relief Items, **70** mosquito nets, **1,010** Jerry Cans, **650** mattresses, **4,609** soaps, and **428** blankets to assist in strengthening the emergency response capacity of the cantons of the Northern Zone.

Livelihoods

Living the Integration (*Vivir la Integración*) is UNHCR's main livelihoods and economic inclusion initiative. It aims to promote socioeconomic inclusion and self-reliance of the population of concern, through a multi-sector approach. Its main objective is to strengthen people of concern's wage employment and entrepreneurial capacities through guidance, training, campaigns and job placement activities. By September 2022, UNHCR and partners provided **1,619** people of concern with guidance on labour market opportunities and life skills trainings to strengthen their readiness for the job market. About **2,500** asylum-seekers and refugee entrepreneurs received business training, seed capital to start businesses and some completed life skills trainings to strengthen their readiness for the job market sources.

Cash assistance

As of September 2022, **1,599** family groups, representing **4,069** individuals, have received assistance for a total of **USD 1.254.416,11**. Most beneficiaries are from Nicaragua (88%), 75% are female and 25% male. Fifty percent of the individuals benefited are minors. Average age of beneficiaries is 21.5. The average household size of HHs benefited this year is 2.4. In 71% of the households, the head of household is a woman. An average of 65.38% of the persons UNHCR serves surveyed for the post-delivery monitoring of monetary assistance from 2019 to 2021 affirm that the assistance contributed to improvements in their living conditions; 59.77% felt stress reduction and for 61.55% the financial burden was reduced.

Health

UNHCR and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) signed an agreement to provide health insurance for **6,000** people of concern initially for 12 months (January-December 2020). During 2021, another agreement was signed expanding insurance coverage to 10,000 people of concern through to February 2022. The agreement outlined UNHCR support to the Government of Costa Rica, providing financial assistance to the CCSS for the monthly payment for each individual included. As of March 2022, another agreement was signed thanks to the availability of funds, continuing the insurance of 6,000 vulnerable people of concern until December 2022.

Registration

While the Government of Costa Rica provides registration for refugee status determination, UNHCR registers refugees and asylum-seekers to support protection responses, manage individual cases, and provide assistance and other programmatic responses. As of September 2022, a total of **58,123 individuals** remain active in UNHCR's proGres database.

Partnerships and Coordination

UNHCR's main government counterparts in Costa Rica are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Migration Authority (DGME). Other ministries that play key roles in the work of UNHCR include: The Ministry of National Planning and Political Economy (MIDEPLAN), the National Social Welfare Institute (IMAS), Ministry of Labour, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) and the National Children's Institute (PANI).

UNHCR supports the Government of Costa Rica in the implementation of its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework locally known as MINARE. In 2021, UNHCR served as MINARE's Technical Secretariat providing support to MINARE's National Technical Team (ETN) and Executive Committee, under the leadership of the Vice minister of Interior. The MINARE facilitates coordination among various stakeholders that participate in the response, providing a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to refugees and asylum-seekers. Through the MINARE, Costa Rica also contributes to the Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS for its acronym in Spanish) that includes Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica y Panama.

In 2021, the Government of Costa Rica reaffirmed the importance of the MINARE to ensure a concerted effort in the response to refugee and asylum issues. More recently, on 19 January 2022, President Alvarado signed executive decree 43393 that formalizes the MINARE. This decree provides the MINARE with legal standing as the national interinstitutional platform for the discussion of international protection matters and will continue guiding Costa Rica's response to asylum seekers and refugees.

As the leading agency for international refugee protection, UNHCR works to support the Government together with key partner agencies. The Office currently has partnership agreements for the implementation of activities with **HIAS** (legal counselling and border monitoring in the southern region); **RET** (responds to specific protection needs of refugees and asylum-seekers including case management and psychosocial support, community-based protection, and sectoral cash grants); **Center for the Social Rights of Migrants (CENDEROS)** (protection and integration programs in safe-houses for refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly for of SGBV and LGBTIQ+); **Fundación Mujer** (carries out livelihood and self-sufficiency activities); **La Salle University Legal Clinic** (provides legal counselling and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers); **Jesuit Migrant Service** (provides legal counselling and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and persons at risk or identified as stateless); **Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional (DNI Costa Rica)** (improves the living conditions of children and adolescents, as well as their families and communities, through interventions that reduce violations and empower them on access to rights and services).

Financial Information

UNHCR is grateful for the support provided by donors contributing to this operation.

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CONTACTS

Irving Pérez, **External Relations Officer, Costa Rica** perezi@unhcr.org, Tel: +506 8353-2442

LINKS

UNHCR Website: <https://www.acnur.org/costa-rica> Twitter [@ACNUR_CostaRica](https://twitter.com/ACNUR_CostaRica)

