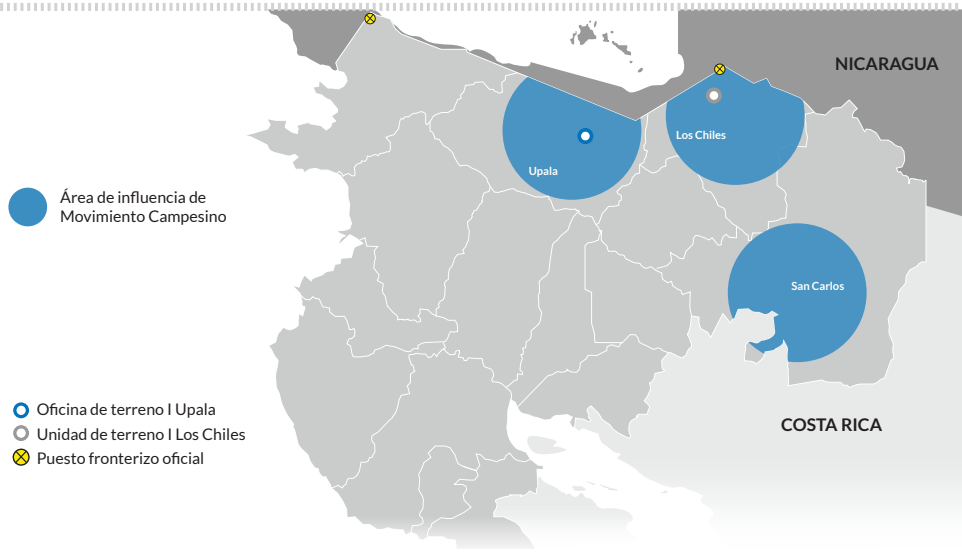
COSTA RICA: Northern Region/ *Campesino* Refugee-Led Organizations (RLO)

As of August 2024

Context

In the recent history of the Northern border of Costa Rica (adjacent to Southern Nicaragua), **two major outflows of Nicaraguan *campesinos* to Costa Rica have been recorded:** the first happened in the 1990s and 2000s, starting with the demands of territorial organizations and the *campesino* movement in political opposition to the Interoceanic Canal project/Law 840 of 2003. The second, also confirmed by members of the *Campesino* movement who participated in the **2018 protests** related to the social security reform and concerns about democratic space, was consummated in the socio-political crisis of April 2018. As a result, campesinos, usually landowners, have been **forced to leave, particularly to Costa Rica, to look for safe places to live,** without losing their rural vocation, seek livelihoods and try to maintain links with their territory.

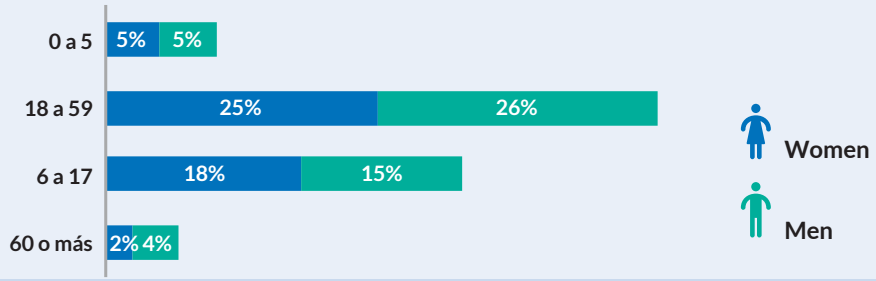


In this way, different community members have grouped together and are located in various sectors of the cantons of **Los Chiles** and Upala. Likewise, organized Campesino groups are present in the canton of **San Carlos** UNHCR has accompanied some of these Campesino groups, **prioritizing work with four of them**, with a focus on strengthening their organizational ties and economic prospects. This aims to ensure that their **livelihoods** allow them to achieve, in this new context, decent living conditions, ensuring **humanitarian needs** and **security,** so that they are able to effectively integrate in Costa Rica.

Key Figures and Profiles

245 people belonging to
80 family groups located in
8 communities in **3** cantons

Distribution by sex and age



Specific needs

34%	21%	15%
Chronic health conditions	Physical and legal protection needs	Unmet basic needs

7%	7%	6%	10%
Women at risk and survivors of SGBV	Children at risk	People with disabilities	Other

Note: the community demographic information varies according to their internal mobility dynamics in Costa Rica. For this reason, the disaggregation corresponds to 168 persons/ 70 family groups registered in UNHCR's proGres system, therefore, they are considered as a reference.

Organizational Structure

Campesino civil society groups are organized under different associative models and structures, which are designed according to the capacities and needs of each group. UNHCR's support has been implemented considering and building on these structures, consolidating the organizational processes and identifying good practices to be transferred among groups.

The campesino community group located in Upala is the most consolidated and strongest civil society organization **in the northern part of Costa Rica, and is led by refugees. As such, it is constituted as a network of leadership and community protection, being a model of solidarity, hope and resilience.**

In terms of livelihoods, its production model, based on the agricultural vocation of the people and the territory, has evolved over the years and is now replicable at the local level. This has already brought benefits to both refugees and members of the host community.

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SPECIFIC NEEDS

Source: **19 participatory assessments** conducted in 2023 with **340 people** (206 women and 134 men) in **43 communities** in Los Chiles, San Carlos, Upala and La Cruz cantons.

Needs evolve according to people's arrival and stay times in Costa Rica.

While there is access to potable **water,** there is no ability to pay the water. Water accessed through alternative means (wells) **is non-potable,** often causing waterborne diseases. **Basic sanitation** solutions exist but are not adequate for the elderly or children.

Housing materials (plastic, wood, metal sheets) are inadequate and present safety risks. Direct access to **electricity** is limited due to the cost; alternatively, neighbors are paid on an *ad hoc* basis.

In terms of **healthcare**, there are varying levels of insurance coverage depending on the territory or board of directors. In the **absence of access to medical consultation,** people turn to **traditional medicine (herbs).**

Lack of information about services and transportation to medical centers remain **access barriers.**

In **Los Chiles,** there is a saturation of services in the EBAIS (Basic Teams of Integral Healthcare), there are health centers with health code violations and there are occasional reports of abuse by officials.

Some communities report difficulties obtaining permission to take **time off work to attend medical appointments.**

For **pregnant women,** prenatal visits are available, but their frequency is very low.

Access to health care for **children** (vaccinations, dentistry) tends to be better, as it is usually promoted in **schools.**

Local governments and UNHCR have provided infrastructure support, particularly at *Finca Las Melinas* (kitchens, bathrooms, electricity, access to potable water**),** including deliveries of materials for their first constructions.

People recognize their **potential to evolve as a community organization** (e.g. around resource mobilization, livelihoods project management).

Support expected from UNHCR:
i) monitoring the **status of the asylum applications** of its members.
ii) actions to reduce the **risk of refoulement.**
iii) **advocacy with authorities** on protection needs. RSD and access to rights.
iv) support to promote integration and economic inclusion.

RESPONSE PRIORITIES

- Guidance and accompaniment on **access to the territory and the refugee status determination (RSD) procedure**, to prevent refoulement.
- **Case identification and referral according to humanitarian and protection needs**. This includes case management to promote health insurance and access to **education.**

  Promotion of **integration, peaceful coexistence and economic inclusion** of refugees and their host communities.
- **Actions to counteract discrimination and xenophobia in host communities**, through area-based interventions that favor all populations.
- Advocacy to motivate the **inclusion of these initiatives in State institutions' workplans,** through field visits by municipal and regional authorities, particularly to Finca Las Melinas.

  This is done by **promoting articulation of the institutional response** and the **identification of complementary actions by** humanitarian partners, including UNHCR.

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PROGRESS, OPPORTUNITIES & SUPPORT BY SECTOR

Livelihoods and local integration

Communities that have reached production levels have strengthened their community ties, as they participate in the local market and are integrated into production chains. This, in turn, has allowed them to deepen their relationship with the **host communities** through the commercial exchange of products, **and with the institutional framework**, with which they have established dialogues to promote a market for the sale of their products and strengthen the production chain.

The four prioritized communities have **extensive experience in agriculture and livestock breeding and sales,** as well as different approaches to **association building and** the **formalization** of their enterprises. These communities also dream of **formalizing other non-traditional enterprises** rather than those rom their communities of origin, such as **baking, beauty salons and sewing.**

For **Upala,** the medium-term goal is to seize opportunities to strengthen productive initiatives through **strategic partnerships, funding opportunities** and the **positioning of its products** on a larger scale, to achieve an economic boost beyond a subsistence economy.

For **Los Chiles,** where there is a higher level of isolation (e.g., higher transportation costs between communities) that hinder their social and economic integration, an **exchange of experiences** is being promoted to facilitate the joint development of a strengthened and independent productive project.

In terms of **training for employment and rural entrepreneurship,** the community's demand is for **self-employment training in agricultural and livestock activities.** In both communities it was noted that the **limitations of public transportation** as well as those imposed by child and elderly care responsibilities, particularly for women, limit their possibility of attending training centers on a permanent basis, and of completing courses.

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Since 2019, UNHCR and its partner agencies have worked hand in hand with the families at *Finca las Melinas* in Upala, through technical, institutional and operational support to enhance agricultural activities, including the improvement of the structure of the pig farming area to ensure compliance with sanitary standards of the Municipality/Ministry of Health and to accompany the community's housing project. Likewise, **UNHCR** has advocated with the institutional framework for the involvement of the communities in the development plans for their products.

In addition to the results of the self-management of *Finca Las Melinas* in **Upala** in 2023 and 2024, UNHCR has oriented its efforts towards supporting and promoting approaches to government, some donors and international financial institutions, to allign ***Campesino* groups' activities** with financing possibilities that will allow them to improve structural conditions on their lands and strengthen their economic activities.

UNHCR is enhancing the technical capabilities of the different clusters through a training offer delivered directly in the communities. This strategy seeks to mitigate access barriers (e.g. transportation costs and time, care responsibilities) and to encourage women's participation. The educational offer includes courses in: basic literacy, digital literacy, business management and formalization at different levels and soft skills and institutional procedures for entrepreneurs. These training processes will be accompanied by **psychosocial processes** to address grieving processes for human, material and social losses caused by forced displacement. They will also aim to strengthen **community capacities** for conflict resolution and peace building.

UNHCR has established **key partnerships** with the **National Learning Institute** (**INA**) for this training, and with the **State Distance University** (**UNED**) for employability purposes. UNED organizes a Regional Job Fair connecting refugees in training and key sectors of the local private sector (tourism and agriculture). Likewise, at the inter-agency level, **UNHCR** has participated in a **high-level visit of the United Nations System** to *Finca Kapi Kapi* to establish contact with **Grupo Acón**, a key pineapple company in the local production scenario, opening up opportunities for the **Living Inclusion Award.**

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PROGRESS, OPPORTUNITIES & SUPPORT BY SECTOR

Protection

From the displacement histories of its members, UNHCR has identified persons in need of international protection among the Campesino groups, including **refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons.**

The main protection needs relate to their access and stay in the country, including **access to the refugee status determination (RSD) procedure.**

People face access barriers such as lack of information, **logistical and economic difficulties to initiate and advance with their RSD process**, and uncertainty due to regulatory changes.

To mitigate these gaps, the **UNHCR** field office **in Upala**, together with its legal partner, the **Jesuit Refugee Service/ *Servicio Jesuita para Migrantes* (SJM),** provides **information and legal advice** through case referrals and outreach visits for specific attention to the communities of the *Movimiento Campesino*. This advice focuses on both **access to the RSD procedure** and current or potential situations of **statelessness.**

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Humanitarian Assistance

The *Campesino* organized communities play an **important and recognized role** among refugees as the first **reception and support network for new arrivals** in Costa Rica. However, **there** are sometimes **gaps in the supply of basic elements to meet initial needs,** such as food or hygiene and shelter items. This imposes **specific challenges** in the case the **Miskito indigenous** people.

Since 2020, in both **Upala** and **Los Chiles**, **UNHCR has supported the coordination efforts by Campesino communities** through technical support, humanitarian assistance (including household and food items, school kits and uniforms) and adequation of community spaces. Using a tool designed by UNHCR, new needs (e.g. of new arrivals) are identified and covered.

Likewise, UNHCR has liaised with key **health** institutions such as the Ministry of Health to carry out **health days and campaigns** on both physical health and sexual and reproductive health; while promoting approaches from these authorities and the Ombudsman's Office. UNHCR has also identified and referred cases for **affiliation through the UNHCR-CCSS agreement.**

UNHCR appreciates the contributions of donor countries that contribute to Costa Rica and global programs with unearmarked funds:
As of 31 July 2024

UNHCR Costa Rica also appreciates the contributions of our private donors globally: Republic of Korea and Japan

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