

FO Upala-Costa Rica

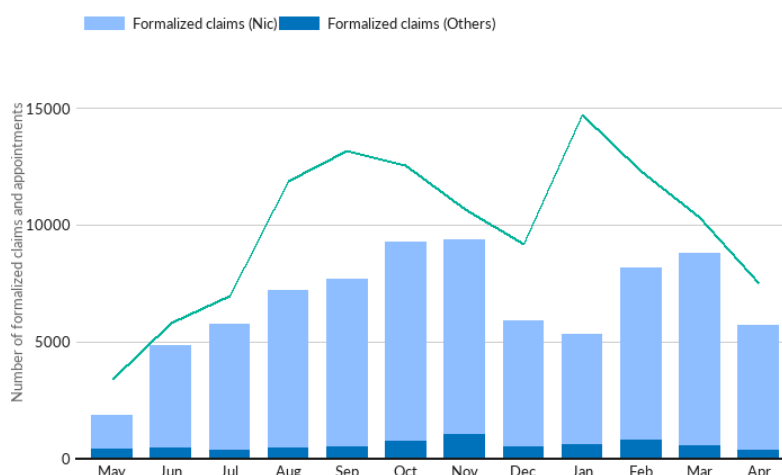
The North of Costa Rica borders Nicaragua across **309 kilometers**, there are two official border points: Peñas Blancas to the West, and Tablillas to the East. UNHCR has identified over **20 irregular entry points both in** maritime and terrestrial areas. Asylum seekers and refugees live in approximately **150 communities along the border organized in 5 cantons**: Upala, La Cruz, Los Chiles, Guatuso, San Carlos. Currently, UNHCR and implementing partners have presence in all of these cantons. Since 2018, UNHCR consolidated its presence on the northern border of Costa Rica with a field office in Upala.



From January to April this year, **44,950** new appointments for asylum have been registered. The majority are Nicaraguans in need of international protection.

25,595 formalized claims and more than 44,400 new appointments in 2022

New asylum claims by month | 2021-2022

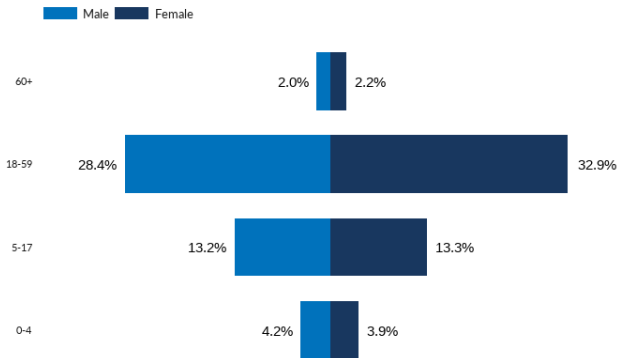


Source: Migration authorities
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According to UNHCR'S registration system (proGres V4.0) as of June 10, 2022, the organization has registered and/or assisted **9,009** persons of concern in the north of Costa Rica.

Population distribution by age and gender

Who are our 9,000 Persons of Concerns registered in the northern zone? | Age and Gender 2022
 Distribution of persons of concerns registered in proGres by age and gender (June 2022)



Note: figures do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding
 Source: UNHCR Refugee Data Finder
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Population by legal status

Who are our Persons of Concerns in the northern zone? | 2022
 Distribution of persons of concerns registered in proGres by legal status (June 2022)



Source: proGres v4
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The main protection concerns as identified by the Field Office in Upala regarding the people we serve and the host communities are:

PROTECTION NEEDS OF PERSONS OF CONCERN

- Safe access to the territory. Protection against smuggling and trafficking.
- Limited access to information due to poor internet connection.
- Update information needs related to their human rights and available services and procedures.
- No access to internet and virtual education methods.
- Xenophobia: 70% of teenagers were bullied.
- Low incomes and/or no work opportunities necessary to cover their basic needs.
- Limited access to drinking water even in the COVID-19 context.
- Protection against GBV / improper relationships.
- Lack of safe spaces for children and youth.

PROTECTION NEEDS OF HOST COMMUNITY

- Infrastructures in poor conditions (educational institutions, streets, houses)
- Restricted access to basic services such as electricity, internet, drinking water, and transportation.
- Low levels of education.
- High levels of domestic violence and teen pregnancy.
- Social insecurity.
- Subsistence farming.
- Poverty and inequalities.

Main Activities

UNHCR's operation in Upala focuses its work under 3 key lines of action: **(1)** Protection including access to territory, RSD procedures and access to basics rights, **(2)** Humanitarian Assistance including Emergency response **(3)** Local integration and peaceful coexistence, implemented through continuous border and protection monitoring and workshops, community outreach and assistance to government for emergency and humanitarian efforts.

Border monitoring

FO Upala staff has performed over **80** monitoring missions to identify the trends of movements at border points; the profiles of people entering the country; and the reasons for leaving their countries of origin. During these regular visits to official and irregular entry points, UNHCR and partners take direct action to prevent refoulement.

Access to asylum

In 2022, UNHCR has put in place a communication strategy for effective access to information related to RSD procedures, people of concern, rights and obligations. FO Upala is delivering **200** radios to people of concern in remote areas in the north and 5 **radio programmes** for "Integrando voces" is broadcast weekly sharing relevant information on access to rights and services. Also, UNHCR conducted **73** sessions and capacity building events with people of concern, local authorities and institutions. Over **250** legal orientations to guarantee access to services were provided, and staff assisted more than **140** asylum-seekers in the RSD process. As of June 2022, **1,005** people of concern were referred to partners for legal advice, legal representation and psychological support.



Addressing specific protection needs

UNHCR established coordination and referral pathways, together with its partners and the Government, for people with specific protection needs, such as gender-based violence (GBV) survivors, minors, people with disabilities, and critical health conditions. Together with partner agencies **RET** and **CENDEROS**, emergency and high-risk cases receive shelter and psychosocial support until they can transition into stable housing.

Regarding access to health, UNHCR has financed access to the Costa Rican Social Security medical insurance to **814** people of concern in the north with serious health conditions and situations of extreme economic vulnerability.

Cash Assistance and Livelihoods

To respond to the immediate needs of asylum-seekers in the most vulnerable situations, UNHCR provides a multipurpose, unconditional cash grant. In the northern region, 53 family groups, and 137 individual beneficiaries of CBI households. In terms of livelihoods, UNHCR works with local institutions, private sector

and it is implementing partner Fundación Mujer to promote trainings and economic inclusion for over **329** individuals in the North.

Emergency preparedness

UNHCR enhanced its participation in the Emergency Committee (CME) in Upala, la Cruz, los Chiles, Guatuso and San Carlos and its presence in the Interinstitutional Coordination Committees (CCCI) of these cantons. UNHCR has provided support to local institutions to strengthen their response capacity in the face of emergency situations caused by natural disasters. Overall, UNHCR has delivered 2890 NFI mosquito nets, Jerry Cans, mattresses, soaps, and blankets; it has also assisted in adapting **9** community halls. The work with authorities seeks to ensure that the people of concern to UNHCR are included, as far as possible, within the institutional programmatic offer.

Community-Based Protection (CBP)



As part of the CBP strategy to strengthen municipality efforts, UNHCR has conducted **61** sessions focused on promoting community participation and empowerment in Upala, Los Chiles, La Cruz, San Carlos and Guatuso benefitting **912** people of concern. Also, in coordination with municipalities, UNHCR implements the project “We are a community” to promote the participation and protection of people of concern minors through local integration and peaceful coexistence through sports.

Working with Partners

Upala collaborates at the local and regional level in the Huetar Norte and Chorotega Regions with public state institutions such as the National Children’s Protection Institute, the National Women’s Institute, the National Council of People with Disabilities, and the National Institute for Social Welfare promoting information sharing, conducting capacity building activities, and strengthening an inter-institutional case management system, to facilitate people of concern’s access to services and basic rights.

UNHCR relies on its four partner agencies in the North, RET, HIAS, Defense of Children International (DNI) and Fundación Mujer (FM) to implement a range of projects which aim at providing legal aid and assistance, ensuring child protection; addressing GBV situations providing psychological support, and promoting livelihood and socio-economic inclusion of people of concern to become resilient and achieve self-reliance.

UNHCR also collaborates with civil society such as DINADECO (National Directorate for Community Development) and CONAMAJ (National Commission for the Improvement of the Administration of Justice) through more than **75** judicial facilitators in the 5 cantons that are key actors in identifying and referring people of concern in need of international protection in the communities.

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