

UNHCR Costa Rica – Field Office Upala

April 2023

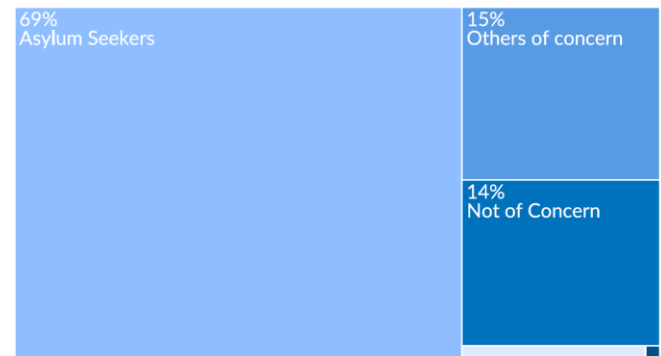
The North of Costa Rica borders Nicaragua across **309 kilometers**. There are two official border points: Peñas Blancas to the West, and Tablillas to the East. UNHCR has identified over **20 irregular entry**

points both in maritime and terrestrial areas. Asylum-seekers and refugees live in approximately **150 communities along the border**. Since 2018, UNHCR consolidated its presence on the northern border of Costa Rica with a field office in Upala.

Currently, the Field Office of Upala and implementing partners have presence in five border cantons: **Upala, La Cruz, Los Chiles, Guatuso and San Carlos**.



Who are our 13,350 persons we serve registered in the North? | Legal Status 2023
Distribution of persons of concerns registered in proGres by legal status (April 2023)



Source: Primes
© UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency

Key figures 2023

13,343	People in need of international protection in the North are registered in UNHCR's case management system
2,958	Assistances provided by UNHCR and its partners in the north
284	People aided with in-kind assistance by UNHCR and its partners.
547	People trained in various subjects, including promotion of human rights and international protection.
234	Beneficiaries of cash assistance for basic needs.
972	People that receive health services

*Data as of March 2023



UNHCR provides humanitarian assistance to remote communities in San Carlos and Upala/Karina Odio/ 2023

Operational Context:

As of December 31, 2022, Costa Rica was hosting about **253,758** people in need of international protection, the majority are Nicaraguans who enter primarily through the north. A portion usually travels to the Great Metropolitan Area (GAM) for employment with a brief stop in the north. Many return to the north to settle because of difficulties in the GAM (a) obtaining a job, (b) accessing a home, (c) cannot afford living costs. Others settle in the north due to family networks. The north also receives seasonal movements for farming in the area. Due to this context, data collection on the people UNHCR serves living in the north is a challenge. Additionally, Costa Rica has experienced an increase in the numbers of mixed movements. Most enter the country irregularly, and then try to make their way north as quickly as possible.

Protection needs:

THE PEOPLE WITH AND FOR WHOM UNHCR WORKS

- Low income and/or lack of employment opportunities.
- Limited access to refugee status determination procedure specifically for persons at heightened risk and children due to limited transportation services, technological difficulties, and limited literacy.
- No access to reliable internet connection that allows access to updated information.
- Effective access to health due to discrimination and xenophobia.
- Limited livelihoods and access to basic needs, in particular single parents.
- Increased risk of gender-based violence.
- Lack of childcare centers

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 gender-based violence and teen pregnancy.
- Social insecurity.
- Subsistence farming.
- Poverty and inequalities.

2023 UNHCR's activities in the North Zone

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 basic 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.



- The Field Office in Upala performed over 42 monitoring missions to identify the trends of movements at border points; the profiles of people entering the country; the reasons for leaving their countries of origin; the dynamics of the mixed movements; risk and protection gaps. During these regular visits to official and irregular entry points, UNHCR and partners take direct action to prevent refoulement.
- Together with partner agencies **HIAS** and **CENDEROS**, emergency and high-risk cases receive shelter and psychosocial support until they can transition into stable housing.
- Regarding access to health, this first trimester UNHCR has facilitated access to the Costa Rican Social Security medical insurance to **943** people UNHCR serves in the north with serious health conditions and situations of extreme economic vulnerability.



- In 2023, UNHCR has put in place a communication strategy for effective access to information related to RSD procedures, people in need of international protection, rights and obligations. At least **547** people have received legal information pertaining to the RSD, the new special temporary category, and modalities of insurance.
- UNHCR has held 5 community workshops with miskitu people and from the farmers movement to identify specific protection needs. The Office has also held **4** workshops to strengthen the network of community representatives in a trainer of trainer’s modality so they can replicate the information in their own communities.
- In coordination with municipalities of Upala and Los Chiles, UNHCR, with partner World Vision, continues implementation of the sports integration project “We are a community” to promote the participation and protection of people of concern minors through local integration and peaceful coexistence in 13 communities, which include a network of community sport coaches and participation of asylum seekers and refugees in community sports and recreational committees.



UNHCR participating in a We are a community activity /Karina Odio/ 2023

- UNHCR also supports an outreach network of 37 asylum-seekers and refugees community representatives with capacity-building sessions on child protection, gender-based violence referral pathways along with local institutions and the office of the Ombudsman, which allows them to continue supporting UNHCR and their communities with orientation, identification and referral of new-arrivals and persons at heightened risk.
- In partnership with the local governments of Los Chiles and Upala, UNHCR developed a pocket guide with the institutional referral pathways and program and services available for persons we serve as well as a gender-based violence referral routes for the local gender-based violence prevention networks.
- UNHCR donated **100** food kits and **350** hygiene kits to the authority tables in Upala and Los Chiles for the attention of mixed movements. UNHCR also strengthened the authority tables in the 4 cantons providing technical assistance to put in place full-day informative workshops of authorities in border communities, drafting their 2023 work plan, mapping humanitarian assistance and supporting in the referral route for assistance of people in mixed movements.



- UNHCR consolidated its participation in the Emergency Committee (CME) in Upala, la Cruz, Los Chiles 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.
- UNHCR donated 1,323 mosquito nets for the response organized by the Ministry of Health in the malaria emergency. These nets will be distributed to the communities of Medio Queso, Coquital and San Gerardo, in Los Chiles, on the northern border of the country. UNHCR’s Field Office in Upala coordinated the delivery of these nets, which are a crucial device to combat diseases transmitted by mosquito bites.



UNHCR donation of mosquito nets for malaria emergency/Karina Odio/ 2023


SOLVE

- 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, there were **74** family groups, and **234** individual beneficiaries of cash assistance. In terms of livelihoods, UNHCR works with local institutions, private sector and its implementing partner Fundación Mujer y Omar Dengo to promote trainings and economic inclusion for over **241** individuals in the North.
- UNHCR donated to the Upala Health Area of assembleable awnings and A/C equipment for the designation of an area for care of people and application of vaccines.

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 Women’s Institute, the National Council of People with Disabilities, the Ministry of Health, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the National Institute for Social Welfare promoting information sharing, conducting capacity building activities, and strengthening an inter-institutional case management system, to facilitate forcibly displaced and stateless persons’s access to services and basic rights.



This year, based on the advocacy carried out by UNHCR, inter-institutional coordination working groups were set up with authorities in the cantons of Los Chiles and La Cruz to improve assistance for the people with and for whom UNHCR works. UNHCR also provides technical assistance in these tables and in those installed by the authorities in San Carlos and Upala. All four working groups of authorities allow inter-institutional coordination, awareness raising, training of authorities and coordination of strategies to assist host communities and people we serve. It also became an institutional mechanism of referral/assistance of cases of people in need of international protection and population in mixed movements.

UNHCR relies on its partner agencies in the North Cenderos, HIAS, Fundación Mujer (FM), World Vision, Jesuit Migrant Service, Fundación Omar Dengo and RET-IMAS to implement a range of projects which aim at providing legal aid and assistance, ensuring child protection, addressing gender based violence situations providing psychological support, and promoting livelihood and socio-economic inclusion of people forced to flee and stateless people 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 90 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.

Contacts:

Vivian Nieme Limpias, Head of Field Office, Upala, Costa Rica,
niemelim@unhcr.org, Tel: +506 2503 1950, Cell: +506 6038 6712

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



Private Donors:

Private donors Australia / Private donors Canada / Private donors Germany / Private donors Italy / Private donors Japan / Private donors Republic of Korea / Private donors Spain / Private donors Sweden / Private donors USA.