

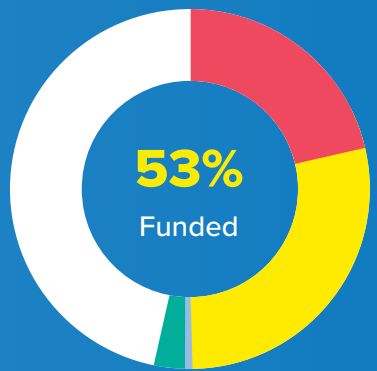

COSTA RICA | FACTSHEET
AS OF DECEMBER 2024

Since 2018, **Costa Rica has been the main host country for forcibly displaced persons from Nicaragua**: as of June 2024, **87%** of the **206,700** asylum-seekers and **60%** of the **27,600** refugees in the country are Nicaraguans. Costa Rica also hosts people from Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia and Haiti, bringing the country's forcibly displaced population to approximately **5% of its total population, one of the highest rates among the region.**

Since 1979, **UNHCR has consistently assisted the Government of Costa Rica in the response to situations of forced displacement** that the country has faced. Currently, **UNHCR supports Costa Rica** in improving the asylum system to promote **access to the territory**, proper documentation, work permits, and prompt and fair decisions. UNHCR also works with various Costa Rican institutions and other relevant actors to **complement efforts for the inclusion of refugees** in social policies and other areas of Costa Rican society.

Costa Rica is also part of the transit route for people in mixed movements, who arrive Costa Rica after crossing the Darien region and head to North America, which have been increasing consistently in the last three years. According to official figures, **more than 752,000 people transited** through Costa Rica between January 2023 and October 2024. **UNHCR participates in the response to people in mixed movements** in coordination with other UN agencies. In addition, together with IOM, it is also implementing the **Safe Mobility** initiative to provide legal pathways to the United States and Spain through resettlement.

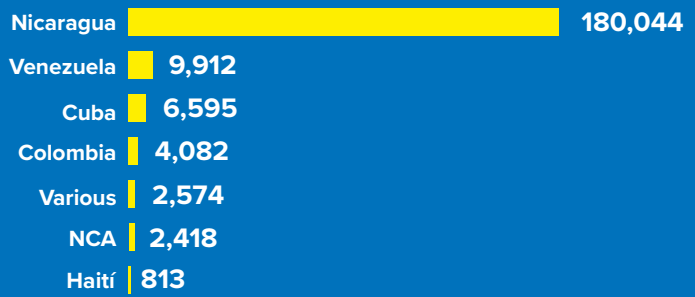
Through this response, Costa Rica is making a local contribution to a regional and global problem: By June 2024, **122.6** million forcibly displaced persons have been forcibly displaced worldwide, due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and other issues. Approximately **26.7 million are in the Americas.**

**FUNDING UPDATE I
as of 30 November 2024**

USD 40.4 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2024

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

**Asylum seekers in Costa Rica
by country of origin I
september 2024**

 Estimated number of asylum seekers:
206,438


NCA: El Salvador (1,058) Guatemala (155), Honduras (1,165)

Operational Context



Since 2018, at least **326,900 Nicaraguans** have fled their country to Costa Rica seeking international protection, due to the ongoing deterioration of the socio-political and human rights situation. By 2024, violations against human and political rights (e.g. against life, identity, freedom of mobility, worship and association) persist, affecting multiple sectors of society, particularly academia, journalism, the judiciary, the clergy, indigenous peoples and different types of associations, with an impact on economic, social and cultural life.¹ As a result, the arrival of forcibly displaced persons persists, with **18,946 new asylum applications** from Nicaraguans between January and September 2024 according to the Migration Authority (DGME). **Costa Rica hosts 52% of of Nicaraguan refugees and asylum-seekers worldwide**, followed by the USA (40%).



The transit of refugees and migrants who have arrived at the southern border of Costa Rica which previously crossed the Darien, continues. The volume of such movements is relatively stable, although it varies depending on the conditions of the route. The **transportation scheme** agreed between the governments of **Costa Rica and Panama**, which consists of direct bus arrivals from Darien (Panama) to the **Southern Migration Station (EMISUR)** in Paso Canoas (Costa Rica), which provides temporary collective shelter and also operates as a transportation terminal to complete the route to Los Chiles (Northern border of Costa Rica), is still in place. Between **January 2023 and October 2024**, more than **752,000 people** have transited under this modality. Led by authorities, the operation at EMISUR has progressively adapted according to the needs of refugees and migrants in transit: key State institutions, as well as UNHCR and other humanitarian actors have **strengthened their cross-sectoral response capacities**. In addition, through the **Response Plan** led by the National Emergency Commission, with the technical support of the United Nations System, response actors have identified and address assistance gaps.



On 12 June 2024, the **Government of Costa Rica issued the Executive Decree 44501-MGP**, reforming, in alignment with international standards, several provisions regarding the **asylum application process**, which had been modified by decree 43810-MGP of December 2022. One substantive change concerns **access to work permits**, as the new resolution establishes two requirements: proof of Social Security affiliation and an asylum seeker identification card. **The new decree had an immediate positive effect** in this regard, with a total of more than 31,000 permits issued as of September 2024, compared to 55 for all of 2023.



Costa Rica, along with Colombia, Guatemala and Ecuador, continues to implement the **Safe Mobility (SMO)** initiative, led by the U.S. government and supported by UNHCR and IOM. The strategy was launched in June 2023 aiming to provide safe and legal alternatives for Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, and, more recently, Ecuadorians intending to stay in the United States or Spain.

¹ Source: [UNHCR Refugee Data Finder](#)

² Source: [DGME Statistics \(in Spanish\) >](#) Refugio (Refugee Status Applications)

³ Source: [DGME Statistics \(in Spanish\) >](#) Atención Flujo Migratorio (Migration Flows Assistance)

UNHCR'S presence in Costa Rica

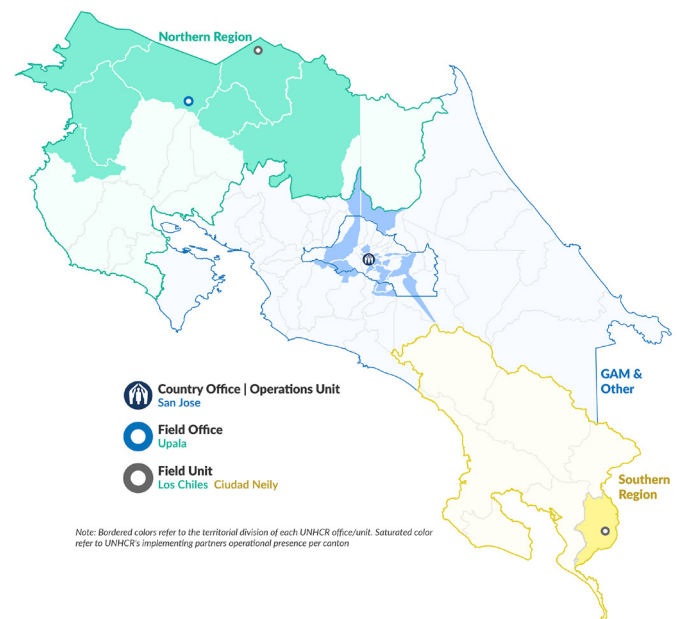
- **Our team (188 people):**

- 156 national staff
- 32 international staff
- 158 in San José
- 25 in the Northern Zone
- 5 in the Southern zone

- **Offices:**

- 1 country office in **San José**
- 1 field office in **Upala** (Northern border)
- 2 field units in **Los Chiles** (Northern border) and **Ciudad Neily** (Southern border).

Direct presence in 21 cantons of 6 provinces



Our priorities

1.

We support the Costa Rican State in promoting the effective access of refugees to the territory and the asylum system.

UNHCR is **present at the Southern and Northern borders of Costa Rica** to promote protection and respect for the human rights of people in need of international protection entering the country. By developing protection **monitoring activities at the borders**, we identify possible restrictions on access to the territory and engage in **dialogue with the authorities**, complementing their response in coordination with protection actors present at such borders; for the latter, we **lead Protection Worktables** at the local level.

UNHCR is supporting Costa Rica in making its asylum system more modern, fair and efficient. To this end, the Migration Authority (DGME) has developed an **Asylum Strategy**, with technical support from UNHCR, which aims to streamline the processing of pending asylum applications and ensure the efficient management of new applications, through technological solutions, development of staff's technical capacities and optimization of case analysis and resolution processes.

2.

We strengthen institutional capacities at different levels, to continue protecting the rights of refugees transiting through and staying in Costa Rica, a principle that is already included in the country's social policies.

- Access to **health** and **livelihoods** are often the most urgent priorities for people in need of international protection. UNHCR works hand in hand with **key institutions for the social protection** of forcibly displaced persons in Costa Rica:
- Through our agreement with the **Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS)**, we have 5,000 coverage slots available to ensure access to healthcare for refugees and asylum-seekers in vulnerable situations.
- With the **Joint Institute for Social Assistance (IMAS)**, we refer cases of refugees and asylum-seekers with specific needs so that they are eligible for benefits such as care networks, educational scholarships, and economic subsidy opportunities.
- Through our directly implemented **Multi-purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) program**, we complement this offer so that more people can meet their basic needs.
- We also work with the **National Women's Institute (INAMU)** and the **National Children's Bureau (PANI)** to better understand the situation of refugee and asylum-seeking women and children and to include them in the services and assistance provided by these institutions.
- At the local level, we **work with the authorities** of cantons with a high presence of forcibly displaced persons (San José, La Cruz, Upala, Corredores, Los Chiles, Guatuso) to promote an effective and timely response and the protection of their rights in emergency situations.

3.

We work together with refugee communities to inform and empower them, promoting their effective access to rights and participation.

UNHCR promotes the participation of women and children in the community through the creation of refugee networks: initiatives such as the **Community Promoter Networks** and the **Youth Refugee Network** enable them to share their stories, identify common issues and advocate for themselves, as well as prevent violence and discrimination.

UNHCR implements two-way communication strategies, such as the **Mobile Information Centers days**, the **Information Center** and other community communication and accountability initiatives. UNHCR disseminates **information on rights, services and access** to their **programs**, partners and institutions, while gathering information about protection risks and needs and managing individual cases.

4.

We strengthen a protection network with various allies to support forcibly displaced persons in the exercise of their rights.

UNHCR provides access to justice for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons by providing them with **information, assistance and legal representation**. To this end, we engage and train private sector and academic actors to provide these services free of charge, which is essential to meet the principle of due process. We also provide training and share insights **with key actors from state institutions** that interact with people in need of international protection, so that such actors gain awareness and tools to provide information and assistance to these individuals.

5.

We promote multi-stakeholder efforts to integrate refugees and recognize their capabilities and contributions.

UNHCR works to promote access to **labor market opportunities** for forcibly displaced persons, thereby improving their **livelihoods**. To this end, we support the development of their skills to enhance their employability and entrepreneurship. Similarly, we work with the **National Council of Rectors (CONARE)** to advocate for their access to higher education and with the **Ministry of Public Education (MEP)** for the accreditation of degrees and skills. Also, hand in hand with the **Ministry of Labor (MTSS)**, we seek mechanisms to promote their inclusion in the labor market.; as well, we develop exploratory dialogues with ILO to develop studies to identify opportunities for labor formalization.

Through the collaboration and economic inclusion framework **Living Inclusion** (formerly Living Integration), UNHCR collaborates with the private sector and other civil society actors to **enhance its work in favor of employability and entrepreneurship** of forcibly displaced persons, including training, inclusion and diversity policies, research, among other activities. Through the Living Inclusion award, we annually recognize the inclusion efforts of our allies in different areas.

We support, through technical assistance, the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in **regional and global forums and coordination platforms** that promote a comprehensive approach to the response to forcibly displaced persons, as indicated in the *Global Compact for Refugees*. Among these forums are: the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS, and its national version, the Protection and Solutions Response to Refugees in Costa Rica - MINARE), the Quito Process, the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V), Cartagena+40 and the Los Angeles Declaration (LAD) and the Disaster Displacement Platform (DDP). We have also supported Costa Rica's participation in two Global Refugee Forums (GRF 2019 and 2023), where the country demonstrated its leadership by informing the international community about the country's good practices and pledges on refugee affairs.

6.

We build and disseminate an evidence-based discourse to inform Costa Rican society about the contributions of forcibly displaced persons to the country, to counteract xenophobia and to promote peaceful coexistence.

UNHCR works hand in hand with **International Financial Institutions** (IFIs) to i) **jointly quantify** the contributions of refugees and asylum-seekers to the Costa Rican economy and society, ii) **identify challenges** for their local integration in different areas, and iii) share the results with authorities to **identify opportunities** for joint work. The main IFIs with which UNHCR works in Costa Rica are the Inter-American Development Bank (**IDB**), the International Monetary Fund (**IMF**) and the World **Bank (WB)**.

Our counterparts

Alta Batalla Law Firm | Civil Registry - Supreme Tribunal of Elections | Costa Rican Bar Association | Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) | Deputy Prosecutor's Office | Directorate General of Immigration and Nationality / Migration Authority (DGME) | Joint Institute for Social Assistance (IMAS) | Judiciary | Ministry of Economy, Industry and Commerce (MEIC) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | Ministry of Governance and Police | Ministry of Health | Ministry of Human Development | Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS) | Ministry of National Planning and Political Economy (MIDEPLAN) | Ministry of Public Education (MEP) | Ministry of Public Security | National Board of Rectors (CONARE) | National Children Trust Fund (PANI) | National Commission for Persons with Disabilities

(CONAPDIS) | National Learning Institute (INA) | National Women's Institute (INAMU) Office for the Attention and Protection of Victims of Crime (OAPVD) | Ombudsman's Office (DHR) | Public Defense Office | University of Costa Rica (UCR) | National University (UNA) | Latin University | University for Peace (UPEACE). We also keep permanent dialogue with local authorities, as well as with other actors of the United Nations System, national and international NGOs, international financial institutions, representatives of the diplomatic corps in Costa Rica, civil society organizations (CSOs) and refugee-led organizations (RLOs), academia, the private sector, among others.

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

As of 15 November 2024



UNHCR Costa Rica also appreciates the contributions of our private donors globally:

Argentina / Australia / Brazil / Germany / France / Italy / Japan / Luxembourg / Mexico / Netherlands / Republic of Korea / Spain / United Kingdom / United States / Sweden

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