



Since 2018, **Costa Rica is one of the main destination countries for people in need of international protection coming from Nicaragua**, with over 184,000 applications as of June 2024 . Despite the Costa Rican government’s willingness to welcome and integrate refugees, the increase in applications has put significant pressure on the asylum system as well as for access to essential goods and services such as education, health and housing. **Costa Rica is also a transit country for people in mixed movements**, which has increased substantially since 2023. Most of them arrive Costa Rica in precarious conditions with urgent humanitarian and protection needs.

UNHCR supports the Costa Rican government in improving the asylum system to ensure access to the territory, proper documentation, work permits, and prompt and fair decisions. **UNHCR participates in the response to mixed movements** in coordination with IOM and other UN agencies and implements the Safe Mobility initiative to provide legal pathways to the United States and Spain. **UNHCR collaborates with development actors** to provide joint evidence regarding the contributions of refugees to the Costa Rican economy and society and to address the impact of hosting a large number of refugees.

¹Source: UNHCR Refugee Data Finder.



Key Figures

22,655

estimation of people assisted from January to September 2024, averaging **11,300** monthly assistance items, bringing a total of over **102.000** assistance items*.

Who we assisted:

Sex and age

- 44%** women
- 38%** man
- 9%** children
- 9%** girls
- 0.04%** non-binary people.**

Profiles



- 82%** refugees or asylum-seekers.
- 14%** people in mixed movements.
- 0.5%** stateless persons.
- 3.7%** people from host communities.

Nationalities



- 74%** Nicaraguan
- 14%** Venezuelan
- 12%** Others***

*Considering that a single beneficiary may receive multiple assistance items.

**Those who do not identify themselves as women or men.

***Mainly including Costa Ricans from host communities, and nationals from Northern Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras).

Our impact on people

 **21,448**

received legal information, assistance or representation.

 **9,266**

have accessed the health system, and **7,399** were assisted through physical and mental health consultations.

 **9,097**

were involved in community participation processes.

 **3,399**

strengthened their livelihoods capacities, including training (**1,545**), as well as scholarships and seed capital (**41**).

 **3,508**

accessed capacity-building and services on child protection, and **675** accessed education.

 **1,938**

received multipurpose cash transfers (UNHCR CBI).

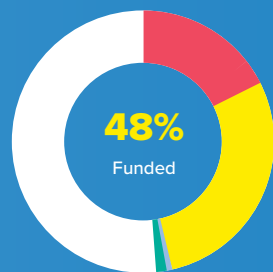
 **688**

people, mostly women and children survivors of gender violence and their families, were assisted through specialized*prevention and response services.

 **502**

were assisted through shelter and housing assistance.

*Including: safe shelter, self-reliance activities, psychosocial assistance and immediate response services, information and counseling on access to rights.



FUNDING UPDATE | as of 30 September 2024

USD 40.4 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2024

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

Context

Costa Rica continued to host a significant number of forcibly displaced persons. As of September 30, 2024, 233,934 persons in need of international protection reside in the country, of whom 211,566 are asylum seekers, mainly Nicaraguans (87%); 22,012 are recognized refugees (mainly from Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela and Northern Central America) and 356 stateless persons. **Some 2,105 new asylum applications are registered each month**, 80% of which correspond to Nicaraguans. Costa Rica hosts half (52%) of the world's forcibly displaced Nicaraguans.

The human rights situation in Nicaragua continued to deteriorate: [the report issued by UN Human Rights Council on the country ahead of the Universal Periodic Review \(to be held in November 2024\)](#) highlights the **critical deterioration of the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and the separation of powers**, as well as increasingly restrictive civic and democratic environment, where dissenting voices (e.g. [NGOs](#) and media) are silenced. It also expresses concerns about discrimination and violence against [indigenous and Afro-descendants \(including land dispossession and forced displacement\)](#), women and LGBTIQ+ persons, arbitrary arrests and torture of detainees, acts of harassment against real and perceived political opponents, such as human rights defenders, [journalists](#) and [members of the clergy](#), including arbitrary deprivation of their nationality. [In September, the Nicaraguan government sent 135 political prisoners to Guatemala](#), in coordination with the Nicaraguan and U.S. governments.

The Government of Costa Rica took favorable measures for access to documentation for refugees in two ways: first, it progressively increased its capacity to process asylum applications (from 250 to 510 appointments per week between January 2023 and September 2024); as a result, the number of applications was 44% higher than the average of the previous eight months. Second, through Executive Decree 44501, issued in May, it eliminated previous barriers to access to work permits; thus, between January and September 2024, more than 31,000 work permits have been issued to asylum seekers.

Movements of refugees and migrants in transit continued: according to the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners (DGME), between January and September 2024 more than 269,000 people had transited through Costa Rica, about 980 daily entries. While a significant portion of these people stay only a short time in the country, they have been exposed to protection risks and incidents and require humanitarian assistance. According to the Mixed Movements Monitoring conducted by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, the main needs prioritized by more than 1,800 groups of people in transit interviewed in 2024 are food (77%), clothing and shoes (60%), shelter (47%) and medicines (22%). **The Government of Costa Rica is planning to build a temporary collective shelter for people in transit in Los Chiles** (northern region), replicating the operation of the Southern Migration Station (EMISUR) in Paso Canoas.

Delivering Protection

The Migration Authority (DGME) agreed to advance on a comprehensive strategy to reduce the backlog in asylum claims, which is technically and financially supported by UNHCR. The strategy consists in adjusting the refugee status determination process, so as the strengthening of DGME's human and technological resources. The aim is to reduce waiting times, improving the quality and consistency of decisions. The strategy includes mechanisms to identify active cases, leaving in temporary file those not promoted by applicants. It also entails developing capacities to verify the status of cases through **improvement of the physical archive of the Refugee Unit** and the design of a virtual platform to facilitate the follow-up of cases for both applicants and DGME officers. Finally, the strategy includes mechanisms to prioritize resolutions for people with heightened vulnerabilities, such as Miskitun indigenous, among others.



Accessing documentation is the first step for people in need of international protection to access goods, services and possibilities for socioeconomic inclusion in Costa Rica ©Manrique Cortés.

Forcibly displaced persons have a need for **information on their rights and access to services in Costa Rica**, especially when they first enter the country; UNHCR develops capacities of authorities to improve the orientations they receive. In San Carlos (North), UNHCR developed **training sessions with 35 law enforcement officers** from the cantons of San Carlos, Rio Cuarto and San Ramon on assistance to people with heightened vulnerabilities. This capacity-building activity strengthened their knowledge on international protection, access to the asylum procedure, statelessness and services provided by UNHCR and its partners. The sessions were conducted in coordination with the Joint Institute for Social Assistance, the National Women's Institute, and the National Children's Trust Fund.

UNHCR works on behalf of stateless persons, i.e. those who are not considered nationals of any country under its legislation; either because they never had a nationality, or because they lost it and were unable to acquire another, or because they were deprived of or denied it due to persecution and/or discrimination in their countries of origin. This quarter, UNHCR, together with its partner organization, the Jesuit Migrant Service, **strengthened local capacities to address statelessness**, jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Registry. In La Cruz (Northern Region), 11 public officials and 7 community leaders were trained, 15 people accessed counselling and legal assistance, and **three cases of application for statelessness status were opened**. In Coto Brus (Southern border), a community visit allowed to identify and assist 23 Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous people at risk of statelessness. **This response was the result of inter-institutional coordination** with the judicial authorities of Corredores and Coto Brus cantons. The visit was accompanied by a training session and a case study with these authorities.



Community Workshop on Statelessness in the Ngäbe-Buglé community of Gallo (Coto Brus). ©Kathia Gabriela Nuevo/Asociación indígena Gallo.

UNHCR has added an important legal ally to promote access to justice for refugees, thus expanding the protection networks for refugees in Costa Rica. **The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Alta Batalla Law Firm** will allow for joint activities to deepen joint work and strengthen specific understanding of the situation, needs and key actions for the legal protection of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons.



Alta Batalla is a key partner of the UNHCR for the legal protection of forcibly displaced persons in Costa Rica. ©Alejandra Bogarín.

Resettlement is a durable solution for people in need of protection and safety in third countries. Under the **Safe Mobility** initiative, led by the United States and implemented jointly with IOM, from **January to September, UNHCR interviewed 10,175 applicants**, of whom **8,509** have already been sent to be considered by resettlement countries (**8,005** to the United States and **504** to Spain). A total of **3,370 persons have already traveled for resettlement (3,359 to the United States and 11 to Spain)**. In this process, where children or adolescents separated from their parents or with special protection needs are identified, a **Best Interest Determination (BID) assessment is conducted**. A panel of experts assesses whether resettlement with their caregiver is the best option for children. Between January and September, the BID Panel assessed a total of **59 cases, of which only 9 were found not to be in the best interest** of the children concerned.

Empowering Communities

Incorporating refugees' perspectives and priorities is fundamental to ensure their participation in policies for their protection and inclusion. To this end, UNHCR supported the **Forum on Access to Justice for Indigenous Peoples**, convened by the Ombudswoman's Office (DHR), which was attended by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Francisco Calí Tzay, the UN Office for Human Rights (UNHCHR), local NGOs and relevant public institutions. **UNHCR also ensured the participation of Miskitu community leaders**, who presented their perspectives on defending their rights and highlighted the challenges to their cultural survival in the face of the dispossession of their ancestral lands. **In the Northern Region, spaces for community participation and advocacy were also developed:** through four sessions developed hand in hand with the Ombudsman's Office and partner CENDEROS, Miskitu leaders in need of international protection presented their needs and discussed response challenges with key institutions, advocating for their rights.

and music in the Pavas district. Meanwhile, refugee and local children were introduced to literature through stories offered by the organization Books for Children.



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UNHCR continued to involve government agencies and partner organizations in **providing information, services and assistance to facilitate access to rights through three Mobile Information Centre sessions** developed in La Carpio, downtown San José (Paseo Colón), Tibás and four in the cantons of San Carlos, Liberia, Santa Cruz and Carrillo in the Northern region. **More than 420 people in the Metro Area (GAM) and 240 in the Northern region were visited in their communities**, and accesses information and assistance regarding the rights of refugees, women and children, legal assistance, health, psychosocial support, the Living Inclusion (VLI) initiative, the Safe Mobility program and other services and programs in Spanish and Miskitu language. Activities were supported by partners CENDEROS, HIAS, SJM and La Salle and by the Ombudsperson's Office, the National Commission for the Improvement of Access to Justice (CONAMAJ), the Ministry of Labor, and VLI partners from the private sector.



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Honoring and preserving the cultural richness, especially of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants in exile, strengthens collective knowledge and sentiments, and in turn contributes to **build bonds of closeness and coexistence in solidarity with the communities that host them.** To this end, an intercultural meeting organized by UNHCR, in coordination with its partner CENDEROS and the Association for Integral Development of San Juan, brought together **more than 40 indigenous, Creole and Afro-descendant refugees and asylum-seekers** who shared their traditional cuisine



Mobile Information Center in León XIII (Tibás).
© Daniel Arguedas/UNHCR



Mobile Information Center in the northern region.
© Andrey Cabezas/UNHCR



Through artistic creation, children and adolescent asylum-seekers and refugees develop their talents while sharing their visions and reflections on their experiences of transit and stay in Costa Rica. Their paintings and poems contribute to **raise awareness and promote meaningful dialogue** within their communities. At the Guararí Civic Center in Heredia canton, 15 children participating in the **ExpresArte project** presented the first exhibition of their work, which was **visited by more than 100 people from the community**. This activity was coordinated by our partner Children Defense International (DNI).

Girls, boys and adolescents reflect through painting on their route, their arrival in Costa Rica and their dreams.
© Manrique Cortés.

Fostering access to basic services

Climate-related disasters can affect forcibly displaced persons, particularly those in vulnerable situations. To cope with the impact of the **winter season, which intensified this year exceeding 1,500 events, UNHCR continues to strengthen the capacity of municipalities at the Northern region**. Through its participation in the Interagency Coordination Committee of San Carlos canton, and with the newly equipped Municipal Emergency Committee (CME), **UNHCR provides technical support in risk analysis, mapping of actors and capacities, participatory assessments, dissemination of prevention messages and liaison with UNHCR services**. This ensures an adequate and timely response during climate-related emergencies, inclusive towards refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons.



©Kai Odio

Every day, hundreds of women cross the Southern border of Costa Rica towards North America, and they pause their journey at the Southern Migration Station (EMISUR). UNHCR and HIAS co-lead the **Entre Nos strategy**, which promotes **solidarity and trusting encounters among them** during this stopover. This includes self-care, learning, awareness, and collective care activities where women **share their experiences along the route and, if they wish, have access to counselling and assistance** on issues such as sexual and reproductive health and protection from gender-based violence. Between August and September, **77 women, adolescents and girls participated in Entre Nos**.



Women, girls and adolescents in EMISUR learn about self-care and expressing their emotions.
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Contributing to economic inclusion and peaceful coexistence



The inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons is a shared responsibility of society as a whole. To this end, UNHCR brings together private sector, civil society organizations, academia and public institutions under the **Living Inclusion (Vivir la Inclusión, VLI) strategic framework**. In July, VLI launched [its website](#) and the [sixth edition of the Living Inclusion \(VLI\) Award](#), a recognition of actors who recognize and promote the contributions of refugees in the labor market. The [partnership with Coca-Cola FEMSA](#) stands out, which will hire 11 refugees and asylum-seekers, who accessed scholarships for specialized training and receive monetary transfers to ensure continuity of their training and job.

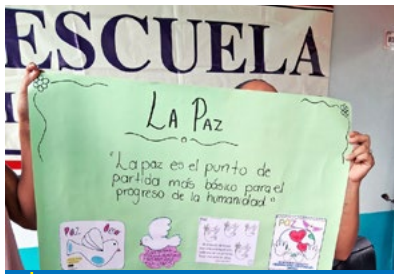
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Similarly, under the Livelihoods program, **1,816 forcibly displaced personas and nationals improved their capacities through digital literacy courses, IT and customer service certifications, development of work plans and financial education, and seed capital to develop their businesses.** In partnership with the State Distance Learning University (UNED), UNHCR coordinated the launch of a **basic literacy course** for 25 asylum-seekers and refugees and members of the host community in Desamparados (San José).

In the Northern region, the partnership with the Technical National University (UTN) and the Los Chiles Cantonal Agricultural Center to **bring specialized agricultural advisory directly to the communities, enabled them to make better use of their farms according to the characteristics of the Costa Rican soil,** and the visits to identify learning needs in dairy production, to design a one-week intensive course for ten refugees participating, who will have access to scholarships.



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In the Northern region, we collaborate with humanitarian partners such as IOM and World Vision, and with institutions as the Ministry of Health to **bring refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants and host communities closer together and with institutions.** In August, more than 100 people participated in a community integration activity in *El Parque* (Los Chiles), where children and adolescents reflected on peaceful coexistence through artistic activities, while their families accessed information, counseling and legal services, including advice on their asylum applications in Costa Rica. This activity was part of the **inter-agency project implemented by UNHCR, IOM and UNDP and funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).**

Key partnerships

Interagency work:

On 30 September, UNHCR and IOM co-led the **inter-agency workshop to prepare the Costa Rica chapter of the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) for 2025**, coordinated by the regional platform **R4V**. The plan is the roadmap for the response by UN agencies and national and international NGO to refugees and migrants in transit and Venezuelan refugees and migrants residing in Costa Rica. For the first time, the country has a specific chapter in this response plan. The strategy responds to the findings of the [Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis 2024 \(RMNA\)](#), published in August by the R4V.



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Working with the Costa Rican government:

On 22 July, Costa Rica held the **first regular meeting of the Executive Committee of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan 2024 (MINARE)**. The meeting was attended by high-level representatives of key Costa Rican government agencies involved in the response to displacement, whose **strategic coordination is essential as Costa Rica prepares to assume the pro tempore presidency of MIRPS in 2025.** The leadership of the Ministry of Labour, which reflected Costa Rica's interest in improving the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons was notable. In addition, **participants reaffirmed their support for the implementation of the Government's commitments to the Global Refugee Forum** and noted the relevance of the **UN Common Pledge 2.0**, which reflects the UN's global leadership in achieving these global commitments aimed at a comprehensive approach to the protection and inclusion of refugees.



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Working with development actors:

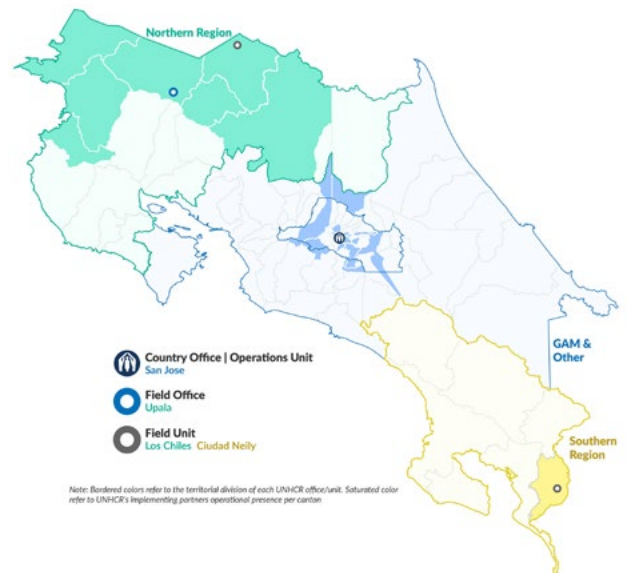
In August, UNHCR facilitated and accompanied a **visit by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to the cantons of Upala, Los Chiles and San Carlos** in the Northern region. There, the international financial institutions heard first-hand from authorities and communities about their most pressing needs and opportunities for cooperation. This provided the Bank with **important information on gaps in infrastructure, education, and temporary shelter for refugees and migrants** to be taken into account in its project design and aligned with its ongoing investments. In addition, the banks offered assistance to the entities in formulating key projects in these areas in order to apply for other funding channels.



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UNHCR Operational Presence

- 21 cantons
- 6 provinces



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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