



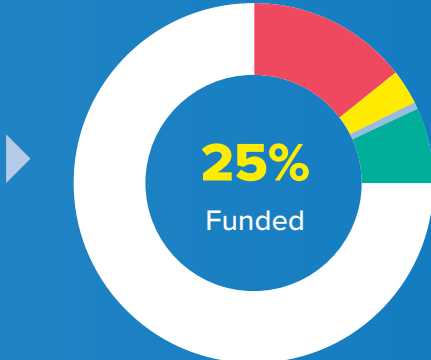
Since 2018, Costa Rica is the main host country for forcibly displaced persons from Nicaragua, with more than 171,000 asylum-seekers and 13,300 recognized refugees by the end of 2023. Costa Rica also hosts people from Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia and Haiti, bringing the country’s forcibly displaced population to approximately 4% of its total population.

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, coming from the perilous Darien route and heading to North America, which have been increasing consistently in the last three years. According to official figures, more than 655,300 people transited through Costa Rica between January 2023 and June 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 April 2024, there will be 120 million forcibly displaced persons in the world, due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and other issues. Approximately 26 million are in the Americas.

**FUNDING UPDATE I
as of 30 June 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
end of 2023**

Estimated number of asylum seekers:
193,178



NCA: Northern Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras)
See more data in theRefugee Data Finder

Operational Context



Since 2018, more than **317,000 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, **human, political, social, economic and environmental rights violations** persist in Nicaragua, affecting multiple sectors of society, particularly academia, journalism, the judiciary, the clergy and different types of associations, including human rights organizations. As an outcome, the arrival of forcibly displaced persons persists, with **8,978 new asylum applications** from Nicaraguans between January and June 2024 according to the Migration Authority (DGME). **Costa Rica hosts 55% of Nicaraguan refugees in the world**, followed by the USA (36%).



The transit of refugees and migrants who have arrived at the southern border of Costa Rica from the perilous Darien stretch continues, and its volume **depends on climatic and social circumstances in Panama** and other countries along 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 June 2024**, more than **655,300 people** have transited under this modality, and both key State institutions and humanitarian actors present in EMISUR (including **UNHCR**) have **strengthened their cross-sectoral response capacities**. In addition, the actors in the response have identified challenges and gaps to be covered through the **Response Plan** led by the National Emergency Commission, with the technical support of the United Nations System.



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 area: from 15 June to 26 August 2024, the Refugee Unit issued **4,395 work permits**, compared to 222 work permits requested and only 55 approved in 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, to provide safe and legal alternatives for those transiting to North America, which was launched in June 2023. In May 2024, [the U.S. government announced the expansion of eligibility criteria to accept Ecuadorians](#) applying to the program in Costa Rica.

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

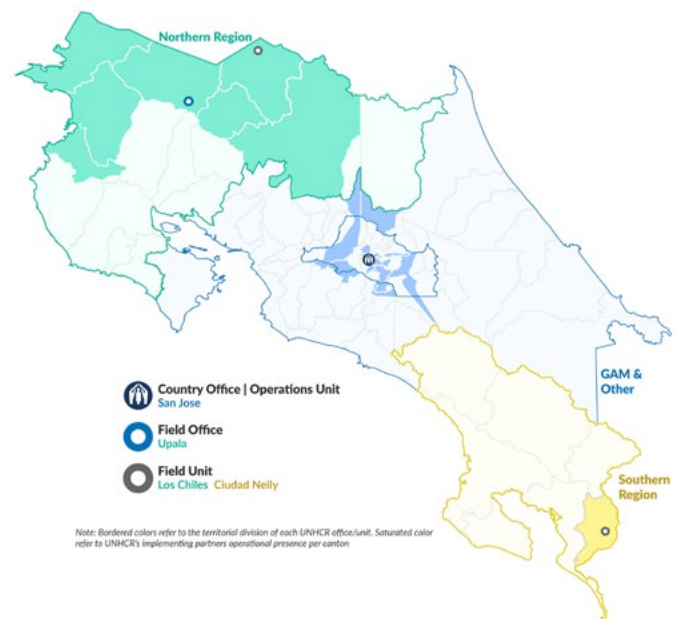
- **Our team (178 people):**

- 151 national staff
- 27 international staff
- 150 in San José
- 22 in the Northern Zone
- 6 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 **monitoring 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.

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**, 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.

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.

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). 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

Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) | 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 Learning Institute (INA) | National Women’s Institute (INAMU) | Ombudsman’s Office (DHR).

We also maintain an ongoing 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 31 July 2024



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

Republic of Korea and Japan

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