

Context



Upon arrival in Costa Rica, refugees and migrants have gaps in meeting their **basic needs**.

On the one hand, **people from Nicaragua** continue to arrive incrementally in Costa Rica in search of protection and security. Notably, Miskitu indigenous persons continue arriving, driven by increasingly dangerous and violent conditions in their territories. Upon displacement, they seek community support networks, often simultaneously confronting significant language and cultural obstacles. Host communities do not always have ways to meet urgent or subsistence needs, which can cause secondary movements.

On the other hand, **people in mixed movements** arrive at Costa Rica's southern border after passing through the Darien region of Panama, and from there transit to the northern border, presenting urgent needs for assistance and protection¹. The Southern Migration Station (EMISUR) provides temporary group shelter and other services prioritized according to vulnerability criteria; meanwhile, in the Northern Region, where access to food and shelter for migrants is more limited, they resort to negative coping mechanisms, including sleeping on the street. **These needs have a specific impact on women and children**, who make up a significant portion of the people in transit identified in Costa Rica: 88% of those traveling in family groups are women or children according to the monitoring of mixed movements by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP².

Similarly, refugees and asylum seekers in the country face heightened vulnerability to climate-related disasters and risks, primarily due to their concentration in precarious informal settlements and high-exposure regions, especially in the northern part of the Country. Consequently, these populations are at increased risk of contracting vector-borne illnesses including malaria, dengue, Chikungunya, and Zika.

UNHCR pursues different lines of work in **humanitarian assistance**, aimed at meeting needs for shelter, hygiene, food and hydration. In the case of people in mixed movements, UNHCR and other humanitarian partners complement the response of the authorities at both borders.

¹The UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP Mixed Movements Monitoring reports that the priority needs of people in transit are: food (76%), clothing and shoes (59%), shelter (47%) and information/telecommunications (21%).

²Proportion calculated for persons interviewed as of July 2024.

Inter-agency Coordination



Since 2023, the increase in the volume of people in mixed movements has required greater regional efforts to ensure a humanitarian response and protection. **UNHCR and other humanitarian partners provide technical and operational support to the Costa Rican government** to assist refugees and migrants in transit, through technical support and operational capacity in the field, to ensure a coordinated and timely response. **UNHCR leads two coordination spaces** that bring together protection actors: the **Protection Desk** in the **Southern Migration Station (EMISUR)** and the **Protection Cluster** in the **Northern Region**. These spaces provide technical support to inter-institutional spaces such as the **Human Mobility Roundtable**.

At the local level, since 2018 UNHCR has supported institutions in the Northern Region of the country in disaster preparedness and response actions. This has included **capacity building, technical support** to design and implement inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, the **identification and provision of shelters** to be used in emergencies, and support through humanitarian assistance. Likewise, since 2024, through field units in **Ciudad Neily (South)** and **Los Chiles (North)**, it has reinforced its presence to support and complement the work of local institutions, for example, through institutional dialogues to advance emergency preparedness and response in the Southern Region.

Key Figures

- 3,144** ▶ mosquito nets.
- 6,904** ▶ items for food preparation. (4,959 for refugee communities and 1,945 for civil society initiatives for people on the move).
- 2,369** ▶ hydration kits (1,895 in the Northern Region and 474 in the Southern Region).
- 1,500** ▶ hygiene kits and **88** paper towels rolls.
- 496** ▶ household items for hygiene, shelter, home and sleeping.

Assistance objectives



Complementing the institutional response

Northern Region:

The delivery of mosquito nets complements the health assistance provided by authorities such as the Health Management Areas and hospitals. Between January and October, UNHCR delivered **3,016 mosquito nets**, 3,000 to the address of Regional Health Management Area of San Carlos and 16 to the Regional Health Management Area of Santa Rosa de Pocosol, to assist people in mixed movements sheltered in the region.

UNHCR also made available **1,195 hydration kits for institutions**, managed by the Human Mobility Roundtables of Upala and Los Chiles, which will be delivered mainly to people in mixed movements according to vulnerability criteria, in which case priority is given to children and women at risk, among other profiles.

Southern Region:

UNHCR, in support of the Corredores health area, delivered **50 paper towel rolls** to promote hygiene practices. In addition to health care provided by local partners in EMISUR, **474 hydration kits** were delivered to people in mixed movements, complementing the health care provided.



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Provision of humanitarian basics, particularly food security, in parallel with self-sustainability and livelihoods processes

Northern Region:

In parallel to livelihoods strengthening processes (delivery of tools for construction and farming and items for pig and livestock farming, training in agriculture and partnerships with local markets). In November, UNHCR started delivering food kits incrementally including **4,959 basic food basket items**, to ensure food security for forcibly displaced persons, particularly indigenous Miskitus persons in Finca Las Marías. This makes it possible to meet immediate needs while the harvesting of their crops produces a sustainable food supply.



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Capacity building for solidarity communities and institutions

Northern Region:

Humanitarian assistance to communities in the Northern Region is led by organizations operating with their own funds, which are sometimes scarce or insufficient to meet the demand for shelter and food. To strengthen the response to people in mixed movements in Los Chiles, in October UNHCR delivered **700 hydration kits**³ and in November delivered **465 household items**, including household items, shelter items and sleeping and hygiene kits⁴, as well as **128 mosquito nets**, in support of organizations such as Casa Esperanza, El Nazareno Church, and Casas Solidarias in Los Chiles, and for the first time to the organization Sepia in Guanacaste.

Likewise, through the delivery of **1,945 items in kind** for the preparation of hot meals, UNHCR supported the organizations Casa Esperanza and Mano Amiga, which prepare hot meals for 120 to 150 refugees and migrants in transit per day. The delivery ensures their operation until April 2025⁵. These deliveries help boost the solidarity efforts of the host communities of forcibly displaced persons.

Southern Region:

UNHCR, in support of the work of the local NGO Hands4Health with the Ngäbe Buglé indigenous population, delivered **38 rolls of toilet paper**, which contribute to its strategy of strengthening hygiene practices.

³Each kit contains: serums, bottle/thermos, 6 energy bars, backpack/bag.

⁴Such as: hygiene (107 soaps, 29 microfiber towels), shelter (24 raincoats), home (144 water jugs, 30 cleaning kits, 18 plastic tarpaulins, 8 kitchen sets, 8 solar lamps) and sleeping (75 blankets, 22 mattresses), 350 school bags, 400 hygiene kits for women, 400 for men, 400 child kits, 1 solar lamp, 201 raincoats.

⁵The shelter Casa Esperanza offers two daily meal times (breakfast + lunch) to 120-150 people per day, while Mano Amiga prepares about 150 hot served meals (dinners) per night.



Direct assistance/deliveries to complement humanitarian partner response

Southern Region:

According to institutional requirements and needs identified in the South Migration Station (EMISUR), UNHCR has delivered items such as lamps, blankets, raincoats and other items on an ad hoc basis, directly to people in mixed movements.

In October and November, **1,500 hygiene kits** were distributed in **EMISUR** to highly vulnerable people (500 kits for women, 500 kits for men and 500 kits for children), in addition to the delivery of clothes and shoes by the CADENA Foundation.



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RESPONSE IN TEMPORARY SHELTERS

In the **Northern Region**, UNHCR has identified **four types of group temporary shelters**: emergency shelters (under GCE), individual temporary shelter solutions, community-based shelter initiatives, and shelters for specific protection objectives (the latter are not included in this section).

On the one hand, there are **159 spaces identified through the Municipal Emergency Committees (CME)**, mostly community halls and schools (152) to be activated in **situations of emergencies associated with climate**. UNHCR has contributed since 2018 with the strengthening of these spaces, including infrastructure adaptations, provision of supplies such as household items, and capacity building in emergency preparedness at the community level (e.g. early warning systems).

As for the care of refugees and migrants in transit, due to the lack of a dedicated space for comprehensive care, there are two alternatives for temporary shelter:

- On the one hand, the implementing partner **HIAS** has established partnerships with **3 hotels** located in Los Chiles, San Carlos and Upala, and has **8 weekly shelter slots** available for people in transit to North America as well as those who wish to stay in Costa Rica. HIAS applies prioritization criteria to favor profiles of people with specific needs, such as pregnant women and people with critical illnesses, among others. As of November 2024, **822 people** in the Northern Region have been housed under this modality.
- On the other hand, for people in mixed movements, UNHCR has identified and supports **three shelter spaces managed by the host communities** (Mano Amiga, Casa Esperanza and Iglesia Nazareno). These organizations have a capacity of approximately **100 shelter spaces**.
- Even so, **the supply of temporary shelter in the Northern Region is not sufficient**, and it is common that people who meet the inclusion criteria do not have access to shelter because the capacity is exceeded, mainly due to logistical restrictions (infrastructure in the territory). For this reason, a **care gap** is identified that has **protection implications** in that it exposes people to being captured by smuggling networks, to witnessing and being victims of multiple situations of violence (e.g. robbery and scams), to sleeping on the streets, and to resorting to negative coping mechanisms (such as exposure of children and adolescents to begging).



In view of this challenge, Costa Rican institutions are designing a **solution for group temporary shelter and humanitarian assistance in the Northern Region**, similar to the operation of the Southern Migration Station (EMISUR). Likewise, in the Southern Region, HIAS and the Local Humanitarian Network are looking for mechanisms to cover the gap in temporary shelter for asylum seekers while they wait for their cases to be resolved.

In the **Southern Region**, the implementing partner **HIAS**, with both UNHCR and its own funds, provides individual temporary shelter slots for asylum seekers; in 2024, 50 people have accessed this offer. When capacity is insufficient, the Local Humanitarian Network tries to complement these efforts.



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