

# Costa Rica

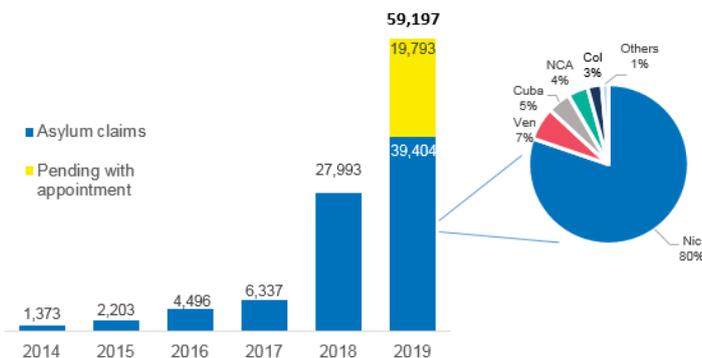
January 2020

Costa Rica is a host country to asylum-seekers primarily from Latin America and the Caribbean, and is a transit point for others. Over the past five years, the country has experienced an upward trend in the number of asylum applications received as a result of political unrest and violence in the region.

Since the onset of the socio-political crisis in Nicaragua in April 2018, over 74,500 individuals have sought asylum in Costa Rica. UNHCR works with the Costa Rican Government to support persons in need of international protection. UNHCR expanded its operations in 2018 by opening

a field office in the north to assist the Government's response to the influx of Nicaraguan asylum-seekers in the region. In 2020, the operation added a San Jose Field Unit to respond to the needs of PoC in the metro area. At a policy level, the framework for the multi-sectoral refugee response is outlined in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan (MINARE).

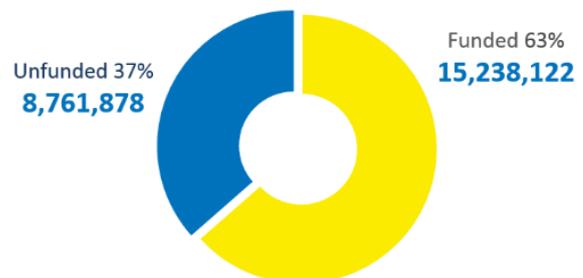
## Asylum seekers per year and nationality (2019 year-end data; Migration Authority)



## 2019 FUNDING (As of January 2020)

# USD 24 M

Requested for the Costa Rican Operation



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

- 55** National Staff
- 10** International Staff
- 60%** Female
- 40%** Male

*Does not include government staff funded by UNHCR*

### Offices:

- 1** Country Office in San Jose
- 1** Field Office in Upala
- 1** Field Unit in San Jose

*Photo: UNCHR 2019*



# Main Activities

## Protection

UNHCR Costa Rica works to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance protection through a variety of interventions and activities for asylum-seekers, refugees, and stateless persons. UNHCR advocates for safe access to territory, *non-refoulement*, no sanctions for irregular entry, effective registration, access to a fair and efficient refugee status determination (RSD) procedure, timely issuance of documentation, and access to basic rights and services. Activities implemented also help strengthen the response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child protection, and comprehensive care for persons with specific protection needs.

### **Community-Based Protection (CBP):**

This strategy aims to reduce protection risks and vulnerabilities while fostering peaceful co-existence and integration. Communication strategies with PoC help provide timely information and learn about needs of PoC and host members, and support to community initiatives promote integration through sports and community activities. In the northern region, the CPB strategy launched in August 2019 with collaboration from the Government and partners. UNHCR conducted introductory sessions in 27 communities in Upala and Los Chiles to promote community participation and empowerment, and identified 21 community representatives to help channel PoC needs. In San Jose, UNHCR began directly implementing CBP in January 2020, building on work started with and through partners in 2019. This complements information campaigns occurring throughout the year to raise awareness about the asylum process, refugee rights, and services provided. An information center is available since 2018 to receive inquiries from persons of concern, with an average of 811 attentions per month (calls, emails, and walk-ins).

### **Asylum System Strengthening:**

In line with the MINARE framework, UNHCR supports the Migration Authority in system strengthening to effectively and efficiently respond to asylum cases. To address the influx of asylum-seekers in Costa Rica, UNHCR provides support to the Refugee Unit in San Jose and Upala, including with funding of human resources, infrastructure, and capacity building. UNHCR also provides support to the Commission on Restricted Visas and Refugees (CVRR) and the Administrative Migration Tribunal (TAM) to increase the adjudication capacity and accelerate processing times.

### **Legal advice and assistance:**

UNHCR provides legal information and assistance to prospective asylum-seekers on issues related to the asylum process, as well as access to other rights, including health, education, and work.

### **Special needs:**

UNHCR has led the Multi-Functional Team on SGBV prevention and response, which is fully operational, with the participation of the National Children's Protection Institute, the National Women's Institute, the Migration Authority, UNHCR partner agencies, and some municipalities. UNHCR partners also provide safe houses for SGBV survivors, at-risk female asylum-seekers and their children, and LGBTI+ persons. In addition, psychosocial services are provided for an increasing number of survivors of torture and trauma.

To further expand its child protection response and assist Nicaraguan asylum-seeker and refugee children, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated (UASC), UNHCR provides technical assistance to national entities to ensure early identification of children-at-risk, and implementation of appropriate responses.

To advance towards the eradication of statelessness, UNHCR works with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal/Civil Registry. As part of a MoU signed with the Tribunal, the Chriticos Project was launched in 2014. It is an initiative for cross-collaboration between Costa Rica and Panama to address issues of low birth registry of the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous people. In 2018, the Civil Registry adopted the project to be implemented nationally. These activities are

coupled with technical support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the body responsible for the statelessness determination procedure, and other authorities on the evaluation process 'towards zero statelessness'.

### **Emergency preparedness:**

Given the northern region's particular vulnerabilities to natural disasters, UNCHR works with the Emergency Committee in Upala and participates in the Interinstitutional Coordination Committee in La Cruz and Los Chiles. UNHCR participated in the first line response to a flash flood emergency in July 2019 and has since committed to warehouse emergency supplies (CRI, drinkable water, and food). UNHCR is also renovating three community centers to serve as emergency shelters in case of a man-made or natural disaster.

## **Livelihoods**

UNHCR livelihoods initiatives increase individuals' self-reliance and promote economic inclusion by removing barriers to income generating activities, through vocational or technical capacity building and by increasing PoC access to the labour markets.

The Living Integration Program, through initiatives such as the Living Integration Seal and different employment and entrepreneurship actions, developed jointly with the Costa Rican Government and partner agencies, seeks to assist asylum seekers and refugees in their local integration. Nearly 2,000 refugees have benefitted from this initiative since 2014.

## **Multipurpose Cash-Based Intervention**

UNHCR implements a multipurpose cash-based intervention (CBI) to provide immediate assistance to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers. These non-conditional, unrestricted cash grants provide a timely response, allowing prioritized individuals and families to address their most critical needs and support integration into their host communities. Between June and August, socioeconomic evaluations were conducted throughout San Jose's metropolitan region as well as in the northern cantons of Upala and Los Chiles. Through this exercise, 2,238 households received a cash grant – 1,557 in San Jose and 681 in Upala and Los Chiles cantons. For three months, families receive USD 450 in San Jose and USD 200 in the northern region. The difference in amount is to adjust for cost of living. In addition to the grant, families received financial training and obtained access to legal advice and other services from implementing partners.

# **Partnerships and coordination**

UNHCR's main government counterparts in Costa Rica are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior (*Gobernacion*), and the Migration Authority (DGME). Other ministries that play key roles in the work of UNHCR include: the Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN), the National Social Welfare Institute (IMAS), and the National Children's Institute (PANI).

UNHCR supports the Government of Costa Rica in the implementation of MINARE, which is the national chapter of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan (CRRF) and represents Costa Rica's contribution to the Regional Comprehensive Response Framework (MIRPS). The MINARE offers a multi-sectoral whole-of-society response to the situation of refugees and other persons in need of international protection, and it is a model for the protection and integration of urban refugees in middle income countries. The MINARE engages a diverse range of stakeholders including various ministries, civil society and faith-based organizations, academia, institutions, UN agencies, and the private sector.

Through private sector partnerships, synergies with key private sector partners and foundations are sought to raise public awareness and diversify the number of organizations that can contribute to UNHCR's work in Costa Rica.

As the leading agency for international refugee protection, UNHCR works to support the Government in conjunction with key partner agencies. The following partnership agreements are in place for implementation of activities.

- **HIAS:** Provides legal counseling and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as border monitoring in the northern and southern region.
- **RET:** Responds to specific protection needs of refugees and asylum-seekers including case management and psychosocial support, community based protection and sectoral cash grants.
- **The Center for the Social Rights of Migrants (CENDEROS):** Implements protection and integration programs for refugees and asylum-seekers, with special emphasis on support for survivors of SGBV and LGBTI individuals in extreme vulnerability.
- **Fundación Mujer:** Executes livelihood and self-sufficiency activities which include support for job placement, skills training, and business development activities.
- **University for Peace:** Provides a temporary shelter program for high risk individuals from northern Central America, including with English classes, psychosocial support for those in transit to a third host country.
- **La Salle University:** A partner agency since 2017, La Salle University has assisted more than 5,000 individuals with legal advice on the RSD process, statelessness, and the naturalization process.
- **Fundación Crisalida Internacional – Glasswing:** Provides access to educational materials for schools, teacher training, spaces for group psychosocial support, safe recreational spaces for minors, and prevention of xenophobia and bullying.
- **Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional (DNI Costa Rica):** Improves the living conditions of children and adolescents and their families and communities, through interventions that allow the reduction of violations of children's rights, girls and adolescents, ensuring their right to a decent and quality life.

## Financial Information

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

[European Union](#) | [Switzerland](#) | [United States of America](#) | [Private donors](#)

### CONTACTS

Ana Maria Baracaldo, **Associate Reporting Officer, Costa Rica,**

[baracala@unhcr.org](mailto:baracala@unhcr.org), Tel: +506 7181 7608

### LINKS

- UNHCR Website: <https://www.acnur.org/costa-rica>
- Twitter [@ACNUR\\_CostaRica](#)