UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

December 2023

OPERATIONAL UPDATE

# Costa Rica

## Key Figures

**>21,900**

*People assisted in 2023, ranging from 9,500 to 17,300 assistance items per month, with a total of 172,000*.*

**44%** Women

**32%** Men

**12%** Girls

**12%** Boys

0.6% non-binary persons

*Considerng that a single beneficiary may be reached through multiple assistance items.

**70%** *of beneficiaries were reached in the Metro Area (GAM) and surrounding areas, 19% in the South area ant the remaining 11% at the North.*

## Our impact on people

**>21,800** *reached through legal assistance*

**>13,000** *registered to better understand their needs and advise them on protection and assistance*

**>13,200** *accompanied to ensure their access to healthcare*

**4,384** *participated in local integration activities and*

**1,904** *were supported in their livelihoods in order to promote their economic inclusion*

**3,103** *children and*

**304** *GBV survivors (women and girls) were accompanied and protected*

UNHCR works to ensure access to healthcare for refugees and asylum-seekers. Through various initiatives, patients with health conditions and in vulnerable situations have access to affiliation, attention, and medicines.
© UNHCR/Austin Ramírez

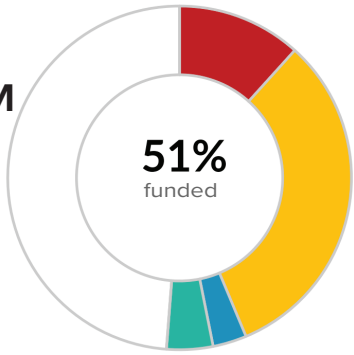
## Our work in Costa Rica

Costa Rican authorities allow **access to the territory and to the refugee status determination procedure;** as well, they provide **short-term assistance** and facil tate **social inclusion** of displaced persons arriving in the country. UNHCR **helps authorities** to meet such objectives.

In 2023, the number of **refugees and migrants in mixed movements** transiting the country **reached unprecedented levels**. In coordination with the Costa Rican government and other UN agencies, UNHCR **participates in the response** aimed at dignified assistance and access to human rights for such population.

## Funding

**USD 36.8M**
funding requirement for Costa Rica




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

We thank to our 11 implementing partners:
La Salle University Association | Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) | CENDEROS | Defense of Children International (DNI) | Fundación Mujer | Fundación Omar Dengo | HIAS | RET International | Jesuit Service for Migrants (SJM) | UN PEACE | World Vision Costa Rica

# Our results

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND STATELESSNESS PREVENTION

Implemented directly and through our partners: La Salle University Association | HIAS | SJM Costa Rica

We work with the **National Police Academy** to implement a pilot program aimed at incorporating a specific module on International **Refugee Law and Specific Protection Needs**. This, as part of the academic program for the technical degree in Police Management, where we reached **180 people**.

In addition, hand in hand with the Subcommission on Access to Justice for Refugees and Migrants, UNHCR reinforced training and education within the **National System of Judicial Facilitators**, so that they can inform and orient people with and for whom we work in rural and remote areas, particularly to indigenous populations. Thanks to UNHCR's advocacy, **the appointment of a specific Judicial Facilitator for persons in need of international protection (which is also a refugee)** allows to increase the impact of this strategy.

### Next priorities

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for strategy with **Police Academy** and **official integration of the module into the academic program**, given the success of the pilot.

We provided training in international protection to 50 candidates of the Police Management Technician program of the National Police Academy in Pococí. The focus on age, gender and diversity will strengthen their capacities to protect refugee and asylum-seekers. ©UNHCR/Alejandra Bogarin

Through our **legal partners** nationwide:

**16,731**
persons accessed **information** on refugee status determination, the asylum application procedure and/or on access to rights.

**3,591**
people were reached through **counseling** on their asylum application processes, including cases of heightened vulnerabilities.

**649**
people were supported through **legal representation**, where partners accompanied people with specific vulnerabilities so that they could effectively gain access to justice regarding asylum requests and access to rights.

**657**
asylum-seekers were supported through **individual shelter solutions** to facilitate the processing of their asylum requests.

UNHCR provides **support and advice to stateless persons,** that is, those who are not considered nationals of any State under its legislation, either because they never had a nationality or because they lost their nationality and were unable to acquire another. To this end, we have reached 998 **people** with **information** on late registration, the procedure for recognition of statelessness and access to rights; as well as 715 **people** through **counseling** and 173 people through **legal representation** on these issues. **Community days led by UNHCR and JSM**, accompanied by the two key entities in the area of statelessness, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship and the Civil Registry, are also to remark. In such activities **we bring together institutions and communities**, especially those with heightened levels of vulnerability.

Thanks to UNHCR's advocacy, the **Inter-Agency Liaison Commission on Statelessness,** which brings together all the institutions working with stateless persons, met again in August 2023; In this space, the country's commitments for the **Global Refugee Forum (GRF)**, the most important event on the subject at the global level, were reviewed and analyzed. This has strengthened the **common vision** regarding the integration of stateless persons in Costa Rica.

## REGISTRATION

Direct implementation

13,057 persons have been individually registered and referenced as having been identified as **eligible for one or more assistance items by UNHCR (60%) and its implementing partners (40%)**. The main areas of referral are livelihoods (32%), legal assistance (31%), psychosocial support (13%) and cash assistance (8%).

## CHILD PROTECTION AND EDUCATION

Implemented directly and through our partners: Defense of Children International (DNI) | World Vision Costa Rica

In 2023, we provided guidance to 2,054 **children and adolescents and 527 parents and caregivers**, orienting them and analyzing their cases through individual child protection services. As part of this work, UNHCR created a **case analysis space with its legal partners**, targeting children in need of international protection who are interested in going to third countries. This analysis is known as “best interest determination” (BID).

Through awareness-raising and information activities, 527 **people** were trained to develop their knowledge and skills on the **right to education** and how to access it under Costa Rican regulation. In addition, 78 **adults (including caregivers, teachers and others)** were trained to **identify both risks and protection factors** for children in need of international protection.

UNHCR identified 566 **children and adolescents with barriers to access to education.** To overcome such barriers, we accompanied them and **referred them to our implementing partners.**

Likewise, 74 **adolescents were accompanied** through individual or group sessions to promote their life path, so that they can envision their future and possibilities of integration in Costa Rica. With the same aim, on Children's Day, as part of *Soñemos en grande* **initiative, in coordination with the National University (UNA),** 25 **children** visited the children's library of this university, which is located near areas with a high influx of refugees, as a way of approach them to higher education.

UNHCR formed the **Network of Refugee Youth** to strengthen the leadership skills and community participation of young people in the Metro Area (GAM) and the Northern area. The Network is comprised by 75 **adolescents and youth in need of international protection**. There, adolescent and young refugees reinforced their exercise of rights and strengthened their integration through meeting spaces in which they created **peaceful coexistence campaigns** and initiatives to counteract xenophobia; while also **reflecting on social, cultural, and environmental rights.** Besides, through the *Expresarte* **initiative**, children and young people from the Network created art to reflect on their arrival and integration process in Costa Rica; such works are being exhibited in different spaces.

We believe in the value of art to promote peaceful coexistence. Thus, in context of the interagency work with UNESCO, IOM, the Municipality of San José, a Theater Workshop for Youth towards a Culture of Peace was developed in Barrios del Sur. This was developed with the *Cultural Association* **Teatro Espressivo (ACTE)**, with a duration of five months and the co-creation of a play as a closure.

## Next priorities

Regarding the work with the **National University (UNA)**, develop vocational counseling with the teenagers who participate in the project.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (GBV)

Implementation through our partner: CENDEROS

In terms of **risk prevention and mitigation,** 68 **women** in both the Metro Area and the North participated in training-action sessions as **community promoters**, which seek to work on prevention, hosting, and assistance to potential victims and survivors of violence against women and girls. At the same time, this **strengthens support community networks** among refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons, ultimately promoting their self-determination and community mobilization (experience with Red Las Pinoleras is an example of this). In addition, through "**coffee time" sessions,** 234 **victims/survivors of violence** have come together while sharing their experiences through art therapy as a way of healing; during such spaces, women build their own prevention routes through community mapping.

Between November and December, UNHCR Costa Rica joined the commemoration of the **16 days of activism against violence against women and girls**, through community activities in the North area and San José. With the aim to raise awareness against violence, the agenda included athletic and artistic activities, workshops with 25 **girls and adolescents** to promote self-care and corporal expression, and training on human rights with 14 **community promoters** for the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls.

Regarding **response,** 236 **GBV survivors and their families** (143 in San José and 93 in Upala) were supported through the Host Houses (Casas de Acogida) strategy, providing them with security and integral protection. This program is being complemented through training in self-employment and entrepreneurship, in order to promote inclusion and economic independence, which are essential for survivors.

## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Implemented directly and through our partner: Defense of Children International (DNI)

Through the **Mobile Information Centers** strategy, monthly workshops are held to approach communities with a high concentration of refugees, asylum-seekers, and other profiles, and to **inform them in person about key issues, such as the Temporary Special Category (CET), documentation, good practices for employability** and other topics. This activity has been developed in coordination with the Ombudsman's Office, which has participated through information sessions and case management. This, in order to ensure access to people who, due to technological or geographical barriers, usually do not have access to protection services.
Thanks to this proximity, **we reached 710 people and addressed 1,180 queries** related to the topics covered in the strategy.

**67 community spaces were identified, created or strengthened** to be used as safe spaces for refugee, asylum-seeking and host community children.

UNHCR, jointly with the Municipality of Alajuela and the Ministry of Culture, provided information of interest to refugees and asylum-seekers through the Mobile Information Centers. ©UNHCR/Daniel Arguedas

Read more about UNHCR´s work on Mobile Information Centers **HERE**

## ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Implemented directly and through our partner: CENDEROS

Thanks to the work of the Information Center, **7,535 people have had a two-way channel to express their needs, concerns and comments** and receive answers and support. Besides, **710 people have accessed information and assistance** through the Mobile Information Centers.

UNHCR visited the communities of San Gerardo and Aguas Negras in the north of the country. During the visits, participatory assessments were carried out with neighbors in each community. ©UNHCR/Kai Odio

Since the beginning of 2023, under the Localization project, **UNHCR has carried out a strategy of mapping, outreach and joint work with at least 45 community-based organizations,** which has facilitated direct contact with civil society leaders. As a result of this approach, **more direct contact between communities and assistance has been facilitated**, thanks to their capacity to identify and refer cases, and to identify opportunities for strengthening and training in areas of their interest.

In Upala, 672 **people have been reached through information and community awareness sessions** to promote their integration in the communities that host them. Also, through cantonal meetings, 78 **refugees and rights promoters in Upala and Los Chiles have been trained and gained awareness** on how to approach the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund and the Ombudsperson's Office to defend their rights.

Likewise, 564 **people** (340 in Upala and 224 in the rest of the country) **have been part of participatory assessments** where they have been consulted about their living conditions, needs, concerns and potentials through social mapping. This has allowed us to **adjust our operation to better respond to the people** with and whom we work.

## LOCAL INTEGRATION

Implemented directly and through our partner: RET International

We recognize the efforts of the Costa Rican state to include people with international protection needs in its social protection strategies. To connect the population with the State's programs, UNHCR established an agreement with the **Joint Institute for Social Assistance (IMAS).** Under this agreement, 1,523 **family groups** comprised by 4,384 **refugees and asylum-seekers**, and 752 **family groups** comprised of 2,358 **of their host communities** were assessed by IMAS to determine their vulnerability level.

Of the total number of people evaluated, IMAS case managers provided 1,444 **assistance items to refugees and asylum-seekers** and 946 **to host communities,** with benefits focused on care networks and scholarships, targeting women (particularly female heads of household) and children and adolescents.

Finally, 33 **family groups from host communities** were referred to state institutions and 13 **refugees and asylum-seeker families** were referred to UNHCR partner agencies.

In Upala, through interinstitutional sessions, UNHCR advocated for the inclusion of 237 **into State's social programmes**.

## LIVELIHOODS AND ECONOMIC AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

Implemented directly and through our partners: Fundación Mujer | Fundación Omar Dengo

In terms of **employability,** 1,747 **people were trained** through short courses that provided them with access to income-generating opportunities. In addition, 1,000 **people** with and for whom we work in the Metro Area and at the North were supported to develop their work plan, and 503 **people effectively accessed salaried work**. In the same line, 218 **people** were reached through certified technical and professional training for **employability** and 26 **with support for training** related to salaried work through transfers.

In the area of financial inclusion, 200 **people were trained** and gained awareness on financial education and bankarization. In addition, 254 **people** were reached through financial inclusion activities for **salaried work, self-employment and entrepreneurship**.

As for **entrepreneurship**, 157 **people** received certified training in business management and 80 **received training** in self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Also, 101 **people** were supported through cash transfers (CBI) with **seed capital for entrepreneurship and self-employment**.

In terms of **digital inclusion**, 250 **people** were reached through **digital literacy** activities for employability, 111 **more** in digital literacy oriented to salaried work and 94 in entrepreneurship.

## CASH-BASED ASSISTANCE

Direct implementation

4,019 **people** received **multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA)** to meet their basic needs, and 51 **were reached through non-food items**, including basic relief items.

## Feedback from households

According to UNHCR's **Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM)** conducted in October and November 2023 with 137 **families** who were assisted through in-cash assistance, 95% **of the households reported feeling safe while spending the amount of assistance**, and 98% felt safe of keeping their money at home. The most common expenditure items were **food (96%), rent (64%) and personal hygiene items (52%). More than half of the families (62%) feel that the program significantly improved their living conditions**; most households also reported a significant reduction in their stress levels (63%) and in the household's economic burden (62%).

## HEALTH

Implemented through our partner: CENDEROS

In order to ensure coverage for the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR supports the **Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS)** to provide health insurance quotas to refugees and asylum seekers (6,000 during 2023). In addition, from September 2023, UNHCR is implementing an **alliance between the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), the Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN) and the Costa Rica University (UCR) Foundation**. This alliance which allows for up to 3,375 insurance quotas for one year. By the end of 2023, 1,440 **people** were referred by UNHCR and insured through this agreement.

Meanwhile, 2,291 **people** accessed primary physical health services and 544 mental health services, the latter oriented to individualized care in emergency cases.

Read more about UNHCR´s work on the health affiliation scheme **HERE**

# Our Interagency work

During 2023, together with **United Nations agencies, UNHCR supported the Costa Rican government in the response to population in mixed movements**. This includes technical advisory to the Migration Authority (DGME) and the National Commission on Emergencies (CNE) for the preparation of their emergency response plan following the September 2023 Emergency Declaration.

To complement these efforts, the **United Nations System defined coordination spaces** adapted to the context and needs of the South and the North borders. UN Costa Rica has also launched a Preparedness and Response Plan for population in transit 2024.

UNHCR and UNICEF prepare donated materials by UN Staff for delivery in Paso Canoas (Southern Zone). ©UNHCR

As a result of our work with **development agencies and International Financial Institutions (IFIs)**, UNHCR contributed, together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to the calculations that led to a study published by the IMF. This study describes the **socio-demographic characteristics of the refugee and migrant population in Costa Rica**, their **contribution to economic growth and public finance, as well as their contribution to the labor market** in addition to the jobs of the Costa Rican population.

Further detail on refugees' contributions in the IMF study **HERE**

A **partnership between IOM, UNDP and UNHCR** resulted in the approval of funds for **an inter-agency peace-building project to be implemented in 2024**. This project seeks to mitigate tensions, preventconflicts and strengthen peaceful coexistence among refugee communities, asylum seekers, migrants and their host communities in northern Costa Rica. Also, the prject seeks to strenghten the capacities of communities and institutions for peaceful conflict resolution, dialogue and consensus building, and combating hate speech and xenophobia. The overall aim is to promote social cohesion, integration and peaceful coexistence.

In June, along with Colombia and Guatemala, Costa Rica joined the Safe Mobility (SMO) initiative, led by the U.S. government to offer legal and safe alternatives for those heading to North America. With this, **the first SMO office was opened in August in Upala**, in order to guide and assist refugees and migrants. A total of 7,598 **people** have registered on web through movilidadsegura.org and are being supported to assess their viability in the program, applicable to persons of Venezuelan or Nicaraguan nationality who were in Costa Rica on or before 12 June, 2023.

VIDEO: The Safe Mobility program in Costa Rica helps refugees and migrants from Nicaragua and Venezuela. @UNHCR/2023

**UNHCR is grateful for the contributions of donor countries that contribute to Costa Rica and to global programs with flexible funding:**
**As of 15 December 2023**

**UNHCR Costa Rica is also grateful for the contributions of our global private donors:**
**Germany / Australia / China / United States / Spain / Japan / Italy / United Kingdom / Republic of Korea / Sweden.**

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