

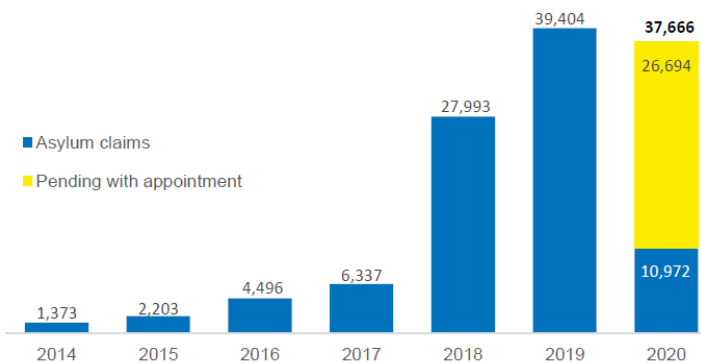
Costa Rica

July 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 80,000 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 persons of concern (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).

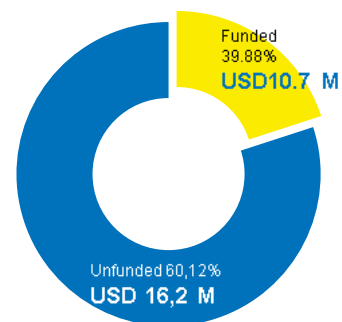
Asylum seekers per year and nationality (2019 year-end data; Migration Authority)



2019 FUNDING (As of July 2020)

USD 26,9 M

Requested for the Costa Rican Operation



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

74 National Staff

10 International Staff

61% Female

39% 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. CBP activities will strengthen bonds between UNHCR and community organizations and support their efforts to respond to COVID-19 and other challenges. In the medium and long term, CBP activities will bring UNHCR closer to refugees and Costa Rican host communities and promote empowerment, self-reliance and peaceful coexistence. The CBP strategy includes the following components: strengthening self-protection mechanisms, fostering community organization and empowerment, communicating with communities and promoting peaceful coexistence with host communities. UNHCR began directly implementing CBP in January 2020, building on work done through partners in 2019. Additionally, an information center is operational since 2018 to receive inquiries from PoC and a helpwebsite has been put in place for online information.

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.

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 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 also renovated 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. Over 2,000 asylum seekers and 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. Emergency COVID-19 grants were developed at the outset of the emergency. The grants target households at increased risk to COVID-19, including the elderly and persons with chronic medical conditions. Under COVID-19, the Costa Rica Operation implemented strict preventative measures to minimize the risk of transmission including the delivery of prepaid cards through a local delivery post service, training for the use of ATMs is provided over the phone and through videos uploaded on the UNHCR Costa Rica help site. Once the situation normalizes, the Operation will consider going back to in person distributions with strict measures in place

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 Ministry of Labor.

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 information, advice and free legal representation for Refugee Status Determination the procedure and access to rights.
- **RET:** Responds to specific protection needs of refugees and asylum-seekers including case management and psychosocial support. RET also implements UNHCR´s agreement with the National Welfare Institute (IMAS).
- **The Center for the Social Rights of Migrants (CENDEROS):** Implements protection programs and provides temporary shelter for refugees and asylum-seekers with special protection needs, particularly 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 in transit to a third host country. The program includes English classes and psychosocial support.
- **La Salle University:** A partner agency since 2017, La Salle University provides free legal information and representation on refugee status determination and access to rights
- **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

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

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LINKS

- UNHCR Website: <https://www.acnur.org/costa-rica>
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