



## ADDRESSING FORCED DISPLACEMENT: THE MIRPS IN COSTA RICA

Costa Rica has a long-standing tradition of hosting persons that have been forcibly displaced from their countries of origin. Its democratic stability, robust institutions, and tradition of respecting human rights provide the conditions for refugees and asylum-seekers to find the security and opportunities they need to rebuild their lives.

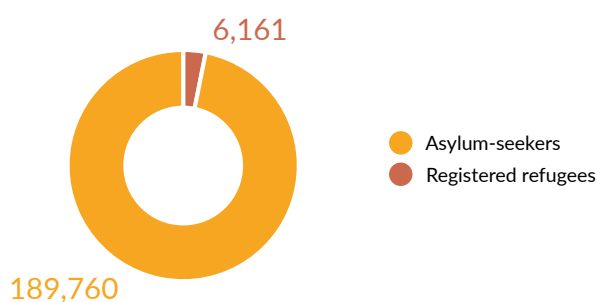
In recent years, Costa Rica has grown in prominence as a country of asylum due to persecution and violence in the region, especially in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, and northern Central America. From 2018 to July 2022, a total of 195,921 persons with international protection needs have sought refuge in the country. This includes 6,161 registered refugees and 189,760 asylum-seekers. Additionally, there are 67 recognized stateless persons, with 125 individuals undergoing the statelessness determination process.

The sustained increase in the number of persons seeking international protection in the country has placed additional pressure on national institutions and their respective response capacities. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified the country's challenges to attend to this population. In the first quarter of 2022, 50,224 persons formalized their asylum claims in the country.

While the country has a robust asylum system, the current displacement context is creating new challenges in its response, in a scenario where the demand for services exceed the supply. When displaced persons enter the territory to seek international protection, border communities are on the frontlines of the response to meeting the needs of this population. The northern border communities, ranking second lowest in the national development index, provide asylum-seekers and refugees with basic health services, education, and humanitarian assistance. The Government and UN agencies are promoting a territorial approach that engages development actors, international financial institutions, and other humanitarian agencies to strengthen host communities and ensure access to rights and services. Costa Rica appeals to the international community to support country efforts to respond to and address the growing needs of refugees and asylum-seekers.

### FIGURES AT A GLANCE

#### PEOPLE OF CONCERN IN COSTA RICA



Source: Refugee Unit, General Migration Authority.  
Data included from 2018 to July 2022

### THE MIRPS IN COSTA RICA

#### NATIONAL TECHNICAL TEAM

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship
- Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS)
- Ministry of Public Education (MEP)
- Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN)
- Viceministry of the Interior
- General Migration Authority (DGME)
- Social Security Bureau (CCSS)
- Social Welfare Institute (IMAS)
- National Apprenticeship Institute (INA)
- National Council of Persons with Disabilities (CONAPDIS)

# NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

## 23 COMMITMENTS



**PROTECTION**  
9 COMMITMENTS



**JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS**  
3 COMMITMENTS



**SOCIAL PROTECTION**  
8 COMMITMENTS



**EDUCATION**  
3 COMMITMENTS

## ACHIEVEMENTS

1



**PROTECTION**

### **Complementary protection for Venezuelans, Nicaraguans and Cubans**

In December 2020, the Government of Costa Rica approved complementary protection measure, ensuring effective protection to persons of these three nationalities whose asylum claims were denied, but cannot return to their home countries due to security concerns. This pilot initiative ran from December 2020 – February 2022, which provided legal security and the granting of a work permit providing unfettered access to the labour market. 4,038 individuals requested this protection, which was granted to 3,934 persons. This represents an approximate approval rate of **99%**.

### **Access of refugees and asylum-seekers to national poverty-reduction programmes**

Costa Rica guarantees that asylum-seekers and refugees in situations of poverty and extreme poverty can access the poverty reduction programmes of the Social Welfare Institute (IMAS) as the same way as Costa Ricans. This access provides refugees and asylum-seekers with inclusion into the national social protection and social mobility systems. In 2021, **4,134** refugees were awarded benefits through different programs.



**SOCIAL PROTECTION**

2

3



**JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS**

### **Access to documentation allowing asylum-seekers to access the labour market**

The Government of Costa Rica grants refugees and asylum-seekers work permits so that they can enter the labour market and supports their integration through the national employment platform, which provides training offered by public institutions to respond to opportunities within the domestic labour market.

In 2021, the platform registered **5,490** foreign nationals, including 35 refugees and asylum-seekers. An additional 81 refugees also participated in other training opportunities to increase their employability.

### **Health insurance for asylum-seekers and refugees**

The Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) provides temporary health insurance to asylum-seekers and refugees as part of an agreement signed with UNHCR. The agreement guarantees asylum-seekers and refugees access to public health services throughout the country. This agreement currently benefits **6,000** people.



**HEALTH**

4

## UPDATED COMMITMENTS

The MIRPS National Technical Team in Costa Rica reviewed and updated its national action plan in 2022 to maintain the relevance and validity of the MIRPS and reflect the current challenges for addressing displacement.

Governmental institutions have identified strategic interventions that require urgent support for the implementation of the plan in the short term (2022-2023). These interventions would address critical needs for the protection of and solutions for displaced populations.

### ESTIMATED COST FOR STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS (2022-2023): USD 4.3 M\*

\* This estimated cost only includes prioritized commitments that have been costed and can be implemented by governmental institutions in 2022 – 2023. It does not include activities by international organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders.

The full list of commitments are presented below by focus area:



### PROTECTION

Strengthen the Costa Rican asylum system to ensure the effective access of forcibly displaced persons to the refugee status determination process and the protection of their rights.

- **Presence at the border:** Strengthen the existing agreement between DGME and UNHCR that facilitates the presence of liaison personnel at border migration posts in Peñas Blancas, Los Chiles and Tablillas in the north, and Paseo Canoas in the south, as well as extending it to ensure the placement of at least one person in the ports of Golfito, Limón, Caldera and in both international airports.
- **Regionalization of the Refuge Unit:** Advance the regionalization of the Refuge Unit in the offices of Upala, Liberia, Paso Canoas, Limón, los Chiles and San Carlos to decentralize the functions of the Unit.
- **Strengthen the Temporary Care Center for Migrants (CATEM):** Guarantee the allocation of funds for the maintenance of infrastructure, equipment, and administration of the CATEMs as a good regional practice as an alternative to administrative detention.
- **Promote national or international public-public and/or public-private partnerships** to secure funds and respond to the need for assistance and legal sponsorship for asylum-seekers undergoing refugee status determination.
- **Project for the Prevention of Delays:** Increase the number of officials specialized in refugee matters, by at least 6 persons in each instance.
- **Strengthening of the Commission on Restricted Visas and Refuge (CVRR):** Assign a full-time Specialized Legal Advisor to each Commissioner, in charge of the respective Ministries in order to assist in the review of files received by the Refuge Unit, and in the preparation of draft CVRR resolutions.
- **Maintain free documentation for asylum-seekers** and reduce the cost of documentation for refugees.
- **Digitization of the Refugee Process:** With the technical and financial support of UNHCR, the DGME will develop a digital system for processing asylum claims that will speed up the process of issuing documents, advancing appointments, and reducing wait times to receive official documentation. This system will allow the Refuge Unit to reduce the number of cases pending the formalization of applications and/or eligibility interviews.
- The General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners will **adapt the procedures for refugee status determination** in line with the assistance, care, and support needs of persons with disabilities claiming asylum to guarantee due process in accordance with their needs and circumstances. This action must be carried out by the DGME with the support of CONAPDIS.



## JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS

Support the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers into Costa Rican society through employment opportunities and entrepreneurship initiatives that promote their self-reliance.

- **Labour integration project for LGBTI populations:** The Ministry of Human Development and Social Inclusion, through Bridge to Work or the National Employment System and with the support of UNHCR, will coordinate a training and labour integration programme for refugees from the LGBTI community.
- **Protection of the labour rights of refugees and asylum-seekers:** a) The National Labour Inspection will consider refugees in its procedures to ensure their labour rights and employer obligations are recognized on an equal basis as nationals; b) Informative actions will also be carried out on current legislation to improve the recognition of the identity documents of asylum-seekers and refugees and reduce discrimination and xenophobia during the recruitment and selection processes.
- **Entrepreneurship promotion project:** The Ministry of Economy, Industry and Commerce will include enterprises led by refugees in the Register of Entrepreneurs and will encourage their participation in business meetings and other activities organized by the Ministry to strengthen micro and small businesses.



## SOCIAL PROTECTION

Ensure access and inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in Costa Rica to the national social protection system to meet their needs through the programs and services offered by public institutions in this sector.

- **Inclusion of the category of refugee in the information files of the social sector:** The Ministry of Human Development and Social Inclusion will instruct all the institutions of the social sector and the National System of Unique Registry of Beneficiaries (SINIRUBE) to include the categories of “refugee status” and “refugee status applicant” in their information sheets.
- **Protocols for care of refugees in the social sector:** The Ministry of Human Development and Social Inclusion will provide technical support to all institutions in the social sector to establish protocols that allow the standardization of care for refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as the implementation of internal awareness processes that guarantee the application of these protocols in all institutions.
- **Solidarity networks for refugees:** The Ministry of Human Development and Social Inclusion, with the collaboration of UNHCR, will promote the participation of civil society in the care of refugees through research initiatives and professional practices with public and private universities.
- **Creation of a collective health agreement** under the modality of temporary voluntary insurance for asylum-seekers and refugees to guarantee the fundamental right to medical care, and to facilitate integration into Costa Rican society.
- **Methodology for quantifying the state contribution to refugees:** The Ministry of National Planning and National Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN) will develop a methodology for quantifying the state contribution in terms of care for refugees with technical support from the OECD. It will be presented to other institutions and MIDEPLAN provide training and support for its use. Formulation, validation, and implementation of a system for generating simultaneous accurate data on the gap in public financing to cover all of the comprehensive care needs of asylum-seekers and refugees, and training of personnel at the institutional level for its optimal use and analytical skills that facilitate decision-making and fundraising in international cooperation will also be undertaken.
- **Development of a care protocol for attending to people with disabilities** during the RSD and integration process.
- **Care protocol for adults and minors seeking asylum and/or refugees** who present health issues derived from the use of psychoactive substances: The Institute on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (IAFA) will develop a care procedure for asylum-seekers and refugees to guarantee access to IAFA care services and those of NGOs that are part of the national treatment system, under the supervision of the Institute.
- **Access for refugees to social interest housing programmes:** The Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements (MIVAH) guarantees access for refugees who meet the conditions and meet the requirements established in its current regulations and legal frameworks, to all social interest housing programmes of the Costa Rican Government.



## EDUCATION

Ensure the right to public education and integration into the educational communities of refugee claimants and refugees who are minors in Costa Rica, as well as provide opportunities for technical and vocational training to increase the employability of this population.

- **Promote the attention and integration of the refugee population and refugee applicants** in the Costa Rican educational system from the intercultural education approach.
- **Project for the provision of alternative evidence for recognition of academic degrees:** CONARE will incorporate the Consular Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship into the Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR for the provision of tests or alternative evidence in the formalization of the application for recognition and equation of academic degrees and professional titles in the country of origin in favour of refugees.
- **Offer priority attention to refugees referred by MINARE,** in accordance with the services offered by INA (education, certification, and training) provided that the referred persons meet the entry requirements established by the institution and the legal framework.

## THE MIRPS

The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) is a regional contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees formed by the governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama to strengthen protection and promote solutions for forcibly displaced populations, addressing the underlying causes and promoting a stable environment that ensures security, economic development and prosperity.



[www.mirps-platform.org/en](http://www.mirps-platform.org/en)



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