

Costa Rica Fact Sheet

June 2024



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Introduction

Costa Rica hosts over 100,000 refugees and migrants, primarily from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Cuba, and Venezuela. The country is also an important transit point for those travelling north after crossing the dangerous Darién Gap. The border areas of Los Chiles and Paso Canoas function as temporary transit points for more than 500,000 refugees and migrants.

The government of Costa Rica has implemented amendments to migration policy that negatively impact refugees and asylum seekers. These changes rolled back legal rights for displaced people, and failed to comply with international protection standards. The administration has also initiated a temporary regularization process targeting asylum seekers who have faced prolonged waits for a final decision on their refugee applications, however many remain unprotected and without access to essential services.

HIAS Programs and Focus

HIAS Costa Rica supports refugees to build new lives and reunite with family members in safety and freedom. Our programs target the most vulnerable refugees and migrants, providing a range of different services that empower people and create conditions to live in safety and dignity.

Legal Protection

HIAS Costa Rica aims to prevent the forced return of individuals to a country where they may face persecution. We provide legal protection services to refugees and asylum seekers through legal orientation sessions, individual counseling on legal procedures, direct legal representation in national Refugee Status Determination procedures, and referrals for further support. HIAS Costa Rica engages in strategic litigation to advance refugee rights and protection before local administrative bodies, and ultimately before the Constitutional Court.

HIAS conducts protection monitoring at both the northern and southern borders to identify and safeguard individuals in need of international protection. We offer information sessions to refugees and asylum seekers, provide training on refugee rights to border authorities, and deliver humanitarian aid — including cash-based interventions, health and hygiene items, and food.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Risk Reduction, Prevention, And Response

Our GBV services are driven by the needs of survivors, supporting women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals to access their rights. HIAS has established a protocol for authorities to respond to GBV among the refugee population, serving as a streamlined reference tool for government officials when identifying and responding to cases. HIAS lawyers also represent asylum seekers with claims for refugee status based on GBV, supporting their efforts to secure health care and shelter services while their cases are evaluated. Our GBV team is located at both borders, in Paso Canoas and Los Chiles, providing survivors with support and cross-border protection in coordination with other HIAS offices along the migratory route.

Economic Inclusion

Access to dignified, sustainable, and safe livelihoods are at the core of our economic inclusion interventions. Our methodology enables refugees, vulnerable migrants, and host community members to find opportunities that allow them to build independent and meaningful futures. HIAS Costa Rica is implementing socio-economic support programs including the Entrepreneurship School with a Gender Lens and the Graduation Model Approach, to eradicate extreme poverty and facilitate integration.



Legal Protection

HIAS engages in strategic litigation to advance refugee rights and promote protection mechanisms.



GBV Response

HIAS provides survivors with cross-border protection in coordination with other offices along the migration route.



Economic Inclusion

HIAS implements the Entrepreneurship School with a Gender Lens and the Graduation Model Approach.



CB-MHPSS Support

HIAS assists transit migrants who experience traumatic events on their journeys through group and individual support.



Sandra Torres* serves pinolillo (a typical Nicaraguan drink) to customers in her restaurant in San José. Sandra participated in the Graduation Model Program at HIAS and as a result, opened her own restaurant. July 21st, 2023, Costa Rica. (Mayela López Corrales for HIAS)

Community Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (CB-MHPSS)

Thousands of refugees and migrants enter Costa Rica after passing through the Darién Gap, and many experience varying levels of distress as a result of the dangers faced on the route. HIAS Costa Rica focuses on psychosocial initiatives for groups and individuals in the areas of Paso Canoas and Los Chiles, along the border with Panama and Nicaragua.

HIAS in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

HIAS advocates for the protection of refugees, asylum seekers, other displaced populations, and local host communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. As part of a comprehensive regional response to meet the urgent needs of these populations, HIAS co-leads and participates in several coordination platforms and partnerships with a focus on protection, socioeconomic integration, MHPSS, food security, GBV, and cash and voucher assistance.

HIAS currently has programs in 11 countries in LAC (Aruba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela) and partners with a wide range of government agencies, UN entities (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, UNVFVT), the private sector (Airbnb, TATA Consultancy Services, and Manpower), and other NGOs and consortia, including Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council and World Vision.

Contact

For more information, please contact:

Roberto Mera, Country Director

+506 8777 4466

roberto.mera@hias.org

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