



**HIAS**

Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.

2022-2023 Overview  
**HIAS COSTA RICA**

# **HIAS Costa Rica**

## **Overview 2022-2023**



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**HIAS Costa Rica 2022**

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## Our History

From our beginnings in the 1880s in a storefront on the Lower East Side of Manhattan providing food and shelter to Jews fleeing antisemitism in Eastern Europe, to our work nearly 140 years later providing social, emotional, legal, and advocacy support to those in need around the world, HIAS has served as a pivotal force for displaced people for generations. Indeed, HIAS began its work even before the world had a legal concept of a “refugee.”

Having helped more than 4.5 million refugees and immigrants escape persecution, HIAS is uniquely qualified to address the modern refugee situation, which has become a global humanitarian crisis. After over 100 years of serving Jews fleeing persecution around the globe, HIAS, starting in the 2000s, expanded its work in the U.S. to include assistance to non-Jewish refugees devastated by the aftermath of conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Hungary, Iran, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Tunisia, Vietnam, and the successor states to the former Soviet Union.

HIAS began a new chapter in 2002 when it established operations in Kenya to provide protection to refugees from African countries plagued by conflict, to advocate on their behalf, and to resettle the most vulnerable. Soon after, we began work in Latin America, serving people displaced by conflict in several countries. Currently HIAS works in 16 countries including Aruba, Austria, Belgium, Chad, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Greece, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Mexico, Panama, Peru, United States, and Venezuela. As the only global Jewish organization whose mission is to assist refugees wherever they are, HIAS continues to protect, empower, and resettle refugees of all faiths and ethnicities from around the world.



## Vision, Mission, and Values

### Vision

HIAS stands for a world in which refugees find welcome, safety, and opportunity.

### Mission

Drawing on our Jewish values and history, HIAS provides vital services to refugees and asylum seekers around the world and advocates for their fundamental rights so they can rebuild their lives.

### Values

Impassioned by our mission, we bring the lessons of HIAS' history and Jewish ethics and experience to our commitment to serve refugees and other displaced persons of concern around the world through the following values:

#### Welcome • Acogimiento • Hospitalité • הכנסת אורחים (Hachnasat Orchim)

We **Welcome** the Stranger

#### Justice • Justicia • Justice • צדק (Tzedek)

We Pursue **Justice**

#### Empathy • Empatía • Empathie • חסד (Chesed)

We Approach our Clients with **Empathy**

#### Partnership • Compañerismo • Coopération • חברותא (Chevruta)

We Believe in Changing the World through **Partnership**

#### Courage • Coraje • Courage • אומץ (Ometz)

We Act with **Courage** to Build a Better World

#### Resilience • Resiliencia • Résilience • רוח (Ruach)

We Adapt and Thrive, Continuously Demonstrating our **Resilience**



**Photos:** Glenna Gordon; Michael Datikash

## Our Impact

Around the world, HIAS makes tangible changes in the lives of refugees and other forcibly displaced people, advancing their legal, social, and economic rights. Our experience and technical expertise, as well as our integration of international best practices, allows for our work to have real and sustained impact. We partner with government agencies and other humanitarian organizations to reach the greatest number of those in need. The core areas where we work include:

1. Legal Protection
2. Gender-Based Violence Response and Risk Reduction
3. Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
4. Economic Inclusion

### Legal Protection

Refugees and other people forcibly displaced from home are fleeing persecution and violence. They need to be able to safely cross borders into countries where their lives are not at risk. Once over the border, they need information and legal representation to secure legal status and access their rights. Without that status, refugees are forced to live on the margins of society, sometimes for generations, without access to healthcare, education, dignified work, or safe shelter. HIAS begins by educating refugees about their rights, then secures protection by engaging in advocacy, legal representation, and strategic litigation, and working with government authorities.

### Gender-Based Violence Response and Risk Reduction

Compounded by rampant gender inequality, forced migration and displacement quickly erode the limited protections women, girls, and LGBTQ populations have, even in times of stability. HIAS is driven by their voices and needs, working to empower them and engage the whole community to reduce the risk of gender-based violence. We raise awareness so survivors know where and how to get help after experiencing violence. We train advocates and support existing services so that no survivor—regardless of age, sexual orientation, or gender identity—suffers alone. We help communities begin the kind of transformative work

that leads to longer-term change. We stay connected to and raise our collective voice alongside those of displaced women, girls, and LGBTQ populations globally.

### Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Violence, conflict, and displacement disrupt relationships and daily life, break down existing support systems, and have a devastating impact on mental health, overall wellbeing, and recovery. A supportive environment is essential to healing and recovery for refugees and other people forcibly displaced from their homes. One of the best ways to build a supportive environment is to strengthen existing relationships, networks, and practices which promote mental health and well-being and allow communities to cope and heal. We facilitate community support groups and psychological support from both lay and professional providers and ensure access to services for more intensive mental health support. Crucially, we sustain our efforts by building the psychosocial competence of HIAS personnel and stakeholders to respond to the acute distress of forcibly displaced persons.

### Economic Inclusion

When refugees and forcibly displaced people arrive in countries of asylum, they often need to adapt their skills to earn sustainable and safe livelihoods. HIAS supports refugees on their road to self-reliance, helping them to find programs focused on poverty eradication, employment, entrepreneurship, and financial services. We advocate for the rights of both refugees and local host communities to access dignified, sustainable, and safe work, alongside economic development.

### Emergency Response

In 2021, with the support of a transformational grant from MacKenzie Scott, HIAS embarked on an exciting new initiative to strengthen our global capacity to respond quickly to new humanitarian emergencies. HIAS' Emergency Department will work closely with country offices to create emergency preparedness plans and provide guidance to adapt core programs to emergency contexts. HIAS will also train a cadre of staff with specialized skills able to deploy quickly during emergencies for assessments, response activities, donor engagement, external communication, and advocacy. Through this multiyear initiative, HIAS will build the skills, systems, and organizational culture needed for effective coordination and response to emergencies.

## Accountability to Affected Populations

HIAS' Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Framework ensures the inclusion of refugees, other forcibly displaced people, and vulnerable host communities throughout the program cycle. Informed by the Core Humanitarian Standards and the principle of "Do No Harm," the framework pillars are: communication and transparency; feedback and response; participation and inclusion; and learning and adaptation.

HIAS ensures that program design is based on evidence from needs assessments, including the annual UNHCR participatory needs assessment, and consultation with affected communities. HIAS shares information about its accountability commitments and available

services in all country offices. HIAS proactively invites affected people to provide feedback on planned and ongoing activities through context-appropriate, accessible channels, ensuring that all affected people can voice feedback, recommendations, and concerns safely and equitably. HIAS uses feedback received to adapt ongoing programs and shape the design and implementation of future programming.

## Governance, Structure, and Policies

Globally, HIAS employs more than 1,300 staff in 16 countries, with headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland (U.S.).

HIAS' Board of Directors is made up of 22 members, including 10 women. It meets at least four times a year. The Board has three officers and operates with six active committees that meet regularly. Board members bring a wide range of professional and business experience to their service, including law, finance, education, and non-profit and refugee advocacy leadership.

HIAS staff are subject to a robust Code of Conduct and set of internal policies, including PSEA, Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment, Conflict of Interest, Privacy, Whistleblowing, Security and Emergency Preparedness, Information Security, Data Breach, Finance and Accounting, as well as others relating to procurement, travel, and reimbursements.

## Context for Vulnerable Refugees and Migrants in Costa Rica



The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Region continues to face intersecting forced displacement crises, including in Venezuela, Colombia, Northern Central America, and Nicaragua. The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the economic and social hardships faced by both displaced populations and those hosting them. The more than 18 million people displaced in the region have fled violence, insecurity, persecution, and human rights violations. This number accounts for 20% of all global displacement. HIAS' comprehensive regional response meets the urgent needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly

displaced people in Aruba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.

Costa Rica has a stable democracy and is known for its commitment to human rights and environmentally sensitive sustainable development. It is a founding member of the United Nations and as a middle-income country, has committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Costa Rica's leadership has prioritized poverty reduction, including among refugees and migrants, as nearly 20% of Costa Rica's population of five million lives under the poverty line.



Costa Rica offers a strong protection framework for refugees and other forcibly displaced people based on its commitment to democracy, peace, and human rights. Costa Rica has been an active supporter of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) for Central America, a regional tool to operationalize the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Due to its location and regional leadership, Costa Rica is both a transit and destination country for people fleeing violence and political upheaval in and out of the region. Costa Rica has been a destination for asylum seekers and refugees from the main situations producing forced displacement in the Americas: Venezuela, Nicaragua, Northern Central America (NCA), and Colombia. Costa Rica is also a transit country for Cubans, Haitians, and other migrants and asylum seekers, who form part of the mixed migration flows proceeding northward in search of asylum or better living opportunities in the United States and Canada. According to UNHCR figures, there are currently more than 153,000 refugees and other forcibly displaced people in Costa Rica. It is expected that Nicaragua will remain the top country of origin for asylum seekers, currently representing about 85% of the total number of new claims, followed by Venezuela, NCA, and Colombia.

Costa Rican authorities have made significant efforts to improve the quality of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) with UNHCR's support. This includes the Quality Assurance Initiative aimed at more efficient and fair decision-making, as well as financial and technical support to the Refugee Unit and the Migration Administrative Tribunal (TAM). Despite this, the government faces enormous challenges dealing with the rising number of asylum seekers arriving.

## HIAS Programs in Costa Rica

HIAS Costa Rica empowers refugees and asylum seekers with integrated approaches to protection, economic inclusion, and gender-based violence (GBV) response and risk reduction.

HIAS Costa Rica provides **legal protection** to refugees and asylum seekers through orientation, individual counseling on legal procedures, direct legal representation in national refugee status determination procedures, and referrals to legal services. HIAS Costa Rica engages in strategic litigation to advance refugee rights and refugee protection before local administrative bodies, and ultimately before the Constitutional Court. HIAS also conducts protection monitoring activities on the northern and southern borders to identify those in need of international protection and to prevent forcible returns to a country where refugees are likely to face persecution, as well as know-your-rights campaigns and targeted emergency assistance.

HIAS Costa Rica's **economic inclusion** programs promote the creation of sustainable livelihoods through integrated and innovative programs, based on market assessments. These programs fall into four main pillars: poverty alleviation through the Graduation Model Approach; wage employment facilitation through the Human Talent Consultancy Services, which includes training and support processes in the recruitment, selection, and bonding processes, both for employees and employers; development of sustainable self-employment opportunities for individuals and communities through HIAS' Entrepreneurship Schools; and the promotion of financial inclusion through community banks, savings groups, and other tools.



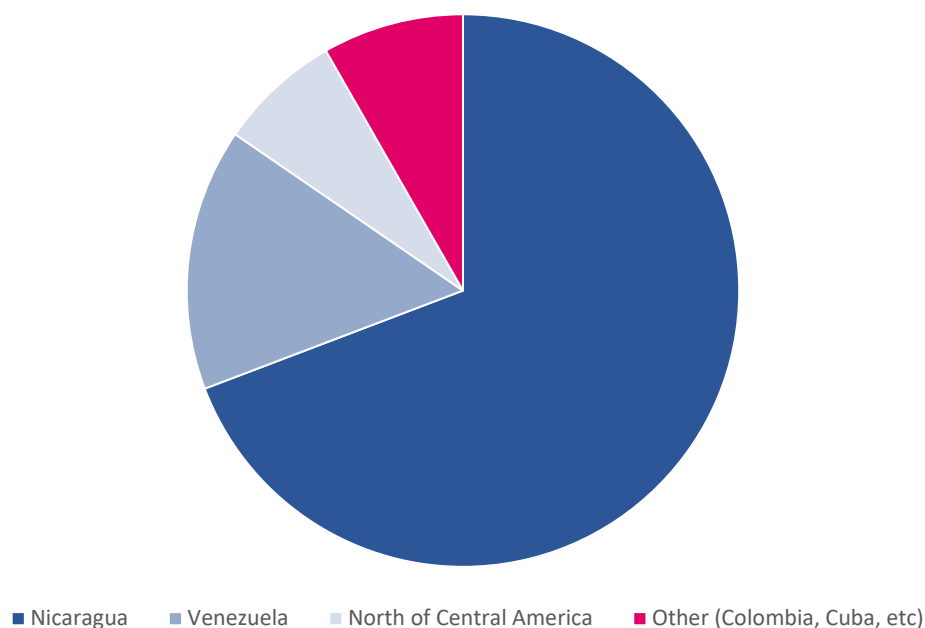
Asylum seekers and refugee women participate in a gender-based violence prevention session (Upala, October 13th, 2021). In workshops, refugee and asylum seekers shared their life experiences and received a kit with important information to prevent gender-based violence. **Photo:** HIAS Costa Rica

HIAS Costa Rica continues to strengthen its **GBV programming** to reach women and girls as well as at-risk LGBTQ refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless individuals. HIAS Costa Rica has established a protocol and streamlined tool for government authorities to use when identifying and responding to GBV survivors who are refugees and asylum seekers in Costa Rica. HIAS Costa Rica's lawyers also represent asylum seekers with claims for refugee status based on GBV, supporting survivors as they secure health and shelter services while their cases are evaluated.

HIAS Costa Rica implements HIAS' global **Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Framework** and staff are trained on AAP principles and standard operating procedures. HIAS Costa Rica displays the Code of Conduct in each office location and shares information about its accountability commitments and available services through written information and through standard operating processes for case management with clients. HIAS Costa Rica uses feedback and response mechanisms that are accessible and context appropriate, including a confidential email address for beneficiaries to lodge complaints or provide comments and feedback. On a monthly basis, a sample of beneficiaries of the services are consulted about their experience and usefulness of HIAS Costa Rica's services. Based on their comments, the processes are fed back to address gaps and reinforce good practices.

**Looking ahead with programs,** HIAS Costa Rica will continue to strengthen programming in its core areas in current locations, while also building out efforts to provide information about available resources for migrants and refugees in transit and preparing for new refugee flows across its borders. HIAS Costa Rica’s legal protection strategy will remain agile to ensure responsiveness to changing needs. HIAS Costa Rica expects to see an increasing need for border monitoring on both the northern and southern borders to ensure refugees have information about their rights, are protected from forcible returns, and are aware of available services. For asylum seekers and refugees recognized in country, HIAS Costa Rica will work to ensure they have effective access to social security systems and health care for acute and chronic needs. HIAS Costa Rica will also advocate for refugee professionals’ access to work authorization and recognition of professional credentials that will support their continued growth and contribution to society.” To “HIAS Costa Rica will also advocate for refugees to gain access to work authorization and recognition of professional credentials that will support their continued growth and contribution to society.

**Graph 1: Populations Served in 2021**

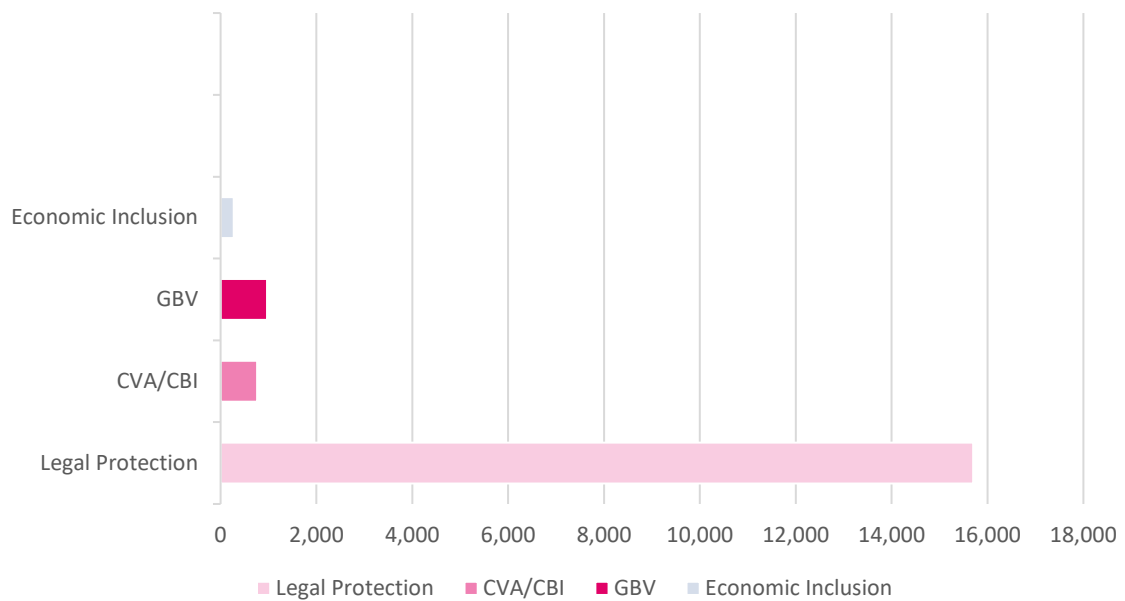


Going forward, HIAS Costa Rica will also build new infrastructure training, including training to ensure effective representation of LGBTQ and gender-based asylum claims. HIAS Costa Rica will also work with partners to advance economic inclusion programming with women and girls, focusing on engaging communities to reduce the risk of GBV and increasing the capacity of service providers to support survivors. HIAS Costa Rica will also continue to expand its efforts to reach and support women refugees by representing those seeking international protection based on GBV. In collaboration with the headquarters-based emergency response team and the LAC regional office, HIAS Costa Rica will also strengthen its capacity to prepare for and respond to new migration flows and other crises.



HIAS legal advisors at the Paso Canoas Immigration Post as part of the border monitoring activities (Southern Border, April 23rd, 2021). **Photo:** HIAS Costa Rica

**Graph 2: People Reached by Program Area in 2021**





## Coordination: Partners and Peer Networks

HIAS Costa Rica works closely with a range of strategic stakeholders, including UNHCR, government authorities, NGOs, and community leaders. HIAS Costa Rica coordinates with authorities at the national level, including Costa Rica's Social Security office, Ministry of Education, Directorate General of Immigration, the Child Protection Authority (PANI), the Women's National Institute (INAMU), the Ombudsman, the anti-trafficking coalition CONATT—a commission made up of 22 public institutions—as well as the judiciary authorities in charge of gender, domestic violence, and family and child cases. At the local level, HIAS works with the Migration Police, Border Police, the Public Forces police, local authorities of PANI, INAMU, and judicial facilitators on both borders, as well as with other NGOs, local associations, churches, and communities and local leaders.

HIAS Costa Rica has an operational presence in San Jose, Liberia, and at both borders, and is actively working to establish and improve referral mechanisms for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. On the southern border with Panama, HIAS Costa Rica coordinates with HIAS teams on the Panamanian side of the border. On the northern border with Nicaragua, HIAS Costa Rica coordinates with partners in Liberia, Peñas Blancas, La Cruz, Upala, Los Chiles, and alongside the border. In coordination with authorities at the northern and southern borders, HIAS Costa Rica provides information about rights, services, and the refugee status determination process to asylum seekers who have been apprehended. Generally, these applications are processed through UNCHR who in turn refers them to HIAS or they are requested directly by the apprehended person or their relatives. HIAS Costa Rica also participates as an observer in the bilateral initiative led by the governments of Costa Rica and Panama, and the Permanent Commission for the Protection and Assistance to Migrants in Vulnerability Status (COPPAMI), which represents all public and private institutions that have a presence in the southern border area. HIAS Costa Rica is a representative of the refugee population before the Subcommittee for Access to Justice of the Judicial Power (CONAMAJ) and is included in the implementation of the National Gender Equity Policy through activities in the Chorotega Regional Action Plan.

HIAS will continue to engage in a range of coordination meetings and working groups to advance refugee protection in Costa Rica, including coordination teams for GBV prevention and response that are convened by UNHCR and other partners to address specific cases requiring a comprehensive approach, the protection working group, case coordination meetings with UNHCR implementing partners, the advisory group of United Nations in Costa Rica, and regular meetings with UNHCR as its implementing partner. As a UNHCR implementing partner, HIAS Costa Rica has access to ProGres, a case management system UNHCR partner agencies access to record services. This prevents duplication of services and helps HIAS identify gaps and emerging needs in Costa Rica, in coordination with other actors providing services in the same sector. HIAS is also a member of the Costa Rica platform for the Venezuela Situation Response, a sub-regional coordination platform for Central America (including Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico).



A HIAS legal advisor visits San Isidro of Pocosol (Northern Border, September 22nd, 2020). These visits make possible for people who live in remote communities to receive legal advice on the refugee status determination process and to address their questions about access to rights. **Photo:** HIAS Costa Rica

## Operational Support for Programs

As HIAS' programs expand to meet new global needs, HIAS remains committed to delivering the highest quality of services to those it seeks to support and empower. To enable country teams to succeed and thrive, HIAS will invest new operational resources in our programs, processes, and people.

At the start of 2022, HIAS Costa Rica employed 42 staff, working in five locations. The senior leadership team is made up of the Country Director and other team leads. Each HIAS Costa Rica staff member abides by HIAS' Code of Conduct and other policies and procedures in line with global best practices. All staff members have completed trainings on **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)**. These trainings are updated and repeated regularly to ensure both prevention and response to any reported incidents of SEA.

HIAS invests in the skills and capacity of staff worldwide, supporting a wide range of local, national, regional, and international trainings for staff. HIAS ensures that international staff have diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) training. Going forward, HIAS Costa Rica will be mapping its staff training and capacity building needs against programmatic objectives. To promote **staff wellbeing**, HIAS has a global contract with the Konterra Group,

which provides support both for work-related issues and for personal challenges. Staff wellbeing and support for Costa Rica currently include weekly check-ins, establishing clear roles and responsibilities across the organization, and encouraging time off as needed and for vacation. HIAS Costa Rica will seek additional resources and tools to improve staff wellbeing moving forward. The goal of these efforts is to enhance program outcomes as well as improve staff satisfaction, retention, and wellbeing across the country team.

HIAS is committed to developing an effective, sustainable **safety and security management** risk system that is in line with our values and mission and organizational duty of care. In Costa Rica, this means strengthening existing tools and policies such as the acceptance strategy and continually updating the overall Costa Rica safety and security management plan. HIAS Costa Rica's security focal point and the regional and headquarters-based work together with the Country Director and programs teams to ensure that the measures in place enable programming while cultivating organization-wide compliance. HIAS Costa Rica will continue to monitor the situation in Nicaragua and respond accordingly to changes in the security situation at the border.

Globally, HIAS is rolling out a **Digital Transformation Strategy** to ensure that beneficiaries' personal information is digitally secured and protected. The strategy will also create one universal source of information and collaboration; ensure all organizational knowledge is standardized, digitized, organized, and discoverable; ensure data around inputs, outcomes, and impact is readily accessible; help employees collaborate on gathering and building resources on this information platform; and easily share and leverage data from partners and affiliates. HIAS will be providing annual refresher training to all country offices on IT tools and procedures. HIAS Costa Rica is privileged to work in a stable environment with respect to internet connectivity and technology infrastructure. This provides ideal conditions for achieving success with the strategy implementation.

With support from headquarters (including the regional office), HIAS Costa Rica will also continue to review and strengthen procedures and tools related to data and reporting as well as finance and compliance, in line with donor requirements and international standards. HIAS Costa Rica will work with headquarters to establish an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. The ERP system will improve alignment of operations, finance, programs, and human resources, allowing for more efficient and cost-effective country operations.

## Donors and Development

HIAS is committed to growing and diversifying its donor base in each country of operation. With support from the LAC Regional Office and headquarters, HIAS Costa Rica is developing a resource mobilization strategy to sustain, increase, and diversify funding sources, building on its reputation for providing comprehensive, high-quality services in close collaboration with the government and other key stakeholders.

HIAS Costa Rica gratefully acknowledges the support of UNHCR and State/PRM and looks forward to sustaining and building those partnerships. UNHCR recognizes HIAS' legal expertise and has also supported HIAS Costa Rica's approach to economic inclusion, providing funds to support a labor market assessment for refugees and asylum seekers in 2019. It has been thanks to the support of BPRM that HIAS Costa Rica has been able to implement economic inclusion initiatives for asylum seekers and refugees, such as the Graduation Model. This methodology has allowed dozens of families to overcome socioeconomic integration gaps through joint work strategies that have resulted in food security and the development of livelihoods.

Additional projects developed with embassies and other partners have allowed HIAS Costa Rica to strengthen its presence in the country and establish HIAS as a leader within the wider humanitarian community. Going forward, HIAS Costa Rica plans to devise a strategy to engage the public and private sectors in the design of comprehensive proposals for asylum seekers and refugees.

## Communications, Policy, and Advocacy

In Costa Rica, priority advocacy issues include the improvement of refugee status determination and employment authorization procedures, and recognition of refugees' professional credentials. Due to the large number of Nicaraguan refugees fleeing to Costa Rica, the country's immigration authority is overwhelmed and there are months-long procedural delays for obtaining refugee and asylum status. This leaves thousands of Nicaraguans and other populations in limbo as they await status, which is required to obtain employment authorization. Critically, professional credentials from outside Costa Rica are not recognized, and there is no process to improve the assessment and acknowledgement of professional qualifications to allow doctors, lawyers, and other professionals to work in their professions in Costa Rica.

Through the MINARE—the national chapter of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan (CRRF)—Costa Rica recognizes that there are people who, while not satisfying the 1951 Refugee Convention refugee criteria, cannot be returned to their countries of origin, because doing so would entail a reasonable risk of suffering irreparable harm. This situation raises the need to implement a new form of protection. There is also a need to build the capacity of legal stakeholders so that refugees' rights are acknowledged, understood, and fully respected.



HIAS Costa Rica will continue participating in multi-stakeholder meetings to contribute to a coordinated approach to advocacy. HIAS Costa Rica will also continue growing its work with law firms to provide pro bono assistance, encouraging the sharing of best practices in both substantive legal services and regarding strategic litigation, communications, and government strategy.

Through blog and video content and strategic engagement on social media, HIAS will continue to engage the public in its work in Costa Rica, creating space for conversation and learning, and providing thought leadership in HIAS' areas of expertise. HIAS Costa Rica will help clients tell their own stories and communicate with the wider public as well as policymakers about their experiences and calls to action. Regionally, HIAS will work to ensure that people traveling across Latin America are aware of HIAS services and locations and other available resources across different countries through digital and other information tools.

**Cover Photo:** Julieta Alarcón  
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