

# Annual Results Report

**2023**

**Costa Rica**

## Acknowledgements

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# Section 1: Context and Overview

## 1.1 Changes to the Operational Context

In 2023 the operational context and the asylum system were seriously impacted by Executive Decree 43810 of 1 December 2022. The decree incorporated admissibility criteria into the asylum procedure limiting access to protection for asylum-seekers. The criteria include a 30-day application time limit and admissibility procedures for "manifestly unfounded asylum applications." It also limited freedom of movement to third countries for asylum-seekers, a measure that was revoked by the Constitutional Chamber, and added a requirement to be affiliated with the Costa Rican Social Security to renew documentation for recognized refugees. The requirements for obtaining a work permit were also tightened.

The changes in the legal context affected the protection environment for people in need of international protection, causing a general situation of lack of documentation and barriers to formal work, ultimately limiting access to basic rights and services. Consequently, the Office received increasing reports of people with unmet needs. Focused group discussions and other feedback tools with forcibly displaced people in Costa Rica indicated the incidence of negative coping mechanisms due to the difficulties related to food insecurity, housing, and health conditions.

In addition, mixed movements of people in transit through Costa Rica increased by more than 130% compared to 2022 (456,800 people according to authorities). The average of 1,500 daily entries constituted a complex scenario of humanitarian needs, especially for those with specific protection needs, such as children and pregnant women. To respond to the dire humanitarian situation, UNHCR strengthened coordination with the government and key stakeholders and undertook a reprioritization of interventions across the Operation.

## 1.2. Progress Against the Desired Impact

### 1. Impact Area: Attaining Favorable Protection Environments

**People UNHCR serves access the territory and a fair and efficient international protection system.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	60.83%	58.32%
1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Stateless Persons	100.00%	100.00%

UNHCR provided technical assistance to the government to enhance the asylum system through the Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI). The Refugee Unit improved adjudications by profiling cases with a high presumption of eligibility criteria for international protection; 3,201 persons were recognized from 31 May 2022 to 31 December 2023. This procedure allowed for quicker and more efficient access to international protection: the average processing time from registration to first-instance asylum decision decreased from 1,351 days at the beginning of 2022 to 1,076 days by the end of 2023. Also, the Commission's recognition rate went from 64% during the first quarter of 2022 to 74% in 2023.

To reinforce access to territory and asylum, UNHCR supported the Refugee Unit's staffing in border areas, increased its capacity-building efforts on refugee protection to border officials, and ensured people in mixed movement were provided with relevant information in border regions. In 2023, at least 57 communities in 15 cantons in the north and Paso Canoas in the south were reached through multiple protection actions, including border monitoring and interventions to mitigate the risk of refoulement, enabling safer access to the territory of persons in need of international protection.

At the Northern border, the decentralization of the Refugee Unit aimed to improve access of refugees and asylum-seekers to the institution and the RSD procedure, in the context of the restrictive measures introduced by Decree 43810; but was limited in their scope. To increase outreach to rural and dispersed populations with international protection needs, UNHCR, through the Field Office in Upala, identified cases with international protection needs and, through liaison with the Protection team, referred them to the Refugee Unit to formalize their asylum applications. This provided protection from refoulement to those in need of international protection and facilitated access to the procedure.

### 2. Impact Area: Realizing Rights in Safe Environments

**People UNHCR serves, including people with heightened needs, effectively access their rights.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	86.00%	89.50%
2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	62.00%	69.50%

Despite disposition from authorities and a slight progress in coverage of basic needs, households with international protection needs in Costa Rica faced important challenges towards inclusion. UNHCR prioritized the provision of cash assistance as humanitarian support to the most vulnerable households and assisted the Government in ensuring their access to the national social protection programmes. UNHCR

observed a 1% decrease in the proportion of the affected population living below the national poverty line (from 32% in 2022 to 31.1% for 2023 – estimation based on annual data from the National Household Survey in triangulation with UNHCR data). Through cash assistance, people in need improved access to physically safe and secure settlements with basic facilities (88% baseline vs. 89.5% endline for 2023).

UNHCR identified an increase of 4.5% in the portion of refugees and asylum-seekers with access to health services (65% in 2022 to 69.5% in 2023). This is especially significant in the North, as difficulties derived from lower income, informal work with a very limited exercise of labor rights, and intersectoral basic needs jeopardize access to healthcare. UNHCR continued its agreement with the Costa Rican Social Security Fund to provide healthcare to the most vulnerable and facilitated access to health services through partners.

UNHCR noted a 21% decrease in the proportion of people in need of international protection who felt safe in their communities, from 72% in 2022 to 51.3% in 2023. This was in line with the perception of refugees and asylum-seekers during UNHCR socio-economic evaluation and with reports about insecurity and people feeling insecure in Costa Rica. This reflected the relevance of working with the Judiciary towards a case referral mechanism involving the Protection of Witnesses and Victims' Office to enhance effective access to justice and protection; as well as the work with the Ombudsperson's office to increase their outreach in remote areas.

### 3. Impact Area: Empowering Communities and Achieving Gender Equality

**People UNHCR serves are integrated with host communities and empowered to participate in self-management mechanisms and decision-making while promoting gender equality.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	79.26%	49.60%
3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Stateless Persons	35.12%	49.85%
3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	83.00%	88.30%
3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	67.01%	57.40%
3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	76.77%	51.24%

In 2023, UNHCR empowered community groups by improving their knowledge of refugees' and asylum-seekers' rights (e.g., access to justice, labour rights, the right to sexual and reproductive health, education, gender, and diversity), through approaches with 45 CBOs (including at least 5 WLO). UNHCR also developed community participation through a youth network for 75 refugees and asylum-seekers and funded five community initiatives for a total of USD 20,000. This way, persons in need of international protection exchanged experiences and good practices while being multipliers among their communities.

UNHCR promoted gender equality by enhancing institutional and individual capacity on women's rights, empowering 68 female promoters to be drivers of the enhancement of local protection environment for women and girls of all ages and in their diversity.

UNHCR in coordination with the 'Ombudsperson's Office of Huetar Norte and Controllers of Health Services of Upala and Los Chiles cantons, promoted integration spaces for networks of rights promoters in the North Zone, and established the first citizen participation platform in such cantons. Within this process, 60 women community leaders received guidance on the complaint mechanisms of the Ombudsperson's Office and Controller's Office, training, and technical support regarding how these mechanisms work and how to present formal requests and letters to public institutions; also, they received training to promote and defend

the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees, children and adolescents, women and health users.

These community representatives identified, presented, and advocated before the Ombudsperson's Office for at least 20 cases of asylum-seekers and/or refugees affected by delays in the resolution of procedures and/or sending of DIMEX (Costa Rican foreign ID), and with pending procedures on health issues, with positive results. In addition, they identified a total of 22 cases of people with specific protection needs.

## 4. Impact Area: Securing Solutions

**People UNHCR serves and the communities that host them have increased access to sustainable solutions.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	399
4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	Stateless Persons	69	119
4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	32	2,690

UNHCR pursued integration in Costa Rica as the main solution for Nicaraguan asylum-seekers and refugees. Despite the effects of Executive Decree 43810 restricting de facto the right to work for refugees; the country made some encouraging progress in the inclusion of refugees in the financial system (bank accounts and mobile payments, 66% in 2023) and in reducing the overall unemployment rate (9% in 2022 to 7.2% in 2023). Relations of UNHCR with international financial institutions such as WB, IADB, and IMF were significantly strengthened, as UNHCR positioned as a key counterpart for technical advisory within coordination dialogues with the Government and to build evidence-based analysis on labor, fiscal and social contributions of refugees and migrants to Costa Rican society; hence, the operations' advocacy towards the inclusion of forcibly displaced and host communities in development financing and planning reached a more meaningful stage.

The Safe Mobility Initiative, led by the United States with partner countries and with the support of UNHCR and IOM, was launched in the second half of 2023, broadening opportunities for solutions for many, substantially expanding the scale and scope of available options for people in mixed movements in the region. The initiative provided a 'one-stop shop' for expedited refugee resettlement and facilitation of access to other lawful admission pathways in strategic locations. In 2023, 3,774 individuals were submitted under the resettlement programme and 780 individuals departed to resettlement countries; this represents a 700% increase in the total of individuals referred by UNHCR to resettlement countries as compared to 2022. UNHCR prioritized individual profiles with specific needs, such as women and children at risk; gender-based violence survivors; people with physical and/or legal protection needs; or people with serious medical conditions. Resettlement is an important protection tool in the context of Costa Rican operation.

## 1.3 Challenges to Achieving Impacts

The Presidential Decree 43810 issued at the end of 2022 substantially affected the national asylum system. Although some of the changes were mitigated by a Constitutional Chamber ruling, the decree and processing conditions restricted the number of people able to access the asylum system in 2023, which meant that the backlog in the asylum system pre-decree (195,000 pending cases) persists.

The restrictions on the right to work for new asylum-seekers, as well as stronger requirements for those renewing their documents, limited their access to the formal labour market driving many refugees and

asylum-seekers to informality and dependence on social programmes, jeopardizing the prospects of socio-economic integration in Costa Rica.

Lack of information from the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) staff on documentation requirements for refugees and asylum-seekers constrained healthcare affiliation. Access to education showed gaps (almost 100% for national children, 91% for foreigners, and 87% for Nicaraguan children), while permanence was affected by factors such as economic limitations, internal mobility of families, the digital divide and discriminatory practices. The risks of gender-based violence for individuals in Costa Rica deteriorated according to the National Institution for Women (INAMU), though remained underreported.

The urgency of addressing the increasing humanitarian needs of people in mixed movements (up to 3,000 daily arrivals to Costa Rica) had an impact on the Operation. The movements were better organized since October 2023, through an official corridor agreed upon by the governments of Panama consisting of a direct route from Panama to EMISUR, a transit center in South Costa Rica, and from there to the Northern border.

## 1.4 Collaboration and Partnerships

In 2023, Costa Rica consolidated its leadership of the MIRPS Group on employment and livelihoods with UNHCR's continued support to the Technical Secretariat of MINARE (the MIRPS national chapter). With support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Costa Rica participated in the World Refugee Forum through nine strategic commitments on protection, social protection, statistical inclusion, and jobs and livelihoods, contributing to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).

UNHCR also deepened work with international financial institutions (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, International Monetary Fund); through technical assistance and engagement in policy dialogue, advocating to include people forced to flee within development investment projects, to integrally address the development needs of host communities, asylum-seekers, and refugees.

Within the Safe Mobility Office Initiative, UNHCR strengthened coordination with IOM, the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and the U.S. Embassy in San José, to successfully expand legal routes to the United States for refugees and migrants.

Together with national and local governments, UNHCR improved refugee registration, documentation, and RSD, advocated to enhance access to rights and services, and helped refugees become self-sufficient and integrate into local communities. This is also thanks to our 12 implementing partners in 2023.

UNHCR also co-led the R4V coordination Platform together with IOM, which included the response of refugees and migrants of all nationalities in transit under the RMRP. Close dialogue between UNHCR and the UN Country Team (UNCT) ensured coherent implementation of the UNSDCF and facilitated coordination to assist and protect for population in mixed movements, particularly at the borders. UNHCR expanded its donor base and engaged traditional donors. Multiple protection and solutions projects were implemented directly and through 12 partners, effectively addressing the needs of the people with and for whom UNHCR works.



## Section 2: Results

### 2.1. Outcomes and Achievements

#### 1. Outcome Area: Access to Territory, Reg. and Documentation

The Costa Rican government ensures fair mechanisms to provide access to territory and prevent refoulement.

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	76.48%	100.00%	100.00%
1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	99.11%
1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	68.70%	90.00%	93.45%

#### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, migration and asylum authorities showed an increased will to ensure access to asylum for people in need of international protection, including the interest in strengthening the institutional capacity of police officers in responding to refugee cases at the border points. Equally, DGME had a collaborative approach to seeking joint efforts to enhance fairness and efficiency of mechanisms on access to territory and documentation.

As a part of the efforts to prevent refoulement, UNHCR worked closely with legal partners and the Ombudsperson's Office to create standard operational procedures to address and manage cases of people with international protection needs who are at risk of being returned at the Juan Santamaría International Airport. The SOP remains operating among the Ombudsperson's Office, the UNHCR, and legal partner agencies, being a valuable mechanism for efficient referral.

UNHCR, in partnership with the Regional Office of the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, trained 180 graduating police officers from the National Police Academy about international refugee law and human rights,

In 2023, UNHCR developed 154 border monitoring missions as the base for regular analyses to assess the likelihood of refoulement in specific cases or contexts; in which Los Chiles and La Cruz cantons showed the highest risks, and Miskitas indigenous were at heightened risk. This increased presence along the border allowed a broader understanding of the situation by the different profiles of refugees, so as the identification and referral of individuals forced to flee to services such as access to refugee status determination (RSD), medical assistance, and gender-based violence response, and enhanced protection through presence, thereby deterring the possibility of refoulement at the border. In parallel, UNHCR deepened and expanded an information network involving multiple actors such as implementing partners, UN agencies (IOM, UNICEF), and Government institutions, among others, enabling the early identification of individuals fleeing their countries and entering Costa Rica. The integral analysis provided evidence to reinforce advocacy efforts to promote fair mechanisms for access to the territory and a stronger presence by partners and institutions, particularly in Los Chiles Canton, given the increased importance of this official border crossing in terms of both volume and diversity of profiles on the move.

## 2. Outcome Area: Status Determination

**The asylum system is strengthened to ensure effective access to the refugee status determination process.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
2.1 Average processing time (in days) from registration to first instance asylum decision	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1,351.00	365.00	1,164.00
2.2 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to legal representation	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
2.3 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to an effective appeal mechanism after first instance rejection of their claim	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, through the Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI), UNHCR provided regular support to the asylum system including the government's three instances on Refugee Status Determination (RSD). In this context, UNHCR also conducted substantive training on credibility assessments, country of origin, status adjudication, and the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees for the UNHCR-supported staff in such instances.

Furthermore, UNHCR proposed the use of accelerated/simplified procedures to process and recognize cases with a high presumption of refugee eligibility for Nicaraguan, Venezuelan, and Cuban nationals. This modality hastened the processing of cases with evident needs for international protection: in 2023, the recognition rate of the Refugee Commission stood at 74% - the general decrease vs. the 2022 recognition rate (85%) can be explained as a result of the implementation of Presidential Decree 43810 and the administrative measures that followed it.

UNHCR also made progress in completing the first phase of the Digitalization project; consisting of the web development of a system to improve the processing of asylum claims for the Refugee Unit to strengthen the government's asylum systems. The module was reviewed by the Migration Authority (DGME) IT department, and by the end of the year, it was waiting for the approval of the government to be tested and launched.

To overcome RSD gaps at the North zone, UNHCR took three actions: i) established a fast-track route to refer forcibly displaced people identified by the Upala Field Office for RSD access, resulting in 16 hard-to-reach cases (representing 30 people) accessing RSD; ii) promoted weekly visits from UNHCR's implementing partners Servicio Jesuita para Migrantes and HIAS to the Refugee Unit at San Carlos (North zone) to identify individuals and provide in-situ attention, iii) coordinated with the Refugee Unit to broadcast messages about changes in the Refugee Unit's local presence and on the channels to access the RSD process, using loudspeakers in remote communities as well as through radio spots in four cantons.

## 6. Outcome Area: Safety and Access to Justice

**People UNHCR serves have access to legal aid.**

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Through its legal partners, UNHCR supported 24,478 people to have access to the asylum procedure and effective access to rights. UNHCR designed a work plan with the Commission on Access to Justice for Migrants and Refugees, which included engagement with the Judiciary Facilitators system, identified as a key actor in disseminating accurate and clear information in hard-to-reach areas. The Judicial Facilitators are Costa Rican community leaders who assume the role of community mediation, social dialogue, dissemination of human rights information, and the mechanisms to defend such rights. For the first time since the creation of the programme ten years ago, a person in need of international protection was appointed as a Judicial Facilitator. UNHCR also promoted access to justice by enhancing institutional knowledge on International Refugee Law and Child Protection.

UNHCR's efforts focused on amplifying protection networks to enhance access to rights for people in need of international protection. To amplify the network of legal services and counseling to refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR worked together with the Costa Rican Bar Association, building knowledge on International Refugee Law and international protection considerations for people fleeing Nicaragua, to enhance information and advice capacities for the staff of their Social Defense Offices throughout the country. Also, in the North, UNHCR conducted inter-institutional workshops with 619 participants, including local authorities such as the Migration Authority, local governments, and the Health Ministry, as well as with implementing partners Servicio Jesuita para Migrantes, CENDEROS and World Vision to inform communities living in remote areas about their rights. As a result, attendees gained access to information about social security, education, the judicial system, and other services. The workshops also led to institutional recognition of vulnerable situations in hard-to-reach communities. UNHCR prioritized the identification and mitigation of gaps regarding effective access to rights by the Miskitu indigenous people, particularly on work, food security, health, housing, and respect for their self-determination, often affected by language and low schooling. UNHCR coordinated work with Miskitu leaders, developed specific participatory assessments and advocated with the National Commission for the Improvement of the Administration of Justice to conform a network of Miskitus community promoters. UNHCR facilitated a joint workspace between members of the Subcommittee on access to Justice for the refugee and migrant population and indigenous community leaders representing the Miskito, Mayagna, and Rama ethnic groups.

## 7. Outcome Area: Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment

**Community groups are functional, inclusive and organized**

**Institutions and other stakeholders promote participation of people UNHCR serves in their decision-making mechanisms.**

**People UNHCR serves and host communities promote peaceful coexistence.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	56.06%	60.00%	64.89%
7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Unknown	Extensive: =70 points	Moderate: 40-69 points

## Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, UNHCR contributed to the goal of promoting more organized and empowered communities. For the first time, UNHCR Costa Rica Inclusive Communities Fund, small-scale grants were awarded to five community-based organizations in the Metropolitan area and in the North Zone. All selected projects

advanced peaceful coexistence and social cohesion among refugee populations and host communities through sports, culture, and mental health projects.

In the North Zone, UNHCR and its partners supported the National Institute for Women in implementing its four-month female empowerment programme “Programa de Formación Humana,” reaching 265 women from the four border cantons through workshops about the human rights of refugee women and girls. UNHCR also worked in advocacy efforts with INAMU to enroll 34 refugee women from Upala canton in the programme and increased its community outreach through gaining contact with female leaders from San Carlos canton.

Together with other partners, UNHCR supported the development of a theater workshop for youth, with the participation of 23 young people from vulnerable communities of displaced people in San José, as part of a peaceful coexistence strategy to enhance their meaningful participation in their communities. The theater was a powerful methodology to work on issues such as social stigma, discrimination, and local violence through the guidance of a multi-functional team.

UNHCR also promoted the meaningful participation of forcibly displaced people in institutions. The Mobile Information Centres were rolled out in five communities of the Metro Area to strengthen two-way communication with refugees and asylum-seekers and share information with the communities about rights and access to services in Costa Rica. More than 700 people were assisted and the activities involved the participation of national institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and Youth as well as the Ombudsperson's Office to provide information on the services available to people with and for whom UNHCR works.

The Office promoted participation mechanisms also through the reinforcement of the strategy on Accountability to Affected Population (AAP). In 2023, UNHCR launched the campaign #Tuvozcounta (“Your Voice Matters”), which included digital media products as well as training sessions on AAP for staff and partners, on the multiple in-person and virtual channels available for feedback submissions, especially for sensitive complaints such as sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and Fraud, designed to reach a wide range of profiles of persons with whom we work.

Through the Information Centre and other outreach activities, UNHCR increased access to effective feedback and response mechanisms. In 2023, a total of 10,000 assistances were provided to forcibly displaced and stateless people through the Information Centre. The most used communication channels were the Help email (4,470 assistances) and the toll-free 800-REFUGIO line (4,138 assistances).

## 8. Outcome Area: Well-Being and Basic Needs

**People UNHCR serves have access to assistance and services to cover their basic needs**

**People UNHCR serves have access to government run programs to address their specific needs.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	73.28%	3.00%	2.85%
8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	93.00%	97.00%	94.00%

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

To overcome refugees' barriers to accessing basic needs, UNHCR reached 4,015 individuals (1,634 households) through cash assistance. 47% of the beneficiaries were under the age of 18 year, 83% were Nicaraguan and 68% were women. Post-delivery monitoring (PDM) showed that 95% of respondents felt safe going to spend the cash, 62% believed that the programme improved their living conditions significantly, and 63% reported a significant reduction in stress levels. As a result of the yearly revision of

the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket, the average amount for the North zone had a 10% rise, to cover increased living costs. Also, through UNHCR's agreement with the Institute for Social Assistance (IMAS), 1,444 people in need of international protection accessed social assistance offer (e.g., multipurpose support, scholarships, access to care networks) and guidance on UNHCR programmes.

At the North, UNHCR enhanced State's capacities and amplified the network of actors who complement efforts on emergency response, considering natural disasters and the increase in mixed movements. UNHCR provided technical support to design and implement referral pathways, ensuring interinstitutional coordination, and complemented local capacity for both preparedness and response through assistance for the Los Chiles Coordination Table (hygiene and cleaning kits); multiple items for authorities to assist people in mixed movements and to prevent malaria situations among all populations, and supplies to enhance healthcare capacities at the Upala Hospital. UNHCR also reinforced the assistance and protection capacity of key community actors supporting mixed movements through the delivery of shelter and kitchen supplies, as well as of food and WASH kits. A total of 11,140 items were delivered in five cantons.

UNHCR supported three Safe Houses where 236 gender-based violence (GBV) survivors and their families were sheltered and given needs-based assistance. During their stay, survivors accessed psychosocial assistance, health services, education, livelihood programmes, and legal support. UNHCR also provided shelter assistance to 639 people in vulnerable situations who could not cover its costs. Moreover, UNHCR supported the World Bank in the development of the SAFE initiative, for strengthening GBV specialized services along mixed movement routes.

UNHCR supported access to healthcare for more than 6,000 refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless people through its partnership with the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS). Also, through funds from the European Union and coordination by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AECID), in 2023 an agreement was signed between the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN), UCR Foundation, and the CCSS in which with technical and operational support by UNHCR, 3,775 additional people had access to health insurance from September 2023 (expected to last until August 2024).

### 13. Outcome Area: Self Reliance, Economic Inclusion and Livelihoods

**An interagency area-based approach increases solutions, opportunities and contributes to local development in the host community.**

**People UNHCR serves have access to decent, formal employment opportunities.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	31.63%	65.00%	66.30%
13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	8.20%	33.00%	11.42%
13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	10.78%	8.00%	7.20%

#### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, UNHCR observed favourable indicators regarding the forcibly displaced's access to employment opportunities, such as a decrease in unemployment (9% in 2022 to 7.2% in 2023) even at a lower rate than the 8% target assumption. Access to bank accounts and mobile payments was also slightly higher than expected (66% vs. the 65% target). In contrast, self-reports from refugees and asylum-seekers assisted by UNHCR on the evolution of their income deteriorated: only 11% reported an increase, 22 pp below the 33% target, which might have been related to the deterioration of working conditions (e.g., informality and low wages) caused by the changes in Costa Rican policy limiting asylum-seekers access to work permits and formal self-employment.

Regarding employability improvement, UNHCR facilitated access to livelihoods and economic inclusion opportunities: through partner agencies Fundación Mujer and Fundación Omar Dengo, UNHCR reached 7,766 people, from which 855 refugees and asylum-seekers (70% women, 30% men; mainly Nicaraguan and Venezuelan) completed their process towards enhancing their prospects for livelihoods. This, through a range of activities such as the design of 2,567 livelihoods work plans, technical orientation for job placement (529 people), business formalization (157 people), and value-chain and market access (131 people); as well as training on labour market orientation, digital literacy, financial health and, technical skills, self-employment, and short-term topics, (1,148 people), from which 75% correspond to the Metropolitan Area and the remaining 25% to the North. Also, 153 livelihood cash grants were delivered, consisting of 34 scholarships for waged employment technical training and 119 cash grants for entrepreneurs and self-employed refugees.

As per the Vivir la Integración (VLI) initiative, UNHCR mapped 63 actors who performed over 7,500 concrete actions to include people in need of international protection, such as training, cash assistance support, job placement, and health insurance. Of these actors, 46 applied for the 5th Edition of the VLI seal (23% increase compared to 2022) and 42 were awarded (14 companies, 13 civil society organizations, 8 public institutions, 5 academy actors, and 2 livelihoods partners).

At the North zone, UNHCR changed its strategy enhancing a community-based approach, which allowed it to prioritize collective entrepreneurial outcomes rather than individual employability prospects, and to overcome causes of non-attendance of training programmes. For this aim, UNHCR, through Fundación Omar Dengo, developed group training sessions directly at communities and granted cash assistance.

Regarding the area-based approach, thanks to a continued UNHCR mid-term strategy of advocacy on needs beyond the protection scope (e.g., development, livelihoods, assistance to specific profiles) in 2023 the UN System reinforced presence and programmes in Upala and Los Chiles (North).

## 15. Outcome Area: Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

**Opportunities for resettlement and complementary pathways of people UNHCR serves are increased.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	3,900	3,763
15.2 Average processing time from resettlement submission to departure under normal priority	Refugees and Asylum-seekers		250.00	273.00

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

UNHCR provided refugees and other people in need of international protection with increased access to resettlement and complementary pathways opportunities. In 2023, the U.S. led Safe Mobility Initiative expanded the resettlement programme in Costa Rica, in close coordination with resettlement countries, IOM and UNHCR in its implementation. In 2023, there was an increase of 700% in the number of individuals referred by UNHCR to resettlement countries compared to 2022. A total of 3,774 individuals were submitted under the resettlement programme and 780 individuals departed to resettlement countries throughout the year.

UNHCR prioritized the identification of refugees with resettlement needs considering profiles such as women and children at risk; survivors of gender-based violence; people with physical and/or legal protection needs; or people with serious medical conditions. Resettlement was an important protection tool in the context of the Costa Rican Operation. Since the launch of the Safe Mobility Initiative, UNHCR applied a protection screening to 9,184 individuals, among which 5,168 individuals were recommended for resettlement interviews. From the 3,774 individuals submitted to resettlement countries, 65% had legal



and/or physical protection needs; around 18% were survivors of violence and/or torture and 16% were women and girls at risk.

To comply with the annual resettlement target, UNHCR increased the number of staff and resources for the implementation of the programme. Moreover, UNHCR adopted tools to increase the processing of the cases. For instance, the implementation of an online self-onboarding portal for registration and automatized triage together with IOM, which facilitated the identification of cases eligible for the initiative; channels of two-way communication with forcibly displaced and stateless people to provide direct guidance and support; and the adoption of simplified resettlement registration forms to expedite the referral of cases to resettlement countries.

## 16. Outcome Area: Integration and other Local Solutions

**The Costa Rican government utilizes effective and comprehensive mechanisms to prevent statelessness.**

Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
16.1 Proportion of people with secure tenure rights to housing and/or land	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	82.80%	87.00%	85.20%
16.2 Proportion of people covered by national social protection systems	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	61.60%	72.00%	69.50%

### Progress Against the Desired Outcome

In 2023, Costa Rica recognized the statelessness status of 301 people, and in total 164 people were waiting for the resolution of the procedure. UNHCR provided technical support for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Civil Registry Office to achieve its High-Level Segment /Global Refugee Forum pledges. UNHCR supported the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by recruiting a lawyer for the implementation of the stateless status determination process and a psychologist for the application of Costa Rican methodology for the differentiated approach. In 2023, through UNHCR's implementing partner Servicio Jesuita para Migrantes (SJM), 998 individuals were reached with information on late registration, statelessness recognition procedures, and access to rights. Additionally, 715 people were reached through advice on statelessness and 173 individuals were supported through legal representation. SJM provided legal assistance to 43 forcibly displaced and stateless people to acquire the Costa Rican nationality.

UNHCR supported the presence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Registry, the two key authorities on the matter in hard-to-reach communities where a high number of stateless people were identified. Three community sessions were held in the cantons of Upala, Los Chiles, Sarapiquí, and Talamanca, with the participation of national and local entities. UNHCR provided information on the late birth registration procedure and conducted training for local institutions and civil society organizations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated the statelessness determination procedures, expanding the scope of such processes, usually carried out at the central level.

Besides, UNHCR's advocacy resulted in the reactivation, in August 2023, of the Inter-institutional Liaison Commission on Statelessness, which reunites institutions working with stateless people. The Commission prepared three country pledges for the second edition of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), the world's most important international meeting on refugees, also reinforcing the common outlook regarding the integration of stateless people in Costa Rica and achieving global outreach and visibility.

Given the situation in Nicaragua with the reform of Article 21 of the Political Constitution and the approval of Law No. 1145, which regulates the loss of Nicaraguan nationality of 317 people, UNHCR led the coordination with legal partner agencies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and civil society organizations to aid those affected with the application of this regulation. UNHCR participated in two workshops organized by the organization SOS Nicaragua: one aimed at a group of 94 people with canceled nationality, and another on statelessness with 25 people who were deprived of their nationality, with the aim of providing information

and legal assistance on the different ways to get international protection, both under the refugee and statelessness status.

## 2.2. Age, Gender and Diversity

The application of the Community-Based Protection (CBP) strategy based on UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity policy favored engagement with diverse populations – ensuring participation of children, women and girls, elderly people, the Miskito indigenous community, people with heightened needs, people of African descent and LGBTIQ+ persons. UNHCR continued to strengthen its case management system in line with this purpose.

Through participatory assessments with 460 refugees and asylum-seekers and 80 people in mixed movements (23% men, 63% women, 14% children), UNHCR captured perspectives from people forced to flee on their protection needs, to address protection challenges, and information gaps – e.g., in the case of mixed movements- and adjust operational response. Participation efforts were also enhanced through the conformation of networks of youth and of women forced to flee.

To address the specific protection needs of children forced to flee, UNHCR signed a Letter of Understanding with the Child Protection National Institute (PANI) and the Migration Authority, considering joint work on both at central and local levels. This included capacity-building sessions with 34 PANI local-level officers and UNHCR's co-design of an education program on children's rights for PANI staff.

To strengthen the effective access to rights of elderly people, UNHCR advocated before the National Council for Elderly People and jointly established a referral pathway. Also, UNHCR and its partner HIAS constituted a technical worktable with the National Council for Persons with Disabilities.

UNHCR continued efforts to implement gender-based violence prevention and risk mitigation by providing VBG services for 304 people and technical support to enhance GBV awareness by funded partners, community leaders, and key community stakeholders. In the South, UNHCR provided technical advice on GBV among institutions in charge of the response, besides specific support to HIAS on GBV case management.



## Section 3: Resources

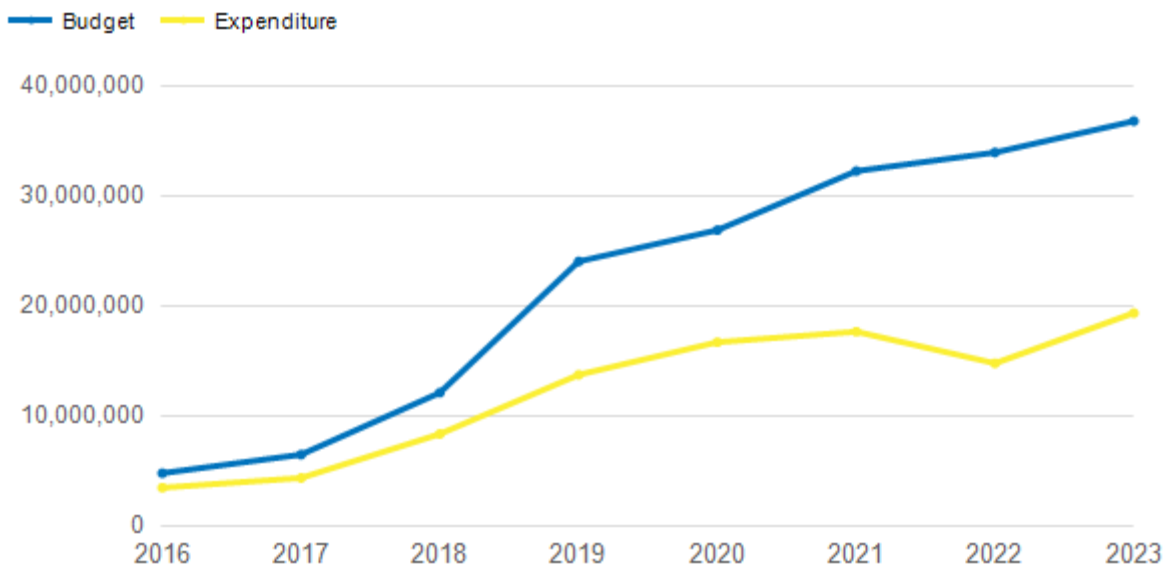
### 3.1 Financial Data

(Financial figures in USD)

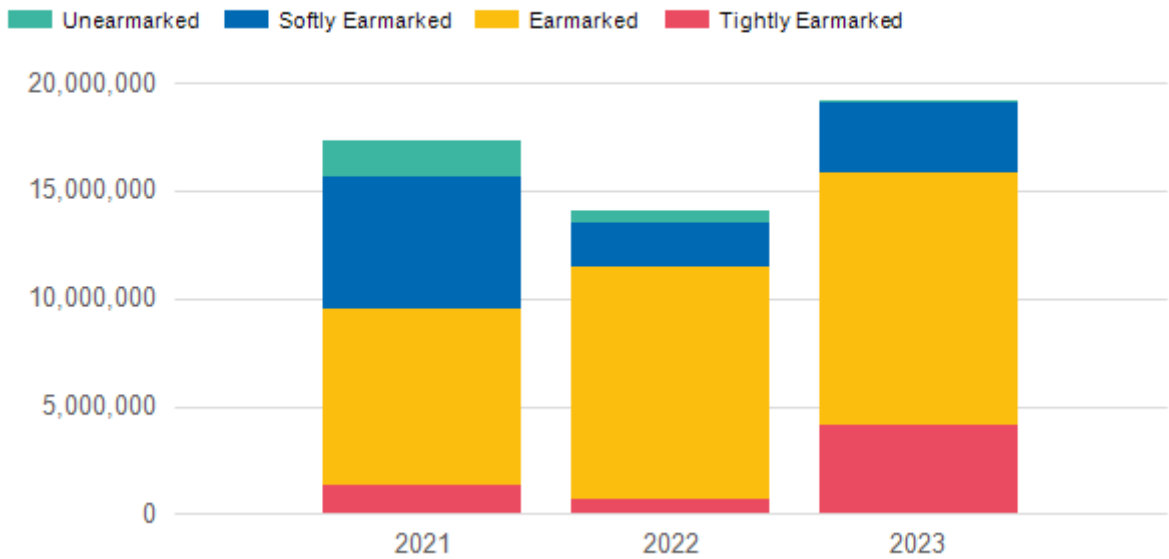
Impact Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
IA1: Protect	7,902,594	2,741,337	34.69%	2,741,337	100.00%
IA2: Assist	18,145,369	10,399,519	57.31%	10,399,519	100.00%
IA3: Empower	3,264,504	2,204,494	67.53%	2,204,494	100.00%
IA4: Solve	7,439,031	3,975,330	53.44%	3,975,330	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,751,497</b>	<b>19,320,680</b>	<b>52.57%</b>	<b>19,320,680</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Outcome Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
OA1: Access/Doc	1,082,487	524,228	48.43%	524,228	100.00%
OA2: Status	6,050,077	1,752,503	28.97%	1,752,503	100.00%
OA6: Justice	1,593,816	1,292,632	81.10%	1,292,632	100.00%
OA7: Community	3,264,504	2,204,494	67.53%	2,204,494	100.00%
OA8: Well-being	15,894,840	8,176,094	51.44%	8,176,094	100.00%
OA13: Livelihood	3,668,404	2,616,553	71.33%	2,616,553	100.00%
OA15: Resettle	3,977,193	1,711,411	43.03%	1,711,411	100.00%
OA16: Integrate	770,031	464,605	60.34%	464,605	100.00%
EA17: Systems	187,632	265,941	141.74%	265,941	100.00%
EA18: Support	93,816	132,970	141.74%	132,970	100.00%
EA20: External	168,698	179,247	106.25%	179,247	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,751,497</b>	<b>19,320,680</b>	<b>52.57%</b>	<b>19,320,680</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### Budget and Expenditure Trend



### Contributions Trend by Type



## 3.2. Resources Overview

The Costa Rican government faced several challenges in 2023, including those derived from the aftermath of COVID-19. While progress was made in reducing poverty rates, macroeconomic factors strained state's ability to adequately deliver essential social services to both nationals and people forced to flee. As a result, a shortage of decent employment led to insufficient access to social protection. To address this gap, UNHCR stepped in with targeted programmes for the most vulnerable, such as cash assistance and support through the Social Security Fund.

UNHCR was heavily involved in supporting the Costa Rican government in modernizing the asylum system.

Key staff were seconded to the Refugee Unit and its two appeal bodies. UNHCR was also deeply involved in discussions on national and local development as the means to achieve opportunities for employment at host communities, and therefore socio-economic integration of refugees and asylum seekers, also bringing international financial institutions to the table as part of such discussions.

UNHCR had to reprioritize available resources to upscale its emergency response for mixed movements, from a minimum core presence at the South border since early 2022, with just one staff based in Paso Canoas, to an enhanced presence since late 2023 given the increased movements and the need to support the inter-agency humanitarian response. This allowed to assist humanitarian needs of people in mixed movements (mainly through food, hydration, core relief items and healthcare), while dedicating permanent staff to provide information and orientation and to identify and address specific protection needs at EMISUR, including leadership of its inter-agency protection group.

In line with its multi-year strategy and considering the increasingly competitive and challenging environment in light of multiple crises worldwide, UNHCR will continue to seek financial support from non-traditional donors (e.g., development actors and private sector).

## Section 4: Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

### 4.1 Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

The change in leadership in the Migration Authority (DGME) in 2023 opened a window of opportunity, but political consensus took longer than anticipated. The evolution in the institutional positioning on asylum led UNHCR to rethink its re-engagement with the authorities and the need to maintain assertive communication with all actors. This situation was addressed in the Operation's Risk Registry and will be included in the new Multiyear Strategy.

The Operation reaffirmed the value of enhancing partnerships to strengthen the protection environment. Improved coordination with legal partners led to the implementation of strategic litigation, which could partly revert the erosion of protection standards caused by legal changes.

The treatment of mixed movements by the government focused on security concerns and on addressing urgent humanitarian needs, making it at times challenging to also focus on international protection needs. In September 2023, the Government of Costa Rica issued a National Emergency decree allowing funding allocation by the National Commission for Emergencies (CNE) to support interinstitutional response to people in transit. The decree was positively received by humanitarian actors and donors; nevertheless, administrative delays were miscalculated: as of 2023, the Investment Plan to be funded by the CNE was not yet validated, and funding is expected to be disbursed at least by April 2024.

UNHCR has also learned to better understand the timing of the government (e.g., to gain ownership across entities and regions) to implement certain projects. The next multiyear strategy will need to consider the different cycles and expectations of government and donors.

The Operation also aims to advance toward analyzing the impacts of climate change on people forced to flee, whether as a primary cause of displacement, a trigger for secondary movements, or a threat to protection and solutions at their destination.



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