

Nicaragua Situation

November 2018

The rapid deterioration of the situation in Nicaragua since April 2018 has led to thousands of Nicaraguans to flee mounting political tensions, violence and serious human rights violations. The Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CPDH) has reported over 2,800 claims of human rights abuses including death threats, harassment and other types of violence perpetrated by armed groups who allegedly support the government. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHRC) (link), at least 317 people have been killed, more than 2,000 have been injured, and an unknown number have been detained. The IACHR also warned about the detention and criminalization of political and social leaders. Forced displacement is expected to continue, as no political solution is yet in sight.

Key Figures

21,517 asylum claims from Nicaraguans registered in North and Central America during 2018 ¹

3,000% increase in average asylum claims in Jun-Oct compared to Jan-May; though with an average **17%** decrease per month since Aug.

18,632 of claims registered in Costa Rica (87%) ² and **1,960** in Panama (9%) ³

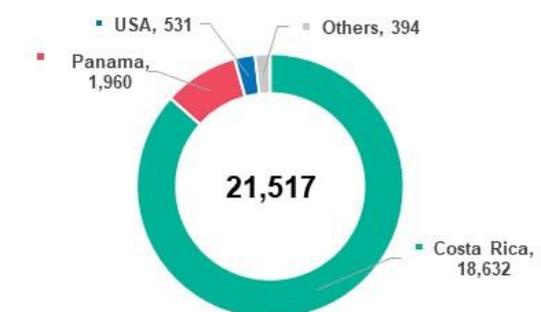
Approx. 10,000 persons scheduled to formally fill their claims in Costa Rica ²

¹ Data provided by Governments to UNHCR. Based on available information as of 15-Nov. Data can be subject to changes once countries complete their reports for all months of 2018.

² Data provided by *Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería de Costa Rica*, as of 15-Nov.

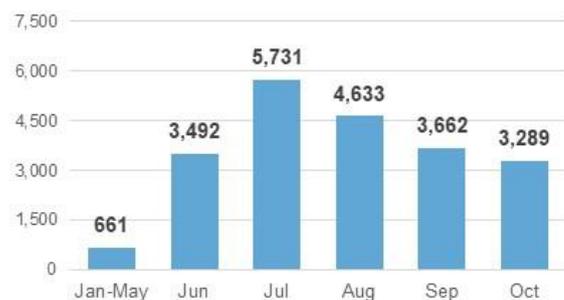
³ Data provided by *ONPAR – Ministerio de Gobierno*, as of 15-Nov.

 **Asylum Applications from Nicaraguans in 2018 by Country of Asylum**



Source: Data provided by Governments to UNHCR as of 15-Nov.

 **Evolution of Asylum Applications from Nicaraguans during 2018**



Source: Data provided by Governments to UNHCR as of 15-Nov. Not included 49 claims reported in the first days of Nov. in Guatemala and Honduras.

- The number of new asylum-seekers from Nicaraguans in neighbouring countries has reached over 31,000 in just a few months of 2018, including those formally registered and those awaiting to formalize their claim. While Costa Rica has received most asylum claims, Mexico and Panama, as well as countries in the North of Central America, have received increased number of Nicaraguans Asylum seekers. However, and due to an increased militarisation of the southern Nicaraguan border, people are finding it difficult to cross into neighbouring countries. As a result, the number of asylum claims registered in those countries does not reflect the magnitude of these movements, while internal displacements is on the rise within Nicaragua.

UNHCR Response

- UNHCR geared up its response, informed by a newly produced a regional response plan particularly addressing this situation and focussing primarily on Costa Rica - the largest host country,. This plan aims at enhancing the reception and admission capacity of the country (including on Refugee Status Determination procedures).It also includes reinforcing border monitoring, supporting temporary transit centres, strengthening the State-run refugee unit, implementing cash-based interventions and delivering assistance.
- In Panama, UNHCR has also strengthened the capacity of the refugee office to cope with the increased pressure due to high number of individual asylum claims received. The Agency has also launched regular protection monitoring to ensure a systematic identification of specific profiles and needs. In addition, UNHCR's partners have strengthened their assistance to asylum seekers, including using Cash Based Interventions. UNHCR is also reinforcing its presence at the northern border of Costa Rica, in Honduras and El Salvador in coordination with the Government, other United Nations agencies and partners, to strengthen border monitoring and shelter capacity. Additionally, within Nicaragua, it has supported the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD), in assisting over 800 Central American asylum seekers and refugees in the country. UNHCR has also started emergency resettlement for some of the most vulnerable cases.

Priority concerns in main countries of asylum

- Costa Rica, as the main arrival point for Nicaraguans leaving their country, received high numbers of persons with specific protection needs (50% of the registered Nicaraguans have been identified as requiring special protection and assistance,, including legal and physical, as well as serious medical conditions). At present, there are still significant delays in RSD processing, and the capacity of service providers in the capital, San José, to meet the specific needs of Nicaraguan asylum seekers is limited. Work with host communities, along coexistence projects, is urgently needed to avoid recurring episodes of xenophobia.
- In Panama, Nicaraguan asylum seekers do not have access to formal employment, whilst waiting for their status determination. With RSD proceedings taking up to several years, Nicaraguan asylum seekers are facing economic hardships and forced into informal labour, increasing their vulnerability.
- Those leaving through the northern border are often afraid to lodge an asylum claim in Honduras or El Salvador, or have abandoned their process due to fear of persecution by Nicaraguan authorities. They instead decide to seek asylum in Guatemala or further north. Some have joined the so called “caravans” leaving both Honduras and El Salvador and have claimed asylum in Mexico, putting further strain on the asylum system there..

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