UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Global Focus
UNHCR Operations Worldwide

2020 Planning summary

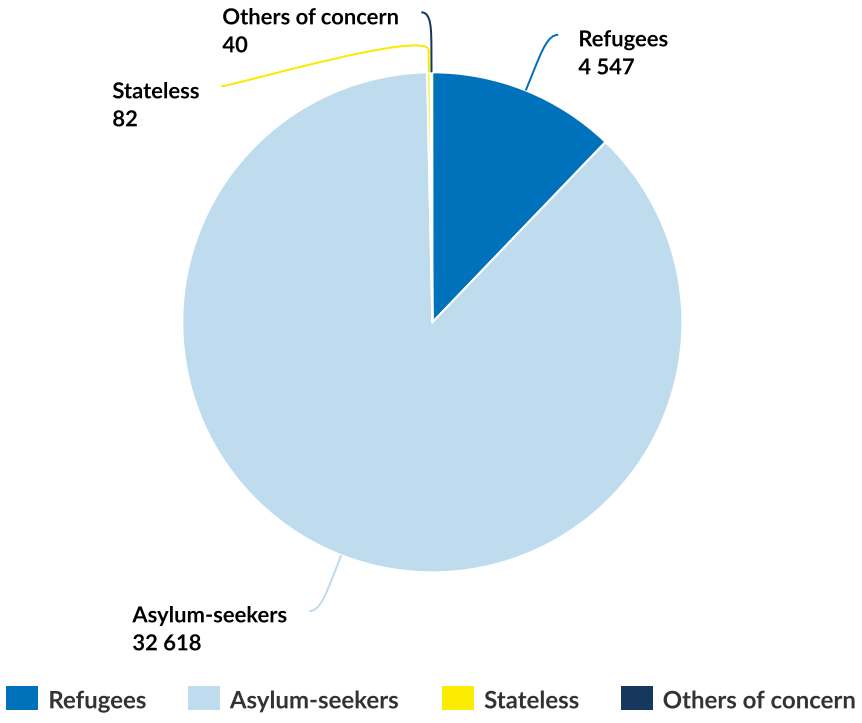
2/12/2019

Operation: Costa Rica

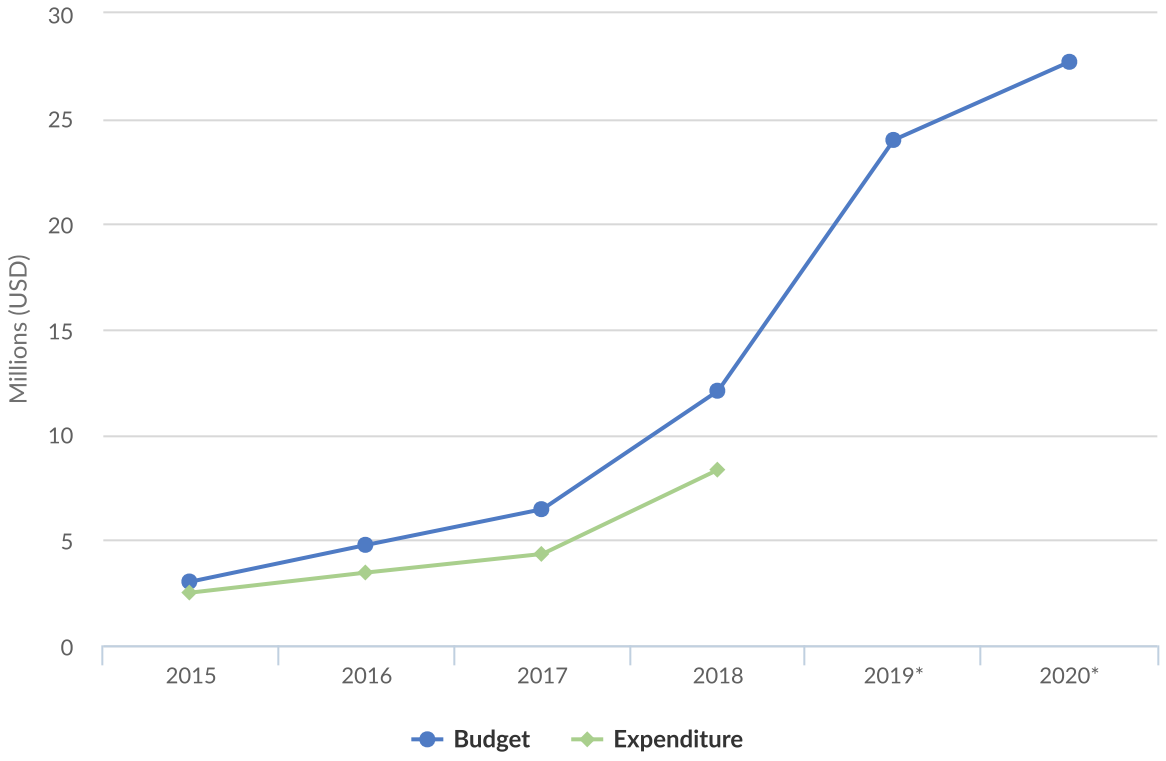
People of Concern

210% INCREASE IN 2018

2018	37,287
2017	12,015
2016	7,953



Budgets and Expenditure for Costa Rica



Working environment

Costa Rica has become a transit and destination country for asylum-seekers from the four main refugee situations in the Americas: Colombia, North of Central America (NCA), Venezuela, and most recently, Nicaragua, as well as for people in mixed movements.

This influx of asylum-seekers is expected to continue, with an estimated 100,000 asylum claims expected by end 2019, equivalent to 2% of Costa Rica's total population. These increasing trends are expected to continue through 2020. A lack of solutions in other parts of the region for people of concern from the NCA; further deterioration of the socio-economic and security conditions in Venezuela; the situation of stalled negotiations and prevailing security and human rights situation in Nicaragua; are all likely to result in more arrivals in Costa Rica in 2020.

The vast increase in people of concern, particularly from Nicaragua, has challenged the State and UNHCR's response capacities, demanding larger and more sustainable investments in humanitarian and integration programmes, and the need to address increased RSD backlogs.

This situation poses unique challenges for the Government of Costa Rica. The increase of asylum claims in the last year has exceeded the response capacity of the refugee unit of the Government. Despite the Government's concerted efforts to process cases, asylum-seekers are compelled to wait between six to nine months to formalize their asylum requests with the Migration Authority, three more months to receive work permits, while appointments for asylum interviews are being scheduled for late 2022. This lengthy wait for asylum processing is affecting asylum-seekers' ability to access basic rights - including food, shelter and health-care.

Despite current challenges, the Government continues to honour the country's long history of respect to human rights while maintaining open doors to asylum-seekers and refugees. Costa Rica's national chapter of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, locally known as MINARE, is one of the most robust protection and solutions frameworks in the region. Led by the central Government, MINARE's implementation has allowed the country to further develop good practices and to strengthen the refugee response by engaging with multiple stakeholders, including civil society, private sector, local governments and academia.

Key priorities

In 2020, UNHCR will focus on:

- supporting the Government in responding to the increased arrival of Nicaraguan and Venezuelan asylum-seekers, putting in place humanitarian response measures. This includes technical advice on the development of a form of stay.
- supporting the Government to improve quality status determination procedures and to ensure that the existing asylum system continues to prioritize the balance of fairness and efficiency even while absorbing larger numbers of asylum claims.
- UNHCR also continues to support efforts for integration of people of concern, including through partnerships with private sector, and other initiatives to improve access to employment and entrepreneurship.
- working to guarantee that people of concern are able to access legal counseling and guidance, and representation in some cases, together with partners.
- improving the access of people of concern to humanitarian programmes of the Government of Costa Rica, while utilizing cash-based interventions to support the most vulnerable people of concern in the meantime.

Advocacy efforts will include ensuring equal access to public health care services for people of concern to that of nationals.

- consolidating its community-based protection strategy and work towards having people of concern at the centre of all planned activities, making sure that that their inclusion, participation, and empowerment is further mainstreamed in all protection and solutions interventions.
- engaging with host communities and promote inclusion of people of concern in the local development plans, to ensure access to rights, pacific coexistence and prevent xenophobia and racism.