

# Nicaragua Situation

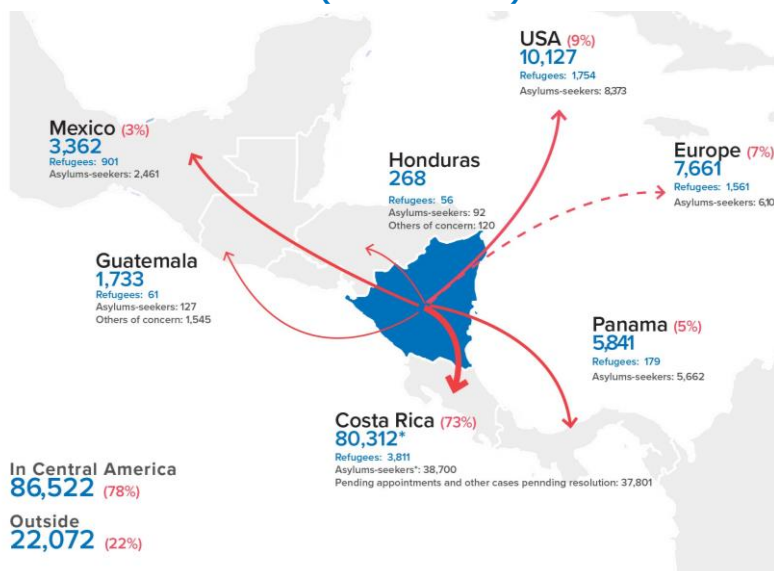
January – June 2021

More than **110,000** Nicaraguans have sought international protection globally, the majority of them in neighbouring Costa Rica. To date, **8,700** Nicaraguans have been recognized as refugees in different countries around the world with many more awaiting decisions on their claims.

The socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in hosting countries has increased the vulnerability of refugees and asylum-seekers from Nicaragua, and the challenges they face to **cover basic needs**, exposing them to renewed protection risks such as **evictions** and **discrimination**.

In close coordination with governments and local **authorities, partners, hosting communities** and **refugees**, UNHCR works to enhance access to asylum, and health care, and to promote socioeconomic inclusion. UNHCR also continues engaging with the **private sector** to join the humanitarian response.

## KEY POPULATION FIGURES (End-Year 2020)



## Finding protection during the COVID pandemic

COVID-19 poses new risks for those forced to flee their countries. Access to healthcare and vaccination are some of the top priorities for asylum seekers and refugees.

In Costa Rica, UNHCR signed an agreement with the Government to provide access to public healthcare for asylum seekers and refugees. This agreement plays an important role in early integration as new arrivals often show unattended chronic conditions or health situations resulting from their journey. This agreement has benefited 10,398 persons so far, most of them (72%) Nicaraguans.

Being healthy and insured increases the opportunity for formal employment and assures protection for the most vulnerable. UNHCR also advocates for and contributes to the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees in national vaccination campaigns.

## Situation Overview

The socio-economic impact of Covid-19 and pandemic-related restrictions have exacerbated the vulnerabilities faced by many Nicaraguan refugees and asylum-seekers. Border restrictions have led to increased irregular movements, which pose additional protection risks for those trying to flee. Assessments in host countries show that pandemic-related restrictions have forced many Nicaraguan refugees and asylum-seekers to go hungry, eating only once a day or sometimes not at all. Unemployment has soared, leading many to borrow money or work informally in exchange for food. Reports of eviction risks have also risen.

Asylum countries and communities have shown great solidarity with Nicaraguan refugees and asylum-seekers, and it will be key to keep supporting them as they ensure protection and promote local integration of Nicaraguans amid a challenging pandemic context. UNHCR has renewed its call on the international community not to turn a blind eye to the plight of Nicaraguan refugees and asylum-seekers, as the pandemic exacerbates their vulnerabilities and needs.



Thirty-year-old Nicaraguan asylum-seeker meets UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at her stall at a market in Upala near Costa Rica's border with Nicaragua. She received training and financial support from UNHCR's partner Fundación Mujer to be able to sell sweets using recipes from home. © UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo

## UNHCR Response

UNHCR strives to help enhance the capacity of refugee-receiving countries to provide access to fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures for **Nicaraguan asylum-seekers**, and to promote their local integration in host communities using their skills or learning new ones. UNHCR also invests in efforts to curb xenophobia and promote peaceful coexistence among Nicaraguan refugees and asylum-seekers and their hosts. These activities span the seven countries impacted by the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers from Nicaragua, namely **Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and Mexico**:



### Safe reception and access to asylum

To strengthen border monitoring, UNHCR opened a new field unit on **Honduras' southern border**. Contacts with local authorities and community leaders in border communities such as Choluteca and El Paraiso are being strengthened to identify Nicaraguans with international protection needs. In **El Salvador**, UNHCR is helping to strengthen the National Refugee Status Determination Commission (CODER) through the support of experts in international protection, the distribution of information on the rights of forcibly displaced persons, and updating the equipment required to manage asylum applications in the country. In **Costa Rica**, 12 new registration staff were hired at the Migration Authority to support quicker access to asylum documentation.



### Health

In Tapachula, **Mexico**, coordination with local actors and the local health authorities has been strengthened and health promoters are available to ensure protection in host communities. In **El Salvador**, UNHCR promoted a consultation with refugees and, as a result, the Ministry of Health coordinated with the CODER the inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees in the national vaccination system. In **Costa Rica**, 390 mosquito nets were donated to the border community of Isla Chica to fight against malaria in support to the Ministry of Health. Also, in the northern region of Upala, UNHCR supported structural improvements of Radio Cultural Upala, to boost broadcast of relevant information, including coronavirus prevention measures for the population of concern and their hosts. The agreement between UNHCR and the national Social Security service extended health insurance coverage to an additional 4,000 refugees and asylum seekers until end of 2021, for a total of 10,000 people covered. In **Panama**, more than 240 refugees and asylum-seekers from Nicaragua received psychosocial assistance during the reporting period.



### Food Security and Nutrition

In **Panama**, in coordination with the national programme Panama Solidario, 93 Nicaraguans received food and hygiene supplies. Food and hygiene kits were distributed in the communities of Llano Azul and Los Chiles in the north of **Costa Rica**, benefiting 238 refugees and asylum-seekers as well as people from the host communities.



### Cash assistance

In **Costa Rica**, cash support to cover basic needs, was given to approximately 2,600 Nicaraguans. In **Mexico**, cash to meet basic needs (food, household supplies, and a contribution towards housing and utility bills) was delivered to 475 Nicaraguans, while an additional 93 Nicaraguans received assistance to mitigate some of the negative socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. In **Panama**, around 118 Nicaraguans were supported with rent payments to avoid evictions and a total of 714 received cash to cover food and household supplies. In **Guatemala**, 79 Nicaraguans received cash to meet their basic needs, in **Honduras**, 54 received humanitarian assistance, and in **El Salvador**, 9 Nicaraguans received multipurpose cash grants.



### Durable solutions and livelihoods

In **Costa Rica**, the COSVIC Institute, a technical-education institution, granted 65 refugees and asylum-seekers a scholarship in Customer Service and Business Start-up Management, while UNHCR provides connectivity to participants for the duration of the virtual courses. Partner *Fundación Mujer* bolsters 13 new businesses run by refugees and asylum-seekers under a programme for start-ups. A private sector workgroup led by Western Union, with the participation of Accenture and Boston Scientific, promotes labour inclusion for refugees and asylum-seekers. The inter-agency "Integrate al Empleo" project has been updated to include population of concern to UNHCR. The "Empléate" initiative led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security benefited 28 refugees and asylum seekers who started a training programme to be certified in cable TV and internet service installation. In **Guatemala**, as part of UNHCR's new strategy for livelihoods, 14 Nicaraguan refugees were included in programmes facilitating access to employment and skills development. Furthermore, one refugee is employed as a UN Volunteer with the office in Guatemala and 4 received cash for traineeship or micro-enterprises. In **Mexico**, as part of the Local Integration Programme, UNHCR supports 51 persons from Nicaragua with temporary housing, cultural orientation, vocational training, school enrolment and job placement.

Thanks to **donors in 2021**. UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have provided generous and timely support to countries in Central America and Mexico, as well as those who have contributed with **unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations**:

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