

# UNHCR Costa Rica – South Border

April 2023

The Costa Rica–Panama border is 348 km long and there are only four border posts on the Costa Rica side in Sixaola, Sabalito, Golfito and Paso Canoas as the main one. Due to its length, the southern border is very difficult to monitor in its entirety.

In 2021, UNHCR Costa Rica resumed border monitoring activities, primarily in Paso Canoas. In 2022, UNHCR supported the government in hiring an Eligibility Officer due to the increase in the number of asylum-seekers at the Southern Border.

Considering the situation, a Protection Associate was posted in May 2022 in Paso Canoas to guarantee the effective protection of asylum-seekers, refugees, at risk of statelessness and stateless persons who enter or reside on the Southern Border.

## MIXED MOVEMENTS FLOW IN COSTA RICA



During the first quarter of 2023, over 87,300 people crossed irregularly the Darien seeking to continue their trip north, 35% of them Venezuelan refugees and migrants, followed by Haitians and Ecuadorians. This figure represents a six-fold increase compared to the entries registered for the same period in 2022.

The persons in mixed movements arrive at the Paso Canoas border and slowly enter Costa Rica irregularly since many require Visas (Venezuelans, Haitians). They remain in the area for a day or two to rest and then continue their journey north by bus if they have the means, if they don't, they wait until some other family in their country of origin can provide finances to continue or they participate in informal labour.

Most were continuing north but after October, when the new migration process for the United States was announced, a significant number of people were left stranded in Costa Rica.

## Protection needs


Most of the people in these mixed movements show high levels of fatigue, many of them have skin lacerations and allergies, as well as gastrointestinal problems. The presence of homeless family groups during their transit through Costa Rica is inconsistent. Likewise, due to the deteriorated state of health, it is common to identify children in need of attention. The majority of people travel by public transport in family groups, with few resources and few health protection measures.



UNHCR information post, Red Cross partner provides humanitarian assistance to people in transit/Norberto Giron/ 2023

## 2023 UNHCR's response in the South Border



- In 2022, UNHCR prioritized hiring a Protection Associate that is currently posted in Paso Canoas. He conducts border monitoring activities and attention to the people forced to flee and stateless people in the area, to guarantee effective access to territory and to the RSD process.
- UNHCR was included in the Permanent Commission for Assistance to Migrants in Vulnerable Conditions (COPPAMI), a commission that comprises institutions active in the border area and in the municipalities of Corredores, province of Puntarenas, and Barú, province of Chiriquí, linked to the protection and assistance of vulnerable migrants, as well as refugees and asylum-seekers.
- UNHCR accompanied Health Fairs led by the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) by providing information to people in need of international protection. These fairs provide a comprehensive approach in health to people in vulnerable conditions who transit the Southern Border of Costa Rica, focusing on four geographical points: Paso Canoas, Río Claro, Río Sereno and Ciudad Neily.
 

*UNHCR participating in the 1<sup>st</sup> health Fair 2023, with PADF, Hands for Health, IOM, SJM, HIAS/Norberto Giron/ 2023*
- UNHCR, in coordination with the Public Force, HIAS, and the CADENA Foundation, have permanently installed an awning to provide information and humanitarian assistance to people in transit.
- UNHCR facilitated capacity-building spaces on International Refugee Law, UNHCR programs and awareness-raising aimed at the Public Force, Professional Migration Police, Border Police and Tourism Police.
- UNHCR, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, organized the first meeting of 2023 between local authorities, partners and humanitarian actors in response to mixed movements. HIAS, Jesuit Migrant Service, ADI Paso Canoas, CADENA Foundation, Hands for Health Foundation, Neily Foundation, Arias Foundation for Peace, Red Cross, UNICEF, OIM, PADF, authorities of the Public Force, Southern Command, Police Borders, DGME (Refuge Office) and DIS participated.

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