

Covid-19 and (Im)Mobility in the Americas

COSTA RICA

October - December 2020

1. **Poverty Rate (defined by unsatisfied basic needs):** 21% of the total population.¹

2. Migrant Data²

- a. Emigration: around 151,000 Costa Ricans, or 3% of the population, reside abroad mainly in the US (66%), Nicaragua (7.5%), and Panama (5.5%).
- b. Immigration: around 420,000 immigrants, or 8.32% of the total population, live in Costa Rica. The main countries of origin are Nicaragua (71%), Colombia (5%), USA (4.12%); and El Salvador (3.4%).
- c. Transit country: migrants from Caribbean, South American, Asian, and African countries transit Costa Rica en route to the US.
- d. Refugees: There are 87,190 asylum seekers in Costa Rica of whom 80% are Nicaraguan, and 7% Venezuelan.

3. State Measures

- After announcing a total reopening of borders, authorities announced modified requirements to enter the country, the most noticeable of these being [the elimination of the PCR test](#), which will most likely facilitate tourism.
- After several months of not providing face-to-face care to its users due to the pandemic, [the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners \(DGME\) is preparing for its reopening](#).
- [The General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners \(DGME\) assured that border authorities are preventing entry of Haitian migrants stranded in Panama](#), these people try to cross to Costa Rican soil through blind spots on the borders. According to the DGME, the rejected people are migrants who leave shelters in Panama, despite knowing that the land borders are closed due to the emergency of covid-19.
- [The Costa Rican Professional Migration Police](#) says they use the regulations and health guidelines in force in the country to return migrants who try to enter through irregular steps.

¹ <https://www.nacion.com/economia/indicadores/pobreza-estancada-en-21-en-2019/BE0A4QB3CZBNLATME5FKBOTY7I/story/>

² <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/costa-rica>
<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/inmigracion/costa-rica>
<https://www.voanoticias.com/a/costa-rica-acnur-cooperacion-refugiados-/5279173.html>

- [Authorities from Costa Rica and Nicaragua signed a binational agreement to regulate the temporary hiring of Nicaraguan workers](#) in Costa Rica to work in agricultural industries. Among the points discussed were administrative, operational, migration and health aspects. The agreement contemplates the “temporary hiring of Nicaraguan workers, due to the shortage of local labor for the harvesting of crops such as coffee, melon, watermelon, yucca, among others,” otherwise in Costa Rica there could be “millions in losses.”
- According to Costa Rican authorities, Nicaraguan labor traditionally arrives to Costa Rica to work in the harvesting of seasonal crops. [The pandemic altered the circulation of these flows](#), which will be carried out under the regulations in through planned increases in entries and under strict protocols imposed by the pandemic.
- The Costa Rican authorities announced on Thursday, November 12, 2020, the creation of a special migratory humanitarian category for Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, and Cubans settled in this country who have been denied refugee status. [The intention of the measure](#) is to assist people whose refugee application was rejected so that they do not fall into a situation of greater vulnerability and can continue to live in Costa Rica on a regular basis.
- People eligible for this migratory category are those who have been denied refugee status as of January 1, 2016, and who have physically remained in Costa Rica on a regular or irregular basis at any point up to March 18, 2020. [The petitioners must provide documents that prove that they are settled in Costa Rica](#) and prove they have no criminal record in this country or in any other.
- Costa Rica virtually held the XXV Regional Conference on Migration, in which irregular displacement and the labor market were a priority of discussion. Other [priority topics](#) addressed in the ministerial meeting were Protection, Irregular and Mass Migration, Labor Migration, and Border Management.
- Currently [Costa Rica is working together with the UN](#) to implement the Health Cooperation Plan generated by COVID-19. The objective is to provide effective attention to migrant flows and prevent the spread of the virus.
- The request for regularization by those with ties with Costa Ricans “must be made when the foreign person holds a legally approved status in the country; that is, their visa time has not expired,” according to the documents with the requirements issued by Migration.

4. Migrant Situation Alerts

Migrants in Transit

- The DGME explained that after the border closure, [coyotes changed routes to circumvent police controls](#) established along the border corridor. Due to this, risks to the migrant population are multiplied by state control measures.

Migrant Population (Especially Nicaraguans)

- Most Nicaraguans who remain in exile in Costa Rica earn less than €100,000 per month (~\$161 USD), according to a recent survey by the Arias Foundation for Peace. The analysis indicates that six out of ten people in this condition entered the country through blind spots on the border, in an irregular manner. Elvira Cuadra, an expert in security who participated in the study, commented [that the low level of income that Nicaraguans indicated is worrying](#).
- Through [a survey of LGBTQ+ refugee migrants](#), it was possible to identify many real scenarios that place them in situations of extreme vulnerability toward COVID-19 contagion. For example, eight out of ten people are completely unemployed and unable to afford basic personal and family items. Similarly, they do not have access to hygiene and biosafety products, which are essential for preventing infection.
- Nicaraguan migrants report that they have experienced discriminatory acts, social and gender exclusion in Costa Rica, they ask the government for actions to ensure that the universal statutes regarding displaced persons are fulfilled.

5. Social Responses

- Solidarity Networks
 - o The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners (DGME) launched the campaign “[Word of mouth information leads to misunderstandings \[De boca en boca la gente se equivoca\]](#)” to urge Nicaraguan migrants who have children born in Costa Rica to regularize their migratory situation “due to their ties to Costa Rica.” The National Coordinator of the IOM's Regional Program on Migration Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, Isis Orozco, said in a statement: “We realized that the lack of simple and accessible information has led to the persistence of many myths, which make a large number of migrant heads of households feel unable to opt for residence in our country.”
 - o The Center for Social Rights of the Migrant Person (CENDEROS), the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), the Nicaragua Never+ Human Rights Collective, and the Jesuit Service for Migrants Costa Rica [signed a letter](#) in which they ask the government of President Carlos Alvarado to be a world example with respect to the guarantee and respect for human rights among migrant populations.
 - o In the letter, the organizations also ask that “in the next vaccination process, Costa Rica might guarantee the rights to health and integrity of forced migrants, under equal conditions and without any discrimination based on immigration status or nationality.”