

As thousands flee violence in Nicaragua, UN refugee agency urges more support for countries taking them in

As thousands flee mounting political tensions, violence and serious human rights violations in Nicaragua, the United Nations refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), has called for international solidarity and more support for the countries hosting those who are joining the exodus.

Around 300 people have been killed during three months of anti-government protests, which have been calling on long-serving President Daniel Ortega to step down. Hundreds have reportedly been detained, amid a violent crackdown by police and pro-government paramilitary groups, according to news reports.

“Currently, an average of 200 [asylum applications are being lodged](#) daily in Costa Rica,” UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler told journalists on Tuesday, noting that applications have increased exponentially in recent months, since protests against the Nicaraguan government began.

According to Costa Rican authorities, nearly 8,000 asylum claims by Nicaraguan nationals have been registered since April, and some 15,000 more have been given appointments for later registration, due to the application system being overwhelmed.

Mr. Spindler said that UNHCR is supporting the Migration authority to increase its processing capacity from 200 to at least 500 claims daily.

“UNHCR is strengthening its presence in Costa Rica’s northern border region”, he added, together with the Costa Rican Government, other UN agencies and NGO partners, he said the refugee agency was “gearing up its response capacity to provide immediate protection and assistance to thousands of Nicaraguan refugees and asylum seekers, both in the northern region and in the metropolitan area of the capital San Jose.”

An estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Nicaraguan families already living in Costa Rica are providing an initial safety net for friends, relatives and fellow citizens as they arrive.

“UNHCR appreciates the efforts of the Costa Rican authorities in keeping the country’s borders open to Nicaraguans in need of international refugee protection, in line with its long tradition of solidarity,” stated Mr. Spindler.

“At the same time,” he continued, “UNHCR calls on the international community to provide support to Costa Rica and other countries hosting Nicaraguan refugees and asylum seekers, in the spirit of solidarity and responsibility-

sharing of the Global Compact on Refugees and the application of the Regional Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework – a collective regional action plan “to strengthen protection and promote durable solutions among countries of origin, transit and destination in Central America and Mexico,” added Mr. Spindler.

While Costa Rica has received the lion’s share of asylum claims, Panama, Mexico and the United States have also recorded hundreds of applications; especially during the first half of 2018, with a significant peak in June.

Meanwhile, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala are increasingly becoming transit countries for Nicaraguan refugees. In coordination with government authorities, the spokesperson said that the UN System and its partners will elaborate “a comprehensive regional response to address the international protection and humanitarian needs of Nicaraguan refugees.”

UNHCR and its partners are also providing assistance to more than 700 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from El Salvador and Honduras, living in the Nicaraguan capital of Managua and other parts of the country.