

Costa Rica



Population: 4,516,220 (July 2010 est.)
Population Growth Rate: 1.347% (2010 est.)
Birth Rate: 16.65 births/1,000 population (2010 est.)
Life Expectancy: total population: 77.54 years
male: 74.93 years
female: 80.28 years (2010 est.)
Literacy Rate: total population: 94.9%
male: 94.7%
female: 95.1% (2000 census)
Net Migration Rate: 1.11 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2010 est.)
Unemployment Rate: 6.4% (2009 est.)
Gross Domestic Product per Capita: \$10,900 (2009 est.)
Religions: Roman Catholic 76.3%, Evangelical 13.7%, Jehovah's Witnesses 1.3%, other
Ethnic Groups: White (including mestizo) 94%, black 3%, Amerindian 1%, Chinese 1%, other 1%
Capital: San Jose¹

Trafficking Routes

Costa Rica is a country of destination, transit, and origin for trafficking in women and children. Costa Rica is often a destination country for prostitutes because that practice is not seen as a crime. As a result, Costa Rica is a major sex tourism destination for men from North America, Europe, Asia and South America.²

Girls from Costa Rica are reportedly trafficked through Central America to work in the sex trades of the United States, Canada, and Europe. Trafficking victims often pass through Costa Rica on their way from Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and other Central American countries.³ Additionally, Costa Rican minors are trafficked internally toward tourist points and ports for sexual exploitation. Babies are also trafficked from Guatemala to Costa Rica for adoption in the United States.⁴

Factors That Contribute to the Trafficking Infrastructure

¹ CIA, THE WORLD FACT BOOK 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/cs.html>.

² Anti-trafficking campaign includes, COSTA RICA, A.M., May 12, 2006, available at: <http://amcosarica.com/051206.htm>.

³ Human Trafficking Organization Shut Down in Costa Rica, COSTA RICA TRAVEL NEWS AND REVIEWS, Dec. 12, 2007, available at: <http://www.costaricaholiday.co.uk/blog/?p=360>.

⁴ Two Lawyers Convicted in Child-trafficking Case, A.M. COSTA RICA, July 7, 2006, available at: <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/30657>.

The most significant societal factor promoting human trafficking is poverty. Poverty in Costa Rica has remained at a rate of around 20 percent for nearly 20 years. The strong social safety net that the government originally put in place to deal with the problem has eroded due to increased financial constraints on government expenditures.⁵ Sixteen percent of the Costa Rican population currently lives below the poverty line.⁶ Poverty often is associated with illiteracy, limited employment opportunities, and bleak financial circumstances for families. Children and women in these families become easy targets for prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation.⁷

Costa Rica's popularity as a tourist destination is linked with its reputation as a destination for sex tourists, many of whom seek to exploit children. As Costa Rica has increased efforts to promote its tourism industry, sex tourism has risen as well.⁸ In addition, Costa Rica's laws and law enforcement mechanisms offer child sex tourists the impunity and anonymity they are looking for.⁹ There is less police control in child sex tourism areas and much local corruption. The Internet has also facilitated the recent rise in child sex tourism by providing a convenient marketing channel.¹⁰ In addition, laws on prostitution make establishments relating to the sex industry easily accessible. Since prostitution is legal for those 18 and older, minors can be easily hidden in Costa Rica's line of sex work. San Jose's many sex services can be located through tour guides, making prostitution accessible and profitable and, therefore, the exploitation of minors easy as well.¹¹ Costa Rica is the No. 1 destination in Central America for sex tourism. It is estimated that out of more than a million tourists visiting the country each year, at least 5,000 people travel to Costa Rica with the intent to have sex with minors. The majority of these tourists come from the United States and Western Europe.¹²

The high earnings of the human trafficking business in Costa Rica are another factor that promotes trafficking. It has been reported that the trafficking of one person could bring in a profit of up to \$10,000, with the Costa Rican operation receiving approximately 20 percent of the amount.¹³ With a suspected 25 to 40 people being smuggled through and into Costa Rica every week, this generates a massive amount of income.¹⁴

Cultural factors also influence the vulnerability of women and children to human trafficking. Throughout Central America, *machismo* attitudes are prevalent. Women are often viewed as sexual objects. Traditional prejudices, sexual harassment in the workplace, domestic violence, and the de facto inequalities between men and women put women at risk for

⁵ CIA *supra* at 1.

⁶ CIA *supra* at 1.

⁷ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, CHILD EXPLOITATION AND OBSCENITY SECTION, CHILD SEX TOURISM (2007), available at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/sextour.html>.

⁸ Tim Rogers, *Sex Tourism Thrives in Costa Rica*, GLOBAL TRAVEL INDUSTRY NEWS, Oct. 14, 2009, available at: <http://www.eturbonews.com/12278/sex-tourism-thrives-costa-rica>

⁹ Paul Jeffrey, *Sex Tourism Plagues Central America*, UNITED METHODIST WOMEN RESPONSE MAGAZINE, available at: <http://gbgm-umc.org/response/articles/sextourism.html>.

¹⁰ DOJ *supra* at 7.

¹¹ AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY GROUP (IABOLISH), COUNTRY REPORT: COSTA RICA (2008), available at: http://www.iabolish.org/slavery_today/country_reports/cr.html.

¹² Jeffrey *supra* at 9.

¹³ *Human Trafficking Organization Shut Down in Costa Rica*, COSTA RICA TRAVEL NEWS AND REVIEWS, Dec. 12, 2007, available at: <http://www.costaricaholiday.co.uk/blog/?p=360>.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 13.

exploitation.¹⁵ Interfamily violence, family breakdown, and poverty also push young people to leave their homes and communities to search for better lives.

Forms of Trafficking

Trafficking for purposes of sex tourism, prostitution, and pornography are the most common forms of human trafficking in Costa Rica.¹⁶ Trafficking is particularly prevalent in urban areas. Statistics indicate that the average age of victims trafficked into prostitution is twelve.¹⁷ According to Casa Alianza, young women and children are most at risk.

To a lesser extent, children are also trafficked for illegal adoption, within Costa Rica and internationally. In March 2004, authorities broke up an illegal adoption ring that paid mothers to give up their babies. The children had been sold for as much as \$10,000. The 14 people arrested included a judge from Liberia, a lawyer, and two social workers. The raid confirmed that a sale of at least 3 children took place.¹⁸

Government Responses

The criminal code prohibits promoting or facilitating the prostitution of individuals of either sex¹⁹ and pimping (securing clients for a prostitutes), as a means of livelihood.²⁰ The code also prohibits “trafficking in women and minors,” stating that “one who promotes or facilitates the entry to or exit from the country of women or minors of either sex to practice prostitution shall be punished by imprisonment of three to six years.”²¹ The penalty is four to 10 years imprisonment in cases of aggravated circumstances, such as cases involving deceit, violence, abuse of authority, or other means of intimidation or coercion or cases in which the perpetrator is an ancestor, descendant, husband, sibling, or guardian or is in charge of the education, care, or custody of the victim.²² The criminal code punishes the production of pornographic materials using minors by imprisonment for three to eight years.²³

¹⁵ MONICA O’CONNOR AND GRAINNE HEALY, THE LINKS BETWEEN PROSTITUTION AND SEX TRAFFICKING: A BRIEFING HANDBOOK (2006), available at: <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/handbook.pdf>.

¹⁶ ALICIA BURKE, STEFANIA DUCCI, GUISEPPINA MADDALUNO, UNITED NATIONS INTERREGIONAL CRIME AND JUSTICE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (UNICRI), TRAFFICKING IN MINORS FOR COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: COSTA RICA (2005).

¹⁷ END CHILD PROSTITUTION CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL PURPOSES (ECPAT), INFORME GLOBAL DE MONITOREO DE LAS ACCIONES EN CONTRA DE LA EXPLOTACIÓN SEXUAL COMERCIAL DE NIÑOS, NIÑAS, Y ADOLESCENTES: COSTA RICA (2006), available at: http://www.ecpat.net/A4A_2005/PDF/Americas/Global_Monitoring_Report-COSTA_RICA.pdf.

¹⁸ Costa Rican Police Arrest 14 in Baby Trafficking, DAILY NEWS, TICO.TIMES.NET, Mar. 04, 2008, available at: http://www.ticotimes.net/dailyarchive/2008_03/0305083.htm.

¹⁹ CODIGO PENAL DE COSTA RICA, Libro Primero No.4573 (1970) art.169(Costa Rica), available at: http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/sp/cri/sp_cri-int-text-cpenal.pdf.

²⁰ CODIGO PENAL DE COSTA RICA, Libro Primero No.4573 (1970) art.171 (Costa Rica), available at: http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/sp/cri/sp_cri-int-text-cpenal.pdf.

²¹ CODIGO PENAL DE COSTA RICA, Libro Primero No.4573 (1970) art.172 (Costa Rica), available at: http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/sp/cri/sp_cri-int-text-cpenal.pdf.

²² CODIGO PENAL DE COSTA RICA, Libro Primero No.4573 (1970) art.170 (Costa Rica) §2 §3, available at: http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/sp/cri/sp_cri-int-text-cpenal.pdf.

²³ CODIGO PENAL DE COSTA RICA Libro Primero No.4573 (1970) art.173 (Costa Rica), available at: http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/sp/cri/sp_cri-int-text-cpenal.pdf.

The Narcotics, Psychotropic Substances, Illegal Drugs, and Related Activities Act criminalizes the laundering of assets generated by specified criminal actions.²⁴ The act also allows the freezing, seizure, and confiscation of assets stemming from the offenses covered by the act.²⁵ The Office of the Auditor General for Financial Bodies is the supervisory body that conducts audits of banks and other nonbanking financial institutions, an important tool in uncovering and prosecuting criminal activity.

The Law Against Corruption and Illegal Enrichment in the Civil Service regulates the conduct of public employees.²⁶ It also requires sworn declaration of assets by officers in all branches of government.

In July 2007, the Costa Rican government sponsored a seminar on human trafficking, bringing together various government institutions such as the Child Welfare Office, the National Institute for Women, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Public Security. The conference was part of a larger Costa Rican plan to step up government efforts to combat human trafficking. The government is in the process of drafting a national plan to create harsher sentences for those convicted of human trafficking.²⁷

Nongovernmental and International Organization Responses

In August 2008, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) joined forces with the National Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling of Costa Rica and Nicaragua's National Committee Against Human Trafficking to bring awareness and training to public officials, including police and immigration officers, nongovernmental organization staff, and other relevant stakeholders. The goal was to educate them on how to identify trafficking networks and how to provide assistance to victims in border areas. In training local officials, especially border patrol police—who are often the first to get in contact with the victims—the IOM hopes to improve officials' ability to identify a trafficking victim and provide assistance as soon as possible.²⁸

In May 2006, the Inter-American Development Bank, together with the IOM and the Ricky Martin Foundation, launched an antitrafficking campaign, "Llama y Vive" (Call and Live), in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Peru. The campaign publicizes telephone hotlines for prevention and protection as well as distributes print and audiovisual materials featuring Latin American singer Ricky Martin, a strong advocate for human trafficking victims.²⁹

²⁴ Ley Sobre Estupefacientes, Sustancias Psicotrópicas, Drogas de Uso No Autorizado y Actividades Conexas No.7786 (1998), *available at*:

<http://www.bccr.fi.cr/documentos/secretaria/archivos/Ley%20Estupefacientes%207786-reformada%20Ley%208204.pdf>.

²⁵ *Id.* at 24, art. 31.

²⁶ Ley Sobre el Enriquecimiento Ilícito de Servidores Públicos No.6872 (1983), *available at*: <http://www.dhr.go.cr/Ley6872.doc>.

²⁷ *Government Steps up Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking*, DAILY NEWS TICOTIMES.NET, *available at*: http://www.ticotimes.net/dailyarchive/2007_07/072707.htm#story3.

²⁸ Press Release, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Identifying Human Traffickers and Their Victims, Aug. 29, 2008, *available at*: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pbnAM/cache/offonce?entryId=18356>.

²⁹ Press Release, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), IDB Launches Regional Campaign Against Human Trafficking with Ricky Martin Foundation and IOM (May 10, 2006), *available at*: <http://www.iadb.org/NEWS/detail.cfm?language=English&id=3056>.

In 2004, the NGO World Vision launched a crime prevention campaign in Costa Rica to deter potential child sex tourists. The campaign provides law enforcement agencies with help in identifying and arresting those engaging in child sex tourism. World Vision has also developed campaign potential sex tourists of the consequences of their actions, with deterrent messages in prominent locations across the United States and Costa Rica, such as in airports and on billboards.³⁰

Paniamor, a Costa Rican child charity, has been active since 2004 in educating the tourism industry about child sex tourism. The NGO works with the Costa Rican tourism industry, particularly the Costa Rican Chamber of Hotels, to train service personnel such as waiters and taxi drivers not to be complicit in tourists' attempts to find minors for sex. The educational campaign teaches employees of the tourism sector about the harm child sexual exploitation can do, and how to discourage and even report child sex tourists.³¹

Multilateral Initiatives

On June 18, 2008, high-level security and migration authorities, as well as ambassadors from Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, united for a conference on migration in relation to human trafficking and prostitution. Participants discussed problems such as the large number of Dominicans that are increasingly trafficked to Costa Rica using illegal immigration documents or marriages of convenience to cross the border. The conference allowed both governments to further their understanding and study of the topic and to agree on preventative measures that would benefit both nations.³²

³⁰ World Vision, The Child Sex Tourism Prevention Project, (2006), *available at*: <http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/globalissues-stp>.

³¹ Fundacion Paniamor, <http://www.paniamor.or.cr/resumenglish.php> (last visited June 30, 2010).

³² *Costa Rica y República Dominicana analizan la trata de personas*, RADIO LA PRIMERISIMA, June 18, 2008, *available at*: <http://www.radiolaprimerisima.com/noticias/resumen/31819>.