

Monthly Situation Overview: Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants living outside of shelters, Boa Vista city

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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

BACKGROUND

As a consequence of social, economic and political turmoil in Venezuela, a rising number of Venezuelans have been crossing the border into Brazil since early 2015 to seek asylum and/or better livelihood opportunities. As of June 2018, it was estimated that over 50,000 Venezuelans are in Brazil, 25,000 of whom are in the northern city Boa Vista, capital of Roraima state according to the Boa Vista Municipality (June 2018). Recently, the influx of Venezuelans into Boa Vista has increased, affecting the city's capacity to ensure access to basic services for new arrivals.

There are currently information gaps on the humanitarian situation and needs of Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants living within the city outside of shelters managed by humanitarian actors. To support the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and partners, REACH has conducted an area-based assessment per city macro area¹ aiming to provide an overview of the main needs and vulnerabilities of this population group.

KEY FIGURES



Estimated total number of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers in Boa Vista²: **25,000**



Number of registered Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers in Roraima State (between the year 2015 and June 2018)³: **46,640**



Reported number of Venezuelan children accessing schools²: **2,094**



Reported number of Venezuelans with access to health care services in Boa Vista city⁴: **10,750**

¹ Macro areas refer to a regroupment of neighbourhoods done by the Reference Center for Social Assistance (CRAS) in order to provide services. This regroupment is based on socio-economic similarities and basic services catchment areas.

² Except for numbers regarding registered individuals, quantitative figures in this section have been provided by the Boa Vista Municipality (June 2018).

³ This total does not include the number of future registration appointments scheduled (4,200) and the number of registration appointments missed (5,900), which would add up to a total of 56,740 individuals (Brazilian Federal Police, June 2018).

⁴ Calculated based on the number of Venezuelans reportedly in possession of the national health card that gives access to public health services (referred to as SUS).

Map 1. Boa Vista macro areas



METHODOLOGY

This Situation Overview summarises key findings from data collected by REACH between 13 May and 26 June 2018 in 57 neighbourhoods in Boa Vista city. Data was collected through 58 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a total of 496 Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants (227 women and 269 men), 63 Brazilian Key Informant (KI) interviews with individuals with knowledge and observations of locations within the city where vulnerable population groups were reported to live in. KIs included municipality officials working in health facilities and in public education institutions as well as other community leaders such as neighbourhood representatives. Given the methodology used, the information presented here should be considered indicative only and cannot be generalised with a given level of confidence and margin of error.



DISPLACEMENT

Area of origin of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers in Boa Vista

The large majority of Venezuelan FGD participants are from the Northeast region (56%), and from the South region, mainly Bolivar state (17%) that shares a border with Roraima state (Brazil). The most mentioned cities of origin of Venezuelans living in Boa Vista include El Tigre, in Anzoátegui state, and Maturín, in Monagas state.



Push factors

Most commonly reported reasons for leaving Venezuela (as reported by FGD participants)¹:

- Elevated inflation, lack of liquidity and unemployment (52 of 59 FGDs)
- Lack of food, including in school-feeding programmes (50 of 59 FGDs)
- Lack of medication and access to healthcare services (44 of 59 FGDs)
- Increasing urban insecurity and/or violence (27 of 59 FGDs)

In light of the country's economic and social turmoil, Venezuelans lack employment opportunities and access to primary needs such as food and basic services, including health, education and transportation.

Pull factors (Brazil)

The primary pull factors attracting Venezuelans to Brazil are **geographic proximity** including

its accessibility via land routes, and the fact that displacement towards Brazil is reportedly **less costly** in comparison to other destinations, such as Colombia, where traveling expenses are reportedly done in dollars (a currency for which the exchange rate is higher than the rate for the Brazilian real). Another important pull factor is the **non-requirement of passports for Venezuelan nationals entering the Brazilian land border**, a document increasingly difficult to obtain in Venezuela for both the cost and accessibility of expedition services.

Pull factors (Boa Vista city)

The main reason Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers reportedly come to Boa Vista is also geographic proximity (the closest Brazilian state capital to Venezuela). In this context, **geographic proximity** is reported to be important both for accessibility reasons and because it facilitates a return to Venezuela.

FGD participants revealed that the **lack of resources to continue their journey** is an important factor leading Venezuelans to remain in Boa Vista. With the closest Brazilian state capital (Manaus) being 780 km away from the municipality of Boa Vista, the movement of Venezuelans towards other regions of the country is often hampered by economic factors.²



INTENTIONS

New arrivals

New arrivals were reported in all macro areas of Boa Vista with an estimated average of 10 Venezuelans arriving in each of the cities' neighbourhoods on a weekly basis.

Future displacement

More than half of the FGD participants expressed a willingness to continue their journey towards other locations both in and outside of Brazil. Most cited aspired destinations include:

Within Brazil (federal units):		Outside Brazil:	
1 st	Amazonas	1 st	Peru
2 nd	Distrito Federal	2 nd	Chile
3 rd	Santa Catarina	3 rd	Argentina

Reasons for new displacement

FGD participants indicated that Venezuelans in transit or who intend to leave Boa Vista will reportedly move to other countries or Brazilian cities searching for better livelihood opportunities.

¹ FGD participants could report multiple answers.

² The average bus fare (least costly means of transportation) to Manaus being an average of 120 BRL (Exchange rate as of 9 July 2018: 1 USD = 3.87 BRL). In addition, the northern region of Brazil is separated from the country's other regions by large river basins, limiting transportation alternatives and increasing the price of those that exist.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

Population composition³

According to data collected by the Municipality of Boa Vista,³ the majority of Venezuelans currently living in Boa Vista are males (57%) aged 15 to 60 years (74%). The majority of the adult population (aged 18 or above) are single individuals (65%) rather than being married; more than half of these single individuals are female. Both FGD and KIs indicated that little to no indigenous groups are currently living outside of shelters in Boa Vista other than in Pintolândia macro area.⁴

Education background

FGD participants reported that the large majority of Venezuelans living in Boa Vista have a **low level of education**, most having completed no more than secondary education (as the case of the majority of FGD participants). However, there are reportedly **few professionals with higher education**, such as engineers, lawyers and health professionals, within the city.



SHELTER

Housing conditions

Within the majority of assessed neighbourhoods, the main housing options for Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers in Boa Vista are **shared rented houses. On average there are 2-3 family groups living within a same house, accommodating 6 to 10 people.** The price of a rented room is reported to vary between 250 and 500 Brazilian real (BRL). Nonetheless, FGD participants indicated that **in some cases shared houses can accommodate 11 to 20 people.** This was mostly the case in Centenário macro area, where the rent price was reported to vary from 500 to 750 BRL.

FGD participants also revealed that many Venezuelans living outside of shelters in Boa Vista are currently residing in spaces granted by host community members. This was reported mostly in Cauamé, Nova Cidade and Silvio Leite macro areas, often in peri-urban zones.

Occupation of public spaces

A **significant number of Venezuelans in Boa Vista are currently living in public spaces**, including non-used public buildings, public squares and local bus terminals. This population was reported to have **limited access to WASH infrastructure and electricity.** These vulnerable groups were reported to live mostly in Cauamé, São Francisco and União macro areas (see Vulnerability Map on page 5).

³ Data was collected between 28 May and 9 June through interviews with 9,000 Venezuelans; sampling was not representative. [Report available here.](#)

⁴ There is currently one shelter (located in Pintolândia macro area and called by the same name) accommodating Venezuelan indigenous populations currently living in Boa Vista. An estimated 750 indigenous people, the majority of which from the Warao ethnicity, are currently living in this shelter.



LEGAL STATUS

Documentation

The **majority of Venezuelans are reportedly registered with local authorities** and registration is mostly perceived as advantageous. FGD participants reported that those who have a tourist visa are mostly new arrivals or in-transit. Very few cases of non-registered individuals were reported, mainly at Pintolândia macro area.

Reported **challenges faced in acquiring documentation include** the distance of the Federal Police⁵ (mostly in the case of Venezuelans living in peri-urban areas in Silvio Leite and Cauamé macro areas) to Venezuelans residence, **limited transportation means** to arrive in the premises of this institution, and **limited internet access**, through which registration forms for temporary residence can be filled.⁶ An additional factor that hampers the registration of Venezuelans is the **lengthy time gap between the request for registration in the Federal Police and the registration appointment date** (reportedly being as long as three months). This is due to the limited registration capacity of federal actors in Boa Vista, and can have a significant impact on access to documentation.⁷

Registration status

Most Venezuelans participating in the FGDs reported to be registered as asylum seekers.⁸ The most commonly reported reason leading Venezuelans to choose this legal pathway was the perception that this **leads to better access to aid**, in particular food and shelter. Other reasons for selecting this pathway were that as the procedure can be quicker than other legal pathways, it would **subsequently be faster to obtain other documentation such as Brazilian work permits**, as well as the fact that the asylum procedure requires less documentation. Factors that hamper the choice of this legal pathway include the **annual renewals of asylum seeker status**, the perception of the refugee status as an **obstacle to local integration** and the perception that this **could lead to political and social discrimination upon return** to their country of origin.

Another legal pathway available for Venezuelans arriving to Boa Vista is the temporary residence card. The main reported reasons leading to the choice of this legal pathway include the perceptions that the **two-year validity of this document**, as opposed to the annual renewal procedure for the asylum seeker status, **will allow for greater protection** and that it **facilitates periodic return** to Venezuela. This status is also perceived to **contribute to local integration**, in particular in regard to local **labour market insertion** and to **accessing financial credit.** Access to this legal pathway is reportedly **limited by the requirement of additional documentation** for registration (such as birth certificates).

⁵ Federal body responsible for the registration of foreign nationals.

⁶ Under Brazilian legislation (2017), Venezuelan nationals have the right to apply for temporary residence in Brazil, which is valid for two years.

⁷ Between the beginning of the influx in 2015 and June 2018, out of the 56,700 Venezuelans that approached the Brazilian Federal Police to request registration, 10% did not return for the scheduled appointment (Source: [Globo News, July 2017](#)).

⁸ As part of the facilitated registration process in Brazil, asylum seekers are given a provisional protocol as soon as their asylum claim has been made. This ID document constitutes proof of their right to remain in Brazilian territory until the final decision of the asylum procedure.



ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Awareness of legal rights

FGD participants highlighted a lack of understanding of the full range of legal pathways available to Venezuelans in Brazil, in particular in regard to the option of temporary residence. In addition to this, FGD participants reported having **insufficient knowledge about their legal rights** or legal services in the case of violated rights. **Information needs** were reported to exist on: **national labour law** (including minimum wages and how to register small business), **immigration laws in Brazil**, implication of registration pathways, validation and translation of documents, regulation on access to shelters and **emergency numbers**.

Sources of information

The **main reported information sources are word-of-mouth via personal acquaintances**, the Federal Police and the **Internet, especially social media** (Facebook and Whatsapp groups). Limited access to the web and lack of mobile phones were reported as factors limiting access to information.



LIVELIHOODS

Access to employment

FGD participants highlighted that Venezuelans living in Boa Vista have limited access to job opportunities. Most reportedly **work irregularly 10 to 15 days per month**, mainly in the informal sector and often in occupations different from those in their country of origin. Venezuelan **men are reported to work mostly as stonemasons, weeders and painters**, and Venezuelan **women were reported to work as cleaners, cooks, nannies and street vendors**. In areas such as Pintolândia and Silvio Leite, Venezuelan women were also reported to work in sectors often reserved to men (as weeders or stonemasons), in support of their partners.

The **daily wages** received by Venezuelans **reportedly varies from 30 to 50 BRL**, going up to as much as 100 BRL. **Minimum reported daily wages varied from 5 to 20 BRL, with women often receiving less** for a day of work than men. Some FGD participants reported being **paid with in-kind donations**, such as food items and second-hand mobile phones.

According to FGD participants, the main challenges faced by Venezuelans to access livelihood opportunities are **language barriers, perceived discrimination/xenophobia**, lack of job offers, lack of documentation and **lack of professional recommendations/references by Brazilians**.

Exposure to labour risks

Among the labour risks Venezuelans reportedly face are **labour exploitation** (through

excessive working hours and wages below Brazilian legal standards), **lack of safety equipments** for construction workers, and **non-payment of agreed-upon salaries** by employers. **Women reportedly** face additional protection risks in their livelihood activities, such as **sexual and/or verbal harassment** and indecent exposure. FGD participants also revealed that farm workers reportedly face risk of violence (including unconfirmed but widespread rumors of disappearance), leading Venezuelans to avoid livelihood activities in the agriculture sector.



ACCESS TO SERVICES

Reported level of access to health

The majority of FGD participants stated that they have **full access to health services**, which are considered to be of good quality. In addition, it was reported that Venezuelans living in peri-urban areas have **benefited from a home-based vaccination programme**. Nonetheless, perceived discrimination (by both hospital staff and Brazilian clients) as well as the difficulty to obtain the health card of the national public health system reportedly limit Venezuelans from accessing these services. Population **groups most in need of health services are reportedly pregnant women and individuals suffering from hypertension**.

Improvements suggested by KIs

KIs suggested hiring additional personnel for health units and the implementation of night shifts in basic health units as a measure to improve the capacity of health services to best respond to the increase in service demand.

Reported level of access to education

Although many FGD participants reported not having children in school age, findings indicate that this population reportedly **have access to education services** in Boa Vista, except in Centenário and Pintolândia macro areas where access was reported to be limited. The main reported **factors limiting access to education include lack of places available** (especially in Pintolândia and União) **language barriers** (faced both by parents in the enrollment process and by children in integrating the school system), **lack of documents required for enrollment** and the **distance** of childrens' homes to school. Cases of bullying were also reported as a challenge faced by Venezuelan students enrolled in schools in Pintolândia macro area.

Improvements suggested by KIs

KIs suggested the availability of Portuguese classes specifically tailored to Venezuelan students and the promotion of debates and awareness campaigns on diversity and inclusion in schools as important measures to best integrate this population group in schools. Socio-educational activities with parents were also among suggestions given by KIs. Flexibility measures such as integration of Venezuelan children in classes prior to the completion of their enrollment process was mentioned as a strategy some schools take to improve the access of this population group to education.

Reported level of access to humanitarian aid

FGD participants reported that many Venezuelans living outside of shelters have received sporadic aid, including distribution of food and non-food items (including clothes, hygiene and kitchen items), offers of Portuguese classes and housing support through allocation of available spaces in houses belonging to host community members. They also reported that Venezuelans living in Cauamé and São Francisco are those with most access to aid, whereas **Venezuelans living in Nova Cidade and Silvio Leite** are those that **least access aid**.

The majority of reported aid actors providing assistance to Venezuelans in Boa Vista are religious institutions (40 out of 60 actors cited by FGD participants), followed by the civil society actors including non-organized host community members (11 out of 60). The **highest numbers of reported aid actors were in Cauamé, São Francisco and Pintolândia**, accounting for 75% of aid actors mentioned, while those with less presence of aid actors were Nova Cidade and União with only two reported religious aid actors each. **The main reported needs** of FGD participants were **employment opportunities, housing support, non-food items and language classes**.



PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

Main trends

Venezuelans reported to have good relations with the host community, underlining generosity, receptivity and donations (food and non-food items). However, there were reports of growing tensions and distrust between the two communities. Areas where relations were reported to be more peaceful were Silvio Leite and Nova Cidade and areas where tension was reported to be more present were São Francisco and Cauamé. Overall, both FGD participants and KIs reported that the relationship between the two communities has deteriorated since early 2018.

Reported tension factors

Tension factors reported by FGD participants included verbal harassment (reportedly typically comprising accusations of certain behaviours), and intimidating acts using motorised vehicles against Venezuelans pedestrians done by host community members. In addition, Venezuelan women reported suffering from stigmatization, often being associated with prostitution. On the other hand tension factors reported by KIs were the perception of health services to be overstrained, fear of losing work opportunities to Venezuelans and the growing feeling of insecurity, particularly in areas where there is a strong presence of Venezuelan men.

Suggested activities to improve peaceful coexistence

Among the suggestions made by FGD participants to improve peaceful coexistence were cultural exchange activities involving sports, gastronomy and culture, language classes, as well as awareness campaigns through communication networks (television, radio and the internet) providing non-biased information on the current social and economic situation in their country of origin.



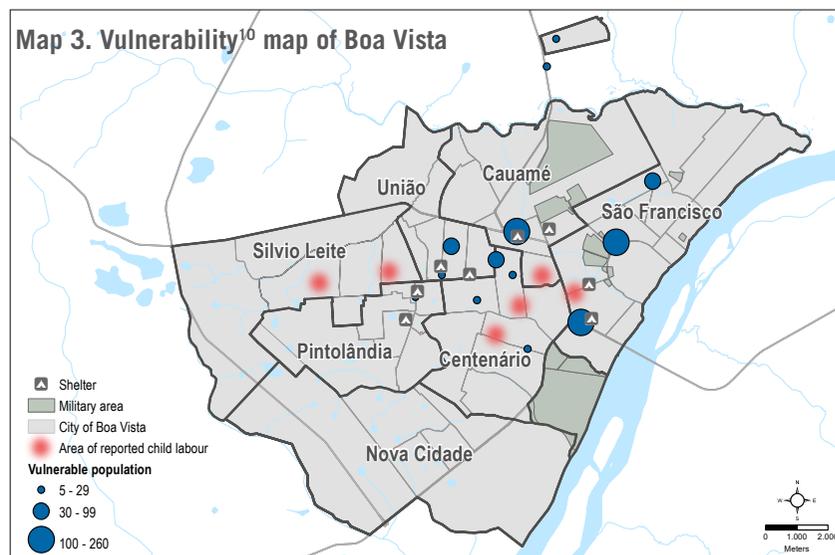
PROTECTION

Vulnerable population

Most of the Venezuelans living in open air conditions were observed in São Francisco macro area in the surrounding of the local bus terminal. Comprised mostly of Venezuelan men, but with a considerable amount of elderly and minors, this population lacks access to WASH infrastructure as well as other basic needs such as electricity used for the purpose of charging mobile phones and assuring communication with friends and family.

Protection concern for children

The main reported protection concern for Venezuelan children living in Boa Vista was child labour⁹, reported to occur mostly in the proximity of local markets in Cauamé, Centenário, Silvio Leite and São Francisco macro areas. Reported child labour activities were mostly child begging (15 of 22 FGDs), followed by street vending and plastic waste collection.



About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organisations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH aims to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to, and within the framework of, inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter: [@REACH_info](https://twitter.com/REACH_info).

9. Child labour is defined as labour that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, and that is harmful to physical or mental development (ILO).

10. Population living in open air conditions, and reported child labour.