

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

October 2018

## BACKGROUND

In early 2015, thousands of Venezuelans started fleeing their country of origin due to ongoing social, economic and political turmoil. An estimated 85,000<sup>1</sup> Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants are currently in Brazil, of which 25,000<sup>2</sup> are located in the northern city of Boa Vista, capital of Roraima state which borders Venezuela. Throughout 2018 the rate of arrivals has increased, stretching the city's capacity to ensure access to basic services. As Venezuelan populations continue to arrive in Roraima, there is a need for regularly updated, detailed information about their needs and vulnerabilities, particularly those populations living outside of shelters managed by humanitarian actors.

REACH, in support of the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other partners, is conducting regular area-based assessments to provide an evidence-base for humanitarian planning and response. This report presents the results of the fourth round of assessment conducted in Boa Vista and aims to provide an update on the vulnerabilities and priority needs of affected populations.<sup>3</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS

- Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants living in Boa Vista reported **significant difficulties accessing livelihoods**, due to a perceived distrust by host community members, a lack of employment opportunities and the language barrier. Women reportedly faced additional obstacles due to the lack of appropriate childcare facilities for their children.
- **Lack of access to rental housing continues to put pressure on Venezuelan households**, and is compounded by the previously noted lack of employment opportunities. Increasingly, FGD participants reported that Venezuelans have been pushed to urban peripheries or into shelters managed by humanitarian actors due to their inability to meet landlord requirements.
- **Venezuelan women reportedly face many obstacles while displaced in Brazil**. Notable challenges relate to verbal and sexual harassment, lack of access to sanitation and hygiene facilities for pregnant and menstruating women.
- Migrants and asylum seekers indicated **difficulties in obtaining fresh food products** such as vegetables, fruits, eggs and meat. Many FGD participants reported relying on lower quality or highly processed food to meet nutritional needs.

1. Federal Police, August 2018. Number represents the total of people registered by the Federal Police since 2015

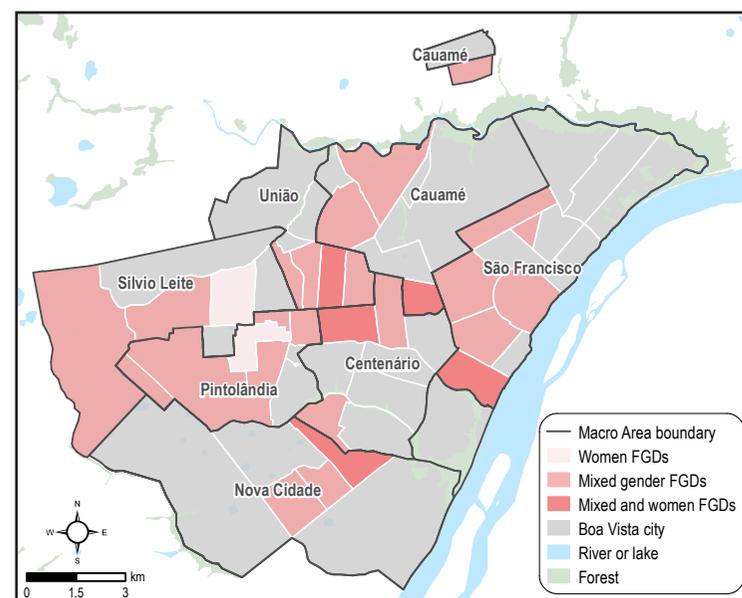
2. Boa Vista Municipality, July 2018

3. The Situation Overview from August is available here: [English](#); [Portuguese](#)

## METHODOLOGY

REACH conducted primary data collection between 16 to 30 October in 28 of the 57 neighbourhoods in the city of Boa Vista (see Map 1 below). Data was collected through 28 mixed-gender Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a total of 182 Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants (112 women and 70 men) and 7 FGDs with Venezuelan women (51 women), designed with the support of UNHCR, UNICEF and UNFPA. Participants were selected from their neighbourhoods of residence and chosen based on their knowledge of the multi-sectoral needs of populations living in their neighbourhoods. The FGDs included a participatory mapping exercise to identify areas with high concentration of Venezuelans as well as cases of people living in vulnerable conditions, which REACH subsequently verified through direct observation and collection of 30 Key Informant (KI) interviews in the locations reported by FGD participants. While REACH attempted to be comprehensive in the direct observation of cases of Venezuelans living in vulnerable conditions, the information presented here should be considered indicative.

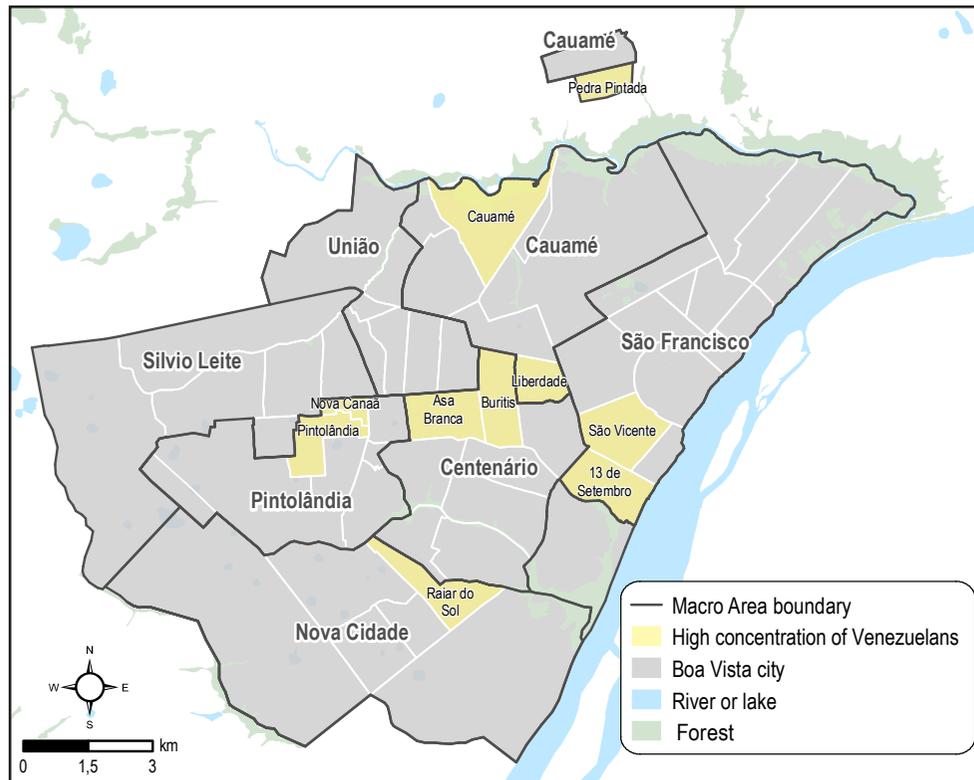
Map 1. Assessed neighbourhoods



## DEMOGRAPHICS AND INTENTIONS

REACH identified Venezuelan populations living in all 7 Macroareas of Boa Vista, and FGD participants reported that the **greatest concentration of Venezuelans were in the neighbourhoods of Pintolândia, Liberdade, Nova Canãa, Asa Branca, Cauamé, Raiar do Sol, Pedra Pintada, 13 de Setembro, São Vicente and Buritis** at the date of assessment (see Map 2, below). Among the main reported factors for relocating to these neighbourhoods were the presence of family members and personal acquaintances as well as easy access to healthcare, education services and markets. Other factors noted included affordable housing cost and security.

**Map 2. Neighbourhoods with greatest concentration of Venezuelans in Boa Vista**



As reported by the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) most recent Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) report<sup>4</sup>, the largest group of Venezuelans are men between the ages of 18 and 35. A significant proportion of migrants and asylum seekers residing in Boa Vista were reportedly living with family members, with the average household including 1 to 3 children. FGD participants noted that the number of Venezuelan children living in Boa Vista had increased from 3 months ago.

Federal Police reported that approximately **54,100 Venezuelans had registered as asylum seekers between 2015 and October, 2018**.<sup>5</sup> FGD participants, however, clarified that many migrants preferred temporary residence status because of **longer validity of registration** (2 years, compared to required annual renewal from those with asylum seeker status), **ease of return to Venezuela**,<sup>6</sup> **ease of opening a bank account, and the ability to obtain a Brazilian ID card that facilitates accessing basic services.**

The majority of migrants and asylum seekers reported that it is a common practice to sporadically send non-perishable food and medicines to relatives in Venezuela, mostly through personal acquaintances returning to the country for visits. FGD participants further reported that Venezuelans send money to their relatives, often using a complex process of transferring funds through third parties due to disruptions in the Venezuelan financial system.

## SHELTER

FGD participants reported that **the majority of Venezuelans in Boa Vista live in rented houses with one room and a bathroom shared with 2 or 3 families** (7-10 people), with the exception of Pedra Pintada neighbourhood where Venezuelans predominantly live in free accommodation from host community members. FGD participants reported monthly rental prices varying between approximately 250 and 500 BRL.<sup>7</sup> Common specific issues related to shelter conditions were damage to walls and roofs, bad ventilation, exposed sewage and inadequate/poor electric installation.

Accessing housing also reportedly posed challenges, particularly the **lack of available rental housing stock, increasing cost of rent, and perceived discrimination and distrust of Venezuelans by Brazilian landlords.** FGD participants reported that in some cases, owners required a recommendation from Brazilians, a signed work permit and 2-6 months of deposit in order to secure a rental property. Families with children reportedly faced greater rates of rejection. Coupled with the lack of access to sustainable livelihoods, some FGD participants noted an increase of Venezuelans reportedly moving out of rented houses and into shelters managed by humanitarian actors due to the difficulties making rent payments. Additionally, in the context of scarce housing availability and perceived discrimination by landlords, **Venezuelans reportedly are being pushed to more distant neighbourhoods.** Participants noted that although these neighbourhoods have relatively lower cost of living (including free access to water) they also often have poor access to healthcare, education and other basic services.

7. US\$ 64,90 - US\$ 130,00. 1,0 USD = 3,85 BRL, 28 November 2018.

4. International Migration Organization (IOM), Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), available at: <https://www.globaldtm.info/>

5. Available at: [http://www.casacivil.gov.br/operacao-acolhida/documentos/venezuela-apresentacao-dia-16\\_10\\_2018-casa-civil-1.pptx/@@download/file/Venezuela%20-%20APRESENTA%C3%87%C3%83O%20DIA%2016\\_10\\_2018%20-%20Casa%20Civil.pdf](http://www.casacivil.gov.br/operacao-acolhida/documentos/venezuela-apresentacao-dia-16_10_2018-casa-civil-1.pptx/@@download/file/Venezuela%20-%20APRESENTA%C3%87%C3%83O%20DIA%2016_10_2018%20-%20Casa%20Civil.pdf)

6. Venezuelan asylum seekers must send a formal notification to the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) if they leave Brazil in any occasion.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

The primary professional background reported by FGD participants was **elementary occupations, followed by professionals with higher education or technical background**. The main occupations of Venezuelans in Brazil reported were stonemasons, gardeners, cooks and painters, with daily salaries varying between 20-100 BRL. Women were reportedly working as cleaners, manicurists, hairdressers, street vendors, waitresses, elder-care and childcare, with daily salaries varying between 10-100 BRL. These labour activities were reported to be informal and irregular.

FGD participants confirmed that **most Venezuelans living in Boa Vista had been issued Brazilian work permits**.<sup>8</sup> Participants reported that the main advantages of having a work permit are the ease of finding steady jobs, renting a house, and accessing bank services, including credit.

Some of the main challenges to access livelihoods reported by FGD participants were **perceived distrust by Brazilian host community members, the lack of employment opportunities in Boa Vista and the language barrier**. Venezuelan women reported facing additional difficulties due to verbal and/or sexual harassment (including in job interviews) and lack of information about adequate childcare opportunities, especially public childcare services. In certain cases, women reported leaving children at home with inadequate supervision in order to access livelihoods.

FGD respondents emphasised that Venezuelans face the ongoing risk of labour rights violations, particularly excessive hours of work, non-payment of salaries, a lack of safety equipment (boots, gloves and helmets), particularly for workers in the construction and agriculture sectors. FGD participants also noted knowledge of violence and harassment against Venezuelans working in the agricultural sector.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The majority of Venezuelans reported that their main channels of information are word of mouth and the internet. A significant trend amongst FGD participants was the use of social media, such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups via mobile internet. Participants noted greater challenges accessing information after the disablement of the previously free Wi-Fi in public squares.

The main informational needs reported in FGDs were labour rights (mainly institutions and proceedings to report violations), access to basic services (i.e. the location of the nearest health units, enrolment vacancies in schools, access to higher education and validation of foreign educational credentials).

8. Since December of 2017, around 14,311 migrants and asylum seekers requested a work permit. Available at: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/noticias/cidadania-e-inclusao/2018/10/carteira-de-trabalho-e-entregue-a-mais-de-14-3-mil-venezuelanos>

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

### Health

**Healthcare facilities were reportedly accessible to the majority of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers**. It is considered to be of good quality, with free distribution of medicines, and home visits for treatment and vaccines. Venezuelans reported that some medical staff speak Spanish and provide good attendance. Several women FGD participants reported that women's health services such as family planning are available in Boa Vista. **The participants who had accessed prenatal care services in Boa Vista considered it of good quality**, with free medicine and vitamins, home based visits, good infrastructure and quality care from healthcare professionals. The most used family planning methods accessible were reported to be oral contraceptive, injections and condoms. Participants reported some cases of women using intrauterine devices (IUD), however they were most frequently acquired while still in Venezuela.

### Education

**The majority of Venezuelan school-age children reportedly had access to education facilities and were well integrated into the local system**. Parents participating in FGDs reported that children received uniforms, books and meals at school. However, they also noted the existence of sporadic cases of bullying and discrimination of their children both by other students and education facility employees. The main difficulties that Venezuelans mentioned in accessing educational services were lack of enrolment vacancies in education facilities, lack of documentation, and large distance to schools. Participants affirmed that recreation spaces for children are available in Boa Vista, however some, such as Praça dos Buritis, have inadequate infrastructure, and others, located in Pedra Pintada and Asa Branca neighbourhoods, are potentially dangerous abandoned or vacant lots. In Laura Moreira, Jardim Primavera, Raiar do Sol and Liberdade neighbourhoods, participants reported a complete lack of recreation spaces for children.

### Humanitarian assistance

Overall, **FGD participants in Boa Vista reported receiving insufficient aid**. The most common form of aid reportedly received by migrants and asylum seekers was non-perishable food assistance, particularly from religious institutions. Financial aid from the government-led Bolsa Familia program was also reportedly available to some participants. The greatest reported challenges in accessing aid were lack of information, long queues at service centres. Regarding difficulties in Bolsa Familia programme Venezuelans reported the delay of 2 to 3 months to register as well as the requirement that all family members have documentation. A few cases of donations provided by local community members including clothes and household items were reported. Participants reported that food assistance through voucher cards and rental assistance were the most needed emergency aid.

## Transport

Venezuelan FGD participants reported **poor access to public transport** due to a lack of financial resources and poor transportation network coverage in some regions of the city. Migrants and asylum seekers therefore reported preferring walking or cycling as primary means of transportation. Poor transportation was noted as a barrier to accessing sustainable livelihood opportunities and schools.



## PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

In all assessed areas of the city, **Venezuelans reported having limited interaction with host community members.** FGD respondents indicated that the most common locations for interaction were churches, workplaces and markets. Additionally, Venezuelan women noted interaction with host community women in health units and schools. In general, Venezuelans characterised their relationship with the host community as positive, **highlighting kindness and cordiality.** Despite overall positive interactions, FGD participants did report sporadic negative interactions such as aggressive behaviour in the street or physical assault. In addition, some FGD participants reported experiencing violence from police authorities, sometimes while being expelled from public spaces. Venezuelan women reported facing stigma and discrimination related to the impression that they were involved in prostitution and crime. They indicated frequent cases of verbal harassment by Brazilian men in public spaces and in workplaces. Participants of all women's FGDs indicated a desire for greater interaction with women from the host community, especially activities involving exchange of information about gastronomy and cosmetics custom.



## PROTECTION

Previous assessments have noted that Venezuelan **women face unique issues while displaced in Brazil.** With the support of UNCHR, UNFPA and UNICEF, REACH conducted focus group discussions with Venezuelan women and expanded questions about children to assess some of these concerns. **Among the most common reported issues were sexual and other harassment by men and a lack of adequate infrastructure for personal hygiene,** particularly for menstruating women. Relatedly, FGD participants noted increasing rates of urinary tract infections and other hygiene-related illnesses. Other important obstacles indicated by FGD participants were the risks faced by women without proper legal documentation to bring children across the border. Participants noted that such women often cross through informal crossing points into Pacaraima, increasing the physical risk of robbery or violence to them and to their children. **Regarding legal assistance, the majority of FGD**

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).

**participants reported not accessing legal services for labour violations due to fear of retribution from employers and the perception that future employers would refuse to hire them.** Women also reported a lack of awareness about their legal rights and recourse in cases of verbal or physical violence. Additionally, commercial sex workers mentioned the risk of contracting sexually transmitted disease and rape.

## Protection concern for children

Child labour<sup>9</sup> was the main protection concern for children living in Boa Vista reported by FGD participants. A participatory mapping activity identified **cases of child labour in the neighbourhoods of Senador Hélio Campos, Nova Cidade, Cauamé, Pedra Pintada, Centro and Bela Vista neighbourhood.** Most commonly, participants noted that children work as stonemasons, cleaners, gardeners, street vendors and beggars near local supermarkets.



## FOOD SECURITY

Regarding access to food, Venezuelan FGD participants reported **the greatest food needs as milk (particularly for children), maize flour and black beans,** which FGD participants noted are traditional components of the typical Venezuelan diet that are more difficult to locate in Brazil. Additionally, **due to financial pressure migrants and asylum seekers reported limited access to fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs and meat.** Participants reported that households engage in coping strategies such as resorting to less preferred or lower quality food products such as processed meats and sausages. FGD participants also noted difficulty storing perishable food products due to inadequate storage spaces leading households to buy products in small quantities leading to issues of supply.

### 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](http://www.reach-initiative.org). You can contact us directly at: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org) and follow us on Twitter: [@REACH\\_info](https://twitter.com/REACH_info).