

# Situation Overview V: Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants living outside of shelters, Manaus city

November 2018

## BACKGROUND

Since early 2015, around 3 million<sup>1</sup> Venezuelans have left their country due to ongoing social, economic and political turmoil. Of those, officials estimate that approximately 117,000<sup>2</sup> Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants are currently in Brazil. Amazonas is the region with the third highest rate of asylum requests with the Federal Police, following behind the states of Roraima and São Paulo. In the first half of 2018, the number of requests for asylum exceeded the total number that was issued in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Manaus city, the capital of Amazonas state, has received 15% of all Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers that participated in the voluntary relocation programme, known locally as the interiorization programme.<sup>4</sup> As additional Venezuelans continue to arrive in Manaus, there is an ongoing need for detailed information about migrants and asylum seekers living outside of the 14 shelters managed by humanitarian actors in the city.<sup>5</sup>

REACH, in support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other partners, conducted regular area-based assessments of settlements in Brazil with high rates of migration in order to provide evidence-based information for humanitarian planning and response. This report presents the results of the first round of assessments conducted in Manaus, and aims to provide an update on the vulnerabilities and priority needs of affected populations.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Similar to other cities assessed by REACH, Boa Vista and Pacaraima, in Manaus Venezuelans also reported difficulties to access sustainable livelihoods, with the greater majority working in the informal sector and in non-regular labour activities. In particular in Cidade Nova, Compensa, Alvorada and Sao Jorge neighbourhoods, Venezuelans indicated scarce employment opportunities.
- Migrants and asylum seekers reportedly have access to educational and health facilities, although challenges were noted, such as distance to facilities and lack of documentation.
- In FGDs carried out in Manaus, many vulnerable groups of Venezuelan indigenous people were identified, normally families under poor conditions and begging. Furthermore, in FGDs, more than a half of Venezuelan women reported risks of moral or sexual harassment and lack of adequate WASH infrastructure (for hygiene purposes) during displacement in Brazil.

1. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2018/11/5be4192b4/number-refugees-migrants-venezuela-reaches-3-million.html>

2. Federal Police, November 2018.

3. From January to June 2018, 4.779 Venezuelans have requested the asylum protocol in Federal Police in Amazonas State. The asylum protocol is a document filled in at the Federal Police when requesting refugee status. Available at:

<https://g1.globo.com/am/amazonas/noticia/em-6-meses-pedidos-de-refugio-de-venezuelanos-dobram-e-chegam-a-47-mil-no-amazonas.ghtml>

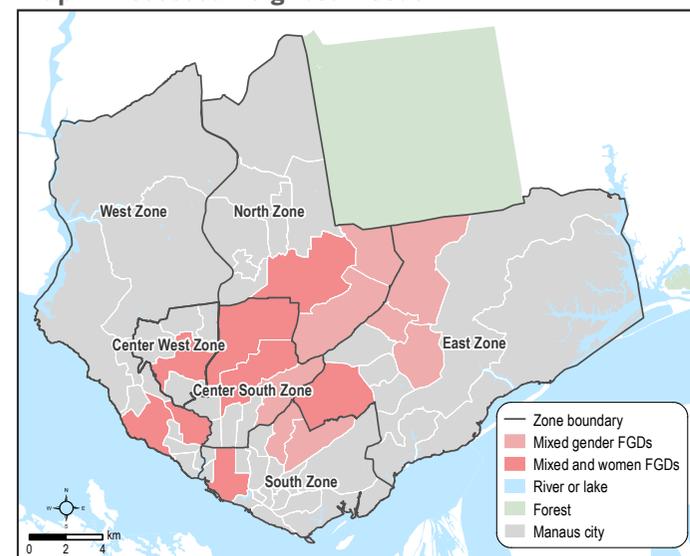
4. International Organization for Migration, Cumulative Report, Interiorization, Operação Acolhida, November 2018.

5. According to the Amazonas State Secretary of Justice, Human Rights and Citizenship, currently there are 341 indigenous persons living in 4 (informal) shelters and 417 non-indigenous people in 10 shelters. (last update from 27 November 2018).

## METHODOLOGY

REACH conducted primary data collection between 30 October and 9 November in 16 of the 63 neighbourhoods in the city of Manaus, which had been identified through Key Informant (KI) interviews and secondary data review as areas with high concentrations of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers (see Map 1 below). Data was collected through 16 mixed-gender Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a total of 108 Venezuelans interviewed (52 men and 56 women) and 8 FGDs with Venezuelan women exclusively (48 women in total). The FGDs with women were designed with the support of UNHCR, UNICEF and UNFPA to address particular information gaps relating to gender. Participants were selected from their neighbourhoods of residence based on the time during which they had been living in the neighbourhood among other factors. The FGDs included a participatory mapping exercise to identify locations and cases of people who were living in vulnerable conditions, which REACH subsequently verified through direct observation, and KI interviews in the locations reported by FGD participants, as well as in additional locations reported by people residing in vulnerable conditions. 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



### Registration

FGD participants noted that the majority of Venezuelans living in Manaus had registered as asylum seekers. Greater proportions of Venezuelans with asylum seeker status were reported to live in the neighbourhoods of Centro, Novo Aleixo and Cidade de Deus. The main reasons that participants reported for registering as asylum seekers over other types of registration were the speed of the process and the reduced burden of documentation. Coroado and Compensa neighbourhoods reportedly had greater proportions of Venezuelans with temporary resident status. Some of the key factors influencing Venezuelans to resort to temporary residency are related to the longer validity period (2 years compared to 1 year for asylum seeker registration) and greater ease of temporary return to Venezuela. In some cases, participants reported to have chosen temporary residence because employers requested an RNE<sup>6</sup> number, which was unavailable to asylum seekers.

Besides the legal register, the great majority of Venezuelans living in Manaus has the CPF<sup>7</sup> document, which reportedly allows them to access education services, activate mobile and fixed phone lines, open bank accounts, access credit, and access reduced prices for medications.

### Push factors

FGD participants reported that the main push factors from their area of origin were the lack of food in Venezuela (including reports of high rates of malnutrition), as well as shortages of medication and employment opportunities, compounded by low salaries and poor access to healthcare and education services. The majority of FGD participants was from Bolivar State, bordering Brazil, followed by Anzoatégui and Monagas States in the north of Venezuela. From their cities of origin, most Venezuelans reportedly arrived in Manaus by bus or hitchhiking.

### Pull factors

The main pull factors that Venezuelan FGD participants mentioned as leading them to displacement in Brazil were the presence of family members, the geographic proximity (particularly for migrants from areas bordering Brazil), as well as the flexible documentation requirements for registering as an asylum seeker. Additionally, FGD participants highlighted the lack of financial resources to move to other further countries, the relatively lower cost of displacement, and the ease of sending food and medicine to relatives in Venezuela as other pull factors for remaining in Brazil. A number of participants reportedly moved to Manaus due to the lack of livelihood opportunities in Boa Vista, and after hearing rumours about additional

6. Registro Nacional de Estrangeiro (RNE), Foreigner National Register, was a document conceded to foreign people considering them as refugees, temporary, permanent or exiled residents. Since 2017, the Brazilian law established a new type of number with the Registro Nacional Migratório (RNM), National Migratory Register, available to temporary residents as well as to asylum seekers.

7. Cadastro de Pessoa Física (CPF), Private Individual Register.

8. Especially due to the existence of a free economic zone in the city, known locally as the Zona Franca de Manaus.

opportunities in Manaus, particularly in the industrial sector.<sup>8</sup>

Pull factors relating to specific regions of the city were most frequently linked to access to services in host community neighbourhoods (particularly schools, childcare and public transport services, markets and banks), support from and/or friendship with host community members, security, as well as availability of or proximity to workplaces or areas with potential livelihood opportunities. Migrants and asylum seekers living in the Petrópolis neighbourhood reported arriving in this area to seek vacancies in a shelter managed by the local church. In the Cidade de Deus neighbourhood, participants highlighted the relatively lower cost of the rental accommodation (including cases of free access to water and electricity).

 **HOUSING**

The majority of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers in Manaus reportedly live in rented houses. FGD participants reported, however, that these houses are usually overcrowded and contain inadequate facilities for the number of inhabitants. In Cidade de Deus neighbourhood, there are reportedly an average of 10 to 12 people sharing 2-room houses, while in Gilberto Mestrinho participants reported up to 14 people residing in the same house. The cost of rental space reportedly varies from 250 BRL to 600 BRL.<sup>9</sup>

 **ECONOMIC SECURITY**

FGD participants reported that most Venezuelans that have access to livelihood opportunities work between 15 to 20 days per month, except in Coroado where FGDs revealed that migrants and asylum seekers often work 3 days per week. The majority of migrants and asylum seekers noted working in the informal sector and being paid on a daily basis. Men and women reportedly work as street vendors. In few cases, men reported to work as stonemasons, car cleaners, cooks and waiters. Also, some women indicated working as cleaners, cooks, hairdressers, and in the manicure and child-care businesses/services. Both genders reported receiving daily salaries of around 30 to 50 BRL.<sup>9</sup>

Among the most common challenges mentioned by FGD participants in accessing livelihood activities were perceived discrimination by employers, lack of documentation and the language barrier. In addition, participants emphasized the importance of having a professional recommendation by Brazilians to find livelihood opportunities. Women reported additional challenges accessing opportunities as a result of difficulties in enrolling their children in childcare services due to lack of information or absence of vacancies, particularly in Cidade Nova, Compensa, Alvorada and São Jorge neighbourhoods.

FGD participants reported that a significant part of Venezuelans in Manaus has a valid work permit document, however, few reported having it signed by employers. In addition, participants in Gilberto Mestrinho, Flores and Nova Aleixo neighborhoods noted difficulties in making an online appointment to request a work permit.<sup>10</sup> Cases of labour exploitation, particularly of exceeding

9. 1,0 USD = 3.85 BRL, 28 November 2018.

10. According to Brazilian law, the signed work permit ensures many labour benefits, such as retirement, unemployment insurance and sick pay.

working hours and non-payment of agreed upon salaries, were reported to be very common among Venezuelans across all parts of the city. Insecurity due to the lack of safety equipment (such as helmets, gloves and security cables) was indicated as a significant risk for those who work in the construction sector. Women highlighted verbal and sexual harassment as constant risks that they face during their labour activities.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Participants reported having access to the Internet through mobile phones or private Wi-Fi networks in the rented houses. Generally, participants reported not having access to the Internet through public Wi-Fi networks. Reportedly, important channels of information include WhatsApp groups (specifically the groups “Informaciones para Venezolanos en Manaus” and “Manaus con Venezolanos”), as well as Facebook groups (specifically the groups “Venezolanos en Manaus” and “Venezolanos en Manaus-Brasil”). Migrants and asylum seekers highlighted labour rights and legal assistance for accommodation rental as the main ongoing information needs. The majority indicated low level of awareness of the existence of legal services or institutions to be accessed in case of violated rights. The language barrier and the lack of mobile phones were considered by FGD participants as the most significant challenges to accessing information.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

### Health

Overall, FGD participants reported that Venezuelans have quite good access to basic and emergency healthcare services<sup>11</sup>, however these at times are located outside of their neighbourhoods, as is the case for people living in Petropolis and Parque 10 de Novembro. Participants reported that Venezuelans consider healthcare services as being of good quality with short waiting times, as well as with receptive and attentive medical staff. Participants also mentioned generally receiving free medications and vaccines. Pregnant women reportedly have access to prenatal healthcare, which is considered as being of good quality. Participants also reported free distribution of vitamins and free medical examinations. Aside from the considerable distance of health units for some participants, no significant difficulties were mentioned in FGDs in the health sector.

Venezuelan women reportedly also have good access to family planning, such as birth control injections, condoms and oral contraceptives from the public health system. However, although the majority of women reported awareness of how to access such family planning services, some have not been accessing it because they reportedly did not consider it as a priority.

11. For basic health, Venezuelans access the “Serviço Único de Saúde” (SUS) units, which are managed by the federal public health system. They also reported having access to the Serviço de Pronto Atendimento (SPA) units for emergency healthcare services, which are managed by the State of Amazonas.

12. Bolsa Familia is a social welfare programme which provides financial aid to poor families (families that have a monthly gross income between 22 USD to 44 USD per person). Families with children participating in this programme must ensure that their children attend school and are vaccinated.

However, in Parque 10, Alvorada, São Jorge and Compensa 2 neighbourhoods, women reported not knowing of health units attending specifically to women’s health.

### Education

FGD participants indicated that the majority of Venezuelan children are reportedly enrolled in schools, however participants from Centro and Aleixo neighbourhoods reported awareness of children not attending educational facilities due to difficulties in enrollment caused by lack of documentation. Other neighbourhoods where children were reported as not attending school were Tancredo Neves, Alvorada, São Jorge and Coroado neighbourhoods, where issues reportedly, and primarily, relate to new arrivals who must wait until the beginning of the following school year to enrol children. Venezuelan parents reported that children are well adapted and integrated. In most neighbourhoods, participants also noted that their children have appropriate spaces for recreation such as squares, parks and sportive courts. In Cidade de Deus, Compensa and Gilberto Mestrinho, São Jorge and Alvorada neighbourhoods, however, participants were unaware of recreational facilities for children and youth.

### Humanitarian assistance

Migrants and asylum seekers reported receiving aid from local residents, with donation of household appliances and clothes. Participants also reportedly receive assistance from religious institutions, particularly food assistance. In the neighbourhoods of Tancredo Neves, Gilberto Mestrinho e Compensa, Cidade Nova and Japiim, participants knew of Venezuelans taking part in the government-run Bolsa Familia programme.<sup>12</sup> FGD participants in Tancredo Neves and Centro reported that the greatest ongoing need for aid was related to financial support for mobility.

### Transport

The majority of participants reported that their primary means of transportation was municipal public transport (buses), however service is reportedly expensive and little information is available about routes and timetables. Walking is also preferred by many Venezuelans according to FGDs. Participants noted that very few migrants and asylum seekers use mobility app services such as Uber, as they reportedly lack funds for this option.

## PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

Venezuelans reported positive relations with host community members, especially in Compensa, Cidade Nova and Petrópolis. FGDs with women indicated that they have few interactions with Brazilians, except in churches and in the workplace. In Gilberto Mestrinho neighbourhood, migrants and asylum seekers perceived that the relations with Brazilians have been deteriorating due to widespread distrust of Venezuelans. Nonetheless, in Compensa, community activities carried out by religious entities, such as choruses or other activities, have reportedly strengthened ties between Venezuelans and Brazilians. Additionally, in the same neighbourhood, women reported positive interaction with neighbours in shared areas of their housing. Few sporadic cases of disrespect were reported, and the same applies for verbal harassment against women across different areas of the city, mainly in public spaces.

Women noted being perceived by the host community as hard working, brave, competent and entrepreneurial people, but others were also perceived to be seen as sex workers, disease agents or invaders.

## PROTECTION

FGD participants reported that Venezuelan single mothers, children, elderly and indigenous people were the most vulnerable groups in Manaus. Many families of indigenous people were reportedly living in vulnerable shelter conditions in markets, bus terminals and churches of Compensa, Coroado, Tancredo Neves, Cidade Nova, Jorge Teixeira, São José Operário, Alfredo I and Centro neighbourhoods. Additionally, known cases of child labour<sup>13</sup> were identified by FGDs in Japiim, Alvorada, Novo Aleixo, Parque 10, Tancredo Neves, Compensa and Cidade Nova neighbourhoods. Venezuelans informed that children and youth working in these areas typically work as street vendors, cleaners and in childcare. Cases of shelterless people were reported in other areas of Centro (such as Praça dos Relógios and Praça Heliodoro Baldi), although, these groups were not observed by the REACH team.

Regarding access to legal services, FGD participants revealed that cases of Venezuelans who faced labour exploitation reportedly gave up denouncing these conditions to authorities, as migrants and asylum seekers fear this may incur in personal or professional retaliation.

In FGDs carried out with women, participants highlighted specific risks while in transit to Brazil through Venezuelan territory. Examples of these risks reportedly include physical insecurity such as robbery, sexual/verbal harassment and forfeiture of assets by the Venezuelan National Guard. Additionally, participants reported lack of adequate WASH infrastructure during the journey to Brazil, creating issues of personal hygiene, particularly for menstruating women. Among suggestions reported to improve the conditions of women in displacement were the increase of security in buses (including the use of cameras), financial support to purchase bus tickets, access to Wi-Fi networks, and information or training upon arrival at the border about security risks for women in Brazil.

## FOOD SECURITY

FGD participants reported having 3 meals per day at least, including breakfast, lunch and dinner. Although they can easily find markets to buy vegetables, fruit, eggs and meat, according to FGDs, access to these food items is not frequent due to the lack of financial resources. In this context, some households reportedly prefer to purchase cheaper food, such as chicken meat and processed sausages. In Tancredo Neves, Cidade Nova and Novo

13. 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).

Aleixo neighbourhoods, Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers indicated having little access to fruit and vegetables.

### Protection

For safeguarding purposes we are not including maps that detail specific locations of vulnerable populations. Should any actor need to access these maps, please contact Paula Costa at [paula.costa@reach-initiative.org](mailto:paula.costa@reach-initiative.org), GIS Focal Point, REACH Brazil

### 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).