

BRAZIL OPERATION

COVID-19 RESPONSE

SEPTEMBER 2020



Venezuelan lady speaks with UNHCR staff during a participatory assessment conducted in Manaus, Amazonas State. Photo: UNHCR/Felipe Irmaldo.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of 30 September, Brazil reached a total of 4,813,586 confirmed cases and 143,886 deaths from COVID-19.

All borders were closed in mid-March and entry restrictions by land and sea remain in place today due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including for individuals coming from Venezuela, with few irregular entries and exits reported. Air entry restrictions in some airports remained for the major part of September. For individuals already in the country, the validity of documentation providing legal stay was extended until the end of the emergency.

On 24 September, the Office of the President, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Ministry of Infrastructure, and the Ministry of Health approved [Ordinance nº 456/2020](#), which extended by an additional period of 30 days from the date of the Ordinance the exceptional and temporary restrictions on entry by land or sea by foreigners. One of the key updates pertaining to this Ordinance is that the entrance by air is now allowed nationwide. As it was the case with the preceding Ordinances, non-compliance with entry restrictions could lead to deportation and disqualification of asylum claims.

Many Venezuelan refugees and migrants are being severely affected by the current crisis and have lost their livelihoods, struggling to meet their most basic needs, including shelter and food, also encompassing the five thousand indigenous Venezuelans of different ethnicities (Warao, Eñepa and Pemón). Venezuelan refugees and migrants continue to have access to national healthcare services and economic relief measures as part of the COVID-19 response.

On 1 September, the Federal Government extended the COVID-19 emergency economic relief subsidy benefiting informal workers regardless of their nationality for four additional months at the reduced monthly rate of 300 BRL (USD 60). This amount represents half of that granted in the first five months of the program, which was of BRL 600 (USD 120).

In order to assist possible confirmed COVID-19 cases, Operation Welcome (*Operação Acolhida*) developed a contingency plan in partnership with UNHCR and other actors in Roraima and Amazonas, including the establishment of a field hospital in Boa Vista (Area of Protection and Care – APC), with the capacity to host up to 1,782 Venezuelans and host community members.

Following ongoing discussions which started in September, Operation Welcome is in the process of developing a transition plan that reduces costs and gradually hands over oversight of activities from the military task force to civil authorities by a gradual and progressive phase out of the Army until end of 2021. The proposed plan foresees an expansion of the internal relocation process, aiming to reach monthly targets of 3,000- 3,500 relocated Venezuelan refugees and migrants and may also introduce changes in the current shelter response. UNHCR, together with other R4V partners and members of Operation Welcome, has been actively participating in all discussion and will continue to adjust strategies and approaches to ensure a smooth transition aligned with Operation Welcome’s objectives, so to strengthen local authorities’ capacities and responsibilities, the consolidation of shelters and closure of spontaneous settlements, as well as the increase of internal relocation targets and local integration opportunities.

KEY RISKS AND GAPS

Community transmission: Hundreds of Venezuelan refugees and migrants are living in informal settlements in dire situations, exposed to increased contagion risks because of inadequate WASH conditions. Moreover, refugees and migrants lack reliable information on COVID-19, its transmission, symptoms and effective ways to reduce exposure.

Collapse in health systems: The health systems in several Brazilian States are particularly critical, facing challenges in the capacity to respond properly.

Socio-economic impact: Due to social distancing and isolation measures, many Venezuelan refugees and migrants are unable to continue with their economic activities and have lost their income source.

Sex and gender-based violence (SGBV): The prolonged and intense co-existence caused by social isolation, coupled with loss of livelihoods, can generate situations of restlessness, discomfort and increased stress, and consequently increases the incidences of gender-based violence for girls and women.

Documentation: The Federal Police reduced operations and suspended the regular issuance or renewal of residency permits and asylum-seekers’ certificates as a result of the pandemic. Issuance of documents currently is provided only for urgent cases. Though the validity of the current documents was extended by the Federal Police until the end of the health emergency, documents with an expired date create challenges for individuals as they are not always accepted by service providers or employers.

UNHCR RESPONSE

Strengthening and adapting shelter support and reinforcing local health responses



Shelter: Aiming at better mapping characteristics, trends and protection risks of refugees and migrants sheltered in Roraima, UNHCR Brazil launched the "[Roraima Shelter Profile](#)" dashboard. This new interactive tool consolidates information on demographics and specific protection needs of the population attended in the 14 shelters in the cities Boa Vista and Pacaraima managed by UNHCR in partnership with the Ministry of Citizenship, Operation Welcome Task Force and civil society partners. The September edition covers the month of August and will be updated on a monthly basis.

On 3 September, 81 indigenous Warao were relocated from Zezão and Ninimberg temporary shelters (opened at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis) to the new Tarumã Açu shelter in Manaus. The opening of the

new municipal shelter is the result of the collaboration between the Municipality of Manaus with UNHCR and other UN agencies as well as their civil society partners Instituto Mana, ADRA and Aldeias Infantis SOS.

During the reporting period, UNHCR provided technical assistance to Rio Grande do Norte state authorities on the adequation of a school which is serving as an indigenous transit center for Venezuelans. Currently, there are approximately 60 Waraos sheltered there and it is expected that the improvements will allow up to 130 people to live there in better conditions.

Health: On 15 September, 34 Venezuelan indigenous refugees and migrants were isolated in the Area for Protection and Care (APC) in Boa Vista, following a COVID-19 testing campaign conducted at the Janokoida indigenous shelter in Pacaraima by the Brazilian Army. The figure included 11 persons who tested positive and their nuclear families. According to data published by COIAB (*Coordination of Indigenous Organizations in the Brazilian Amazon*), as of mid-September a total of 2,903 indigenous persons had a positive result for COVID-19 in Roraima which remained as the third worst-affected State by COVID-19 infections country wide.

As of 29 September, 29 persons were isolated in the APC in Boa Vista, with 4 confirmed and 25 suspected cases of COVID-19. In addition, there were 100 persons hospitalized in the clinical area. Since its opening, 3,417 persons have received some sort of health assistance in the site, of whom 287 were Venezuelans. Additional isolation facilities were also established in the cities of Manaus and Belem.

Ensuring protection and supporting integration processes

Integration: On 3 September, UNHCR participated in the Webinar *Proteja o Trabalho – Meu contrato foi suspenso. E agora?* (Protect Work - My contract has been suspended. Now what?) which was jointly organized with ILO, IOM and the Subsecretariat for Labor Inspection (Ministry of Economy - Special Secretariat for Social Security and Labor). The *live*, which was the first of a series, was attended by more than 350 persons and the recording is [available on YouTube](#). The virtual event is part of a broad campaign entitled "Protect Work" with the objective to provide information to Brazilian workers, refugees and migrants, as well as employers, on the measures adopted by the Federal Government to confront COVID-19. Four booklets are available for download in Portuguese, English, French, Spanish and Arabic at the [website of the campaign](#).

On 15 September, UNHCR, alongside UN Women and the Global Compact Network in Brazil, hosted the launching webinar of this year's edition of the *Empoderando Refugiadas* project which seeks to promote the integration of refugee women living in shelters in Boa Vista into the Brazilian labour market. Through this initiative, 50 participants will receive support to initiate recruiting processes with partner companies with the prospect of being interiorized to other States of Brazil under the employment modality.

To support refugees and migrants building a new life in São Paulo, UNHCR's partner Compassiva offered more than 60 hours of virtual Portuguese classes to more than 270 students of different nationalities.



Gender and SGBV: On 22 September, UNHCR and partner organization SJMR carried out a training session on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response attended by 40 participants from Casa da Mulher Brasileira and local authorities in Boa Vista. The activity aimed at strengthening the coordination and response capacity of institutions conforming the local state network dealing with SGBV cases. The specific needs of indigenous women survivors of SGBV were also addressed during the activity.

On 14 September, UNHCR and partner organization SJMR conducted an assessment on the situation of refugee and migrant women engaged in survival sex, with emphasis on the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the transgender community. As a result of this exercise, 16 transgender women with specific needs were identified and referred to the local protection network for assistance.

Documentation: The Federal Police increased the number of daily appointments reserved for refugees and migrants in need of documentation at the Documentation and Interiorization Centre (PITRIG) in Boa Vista. Starting 1 September, the number of appointments at the PITRIG in Boa Vista increased from 60 to 140 per day, of which 70 are reserved for asylum-seekers or recognized refugees and 70 for migrants seeking

residences.

Throughout September, UNHCR supported the documentation of 1,552 refugees and migrants in Boa Vista. Of those, 172 submitted asylum claims, 456 renewed their asylum seekers' provisional documentation and 106 obtained duplicates. In addition, 332 Venezuelans who were recognized as refugees as part of CONARE's *prima facie* decision received support to formalize their requests for residence. During the same period, UNHCR supported the pre-documentation of 570 asylum seekers and 284 recognized refugees at the Documentation and Interiorization Centre (PTRIG) and the Bus Station Support Space (PRA) in Manaus.

Scaling up and adapting strategies for Communication with Communities (CWC)



CwC: In Pacaraima, through the four WhatsApp groups INFORMA-TE, UNHCR partner AVSI reached an average of 598 refugees and migrants and 268 Brazilians with information materials on COVID-19 prevention and response in September. In addition, outreach volunteers carried out informative sessions on the local protection network reaching 86 Venezuelan refugees and migrants living in spontaneous settlements.

In Manaus, UNHCR held five information sessions on COVID-19 prevention, personal hygiene, and safety protocols, attended by approximately 1,477 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the PITRIG. In addition, UNHCR and partner organization Fraternidade (FFHI) carried out information sessions reaching 694 Venezuelan refugees and migrants at the Transit Center (ATM). Also, UNHCR and partner Instituto Mana conducted community-based information activities in indigenous communities, reaching 135 Venezuelan refugees and migrants with information on COVID-19 prevention and community-based protection activities.

On 14 September, UNHCR and Caritas Manaus selected four new outreach volunteers, including representatives of the LGBTI and indigenous communities, to ensure that all communities are represented in the program in line with UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach. In Belem, UNHCR is working with partner Aldeias Infantis to also start the selection of new outreach volunteers among the Warao indigenous community, as part of a project funded by the Embassy of Canada.

UNHCR Brazil Podcast: On 4 September, UNHCR Brazil, in partnership with the Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Consortium (CSVM), released the second episode of the *Refúgio em Pauta* podcast. Every month the podcast discusses the realities and challenges to integration faced by refugees in Brazil. The podcast centred around the integration of indigenous refugees and migrants from Venezuela, including perspectives from a Warao woman, a Public Defender and an UNHCR specialist on the subject. The episodes are available at [UNHCR website](#) and [Spotify](#).

Ensuring the most vulnerable have access to basic items



Food and non-food items (NFIs) distribution: From 9 to 15 September, UNHCR distributed 200 units of spray alcohol and 100 units of gel alcohol to 198 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the bus station area of Boa Vista.

Moreover, it distributed 99 units of gel alcohol and 198 units of spray alcohol to 89 families living in four spontaneous settlements in Boa Vista (Aprisco, Posto Equador, Cel Monteiro Baena, and Sumuru). The alcohol had been donated to UNHCR by Grupo Boticário.

On 11 September, *Anjos de Luz* Association distributed food baskets, face masks and hand sanitizers to Venezuelan refugees and migrants. This local organization is one of the recipients benefited by a Grupo Boticário donation facilitated by UNHCR, aiming at reaching about 4,000 Brazilians and Venezuelans with disabilities, in the state of Roraima.

UNHCR donated NFIs to the new Shelter for Vulnerable Children and Adolescents in Amazonas (SAICA) managed by the Municipal Secretary of Women, Social Assistance and Citizenship (SEMASC). The SAICA

shelter, inaugurated on 8 September in Manaus, is the main shelter for children in need of protection in Amazonas State, including refugee and migrant children and their families. UNHCR supported SAICA through the provision of 20 beds, 30 mattresses, 30 mattress covers, 10 hammocks, 10 hygiene kits and five kitchen kits.

On 25 September, UNHCR distributed 380 food packages to approximately 1,500 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Pacaraima. The initiative, implemented with the support of a local church, aims at supporting Venezuelan refugees and migrants affected by the COVID-19 economic downturn. UNHCR expects to deliver 380 food packages every month until December.

In São Paulo, UNHCR's partner Compassiva delivered 2,391 food baskets to refugees, migrants and Brazilians, benefiting over eight thousand individuals. Throughout September, this organization registered more than 800 new applicants seeking socioeconomic assistance, highlighting the ongoing challenges this population is facing to meet basic needs.

In Paraná, partner organizations I Know My Rights (IKMR) and Cáritas Paraná moved forward with the expansion of their non-food items programme, reaching over 3,500 refugees and migrants during the month.

Expanding the provision of life-saving cash assistance

Cash-based assistance (CBI): As of the end of September, UNHCR's CBI direct implementation amounted to BRL 3,096,637 (equivalent to approximately USD 558,000). So far in 2020, 1,582 households have been reached with CBI, of whom 1,263 were headed by women. In total, 4,888 people have benefited from the program this year.

On 20 September, the Centro Pastoral Migrante (CPM) in Cuiabá (Mato Grosso) welcomed a first group of 8 Venezuelans since it started functioning as a transit house supporting the interiorization strategy. This new arrangement was achieved through a partnership with UNHCR, who will support CPM through the provision of CBI for refugees and migrant families starting a new life in Cuiabá.

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UNHCR Partners in Brazil:



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