

# BRAZIL OPERATION

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

APRIL 2021



More than 50,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants have been so far relocated to 675 Brazilian cities, in the context of *interiorização*

### OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of 30 April, Brazil reached a total of 14,659,011 confirmed cases and 403,781 deaths from COVID-19. The country's fatalities have fallen slightly from a peak of more than 4,000 in a single day in early April, which still overall surpassed the death toll recorded in March, with more than 80,000 people dying of COVID-19. On 14 April, the Brazilian Supreme Court authorized a Senate investigation, also known by its Portuguese acronym CPI, into President Jair Bolsonaro's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 8 April, a Federal Court instructed the Federal Government and the municipality of Boa Vista to provide equal healthcare to Brazilians and Venezuelans in health posts, also determining that all municipal health facilities must visibly place information in Portuguese and Spanish describing that access to public health services is guaranteed, on the national territory, without any discrimination on grounds of nationality and migratory status.

The Operational Coordinator of Operation Welcome, General Barros, informed that 2021 budget forecast for the federal government response to the influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants would be initially of around BRL 90 million, representing a significant reduction compared to last year's available financial resources. A request to increase the budget of an additional BRL 150 million was subsequently channelled through the Ministry of Defence.

On 20 April, the Ministry of Citizenship convened a virtual event to celebrate the milestone of 50,000 Venezuelans successfully relocated from the northern states of Roraima and Amazonas to over 650 Brazilian cities with better opportunities for socio-economic integration. The event saw the participation of the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Chief of Staff (Casa Civil) as well as key partners in the framework of Operation Welcome's voluntary internal relocation strategy, such as municipal governments, civil society organizations, UNHCR and IOM.

On 30 April, the Ministry of Economy issued a Technical Note confirming that both asylum seekers and recognized refugees may be hired as temporary workers by any company without any restrictions, bringing a positive development compared to its previous orientation to limit such opportunity only to recognized refugees.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) produced a press release expressing its concern about the growing militarization of borders and restrictions on access to territory and protection procedures in the Americas, and specifically pointing out recent developments at the border in Pacaraima.

## KEY RISKS AND GAPS

**Access to territory and asylum:** Entry restrictions result in increasing numbers of Venezuelans crossing irregularly the border into Brazil in extreme vulnerable situations, exposed to human trafficking, exploitation and abuse. Moreover, with no clear path to regularization and documentation, refugees and migrants are facing additional challenges to exercise their rights.

**Socio-economic impact:** High unemployment exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, cuts and reductions to social programmes and sharp price increases on basic food staples combine to make many Venezuelan refugees and migrants unable to sustain their livelihoods.

**Increasing number of Venezuelans with expired documentation:** Despite efforts by the Federal Police to extend the validity of expired documents until September 2021, employers and service providers are generally not aware of this measure and do not easily accept expired documents, adversely impacting on refugees and migrants' access to services or job opportunities.

## UNHCR RESPONSE

### Strengthening shelter support and ensuring access to basic items and health services

**Access to Health:** On 15 April, UNHCR participated in 2021 first meeting of the State Committee for Health of the Immigrant and Refugee Population of Rio de Janeiro to discuss local health initiatives, including the ongoing epidemiological research on health indicators of refugees and migrants during COVID-19 and the expansion of specialized services to assist this population across the state.

UNHCR continued to support the Amazonas Secretariat of Health in the effort to improve healthcare delivery in public hospitals and maternity services: in April, UNHCR donated two medical refrigerators for storing temperature-sensitive medicines, which will ensure the adequate handling of medication in basic healthcare units.

In the first week of April, about 180 Indigenous Warao living in Rio Grande do Norte and Piauí received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, as a result of advocacy efforts promoted by local refugee protection committees. To support the initiative, UNHCR distributed information material in Warao language to raise awareness on the importance of vaccination among Indigenous communities. Similarly, in Boa Vista, the Municipal Secretariat of Health progressed with the third phase of the vaccination plan, reaching 6 elderly persons at the Pricumã shelter.

**Shelter:** In April, 1,285 refugees and migrants were allocated to Operation Welcome's shelters in Roraima. UNHCR also supported community leaders of the former Ka'Ubanoco spontaneous settlement and current residents of the Jardim Floresta shelter in the planning process of their relocation to a private land in the municipality of Cantá and the registration of their Indigenous association.

In the context of UNHCR's protection mapping to identify refugees and migrants in a vulnerable situation at the Manaus Bus Station Support Space (PRA), in the month of April, 66 people were accommodated in the municipal shelters and another 18 people were referred to the Isolation Area at the PITrig for a quarantine period, before being transferred to the local shelter network.

At the same time, UNHCR and Instituto Mana resumed their regular presence in Indigenous shelters, which was suspended in January due to the second wave of COVID-19, to provide technical support for shelter coordination and continue working on prevention and response of protection risks.

**Food and non-food items (NFIs) distribution:** In April, UNHCR delivered 2,791 family and individual hygiene kits, 1,802 family cleaning kits, 7,164 bars of soap, 285 mattresses, 308 waterproof

mattress covers, 2,170 packs of diapers, 157 jerrycans, 187 buckets, 760 mosquito nets, 19 solar lamps and 10 rolls of plastic tarpaulins to support refugees and migrants sheltered in Roraima. UNHCR also donated more than 90,000 UNILEVER bars of soap to Roraima State Department of Education and Sports to support vulnerable children enrolled in public schools.

### Ensuring protection and supporting integration processes

**Integration:** During the month of April, a total of 1,260 refugees and migrants were voluntarily relocated from Amazonas and Roraima states to other parts of Brazil by bus or flight. UNHCR supported the Fit For Travel (FFT) process for all these individuals and oversaw the institutional modality relocation of 64 individuals.

On 8 April, the Office of the Chief of Staff (Casa Civil) hosted an event to present key findings from the recent [UNHCR-World Bank policy research on Integration of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Brazil](#). The research emphasizes how, despite minimum legal constraints and relative ease in obtaining work permits, Venezuelan refugees and migrants still face challenges integrating into the education system, social protection programs and the formal labour market in Brazil.

On 23 April, UNHCR convened a virtual meeting with representatives from the Secretariats of Social Assistance of Nova Iguaçu, Rio de Janeiro, Ananindeua, São Paulo and Belém, allowing the 21 participants to exchange knowledge, experience and best practices in the reception and protection of refugees and migrants, including Indigenous people, in their respective municipalities.

In April, UNHCR provided financial assistance through multi-purpose cash grants to 442 families (1,422 individuals), 96% of them being of Venezuelan nationality.

**Protection:** In the framework of CONARE's 153<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Meeting, CONARE deliberated about 515 Refugee Status Determination (RSD) cases. The Committee recognized 104 individuals as refugees, including from Venezuela and Syria, and granted derivative status to 347 persons, mainly from Venezuela and Cuba.

In April, 1,188 refugees and migrants contacted UNHCR Manaus protection line for queries related to access to documentation, urgent material support (food and non-food items), financial assistance, and other protection issues. Based on the reduced capacity of the Reception and Documentation Centre (PITrig) and the limited slots offered by the Federal Police, UNHCR referred 238 asylum seekers and 80 refugees for documentation procedures during the month.

UNHCR conducted a series of capacity-building activities targeting about 80 participants from partner organizations and municipal authorities in Belém to leverage and expand their existing capacity in responding to evolving needs and opportunities related to refugee and migrant protection, with a focus on Indigenous communities. Similarly, UNHCR organized training sessions on refugee protection and solutions for approximately 300 participants working in the areas of social assistance, education and health in the States of Rio Grande do Norte, Minas Gerais, Piauí, Ceará, Pernambuco and Bahia.

In the month of April, UNHCR, in coordination with local partners, continued to monitor the situation in the area of Foz do Iguaçu where increased cross-border movements of Venezuelans had been reported, and specifically supported Caritas Parana with a dedicated staff to ensure protection assistance for refugees and migrants at the Brazilian side of the border.

On 15 April, UNHCR launched a publication bringing anthropological perspectives to the protection of Indigenous refugees and migrants in Brazil, gathering the results of a field research about the Warao population collected over four years.

**Documentation and Registration:** In April, in Boa Vista and Pacaraima, UNHCR and partners registered in proGres v4 2,355 persons and generated 986 shelter IDs. The numbers reflect registration efforts targeting PoCs supported through shelter allocation, CBI assistance or included within the voluntary relocation strategy promoted by the federal government.

Additionally, UNHCR supported the documentation of 1,091 individuals at the Reception and Documentation Centres (PITrig) in Boa Vista and Pacaraima, including 187 asylum seekers who

entered Brazil before border restrictions came into force.

### Strengthening public awareness and Communication with Communities (CwC) strategies

On 6 April, UNHCR launched “The Journey”, a social video highlighting the power of sport in changing the lives of forcibly displaced people: in Brazil, it was released at the São Paulo Metropolitan Train Stations and disseminated in a social media campaign calling for support of the Refugee Olympic and Paralympic Teams that will compete in the Tokyo Games this summer.

In April, UNHCR jointly with IOM and Operation Welcome’s Task Force conducted information sessions on access to shelter and documentation for approximately 1,000 Venezuelans living in four spontaneous settlements in Pacaraima. At the same time, at the BV8 Transit Center, about 1,050 refugees and migrants received information on the different modalities of interiorization and potential opportunities for local integration in other cities in Brazil. Community-based protection initiatives targeting Indigenous Venezuelan and host communities are being supported by 4 Outreach Volunteers (OVs), who recently joined UNHCR and partners’ teams in Pacaraima.



From 1 to 30 April, [UNHCR’s Help Platform](#) registered 19,557 sessions, 73,7% of which were new visitors, the majority being women.

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#### Parceiros do ACNUR no Brasil – UNHCR partners in Brazil



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