

# Protection Monitoring Report

## UNHCR Brazil

January-February 2021

### I. Introduction and Context

In 2018, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, set up a regional tool to monitor the protection needs and situation of persons that have been forced to leave their country, focusing initially on the Venezuelan Situation. Protection Monitoring is a key process of UNHCR’s response and entails the systematic verification and analysis of the violation of rights and protection needs of persons of concern (PoCs) over an extended period of time. Prior to the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, UNHCR Brazil and partners conducted face-to-face interviews with PoCs with a geographical focus on the state of Roraima. The current COVID-19 context and measures adopted by States in response to the pandemic required UNHCR and partners to adapt its data collection methodology. This report covers the results of the first of four rounds of remote data collection to be repeated on a quarterly basis throughout 2021.

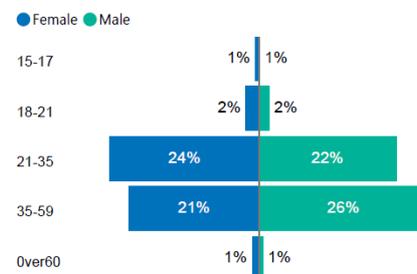
### II. Methodology

The first round of protection monitoring data collection focused on a self-administered questionnaire accessed by asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. UNHCR and partners disseminated links to the online questionnaire through existing communication channels<sup>1</sup> with respondents who submitted their results through mobile phones or electronic devices.

The questionnaire was available from January 25 to February 5. The sampling of this exercise followed a convenience / non-probability methodology, i.e. sample was selected based on accessibility to the population, as respondents most likely already had prior contact with UNHCR and/or partners and had access to mobile phones or electronic devices and an internet connection. Therefore, the results below are not statistically representative and cannot be extrapolated to the whole population.



- **221 questionnaires / 888 individuals**
- **7 distinct nationalities**
- **Residing in 13 States in Brazil**



<sup>1</sup> This includes existing and trusted information and communication channels with PoCs, such as the [Help Platform](#), social media, WhatsApp groups and community networks.

### III. Demographic information

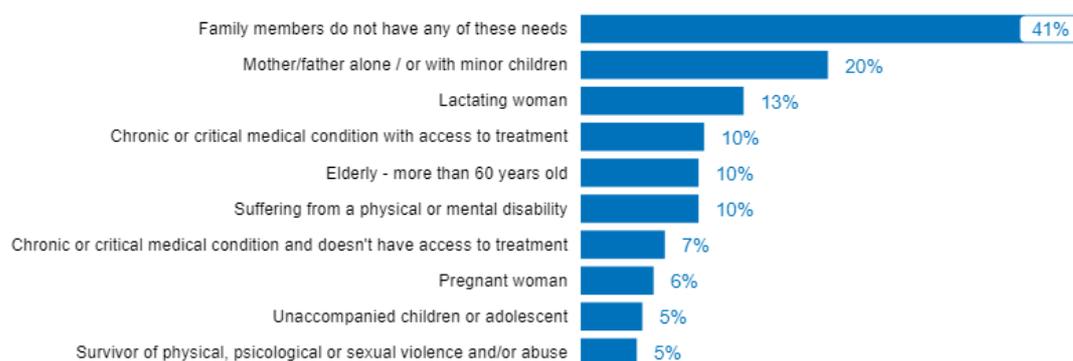
- **Average family size:** 4 members
- **Heads of family:** 48% of those who identified as heads of family are female.
- **Children:** Almost 80% of families have at least one child (42% of whom have at least one child under 5 years old).
- **LGBTI:** 10% of those who answered the question on sexual orientation and gender identity identified themselves as a member of the LGBTI community.
- **Nationalities:** 95% of the population surveyed are Venezuelan refugees and migrants. The remaining respondents are from Colombia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria and Yemen.
- **Ethnic group:** 48% of respondents identified as mixed (two or more races / bi-racial); 18% indicated they are unsure about their ethnicity; 15% identified as Caucasians; and 7% identified as black or of African descent.
- **Time of arrival to the country:** 24% of respondents arrived to Brazil within the last 6 months; 43% arrived between 6 months and 2 years ago; and 33% arrived more than 2 years ago.

### IV. Highlights

- **A majority of respondents (60%) identify with one or more specific protection needs.** In comparison, 25% of PoCs registered with UNHCR in Brazil identify as having specific protection needs.
- **Nearly two-thirds of respondents (66%) state they would face risks upon return to their country of origin,** including lack of food, unemployment, lack of access to medical services and risk of danger due to insecurity. As over 95% of those surveyed are Venezuelans, a notable majority manifest a need for international protection.
- **A considerable number of respondents (20%) do not possess legal migratory documentation in Brazil,** which in practice may limit access to rights and services, including non-urgent medical care, formal employment, and education.
- **More than half of respondents are unemployed (55% of 196 family groups).** The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 has contributed to difficulties in obtaining formal employment in Brazil along with challenges in recognizing respondents' previous work experiences and academic diplomas.
- **The majority of interviewed families indicate their children are enrolled in school (57%), however, more than half (53%) do not have the necessary resources to access their children's education virtually** in times of COVID-19.
- **Only one fifth (20%) of respondents have access to social assistance benefits** (i.e. Bolsa Família).

### V. Specific Protection Needs

More than half of the families interviewed (approx. 59%) identified with **at least one specific protection need**, such as single parent households, pregnant or lactating women, elderly at risk and people with chronic or critical medical conditions.



## VI. Legal status and access to territory

Some of the measures adopted to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including the border closure, have adversely affected the ability of refugees and migrants to enter Brazil and enjoy basic rights and services. Access to territory and protection from non-refoulement are therefore key protection considerations for refugees and other persons in need of international protection.

- **66%** of respondents agree or strongly agree that their **family members would be at risk if they had to return to their place of initial residence or home country.**

Of the risks faced upon return, 47% indicate lack of food; 45% indicate unemployment; 40% indicate lack of access to medical services; and 36% indicate a risk of danger due to insecurity in their country of origin.

### A. Entry to the country

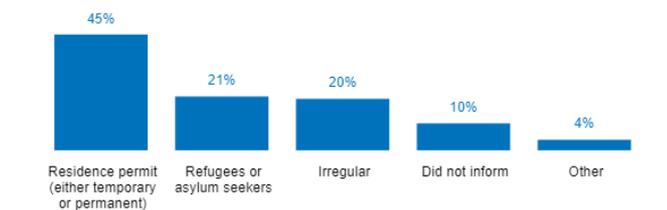
- 76% of interviewees stated they **entered the country in a regular or legal manner** and registered their entry with the Brazilian immigration authorities.
- 71% of the population surveyed mentioned they have **at least one dependent or family member who remained in the country of origin**, original residence, or is in transit.

Most of the population surveyed entered Brazil before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Brazil's borders were open. Since March 2020, however, when the Brazil-Venezuela border closure took effect, irregular entries to Brazil have increased through informal border crossings mainly through Pacaraima, in the northern state of Roraima. This undocumented population is represented by respondents who indicate having entered Brazil within the last 6 months (24%) or between 6 months and 2 years (43%).

Although **96% of respondents indicated not having experienced any negative incidents with state authorities** (e.g. refusal of entry, deportation, or forced return), the results reveal respondents experienced issues related to their safety and security since having left their homes. **One in four (26%) respondents indicated they or family members have suffered from or witnessed a protection incident, primarily theft, physical threats or bribery.** This figure is low when compared to data collected in February 2021 from newly arrived Venezuelan refugees and migrants sheltered in Boa Vista. One explanation points to the scope of outreach that the online questionnaire via the self-administered channel has in favoring individuals who have access to electronic devices and internet connectivity and thus have better socio-economic conditions when compared to recent arrivals.

## B. Legal Status

Although **most families indicate having had access to asylum or temporary residence procedures, one-fifth (20%) of respondents** represent individuals who entered Brazil irregularly and/or do not have a current legal migratory status. This is the highest percentage of undocumented respondents when compared to other protection monitoring surveys conducted by UNHCR and partners.



## C. Asylum in Brazil

24% of respondents indicate the intention to apply for asylum though they are yet to do so mostly due to the effects of the pandemic (e.g. services limited to online appointments), lack of information, and lack of documentation. It is unclear what respondents intend to indicate when selecting lack of documentation as an answer to the inability to apply for asylum as possessing identify documents is not a requirement under Brazilian law when applying for asylum. However, individuals who entered Brazil irregularly during the border closure are unable to apply for asylum on account of lack of an official migratory entry document. Also, 19% of the interviewees stated that they have no intention to apply for asylum. This can be explained by the lack of information about the differences between asylum and temporary residence procedures and the perception that the asylum seeker protocol is not always accepted by service providers as a valid ID document.

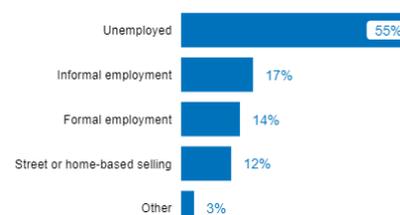
## VII. Access to rights and services

### A. Access to education

- 42% of families that have school-age children stated that they have at least one child **out of school** mainly due to **lack of documentation** or other **school enrollment requirements**, though the survey doesn't allow respondents to further detail these challenges.
- Even though the majority of interviewed families have their children in school (57%), more than half of them (53%) **do not have the necessary resources and access to receive their education virtually in times of COVID-19**.

### B. Employment

A total of 196 family groups were consulted on employment. The majority of respondents are **unemployed** (55%), nearly a quarter are engaged in informal employment activities to meet the needs of their families (17%), 14% are engaged in formal employment, and 12% are engaged in street-based selling.



The current employment situation of the respondents contrasts with their previous experience in their respective countries of origin. A lower number of respondents indicate having been unemployed in their country of origin (21%). When we consider only the sample of respondents who had formal jobs in their countries of origin (28%), only one fifth of them (20%) have a formal job in Brazil.

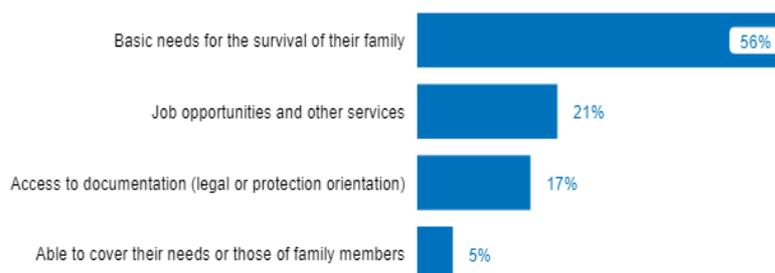
Difficulties in finding formal employment in Brazil can be explained by the current socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, refugees and migrants face challenges when trying to validate their previous professional experience or academic diplomas in Brazil.

### C. Social assistance

- 80% of respondents answered they are **not receiving any kind of social assistance** (cash allowance).
- 13% reported they are receiving economic assistance from the government, 78% of whom identified it as the national cash-transfer program “Bolsa Familia”.

## VIII. Priority Needs

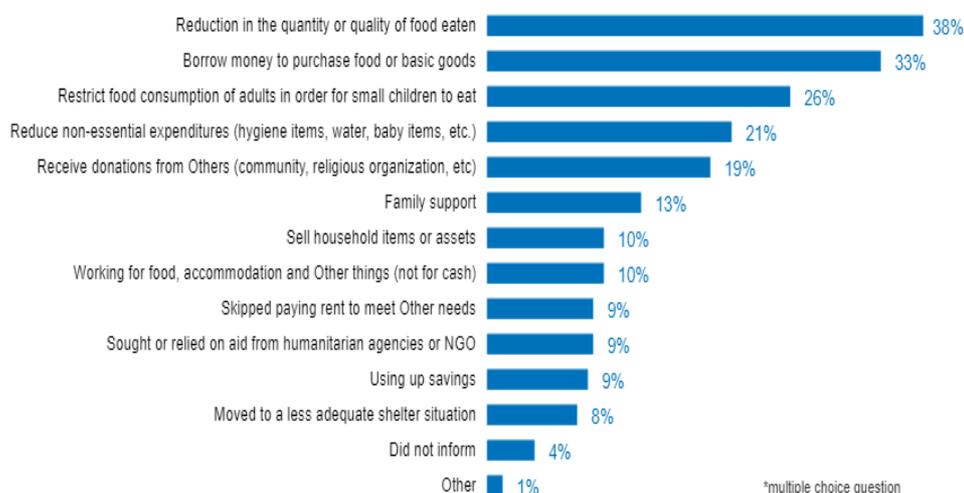
When asked what their most urgent needs and priorities were in the month prior to the survey, 56% answered **basic needs for the survival of their family** such as food, shelter, clothing, among others. In addition, 21% reported that their priority needs are linked to job opportunities and other services (e.g. health, education) and 17% mentioned access to documentation (legal or protection orientation), which represents a high increase in this need when compared to other protection monitoring exercises conducted by UNHCR and partners.



## IX. Coping mechanisms

The survey also asked if in the three months prior to data collection, the family members had to resort to coping mechanisms to cover their own / family members' basic needs.

- 38% reported they had to **reduce food or the quality of food eaten**
- 33% informed they had to **borrow financial resources**, and
- 26% **limit the food consumption** of adults in order for children eat

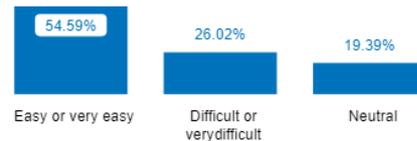


\*multiple choice question

## X. Well-being

A total of 196 family groups were consulted on well-being and demonstrated positive indicators in this area. **Most of the population surveyed mentioned they feel safe in the area/community where they live now (78%) and consider their interaction/relationship with the local population positive or very positive (72%).** However, many of them reported that during the time they have lived in Brazil, they have felt **lonely or socially isolated (37%) or discriminated against (47%),** with the perception that it was on account of their **nationality (93%).**

The survey also collected data on **access to internet** when needed. Even though most of the respondents (55%) indicated they can easily or very easily access connectivity, a considerable number reported **difficulties (26%).** This is an expressive percentage considering that the submission of these results required connectivity in the first place.



## XI. Future plans

- Most of the respondents (45%) planned to **stay where they currently are** when asked if they have expected to move or change their residence in the short or medium-term.
- 28% answered that they **plan to relocate.** Of those, most of them (89%) responded they are planning to move **to other cities within Brazil,** mainly to the south and southeast of Brazil with some reporting that they have been part of the voluntary internal relocation strategy (“interiorização”) (17%).

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