

BRAZIL OPERATION

COVID-19 RESPONSE

JULY 2020



Venezuelan family receives a kitchen kit before voluntarily embarking in a relocation flight that will take it from Boa Vista to another Brazilian city. Photo: UNHCR/Allana Ferreira.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of 31 July, Brazil reached the mark of 2,666,298 confirmed cases and 92,568 deaths from COVID-19.

Borders remain closed since mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including for individuals coming from Venezuela, with few irregular entries and exits reported. For individuals already in the country, the validity of documentation providing legal stay was extended until the end of the emergency.

As previously reported, following the declaration of the State of Emergency by the Federal Government, state Governors have adopted a series of measures to prevent the spread of the virus, and some cities had to enact total lockdown. However, throughout June and July several cities started a loosening process of gradual reopening, which caused a new increase of cases in several locations.

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 four 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. However, as the COVID-19 crisis advances, the public health system capacity to respond to the needs of the population is further strained, affecting not only people infected with the coronavirus, but also persons in need of other health services.

In July, the Federal Government paid the fourth instalment of the monthly emergency economic relief of 600 BRL (USD 120) established in April for informal workers, regardless of their nationality, in order to alleviate the economic impact of the COVID-19 situation for up to three months. At the end of June, the Federal Government announced the grant's extension for two more months, and now the viability and alternative terms to extend the grant until the end of the year is being analysed.

In order to assist possible confirmed COVID-19 cases, Operação Acolhida (OA) 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. Additional isolation facilities were also established in the city of Manaus.

Entry restrictions for foreign nationals have been extended until the end of August with the approval of [joint Civil Cabinet, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Infrastructure and Ministry of Health Ordinance nº 1/2020](#). The measures remain the same as the ones contained in the previous ordinances, including restrictions related to the entrance of nationals from Venezuela by land or sea, regardless of their migratory status. The entrance by air is now allowed and foreign travelers will have to present a visa if required according to the Brazilian Migratory Law; the entrance by air is not allowed in the following States: Mato Grosso do Sul, Paraíba, Rondonia, Rio Grande do Sul e Tocantins; the failure to comply with the Ordinance (if the person enters by land or sea) can still lead to immediate deportation or repatriation and to the disqualification of an asylum claim.

KEY RISKS AND GAPS

Community transmission: Hundreds of Venezuelan refugees and migrants are living in informal settlements in dire situations, exposed to increased transmission 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 have had to stop their economic activities and lost their income source.

Sex and gender-based violence (SGBV): The prolonged and intense coexistence 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.

Access to territory: The Federal Police published guidelines extending the suspension of the issuance of passports, national identity for foreigners, both temporary and permanent (DPRNM and CRNM) on 23 May. The issuance will remain suspended if the public health state of emergency continues. However, exceptional cases should be sent directly through e-mail to the Federal Police Department closest to the requesting person.

UNHCR RESPONSE

Strengthening and adapting shelter support and reinforcing local health responses



Health: As of the end of July, the Area for Protection and Care (APC) in Boa Vista was hosting 69 persons of whom four were under intensive care. In total, 1,073 persons have been assisted in the APC, most of them Brazilian members of the local community. The APC is also staffed with 65 Venezuelan health workers who have contributed to life-saving efforts, utilizing their experience and skills, joining their Brazilian peers in the response. UNHCR Brazil launched an [original video](#) to highlight its actions in response

to the COVID-19 outbreak, with images of the organization's participation in the construction and implementation of the Area for Protection and Care (APC) in Boa Vista.

In Rio de Janeiro, UNHCR Brazil supported the development of the first State Health Plan for Refugees and Migrants. The action was announced by the State Committee for Refugees and Migrants in Rio de Janeiro on 24 July and will be based on three axes: health information, qualification of health workers and qualification of health services provided to migrants and the refugee population. The committee also continues to support legal initiatives to prevent evictions from taking place while the public health crisis persists. As a non-voting member of the committee, UNHCR will continue to provide technical guidance and support to these initiatives.



As the novel coronavirus pandemic spreads across Latin America, UNHCR Brazil continues to provide support for humanitarian emergencies in the region. As of the end of July, 336 Refugee Housing Units (RHU) were shipped to Peru, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Aruba and Guyana, as a result of the cooperation between UNHCR offices in different countries.

Much has also been done for the Brazilian indigenous population. In Boa Vista, 35 RHUs were donated to the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI). The housing units will be used to isolate confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases involving the Yanomami indigenous people, both in strategic locations within the Yanomami Indigenous Land and in urban locations where these populations live. Another 39 RHUs were donated to FUNAI and will be used in the municipality of Tabatinga, in Amazonas, aiming also at the isolation of indigenous Brazilians.

UNHCR, in coordination with PAHO and Doctors without Borders, trained 57 partner staff to help with alcohol abuse case management in Roraima's shelters. In total, 25 refugees and migrants participated in these trainings. Moreover, UNHCR supported IOM to provide medical attention to 122 people in 7 shelters.



Shelter and reception: In July, UNHCR launched the *Roraima's Monthly Report* covering the month of June (in Portuguese), compiling relevant information about shelter, registration and interiorization. The report also includes information regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the coordination dynamics regarding monitoring and prevention measures in the shelters, and the necessary adjustments to the registration and interiorization activities.

In Belem, over 64 Venezuelans indigenous Warao (14 families) were relocated from smaller state shelters, which will be closed, to a new central shelter. At their arrival, they received kitchen sets; in addition, two refugee house units (RHUs) were set up to provide office space to the shelter's staff.

On 22 July, after an assessment carried out by the UNHCR protection team in coordination with its partner Fraternidade, improvements were made in the bathrooms of the Manaus Transit Shelter (ATM), aiming to mitigate protection risks for the LGBTI+ population and to guarantee privacy and better reception conditions for people sheltered on the site.

Also, UNHCR Brazil released the [Activities for Indigenous Populations report](#) for the month of June, revealing that more than half of the Venezuelan indigenous persons in Brazil have received UNHCR support and also highlighting the various actions that the agency takes to guarantee the rights of, and the care for, these populations.

Ensuring protection and supporting integration processes

Documentation: While the COVID-19 outbreak is hampering the access to documentation in the South and Southeast of Brazil, UNHCR has been engaged in several activities to ensure these services are available to people in need of protection. In Santa Catarina, more than 1,100 refugees and migrants have been unable to access the Federal Police to renew protocols, claim asylum or request naturalization due to problems in administrative procedures, including scheduling. During the pandemic, even though the Federal Police has extended all validity deadlines for asylum seeker protocols and residency permits, undocumented new arrivals are not able to access to services and formal employment, and the increasing backlog of demands once activities are resumed is raising concerns. UNHCR and IOM have been liaising with the Federal Police and the Federal Public Defender's Office (DPU) to promote timely measures to document new arrivals and manage the backlog.

In other states, Registry Offices are refusing to register newborn children of refugees and migrants with expired documents. In Japeri (RJ) and Uberlândia (MG), Warao families have had problems to register newborns. In both cases, UNHCR is supporting local indigenous working groups to liaise with authorities and ensure these issues are solved and to prevent the emergence of more cases.

In Manaus, UNHCR Brazil supported approximately 227 Venezuelan refugees and migrants to access the emergency economic relief assistance from the Federal Government, also supporting documentation efforts to facilitate access to health services, the interiorization strategy and job opportunities. Moreover, UNHCR keeps conducting daily screening to identify the most vulnerable cases.

Integration: In July, UNHCR supported shelter-to-shelter internal relocations as internal flights resumed with increased health security measures. Assistance was provided by mapping available vacancies in shelters and liaising with authorities and partners. These refugees and migrants were relocated to Aldeias Infantis sites in the cities of Juiz de Fora (Minas Gerais), Brasília (Distrito Federal), São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul). As families share common spaces, UNHCR donated 18 kitchen kits and 114 masks as a preventive measure against COVID-19. Furthermore, UNHCR donated 3,600 units of winter clothes for families that are participating in the pre-boarding phase of relocation that will go to regions in the southern regions of Brazil, which are typically colder than the rest of the country. Also, 138 refugees and migrants were interiorized from Manaus.



Expanding the provision of life-saving cash assistance



Cash-based assistance (CBI): In July, UNHCR disbursed just over BRL 316,605 (approximately USD 60,000) in CBI transfers, bringing total CBI distributions in 2020 to over BRL 2,043,077 (USD 384,000). In 2020, almost 1,101 families have been served so far, with 895 of them headed by women. In total, almost 3,464 people have already benefited from the program this year. Furthermore, UNHCR distributed BRL 10,259 (USD 1,900) to 13 families (36 Individuals) who were voluntarily relocated as part of our CBI strategy.

During July, UNHCR also started the 2020 Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants who received and used CBI with prepaid cards. The PDM is conducted through phone calls where the beneficiaries are asked about their experience, the use they make of the cash received, the availability of the items they need on the market and the risks and issues encountered when using the CBI. The results of this PDM will help UNHCR to evaluate and adjust its CBI strategy.

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

CWC: In Boa Vista, UNHCR coordinated with UN Women and UNICEF an action to ensure Venezuelan refugees and migrants were informed of a new fine of BRL 50,00 (USD 10.00) for persons not wearing facemask in private and public spaces. Informative materials were developed in Spanish and distributed by UNHCR and partners through WhatsApp messages, reaching out to a total of 6,555 Venezuelans with the support of outreach volunteers. Posters were also displayed in ten shelters and one Emergency Site, and information sessions were conducted during food distributions, reaching out approximately 5,170 refugees and migrants.

UNHCR also produced information materials in the Warao language about the importance of wearing facemasks in private and public places. The materials were disseminated through WhatsApp, reaching 300 Waraos living at Spontaneous Settlement Ka'Ubanoko and almost 500 in Pintolandia Shelter.

Furthermore, Venezuelan refugees and migrants have been benefited by facemask distribution initiatives, both in shelters and spontaneous settlements, while the Municipality announced the creation of distribution spots across the city. UNHCR will keep a stock of facemasks of the project *Prevention without Borders* in PITRIG (reception centre) for donation to vulnerable cases unable to acquire it.



In Pacaraima, through the four active WhatsApp groups INFORMA-TE managed by UNHCR and AVSI Brasil, approximately 600 refugees and migrants were reached with COVID-19 related materials, such as pregnancy, baby care, antixenophobia and COVID-19 prevention.

In Manaus, six information sessions on COVID-19 were carried out by UNHCR and IOM with the participation of approximately 200 refugees and migrants in the Bus Station Support Space (PRA) to raise awareness on the current situation of the pandemic in Brazil, health and hygiene practices as well as current travel restrictions.

In Sao Paulo, UNHCR's partner CASP supported by Whatsapp approximately 650 refugees and asylum seekers, covering themes such as social assistance, protection and mental health.

SGBV: UNHCR, in partnership with the Citizenship Ministry, IOM, UN Women and UNICEF, released a new version of the COVID-19 emergency assistance booklet targeted for women. This version includes recent adjustments for access to emergency assistance, tips on how to handle the main problems that can occur with the request, how to make appeals, the possibility of access by adolescent mothers, and the option of making the request at post offices for those who do not have Internet access or a mobile phone number. The booklet also contains information on the prevention of violence against women who may be in situations of increased vulnerability because of the pandemic. The booklet will be available in Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, French and English.

On 17 July, UNHCR and UNFPA delivered a training session on responding and preventing to SGBV for nine persons. The attendees were from *Força Tarefa Logística Humanitária* (the Brazilian Army humanitarian task force), AVSI (UNHCR's partner) and cleaning service providers at APC. This was the last session out of three on the package of continuous capacity building for prevention and response of SGBV delivered to the staff in the Protection Area of APC.

Ensuring the most vulnerable have access to basic items



Food and non-food items (NFIs) distribution: UNHCR Brazil distributed 357 backpacks with personal hygiene kits for Venezuelans in the Transit Shelter of Manaus (ATM). The initiative aims to reinforce the importance of the ATM as a space that provides support to family and individuals in transit at different levels - through information activities and the provision of basic assistance.

On July, UNHCR Brazil established a partnership with Grupo Boticário which donated three tons of alcohol gel and three tons of alcohol spray to be used in prevention for the population assisted by UNHCR in the north of Brazil, in the field hospital of Boa Vista (APC) and in other shelters in the region. Grupo Boticário is one of the biggest cosmetics franchises in the world. The partnership was signed with the objective of subsidizing the agency's COVID-19 response plan in the region.

On 12 July, more than 680 pieces of winter clothes donated by the Japanese company UNIQLO were distributed by UNHCR and five partners in the Federal District, impacting around 350 people, including Venezuelans and Brazilians in vulnerable situation. The aim of the activity was to strengthen peaceful coexistence and partnership with key civil society organizations current working with shelter, indigenous peoples, LGBTI persons and asylum-seekers and refugees in Brasília.

In Belém, UNHCR went to the Curuçambá neighborhood to provide Venezuelans indigenous with 5 tarpaulins to help them finish the construction of Janokos (culturally adapted habitations) benefiting 70 persons living at the local. At the occasion, the group indicated some health and protection concerns they had, receiving guidance on referrals that will help them reach the health and documentation services from the local protection network by themselves.

From 22 to 28 July, UNHCR and SJMR delivered almost 900 cloth masks to refugees and migrants living in four different spontaneous settlements in Boa Vista. In collaboration with *Anjos de Luz* Association, UNHCR donated 280 facemasks to 140 persons with disabilities, both Venezuelans and Brazilians, living in the municipalities of Cantá and Amajari. Activities also included the delivery of information materials on access to documentation, rights and duties in Brazil and SGBV.



UNHCR and partners in Rio de Janeiro continue to reinforce support for the most vulnerable refugees and persons of concern in the state. Between March and June 2020, UNHCR, through partner Caritas Rio de Janeiro (CARJ), assisted more than 2,200 people, of whom 1,059 (47 per cent) were new registrations due to new arrivals and increasing emergency needs in the pandemic context. During this period, CARJ distributed more than 820 basic food baskets and cans of powdered milk to refugee families, providing food for more than 2,234 people in vulnerable situations, primarily families with children and pregnant women. In addition, more than 1,474 non-food kits (including winter clothing, hygiene kits and masks) were distributed during the period, benefiting almost 3,500 people in the state of Rio de Janeiro. UNHCR is also advocating and supporting initiatives for access to adequate housing and shelter, prevention of evictions and food insecurity through the State Committee for Refugees and Migrants. The Committee and Caritas, among other local members of the protection network, are seeking out additional partnerships to increase donations to address increasing needs in Rio de Janeiro State.

In São Paulo, CASP (UNHCR’s partner) delivered more than 500 basic food baskets and 1,300 hygiene kits, and winter clothes donated by UNIQLO to refugee families.

In July, UNHCR’s partner Compassiva delivered more than 500 basic food baskets, benefiting an average of 2,000 people, including adults, children and the elderly from different nationalities. The hygiene kits reached more than 1,400 people. The organization also registered 121 new beneficiaries.

Contacts:

Paola Bolognesi – Inter-Agency Coordinator Officer (bolognes@unhcr.org)

Flavia Faria – Donor Relations Associate (faria@unhcr.org)

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