

BRAZIL OPERATION

COVID-19 RESPONSE

JUNE 2020



Venezuelan boys in the new emergency site Treze de Setembro in Boa Vista, Roraima: UNHCR/Lucas Novaes.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of 30 June, Brazil reached the mark of 1,383,678 confirmed cases and 58,927 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, in June 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, including 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 June, the Federal Government paid the third 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 the month, the Federal Government announced the grant's extension for two more months.

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 2,200 Venezuelans and host community members. Additional isolation facilities are also being established in the city of Manaus.

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 as long as 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: On 19 June, Operation Welcome inaugurated the care wing of the field hospital in Boa Vista built to serve refugees, migrants and local community members with COVID-19. Built with the support of UNHCR and partners, the hospital is part of the Area of Protection and Care (APC) – a key element of the health response of the federal, state and municipal governments to the pandemic and increases the number of hospital beds and intensive care facilities available in the region. UNHCR has contributed to the project since the preparation of the preliminary study of APC's architectural plan, in addition to donating 2,000 beds and 250 refugee housing units (RHUs) used in shelters to serve as isolation areas for suspected and confirmed cases.

Between 2 and 5 June, UNHCR carried out a rapid qualitative assessment (RQA) to understand the paradox of a drastic drop in the number of Venezuelans admitted in the Protection area of the APC, while the

incidence of COVID-19 cases continues to grow in Boa Vista. Carried out through semi-structured key informant interviews in 50 per cent of the shelters in Boa Vista and Pacaraima, the assessment revealed that while efforts to prevent COVID-19 contagion in shelters is effective and therefore there is a reduction in actual number of persons presenting symptoms, there was also a reluctance amongst POCs to report symptoms and be transferred to the APC due to rumours that the quality of the accommodation and infrastructure at the APC was poor, fear of infection and limited access to information on the APC. The results of the assessment are being used to improve the design of the on-going CwC activities in shelters.

Shelter: The newly opened Emergency Site, 13 de Setembro, is now with a total population of 131. The Emergency Site's coordination team and UNHCR conducted a community assembly with refugees and migrants to introduce the team, services, community participation structures and rules of the site, as well as COVID-19 related information.



As part of our commitment to assist in the COVID-19 response regionally, UNHCR Brazil delivered a total of 192 RHUs by road to the UNHCR operations in Venezuela (48), Dominican Republic (48) and Guyana (96).

On June, UNHCR Brazil completed the establishment of a service contract to produce approximately 2,000 metallic windows to be installed in RHUs, which will contribute to improve the living conditions in all shelters adapting the RHUs to the tropical climate in Roraima.

Aiming at better mapping protection risks and addressing specific vulnerabilities, UNHCR Brazil launched the Monthly Registration and Shelter Report in Roraima, Protection Monitoring of the Spontaneous Occupation in Roraima and the Indigenous Population Activities Report. These reports are part of the strategy to strengthen protection for refugees and migrants, guaranteeing their access to basic rights and services.

Ensuring protection and supporting integration processes



Protection: Since the beginning of the pandemic, UNHCR has been working with local partners in the south-eastern region of Brazil to respond to the needs of the refugee population in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Paraná. Between March and June 2020, implementing partners (CASP, CARJ, CAPR, IKMR and Compassiva) served more than 4,600 people, of whom 1,646 (36 per cent) were new registrations, including both recent arrivals and members of existing populations that developed emergency needs. The following services were provided: support for registration so that refugees have access

to the emergency basic income and Bolsa Familia (an on-going cash transfer programme for low-income families in Brazil), intensification of mental health services for the refugee population in a context of worsening psychosocial status, monitoring of barriers to processing documentation and labour issues. Furthermore, Portuguese courses were adapted for the virtual environment to facilitate the integration process of refugee people and capacity building for partner staff was implemented by UNHCR to improve internal processes and facilitate the sharing of good practices.

Expanding the provision of life-saving cash assistance

Cash-based assistance (CBI): UNHCR is still working with partners throughout Brazil to implement cash-based assistance to the most vulnerable persons of concern to UNHCR. Distribution has been adjusted for the COVID-19 context, with new remote beneficiary assessment procedures put in place to reduce the risk of infection during the delivery of assistance. In June, UNHCR disbursed just over BRL 308,095 (approximately

USD 60,000) in CBI transfers, bringing total CBI distributions in 2020 to over BRL 1.7 million (USD 325,000). In 2020, 983 families have been supported so far, with 788 of them headed by women, representing a total of 3,106 beneficiaries. However, UNHCR Brazil is operating with a CBI budget that covers only 24 per cent of initially assessed needs, while needs increase exponentially in the context of COVID-19.

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



CWC: In Manaus, at the Bus Station Support Space (PRA), UNHCR and IOM held an information session on the novel Coronavirus for 60 refugees and migrants. The community radio initiative continues in the indigenous shelters in Manaus, reaching the nearly 600 indigenous sheltered there. Materials on residency for Haitians and the Emergency Aid Brochure for Women was shared to approximately 3,900 refugees and migrants. In Boa Vista, two information sessions on COVID-19 prevention and documentation were delivered to almost 300 persons in the Emergency Site 13 de Setembro.

In Pacaraima, on the occasion of World Refugee Day, two information sessions on financial education and the use of the federal aid benefit were delivered to Warao people in the indigenous shelters Janokoida and Janoko Yaquera in coordination with the Ministry of Citizenship, with the participation of 140 community members. Additionally, UNHCR and FFHI increased efforts to post relevant written and visual information in Janokoida shelter, reaching 506 sheltered refugees and migrants. Also in Pacaraima, on World Day Against Child Labour, UNHCR organized an interview with the Pacaraima Guardianship Council through Warao Radio in the indigenous shelters, reaching some 170 people.

Through the WhatsApp group INFORMA-TE, 513 refugees, migrants and host community members had access to information on COVID-19 prevention, services in PTRIG, World Refugee Day activities and border closures in Spanish and Portuguese. Moreover, UNHCR partner AVSI directly reached 67 community focal points -refugees, migrants and host community members- including 38 women and 29 men, 46 Venezuelan and 21 Brazilian. The key messages indirectly reached a total of 228 people. Also, through WhatsApp, UNHCR partner ASAV distributed LGBT+ communication materials to some 300 PoCs, and SOS Children Village shared COVID-19 prevention and LGTBI materials with over 110 relocated Venezuelans in Brasilia, Igarassu and Porto Alegre.



SGBV: As a preventative measure to ensure the centrality of protection and the best assistance for persons of concern, UNHCR Brazil held a two-day session on PSEA with implementing partner FFHI about sexual misconduct and its impacts on the mandate of UNHCR and its partners. In total, 12 FFHI staff participated, who are currently working at indigenous sites in Pacaraima.

The campaign *Quarentena Sem Violência* (Quarantine Without Violence, in English) was launched on 10 June to sensitize the population on risks of domestic violence amid increased reports during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign was prepared by the Roraima State Secretariat of Labor and Welfare (SETRABES), *Casa da Mulher Brasileira* and other local authorities, with support from UNHCR and UN WOMEN. A total of 1,000 information kits will be handed out in several neighborhoods in Boa Vista with higher levels of vulnerability.

Ensuring the most vulnerable have access to basic items



NFIs distribution: UNHCR and partners have distributed almost one ton of clothing in different parts of the country. The clothes distributed were donated to UNHCR by the Japanese company UNIQLO. As winter begins in the southern region of Brazil, 153 refugees in Sao Paulo already received the clothes, while additional distributions are planned for refugees and migrants in Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul. In addition, more than 14,000 non-food kits (such as hygiene kits and masks) were distributed in southern states, benefiting almost 23,000 refugees. In Boa Vista, clothing distributions will be made to Venezuelan refugees

and migrants departing for relocation in other Brazilian states under the Federal Voluntary Relocation Strategy known as interiorization.

In Belem, UNHCR distributed hygiene kits, kitchen sets, mosquito nets, solar lamps and tarpaulins in five private houses, two state shelters and the new municipal shelter to enhance protection conditions and meet the basic needs of 532 indigenous refugees and migrants. Furthermore, in partnership with FUNPAPA and UNICEF, UNHCR distributed 35 basic food baskets benefitting 86 indigenous refugees and migrants.

In Boa Vista, UNHCR distributed 1,540 cleaning kits in 11 shelters and the emergency site *13 de Setembro*. Furthermore, UNHCR already delivered approximately 2,300 school kits to children aged 3 to 17 in 15 sites, including shelters and *Canarinhos da Amazônia* project, in Pacaraima.

Also, 1,000 cloth masks have been received by UNHCR to be distributed to refugees and migrants waiting to be internally relocated through interiorization. This donation is part of a partnership between UNHCR and SJMR, with an additional 1,000 units expected by July.



Food distribution: In June, more than 6,500 basic food baskets were distributed in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Paraná to refugee families, providing food for more than 13,000 people in vulnerable situations, primarily families with children and pregnant women.

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