

BRAZIL OPERATION

COVID-19 RESPONSE

JANUARY 2021



UNHCR's donation of 115 beds to better equip healthcare facilities, including emergency rooms and maternity hospitals, in the Amazonas state
© ACNUR/Felipe Inaldo

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of 31 January, Brazil reached a total of 9,118,513 confirmed cases and 222,666 deaths from COVID-19.

The situation in Manaus, capital of the Amazonas state, rapidly deteriorated in January leading to a second collapse in the local healthcare system, characterized by long waiting lists for ICU beds and a serious lack of oxygen. COVID-19 infections, partly propelled by the discovery of a potentially more contagious variant in the region, surged by 125% in Manaus between 7 January and 22 January, according to the National Council of Health Secretaries and Brazilian media. On 8 January, the municipality of Manaus declared a 180-day state of emergency in the face of the rapidly mounting cases, suspending all public events until 31 January and establishing teleworking arrangements for the municipal administration until 31 March. To support the Amazonas government in the response to the second wave of COVID-19, UNHCR, together with IOM, UNFPA and UNICEF, donated to the Health State Secretariat (SES-AM) more than 160,000 non-food items, including 115 beds and 90 mattresses, 180 blankets, 26,000 gloves, and 300 protective clothing to better equip maternal health facilities in Manaus.

On 6 January, *Operação Acolhida* temporarily closed Manaus' Interiorization and Documentation Center (*PITrig*) to use its premises as a quarantine facility. On 18 January, UNHCR temporarily suspended its in-person activities, as a prevention measure both for PoCs and staff located in Manaus. Remote support continues to be provided through a protection hotline that in January enabled 750 refugees and migrants from Venezuela to receive direct assistance and referrals to services in order to access documentation, urgent material needs (food and non-food items), financial support, and other protection needs.

On 20 January, a group of 20 Venezuelan elderly people, who were relocated through *Operação Acolhida* to a shelter in the municipality of Nova Iguaçu (RJ), received their first dose of COVID-19

vaccine. On 25 January, 36 Indigenous Warao who were relocated from the Brasilia bus station to a shelter were also immunized.

On 29 January, UNHCR and the Ministry of Citizenship (MC) adopted the 2021 Work Plan, under the terms of the Technical Cooperation Agreement in force between both signatories since 2018, which contributes to addressing refugees and migrants' arrivals from Venezuela to Brazil. The Plan establishes strategic directions between the MC and UNHCR, including management of shelters, (including transit and interiorization sites), as well as support on documentation, screening and socio-economic integration.

To respond to the constantly growing number of undocumented Venezuelans living in street situation in the Roraima state, on 30 January, Operation Welcome activated the contingency plan which established the reopening of Nova Canaã and Tancredo Neves shelters for Indigenous population and further expansion of existing shelters to accommodate 1,300 refugees and migrants. UNHCR, together with the Army, installed 128 refugee housing units (RHU). In addition, Operation Welcome started to coordinate a joint vulnerability assessment reaching, in January only, around 3,000 Venezuelans who entered the country irregularly after the closure of the border.

KEY RISKS AND GAPS

Collapse in health systems: Local health systems in several Brazilian States continue to face multiple challenges in their COVID-19 response and capacity.

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.

Gender-based violence (GBV): 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, especially for girls and women.

Increasing number of undocumented Venezuelans: Protracted border closures has led to increasing number of undocumented Venezuelans, who face challenges to access rights and services. Many are living in precarious conditions and cannot meet their basic needs of food and shelter.

UNHCR RESPONSE

Strengthening and adapting shelter support and reinforcing local health responses

Shelter: In January, UNHCR sheltered 944 refugees and migrants to different shelters in Boa Vista, including the remaining 250 residents of Ka'Ubanoko, the largest spontaneous settlement of the city, where 850 persons used to live in precarious and hazardous conditions. Throughout the eviction process, UNHCR and the army consulted 50 community leaders to inform them on the relocation plan and adjust its logistics to ensure protection needs were effectively reflected. This group was relocated to the indigenous shelters available in Boa Vista, including Jardim Floresta, a site that had been deactivated in mid-2020 and was reopened last December to receive former residents of Ka'Ubanoko.



On 12 January, UNHCR and the Secretary of Justice, Human Rights and Citizenship (SEJUSC) of

Amazonas State relocated 21 Venezuelans provisionally sheltered at the Manaus Bus Station Support Space (PRA) to Coroado shelter, a facility run by the local government. This action was a response to a 62% increase in the number of refugees and migrants sheltered at the PRA during December 2020, due to loss of livelihoods and evictions among refugees and migrants. UNHCR identified the most vulnerable families and supported the SEJUSC in the relocation after all concerned individuals tested negative for COVID-19.

Ensuring protection and supporting integration processes

Integration: In Pacaraima, the Federal Police began issuing ID cards for asylum seekers for the first time on 15 January. The issuance of this new document, foreseen in Decree 9277/18, was previously only tested on a pilot basis in Brasilia. This shift from paper protocols, which are sometimes rejected (despite being legally valid) by employers and local authorities, is deemed to facilitate asylum seekers' access to socio-economic services. The new IDs also maintain validity until the asylum claim is adjudicated, while the protocols need to be renewed annually.

During the month of January, a total of 1,360 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 (FTT) process for all these individuals and oversaw the institutional modality relocation of 58 individuals. Moreover, in the context of the *Empoderando Refugiadas* project, 12 women, including persons with disabilities, chronic diseases and other specific needs, were offered jobs in São Paulo state and were supported by UNHCR to settle in their new destination cities.



On 11 January, in the framework of *Memorial da América Latina*, an initiative of the Brazilian Center for Latin American Studies (CBEAL), UNHCR participated in a course on “Humanitarian Translation and Cultural Mediation for Migrants and Refugees”, targeting 500 participants working and researching on forced displacement and migration topics.

On 21 January, UNHCR, *Serviço Jesuíta a Migrantes e Refugiados* (SJMR) and Minas Gerais Indigenous Committee held a training session for 74 employees of the national bank Caixa Econômica on the current situation of refugees and migrants including on access to documentation, social assistance and financial inclusion, while also promoting awareness on indigenous rights and Warao cultural identity. It is expected that this awareness raising will improve the financial inclusion of indigenous refugees and migrants in the state.

On 25 January, UNHCR, Hermanitos and Banco Pérola presented the pilot project “Creditodos” to 45 Venezuelan entrepreneurs from Manaus, informing participants about microcredit opportunities, business loans and access requirements to the pilot program.

Protection: In Boa Vista and Pacaraima, UNHCR held sessions on Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEA) for the 10th military contingent and humanitarian staff, reaching a total of 373 participants.

On 5 January, UNHCR conducted a lecture for the Online Training on Human Rights and Migration organized by the Federal University of Bahia. The live session reached an audience of over 200 people and provided key insights into refugee legal frameworks and UNHCR’s mandate. On 30 January, UNHCR, together with DPU, also participated in a lecture held at the State University of São Paulo (UNESP) on the current situation of documentation and border restrictions in Brazil, attended by approximately 50 students, mostly Venezuelans.

On 6 January, the Federal and Military police in Pacaraima detected 55 Indigenous Warao, including 32 children, crossing the border irregularly and conducted them to the Federal Police (FP) for deportation. The Public Defender's Office acted through a Public Civil Action that led to a Federal Justice's decision against the deportation. In the following days, the group was relocated to the Jardim Floresta shelter.

On 22 January SJMR, with UNHCR's technical and financial support, opened the Reference Center for Refugees and Migrants in Porto Alegre, whose activities and services will expand partners' capacity in different areas of intervention, such as reception and protection, psychosocial support, legal advice, advocacy and socio-economic integration.

On 29 January, UNHCR and IOM conducted an online training session for 40 participants from the Secretariat for Social Development (SEDES) of the Federal District Government (GDF) aimed at strengthening institutional knowledge on community-based protection (CBP) issues. In addition, UNHCR and Instituto Mana conducted townhall meetings with 20 refugees and migrants from two Indigenous shelters in Manaus to jointly assess ongoing CBP initiatives and strategies for the dissemination of COVID-19 prevention messages.

Documentation and Registration: In January, in Boa Vista and Pacaraima, UNHCR and partners registered 1,680 persons in proGres v4 and generated 1,369 shelter IDs. The numbers reflect registration efforts targeting the population who was living in the Ka'Ubanoko spontaneous settlement and at the Bus Station for shelter allocation.

Also, UNHCR supported the documentation of 1,098 individuals at the Reception and Documentation Centres (*PITrig*) in Boa Vista and Pacaraima.

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

CwC: At the Manaus Bus Station Support Space (PRA), UNHCR provided information on refugees' protection, rights and duties, and COVID-19 prevention measures to 330 refugees and migrants. UNHCR also promoted information sessions, together with Fraternidade Internacional (FFHI), on personal hygiene methods, sanitization, and COVID-19 prevention methods to 175 PoCs staying at the Manaus Transit Shelter (ATM) waiting for the interiorization flights.

From 1 to 31 January, UNHCR's Help Platform registered 19,998 sessions, 70% of which were new visitors.

Ensuring the most vulnerable have access to basic items

Food and non-food items (NFIs) distribution: UNHCR delivered 1,147 hygiene kits, 821 cleaning kits for families, 148 packs of adult diapers, 385 mattresses, 620 cover mattresses, 630 buckets and 884 jerry cans to meet hygiene standards and needs of 3,409 refugees and migrants and 1,121 family groups living in shelters in Boa Vista.

In Pacaraima, 229 families of four Indigenous Pemon-Taurepang communities were supported with hygiene kits, soaps, sleeping mats, and plastic tarpaulins. Also, to support the reception of vulnerable and undocumented Venezuelan women and children, UNHCR provided Casa São José 324 bars of soap, 30 mattresses and 26 mattresses covers.

In São Paulo, UNHCR donated 30 single and double beds and 24 mattresses to Casa de Acolhida Madre Assunta, a Scalabrinian shelter, in order to set up 6 rooms for interiorized Venezuelans families.

In Manaus, UNHCR led a NFIs distribution of cleaning kits, cotton masks, hygiene kits and mosquito nets to 74 Indigenous families living outside shelters. This joint initiative aimed to support

a total of 313 Indigenous with basic items following the new restrictions of movement imposed by the state amidst the COVID-19 resurgence.

Expanding the provision of life-saving cash assistance

Cash-based interventions (CBI): In January, 29 families traveling via the employment-based modality of the interiorization strategy benefitted from cash-based assistance to cover their basic needs during the first months of their relocation to other states of Brazil.

Contacts:

Chiara Orsini – Associate Reporting Officer (orsini@unhcr.org)

Natália Neves - Donor Relations Associate (neves@unhcr.org)

Parceiros do ACNUR no Brasil – UNHCR partners in Brazil



UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the support of:
 O ACNUR, a Agência da ONU para Refugiados, agradece o apoio de:



With the support of the following organizations and private sector partners:
 Com o apoio das seguintes organizações e parceiros da iniciativa privada:



O ACNUR Brasil agradece o grande apoio e parceria com todas as outras agências da ONU, autoridades brasileiras (a nível federal, estadual e municipal) e organizações da sociedade civil envolvidas na resposta de emergência e nos programas regulares da operação brasileira.