As interiorization activities are resumed, Venezuelans arrive in one of the destination cities with the support of UNHCR staff.

Photo: UNHCR.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of 31 October, Brazil reached a total of 5,535,605 confirmed cases and 159,884 deaths from COVID-19.

All borders were closed in mid-March and entry restrictions by land and sea remain in place today 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.

On 2 October, the Office of the President, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Ministry of Infrastructure, and the Ministry of Health approved Ordinance nº470/2020, which extends by an additional period of 30 days from the date of the Ordinance the exceptional and temporary restrictions on entry by land or sea by foreigners regardless of nationality due to COVID-19. The restrictions on entry of individuals arriving from Venezuela remain, which means that regardless of an individual's migratory status, persons arriving from Venezuela will not be allowed entry to Brazil. In addition to that, entrance by air is now allowed nationwide and the person will have to present a visa (if required by the Brazilian Migratory Law).

On 9 October the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court ordered the Federal Government to transfer additional resources to the Roraima State to cover half of the incurred expenses linked to the provision of public services to refugees and migrants from Venezuela. The Ruling came in response to a Civil Action which had been submitted by the State of Roraima.
On 15 October, UNHCR staff in Brasilia, Sao Paulo and Belem returned to work at the office following a rotation schedule and internal guidelines for safe return and the prevention of COVID-19 in the workplace.

On 19 October, the Federal Police issued a directive lifting the suspension of administrative deadlines for refugee and migration-related processes introduced in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Deadlines and expiration dates for documentation will resume on 3 November 2020. All documents for refugees and migrants that expired from 16 March 2020 onwards will be accepted by the immigration authorities and can be used by the individuals until 16 March, 2021.

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 five 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.

**KEY RISKS AND GAPS**

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

**Sex and gender-based violence (SGBV):** 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 for girls and women.

**Documentation:** The Federal Police reduced operations and suspended the regular issuance or renewal of residency permits and asylum-seekers’ certificates as a result of the pandemic. Issuance of documents currently is provided only for urgent cases. Though the validity of the current documents was extended by the Federal Police until the end of the health emergency, documents with an expiring date create challenges for individuals as they are not always accepted by service providers or employers.

**UNHCR RESPONSE**

**Strengthening and adapting shelter support and reinforcing local health responses**

In Boa Vista, UNHCR is supporting Operation Welcome (OW) shelter transition strategy with technical advice on site planning and WASH infrastructure in order to adapt part of the Area for Protection and Care (APC) to become a regular shelter site.

Also in this framework, UNHCR supported the closure of the Jardim Floresta and the Nova Canaã shelters. To this end, UNHCR coordinated the relocation of refugees and migrants to other shelter sites and offered guidance on existing support mechanisms for alternative housing such as the interiorization programme and CBI opportunities. Moreover, UNHCR alongside the Brazilian Army and implementing partner AVSI, coordinated the opening of the Pricumã site, which has been adapted to become the first OW shelter site hosting persons with specific health conditions and disabilities.
UNHCR and partner organization AVSI developed a shelter relocation plan for 21 unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) living in shelters being deactivated as part of the Operation Welcome’s shelter restructuring plan. To this aim, a meeting was held with the Childhood and Youth Court in Boa Vista to notify them about the upcoming changes and ensure that applicable legal procedures related to the transfer have been followed. The UASC will be transferred to four different shelters in the coming days.

In the month October, UNHCR allocated over 130 refugees and migrants to different shelters in Boa Vista who were previously living in the streets.

In Pacaraima, from 21 to 23 October, UNHCR imparted a training in Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) for shelter management partners. This action is part of UNHCR’s CCCM strategy to develop capacity building for partners in areas related to management techniques, community participation, reporting, distribution, among others.

In the city of Manaus, following heavy rains which caused structural damages to the temporary accommodation area of the Reception and Support Centre of the Manaus Bus Station (PRA), UNHCR supported the relocation of 96 Venezuelan refugees and migrants to five other shelters in coordination with the city’s Municipality, the State’s Government and civil society organizations.

### Ensuring protection and supporting integration processes

**Integration:** As part of its efforts to strengthen the communication with communities about the federal interiorization programme, UNHCR distributed 75 informative banners in all shelters managed by Operation Welcome and the PITRIGS in Boa Vista and Pacaraima. The material contains key information regarding the various interiorization modalities and the enrolment process.

During the month of October, Operation Welcome internally relocated 1500 refugees and migrants from Venezuela. 926 persons were relocated through the “social reunion” modality, and were received by Brazilian private persons who make themselves available to support Venezuelans; 249 benefitted from the “shelter-to-shelter” modality and were received in facilities managed by public authorities and UNHCR partners; 181 were relocated through a job placement; 132 through family reunification and 12 were benefitted from an internal relocation made available by civil society organizations. The cities that received more beneficiaries are Curitiba (145), São Paulo (138), Porto Alegre (60), Seara (56) and Belo Horizonte (54).

On 21 October, UNHCR participated in a training for public school teachers in the state of São Paulo promoted by the Commercial Social Service Institute (SESC) in partnership with the Regional Board of Education and the Municipal Secretary of Education. The initiative is part of the implementation of the “Refugios Humanos” project seeking to raise awareness about refugee protection and enhance the integration of refugee children in the school environment. The webinar reached approximately 120 teachers.

**Gender and SGBV:** UNHCR and ATTER (Trans and Transvestite Association of the State of Roraima) joined efforts towards the identification and support to LGBTI+ people in situation of vulnerability in the city of Boa Vista and nearby municipalities. As part of this collaboration, Venezuelan refugees and migrants with this profile identified by ATTERR are being referred to UNHCR for protection assessments at the PITRIG. So far, 31 individual LGBTI+ cases have been supported with CBI, shelter and/or protection counselling.

**Documentation:** In October, UNHCR supported the documentation of 1,817 refugees and migrants at the Documentation and Interiorization Centre (PITRIG) in Boa Vista. Of those, 250 submitted asylum claims, 772 renewed their asylum-seekers’ provisional documentation and 101 obtained duplicates. In addition, 766 Venezuelans who were recognized as refugees as part of CONARE’s prima facie decisions received support to formalize their request for permanent residence. During the same period, UNHCR supported the pre-documentation of 1,236 asylum-seekers and 487 recognized refugees at the PITRIG and the Reception and Support Centre of the Manaus Bus Station (PRA) in Manaus. Considering the increasing demand for documentation services at the Operation Welcome facilities in Manaus, the Armed Forces, UNHCR, IOM and the Federal Police have jointly agreed to increase the daily appointments reserved for Venezuelan refugees and asylum-seekers from 70 to 100.
Scaling up and adapting strategies for Communication with Communities (CwC)

CwC: In Boa Vista, UNHCR collaborated with PAHO to develop awareness-raising information materials on suicide prevention which were distributed with the support of local authorities, implementing partners, community leaders and outreach volunteers. The materials, available in Spanish and Portuguese, reached a total of 12,833 persons, including 4,454 in shelters and 8,379 outside shelters. Among the Venezuelan refugees and migrants reached outside shelters, 6,424 were Venezuelans, 1,749 Brazilians, 146 Haitians and 15 Colombians. Also, in Boa Vista UNHCR developed and displayed informative materials regarding border-entry restrictions currently in place reaching approximately 3,873 refugees and migrants, including 2,912 in shelters, 611 at the PiTRIG and 350 at the Bus Station Support Space. The purpose of this initiative is to alert Venezuelans on consequences of non-compliance with these regulations, including risk of deportation and disqualification of asylum claims.

In Manaus, 967 refugees and migrants received information about personal hygiene and COVID-19 prevention methods through awareness-raising sessions held by UNHCR at the PiTRIG (Documentation and Interiorization Centre). Additional informative sessions were carried out by UNHCR and partner FFHI at the Manaus Transit Center (ATM), reaching 629 newly arrived Venezuelan refugees and migrants participating in the interiorization program.

In Pacaraima, through the four WhatsApp groups INFORMA-TE, UNHCR partner AVSI reached 1,917 persons (including Venezuelans and members of the host community) with information materials on COVID-19 prevention and response.

The UNHCR Help Platform registered 6,670 sessions in October, out of which 73% were new visitors.

Ensuring the most vulnerable have access to basic items

Food and non-food items (NFIs) distribution: In Belem, UNHCR and partner ADRA, delivered backpacks, jerrycans and buckets to 557 refugees and migrants among 146 Warao families living at the Tapanã Shelter and in private accommodations across the city.

In Manaus, UNHCR distributed hygiene kits reaching 254 people in the Tarumã Açu 1, Tarumã Açu 2 and Tarumã Centro indigenous shelters. The activity was carried out with the support of SEMASC (Municipal Secretary of Women, Social Assistance and Citizenship).

UNHCR distributed 1,203 hygiene kits and 30 packages of geriatric diapers to Venezuelan refugees and migrants in shelters in Boa Vista, benefiting 1,200 family groups and 435 single individuals. UNHCR also donated 1,425 units of hand sanitizers (spray alcohol) to Casa da Mulher Brasileira (CMB). With this contribution, UNHCR aims to support CMB’s efforts for COVID-19 prevention among SGBV survivors.

Also, in Boa Vista UNHCR donated 18,144 soap bars to refugees and migrants from Venezuela living in shelters. This distribution is part of UNHCR’s partnership with the UNILEVER group to bring dignity and personal hygiene care to refugees world-wide. Besides that, UNHCR has delivered backpacks containing hygiene kits and hand sanitizers to beneficiaries participating in the interiorization program and traveling to Curitiba, Cuiabá, Conde, Belo Horizonte, and São Paulo under the shelter-to-shelter modality.
Expanding the provision of life-saving cash assistance

Cash-based assistance (CBI): UNHCR, in partnership with UN Women, supported refugee and migrant women pursuing the revalidation of their medical degree credentials with CBI assistance. The assistance aims at facilitating their insertion in the Brazilian health labour market and covering their family’s basic needs given the financial expenses involved in the revalidation process.

Over the month of October, UNHCR also supported 119 families participating in the interiorization programme under the shelter-to-shelter and employment-based modalities with CBI to cover basic needs while adjusting to a new life in other states of Brazil.

Also during this month, 83 families (totalizing 146 refugees and migrants) were assessed by UNHCR for cash-based assistance at the Documentation and Interiorization Centre (PITRIG) in Boa Vista. Among these families, 35 had been identified during participatory assessments with people renting living spaces in Boa Vista’s neighbourhoods (among other groups) which took place at the end of September. As of 14 October, 6 families have received CBI prepaid cards, including 4 households led by women who were survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). UNHCR also delivered CBI cards to residents in the Latife Salomão shelter with serious health conditions and a SGBV survivor identified during a protection screening at the PITRIG.

Contacts:

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