

BRAZIL OPERATION

COVID-19 RESPONSE

AUGUST 2020



Venezuelan girl pouring potable water at Alfredo Nascimento shelter in Manaus. Photo: UNHCR/Felipe Irnaldo.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of 31 August, Brazil reached a total of 3,910,901 confirmed cases and 121,515 deaths from COVID-19.

All borders were closed in mid-March and entry restrictions by land, sea, and some airports remain in place 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. Entry restrictions for foreign nationals have been extended until the end of September following the [Executive Ordinance nº 419/2020](#) issued on 26 August. 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 health insurance and a visa, if the latter is required according to the Brazilian Migratory Law. According to the Ordinance, non-compliance with entry restrictions could lead to deportation and disqualification of asylum claims.

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 ordered a lockdown. However, since 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, 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. However, as the COVID-19 crisis advances unevenly throughout the country, 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 August, the Federal Government paid the fifth 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 in August the viability and alternative terms to extend the grant until the end of the year was being analysed.

In order to assist possible confirmed COVID-19 cases, Operation Welcome (*Operação Acolhida*) 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 cities of Manaus and Belem.

On 28 August, the Government of Brazil recognized 7,787 Venezuelans and 161 individuals from other nationalities as refugees, reaching an estimated population of over 55,000 persons formally recognized as refugees. With these decisions on Venezuelans, which are part of the simplified *prima facie* procedure adopted by the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), Brazil has now nearly 46,000 Venezuelans recognized as refugees - the largest population with this profile in Latin America. The *prima facie* procedure was extended at the end of August for 12 additional months taking into account the prevailing conditions in Venezuela, in line with the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees.

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 expired 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



Health: Since the opening of the Area for Protection and Care (APC) in Boa Vista in June, 2,270 persons have received medical assistance, including people from Venezuela, Cuba, Guyana, Cape Verde, Bolivia, and Haiti, as well as local community.

A State Emergency Program for Social Assistance in response to COVID-19 open to refugees, stateless persons and migrants was launched in Rio Grande do Norte on 4 August. The emergency measure, known as “RN Chega Junto”, aims to alleviate the most compelling needs of the local population through rent

subsidies and the distribution of nutritional food and hygiene kits. UNHCR advocated for the inclusion of refugees, migrants, stateless persons and the indigenous population in the program, which is expected to benefit approximately 250 refugees in Rio Grande do Norte, mainly indigenous Venezuelans. Moreover, UNHCR provided technical support to the authorities setting up the program, whose rent support component is based on UNHCR's cash-based interventions (CBI) strategy.

To commemorate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, celebrated on 9 August, UNHCR's global and national websites published the story of a Venezuelan Warao woman who recovered from COVID-19. The story, available in [English](#) and [Portuguese](#), highlights UNHCR's efforts to support the inclusion of indigenous persons in local health responses to COVID-19. During that same week, UNHCR and MSF organized a virtual training on "Psychological care in times of pandemic". The activity aimed at building capacity for 20 social assistance and health professionals currently working with the Warao community in the state of Pará.

Shelter and basic needs: From 11 to 24 August UNHCR supported the allocation of 94 refugees and migrants from Venezuela living in extreme vulnerable conditions on the streets or precarious settlements to various Operation Welcome shelters in Boa Vista and the new Taruma-Açu shelter in Manaus.

Aiming at better mapping shelters and other spaces hosting refugees and migrants and profiling beneficiaries, UNHCR released the [July Registration and Shelter Report in Roraima](#) and a [fact sheet on its interventions in Manaus](#). Both reports highlight UNHCR's activities to respond to the COVID-19 emergency in Roraima and Amazonas.

On 21 August, UNHCR finalized the assembly of eight Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) donated to FUNPAPA for the Tapanã shelter in Belem. Five of these RHUs will be used for the schooling of young children and the other three as offices for the shelter staff. UNHCR is supporting the purchase of furniture and air conditioners for the RHUs to be used as offices and is collaborating with FUNPAPA in the development of a fire safety plan.

Ensuring protection and supporting integration processes



Registration and documentation: After temporarily serving as an isolation area for suspected cases of COVID-19, the Documentation and Interiorization Centre of Manaus (PITRIG) resumed its activities on 3 August. During this gradual reopening, with requirements to observe preventive measures, the screening centre received around 100 persons per day. In order to respond to the increasing number of refugees and migrants seeking documentation at the Bus Station Support Space (PRA) in Manaus, UNHCR continued to conduct priority screenings of Venezuelan refugees and migrants every morning to support the pre-documentation for the most vulnerable cases. Approximately 180 individuals are seeking access to documentation every day to access health services, job opportunities, the emergency subsidy

for COVID19, the interiorization process, among others.

In Boa Vista, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the reception centre (PITRIG) has been also operating under a reduced number of daily appointments for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. However, even during the most critical period, UNHCR continued to operate at this PITRIG in order to receive and follow up on the most vulnerable cases. Besides the regular assistance provided to Venezuelans at the PITRIG, in August UNHCR's protection team assisted a group of 18 asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka in submitting their asylum requests.

As part of the efforts to register and document Venezuelan indigenous refugees and migrants, as of 11 August about 94% of all the shelter ID cards in the Pintolandia indigenous shelter in Boa Vista had been replaced with a new version, which included an individual photo. UNHCR has now issued IDs for nearly all indigenous children under the age of five, which will ensure their access to life-saving services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, UNHCR and IOM jointly conducted registration sessions in indigenous communities in Pacaraima, reaching 953 Venezuelan indigenous refugees and migrants. The activities took place in the four Pemon-Taurepang communities supported by UNHCR (Tarau Paru, Sakaumota, Bananal

and Sorocaima), resulting in 372 referrals of individuals to PITRIG (reception centre) to renew their documentation.

UNHCR is also moving forward with the protection and integration strategy of Warao indigenous groups living in the states of Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, and will lead working groups engaging local networks including federal, state and municipal actors as well as civil society, aiming at establishing an action plan focusing on protection and integration for the 80 Waraos living in these cities.

Integration: In Boa Vista, over 500 Venezuelan refugees and migrants are receiving Portuguese classes since the beginning of August. All UNHCR-managed shelters are now equipped with a learning space for the delivery of the course, which is imparted by the National Commercial Learning Service (SENAC) in partnership with NGO partners AVSI and World Vision.

On 11 August, the Municipality of São Paulo launched the city's first [Plan of Public Policies for Refugees and Migrants](#), in close collaboration with UNHCR. The Plan, to be implemented during the period 2021-2024, is structured around eight thematic axes, outlining key objectives and indicators while designating focal points within the Secretariats responsible for its implementation. UNHCR will support the plan's implementation, including its dissemination in English and Spanish.



UNHCR's Brazil [Interiorization Bulletin](#), covering the month of July, has also just been released this month. The report highlights the broad range of activities carried out by UNHCR to support the Federal Government's voluntary internal relocation programme and its beneficiaries since April 2018 when it started.

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



CwC: In Boa Vista, UNHCR and SJMR reached 100 Eñepa individuals through WhatsApp with information on COVID-19 prevention. The initiative was implemented with the support of outreach volunteers from an indigenous community at the *Kaubanoko* spontaneous settlement. A similar exercise took place at the Pintolândia indigenous shelter in collaboration with UNHCR's partner Fraternidade (FFHI), reaching another group of 50 Eñepa individuals.

In Manaus, more than 1,100 Venezuelan refugees and migrants received information about personal hygiene and COVID-19 prevention methods through awareness-raising sessions held by UNHCR at the PITRIG and the Bus Station Support Space. In addition, UNHCR's partner Fraternidade (FFHI) carried out three informative sessions reaching more than 400 persons at Manaus Transit Center (ATM) and 380 persons in the Bus Station Support Space (PRA).

In Pacaraima, UNHCR partner AVSI reached approximately 600 Venezuelans and 200 Brazilians through the four WhatsApp groups INFORMA-TE for the distribution of information materials on COVID-19 and Malaria prevention.

As of the end of August, the [UNHCR Help Platform](#) registered an average of 6,000 sessions. From this total, 73% were new visitors.

Gender and SGBV: In Boa Vista, UNHCR, UNFPA, and IOM held four information sessions on the protection of women and girls reaching 31 female leaders in four spontaneous occupations (Sumuru, Pacaraima, Beira Rio e Aprisco) and the support space area of the bus terminal. Informative material on COVID-19 prevention was also displayed at these sites.

On 14 August UNHCR participated in the "*Quarentena sem Violência*" (quarantine without violence) campaign in Boa Vista, aiming at preventing and combating domestic violence. The initiative, organized by

the *Casa da Mulher Brasileira* and supported by UNHCR, UNFPA and partner organization AVSI, included the donation and distribution of kits containing information on local support network services, face masks, condoms and personal hygiene products to women living in some of the UNHCR-managed shelters and passing by in the street.

From 13 to 19 August, UNHCR Manaus, alongside its implementing partner Instituto Mana and Warao community members, conducted community information sessions on COVID-19 prevention in their native language, reaching 75 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in four shelters.

UNHCR Brazil Podcast: On 6 August, UNHCR in partnership with universities from the Sérgio Vieira de Mello Academic Consortium (CSVM), launched the podcast “*Refúgio em Pauta*”. Every month the podcast will discuss the realities and challenges to integration faced by refugees in Brazil, gathering perspectives from refugees, humanitarian professionals, professors, researchers and UNHCR partners. The [first episode](#) covered food security in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with the participation of Boa Vista Field Coordinator, Arturo de Nieves, who addressed UNHCR and its partners’ response to the Venezuelan emergency situation in Roraima.

Ensuring the most vulnerable have access to basic items

Food and non-food items (NFIs) distribution: On 4 August, UNHCR delivered 87 plastic tarpaulins at the spontaneous settlement Ka’Ubanoko (Pacaraima) with the aim of reducing the vulnerabilities of its 886 inhabitants during the rainy season in Roraima. Furthermore, UNHCR donated 4 bales of women’s and men’s clothing to *Casa da Mulher Brasileira* which will be distributed to families in vulnerable situation in “Baixo Rio Branco”, located in the southern part of the state of Roraima which includes approximately 300 refugees and migrants.



On 11 August UNHCR delivered mattresses and pillows to the Area for Protection and Care (APC) in Boa Vista, completing its donation of 180 beds that are used in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Also in Boa Vista, 200 face masks were donated to the ATTERR (Associação de Trans e Travestis do Estado de Roraima) which is expected to benefit LGTBI+ persons in vulnerable condition, including refugees and migrants. The masks were delivered in coordination with partner organization SJMR.

Throughout August, UNHCR’s partners covering the southern states of Brazil continued efforts to respond to the growing needs of the refugee population in the context of COVID-19. In São Paulo, partner Compassiva delivered 180 hygiene kits to more than 700 persons, while IKMR distributed 360 food baskets and 640 masks among 720 beneficiaries. In Curitiba, Caritas Paraná distributed 54 food baskets, 190 NFIs and more than 150 winter clothing pieces to help refugees and migrants cope with the low temperatures. In Rio de Janeiro, Caritas Rio distributed 37 food baskets, 540 NFIs, more than 300 masks and about 40 hygiene kits, benefiting more than 1,300 people; throughout the month, 1,551 people were served by this organization which recorded 422 new registrations during August.

Expanding the provision of life-saving cash assistance



Cash-based assistance (CBI): As of the end of August, UNHCR’s CBI direct implementation amounted to BRL 2,449,476 (equivalent to approximately USD 480,000). So far in 2020, 1,305 households have been reached with CBI, of whom 1,068 were headed by women. In total, 4,096 people have benefited from the program this year.

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UNHCR Partners in Brazil:



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