

# Protection Monitoring Report

## UNHCR Brazil

April-May 2021

### I. Introduction and Context

Protection monitoring during forced displacement is essential to safeguard fundamental rights enshrined in international human rights and refugee law instruments, regional treaties, and national legislation. By collecting, verifying and analyzing information, it is possible to identify human rights violations and protection risks in order to inform advocacy strategies, design and implement programmes, and make quality interventions.

In 2018, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, set up a regional tool to monitor the protection needs and situation of persons that have been forced to leave their country, focusing initially on the Venezuelan Situation. Protection Monitoring is a key process of UNHCR's response and entails the systematic verification and analysis of the violation of rights and protection needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and others in need of international protection, over an extended period of time. Prior to the outbreak of the new Coronavirus pandemic, UNHCR Brazil and partners conducted face-to-face interviews with refugees and others of concern with a geographical focus on the state of Roraima. However, the current COVID-19 context and sanitary measures adopted by States in response to the pandemic required UNHCR and partners to adapt its data collection methodologies. Thus, remote channels of data collection have been introduced in order to allow for the continuity and reinforcement of protection monitoring exercises.

In Brazil, the first round of data collection based on a high frequency survey was conducted in January and February 2021. The Report summarizing the main findings can be found [here](#). This report covers the results of the second of four rounds of data collection to be repeated on a quarterly basis throughout 2021. Data collection was conducted nationwide during the last week of April and first week of May 2021.

### II. Methodology

The second round of UNHCR's 2021 protection monitoring data collection included three different modalities. It focused on (i) a self-administered questionnaire accessed by asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants via online channels (UNHCR and partners disseminated links to the online questionnaire through existing communication channels<sup>1</sup> with respondents who submitted their results through mobile phones or electronic devices), (ii) remote interviews and (iii) interviews initiated through proGres during registration activities in Boa Vista/Roraima.

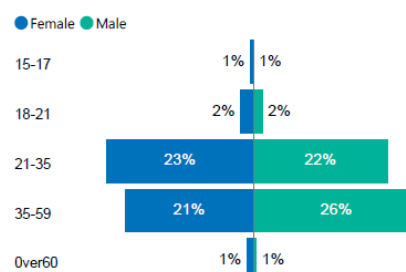
The sampling of this exercise followed a convenience / non-probability methodology, i.e. sample was selected based on accessibility to the population, as respondents most likely would have had prior contact with UNHCR and/or partners and access to mobile phones or electronic devices with internet connection. Therefore, the results below are not statistically representative and cannot be extrapolated to the whole population. 204 responses were obtained via the self-administered channel, 116 via remote interviews and 68 via interviews initiated during registration activities in Boa Vista/RR, totalizing 388 responses nationwide.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes existing and trusted information and communication channels with PoCs, such as the [Help Platform](#), social media, WhatsApp groups and community networks.



- 388 questionnaires / 1503 individuals
- 14 distinct nationalities
- Residing in 12 States in Brazil



\*Age/sex pyramid –388 questionnaires, out of which 327 head of families identified their age and sex.

### III. Demographic information

- **Average family size:** 3.87 members
- **Heads of family:** 54% of those who identified as heads of family are female.
- **Children:** Almost 71% of families have at least one child (58% of whom have at least one child under 5 years old).
- **LGBTI:** 9% of those who answered the question on sexual orientation and gender identity identified themselves as a member of the LGBTI community.
- **Nationalities:** 95% of the population surveyed are Venezuelan refugees and migrants. The remaining respondents are from Colombia, Haiti, Cuba, Guinea-Bissau, Bolivia, Angola, Togo, Morocco, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Yemen and Nigeria.
- **Ethnic group:** 41% of respondents identified as mixed (two or more races / bi-racial); 12% indicated they are unsure about their ethnicity; 17% identified as Caucasians; and 15% identified as black or of African descent.
- **Time of arrival to the country:** 32% of respondents arrived to Brazil within the last 6 months; 29% arrived between 6 months and 2 years ago; and 39% arrived more than 2 years ago. Compared to the first round conducted in January/February 2021, there has been an increase in respondents who arrived in Brazil within the last 6 months. This can be explained by interviews initiated through proGres, a new data collection channel which was added for this second round onwards in Boa Vista/RR, located near the border with Venezuela.

### IV. Highlights

- **Most respondents (48%) identify with one or more specific protection needs.** In comparison, around 30% of PoCs registered with UNHCR in Brazil<sup>2</sup> identify as having at least one specific protection needs.
- **63% stated they would face risks upon return to their country of origin,** including lack of food, unemployment, lack of access to medical services and would face the risk of

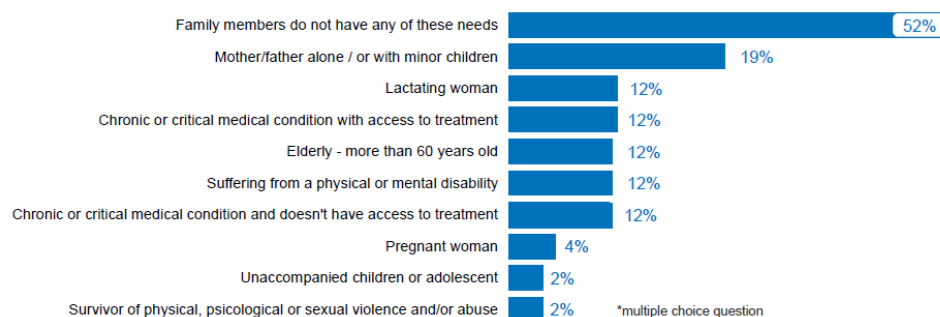
<sup>2</sup> Source: UNHCR registration system - proGres V4.

danger due to insecurity. Similar to the first-round of 2021 protection monitoring, over 95% of those surveyed are Venezuelans, a notable majority of whom manifest a need for international protection given the socioeconomic and human rights situation in Venezuela.

- **One quarter of respondents (23%) do not possess legal documentation in Brazil**, which in practice may limit access to rights and services, including non-urgent medical care, formal employment, and education. During the reporting period, the land border with Venezuela in Pacaraima/RR remained closed which impacted access to territory and as a result, access to documentation for those in need of international protection.
- **More than half of respondents are unemployed (58% of 327 family groups)**. The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 continues to contribute to difficulties in obtaining formal employment in Brazil, along with challenges in recognizing respondents' previous work experiences and academic diplomas.
- **The majority of interviewed families indicate their children are enrolled in school (66%)**. When compared to the first round of data collection, this increase can be explained by the gradual reopening of public schools for enrolment in Brazil (although many are still operating remotely), especially in Roraima. **However, 43% still remain without the necessary resources to access their children's education virtually** in times of COVID-19 while many schools still resort to distance learning modalities.
- **45% of respondents have access to social assistance benefits, of which 23% represents government assistance** i.e. Bolsa Família and Auxílio emergencial.

## V. Specific Protection Needs

Nearly half of the families interviewed (approx. 48%) identified with **at least one specific protection need**, such as single parent households, pregnant or lactating women, elderly at risk and people with chronic or critical medical conditions.



## VI. Legal status and access to territory

Some of the measures adopted to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including the border closure, have adversely affected the ability of refugees and migrants to enter Brazil and enjoy basic rights and services.

Access to territory and protection from non-refoulement are therefore key protection considerations for refugees and other persons in need of international protection. **63%** of respondents agree or strongly agree that their **family members would be at risk if they had to return to their place of initial residence or home country**. As 95% of the respondents are Venezuelan nationals, this confirms the trend that Venezuelan refugees and migrants are in need of international protection considering the socioeconomic and human rights situation in the country.

Of the risks faced upon return, 36% indicate lack of food; 32% indicate unemployment; 27% indicate lack of access to medical services; and 21% indicate a risk of danger due to insecurity in their country of origin.

## A. Entry to the country

**66%** of interviewees stated they **entered the country in a regular or legal manner** and registered their entry with the Brazilian immigration authorities. As the land border with Venezuela in Pacaraima remains closed, irregular entries contributed to the increase in the number of undocumented refugees. This undocumented population is represented by respondents who indicate having entered Brazil within the last 6 months (32%) or between 6 months and 2 years (29%).

Although **94% of respondents indicated not having experienced any negative incidents with state authorities** (e.g. refusal of entry, deportation, or forced return), the results reveal respondents experienced issues related to their safety and security since having left their homes.

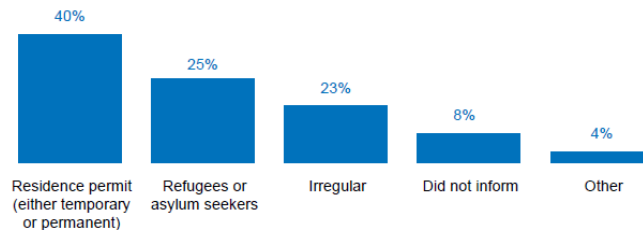
**One in five (20%) respondents indicated they or family members have suffered from or witnessed a protection incident, primarily theft, physical threats, or bribery.** This figure is lower when compared to data collected in the first round of the UNHCR's protection monitoring, during January and February 2021.

Moreover, 66% of the population surveyed mentioned they have at least one dependent or family member who remained in the country of origin, original residence, or is in transit.

## B. Legal Status

Almost **one-fourth (23%) of respondents** represent individuals who entered Brazil irregularly and/or do not have a current legal migratory status. This is a higher percentage of undocumented respondents

when compared to other protection monitoring surveys conducted by UNHCR and partners, including the protection monitoring report from January/February 2021, as the land border with Venezuela in Pacaraima remains closed and the number of people from Venezuela in need of international protection continues to rise.



## C. Asylum in Brazil

**24%** of respondents indicate the intention to apply for asylum though they are yet to do so mostly because of the pandemic (e.g. services limited to online appointments), lack of information, and lack of documentation. It is unclear what respondents intend when selecting lack of documentation as an answer to the inability to apply for asylum given that possession of identity documents is not a requirement under Brazilian law when applying for asylum. However, individuals who entered Brazil irregularly during the border closure have been unable to apply for asylum on account of lack of an official migratory entry document.

**30%** of the interviewees stated that they have no intention to apply for asylum. This may be on account of lack of understanding of the difference between refugee and temporary residence status and a perception that the asylum seeker protocol is not always accepted by service providers as a valid ID document.

# VII. Access to rights and services

## A. Access to education

**One third (33%) of families** that have school-age children stated that they have at least one child **out of school**. According to Brazil's education census of 2020, just 37,700 or 45 percent of Venezuelan school-age children have been enrolled in school.

The survey results indicate the main reasons a child may be out of school as **lack of documentation** or other **school enrollment requirements**, though the survey doesn't allow

respondents to further detail these challenges. This may be explained by a lack of understanding on the Ministry of Education's recent favorable regulations, such as Resolution 1 of 13 November 2020<sup>3</sup>.

Public schools in Brazil are gradually reopening for in-person attendance so the number of children out of school slightly decreased when compared to the first round of data collection.

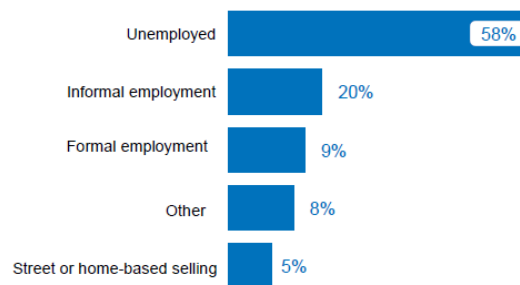
A recent study conducted by UNHCR and the World Bank<sup>4</sup> stated that overcrowded schools and a mismatch between age and grade attainment are the main impediments for the children of Venezuelan refugees and migrants when it comes to integrating in schools. It suggests that increasing the capacity of schools by introducing morning and afternoon sessions could help alleviate overcrowding in schools and reduce class sizes.

Even though the two-thirds of interviewed families have their children in school (67%), 43% indicated they do not have the necessary resources and digital access to receive their education virtually in times of COVID-19.

## B. Employment

A total of 327 family groups were consulted on employment.

Most respondents indicated they are **unemployed (58%)**. This figure rises to 73% when answered by **refugees and migrants who arrived in Brazil within the last 6 months** and lowers to **43% for those who have been in the country for more than 2 years**.



Moreover, a quarter are engaged in informal employment activities to meet the needs of their families (20%) and 5% are engaged in street-based commerce.

The number of refugees unemployed or resorting to informal employment increased when compared to the first round of data collection as the COVID-19 economic impacts continue to be felt, especially in the service sector.

Overall, 9% of respondents are engaged in formal employment. The percentage increases to 12% when considering interviewees who have been living in Brazil for more than 24 months. However, among respondents who have recently arrived in the country, only 3% have formal work.

The UNHCR and World Bank<sup>5</sup> paper describes that refugee and migrant workers employed in the formal sector are younger, less likely to be female or white, and more likely to have completed high school than their Brazilian peers. They are also likely to work longer hours a week and more often in temporary positions compared to host community workers. It concludes that having stronger labor market activation programs that include job intermediation and skills and language training should help in overcoming search barriers and matching friction.

As in the previous monitoring, the current employment situation of the respondents contrasts with their experience in their respective countries of origin. Only 19% of interviewees indicated having been unemployed in their country of origin; 22% indicated having had informal employment; and 27% reported having had formal work. Difficulties in finding formal employment in Brazil may be explained by the current socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, refugees and migrants face challenges when trying to validate their previous professional experience or academic diplomas in Brazil due to lack of required documentation and costly revalidation processes.

<sup>3</sup> Available at [http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com\\_docman&view=download&alias=165271-rceb001-20&category\\_slug=novembro-2020-pdf&Itemid=30192](http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&alias=165271-rceb001-20&category_slug=novembro-2020-pdf&Itemid=30192)

<sup>4</sup> [Integration of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Brazil](#) (UNHCR/ World Bank)

<sup>5</sup> Idem.

### C. Social assistance

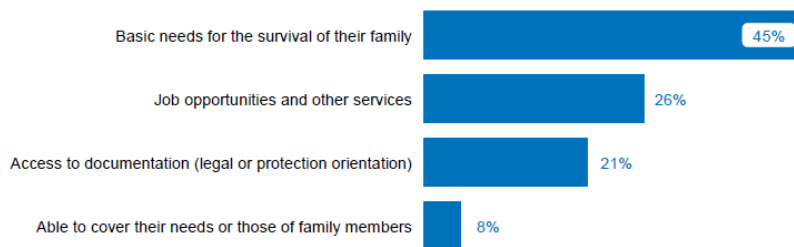
- **45%** of respondents answered they are **receiving some kind of social assistance** (cash allowance).
- **63%** reported they are receiving economic assistance from the **emergency COVID-19 assistance program** and **57%** from **“Bolsa Familia”** the national cash transfer program.

Overall, statistics<sup>6</sup> show that Venezuelans who register in Cadastro Único are poorer but more educated than their Brazilian counterparts. However, the lower registration rate may signal that many refugees and migrants may not be aware of their rights and guaranteed access, suggesting a need to continue providing information and assistance to overcome language barriers.

## VIII. Priority Needs

When asked what their most urgent needs and priorities were in the month prior to the survey, **45%** answered **basic needs for the survival of their family** such as food, shelter, clothing, among other needs.

In addition, 26% reported that their priority needs are linked to job opportunities and other services (e.g. health, education) and 21% mentioned access to documentation (legal or protection orientation), which represents a high increase in this need when compared to other protection monitoring exercises conducted by UNHCR and partners as the difficulties in finding formal employment and accessing documentation remain largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and border restrictions.



## IX. Coping mechanisms

The survey also asked if in the three months prior to data collection, family members had to resort to coping mechanisms to cover their own or family members' basic needs.

- **30%** reported they had to **reduce food or the quality of food eaten**
- **21%** had to **limit the food consumption** of adults in order for children to eat
- **21%** informed they had to **borrow financial resources**



<sup>6</sup> [Integration of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Brazil](#) (UNHCR/ World Bank)

## X. Well-being

A total of 327 family groups were consulted on well-being and demonstrated positive indicators in this area.

**Most of the population surveyed considered their interaction and/or relationship with the local population positive or very positive (75%) and mentioned they feel safe in the area or community where they now live (68%).**

Nonetheless, many of them reported that during the time they have been living in Brazil, they have felt **lonely or socially isolated** (52%). Furthermore, 31% state that they were **discriminated against**, with the perception that it was on account of their **nationality** (93%).

The survey also collected data on **access to internet** when needed. Even though half of the respondents (51%) indicated they can easily or very easily access connectivity, a considerable number reported **difficulties (36%)**. When compared to the first round of data collection, more refugees indicated difficulties in accessing connectivity. This can be explained by the inclusion of the two new channels introduced as of the second round, interviews by phone and initiated during registration, which reach individuals who aren't already accessing the survey through an internet-connected device.

## XI. Future plans

Most of the respondents (44%) planned to stay where they currently are when asked if they have expected to move or change their residence in the short or medium-term.

- **36%** answered that they **plan to relocate**. Of those, most of them (85%) responded they are planning to move **to other cities within Brazil**, mainly to the south and southeast of Brazil.
- **16%** reported they have been part of the voluntary federal relocation programme (“interiorização”) supported by UNHCR and civil society partners.

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