

# Situation Overview III: Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants living outside of shelters, Boa Vista city



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



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more effective  
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## BACKGROUND

Since early 2015, Venezuelans have been leaving their country of origin due to social, economic and political turmoil. An estimated 75,560<sup>1</sup> Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants are currently in Brazil, of which 25,000<sup>2</sup> are in the northern city of Boa Vista, capital of Roraima state. Throughout 2018 the rate of arrivals has increased, stretching the city's capacity to provide access to basic services. As Venezuelan populations continue to arrive, there is a need for regularly updated, detailed information on their needs and vulnerabilities, particularly those living outside of shelters managed by humanitarian actors.

REACH, in support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and partners, is conducting regular area-based assessments to assist humanitarian planning and response. This report presents the results of the third assessment conducted in the city<sup>3</sup> and aims to provide an update on vulnerabilities and priority needs of affected populations.

## KEY FINDINGS

- As indicated in previous months, sustainable livelihood opportunities, as well as adequate employment conditions were reported by FGD participants as the main priority needs for Venezuelans living across the city.
- Migrants and asylum seekers reportedly have access to health and education basic services in Boa Vista city. However, Venezuelans indicated difficulties with vacancies in schools and health units as well as a perceived discrimination by host community members in these spaces.
- FGD participants reported a perception that the social unrest that occurred in Pacaraima on 18 August led to an increase in tensions with Brazilian host communities in Boa Vista.<sup>4</sup> This includes a perceived increase in physical assault and intimidation by host community members against Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers.
- Similarly, FGD participants perceived a decrease in the assistance offered by host community members to vulnerable populations living outside of shelters. Spaces for housing, sporadic donations of clothes and non-food items given for free by host community were less commonly reported in August. Reportedly, the humanitarian aid provided in August was limited to food donations provided primarily by religious entities as well as the government programme "Bolsa Família".<sup>5</sup>

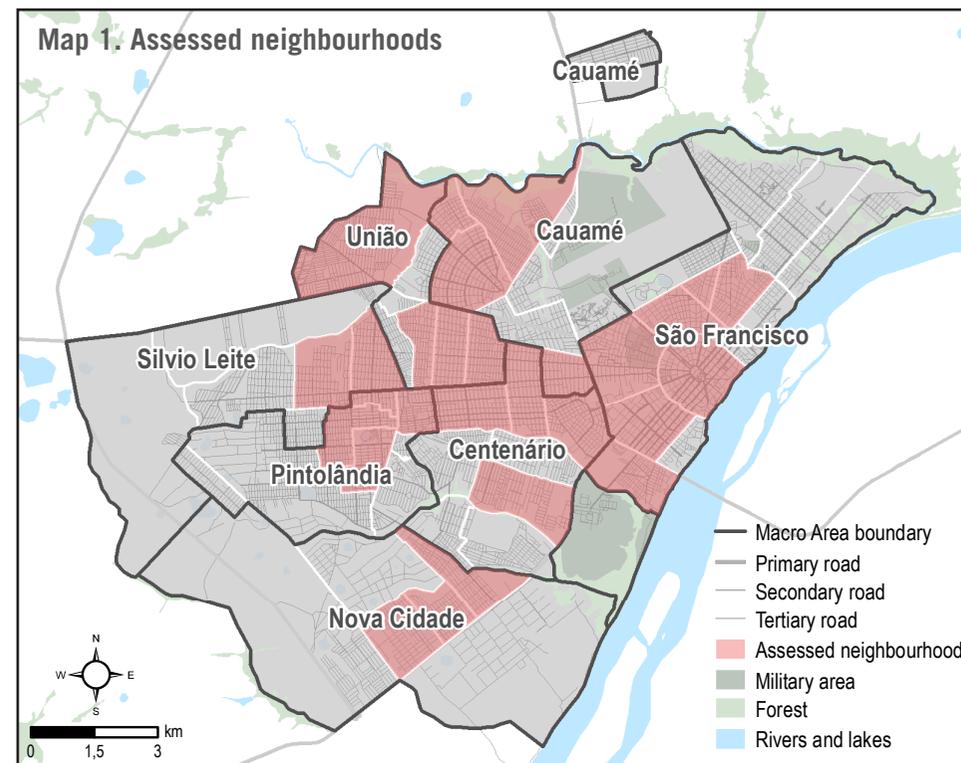
1. Federal Police, August 2018. Number represents the total of people registered by the Federal Police since 2015

2. Boa Vista Municipality, July 2018

3. The Situation Overview from July is available here: [English](#), [Portuguese](#)

4. On 18 August 2018, social unrest involving by host community members of the border town resulted in the displacement of many Venezuelans from the town.

5. Social welfare programme of the Brazilian government which provides financial aid to families in return for families ensuring children attend school and are vaccinated.



## METHODOLOGY

REACH conducted primary data collection between 15 and 28 August in 28 of 57 neighbourhoods in Boa Vista city (see Map 1 above). Data was collected through 28 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a total of 197 Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants (108 women and 89 men). Participants were selected from their neighbourhoods of residence and chosen based on their knowledge of multi-sectoral needs of populations. Further, cases where people were living in vulnerable conditions were verified through direct observation and data collection in the locations reported by FGD participants. Given the methodology used, the information presented here should be considered indicative only.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

According to data collected by the Municipality of Boa Vista, as of June 2018 the majority of Venezuelans residing in Boa Vista are aged 15 to 60 years (74%), and over half of Venezuelans in Boa Vista are male (57%).<sup>6</sup> FGD participants indicated that the most common household composition is family groups followed by people living with friends and acquaintances. In terms of education, it was estimated that the majority (around 70%) of Venezuelans in Boa Vista have secondary education, with a minority (around 20%) having higher education or other type (10% primary or technical education). Finally, FGD participants indicated that little to no indigenous groups are currently living outside of shelters in Boa Vista other than in Pintolândia macro area.<sup>7</sup>

## DISPLACEMENT AND INTENTIONS

In August, areas of origin of Venezuelan FGD participants remained similar to those of participants assessed in July. The majority were from the Northeast region (58%, primarily Monagas and Anzoátegui states), followed by Bolivar state in the south (33%) that shares a border with Roraima state (Brazil).

Map 2. Areas of origin of FGD participants



6. Data was collected between 28 May and 9 June through interviews with 9,000 Venezuelans; sampling was not representative.

7. There is currently one shelter (located in Pintolândia macro area and called by the same name) accommodating Venezuelan indigenous populations currently living in Boa Vista. Factsheet with July information is available [here](#).

In August, primary push factors for leaving Venezuela and pull factors attracting populations to Brazil remained largely similar to the previous month. Economic factors such as inflation, unemployment, cost of living and low wages, and the lack of health and education services were the most commonly reported push factors. There were also reports of fear of official security personnel in the country (police and military), as well as increasing general insecurity. The most commonly reported pull factors to Brazil were the geographic proximity, lower cost of travelling to Brazil in comparison to other destinations, and lack of passport requirement to cross the border. As reported by FGDs, this has become an increasingly important pull factor in the last months, with passports becoming increasingly difficult to obtain in Venezuela, as well as the introduction of passport requirements to cross the border into other neighbouring countries.

The most commonly reported pull factors for choosing to stay in Boa Vista are the perception that it is safe compared to elsewhere in Brazil, presence of family or acquaintances, a lack of money to go elsewhere and a preference to be close to Venezuela to facilitate visiting family or sending money and food. However, many FGD participants stated that if they knew of employment opportunities elsewhere and they could afford to leave, they would prefer to leave Boa Vista.

## SHELTER

In August, in all macro areas of the city FGD participants reported that Venezuelans were looking for rented housing, and that these were becoming increasingly scarce. Rental houses are typically shared by more than one household group to save on rental prices, with an estimated average of one household group (3-5 people) per bedroom and average rent of 250-500 BRL.<sup>8</sup> Many FGD participants reported that their living conditions are not of decent quality, with a lack of basic furniture or bathrooms, insufficient personal space, lack of cleanliness and issues with humidity and lack of ventilation.

## LEGAL STATUS

In August, the legal status of Venezuelans did not change significantly, with the majority of people registered with the Federal Police.<sup>9</sup> The most common legal status was asylum seekers, followed by temporary residency.<sup>10</sup> FGD participants indicated that they would prefer to have temporary residence status, though it was noted that many participants did not have a clear understanding of the different types of registration and their relative benefits, and opt for the status that is fastest to obtain at the time of registration.

The majority of FGD participants reported that they did not face challenges registering, though a minority noted a lack of flexibility in the appointment dates for registration, as well as the perception that the waiting time to get an appointment is increasing, particularly for temporary residency. Additional challenges reported by a small minority of participants were that younger children often do not have passports or ID cards resulting in difficulties registering, and those without internet connection faced difficulties confirming and checking their appointments.

8. 1 USD = 4.13 BRL, UN Operational Rates of Exchange, 19 September, 2018.

9. Federal Police is the body responsible for the registration of foreign nationals.

10. Under Brazilian legislation (2017) Venezuelans nationals have the right to apply for temporary residence in Brazil, which is valid for 2 years, whereas asylum seeker status needs to be renewed annually.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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As in July, FGD participants in August reported that Venezuelans have little knowledge about their legal rights and legal institutions that they can access in case of violation of their rights. Informal sources are reportedly the main channels of information, in particular internet (accessed through mobile and public wifi network in many squares all over the city) as well as word of mouth through personal acquaintances. Language barrier and the lack of mobiles were reported as the main challenges to accessing information. The most important information needs highlighted by FGD participants were labour and migrants rights. In Centenario macro area migrants and asylum seekers also indicated presence of information needs on legal issues related to rental housing.

## LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

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In August, it was reported that almost all Venezuelans in Boa Vista are unable to find work in their area of expertise or in jobs similar to those held in Venezuela, and the majority face significant challenges accessing any form of employment. In Boa Vista, the most common type of employment is reportedly informal or irregular daily work, with people working an average of 15-20 days per month. In Cauamé and Centenario macro areas, FGD participants reported an average of less than 5 days worked per month. Daily wages reportedly varies between 26-50 BRL in most macroareas, except São Francisco and Cauamé where the average paid was reported to be 51-100 BRL.

FGD participants reported that whilst the difficulties finding employment were partially due to a lack of appropriate job opportunities in the city, there was also a perceived discrimination towards them compounded by the language barrier. Many noted that without connections with members of the Brazilian host community, formal or regular jobs are extremely difficult to obtain. FGD participants reported a wide range of desired employment, with the most commonly reported being cooks, policemen, hairdressers, customer service, retailers, waiter, secretarial or administration, petroleum engineering, skilled or unskilled construction workers, telecommunications, and painters.

Further, those who are able to obtain some form of employment reportedly typically face significant labour risks. These differ by gender: men commonly reported a lack of safety equipment provided whilst working in construction and similar activities, whilst women most commonly reported harassment and in some occasions, sexual abuse. Other risks reported by both genders were intimidation by drivers of motorized vehicles whilst going to work on bicycle, as well as cases of exploitation and the nonpayment of labour.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

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### Health

Access to health services did not appear to have change in August, with the majority of FGD participants reporting that they were able to access services. Further, they indicated that services were generally of a high quality, with free and available medicine, as well as trained and compassionate doctors. However, in Pintolandia and Uniao macro-areas, there were some isolated reports of discrimination by hospital staff and Brazilian clients, as well as issues related to health service capacity.

### Education

In August, FGD participants continued to report a lack of spaces in schools, particularly in Cauamé and Sao Francisco macro areas. Further, children who are not yet registered with the Federal Police are reportedly unable to access education services, and others have to wait for the school year to finish to apply for a place. Those with children attending schools reported that they perceived education services to be generally of good quality, with professional teachers and high quality school materials, though isolated reports of bullying or discrimination continued. In Nova Cidade, Pintolândia and União macroareas Venezuelans reported distance as a main challenge to accessing schools.

### Humanitarian assistance

According to FGD participants, in many macro areas, the primary form of aid received was basic food baskets from religious organizations and non-government organizations. Further, some migrants and asylum seekers reportedly benefit from the government cash transfer program Bolsa Família. Venezuelans living in Cauamé macroarea reported receiving insufficient aid. Compared to June and July, FGD participants reported a decrease in the aid offered by host community members. This is likely due to a perceived sense of distrust reportedly intensified by the social unrest that occurred in Pacaraima, on 18 August. Sustainable livelihood opportunities remain the most highlighted need by FGD participants.

## PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

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In general, Venezuelans residing outside of shelters managed by humanitarian actors in Boa Vista reported positive relations with host community members, though it was common to have limited interactions. Following social unrest in Pacaraima, Venezuelans perceived that relations with host community members have deteriorated with reported cases of verbal physical assault and intimidation from host community members against Venezuelan pedestrians in almost all macroareas of the city. In order to improve peaceful relations, Venezuelans suggested initiatives related to cultural exchange, linked to gastronomy and popular national traditions, sport activities, language classes, as well as awareness campaigns promoting tolerance and local integration of Venezuelans in Brazil.

### Vulnerable population

As shown in Map 3 and the macro area maps on the following pages, large numbers of Venezuelans continued to live in public spaces, tents, open air, non-used public buildings or abandoned/damaged houses. Throughout August, parts of these populations reportedly moved into managed shelters, which had spaces available as some previous residents left to participate in the voluntary relocation programme. However the influx of population into the city continued on a reportedly daily basis, the number of people in vulnerable conditions living do not seem to increase significantly.<sup>11</sup> Further, unconfirmed episodes of violence from law enforcement were also reported.

### Protection concern for children

As reported in June, child labour<sup>12</sup> was reportedly prevalent across the city, most commonly in São Francisco, Cauamé and Pintolândia macro areas. The most common type of labour reported in FGD discussions was child begging, with some sporadic reports of street vending and plastic waste collection.

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11. Due to the transitory nature of much of this population, information on each vulnerability case can be considered relevant at the specific time of data collection only, and aggregated information is indicative only.

12. Child labour is defined as labour that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, and that is harmful to physical or mental development (ILO).

### About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organisations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH aims to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to, and within the framework of, inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, please visit our website: [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org). You can contact us directly at: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org) and follow us on Twitter: [@REACH\\_info](https://twitter.com/REACH_info).