



Gender and Forced Migration from Venezuela: Brazil's Advancements and Challenges

A Discussion Paper by Julia Camargo

Translated into English from the original Spanish version.

Background

By 2019, 4.3 million Venezuelans had left their country as refugees and migrants; of those, 168,000 arrived in Brazil.¹ While there have been some attempts to analyze this phenomenon through a gender-based lens, official figures from government entities and international organizations are not disaggregated enough to adequately reflect accurate data on women or LGBTQ+ individuals in Latin America. A recent report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Venezuela includes important considerations on the issue of gender. Specifically, it emphasizes the high numbers of women who must leave the country to give birth; a lack of protection against domestic violence; the number of women, adolescents, and girls suffering due to hypersexualized stereotypes; and the unique risks to indigenous women and girls, including a heightened risk of human trafficking.²

The gender-based aspects of migration have added new challenges to the growing violence in Brazil, a country that has the fifth-highest rate of femicides related to domestic or family violence according to the World Health Organization. A gender-based analysis of two papers on Venezuelan migration to the Brazilian state of Roraima, which borders Venezuela and where 47 percent of migrants are women, demonstrates the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies in this context.³

Reports show that 60 percent of refugees and migrants making less than the monthly minimum wage are women. Among gender-related workplace risks reported by migrants, harassment and sexual abuse constitute particular concern and alarm. Female

migrants also face discrimination related to stereotypes that they will engage in prostitution and crime, a stigma exacerbated by verbal harassment from Brazilian men in public and in the workplace. Many female migrants claim to be unaware of their legal rights or recourses against such cases of verbal or physical abuse.⁴

It is important to note that while over half of Venezuelan men arrive in Brazil unaccompanied, the majority of Venezuelan women arrive with their children. This highlights the unique vulnerabilities and risks for violence for female Venezuelan migrants. Women who entered into Brazil at informal crossing points in Pacaraima without adequate legal documentation for their children report having suffered physical attacks to them and their children, including theft and physical violence.

It is also important to acknowledge that pregnant Venezuelan women must sometimes flee to give birth in other countries. In 2018, Roraima had the highest population growth and number of recorded births of all Brazilian states. During that year, of the 11,502 total births recorded, 40 percent were to Venezuelan mothers. This data reflects the need to provide specific prenatal and postnatal protection for these women and their babies.⁵

Venezuelan women may also be subject to inequities at the institutional level. As of November 2019, 25,332 Venezuelans in Roraima had been relocated to other Brazilian cities under the *Interiorização* (interiorization) policy, which falls under the *Operação Acolhida* (Operation Welcome) program managed by the Brazilian Armed Forces. Fifty-six percent of participating Venezuelans were men. While 10 percent of them left the state of



Roraima with a guaranteed job, only 2.5 percent of participating women received a job offer.⁶

Faced with these challenges and vulnerabilities, progress can be seen in some specific projects by the Brazilian government to protect and empower migrant/refugee women and girls. One innovation is the inclusion of gender-related issues in the training provided to military personnel assigned to *Operação Acolhida*, including on preferred names, as well violence and harassment. Other innovations include specific restrooms for LGBTQ+ individuals in temporary shelters, the creation of a dedicated shelter for the LGBTQ+ population in the city of Manaus, and a halfway house for female victims of violence.

Recommendations

- Understand that refugee women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals require special protection and face a greater risk of work exploitation, sexual abuse, violence, human trafficking, persecution, prejudice, and xenophobia.
- Design and implement actions aimed at overcoming the inequities affecting Venezuelan women and LGBTQ+ individuals seeking asylum.
- Guarantee safe houses and shelters for women and LGBTQ+ individuals and promote economic empowerment and leadership, especially for mothers migrating alone with their children.
- Institute gender-sensitive training programs for teams involved in humanitarian response efforts, and implement reporting mechanisms for cases of abuse and sexual exploitation, including by humanitarian actors against assisted populations, working to avoid revictimization.
- Promote the creation and dissemination of gender-specific reports in countries receiving Venezuelan migratory flows with the purpose of providing specific public policy recommendations.

Endnotes

- ¹ UN Refugee Agency, “Situation of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants Needs Greater Global Attention,” August 29, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2019/8/5d67c6e94/situation-venezuelan-refugees-migrants-needs-greater-global-attention.html>.
- ² UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Advance Unedited Version)*, July 5, 2019, A/HRC/41/18, https://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Countries/VE/A_HRC_41_18.docx.
- ³ Jessica Gustafson, “Brasil caminha para liderar ranking mundial da violência contra mulher,” *Catarinas*, January 28, 2019, <https://catarinas.info/brasil-caminha-para-liderar-ranking-mundial-da-violencia-contra-mulher/>.
- ⁴ Gustavo F. Simões, *Perfil sociodemográfico e laboral da imigração venezuelana no Brasil*, comp. Gustavo da Frota Simões (Curitiba: CRV, 2017); UNHCR/REACH, *Situation Overview IV: Venezuelan Asylum Seekers and Migrants Living Outside of Shelters*, Boa Vista City, October 2018.
- ⁵ Heloísa Mendonça, “Cruzar a fronteira para conseguir dar à luz,” *El País*, September 18, 2018, https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/09/04/politica/1536079388_175129.html.
- ⁶ International Migration Agency, “Informe de Interiorización,” *UN Refugee Agency*, May 2020, <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/72086>.



About Us

The Stanley Center for Peace and Security partners with people, organizations, and the greater global community to drive policy progress in three issue areas—mitigating climate change, avoiding the use of nuclear weapons, and preventing mass violence and atrocities. The center was created in 1956 and maintains its independence while developing forums for diverse perspectives and ideas. To learn more about our recent publications and upcoming events, please visit stanleycenter.org.



CRIES

The Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES) is a network of research centers and nongovernmental organizations that acts as a regional think tank, promoting analysis, debate, and policy creation about topics of regional, hemispheric, and global relevance, from the perspective of civil society. CRIES is an independent nonprofit institution that promotes pluralism and citizen participation. It is not affiliated with any political or religious organization. For more information about its activities and its virtual publications, please visit www.cries.org.

