

# Situation Overview: Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants living outside of shelters, Pacaraima town

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**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

**REACH** Informing more effective humanitarian action

## BACKGROUND

Since early 2015, Venezuelans have been leaving their country of origin due to social, economic and political turmoil. As of July 2018 it was estimated that over 54,000 Venezuelans are in Brazil,<sup>1</sup> with the large majority entering the country through Pacaraima. Pacaraima is a small border town with an estimated population of 15,000 people, located in the north of Roraima state, 215 km from the state capital Boa Vista. Between June and August 2018, 7,989 people were recorded to have crossed the border from Venezuela through Pacaraima.<sup>2</sup>

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 follows similar assessments conducted in Boa Vista city<sup>3</sup> and aims to provide information on vulnerabilities and priority needs of affected populations in Pacaraima town. Information presented here reflects the situation before 18 August, when inharmonious events occurred in Pacaraima.

## KEY FINDINGS

- As Pacaraima is a border town and close to a key crossing point for Venezuelans entering Brazil, there are large numbers of people in-transit. Although the majority reportedly want to move elsewhere in Brazil, focus group discussion (FGD) participants noted that some lack the resources to do so and remain in Pacaraima longer than intended.
- FGD participants reported that as Pacaraima is a small town, livelihood opportunities are limited to informal and irregular labour activities. The lack of livelihood opportunities is reportedly a key factor leading to many Venezuelans in Pacaraima wanting to move elsewhere in Brazil.
- In general, Venezuelans in Pacaraima are reportedly able to access health and education services, though those lacking certain documentation faced some challenges to access. FGD participants noted that services were generally of good quality.
- At the time of data collection (8-9 August), those without resources to rent housing were primarily sleeping in open air or tents along Brasil Avenue in the centre of the town. Although there were approximately 400 people observed living in vulnerable conditions,<sup>4</sup> social unrest along the street on the 18th August led to displacement of these people. Those who were not able to find shelter in the town or travel to elsewhere in Brazil returned to Venezuela. As of 31 August, an estimated 200 people were sleeping in vulnerable conditions across the border on the Venezuelan side, crossing into Pacaraima during the day to look for work or to obtain assistance.

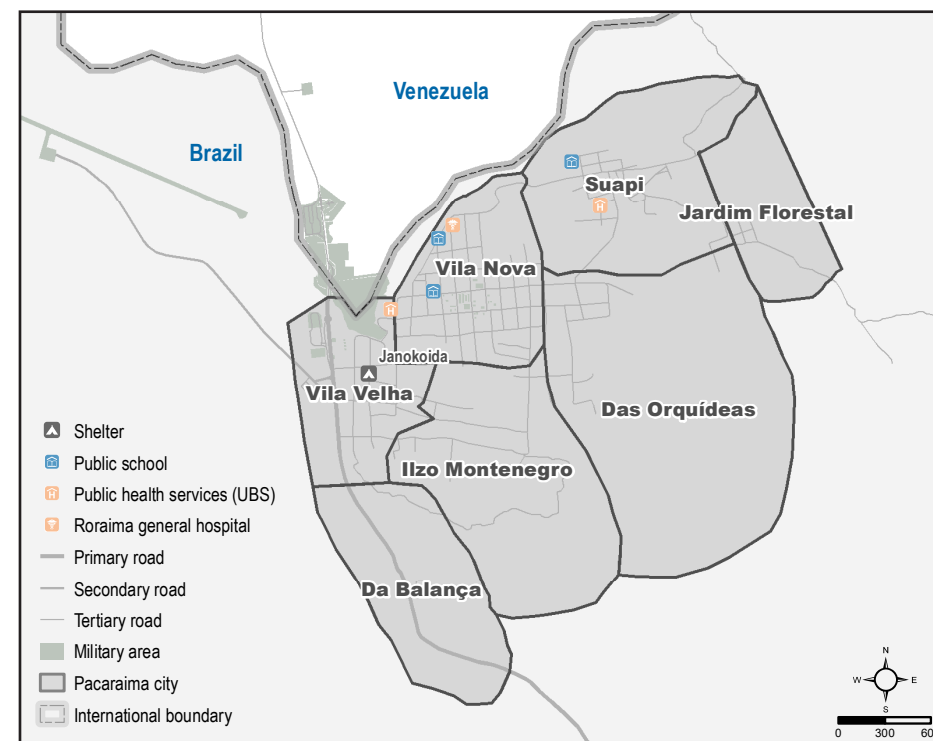
1. Estimate from Federal Police, July 2018.

2. Cumulative report Operação Acolhida - Centro de Triagem de Pacaraima, August 2018

3. June reports available here: [English](#), [Portuguese](#); July here: [English](#)

4. This includes people living in tents, open air, makeshift shelters, unfinished or heavily damaged buildings with limited access to basic services. Due to the transitory nature of much of the population living in these conditions, information on each vulnerability case can be considered relevant at the specific time of data collection only, and aggregated information is indicative only.

Map 1. Pacaraima neighbourhoods



## METHODOLOGY

This Situation Overview summarises key findings based on qualitative data collected by REACH between 8-9 August 2018 in Pacaraima town. Data was collected in the following seven neighbourhoods: Jardim Florestal, Da Balança, Ilzo Montenegro, Vila Velha, Vila Nova, Suapé and Das Orquídeas. In total, 6 FGDs with 55 Venezuelan participants residing or staying temporarily in the area were conducted, as well as 6 key informant (KI) interviews with Brazilian service providers, selected for their knowledge about the community. Further, cases where people were living in vulnerable shelters were verified through observation and direct 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 FGD participants, the majority of Venezuelans residing or staying in Pacaraima are family groups. Most reportedly have completed secondary education, with few having technical education or studied at universities.

## DISPLACEMENT

The primary areas of origin of FGD participants are Monagas and Anzoátegui states in the northeast region (40%), followed by the southern state of Bolívar (20%) which share a border with Roraima state (Brazil). FGD participants reported that the majority of Venezuelans leave their country of origin due to the scarcity of food and medicine, followed by economic factors including the high level of unemployment, inflation and lack of livelihood opportunities. In addition, the collapse of transportation systems in Venezuela was reported as a secondary push factor. Personal cars have reportedly become very expensive to maintain or have been sold to pay for other basic needs, and public transportation networks are overstrained, resulting in extremely limited mobility.

The most commonly reported pull factors to Brazil were the geographic proximity and its accessibility via land routes across the Brazilian border. In the northern region, direct bus trips from cities, such as Maturín and El Tigre, to the border town Santa Helena de Uairen facilitates the journey. FGD participants also highlighted the presence of family members already living in the country and the fact that migration towards Brazil is reportedly less costly in comparison to other destinations.

## SHELTER

The primary shelter type for Venezuelans in Pacaraima reported by FGD participants is rented houses with 2 rooms (a bedroom and a bathroom), shared by 5 to 7 people (typically 2 families). The price of rent per house reportedly varies between 200 and 500 BRL.<sup>5</sup> In Jardim Florestal, Das Orquídeas and Suapi neighbourhoods, which are peri-urban and less populated, many Venezuelans are reportedly living for free or with agreements to contribute to house running and maintenance costs. It is not reportedly common for Venezuelans to share the same house as Brazilians, with just one case reported. In Vila Velha neighbourhood, FGD participants indicated that most Venezuelans living in this area are without adequate shelter.

5. 1 USD = 4.04 BRL, 22 August 2018.

## LEGAL STATUS

Reportedly, the majority of Venezuelans residing in Pacaraima are asylum seekers, choosing this legal status primarily due to the fact that the application requires less documents than the temporary residence<sup>6</sup> application, with the document noted as being most difficult to obtain being the birth certificate. There is also a perception that the asylum seeker process is relatively faster. Those who opted for temporary residence reportedly did so as it is perceived to ease return to Venezuela, it has a longer validation of two years (it is worth noting the lack of knowledge of the ability to renew asylum seeker status in perpetuity until a decision is received), enables voting in political elections and ability to open a bank account. FGD participants noted that local authorities in Pacaraima have recently started allowing copies as well as original documents for registering Venezuelans.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

In Pacaraima, the majority of FGD participants reported having limited information about their legal rights, beyond the basic proceedings of documentation. They reported receiving this information in the first few days of arrival primarily from other Venezuelans, followed by the Federal Police and United Nations agencies. The main challenges to accessing information highlighted were the lack of mobile phones, television and radio, as well as limited access to internet and phone signal in Pacaraima, due to reportedly limitations of the telecommunication network. The primary information needs are reportedly on labor laws, migration laws, provision of aid and the voluntary relocation programme<sup>7</sup>.

## LIVELIHOODS

In Pacaraima, Venezuelans were reported to work primarily in informal and irregular labour activities for 4-15 days per month, with daily salaries varying between 10 and 40 BRL. In Vila Velha and Das Orquídeas neighbourhoods, FGD participants reported that indigenous Venezuelans were working informally, typically as porters, and receiving extremely low salaries. For males, the most common employment was reportedly street vendors, followed by stonemasons, gardeners, painters and mechanics. Women were reportedly most commonly working as cleaners, manicurists, hairdressers, nannies and a smaller number were also reportedly working as stonemasons, gardeners and sex workers.

FGD participants reported that Venezuelans face significant challenges to accessing livelihood opportunities, primarily due to the lack of job opportunities available, a perceived discrimination and distrust by Brazilians, and a lack of documentation (such as national work permit). In contrast to Boa Vista, language was not reported as a major barrier in Pacaraima, as Spanish is more commonly spoken in the town due to relations with nearby border towns in Venezuela.

6. Under Brazilian legislation (2017) Venezuelans nationals have the right to apply for temporary residence in Brazil, which is valid for 2 years.

7. Programa de Interiorização (in Portuguese) is a government-led voluntary relocation programme, implemented with the support of UN agencies, that aims to facilitate the integration of Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants in the Brazilian society and labour market. The programme includes transportation elsewhere, housing, and integration support.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

### Health

Pacaraima has three healthcare units: one hospital and two smaller healthcare facilities. In order to meet the additional demand for healthcare services in the town, some units have reportedly hired more staff and extended working hours. All FGD and KI participants stated that Venezuelans generally have access to healthcare services, including treatments and a home-based vaccination programme. Venezuelans residing in Ilzo Montenegro reportedly face challenges to accessing healthcare services due to their lack of legal documentation required to obtain the SUS<sup>8</sup> card. In addition, they highlighted that services are considered to be of good quality, with prompt attendance. Clinical care, prenatal and diagnostic tests are the main services reportedly required by Venezuelans living in Pacaraima.

### Education

According to FGD participants, most Venezuelans have access to education in Pacaraima, with those children not attending school primarily being new arrivals. However, FGD participants noted a lack of available spaces (particularly in Vila Nova neighbourhood) and documentation as main challenges to accessing schools. In KI interviews, service providers highlighted that some Venezuelan children live far from schools and face difficulties travelling. Services were reported to be of a good quality, with adequate infrastructure and teachers.

### Humanitarian assistance

According to FGD participants, Venezuelans in Pacaraima have limited access to aid. Migrants and asylum seekers reportedly receive sporadic donations, most commonly food items primarily given by religious organizations. KIs also reported that the host community has been donating medicines, housing and clothes. Other types of aid reported by FGDs were the government cash transfer programme (Bolsa Família<sup>9</sup>) and free music classes for children.

## PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

At the time of data collection, on 8-9 August, FGD participants characterized the relationship with Brazilians in Pacaraima as without significant change over time. Whilst most FGD participants underlined cordiality with local residents, Venezuelans reportedly have few interactions with the host community in Pacaraima. Areas where relations were reported to be more cordial were Suapi and Das Orquídeas neighbourhoods, which are less populated and considered relatively safe, with reported cases of living spaces granted by Brazilians and friendly interactions.

8. Sistema Único de Saúde, public health care system in Brazil.

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

Tensions were reported to exist in Vila Velha neighbourhood, the central commercial area which at the time of data collection (8-9 August) had a high presence of people in transit lacking adequate shelter. According to KIs, the burden on basic services in the town has contributed to a deteriorating relationship. The protests on the 18 August by some host community members reflected the feeling of distrust, and as of 31 August people were no longer sleeping in tents or open air in this area.

The most common suggestions made by FGD participants to improve peaceful coexistence were cultural exchange activities in music, sports, language classes and organised meetings between people from both communities aiming to discuss solutions for peaceful coexistence.

## PROTECTION

### Vulnerable population

At the time of data collection (8-9 August), populations living in vulnerable shelter conditions<sup>10</sup> were observed in Vila Velha, Vila Nova and Da Balança neighbourhoods (see map on following page). The largest concentration of people was in Vila Velha neighbourhood due to the proximity to central commercial area, the border crossing point and the Brazilian Federal Police office. However, on 18 August, protests by members of the host community led to displacement and destruction of personal property. As of 31 August, no one had returned to sleep in these areas. Those who were not able to find shelter in Pacaraima or move to elsewhere in Brazil were reportedly sleeping in vulnerable conditions across the border on the Venezuelan side, coming into Pacaraima during the day for work or to obtain assistance.

### Protection concern for children

Child labour<sup>11</sup> was reported across the city, with the most common types being street vending and begging including by indigenous children. In some cases children were unaccompanied whilst working. In addition, children with physical and mental special needs were observed living in vulnerable shelter conditions (see map on page 4).

### About REACH

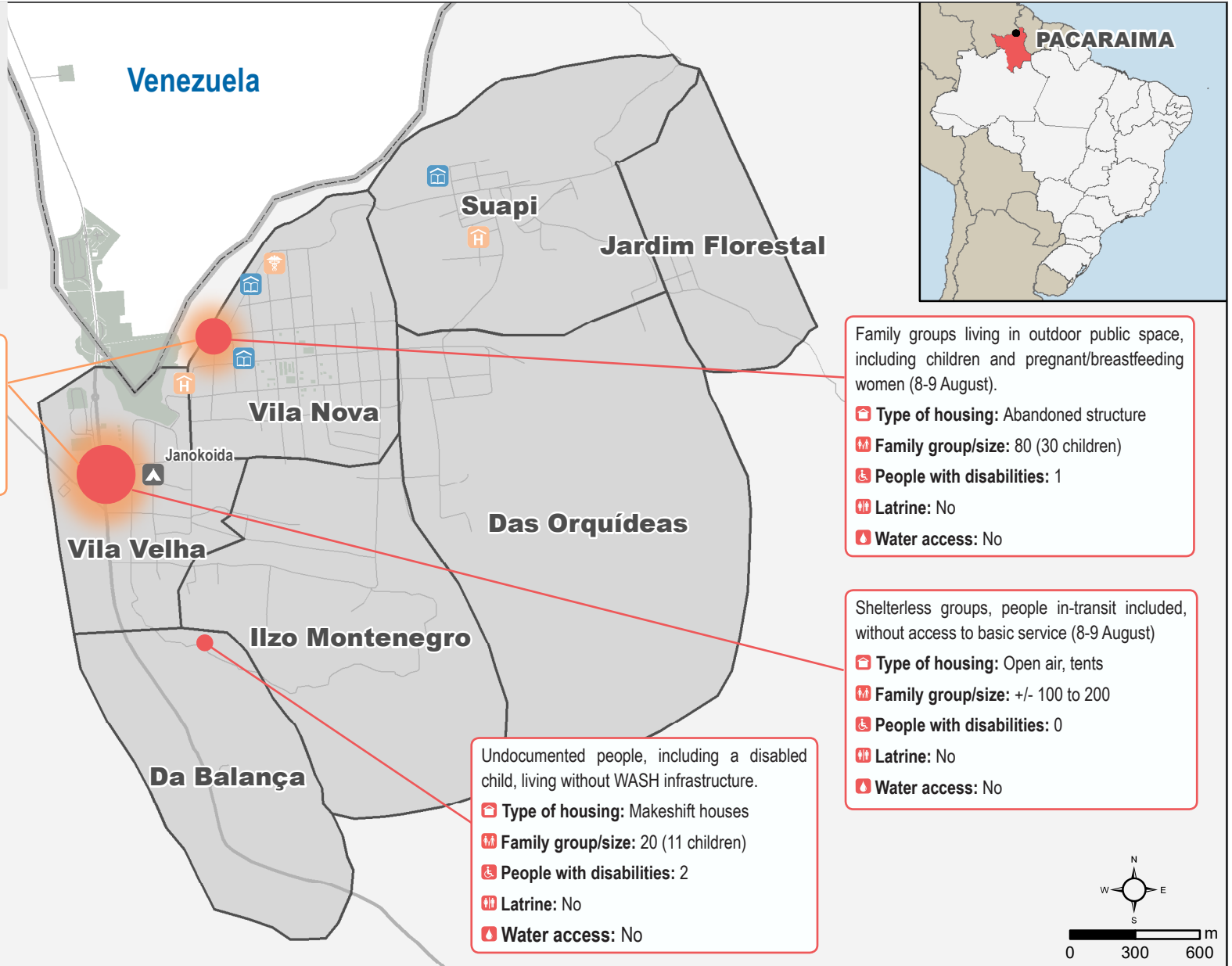
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10. This includes people living in public spaces, tents, open air, makeshift shelters, unfinished or damaged buildings with limited access to basic services.

11. 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).

**Map 2. Venezuelans living in vulnerable conditions<sup>11</sup> in Pacaraima town (8-9 August)**

This map was based on qualitative data collected between 8-9 August 2018, and updated on the 31 August. It presents the cases identified by FGDs, KIs and direct observation. There were approximately 400 vulnerable individuals observed on 8-9 August. However, following events on 18 August, which directly affected people from Vila Velha and Vila Nova neighbourhoods, these areas were reported to be completely cleared of people. As of the 31 August 2018, populations had reportedly not returned to sleep in these areas.



11. This includes people living in tents, open air, makeshift shelters, unfinished or heavily damaged buildings with limited access to basic services. Due to the transitory nature of much of the population living in these conditions, information on each vulnerability case can be considered relevant at the specific time of data collection only, and aggregated information is indicative only.