

## Migration of Venezuelans to Brazil: the enormous challenge of border cities

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The uncontrolled arrival of Venezuelan immigrants to Brazil in the last three years, especially in the Northern Region, has caused the immigration issue, which has been very little discussed in the country until then, to have an exposition above the usual and came to be seen as a state problem.

Immigration from Venezuela to Brazil was practically non-existent until the beginning of the 2010, compared to immigration from other South American countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay or Peru, and entered the country through large cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília. Although the US and Spain are historically the most sought-after destinations for Venezuelan immigrants, Brazil, as well as Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Cuba and Argentina, can be considered one of the countries that has received the most these population in the last ten years, passing from the 15th country with more Venezuelans outside of Venezuela, to become one of the 10 countries with more Venezuelans in the world.

Until the mid-2010, most of these people arriving in Brazil were skilled workers, naturally seeking better working conditions and contracted by governments or private companies. However, in the years 2014 and 2015 the Venezuelan economy showed the worst macroeconomic performance in Latin America, characterized by a significant contraction of economic activity, the highest inflation in the world and high levels of scarcity, which led Venezuela to be considered the country with the worst overall macroeconomic performance in 2016. As a result of this chaotic economic situation and the political problems that have arisen in Venezuela, this immigration has gradually become more pronounced.

The year of 2015 is then considered the milestone in the change of this scenario, when a significant increase in the numbers of this immigration was observed by different segments of the Venezuelan population, shortly after President Nicolás Maduro lost the parliamentary elections. Masses of displaced people in precarious situations began to cross the border, fleeing the poor living conditions, and even political violence triggered as repression by socialist governments, a situation that had already begun in the period of Hugo Chavez. Thus, these immigrants - considering the number of entire families who left their homes and marched towards Brazil - began to be classified as refugees. Prior to 2015, there are no transboundary migration records at the Venezuelan border with Brazil that were typical or significant, considering that many Venezuelans at first crossed the border only to buy food and medicine, and then returned to their own country, in a movement called "pendular".

Due to the relative proximity of the Brazil-Venezuela border, the municipality of Pacaraima located on the Brazilian side, in the State of Roraima, has been the gateway of the Venezuelan immigrants that cross the border on foot. According to data from the Federal Police, 127,778 immigrants were registered through Pacaraima from 2017 until June 2018, and from this total, there were only 68,968 immigrants leaving for other countries. In turn, 58,810 immigrants still remain on Brazilian soil, concentrated largely in the municipalities of Pacaraima (with 12,375 inhabitants), and Boa Vista (with 332,000 inhabitants), and in a smaller number in Manaus city, State of Amazonas.

According to data obtained by the Directorate of Public Policy Analysis of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (DAPP / FGV) with the Federal Police, in July 2017 the number of active registrations of Venezuelans in Brazil was still only 5 thousand. Even without considering the large number of unregistered immigrants, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) accounted for more than 22,000 applications between 2014 and 2017, which leads us to notice that this occasion has already been established as an uncontrolled migratory and a disproportionate amount of requests for refuge from Venezuelans to Brazil.

With the intensification of the influx of immigrants in 2017, the Brazilian Government was forced to act more directly in the humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans. The entry into force of the new migration law in Brazil - Law no. 13445 of May 24, 2017 - updated and consolidated several other laws that dealt with the subject, and provided better legal conditions for this rapid evolution of the number of immigrants.

The publication of Decree No. 9,286, dated February 15, 2018, established a Federal Emergency Assistance Committee responsible for the assistance and reception of immigrants in vulnerable situations. In this way, the Decree established a governance structure, within the Federal Government, of actions and initiatives on the subject. Two other norms were also milestones for the federalization of actions related to the Venezuelan migratory flow: Provisional Measure No. 820, of February 15, 2018, which established assistance measures to accommodate people in situations of vulnerability due to migratory flow, recognizing such as an emergency humanitarian crisis, and Decree No. 9,285, dated February 15, 2018, which recognized the situation of vulnerability due to migratory flows to the State of Roraima.

In fact, these Decrees and Provisional Measures officialized some of the humanitarian measures that were already being carried out, determined other State actions, mainly of a sanitary nature, to improve the reception of these immigrants, and guided the planning for the internalization of these personnel. By internalization we mean the organized transfer of foreigners to cities in the interior of Brazil, better able to receive them. It should be emphasized that there was no significant opposition to these Decrees that were received as necessary measures by the population of Roraima.

The recent report presented by the Federal Police, which consolidates data until last July, showed that the daily balance of Venezuelans has gradually increased (balance = entry minus exit), and is currently in the range of 400 Venezuelans / day. This increase in flow generates a need to increase internalization in order to allow greater turnover of Venezuelans in the shelters, making them only a temporary residence, only for the necessary period for the flow of immigrants sheltered to other States of the Federation. It is estimated that there are about 2,000 Venezuelans totally unattended on the streets of Boa Vista. Among the characteristics of those who enter Pacaraima in Brazil, according to data provided by UNHCR, a large number of adults (between 18 and 45 years old), men, single and with high school completed.

Another factor that has been the subject of careful attention by the Brazilian government is the natural social conflicts resulting from the atypical and sudden superpopulation in those cities closer to the border, such as Boa Vista in Roraima, and even Manaus in the Amazon. Disputes over jobs, vacancies in the public school system, hospitals and even food have been aggravated by the incessant arrival of these immigrants, who have continuously accumulated over months, in makeshift shelters and even in the squares and streets of these cities. Although until October 2017, about 48.4% of the Venezuelans who were in Boa Vista had not yet used any public service, according to research carried out by the Observatory of International Migrations - OBMigra - several frictions happened. Only in February 2018, there were two clashes between Brazilians and Venezuelans, and in the last six months the average was a conflict every ten days. On August 8, in Pacaraima, a more serious confrontation between Brazilians and Venezuelans took place for the first time. A violent confrontation was established that led dozens of immigrants to cross the border back from the attacks of a small portion of the local population revolted by the aggression committed by Venezuelans to a Brazilian merchant.

OBMigra's research also showed that a significant portion of the non-indigenous Venezuelan population that crosses the border has a good level of schooling (78% have a complete secondary level and 32% have a full or postgraduate degree). According to data from the same OBMigra, 60% of these individuals were, in 2017, employed in some paid activity and sent remittances to spouses and children in Venezuela. That is, despite being undervalued professionally, it is an immigration that, if well organized, could even bring benefits to Brazil. At the general levels, non-indigenous Venezuelans who migrate to Boa Vista have a higher education level than the average local population, and the percentage of Venezuelans entering the formal job market, 28%, is not very different from the percentage of Brazilians, 3% in 2015, according to Geography and Statistics Brazilian Institute (IBGE).

Unfortunately, although there is an up-to-date Immigration Law, there is still no consistent migration management policy and refugee institution in Brazil. Thus, the adopted remedy has been the accomplishment of missions of punctual support to the municipalities, with the assembly of host camps, distribution of medicines, food, essential necessities, actions developed by the National Immigration Council (CNIG) / Ministry of Labor, together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Armed Forces.

Recognizing the professional skills of this foreign population, mapping with the private sector the opportunities, and coordinating market needs according to the competencies presented by the immigrants, would allow a more adequate response to the studies so far developed. Today, there will probably be a need for greater involvement of government agencies, the Armed Forces, international agencies accustomed to dealing with refugee issues,

NGOs and volunteers. It should not be forgotten the need to regularize roles, such as work visas, work permits and professional diplomas. De-bureaucratizing and expediting the issuance of documents is essential for the prompt allocation and integration of immigrants.

In fact, it is a reasonably large migratory flow, which must be considered and treated equally with any other similar humanitarian tragedy. Surely, it is the largest immigration that Brazil has seen in such a short time, but fortunately it is far from reaching the current capacity of Brazilian absorption of foreigners. The country has been modest in its immigration rates, receiving a very small number of foreigners to reside, study or work, considering any parameters, either in comparison with the GDP, with the territorial extension, or even with its total population. It is estimated that today it is about 1% of the total population of Brazil the number of immigrants in the country, even counting all immigrants, regular and irregular. In Argentina this percentage is 4% and in the US it is 14%, while the world average is 3.7%. Brazil receives relatively little immigration and, if the political and economic conditions were more favorable, it could even receive much more.

It is important to note that today Brazil is experiencing an economic crisis that has been going on for more than 10 years, with damaging consequences for all sectors, and with a record unemployment rate, totaling more than 13 million unemployed people in this last half of 2018. This makes the socioeconomic conditions of Pacaraima and Boa Vista even more sensitive in Roraima - and even Manaus, in Amazonas - more affected cities, because they are closer to the border with Venezuela. They are unable to receive larger contingents than they have already received, and their capacities are saturated to meet the unforeseen large demands for goods and services resulting from such immigration. Public health is also already suffering negative impacts, such as outbreaks of influenza and measles (a disease that was already eradicated in Brazil since the 1960s), consequences of unhealthy conditions experienced in areas of greater concentration of immigrants.

Although, in theory, Brazil has a structure and may even offer good employment conditions for the better prepared immigrant, the deficient structures of the cities of entry into Brazil of this mass of displaced people have caused many difficulties to deal with the problem. Today, any more effective solution will require more detailed planning, as well as special attention to socioeconomic and humanitarian aspects, to an effective internalization of Venezuelan immigrants and their complete integration into Brazilian society.