

Venezuelan displacement: a challenge to Brazil

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Brazil must strengthen its reception and integration of fleeing Venezuelans

Venezuela's political, social and economic crisis, accompanied by increasing crime rates, has triggered widespread movement of Venezuelans to the state of Roraima in northern Brazil and elsewhere. Despite Venezuelan citizens being entitled (under a recent Resolution made for associate MERCOSUR members) to temporary residence in Brazil of up to two years, most do not know about this possibility or have been deterred by the financial cost associated with it. They apply instead for asylum, whether they are eligible for it or not, since after making the application they are permitted to access public services and to receive a work permit.

Between January and June 2017, the state of Roraima received a total of 5,787 asylum claims (including Venezuelans), 3,500 more than it received in the whole of 2016, and Roraima authorities report more than 30,000 people crossed the border in the following three months. As the crisis deepens, the number of people fleeing Venezuela will only increase.

Brazil's new Migration Law (Law No 13445) of 2017 takes a rights-based approach, and there is hope that it will provide better legal migration channels for those who do not have the grounds to seek asylum in Brazil, thus easing pressure on the country's asylum system. However, the country tends to react to, rather than anticipate, waves of migration and lacks a migration policy to respond adequately to those migrants and refugees who have already arrived. The Brazilian government was slow to enact the normative resolutions that were needed to provide humanitarian visas to Haitians following the 2010 earthquake (Resolution No 97, 2012), and has been similarly slow in providing temporary residence for Venezuelans (under Resolution No 126, 2017), the latter resolution only being issued after pressure from civil society and public bodies. Although the

federal government has provided funds to the states of Roraima and Amazonas to provide social support and health care to Venezuelans, these measures are far from sufficient and, as these areas were already suffering from shortcomings in Brazil's provision of public services, both migrant and host populations are insufficiently supported.

As a State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Brazil is required to provide an effective structure for refugees' reception and integration – but this is still absent. Brazil's lack of an effective migration policy and structure is a political choice; the government opts instead to adopt provisory solutions on a case-by-case basis. This is contrary to the law and spirit of the 1951 Convention, and Brazil must strengthen reception and integration for both Venezuelan migrants and refugees. A more proactive long-term approach will enable faster and more effective protection of forced migrants, particularly important at a time when displacement from Venezuela shows no sign of abating.

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Members of the Warao indigenous community who have fled Venezuela sleep in hammocks outside a shelter in Boa Vista, Roraima, Brazil.