

Country strategy Evaluation **Brazil 2021-2024**



ENGLISH VERSION (TRANSLATED)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | May 6, 2025

UNHCR Evaluation Office

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of UNHCR's Country Strategy in Brazil is part of a series of evaluations designed to contribute to learning and planning processes. This evaluation covers the period from 2021 to 2024. The conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation of UNHCR's Country Strategy in Brazil will serve as a basis for drafting the new multi-year strategy, to be launched in 2026. The evaluation covers the geographical areas of Brazil where UNHCR operates, in particular the North, Midwest and Southeast, and is structured around five evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability), and five main evaluation questions. It was carried out following principles of participation and use, with a summative and formative character, using a theory-based approach as a framework and employing mixed methods for data collection and analysis. Primary information was gathered through interviews and an online survey. Secondary sources included: i) Document review; ii) Semi-structured interviews with 176 key informants (52% women); iii) Field visits to selected projects. Data analysis was structured on the basis of the evaluation matrix. An analysis of the Results Monitoring Survey (RMS) 2022 and 2023 complemented the triangulation.

The analysis followed a gender and equity approach, in accordance with the guidelines of the United Nations Evaluation Group, the UNHCR and the United Nations System Plan of Action on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. The evaluation followed the UNHCR Evaluation Policy and the UNEG Evaluation Norms and Standards. Quality control was carried out through self-evaluation by the evaluation team and the UNHCR evaluation service. The evaluation aligns with UNEG's Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct, as well as the UN Supplier Code of Conduct.

Limitations include difficulties in interacting with public administrations due to municipal elections; variations in the responses of institutions (federal, state, municipal) to the displacement of people of different nationalities, especially Venezuelans; fatigue of communities due to ongoing investigations; and the transition between different UNHCR planning and results monitoring instruments.

FINDINGS

ADAPTING THE UNHCR'S STRATEGY IN BRAZIL

In response to the Venezuelan displacement crisis, the UNHCR in Brazil has developed a strategy that reflects a progressive process of adaptation to contextual changes. This strategy has been characterised by the transition from an initial emergency approach to more structural and sustainable action, focused on strengthening national public policies for the protection and integration of refugees and migrants. However, this evolution in strategy has not been reflected in a similar evolution in the budgetary structure and the financing of the operation.

Initially, UNHCR acted decisively in response to the humanitarian emergency, supporting the Government of Brazil (GoB) in its creation of innovative reception and assistance models for forcibly displaced Venezuelan people. These models, used as benchmarks, included the development of effective documentation, reception and internal voluntary relocation (*interiorização*) mechanisms, implemented especially through Operation Welcome, in close

partnership with civilian and military authorities. This collaboration consolidated a model of humanitarian-military cooperation in Latin America.

UNHCR's action has not been limited to the Venezuelan forcibly displaced population. With the diversification of mixed movements¹, the organisation has adapted its strategy to include other nationalities and vulnerable groups. This adaptation has included actions such as monitoring new entry points, the use of cultural mediators, and the adoption of specific protection measures for populations at risk, in line with the principles of international law (e.g., access to territory and *non-refoulement*).

One of the pillars of strategic adaptation was the systematic generation of disaggregated data and evidence-based analysis, which has allowed actions to be continuously adapted to emerging needs, facilitating the formulation of "adaptive responses". The analysis of local contexts has underpinned advocacy actions and public policy formulation, fostering dialogue with different levels of government and the private sector.

Although there are still challenges related to the balance between responding to immediate needs and the medium-term strategies required for local integration, UNHCR's approach in Brazil demonstrates good adaptation to diverse sub-national contexts and sensitivity to the multiple dimensions of forced displacement.

SYNERGIES AND CATALYTIC ROLE

UNHCR in Brazil has played a catalytic role in promoting synergies and mobilising a wide network of actors around the protection and integration of refugees and migrants. Its participation as co-leader of the R4V platform, alongside IOM, has been crucial in ensuring multisectoral coordination, aligning with regional normative frameworks (e.g., the Cartagena Declaration), promoting the division of responsibilities among agencies, and strengthening a more robust "protection ecosystem". The coordination of the R4V platform required a high level of commitment from UNHCR, which served to establish a division of labour, strengthen the "localisation" approach and present a reasonably orderly interlocution with the Government of Brazil. However, the coordination of R4V could not prevent a fragmented response, due to the large number of partners and the diversity of actors involved, not only from the humanitarian sector.

UNHCR's interaction with the Government of Brazil has been strategic, despite some challenges regarding international protection issues (e.g., recognition of refugee status as declaratory², access to international protection in a context of mixed movements). More recently, UNHCR's participation in COMIGRAR II and in the formulation of the National Policy on Migration, Refugees and Statelessness has consolidated its role in the definition of long-term public policies.

UNHCR's coordination with state and municipal governments has also been crucial to the implementation of reception and integration policies at the local level (Cities of Solidarity Programme). This initiative strengthened the institutional capacity of cities such as São Paulo, Juiz de Fora, Belém and Manaus to formulate municipal committees and plans for refugees and migrants. Despite being major arrival and reception points for displaced people from Venezuela and despite UNHCR's sustained efforts, institutional factors and political cycles have prevented

¹ UNHCR's definition of mixed movements refers to movements of refugees and migrants, including asylum-seekers, using the same routes and means of transport, often irregular, and for different reasons (UNHCR's 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed 2007, Revised in 2016).

² See Refugee definition: The refugee definitions are declaratory, i.e. people are to be regarded as refugees until it is determined otherwise, and apply in all situations including emergencies (UNHCR Emergency handbook).

the organisation from establishing structured cooperation with key institutions in the municipality of Boa Vista and the state of Roraima.

UNHCR's work has also benefited from partnerships with civil society organisations, the private sector and other agencies, which have enabled it to expand protection and develop vocational training and employability initiatives (e.g., the Companies with Refugees Forum). In addition, engagement with financial institutions has focused on understanding the impacts and benefits of forced displacement and formulating evidence-based public policies. Synergies and complementarities between organisations were more difficult to achieve in urban contexts with high levels of violence where refugees and migrants are being hosted (e.g. São Paulo) and in humanitarian responses to emergencies outside of the scope of Operation Welcome (e.g. floods in Rio Grande do Sul).

EFFECTIVENESS OF UNHCR'S RESPONSE IN BRAZIL

UNHCR's position on Venezuelan displacement in Brazil extended protection to different nationalities, profiles and situations (mixed movements, extreme weather events), and was decisive in the recognition of Venezuelan displaced people as refugees through a *prima facie* procedure. UNHCR contributed to adapting the legal framework and federal public policies at the state and municipal levels, helping to ensure a differentiated approach. Challenges included issues related to transparency and the prioritisation of vulnerabilities in the group recognition process, as well as the difficulties faced in influencing a favourable protection context in the municipalities of Boa Vista and Pacaraima. In this context of mixed movements, some of the challenges were related to confusion about the application of international protection and preventing the association of refugee status solely with the issue of documentation regularisation (residence permits).

Through Operation Welcome, UNHCR played a crucial role in providing documentation, reception and humanitarian assistance. The establishment of screening centres ("postos de triagem") and extensive technical support to National Committee for Refugees in Brazil (CONARE) strengthened the asylum system.

In terms of promoting access to public services, the UNHCR has worked to create local councils and committees and to support the process of voluntary internal relocation³, which has resulted in reasonable rates of socio-economic integration of those who have been voluntarily relocated. Specific initiatives, such as the Empowering Refugees programme, have sought to expand opportunities for women heads of household, although the results in reducing gender disparities are still limited.

UNHCR has also responded to the challenges faced by groups with specific needs, such as the indigenous Warao, the elderly and people with disabilities, through programmes focusing on traditional crafts, community housing and vocational training. However, discrimination, dependence on external aid, and fragmented services have hampered its effectiveness. Although effective in meeting basic needs, especially in emergency situations, the use of cash-based interventions has not always been combined with a comprehensive protection perspective.

Finally, although Brazil has favourable legislation, full access to social protection, safe housing, financial services and specialised services remains markedly unequal across demographic groups.

³ Interiorisation programme: An initiative by UNHCR and the UN Global Compact in Brazil to encourage refugees and migrants to access the Brazilian labour market through training, private sector awareness and relocation through the "interiorisation" strategy of Operation Welcome.

FIT-FOR-PURPOSE OF UNHCR'S STRUCTURE, STAFF AND RESOURCES IN BRAZIL

The distribution of UNHCR field offices in Brazil has made it possible to cover a wide range of needs related to the arrival, reception and assistance of refugees and migrants, particularly from Venezuela. The field offices have evolved accordingly, gradually integrating people of other nationalities and profiles with protection needs into UNHCR's response. This evolution has contributed to a more tailored response to the different sub-national realities, strengthening partnerships with local associations and actors, as well as expanding interventions aimed at the socio-economic integration – particularly in the southern states –, which was a growing priority for UNHCR in Brazil. However, the emergency response continued to absorb a significant part of the field offices' resources, limiting their ability to adequately address the growing socio-economic integration needs of the Venezuelan displaced persons arriving from the north in host states in the south.

While UNHCR has taken steps to adapt its staffing levels to emerging needs, these efforts have not been sufficient in the face of the challenges and changes faced during the period under review. In the face of declining resources, UNHCR has had to deal with limitations such as a decrease in technical capacity, work overload and some inefficiencies resulting from staff reductions and imbalances in the allocation of staff both between functional units and between field offices (e.g. the country office increased from 30% to 41% of total staff between 2021 and 2024). The reduction of staff in the Boa Vista office, while partly understandable given the evolution of UNHCR's strategy, seems particularly pronounced given that the office managed 43% of the total OPS budget.

The persistence of a large gap (around 39%) over four years between the needs-based planning (OP) and the available budget (OL), which remained unchanged over the period, casts doubt on the consistency of the needs-based budget planning. The distribution of the available budget (OL) between budget lines shows an imbalance between the resources allocated to administration (ABOD) and staff (STAFF), to the detriment of the resources allocated to operations (OPS). In addition, the allocation of the available budget (OL) by outcome does not seem to be fully in line with the objectives and evolution of UNHCR's strategy in Brazil, as most of UNHCR's funding has been allocated to humanitarian needs (42% of OL between 2022 and 2024). The operation's funding model has been heavily dependent on funding from the United States. While efforts to diversify funding sources have shown positive results, they remained insufficient to reduce dependence on a single donor.

SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES INTO NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Since the beginning of the Venezuelan displacement crisis, UNHCR's support to the Voluntary Internal Relocation Programme (interiorização) has consolidated local integration as a long-term solution, promoting refugees' access to public policies. In this process, UNHCR has played a key role in providing technical training to local and state governments, contributing to the strengthening of municipal councils and committees, and promoting the institutionalisation of reception and integration policies. However, risks remain for the sustainability of some UNHCR-supported interventions, related to the limited administrative base of the State and public resources to ensure ownership by public administrations, some weaknesses in policy integration mechanisms between the three levels of public administration, and resistance in some sub-national institutions.

Direct assistance, particularly in Roraima, was essential to alleviate the pressures associated with forced displacement and enabled the transition from emergency response to development strategies. An example of this transition is the transfer of the management of the shelters to the

Government of Brazil, signalling a progressive movement towards the nationalisation of the humanitarian response.

Cooperation between UNHCR and development organisations has been key to promoting socio-economic integration; in particular, studies conducted with the World Bank have generated data and disseminated the benefits and contributions (labour, economic and social) of refugee and migrant labour market integration, as well as of their financial inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

STRATEGIC DIMENSION

C1) Institutional positioning. The joint and sustained work carried out by UNHCR together with the Government of Brazil has been essential for implementing a large-scale, multi-stakeholder humanitarian response to the Venezuelan displacement, which, despite gaps and limitations, has become a global benchmark in a regional and global context where asylum policies are increasingly restrictive.

C2) Recent changes in the architecture of humanitarian aid⁴. The reductions in humanitarian funding have led to a serious crisis in UNHCR's funding model (and the R4V platform in general), forcing an in-depth review of UNHCR's strategy and model of presence in the country. There is also a clear need to review the mandate received from the UN Secretary-General in 2018 to co-manage the response to the Venezuela situation.

C3) Protection. UNHCR has adopted a pragmatic approach in its engagement with national institutions. On the one hand, it has taken advantage of opportunities to offer protection and assistance on a large scale. On the other hand, there have been challenging choices, particularly in the face of emergencies, which have resulted in protection situations that were not fully aligned with the highest protection standards.

OPERATIONAL DIMENSION

C4) National asylum system. UNHCR's engagement with CONARE was essential for the maintenance and development of good protection practices in the national asylum system, as well as in the search for fair and efficient decisions. UNHCR has successfully supported staff training, secondments, digitisation, debates to promote protection mainstreaming, and advocacy with key national institutions.

C5) Visibility and participation in public policies. UNHCR's joint work with various government institutions has been essential in increasing visibility for asylum, protection, refugee and migrant needs, as well as promoting the integration of refugee-led organisations into political and social agendas. Even so, there remain critical challenges for integrating refugees and migrants into municipal agendas and services, especially in the state of Roraima.

C6) Socio-economic integration. UNHCR's advocacy work has been effective in creating a favourable environment for the employability of refugees and migrants, mobilising private partners and creating opportunities, but an expansion in key states and certain actions to overcome

⁴ The analysis of the impact of the decisions made by the new US administration (February 2025) on UNHCR Brazil (and globally) is outside the timeframe of the evaluation. However, the evaluation team recognises the need to reflect on the crisis generated by reductions in humanitarian funding in the organisation and to make profound changes to UNHCR's strategy in Brazil. The evaluation team identified evidence showing that the high degree of dependence on US funding posed a critical risk to the operation (as presented in the report), which is in line with the conclusions of all the CSEs carried out in the Americas over the last three years.

structural barriers would be necessary in order to consolidate even more inclusive environments and broaden the mobilisation of private companies.

C7) Sustainable priorities. UNHCR's performance in Brazil during the evaluation period was affected by decisions taken before the period covered by the evaluation, especially when it came to the response to the displacement of the Venezuelan population. This approach focused on finding emergency solutions to the large-scale influx, with UNHCR directly involved as a partner in the response. However, the complexities and practical and political challenges may have compromised the achievement of the highest standards of protection and the adoption of best protection practices.

C8) Capacity to adapt to changes in population movements. UNHCR's evolution within Operation Welcome reflects a sophisticated understanding of contemporary forced displacement dynamics, where the intersection between emergency response and sustainable development demands adaptive and multisectoral approaches.

C9) Climate action. UNHCR's response capacity, in particular to the floods in Rio Grande do Sul, has positioned UNHCR as a relevant organisation in responding to population displacement induced by extreme weather events. However, the response raised questions about UNHCR's role in relation to climate events, internal displacement in Brazil, and the extent to which UNHCR should assume an operational role in such emergencies in Brazil.

ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION

C10) Distribution of field presences and workforce. UNHCR's organisational structure (field presence and workforce) in Brazil is partially aligned with its strategic objectives, mainly through a targeted and decentralised presence in the main border regions and major urban centres. This facilitated the deployment of a wide range of interventions, from emergency humanitarian assistance to durable solutions.

C11) Funding model and budget. There were imbalances in UNHCR Brazil's funding model and budget allocation (both among ABOD, STAFF and OPS, and among strategic planning outcomes) which made it difficult to align resources with changes in strategy and operational objectives.

C12) Quality of planning, budgeting and monitoring. In terms of reliability, consistency and clarity, some gaps in the quantitative data provided for the evaluation in relation to the planning, budgeting and monitoring of UNHCR's strategy made it difficult to carry out a more detailed analysis of organisational efficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Recommendations chapter contains a series of criteria proposed by the evaluation team to help prioritise recommendations in a context of budget reductions.

STRATEGIC DIMENSION

R1) Capitalise on the Government of Brazil experience to strengthen its position in regional and international forums on asylum, refuge and international protection, in a context of humanitarian funding crisis and where it would be necessary to review the mandate received from the UN Secretary-General in 2028 to co-manage the response to the Venezuela situation.

R2) Promote the consolidation of the functioning of the national asylum system based on the highest standards of international protection.

OPERATIONAL DIMENSION

R3) Promote the mainstreaming of refuge and international protection in government institutions and public policies (sub-national focus), in a context of growing mixed movements.

R4) Continue working with the Government of Brazil towards the transformation of Operation Welcome from a specific emergency humanitarian response to Venezuelan displacement into a mechanism for responding to forced displacements of population, integrated into public institutions and policies.

R5) Strengthen the localisation approach of UNHCR Brazil's strategy and actions (with a sustainable response perspective).

R6) Rethink the role of the UNHCR with regard to displacement caused by extreme weather events.

R7) Strengthen the socio-economic integration of especially vulnerable refugees and migrants.

ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION

R8) Review the mechanisms for organising and distributing the workforce between offices and improve internal and external communication.

R9) Strengthen efforts to diversify UNHCR's funding model in Brazil and increase Brazil's contribution as a member state to corporate funding.

R10) Improve the quality and accuracy of the planning (budget and programme) and results monitoring framework.

R11) Improve the quality of Results Monitoring Surveys to ensure their reliability as an essential tool for COMPASS-based monitoring planning.