



UN Women Brazil / Felipe Abreu

CASE STUDY
***LEAP JOINT PROGRAMME -
LEADERSHIP, EMPOWERMENT, ACCESS
AND PROTECTION FOR MIGRANT,
ASYLUM SEEKER AND REFUGEE
WOMEN AND GIRLS IN BRAZIL***

LUXEMBOURG
AID & DEVELOPMENT



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



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Brazil, June 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As of 2018, the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis started to have more significant impacts in Brazil, with an increase in the migratory flow. Of the more than 5.4 million people who had migrated from Venezuela to other countries by January 2021, more than 261,000 were in Brazil, according to the R4V Platform. The Northern state of Roraima is the main gateway for this contingent, and it is there that UN Women has worked to assist Venezuelan migrant and refugee women and girls, through the LEAP Joint Programme - Leadership, empowerment, access and protection for migrant, asylum seeker and refugee women in Brazil.

The LEAP programme is run by UN Women in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with funding from the Government of Luxembourg. Signed in 2018 and implemented since 2019, the programme aims to support the Brazilian government in responding appropriately to the needs of migrant and refugee women in Brazil - aggravated from 2020, with the pandemic of COVID-19.

The program is established on three fronts: Protection and Gender-Based Violence; Economic Empowerment; and Leadership and Participation. Together with the United Nations System in Brazil and civil society organizations involved in the humanitarian response, LEAP seeks to strengthen and coordinate humanitarian actors and public authorities, develop the capacities of local organizations and create safe, positive spaces and resilience for migrant and refugee women achieve

good coexistence with local communities. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also offered support to women community leaders, migrants and Brazilians.

Together with educational institutions, the Federal Government through Operation Welcoming, and with the engagement of the private sector, the LEAP program also promotes actions for the socioeconomic integration of Venezuelan migrants and refugees. Activities include professional qualification, financial assistance, mentoring, support for groups of women entrepreneurs and active search for formal job vacancies.

The LEAP program works, ultimately, to mainstream the gender perspective in Humanitarian Action. UNHCR, UN Women and UNFPA are part of the Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for responding to Venezuelan-Lebanese migratory flows in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.



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CONTEXT

Since the beginning of the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis, thousands of refugees and migrants have crossed the border with the state of Roraima, in the Northern region of Brazil. In this scenario, women and girls end up living in a situation of greater vulnerability.

Roraima, the border state with Venezuela, in the Northern region of Brazil, was the first to suffer the impacts of the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis. As the situation worsened, in March 2018, the humanitarian response was federalized. In 2020, the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic further hampered the socioeconomic integration of refugees and migrants to the local community.

In humanitarian crises, the most affected populations are women and girls. In the state of Roraima, in the northern region of Brazil bordering Venezuela, the most significant triggers to the vulnerability among migrant and refugee women is due to their circumstances of poverty, partial or total family separation, changes in traditional gender roles, barriers in accessing protection and services, and their exposure to increased risks of violence. UNHCR and UNFPA research on Venezuelans and Brazilians in Roraima shows that at least 30.3% of women in the cities of Boa Vista and Pacaraima have experienced psychological violence at least once in their lives, 20% have suffered physical violence and 7.4% have undergone sexual violence¹. In 2020, the economic crisis and COVID-19 further hampered the socioeconomic integration of refugees and migrants to the local community.

In Brazil, this humanitarian response was federalized in March 2018 through the implementation of *Operação Acolhida*², (Operation Welcome) in the border states led by the Chief of Staff's office through an interministerial task force with 11 ministries and the operational coordination of the Armed Forces. It is a large humanitarian logistical task force carried out and coordinated by the Federal Government with the support of UN agencies and more than 100 entities from civil society and local government. From the beginning of the migratory crisis until April 2021, more than 260,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants have formally entered Brazilian territory. Currently, over 145 thousand have procured a resident's visa, more than 96 thousand are asylum seekers and over 46 thousand have been admitted as refugees.

The first axis of Operation Welcome is border management, which involves documentation, vaccination and border control. The second is reception, which includes shelter, food, and non-food items, and access to health services. The third is interiorization consisting in the voluntary relocation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants from the state

of Roraima to other units of the federation, viewing their social and economic integration. By April 2021, more than 50,000 Venezuelans had moved to other Brazilian states through interiorization³. Of these, 14% are men and 12% are women interiorized in the institutional modality by entering shelters in other municipalities; 9% are men and 9% are women in family reunion; 21% are men and 19% are women in the social reunion modality; and 6% are men and 2% are women with an appointed job opportunity^{4,5}.

At a regional level, the Regional Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) is the coordination mechanism and involves the three agencies of the LEAP programme (UNHCR, UN Women and UNFPA). In Brazil, the National Chapter of R4V complements and reinforces the government's response to the Venezuelan emergency in the country through efficient and effective joint actions. Currently, 51 organizations are members of R4V, including UN agencies and Civil Society Organizations, and their activities are carried out in different sectors: education; food security; health; integration and humanitarian transport; nutrition; protection (including child protection, gender-based violence and human trafficking); shelter; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

1 https://brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/violencia_de_genero_nacionalidade_e_raca-etnia_em_duas_cidades_de_roraima.pdf

2 <https://www.gov.br/acolhida/historico/>

3 <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrJoiMDc5ZTk2YjktMzlsYiooYWM1LWEyNzMtMzkzMjFOTlkMzZkliwidCI6ImU1YzY3OTgxLTkyNjQ0NDZlNDk0YTBjLTkyNDk0MmFmODBiZSIsImMiOiJh9&pageName=ReportSection50c1da4ca53f9fc2c34>

4 For 4% of women and 4% of men, there is no information about interiorization modality.

5 Subcomitê Federal para Interiorização [Federal Subcommittee on Interiorization]. *Informe de interiorização fevereiro 2021* [Interiorization report February 2021], 2021



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IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Refugee, migrant and host women have access to protection and support mechanisms, more opportunities for economic empowerment, capacities and opportunities for engagement in the humanitarian response.

LEAP seeks to ensure a gender perspective in the humanitarian response. The Joint Programme works since the designing of the response, so that the specific needs of women are considered. As a result, women have access to protection and support mechanisms, more opportunities for economic empowerment and the active inclusion of migrant, asylum seeker and refugee women in assessment, planning and the implementation of the humanitarian response.

In Brazil, the LEAP programme is mostly directed at supporting the Brazilian government to adequately respond to the needs of migrant, asylum seeker, refugee, and host women so that the national response to the Venezuelan mixed influx is more inclusive and responsive to gender issues. As a result, refugee, migrant and the host women have had access to protection and support mechanisms, to more opportunities for economic empowerment, and to expanding their capacities and their opportunities for acting together with humanitarian response stakeholders who follow through with the response planning, assessments, and implementation.

To bolster women protection and support mechanisms, the LEAP programme offered positive and resilient environments such as Women Empowerment Hubs (WEH) and Safe Spaces⁶, which have proved to be a good practice of the programme. WEH and Safe Spaces are opportunities for sharing life stories based on participatory mapping and peer support where discerning listening and handling of cases of protection and gender-based violence (GBV) with a focus on the survivor are carried out, as well as first psychological care and psychosocial support, in accordance with the principles of the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC). Women and girls receive life-saving information regarding protection, mitigation and response to GBV through communication materials, information sessions, conversation circles and workshops. They also have access to individual care and assistance, and referral to the intersectional protection network for health, social welfare, justice, security and psychosocial assistance.

To ensure women's protection, LEAP programme also strengthens the capacities of humanitarian actors, the government and the protection network for women in Roraima, mainly from the State Women's

Machinery, *Casa da Mulher Brasileira* (Brazilian Women House) and its services, in addition to security, justice and social assistance teams. The programme's partners at national and local levels lead coordination mechanisms on GBV through R4V sectors and working groups, strengthening the capacity of other humanitarian actors and the government, in order to act as articulated ambits.

To ensure that Venezuelan and host women have access to opportunities for economic empowerment, LEAP programme offers workshops, technical training courses, opportunities and rights. In most cases of interiorization in the modality of appointed job opportunities, companies commonly prefer single men or men who can initially move without their families. Through contact and awareness building with companies, women have been able to be relocated to other states together with their families, and with due formal employment. The programme also set up a focus on age, gender and diversity (AGD), with groups of disabled women, women over age 50, and Lesbian, Bisexual and Trans (LBT) women. Technical assistance, training and mentoring were also offered to humanitarian partners and government actors to promote the economic empowerment of women.

In order to provide more livelihood guarantees, migrants, asylum seeker and refugee women have access to different types of financial assistance aimed at ensuring opportunities for their socioeconomic reintegration, which was another good practice of the programme, routinely used by some of the programme's different

6 <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/women-girls-safe-spaces-guidance-note-based-lessons-learned-syrian-crisis>

partners. This support is followed up by technical courses in areas with opportunities for employment in Brazil and professional development courses for women who have not yet gotten an assigned job vacancy; or mentoring to women entrepreneurs, so they can start their own businesses in a formal way. In mass forced displacements there commonly is a large number of single-parent families. With the COVID-19 pandemic, female head of household lost their jobs or were forced to stay at home due to the closure of schools and to health issues. Women affected by COVID-19 also gain access to financial aid, in order to reduce the impact caused by the disease. In a partnership with educational institution UFMG/Cedeplar, the programme is developing a study to analyze challenges, limitations and barriers to local integration and socioeconomic inclusion for Venezuelan women and men voluntarily relocated through interiorization during the COVID-19 pandemic, and with a view to the economic recovery phase.

In order for humanitarian action to be oriented to respond to the needs and demands of the migrant and refugee population, the LEAP programme offers opportunities for migrant, asylum seeker and refugee women to work with actors to design the humanitarian response. Humanitarian organizations, government institutions and private sector entities, as well as civil society organizations or women's movements are mobilized to promote the participation of women and girls and receive training to effectively incorporate the gender perspective in the humanitarian response in a multidisciplinary format.

Groups of women have been created and hold regular meetings where they can discuss the rights of migrants and refugees in Brazil, the upholding of

women's rights, the coping with violence against women and girls, access to health, and protection of children. Women who assume a leadership role in their communities are supported in community awareness activities, especially in COVID-19 times, and are engaged in planning the R4V Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), which is seen as another good practice, mainly to bring the voices of refugee and migrant women to the center of humanitarian action planning. The programme also develops small-scale projects for the integration and promotion of peaceful coexistence with the host community. An example of this integration is the support for indigenous Warao women in shelters in Boa Vista (the capital of the state of Roraima) and Manaus (the capital of the state of Amazonas), by making their products available through handicrafts production, events, exhibition for the sale of products and creation of the Association of Artisans, ensuring that these families achieve self-sufficiency and socioeconomic integration into society.

Ultimately, LEAP aims to mainstream gender all along the humanitarian response, and works with capacity building and advocacy with humanitarian actors from R4V and with the Federal Government, through Operation Welcome, so that the response to the Venezuelan migratory influx is designed, implemented and evaluated based on the specific needs and demands of migrant, asylum seeker and refugee women.

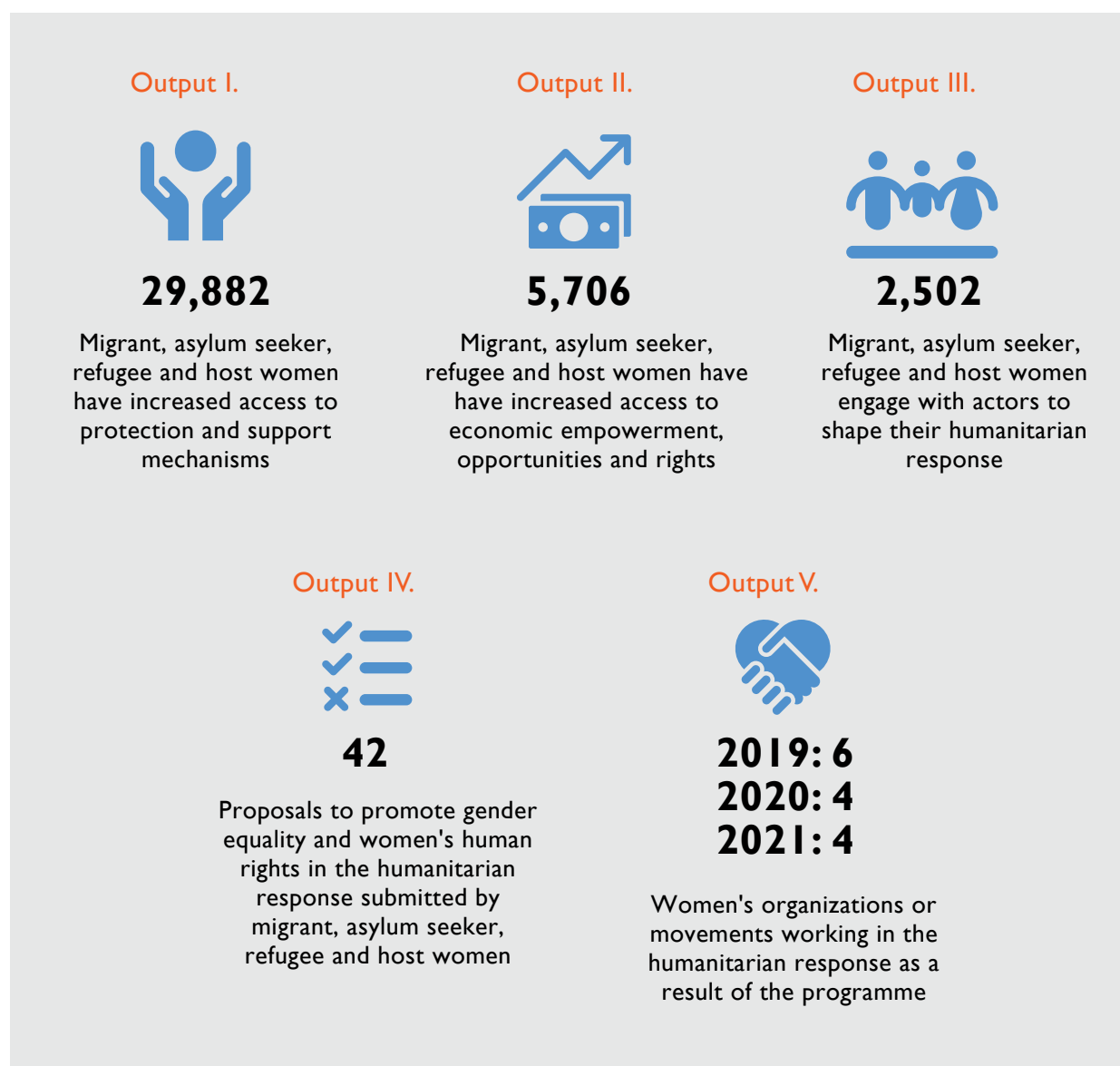
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KEY RESULTS

Improving the quality of the humanitarian response to the Venezuelan migratory flow in Brazil, incorporating measures and budgets that aim to address the needs of refugee and migrant women.

Through LEAP, the quality of the humanitarian response to the Venezuelan migratory flow in Brazil was improved. In the response actions, measures and budgets directed to the needs of refugee and migrant women were incorporated. Also, since the response planning, gender analysis has been incorporated, mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment.

Using its implementation strategies and tools, the LEAP programme achieved the following results⁷:



⁷ The results refer to the period between January 2019 and April 2021

The quality of the humanitarian response to the Venezuelan migratory influx in Brazil has been improved by incorporating measures and budgets that address the needs of refugee and migrant women. This improvement is due to the involvement of women in the analysis and planning process, which in 2020 had the participation of 14 women leaders. As a result, the RMRP 2021 country chapter incorporated a very solid gender analysis, also integrating gender equality and women multidisciplinary empowerment.

In 2021, 47% of planned activities became sensitive to both gender and age – an increase of 10% as compared to 2020. This results from the mandatory application of the Gender and Age Marker (GAM) of

IASC, a planning tool that leads projects to be gender responsive, and which had technical support from LEAP partners.

The data disaggregation by gender and age has also become mandatory in the monthly reporting of data to R4V since the beginning of 2020. This allowed for an analysis of the different barriers that girls, women, boys and men face during the migratory influx, and further opened the space for a response that takes into account the diverse needs according to the specificities of each group.

8 <https://rmrp.r4v.info/>

9 <https://www.iascgenderwithagemarker.com/en/home/>

4

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lessons learned over the 2.5 years of the Joint Programme, including the worsening of the situation with the global declaration of COVID-19 pandemic.

The mixed flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela is unprecedented in Brazil. Roraima, as a small state, ends up not having enough capacity for absorption and adequate care of all these people. Economic integration and financial autonomy continue to be one of the main challenges to be overcome, as well as the knowledge on gender equality and women's empowerment by humanitarian actors themselves. The COVID-19 global pandemic and the teleworking arrangements turned the situation even more challenging.

The massive influx of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Brazil is recent and unprecedented. Brazil has had no history of systematic engagement in national humanitarian action, which makes the response quite challenging regarding the coordination of its committed actors. In addition, there are multiple difficulties in accessing the state of Roraima, the border region between Brazil and Venezuela. Added to this difficulty, the Roraima has undergone a prolonged economic crisis, which resulted in the precariousness in public services in health, education, social welfare and justice, even before the intensification of the influx.

Services in the state were not prepared to cope with an increase in the demand of public services that would have to be further burdened by the sharing of it with the migrant population. In addition, many migrant and refugee people who arrived in Roraima before the establishment of the Operation Welcome and at the beginning of its implementation had ended up living on the street because of lack of shelter to attend all the people in vulnerable situations. There also are episodes of discrimination and xenophobia on the part of the host community against Venezuelans, carrying risks to the integrity of women and girls, and humanitarian actors have ended up being victims of retaliations for aiding this population. The LEAP programme works to strengthen local capacities for humanized and equal care among migrants, refugees and the host community, with a primary focus on the actors of the State Women's Machinery, so that refugee and migrant women have a welcoming access on the local network. It also works with initiatives of peaceful coexistence with the host community, as well as with conflict mediation, so that refugees and migrants do not suffer from a xenophobic discrimination in their process of socioeconomic reintegration.

The humanitarian response was federalized in 2018 through Operation Welcome, whose operational coordination is under the responsibility of the Armed Forces, linked to the Federal Government, which does not put work on women's empowerment and gender equality

as a priority. They hardly acknowledge the fact that women and men experience the process of forced displacement in different ways. From 2018 to the first half of 2021, Operation Welcome received 11 contingents, divided into 13 cells each. So far, only three women have been in charge of these cells, which shows a lack of representativity in decision-making and high-level positions. In 2020, only 29.15% of the people allotted to Operation Welcome were women and most of these were placed in areas of care, such as health, psychosocial support and civil affairs. The programme works intensively with advocacy, dialogues and training with the Armed Forces, but terms such as "gender equality" require a long process to be understood and debated with due importance. For the changes to be more sustainable, an articulation must further be put in place at the national level, so that there is more equality between women and men as cell leaders, since the inequalities within the Armed Forces remain structurally embedded.

Another central challenge is in the humanitarian actors' poor knowledge on gender equality issues and on women empowerment. This fragility reaches the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) partners, who initially resisted mainstreaming gender into the humanitarian response. Data collection was not carried out with disaggregation by gender and age, which also explains the lack in gender analysis of the specificities experienced by women and by men during the migratory influx. Only from the increase in incidence of LEAP and the start of the disaggregation of data collection by institutions participating in the humanitarian response, was it possible to perceive gender inequalities and the challenges faced by women. As a result of this perception, the development of strategies that ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women in the humanitarian action is now being debated. Even so, only 47% of R4V organizations have planned for gender and age-sensitive actions for 2021, which leaves the lesson-learned that there is still a great need for training and for engagement of partners.

LEAP's non-crucial face-to-face activities were suspended with the advent of COVID-19 and the contingency plans adopted by UN agencies and Welcome Operation. At the same time, the initiatives were adapted to respect sanitary measures, such as carrying out critical activities in small groups and in open spaces, or virtual activities whenever possible. However, there is big limitation in access by internet, computers, cell phones or apps by people of concern, which posed an extra challenge for the continuity of activities. For this period, it was necessary to adapt the action formats, since an important part of the LEAP team went into teleworking arrangements. Women leaders became essential in raising community awareness for prevention and response to COVID-19. Until the outburst of the pandemic, they participated in activities and groups organized by LEAP partners, but then began to act as leaders in this process, with remote support from the team. It was an adaptation to respond to COVID-19, but it became extremely propitious for the process of women's empowerment. In addition, specific communication materials had to be timely produced for the period and the scope of financial assistance offered by the program expanded. With COVID-19, initiatives that used to be mostly focused on economic empowerment also became directed at women strongly impacted by the pandemic.

Albeit the use of personal protective equipment and distancing measures, humanitarian organizations, the Armed Forces and the public sector teams were strongly affected by the virus and the removal for recovery of individual team members from the field was not uncommon. This directly impacted the services, and there have been delays in some deliveries. In order not to fail to achieve the results of the programme, it was also necessary to hire new implementing partners so as to continue implementing the planned activities and strategies. This involves time-consuming and bureaucratic processes that, nonetheless, expanded the response capacity and the performance of the programme, once the partners were back to working at the front.

Adding to all these challenges, the border between Brazil and Venezuela was closed in March 2020 and has remained shut for over a year. However, migrant and refugee people continue to cross the border seeking for protection, for access to basic services and better economic and social conditions. However, they are unable to achieve migratory regularization in the territory, which results in a huge obstacle to access health, education, social welfare or shelter services, making them more vulnerable. In addition, those people who continue to enter Brazil during the closing of the border may also suffer from

deportation. The role of federal and military police in the border city of Pacaraima has been intensified and, in general, not even the most vulnerable cases are being referred to UN agencies. After irregular police action in a civil society shelter, the Federal Court decided to prohibit the deportation of Venezuelans at extreme vulnerability conditions. LEAP partners continue to raise awareness at the local government, so that migrant, asylum seekers and refugee women may have access to the Protection Network, even if they are undocumented. Partners also work with materials and information sessions directly with people of concern so that migrants and refugees can better understand their rights and paths to access services. Even so, advocacy at the national level is necessary, so that the border may be reopened, fully complying with sanitary measures. In the meantime, refugees and migrants may lawfully have partial access to Brazilian documentation but not the migratory regularization, as is the case with the *Cadastro de Pessoa Física* (CPF, or Individual Taxpayer Registration, in free translation) and the user's card to access *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS, or Unified Health System).

The socioeconomic reintegration of migrant, asylum seekers and refugee women remains as a major obstacle to the humanitarian response, mainly regarding access to a formal job vacancy. While approximately 70% of job openings are flagged to men, only 30% are to women. Countless women in Roraima are unable to leave shelters or be part of the interiorization process. Many women work autonomously as entrepreneurs or informally, without stability or social protection. Aiming at medium and long-term integration, with safer opportunities for migrant, asylum seekers and refugee women, UN Women, UNHCR and UNFPA aim at developing a programme based on the legacy of LEAP, more focused on the economic empowerment of women but also motivated by zero tolerance on violence against women and girls. It is crucial to continue raising awareness of companies not to hire only male refugees and migrants, but also that enterprises have to become aware of the need to equally hire women. To ensure that women have access to the formal labor market, it is necessary to work with public authorities to implement access, for example, to nurseries and schools for children, so that mothers – more burdened by care tasks – may have a safe place to leave their children while working in the formal market.

10 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/82930>

LEAP Joint Programme - Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection for migrant, asylum seeker and refugee women in Brazil

The LEAP Joint Programme - Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection is a Flagship Programme adapted in Brazil as a joint initiative between UN Women, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the context of mixed flow of refuge and migration from Venezuela. The programme started in January 2019 and its general objective is to support the Brazilian government in adequately responding to the different needs of migrant, asylum seeker, refugee and host women in Brazil, as well as the host community. Specific objectives include to strengthen protection and support mechanisms; to promote women's economic empowerment, opportunities and rights; and to promote women's empowerment, leadership and substantive participation in the humanitarian response.