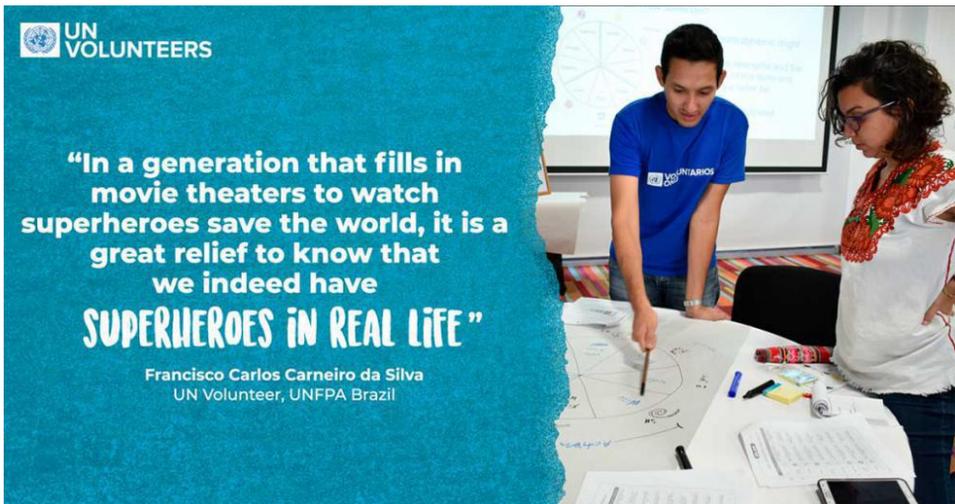


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## Former UN Volunteer supports LGBTI and other vulnerable Venezuelan migrants in Brazil

In all crises, those in situations of vulnerability are inevitably the ones who suffer the most. In northern Brazil, this is true for Venezuelan migrants, facing the COVID-19 pandemic. UN Volunteers support these migrants, particularly those who are LGBT or who have suffered sexual or gender-based violence.

A year before the global pandemic began, Francisco, who had recently graduated in medicine, was in Roraima facing the migrant emergency which is yet to be resolved. Serving as a UN Youth Volunteer during the first half of the year would teach him a life lesson that changed his perspective.

This experience encouraged him to continue contributing as a volunteer in subsequent crises. "In a generation that fills in movie theaters to watch superheroes save the world, it is a great relief to know that we indeed have superheroes in real life," Francisco shares, referring to the volunteers he met during his time as a UN Volunteer with UNFPA.

In 2018, a large number of Venezuelans were arriving in northern Brazil as a consequence of the ongoing economic and political crisis in their home country. The Brazilian Armed Forces, with the support of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) carried out an aid initiative known as Operação Acolhida (Operation Welcoming). Soon, other UN agencies and many government offices and civil

society organizations joined the effort and provided this initiative with logistics and human resources.

Francisco joined Operation Welcoming in the Triage Station, the first point of contact for migrants and refugees entering the country. This is where new arrivals must remain, often for many days, while the Brazilian administration collects information to determine their legal status.

The recently graduated Brazilian doctor assisted vulnerable Venezuelans, many of them women and members of the LGBTI community, in matters related to gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, and the Brazilian healthcare system.

"Everything here works differently than it does in Venezuela, so people need to know where to go when they need medical services," Francisco explains. "Information saves lives."

“ Many of the migrants and refugees who arrived at our tent had suffered sexual or other kinds of violence during their journey to the border, and they often needed emotional care. We provided information on legal steps for reporting assaults, where to get tested for sexually transmitted infections and administrative procedures related to health services. – Francisco Carlos Carneiro da Silva, former UN Volunteer with UNFPA

Many people, including a large number of women victims of gender-based violence, did not know their rights in Brazil and were often unaware of laws that could protect them. The UN Volunteers serving on the ground organized talks and workshops that provided a safe space for Venezuelans to talk about their situation, and feel heard and supported. Today, in addition to working as a doctor at a local hospital, Francisco continues to serve Venezuelan migrants in the same region with Doctors Without Borders. The past and current work of the volunteers at the border has proven really helpful in the pandemic response: "It is easier to spot COVID-19 outbreaks and assist people who may get sick when the migrant emergency and the improvement of people's health conditions have been properly managed," Francisco states.

Now that the pandemic is hitting Brazil hard, recognizing the importance of assisting the most vulnerable sectors of the population, such as the LGBTI community, becomes essential. Those who were already in situations of vulnerability prior to the crisis may suffer more from these new circumstances, and that is why the support structures previously established by UN partner agencies and other organizations must be leveraged to ensure

that no one is left behind.

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*This article was prepared with the kind support of [Online Volunteer](#) José María Sainz Maza del Olmo.*

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• COVID-19 • Coronavirus • LGBD • Gender-based Violence • migrants • UNHCR • IOM

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