

# Venezuelan refugees at the Brazilian borders during the covid-19 pandemic: an analysis from security studies

*Refugiados venezolanos en las fronteras de Brasil durante la pandemia de Covid-19: un análisis a partir de los estudios de seguridad*

**Abstract:** The Covid-19 pandemic impacted incisively on the migration issues in the Brazilian state of Roraima, producing effects both on the flows of migrants and refugees coming from Venezuela, as well as on the management of migration processes carried out by governments, international organizations, and civil actors. This paper aims to present and expose the situation of Venezuelan refugees on Brazilian borders during the Coronavirus pandemic, analyzing the migratory flow from international security studies, under the theory of Buzan and Weaver. For this, a clipping was conducted on the performance of the "Acolhida" Operation, launched by the Brazilian Army in 2018, considered a Humanitarian Logistics Task Force, focusing on the actions developed during the pandemic. Collaborative and solidary cooperation between national and transnational agents is necessary and urgent in order to mitigate the suffering of people who are vulnerable, such as the refugees, who before the closing of the border, arrived daily in large numbers to the Brazilian territory.

**Keywords** Clipping; Covid-19; "Acolhida" Operation; Refugees; Social Security.

**Resumen:** La pandemia de Covid-19 impactó de manera incisiva la problemática migratoria en Roraima, produciendo efectos tanto en los flujos de migrantes y refugiados de Venezuela, como en la gestión de los procesos migratorios que llevan a cabo gobiernos, organismos internacionales y actores civiles. El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo presentar y exponer la situación de los refugiados venezolanos en las fronteras brasileñas durante la pandemia del Coronavirus, analizando el flujo migratorio a partir de los estudios de seguridad internacional, bajo la teoría de Buzan y Weaver. Para ello, se realizó un clipping (recorte de reportajes) sobre la actuación de la Operación "Acolhida", deflagrada por el Ejército Brasileño en 2018, considerada una Fuerza de Tarea Logística Humanitaria, con foco en las acciones desarrolladas durante la pandemia. Se torna necesario y urgente la cooperación colaborativa y solidaria entre los agentes nacionales y transnacionales para mitigar el sufrimiento de las personas que se encuentran vulnerables, como los refugiados, que antes del cierre de la frontera, llegaban diariamente en gran número al territorio brasileño.

**Palabras clave:** clipaje; Covid-19; Operación "Acolhida"; refugiados; seguridad social.

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## 1 Introduction

National borders open and close from time to time, despite the liberal order's constant quest to reinvent itself, as in the current Covid-19 epidemic. Plagued by the growth of nationalism and the economic power of non-Western countries, the modern age faces an epidemic with reduced border access. The lines that draw the closure of accesses are being drawn into the social clusters of the States, as the worker migrates home after work ends and is not welcome in his or her own home. Isolation conglomerates and segregation centers resemble detention centers for individuals, and clearly, this presents itself as a process with no turning back for globalization led by the WTO (World Trade Organization), EU (European Union), and Free Trade Zones based on liberal norms (GHOSH; CHAUDHURY, 2020). John Locke's liberal ideas must face an undeniable fact. The current situation requires necessary preventive measures that are uncomfortable to the world before the pandemic and that resemble repressive devices for liberal interests, since for Locke, a state of perfect liberty would be the one that protects the rights to possessions and to people, according to the convenience of their interests, within the limits of protecting the natural rights of individuals, which are the right to life, liberty, and property. But this should happen in a natural flow, without the need for permission or dependence on the goodwill coming from another man (LOCKE, 1978).

The Covid-19 pandemic has generated unprecedented turbulence in multiple forces, both in political, social, economic, and epidemiological arenas around the world (GREER, et al., 2021). This moment is a "period of war", which accentuates the perception of three old crises: the much talked about ecological crisis; the crisis of global capitalism; and the biological crisis, evidenced in the current Covid-19 pandemic. The governmental apparatus has not been able to protect its citizens against the aggravation of such problems, instead it has legitimized the means to make it possible to reach this situation, which allows the question: on what validity do the Nation States stand? This question is difficult to answer, but in a way, we can elucidate that the states rely on an invisible frontier that has emerged with the virus, in which they balance guaranteeing the lives of their inhabitants and delaying the deaths caused by the spread of the disease (GHOSH; CHAUDHURY, 2020).

In Brazil, the first official notification of a person suffering from Covid-19 happened on February 26, 2020, in São Paulo. Throughout the country, the management of migratory processes and circulation flows were strongly affected, due to the sanitary measures adopted to confront the disease (GREER, et al., 2021), porous borders of international access also suffered from this ambivalence between the hospitality of access and the hostility of closure, one of them was the border with Venezuela, in Pacaraima, impacting the migratory flow by land of Venezuelans to Brazil (TEIXEIRA, 2021). While the rapid spread of the virus has revealed how connected we are, epidemiological measures seem to neglect those who seek help in other countries. For some individuals there is no right time to leave their nationality in the past and look for a safe place (BRASIL, 2021).

Brazil has developed over the years a profile of a hospitable country and this is reflected in our laws, as can be seen in the changes that have occurred since the Statute of the Foreigner (Law No. 6,815) of August 19, 1980, to Law No. 13,445 of May 24, 2017, known as the Migration Law. The Statute in question was created during the military period, and its main objective was to safeguard both national sovereignty and Brazilian interests against a possible foreign threat, that is, the immigrant was seen as a potential enemy (CLARO, 2020). Meanwhile, numerous changes can be observed with the Migration Law, which guarantees refugees the right to not be deported massively into the national territory, protection, and full equality, which involves access to the Unified Health System (CERÁVOLO; FRANCHI, 2020).

Despite these changes, with the new Coronavirus pandemic, the situation of Venezuelan refugees, which was already delicate, has become even worse. The closing of the border is supported by Law No. 13,979 of February 6, 2020, known as the "quarantine law", which determined the temporary restriction on entering and leaving the country by highways, ports, and airports, with the Brazilian government's claim that SUS would not support the treatment of foreigners infected by the new virus (ASENSI; RIBEIRO; FILPO, 2021). In many cases, migration works as a way to access health care, but when they arrive in Brazil, Venezuelans find a dissonance between the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde — SUS) and the health subsystem (MOREIRA; TORELLY, 2021).

Thus, the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are evident in all spheres around the world, especially in relation to social and humanitarian issues, essentially for vulnerable populations. One of these vulnerable populations, as seen earlier, are the refugees who leave their countries in search of better living conditions. The Venezuelans have felt the impact of the social and humanitarian crisis experienced in Venezuela and potentiated by the pandemic, where even with the potential contamination by the virus, many still seek refuge in other countries, one of them being Brazil. This article has the general objective of describing the migratory movement on the border of Roraima and Venezuela during the pandemic and to observe the impacts that occurred, especially in relation to Operation Acolhida, analyzing it from the perspective of Security Studies.

## 2 Sources And Methods

In order to achieve the proposed objective, which is to present and expose the situation of Venezuelan refugees on Brazilian borders during the Coronavirus pandemic, analyzing the migratory flow from the perspective of Security Studies, we first analyzed Barry Buzan's contributions and Security Studies applied to the social security agenda. As for the methodology, we used *clipping*, a tool for comparing information, which allows us to understand the vision of the communication vehicles about a certain subject. In other words, *clipping* is about a cut of the news broadcast in the media that portray the same object of study from different angles, addressing positive, negative and/or neutral perspectives (CARVALHO; CORDEIRO; MOREIRA; CORDEIRO, 2018).

This article will be divided into six parts. In the first part the problem is contextualized starting with the introduction. The second part presents the methodological framework. The third part illustrates Buzan and Weaver's theory of the new international security agenda. In the fourth part the origin of the increase in the flow of Venezuelan migration to the state of Roraima is reported, and the actors that act in this environment. The fifth part demonstrates the *clipping* method with information from Acolhida Operation. Finally, the sixth part presents the conclusions of the study.

### 3 Barry Buzan And The Social Security Agenda In The International Arena

Security studies face new challenges with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar conflict scenario with the US, still in the early 1990s, a period in which many publications were influenced by the end of bipolarity, and questioned the very nature of the studies published until then, which focused on the rivalry between the two superpowers and the threats of a nuclear war between them. Theorists and theories that had a broader scope on the security theme gained greater notoriety after this episode, such as the Copenhagen School, which played an important role in the evolution of International Security Studies (CERÁVOLO; FRANCHI, 2020).

The Copenhagen School was an organization of theorists who discussed securitization theory, developing a set of concepts and analytical frameworks that would enable the analysis of international security from a broader perspective, developed by Barry Buzan and other authors (TANNO, 2003). The concept of securitization as a social construction that supports the principles drawn by Onuf, a pioneer of constructivism, justifies that the world is a social construction created through discourses and social relations, that is, for a specific issue to be perceived as a security problem, it must first necessarily be declared a problem by some entity of social importance, this securitization process can be observed through discourse analysis.

Buzan and Weaver, two of the most respected authors of the Copenhagen School, proposed a new way to analyze the security theme, replacing it with a holistic approach to the security of human communities and nations. They examine the distinct character and dynamics of security in five sectors: military, political, economic, environmental, and social (CERÁVOLO; FRANCHI, 2020). Theoretically, there are conceptual distinctions between the political and military sectors, but what Buzan points out is the existence of a partial interchangeability that unites the two forces in the process of constituting government, as both are linked to the purpose of the state, in confronting dual-directional issues: inward, to the domestic construction and life of the state, and outward, to its position and relationship with other members of the international system.

In regard to military security issues, questions have arisen mainly about the internal and external actions by which human communities establish and maintain the machinery of government, for the exercise of government goes beyond the simple use of force. In other words, in terms and conditions of political legitimacy, the limit at which military resources are accepted is as important as the military considerations. In practice, the military security agenda revolves

around the ability of governments to maintain them against internal and external threats, but there may also be a need to involve the use of military power in the defense of states or governments against threats to their own existence, making a maintenance of their *status quo*, as in the case of the emergence of migrants or rival ideologies.

As far as society is concerned, the analysis of social security starts from those ideas and practices that identify individuals as members of a social group. Society is about identity, the self-conception of communities and individuals identifying themselves as members of a community. These identity ties are distinct, though often entangled with the organizational political spectrum, concerned with government. The focus has been on the institutional politics of the State, and consequently of the political and military sectors. If one approaches the nation, another sector enters the picture, the society.

The social security agenda is set by different actors in different eras and regions, but one of the most common problems that have been seen as a threat to social security is migration in a way that alters identity as a result of the changing composition of the population. The movement of people through geographical space is an old human habit in its history. We can consider this migration to occur because of a depopulation problem, people can make individual decisions to move for various reasons, be it plague, war, famine, natural disaster or extermination policies.

Migration operates most intensely as an intra-regional and neighboring region dynamic. It is easier to migrate over a short distance than over a long one, and by cultural impulses to travel to neighbors than to distant places. Different societies have different vulnerabilities and this will depend on where and how their identities are constituted. Depopulation threatens social identity by threatening its individuals, but it is not specifically a part of the social sector identity logic, except perhaps in cases where extermination policies are motivated by the desire to eliminate an identity in an extreme case, as happens with unemployment and crime, these are threats primarily to individuals, only if they threaten the collapse of state society do they become social security issues (BUZAN; WAEVER; WILDE, 1998).

#### **4 The Venezuelan Migratory Crisis, The State Of Roraima And The Actors Involved**

The flow of Venezuelans migrating to other countries increased significantly from the year 2015, when several countries in the American continent, including Brazil, had a significant increase in the number of records of the presence of Venezuelan refugees in their territories (SIMÕES, 2017). At the beginning of this year (2015), few Venezuelans settled in the country, there was a growing movement on the Brazil-Venezuela border of Venezuelan citizens to make purchases of various products, mainly food and medicines, but few remained in the territory. However, starting in 2016 the flow of Venezuelans to Brazil increased throughout the year, this new migratory movement came in search of medical-hospital services and with the intention of staying in the country. Venezuela has a border strip with other countries, the Venezuelan states to the South and East border only Brazil and Guyana, the limits with the states of Amazonas and Roraima, but the entrance door of the refugees ends up being through Roraima because of the access (CERÁVOLO; FRANCHI, 2020).

Roraima is a state located further north in Brazil and has dry borders with Venezuela and Guyana. The capital of Roraima, Boa Vista, is the only Brazilian capital located in the northern hemisphere of the globe. This interferes with the counting of the seasons in relation to the rest of the country (VIDIGAL, 2021). The state has peculiar characteristics, such as its remoteness from the political-economic center and the demarcation of 46% of the state as indigenous land, and presents problems of border and environmental illicit activities on the border strip. Roraima has a population of 576,568 (IBGE, 2018 apud CERÁVOLO; FRANCHI, 2020) and an annual income of 11 million reais. In addition, the electricity grid is disconnected from the national grid, and receives power from the Guri hydroelectric plant in Venezuela.

What calls attention are the causes that foment this great migration to the state of Roraima, more specifically to the country that originates this great flux of migrating people, the neighboring country to the national borders, Venezuela, which is not suffering from any serious environmental problem or going through a period of war. But what are or were the problems that became so severe that Venezuelan citizens left their country? (CERÁVOLO; FRANCHI, 2020). The author Gustavo da Frota Simões, adjunct at the Federal University of Roraima (Universidade Federal de Roraima – UFRR) assesses that the crisis in Venezuela has its origin prior to the year 2015, and divides the crisis into three faces: an economic, a political and a social one (SIMÕES, 2017).

In the last decade, Venezuela had a relatively high Human Development Index (0.634), higher than its neighbors in South America and the Caribbean (e.g. Brazil 0.611 and Colombia 0.592). The country was one of the founding states of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960, along with Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Currently, OPEC controls more than 80% of the world’s proven oil reserves. Author Tássio Franchi, from the Army Command and Staff School (Escola de Comando e Estado-Maior do Exército – ECEME) evaluates each of the three fronts of the Venezuelan crisis, with this, the following table is constructed.

**Table 1 – The three fronts of the crisis in Venezuela**

<b>Political</b>	The country suffers from the lack of maintenance of democratic precepts, marked by the rise of a government with socialist leaning, in which there is no alternation of power, compromising the management and balance between the three powers, consequently affecting the legislative and judiciary powers, and affecting the ability to restrain or supervise the actions of the executive branch.
<b>Economical</b>	The country does not have sufficient domestic production to meet the needs of the domestic market demands, leaving it excessively at the mercy of import relations. Although Venezuela holds almost a quarter of the oil reserves, the infamous drop in the price of oil on the international market has directly affected the country’s purchasing power.
<b>Social</b>	The political and economic crises have promoted a deep and acute crisis in the social sector. The high crime rates, attributed to the population’s lack of access to basic supplements, such as food and medicine, become one of the main reasons for individuals to leave Venezuela, reasons pointed out by migrants who arrived in Brazil in 2017.

Source: Franchi, 2019.

This problem originated in the 1970s, after the year 1973, the high valuation of oil, mainly due to the creation of *Petróleos de Venezuela* (1976), when the Venezuelan State had more control over its oil and, consequently, obtained a larger share of foreign exchange. This has enabled the country to buy food products on a large scale with low prices and good quality in foreign trade. The domestic production of food was not able to compete with the foreign market, so, inevitably, there was a stunting of the food industry, which became unstructured over time, to the point of not being able to promote self-supply. Despite several presidents and ministers of agriculture trying to promote a better production framework for local producers since the 1980s, the import of basic products has been maintained because of the dividends from oil production. However, from the second decade of the 2000s, more specifically from July 2014, there was a systematic drop in oil prices in the international market, affecting Venezuela's purchasing power, consequently, it was unable to meet the demands of domestic consumption. In addition, the subsequent economic and political crises have resulted in a social crisis that has manifested itself, above all, in the amplification of internal insecurity. The result of these crises and the lack of internal physical security is what some authors identify as the "Venezuelan diaspora," because of its migratory process that began in 2005 (CERÁVOLO; FRANCHI, 2020).

Because they cannot and/or do not want to return to their country, for various reasons, many Venezuelans seek refuge in Brazil, and because of this, according to author Thiago Augusto Lima Alves, they are considered forced international migrants, who cross the national borders of their countries in search of protection. According to the UNHCR definition, refugees are those who are outside their home country for fear of their fundamental rights because of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. This is also due to widespread violence, severe human rights violations and internal conflicts; therefore refugees cannot or do not want to return to their country of origin because they do not have state protection (ASENSI; RIBEIRO; FILPO, 2021).

#### **4.1 The state of Roraima and the acolhida operation**

The Acolhida Operation, which, according to the Federal Government's official website is coordinated by the Casa Civil (Chief of Staff Office), operates in three axes, namely: border planning (provides for documentation, vaccination, and control operations by the Brazilian Army); shelter (includes offering shelter, food, and health care); and, finally, interiorization (aims at socioeconomic inclusion).

The operation counts on the participation of 11 ministries, as well as civil society organizations and international organizations, providing socio-economic inclusion opportunities to refugees and migrants. To get an idea of the importance of this type of humanitarian logistics operation, the operation in question has performed more than 217,000 social services; more than 46,000 Venezuelans have been recognized by Brazil as refugees; in addition, more than 255,000 CPFs—Brazilian document—have been issued. Also, about 155,000 residency applications were

granted. In relation to the Armed Forces, also according to the Federal Government's portal, approximately 4 thousand soldiers have already participated in the reception actions. According to information from the Federal Government's website, the operation:

It has reached the mark of 50,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants interiorized in three years. They were welcomed in more than 670 Brazilian municipalities after arriving in Brazil in search of a better future with jobs and access to education and health services. Interiorization is one of the axes of the Acolhida Operation, which voluntarily takes Venezuelans from Roraima and Manaus to other cities as a form of socioeconomic inclusion, to reduce population pressure in these regions and offer better opportunities to migrants and refugees. (BRASIL, 2021, n.p.).

As for the refugee data in Brazil in 2020, according to the 6th edition of the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety's *Refuge in Numbers*, based on data provided by the Federal Police, in 2020 Brazil received a total of 28,899 requests for recognition of refugee status. Also, according to this edition, there was a negative variation (-65%) when compared to 2019, when the country received 82,552 requests. Still on the subject of numbers:

Most of the people who applied for refugee status recognition in Brazil in 2020 held Venezuelan nationality, or had Venezuela as their country of habitual residence. There were 17,385 requests for recognition of refugee status, which corresponded to about 60.2% of the total number of requests for recognition of refugee status received by Brazil that year. (SILVA, G. J. et al., 2021, p. 9).

Regarding Venezuelan applicants, 52.7% were male and 47.3% were female, most of them under 15 years of age, "which shows that the significant incidence of children and adolescents requesting recognition of refugee status is strongly correlated with the dynamics of Venezuelan forced international mobility" (SILVA, G. J. et al., 2021, p. 14). According to the aforementioned edition, 5,880 people were under the age of 15; 4,307 were aged 15 to 24; 4,443 were aged 25 to 39; 1,490 were aged 40 to 49; 817 were aged 50 to 59; and 448 were aged 60 or over.

As for the requests for recognition of refugee status considered by Conare in the year 2020 [...] it analyzed 63,790 requests for recognition of refugee status, with emphasis on the number of applicants for recognition of refugee status from Venezuela, 46,192 requests, which corresponded to 72.4% of the total number of requests considered by the Committee (and its General Coordination) in 2020. (SILVA, G. J. et al., 2021, p. 16).



Regarding the North Region, the state of Roraima concentrated the highest volume of requests for recognition of refugee status in 2020. In 2020, 75.5% of the requests considered by Conare were registered in the states that make up this region. These applicants for refugee status were mainly from Venezuela (43,183) (SILVA, G. J. et al., 2021).

## 5 The Clipping And The Acolhida Operation

The vulnerability in which refugees live is evident, in addition to the invisibility that was reinforced during the pandemic of the new Coronavirus. In light of the above, the present work will perform a clipping on Venezuelan refugees during the Coronavirus pandemic, exposing the characteristics and actions that occurred during this period, analyzing it from the theory of Buzan and Weaver's Security Studies and the Copenhagen School. There has been a decrease in the information and data, both released by the Federal Government and the traditional media about the migratory flow and Acolhida Operation during this period, due to the adversity of the situation. The closing of borders has made it difficult for refugees to access decent living conditions, often impacting their health.

It is evident that the closing of the borders is a liberal political decision, since it is paradoxical to the official claims that the restrictions on the circulation of refugees on the Brazil-Venezuela border were measures taken as a public health precaution, stating that the situation was due to "sanitary reasons related to the risks of contamination by the coronavirus". The blockade occurred when Venezuela had only 33 registered cases, while Brazil's air borders with Europe remained open, even after tens of thousands of cases were confirmed on the European continent. Access to national land borders, which is the main way for people to cross in search of protection and refuge, was restricted, while air borders, including Venezuela itself, remained open. The ordinance also establishes punishments for refugees: deportation and disqualification from refugee claims if the foreigner fails to comply with the restriction (BRASIL, 2020 apud RODRIGUES; CAVALCANTE; FAERSTEIN, 2020).

This decision by the Federal Government shows changes in the actions linked to Brazilian Foreign Policy and the tradition of Brazil as a diplomatic country. One of these milestones was Brazil's withdrawal from the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in 2019, generating a "diplomatic discomfort" that indicated a change in the country's stance on such humanitarian issue, in addition to breaking with a historical approach of the country towards migration and refuge (SILVA; BAHDUR, 2020). In contrast, when the state of Amazonas had its health system in collapse, Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, released cargo of hospital oxygen from *White Martins* produced in the country to the state in question (EXAMEMADURO..., 2021).

Still on these measures and protocols, at the very beginning of the pandemic, according to an article by Verdélio (2020) published on March 18, 2020 on the Agência Brasil portal, the government temporarily restricted the entry of Venezuelans for 15 days by land means, claiming that if the measure was not followed, the migrant would be deported and could not apply for refuge in Brazil. Moreover,

this measure was extended later on. Currently, there is a new ordinance in force, 655 of June 23, 2021, which, according to UNHCR Brazil (2021b), allows the exceptional entry of Venezuelans into Brazilian territory for humanitarian reasons, but the Brazilian borders remain closed.

The humanitarian crisis in which Venezuela finds itself has been going on for several years and has worsened since the beginning of the pandemic, and is not a focus on the International Agenda. In view of this, and analyzing the reports from various media, it was possible to extract some situations that occurred in order to verify the impact of the pandemic for the refugees and for the actions of Acolhida Operation, which will be exposed below. Still on the impact of the closing of borders, according to the portal Agência Senado, of the Federal Government, published on April 23, 2021, the pandemic intensified and worsened the situation of refugees, because:

The Mixed Commission on International Migration and Refugees debated this Friday (23) the situation of refugees during the health crisis in Brazil. Experts pointed out that the closing of borders with other countries to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus goes against international conventions and makes refugees' access to basic rights more precarious. (TEIXEIRA, 2021, n.p.).

In the year 2020, the Federal Government launched a financial benefit to provide emergency protection in the period of coping with the pandemic crisis. According to the G1 portal, published on March 24, 2021 Vidigal (2021), the government's difficulty in covering everyone during this period has had consequences for the refugees; those who get the aid end up helping other migrants in more vulnerable situations. The difficulty of access to aid sometimes led some to work in the informal market, despite the restrictions imposed, and many others were left without a source of income. It is worth noting that refugees in a regular situation in Brazil are also entitled to emergency aid, but there has been an interruption in the payment and even a difficulty in getting the documents to do so. Another important point highlighted in the aforementioned news is the issue of the world/activities having become, to a great extent, digital, but this digital "world" has not arrived for everyone, because many do not have access to mobile internet and, much less to a mobile device.

According to the news published by Veja, on September 10, 2020 and updated on March 05, 2021 (COM A PANDEMIA..., 2021), due to the pandemic, approximately 6,000 Venezuelans returned from Brazil (a fact that there was a big fanfare by the Maduro regime, in order to discourage Venezuelans to leave the country), because many of the refugees were dependent on informal income. Without income, they ended up evicted from their places of residence. This is characterized as a mixed migration flow. Another unfortunate issue aggravated by the pandemic were the cases of sexual abuse of women. According to a CNN report on November 22, 2020, (Martinez ,2020), the closing of borders and consequently "safe routes" have placed women and children in vulnerable situations, such as those of sexual abuse, kidnapping, and trafficking on the informal routes. In addition, the occurrence of xenophobia and discrimination with migrants and refugees has increased.

Still on the impacts of the pandemic for Venezuelan refugees, according to the Federal Government's website, published on May 28, 2021, the Ministry of Citizenship participated in the international conference, held by the United Nations, to discuss the reception of the refugees and their needs in order to build initiatives to ensure actions and support to the group. Also in the report it states that:

The Brazilian government, for its good performance in Acolhida Operation, was invited by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to join the Donors Conference of the R4V Platform – Response to Venezuelans. With the theme “Refugees and invisible migrants in Covid-19: disproportionate impacts on special protection groups”, the event took place from 24 to 28.05 (BRASIL, 2021a, n.p.).

Acolhida Operation has support from the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela, which was created in 2018 at the request of the UN Secretary General, who requested UNHCR and IOM to coordinate interagency operational and integration responses regarding Venezuelan refugees and migrants, its main functions/responsibilities include: drafting a harmonized response plan (RMRP); strategic coordination of the actions of UN agencies and civil society; articulating actions in support of Acolhida Operation; monitoring activities; and, finally, donor relations. The platform in question, according to the IOM Brazil portal, published on May 13, 2021, supported Acolhida Operation in resuming services to Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Manaus.

Disclosed in the same portal of the Federal Government, on August 21, 2020 (BRASIL, 2020), there was an investment of more than R\$ 630 million in the year 2020 in Acolhida Operation, to promote the inclusion of refugees in the national territory, besides stating that, since the beginning of the pandemic, the actions of the Brazilian government contributed to the internalization of more than 6.5 thousand Venezuelans. However, a decrease in internalization could be seen during the pandemic due to border closing measures and protocols.

Still about Acolhida Operation, according to a report from O Globo, published on July 07, 2021 (OPERAÇÃO..., 2021), despite this investment occurring in 2020, it states that the operation is at risk of being interrupted due to lack of resources, moreover, Braga Netto, Minister of Defense, states that this interruption may “compromise Brazil’s reputation.” Netto also states that the current budget for this operation only allows to maintain the actions until the end of July this year, and asks for another 178.9 million reais to continue it until March 2022. According to the Minister of Defense, in March 2021 the operation had 13 shelters with a maximum capacity for 7,642 immigrants, where 10,000 meals a day were offered (O GLOBO/OPERAÇÃO..., 2021). In addition, the Ministry of Defense forwarded a letter to the Ministry of Economy and the President’s Chief of Staff and attached to it a technical note stating that the request is “urgent and indispensable”. The amount requested from Economia was calculated according to the average amount spent on the operations (OPERAÇÃO...O GLOBO, 2021). According to the report published in Correio Braziliense on December 27, 2020, based on information from the newspaper O Estado de São Paulo, it states that the military wants to leave the operation. Also according to the report:

The Ministry of Defense is discussing in the Jair Bolsonaro government how to withdraw the Armed Forces from Acolhida Operation, created to receive and serve Venezuelans. Considered a model by the United Nations and one of the government's rare international assets, the operation is about to complete three years and has undergone changes in dynamics because of the reduced flow of immigrants caused by the covid-19 pandemic (CORREIO BRAZILIENSEMILITARES..., 2020, n.p.).

Regarding the structure, it is observed that:

Among the military, the Acolhida Operation is classified as a Humanitarian Logistics Task Force. The command is from the Army, which gives up space in the 3rd Special Border Platoon in Roraima to receive the immigrants. They also work in Boa Vista, the state capital, and Manaus, in the state of Amazonas, cities that concentrate Venezuelans and have shelters. Every three months, military personnel from the Navy, Air Force, and especially the Army are deployed from various commands in the country to take over as the contingent of the turn. (CORREIO BRAZILIENSEMILITARES..., 2020, n.p.).

The military, besides logistics, are also present in security and health care, along with other agencies. The report further states that:

The generals say that this “deviation” of function, as they classify it, occurs due to political and social pressure, as well as lack of personnel and organization in other government agencies. Despite the willingness to leave Acolhida, the military foresees difficulties in finding another body capable of taking over the main operational tasks—the service at the tip for refugees and immigrants escaping the widespread crisis in Venezuela (CORREIO BRAZILIENSEMILITARES..., 2020, n.p.).

According to the USP newspaper, published on May 05, 2021 (Capomaccio, 2021), the situation of immigrants in Brazil worsened during the pandemic. As adds the researcher, specialist in migration and refugees, Patrícia Nabuco, despite the Brazilian government recognizing Venezuelans as refugees, there is still a lot of prejudice and discrimination, mainly due to the fact that many procedures are only in Portuguese and not in other languages, and public employees are not always prepared to work with this population. Another important point is the difficulty in revalidating the diploma here in Brazil. The report points out that:

During the pandemic, refugees were not considered in public policies, many lost their jobs and had no access to emergency aid. Immigrants use the National Migratory Register (Registro Nacional Migratório – RNM), recognized since 2017—, but that access to it was done with the RG number, a document that immigrants and refugees do not have. In addition, other problems were faced from the first year of the pandemic, such as the prohibition of both entry and exit of foreigners in the country (CAPOMACCIOUSP, 2021, n.p.).

Finally, the last report analyzed in this paper, published in *Folha de São Paulo* on June 16, 2021, states that the world needs to do more for Venezuelan refugees, and the cost of not acting now puts regional stability at risk. Also according to the report:

The pandemic has further compounded the difficulties, increasing the numerous risks that Venezuelans face when trying to reach safety. The measures of prolonged confinement make it difficult for refugees and migrants to try to find employment. Women and girls, in particular, are exposed to even greater risks of exploitation and xenophobia (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO MUNDO..., 2021, n.p.).

The report also talks about the importance of social and economic integration in Latin America and the insufficiency of international support, especially in relation to the UN, whose funding has been able to supply only half of the financial needs for the cause.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

The post-Cold War period was marked by the extension of the concept of International Security, in which international migrations began to be thought of within this security perspective. Certified this, it is observed that the impacts on the international security agenda, more specifically on the regional security agenda, make the Venezuelan migration crisis an international security instability problem, since not only Brazil receives refugees, but also Colombia, Peru, among other countries. However, many of these nations do not have good conditions to receive them and, according to UNHCR itself, some refugees are reaching a point of extreme unhealthiness, even though there are international policies for the reception, and the difficulties faced by refugees are aggravated in the current situation, especially in relation to economic and social issues.

The research also observed that the Covid-19 pandemic impacted incisively on migration issues in Roraima, producing effects both on the flows of migrants and refugees, as well as on the management of migration processes carried out by governments, international organizations, and civil society actors. Although there has been a consensus before that cooperation between nations produces good results when dealing with migration flows, recent events have made this more evident. Collaborative and solidary cooperation between national and transnational actors is necessary and urgent in order to mitigate the suffering of people who are vulnerable, such as migrants in situations of refuge, who before the closing of the border, arrived daily in large numbers to the national territory. This highlights the importance of increasing investments in inter-agency operations, focused on the social and economic integration of South America, in order to seek stability on the continent.

Despite the existence of *Acolhida* Operation, there were impacts on the operation's activities, which affected three axes of the work: border planning, shelter, and interiorization. The interiorization of refugees and migrants, which was not completely paralyzed during this

period, had some of its performance statuses compromised, such as the internalization of shelter and job vacancies. In addition, there was a need for the creation of the Area of Protection and Care (Área de Proteção e Cuidado — APC) in order to allow for the isolation of suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19.

In relation to the media analysis performed in this article, it was possible to notice that there was no efficient approach to the refugees during the pandemic, with few reports about their reality. However, it is evident the negative impacts of the pandemic, mainly in relation to migration flows, also impacting the actions carried out by Operation Welcome, which was paralyzed, but, from the clipping, it could not be ascertained for how long. Despite these negative impacts, there has been a major effort by the actors involved to seek effective solutions in the protection of Venezuelan refugee applicants, despite limited resources to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Finally, the pandemic highlighted a greater need for collaboration and solidarity among nations to face this situation. Brazil needs UNHCR's humanitarian aid to help with the refugee issue, and in this context, international relations between countries and institutions will not be—or should not be—the same. Isolationist measures and closed borders will not solve the problems currently experienced, they have only worsened by being neglected. It is necessary, in this new international scenario, for us to think of new ways to refute old social bottlenecks, seeking paths traced by science, in order to increase international cooperation.

### **Authorship and Collaborations**

All authors participated equally in the development of the paper.

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