

## REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CIVIC SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLECTIVES IN RIO DE JANEIRO: SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND ENTANGLEMENTS

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### ABSTRACT

In the last decades, there has been a substantive growth in international migration between countries in the Latin American region, most especially among Haitians and, lately, Venezuelans. In Brazil, foreigners represented 200,000 in 2023, and there were around 50,000 asylum requests in 2022. These processes confront individuals with several stressors and force them to develop resilience strategies, many of which are promoted and supported by civic society associations acting in their favour or by migrant and refugee collectives. These have risen as a privileged locus to mediate the relationship between the state and society and act in the empty spaces left by public migration policies. The present study describes and reflects upon the role of these associations, their aims, actions, and forms of inter-institutional articulation in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Its findings show that they fulfil valuable common goals, such as upgrading migrants' and refugees' information on documentation and human rights, providing legal orientation, promoting insertion into the labour market, and upgrading their social integration and political advocacy capacities. However, they act in fragmented ways, often with few financial resources and entanglements between them or with other institutions are short-lived.

**Keynotes:** refugees; migrants; Brazil; civic society association; migrant and refugee collectives; social entanglements, collective resilience; social integration.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

At the global level, the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2023) estimates that the number of international migrants has increased in the last five decades, reaching approximately 281 million in 2020, which represents 3.6% of the total global population.

At present, the growth in foreign migration has been within the Latin American region (as part of South/South migration), with the dislocation of people from the Northern Countries to those of the South of Latin America (Salamanca, 2022). The migration movement of Venezuelans, and before that, of Haitians, has impacted Brazil and the countries of the Southern Cone of Latin America. The Venezuelan migration was caused by the economic, political and social collapse of the country, resulting in a lack of food, medicine and a growth in violence and poverty. Data from the United Nations indicate that between 2017 and 2019, the group that most requested asylum globally corresponded to people leaving Venezuela— more than 4

million till 2020 (Chávez-Gonzalez & Echeverria-Estrada, 2020). The displacement of Haitians was largely generated by the devastating earthquake of 2010, the political instability and the subsequent extreme violence among gangs in the country (Nascimento & Riolfi, 2023).

According to data compiled by the International Migration Observatory (OBMigra) from SisMigra (The National Migration Registry System), there was a significant growth in the volume of migrants arriving in Brazil between 2010 and 2023, increasing from approximately 46,000 in 2010 to over 200,000 in 2023<sup>1</sup>.

However, data compiled from the same sources indicate a significant shift in the composition of migration flows in 2022 in Brazil. Among the top ten countries of origin, only two were from the Global North (France and the United States), with the remaining eight originating from Latin America and the Caribbean (Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Haiti, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay). It is worth noting that Venezuela was the primary country of origin for more than 55% of migrants/refugees.

Migration has been feminizing. Women represented 30.79% of migrants in 2010 and 46% in 2023. The pattern of female migration also changed in terms of nationality since 2015, as Haitian women (5,301) became the leading nationality in terms of registrations until 2018, when they were overtaken by Venezuelan women. Female migrants were largely single and young, mainly belonging to the age cohorts of 15 to 25 years old (24%) and of 26 to 40 years old (43%) (SisMigra). São Paulo and the three Southern states of Brazil were the ones that absorbed most of these migrants (Tonhati; Macedo, 2020).

There has been a very significant growth in the number of asylum seekers in Brazil between 2016 and 2022. Almost 8,700 asylum requests were registered in 2016, over 82,000 in 2019, and almost 50,000 in 2022, according to the International Traffic System - Alert and Restriction Module (STI-MAR), provided by the Federal Police and compiled by OBMigra (apud Oliveira et al., 2024). More than half of these requests in 2022 came from the Northern States, especially from Roraima, according to the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), which recognized 5,795 individuals as refugees in 2022. Asylum requests mainly involved Venezuelans (65% of the total in 2018), followed by those of Haitians and Cubans. These were mainly made by men, except in the 60 years and older category, where women outnumbered men (Junger da Silva et al., 2023).

The general process of migration or refugee seeking - including departure from their own countries, the journey itself, places of transit, arrival and settlement - confronts individuals with a number of stressors and forces them to develop individual and collective resilience strategies. States and their migration policies and actions are often unprepared for the reception of these flows in terms of infrastructure, basic services and the dissemination of registration and residence information in adequate intercultural ways, so these populations cannot fully exercise their human rights. Civic society institutions and migrant collectives organize initially to fill these gaps.

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<sup>1</sup> The data was obtained through the DataMigra system, provided by the Observatory of International Migrations (OBMigra), available at: <https://datamigra.mj.gov.br/#/public>

The study aims to describe how these migrants/refugees in Rio de Janeiro have organized themselves and received support from organizations advocating for their demands, towards social integration and the protection of their rights. It sets out to answer the following interrelated questions:

- What type of institutions predominates on this topic in civic society in Rio de Janeiro?
- What are their main aims and the actions taken to fulfil them?
- How far do they develop arrangements to articulate with each other and other significant social actors?

## 2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Theoretical considerations

Civic associations supporting migrants/refugees and collectives have risen as a privileged locus to mediate the relationship between the state and society (MacGowan et al., 2016). At the end of the 1980s, with the new Constitution of 1988 - and more so at the end of the 1990s- the rights of migrants and refugees in Brazil began to raise some public concern. Most specially, the requests for asylum were further recognized, as well as the criteria to integrate within policies and norms, specialist knowledge with lay knowledge on the migrants and refugees' experiences, i.e. situated knowledge depending on nationality, class, race/ethnicity, age and gender (Nowotny; Scott; Gibbons, 2001, Haraway, 1988). A trend to legitimize the reflections of these populations gradually started and somewhat widened the democratic participation of these previously excluded social groups.

The range of these associations expanded to fill the vacuums left by the public migratory policies. These policies were often inadequately shaped to respond to migrants'/refugees' immediate needs, living conditions and cultural specificities. Moreover, they had rarely taken into account the engagement of migrants and refugees in their design, implementation and monitoring. This is the case of the 2017 Migration Law (Law No. 13,445), which, even if it represents an important humanitarian advance compared to the dictatorship's Law of Foreigners (Law No. 6.815, 1980), still neglected the participation of civic society in its formulation. It also has not led to consistent public action for the systematic update of statistics on subcategories of data that would allow focused state interventions, e.g. on race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others.

The latest initiative towards developing an inclusive new Plan for Migration, Refugees and Stateless People, with broad engagement of migrant and refugee delegates to prioritize their proposals, is still an ongoing process, called COMIGRAR. It is being led at the Federal level by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (2024) to co-produce the new plan. Local, municipal, and state-level encounters, along with two National Conferences, have been organized to raise the main demands from these populations, eventually synthesizing them and including them in the orientation of the future Migration Plan.

Various informal networks, formal organizations, and institutions, including charities, branches of faith-based bodies, social enterprises and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) help to develop migrants' possibilities of economic and social integration (Aerne & Bonoli,

2021). They provide direct support through voluntary work and indirect support, advising on legal rights, skills development and peripheral administrative tasks, for example, to remove barriers for migrants to access public services.

Some authors have called these associations ‘migrant support ecologies’, in a normative sense, defined as “shared physical and abstract spaces where multiple organizations work to help migrants access and transition within social and economic integration” (Lugosi et al., 2022, p. 1231). Three key sets of factors that shape the dynamics of the migration support ecologies are: first, the diversity and evolving profile of arriving migrants; second, the changing migrant reception policies and funding available to support organizations; and third, the new service providers entering this sphere of activity and the new services they develop in response to emerging challenges. Appreciating the impacts of the three factors subsequently helps to understand how and why inter-organizational entanglements may have emerged in these support ecologies.

In spite of Richardson’s et al. (2020) recommendation to adopt an ‘ecosystems’ perspective to examine how different organizations can and do cooperate to support refugees and migrants, it is often unknown the extent to which in Rio de Janeiro these organizations are aware of the presence and capabilities of other organizations. Moreover, to analyze whether they cooperate in a systematic and coordinated manner to fulfil common goals becomes a complex task. As they coexist organizationally, this simultaneously involves resource competition, functional specialization, selective cooperation and moral obligations that potentially shape individual and collective practices within inter-organizational arrangements.

The activities of individual organizations and the interactions between frontline service providers and their ‘clients’ have been selectively studied in countries other than Brazil, and the collaborations between private, public and third sector organizations (e.g. Morano-Foadi et al., 2023). But the nature of these interactions has been less analyzed and hence, there is inadequate knowledge regarding inter-organizational arrangements, including the factors shaping their interactions (Lee et al., 2020). Multiple tensions shape their activities and engagement, for example, the diversity of institutional logics followed by state, commercial and charitable organizational actors. The evolving profile of new migrant cohorts and the challenges presented by their cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics has been recognized by academics (Moreira, 2014; 2017). The unfolding uncertainty of the situation drives organizational actors to reflect on their clients’ needs and on how they could best be addressed, either through their services, but also of those of others operating in the same ecology.

Invoking the notion of inter-organizational ‘entanglement’ acknowledges actors’ coexistence and that their practices may be less ordered, interactive or integrated. These engagements might involve loose associations among organizations. They may claim individualized/common benefits and agreed goals (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020) in their dynamics or not. It is also possible to observe if these associations have a broad or narrow scope of activities and stakeholders.

In this study, different types of collaborations will be analyzed, mainly: (a) associations whose work is self-contained and in isolation from others; (b) those that interrelate regarding specific

events and initiatives, i.e. have episodic interactions; and (c) those that prioritize for their inter-institutional arrangements only some of their common goals.

Resilience strategies adopted to be able to reach social integration figure highly among these populations. Resilience as a concept has been applied in different ways in academic studies. A very well-known psychosocial and environmental definition is that of Ungar (2005), whereby resilience is considered as a system's, population's, community's or individual's ability to respond to different types of shock, adversity or disturbance from a position of adaptation, renovation or transformation of its previous dynamic state of equilibrium. This framework has been questioned by the present author in its neoliberal individualistic aspects and elaborated upon in another study (Acero, 2024).

In order to strengthen their social integration, migrants reformulate their subjective resilience into collective resilience, often through participation in the type of organizations described, that not only intervene in aspects that the state has left aside, but also question the state and its policies through collective action, as a form of resistance to acculturation and blind assimilation. In Bouchard's terms (2013, p.267), migrants/refugees accommodate using a progressive resilient strategy whereby: "those attained by risk and stress creatively respond to shock, restructuring and changing power relations, while facing adversity". To respond creatively to the shocks of migration, migrants and refugees of different nationalities gather in partnerships with common goals.

From the perspective of base organizations, involvement in the question of human mobility is a political act and hence is never neutral. Movements, associations and churches devoted to the migration cause defy neutrality, as the human rights of people in mobility include vigilance, which they cannot avoid confronting, on the abuses practised in the territories of settlement (Lussi, 2013). The empowerment of actors in migration/refugee processes is often stopped through political violence, social discrimination or other forms of violation. Legal and journalistic denouncement, plus public protests articulated with public sensitization campaigns, become important pathways towards change in which these associations often engage. A radical commitment sometimes emerges in the associations' modes of action.

The focus of the commitment towards human rights of these organizations is to "approach the question centered in the persons and not acting through a State and market perspective. Notwithstanding, the recognition of the right to migrate assumes the existence of a subject obliged to facilitate and guarantee the enactment of this right, that is, the State itself." (Observatory of Public Policy on Human Rights in Mercosur, 2009, p. 12). Castro (2008) considers that these associations vindicate migrants'/refugees' dignity and civic, political and social rights, seeking their recognition as citizens. Base organizations related to this field also have to learn how to articulate themselves with the main social actors involved, the community, the local context, the historical and political moment and the cultural weight of mobility itself.

### 3.0 METHODS

Methodologically, the study is designed as a bibliographical and documental one, which uses secondary data, especially qualitative analysis of information and selective quantitative analysis of statistical data. First, recent academic articles – from the last five years - gathered from specialized national and international journals on this type of associations/collectives

were retrieved, from journals, such as: *Migraciones Internacionais*, *Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana (REHMU)* and *Polis*, using Google Scholar and the keywords: “migrant associations”; “migrant collectives”; “refugee associations” and “refugee collectives” AND Rio de Janeiro. Very few studies on these topics were found about Rio de Janeiro, describing and discussing directly or indirectly the role of civic associations in favour of local migrants/refugees or collectives.

The main associations in Rio de Janeiro were first listed using a snowball technique and classified according to their types of institutional backgrounds: church-related, entrepreneur-related, general public-oriented and migrant or refugee collectives by nationality. Then, they were classified using the following descriptive criteria: aims pursued, year of creation, affiliations, public to which they are oriented, range of initiatives, stability, regularity of their actions, action updating, publications, news, extent of involvement with other institutions (including public ones), quality of information transmitted, degree of public participation, employment/volunteer composition and so on. This information was obtained from their websites.

This is a descriptive study on the range of this type of institution guided as far as possible by selective questions and the criteria mentioned. It would perhaps require interviews with key representatives to draw a more detailed and updated scenario, especially on the quality of their entanglements with other associations, an activity that exceeds the present study.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Civic Associations in favour of Migrants and Refugees in Rio de Janeiro

There are three main types of civic organizations related to migrants and refugees in Rio de Janeiro: those that develop work to support and protect them, those that are formed themselves by migrant/refugee collectives, and those that carry out only specific interventions on this topic. For example, one of the latter types is **the Centre for the Protection of Migrants of the Rui Barbosa House (CEPRI – Casa RUI)**, founded in 2018, which manages a legal clinic for migrants and refugees and is also concerned with the specialization of students and professionals in the area. Another one worth mentioning, though located in São Paulo, is **Conectas- Human Rights**, which participates in legal and juridical defense and was very active in the introduction of a human rights perspective in the negotiation of the last migration law.

Some umbrella associations could also be mentioned. **Brazil Fund** (Fundo Brasil) consists of a human rights association created by human rights activists to strengthen the organizations of civic society, especially those that are formed by vulnerable people and who themselves suffer violation of rights. Though they specialize in indigenous associations, they raise funding for other types of organizations, including those of migrants and refugees, among many others. They also create or facilitate learning opportunities among pairs, promote encounters for mobilization and the articulation of demands and follow up on the work of each organization or collective supported.

Moreover, there are two important United Nations international organizations working on the topic globally: the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** and the **United**

**Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)**, but the International Labour Organization (ILO) also has projects and protocols on the labour market and decent jobs for migrants/refugees. To a lesser degree, so do the United Nation Agency for Children (UNICEF), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). It is not the purpose of this article to cover the many actions they develop, though some of their publications will be discussed. Also, **the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V) (Response to Venezuelans)**, is made up by over 200 organizations (including United Nations' Agencies, civil society and other) and works as an umbrella organization that produces statistical data on migration and covers contents in many relevant subtopics on this theme. Another umbrella organization that includes work with refugees and migrants in Brazil is the Italian NGO **AVSI –People for Development**<sup>2</sup>, which was created in 1972 and stimulated the foundation of AVSI Brazil in the 80s. The last promotes human development, giving special attention to education and personal dignity, based upon the Goals of Sustainable Development of the United Nations (SDGs). The civic society organization collaborated, for example, with the Federal Government in Operação Acolhida for the Venezuelans arriving in the North, which will be discussed later in this paper.

**MigraMundo** in Rio de Janeiro could be considered another umbrella association that works in favour of migrants and refugees. It consists of a journalistic project founded in 2012 on the topic of migration, considered as a human process, driven by political, economic and cultural development and to combat xenophobia. It acts in a hybrid way, articulating journalistic production to scientific dissemination and offers support for the design of academic research projects. The portal began as a blog and became a website in 2016, turning into a point of reference for information on the topic of migration and refuge for researchers, public agents and communication professionals. Its financial resources, at present, are obtained mainly through Google AdSense and via crowdfunding campaigns plus individual donations. Everybody involved works voluntarily, but the plan is to develop a stable remunerated team. This association offers updated and invaluable Brazilian and international information on migration and refugee trends, with an emphasis on cultural events and the production of high-quality, up-to-date news.

## 4.2 Caritas-PARES RJ<sup>3</sup>

One of the main, largest and oldest associations dedicated to this work is **PARES-** Programme of Service to Refugees and Refuge Applicants (Programa de atendimento a refugiados e solicitantes de refúgio), an offshoot of **Caritas**. Caritas was founded in 1976 as a pioneer initiative by the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro. At first, it provided protection to the citizens fleeing from neighbouring countries under dictatorships, such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, when politically persecuted. For these citizens, Rio de Janeiro was a pathway towards

European countries through the negotiations developed by the Archdiocese, as Brazil was also ruled by a dictatorship.

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<sup>2</sup> AVSI Foundation. Humanitarian projects in Brazil. Available at: <https://www.avsi.org/en/what-we-do/countries/brazil>.

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.caritas-rj.org.br>

Further on, the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, Dom Eugênio Sales, established a permanent service to help refugees in collaboration with UNHCR and designated Caritas-RJ as the first systematic service for refugees in Brazil. This service now counts with the partnership of different types of institutions, seventy volunteers and provides support to 60 different nationalities of foreigners. Its lawyers accompany the processes of applications for refugee status through interviews, case reviews and providing assistance to obtain and regularize documentation, as well as clarifying aspects of the latest Migration Law and offering other types of legal orientation.

One of PARES' aims is the social integration of refugees towards acquiring their autonomy, by facilitating access to the learning of Portuguese, the labour market, educational training, along with health and mental health services. It specializes in the welcoming, protection and integration of refugees. For these purposes, it establishes partnerships with a wide range of public and private institutions. Reaching out to the general public is another of its objectives, to inform, sensitize and mobilize the general community on this topic. In this initiative, they promote public engagement through: talks, events, campaigns, partnerships, encounters, content production, project articulation and volunteering, among others. In these multiple ways, networks of refugees' support are created. During 2024, Caritas developed a total of 44,550 interventions and treated 3,241 people.

Nowadays, PARES is focused on the following projects: (a) facilitating sources of employment and capacity building for work- Projeto Trampolim (Trampoline Project); (b) the 'Refugees at schools' project, to promote encounters between refugees and public or private school students, sensitize them on the living conditions of refugees and take a stand against discrimination and xenophobia; (c) solidarity nucleus is also organized among those students to develop empathy and support refugees. At present, 6,701 students are participating in them and PARES is acting in 71 public and private schools; (d) the association teaches regular courses in Portuguese; (e) it develops weekly orientation groups, coordinated by psychologists and social workers and co-created with refugees, to deconstruct stigma against migrants from a humanitarian perspective and generate the necessary trust and intimacy to talk about mental health. The topics debated in these groups vary monthly; (f) the Opportunities Project is a yearly partnership between Caritas and IMO initiated in 2023, with the financial support of The United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It aims at capacity-building for formal employment (90 people were benefited); provision of information for revalidation of middle and higher-level foreign education diplomas and the sensitization of 150 firms on the importance and benefits of employing professional refugees. Moreover, during this activity, orientations on how to confront violence at work were offered to participants; and (g) the Socioeconomic Integration Project for 400 very vulnerable Venezuelans living in Rio de Janeiro was initiated in 2024, jointly with IMO. This project forms part of the Federal strategy called Welcome Operation (Operação Acolhida) to promote a planned and voluntary displacement of Venezuelans arriving at the Northern States towards other States. It started with 22 of them who resided in the local shelter SOS Aldeias Infantis and was later expanded.

Among the Working Groups that PARES also organizes, two are central: the one on Work and the one on Conversation with Women. The first one discusses information on the Brazilian labour market, recruitment processes and labour rights, collectively seeking for potential solutions to problems. The Women's Conversation Group debates issues that mainly affect



women, such as, sexual and reproductive health, violence, gender, family relationships and employability.

In summary, the three civic associations described—Fundo Brasil, MigraMundo and PARES-Caritas RJ—carry out a broad scope of activities and have numerous stakeholders, though they implement their common goals in different ways, directly and indirectly - as in the case of MigraMundo and Fundo Brasil, respectively. They are all profoundly entangled with the publics, though only PARES has a stable practice of establishing relationships with other civic societies and public and international agencies. Economic and social integration of migrants/refugees and the formation of networks between them support their resilient strategies. In all these organizations, their inter-institutional arrangements prioritize certain specific goals, but only PARES works in regular collaboration with United Nations' international agencies.

### **4.3 Migrant/Refugee Collectives in Rio de Janeiro**

The migrant/refugee collectives have usually been more recently founded than the associations described before and have been initially formed by individuals or groups of migrants/refugees to attain specific aims according to the difficulties they have faced during migration and settlement. Those formed by Venezuelans predominate, as this is the main nationality among South American foreigners in Brazil. In general, they depend financially on donations from individuals, firms and sometimes, project agreements with public or international organizations (such as IOM, UNHCR and ILO) and volunteer work. It is difficult to estimate the number of this type of organization existing in Rio de Janeiro, as no specific listing has been found. However, it is apparent that those that predominate are mainly concerned with refugees. Each of these collectives, although developing common tasks in favour of migrants/refugees, tend to specialize in a certain aspect.

### **4.4 MAWON<sup>4</sup>**

MAWON defines itself as a 'cultural hub without borders, articulating education and culture'. Created in 2012 by migrants (Robert Montinard-Bob, President), it has as its main aim the promotion of migrants/refugees' rights, the assistance for cultural and socioeconomic integration of migrants and intercultural mediation. The team includes professionals who have the capacity to communicate with migrants in their own language while respecting their cultural values. They value multiculturalism and cultural mediation, self-esteem and financial autonomy. They have four pillars of action: socio-juridical services (labour rights and their violations, women's rights and gender, rights of children and adolescents), training, cultural events and advocacy within decision-making spaces.

They act both as a social enterprise as well as a migrant collective. In the last role, as advocacy delegates, they participate in a number of public, municipal and State-level forums, including the initiatives of the first and second National Conferences of Migration, Refuge, and Statelessness (COMIGRAR).

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.mawon.org/>

In their role as a social enterprise, they promote employability through establishing regular dialogues with the private sector. They have also designed and organized five different editions on entrepreneurship projects, carried out specially within peripheral communities, such as at the favela Rocinha, and considered as an opportunity to generate rent by its residents. The fifth version involved a total of 96 resident participants, and it obtained funding from the Foundation Carlos Chagas Filho for the Support of Research in Rio de Janeiro (Faperj). It consisted of three different learning pathways: the first one was oriented to support migrants' access to the labour market (33 people were trained); the second and third ones were devoted to capacity building towards the development of migrants' own entrepreneurial undertakings (66 people were trained). Training includes individual mentoring and group coaching, as well as legal advice for participants and their families. As a result of this initiative, eleven new formal contracts, almost evenly divided between genders, were obtained and 17 firms became partners for future engagements.

The first edition of the entrepreneurship projects was developed in partnership with the Rio Institute and the Phi Institute and consisted of Portuguese classes and 10 workshops with key public agencies in the area, such as the Brazilian Service for the Support of Micro and Small Enterprises (Sebrae). After evaluation, some residents received seed capital for their own start-ups. The second edition was carried out in partnership with the Mitsubishi Corporation and the Institute of Intelligent Philanthropy (Phi Institute) and was similarly shaped. The third edition was developed with financial aid from the IMO and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and had the aim of contributing to improving business initiatives during the pandemic (through individual mentorship and online classes). The fourth edition, financed by the same institutions mentioned above, had a focus on Venezuelan refugees/migrants and included training for the formal labour market. Fifty candidates were selected from 160 applicants.

The collective is also engaged in legal and culturally oriented projects, such as the Integrate Project (socio-juridical services and Portuguese classes), as well as Cultural Experiences (offering music groups, artisan and fashion networks and workshops; dance presentations, food preparation and talks on different topics). During 2022, 187 migrants benefited from MAWON's projects, out of which 72% were women. These involved the improvement of 54 enterprises and 820 legal services.

## 4.5 LGBT+ Movement<sup>5</sup>

The LGBT+ Movement is the only specific movement in Rio de Janeiro for people with this sexual orientation and gender identity. This population is extremely vulnerable as members suffer permanent structural violence, marginalization and lack of visibility wherever they are; this behaviour crosses international borders. Brazil is one of the countries globally that kills the highest number of LGTBTTQIA+ people, according to *agenciaBrasil*<sup>6</sup>. In 2023, there were 257 deaths registered among this population in Brazil—one every 34 hours—with the highest percentage being among travesties and transgender individuals (127); while 118 were gay, nine

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://lgbtmaismovimento.com.br/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/direitos-humanos/noticia/2024-01/violent-deaths-lgbtqia-individuals-reach-257-2023>

were identified as lesbian, and three as bisexual<sup>7</sup>. According to the National Association of Transvestis and Transsexuals (ANTRA)<sup>8</sup>, 82% of the trans people assassinated in Brazil in 2019 were black or brown (pardas). Given this violence, the institution states that they have accompanied trans women who underwent processes of de-transition due to the episodes of transphobia they experienced in Brazil and who, as a survival strategy, externally performed as cis men.

At a normative level, Brazil is considered a progressive country in relation to the different rights and policies directed toward LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as in the reception of migrants and refugees. However, there are very few debates on the intersection between gender/sexuality and migration/refugee, and institutions are highly unprepared for any discussion on this subject's specificities. There is also a lack of data on this population's experiences, as well as a complete absence of public policies for LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees.

The LGBT+ Movement was created in 2017 on a community basis and prioritizes affection in the care of its attendees through personalized services and treatment, with projects and partnerships in the areas of socio-juridical protection, employability and health. Their work is based on establishing relationships of trust between those employed, the volunteers and the attendees. Migration among this population is a solitary process, usually carried out alone. But also, loneliness is common among this population even when they have a family or when they are expelled from their home due to sexual orientation or gender identity. This is partly why the institution takes great care in creating or strengthening its support networks.

They follow three main axes of action: 1. Listening and welcoming (personalized face-to-face or remote service for the co-construction of integration strategies); 2. Integration into networks (programmes and partnerships to address the person's needs); 3. Incidence (data dissemination and articulation to expose the condition of these individuals and intervene to improve).

The organization reports that with the help of new employees and volunteers, through the financial contribution of the Fund Elas (a women's and feminist NGO) and self-declaration from those attained, they are restructuring their database to make it more secure, organized and fluid. This is extremely important because this population suffers a double type of stigma: either one that formulates that they do not exist, or else, that they are minimal in numbers. These people are not accessing different rights and spaces due to racism and marginalization based upon class and territory, which contributes to political articulation becoming extremely complex amid violence and a precarious life quality (França, 2023).

In a visual Report from 2023 on their work, the collective informs that they have dealt with: 41.2% gay, 27.3% lesbian, 18% bisexual, 12.2% heterosexual and 1.1% asexual persons according to sexual orientation – usually characterized as a stable pattern of romantic and sexual attraction directed in different forms. Meanwhile, according to gender identity – defined as an individual's self-conception as a man or woman, as a boy or a girl, as some form of

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<sup>7</sup> Statistics collected by the Bahia Gay Group (GGB), the oldest LGBT non-governmental organization in Latin America

<sup>8</sup> ANTRA - Dossiê Assassinatos e Violência contra Travestis e Transexuais Brasileira em 2019.

combination or fluctuation or as someone outside those categories altogether - they have treated 41.6% Cis Men, 36.4% Cis Women, 13.8% Trans Women 2.3% Trans Men, 1.1% A-gender;

1.7% Intersex, 1.7%, Travesties, 0.5%, Fem-boy and 0.5% Fluid Gender. According to racial identity, 32.6% (n=15) identify themselves as White, 26% (n=12) as mixed race (mestiza), 21.7% (n=10) as brown, 10.8%, (n=5) as black; followed by 4.3% (n=2) as Latin and 4.3% (n=2) as brunette.

Out of them, 75.1% have been Venezuelans, 6.3 % Argentinians and 3.3 % Colombians. Most of them are young (46.9%), within the age cohort between 18 and 29 years old, and 64.7% are racialized. In 35.8% of cases, their main reason for migrating was either their gender or their sexuality, and only 23.5% of trans persons had their social name legally validated on arrival. The following indicators show their precarious life quality: 82.9% were unemployed; among women trans or travesties, 87% are or have been at some point sex workers. The majority of the population treated by this organization lives in Rio de Janeiro (82.6%); 67.4% inhabit favelas or housing in the periphery of the city, and 13.1% are homeless. A most shocking indicator is that 53.8% of those with a severe health condition have contracted HIV/AIDS.

The institution also develops booklets on the documentation required for formal employment and the respective certifications. The association informs on the violation of rights at the job level, such as discrimination in recruitment interviews, in the contract process and during everyday work. They explain that if there is a lack of unisex bathrooms – typical in Brazil – each person has the right to choose the one in which they feel more comfortable and that they all have the right to be called using their social name, even when documents do not reflect them. The Supreme Federal Tribunal (STF) equalized crimes against this population to those resulting from race or colour (Law n. 7.716/89), until the National Congress passes a law on this more specific topic.

A new partnership has been recently signed for 12 months with The Ministry of Justice and Public Security through the Secretariat of Justice, to expand the collective's work on dignifying this very vulnerable population and to be carried out jointly with the Milbi+ Network and the University of UNICAMP. It aims to gather data, analyze it and develop actions on the labour conditions of these people in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It involves accompanying 189 individuals in Rio de Janeiro and developing more than 400 services, as well as sensitizing firms.

The LGBT+Movement also created the 'Project Trans Alive and Migrants' intending to strengthen the trajectories of transsexual and travesties migrants/refugees in Rio de Janeiro and receiving scholarships. It involved 3 months' weekly meetings with seven Venezuelan trans and travesties women. The main barriers and difficulties experienced by participants were identified, and solution strategies for their challenges were proposed. Talks included sensitization on access to rights, employability and health.

## 4.6 Association Venezuela Global<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See, <https://www.venezuelaglobal.org/>

This is a group that started voluntarily among a group of Venezuelans and, in 2021, became an association. Its aim is to promote the social and economic integration of Venezuelan migrant and refugee people in Brazil. They carry out social and legal assistance, training in new abilities and competences and integration into the informal labour market among others. They work mainly based on donations, and they have a programme to train their own volunteers.

In May 2023, they organized the first Fair for Migrants, Refugees and Stateless people in Rio de Janeiro. During the event, professional training, vocational orientation and information on the labour market in the city of Rio de Janeiro were offered, activities for the prevention of slave work and a database of curriculum vitae was developed to disseminate job opportunities. Different organizations participated, such as IMO, The University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), Aldeias Infantis SOS (a migrant shelter), the migrant association Mawon, Sistema SESI-FIRJAN (public technical training system) and Ação Floresta da Barra (an NGO acting in education, sports and cultural activities), among others. Venezuela Global also participated in the preparatory stages for the Second National Conference of COMIGRAR and chose 8 migrant/refugee delegates.

A very interesting initiative the NGO has undertaken is to begin mapping the amount and location of Venezuelan medical doctors in Brazil. “Till today we do not know the amount of Venezuelan medical doctors that live in Brazil, nor their migratory status or geographical location, data that is the first step to examine their situation” (William Clavijo, President of Venezuela Global, in website). He explained that they also do not know if they have been able to validate their degrees. The speaker refers indirectly to what was initially a federal initiative in cooperation with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), launched in 2013 and called “More Medical Doctors Programme” – for Brazilian and foreigners, especially Cubans, launched after an intercountry agreement, and later on, many Venezuelans applied. Initially, it brought over and included Cuban medical doctors into the national public system (SUS) and strengthened the strategy of family doctors within primary care. Recently, in 2023, 15,000 vacancies were announced (Planalto, 2023). There exists a scarcity of medical doctors in some regions of Brazil, and it takes- according to the University of São Paulo- approximately 290 thousand reais (around 50.000 US dollars) in 5 years to train a doctor. The mapping undertaken by Venezuela Global would be crucial, both for medical doctors’ work opportunities and to estimate its potential effects on financial savings in Medical University training for Brazil.

Conversation circles with women are regularly promoted in preparation for International Women’s Day, inviting specialists on gender violence, family medicine, sexual and reproductive health and giving talks on access to SUS, as well as employability. Venezuela Global has also handed out 500 kits of schooling materials in 2023 for one of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, a joint undertaking with the NGO Ação Floresta.

The institution counts with an organization focused on entrepreneurship: the Association of Venezuelan entrepreneurs and professionals (AVEPRO) and contributes to the Federal programme for young apprenticeship in its hiring modality (30 hours a week for those who are still students), based on the Apprentice Law 10.097/2000 for first employment. For this purpose, it receives financial support from IMO.

## 4.7 Haiti Aqui<sup>10</sup>

It is an NGO created by the social enterprise Viva Rio in 2014. It is dedicated to the social integration and legal protection of migrants/refugees from all nationalities (since 2017), although it primarily focuses on integrating and providing different types of information to Haitians. However, it focuses on the most vulnerable people: refugee applicants, stateless, dislocated, victims of people trafficking, international students and other individuals who dislocate for economic, academic or family reunion reasons. In the field, it develops events for the integration and articulation that help migrants and refugees with issues related to health, work, education, family and leisure.

The services for which they have had the greatest demand have been: access to Brazilian documents, resident authorizations from The Common Market of the South (Mercosur), document translation, support for enrolment in schools and contribution for the creation and maintenance of individual micro entrepreneurship (MEI), support to register in CadÚnico (the Unique Registry for Federal Government Social Programmes), access to social benefits and company for health treatment and hospitalization processes, mainly, through helping to mediate between languages and cultural issues.

Its founder, Viva Rio, is a formally constituted social enterprise (OS), a private entity with no profit-oriented objectives. Its mission is to promote the culture of peace and facilitate social inclusion through projects in the following areas: health, education, sports, art, social development, social environment, human security and volunteering. It became well-known when the United Nations invited it in 2004 to become part of the implementation of the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (Minustah). This was due to the success the social firm had had in its previous experience as mediator of conflicts among different favelas in Rio de Janeiro. It was called upon to join Haiti's Mission to handle second-generation projects on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). In this approach, peace is promoted through the reduction of violence, e.g. social reinsertion of ex-guerrilla, handing in of weapons, and it includes the whole community. Viva Rio has been working both in Brazil and at its local headquarters in Haiti for the past 17 years on projects related to education, sports, culture, and humanitarian support activities.

## 4.8 Abraço Cultural<sup>11</sup>

The organization primarily offers individual online and face-to-face language courses in English, Spanish, French and Arabic for migrants and refugees and prepares teachers and facilitators among them. These can be initial or more advanced courses. Additionally, the organization works at the corporate level, teaching languages and inducing multicultural experiences that can incentivize members to support the refugee cause and develop continuous learning at the workplace. It also promotes workshops and talks on awareness about refuge in different types of organizations.

The organization has headquarters both in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It creates innovative learning experiences and different forms of access to knowledge relating global South cultures.

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<sup>10</sup> See, <http://haitiaqui.com/>

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://abracocultural.com.br/>

In that way, it aims at transforming cultures and diversities into opportunities through education for social, cultural and economic integration of migrants and refugees to Brazil.

In summary, in the case of the migrant/refugee collectives described above, they tend to have a narrower focus and a narrower group of stakeholders than the civic associations discussed, most especially PARES-Caritas RJ. For example, the LGBT+ Movement is directed to only one social sector of refugees and migrants, and in the case of Abraço Cultural, it mainly specializes in education and cultural training. Both work in a higher isolation from other private organizations than the rest of the collectives. However, the LGBT+ Movement is soon going to have a direct relationship with public agencies. In the case of MAWON, its entanglements with other associations and collectives seem to involve mostly specific events and initiatives, i.e. they have episodic interactions. However, the collective is very active in politically oriented advocacy at the municipal, State and National levels. Venezuela Global also acts in a similar direction regarding inter-institutional cooperation, incorporating collaborations, for example, for their market fairs and activities for International Women's Day and is also strong in advocacy. There are two collectives, however, that work at two different levels as social enterprises and collectives: Haiti Aqui, but mainly MAWON. This encourages one of their goals, the insertion of migrants/refugees into the labour market.

In terms of content, all the collectives emphasize the importance of migrant/refugee employability (formal and informal), social integration, formalization of documentation and human rights. The specialized literature shows that those aspects raise migrants'/refugees' dignity, self-worth, self-esteem and social integration, as well as, diminishing precarious life quality and that they indirectly act positively on individual and collective resilience strategies (e.g. Salgado et al. 2018; Lindert et. al, 2023; Herrera et al., 2022).

But only the LGTB+ Movement mentions as central the development of relations of trust, care and affection and the active integration in networks from the very beginning, as well as the importance of dealing with mental health and personal experience in all their activities on a group and one- to- one basis (They do so differently from PARES-Caritas RJ who tends to hire professionals in the area for those purposes). Discrimination and racialization do not seem like aspects openly tackled by these collectives, at least, considering the limits of the information gathered through their websites. This is mentioned, though little elaborated upon except in the case of the LGTB+ Movement. Stable entanglements and ecologies seem poor between these collectives, given perhaps the difficulties in finance and security.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings show that several civic organizations are devoted to migrants and refugees in the State of Rio de Janeiro, and more so to refugees and asylum seekers. They undoubtedly defend very valuable common goals, such as, upgrading migrants' and refugees' information on documentation and human rights, providing legal orientation, promoting pathways towards insertion in the labour market, sometimes providing food, housing and related basic living resources (most especially, during the Covid-19 pandemic or upon migrants' and refugees' arrival in the country) and these associations all exercise different forms of general capacity building. However, they sometimes act in fragmented ways between them, and their mutual entanglements are selective, especially among the collectives. Although they establish

relationships with other social institutions, these articulations hardly persist over time. Political advocacy tends to be an indirect result of their general aims, except in a few cases.

Scarce public and private stable funding might have a strong impact on this form of fragmented behaviour, as most associations highly depend on donor contribution and volunteer work, especially when compared to the high financial amounts raised by similar institutions in the advanced countries and organized as networks or even Foundations (e.g. R4 V; The British Red Cross and so on). Most of the other types of funding local civic associations and collectives can sometimes tap into, are offered by the programmes designed at the local or general headquarters of international or regional organizations, such as IMO, UNHCR, PAHO and ILO. However, these funds are often related to general programmes defined by those organizations as part of their general global planning, though sometimes adjusted to local conditions. Following these general directives, most especially collectives, have often little room to maneuver in order to build on their own demands and ways of acting. It is interesting to note that almost no associations— except for PARES-Caritas RJ, which was initially built by the Catholic Church and hence, also has a pastoral interest – mention any interaction with international networks defending a similar cause.

Lately, the initiative COMIGRAR has begun to congregate at the municipal, State and national levels, the once dispersed initiatives of these organizations, hopefully to make an impact with their proposals on the future Migration Plan. But regardless of this potential effect, networking itself has been an important space for these organizations to enhance their resilient collective strategies, have a voice and be widely heard in their demands, mainly through their encounters, media reports and popular mobilization. Resilience is strengthened by operating collectively, and often, when associations' proposals confront the state, it turns into resistance.

Though the literature shows the importance of mental and psychosomatic problems in these populations (e.g. Astorga-Pinto, S., et al., 2019; Baeza-Rivera, M. J., et.al., 2022; Acero, 2024), psychological treatment and support are taken more seriously and systematically almost only among migrant and refugee collectives. They tend to be more directly in touch with these types of problems of the people that reach out to them and have smaller groups where they can develop trust in relationships.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Lara's (2019) work with female refugees in Chile and the time it takes to build trust for them to open up on mental discomfort and disease.



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