



## International Partnerships

# Brazilian public defenders give migrants new hope

Roberta Alvim and human rights defender Atanásio Darcy Lucero Júnior visiting the Warao Janokoida indigenous shelter in the city of Pacaraima © Brazilian Public Defenders' Office

In January 2021, 55 people from the Warao indigenous community, including 32 children, arrived in the city of Pacaraima, in Northern Brazil. They had travelled 800 km on foot for 18 days, fleeing precarious living conditions in northeastern Venezuela.

Under legal provisions issued by the federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic, these migrants should have been deported. But thanks to the swift intervention of the Brazilian Federal Public Defenders' Office (DPU) and the Federal Prosecutor's Office, the federal court decided to rule against their mass deportation.

Roberta Pires Alvim was among the federal public defenders working on this case. Since 2015, she has provided free legal assistance and has worked to promote the human rights of populations in vulnerable situations, such as the Warao.

Since 2016, the influx of Venezuelans into Brazil has intensified, especially in the north of the country. Indigenous people of the Warao ethnic group make up a large part of this migratory flow.

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*The focus of our work is the defence of the human rights of any person, Brazilian or migrant, who is in our country in a situation of vulnerability.*

**Federal public defender, Roberta Alvim**

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The Brazil-Venezuela border © Brazilian Public Defenders' Office

The DPU has the power to act before federal administrative bodies responsible for migratory decisions and before the federal court. It works to promote respect of the rights of all migrants and asylum-seekers. In her duty as federal public defender, Dr Alvim, alongside other public defenders and attorneys, has acted extrajudicially and judicially in favour of migrants from Venezuela since the intensification of this migratory flow.

In the city of Pacaraima, in the state of Roraima, the main gateway for Venezuelan migrants to Brazil, the DPU began to act from August 2018, joining 'Operation Welcome', a humanitarian logistics task force of the federal government.

As part of this operation, the DPU and ['Migration EU eXpertise' \(MIEUX\)](#), an initiative funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), sealed a partnership to develop training for public defenders to help them during interviews with migrant children and adolescents.

The project started in 2019, with the aim of strengthening the DPU's mission to protect the human rights of vulnerable populations living in Brazil. This partnership allows for the exchange of knowledge and experiences with professionals working in the same areas in the EU.

Federal public defenders at a public hearing held in the indigenous community in Pacaraima © Brazilian Public Defenders' Office

Roberta Alvim was among the project participants. Thanks to the training she received, she was able to provide humanitarian and legal assistance remotely to migrants who were in Roraima during the pandemic.

For the Deputy Federal Defender General Jair Soares Júnior *"working with MIEUX+ and European experts is a great opportunity to strengthen capacities, absorb best practices and also pass on successful practices from the DPU, especially in the area of asylum and international protection. The engagement of the institutions involved contribute greatly to improve the public service provided, also strengthening the promotion of human rights"*.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, working towards the inclusion of migrants will prevent other crises from having similar adverse effects. We have a choice: go back to business as usual or make migration safer for everyone.