

Brazil-Venezuela Border Reopens Amid Fight Over Refugees

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RIO DE JANEIRO — One of the main border crossings between Brazil and Venezuela reopened Tuesday after a legal fight that kept it shuttered for nearly a day.

It was the latest salvo in a tug-of-war between a state government overwhelmed by hundreds of Venezuelans arriving every day to escape their country's economic crisis and the federal government and higher courts, which insist the border must stay open.



FILE - In this March 9, 2018 file photo, young Venezuelans pull their luggage after crossing the border to Pacaraima, Roraima state, Brazil. One of the main border crossings between Brazil and Venezuela has reopened Tuesday, Aug. 7, after a legal fight that kept it shuttered for nearly a day. It's part of a tug-of-war between a state government overwhelmed by hundreds of Venezuelans arriving every day and the federal government and higher courts, which insist the border must stay open. (Eraldo Peres, File/Associated Press)

The crossing in the Brazilian city of Pacaraima was closed Monday after Judge Helder Girao Barreto ruled it should be closed until a program to relocate Venezuelan refugees can keep pace with daily arrivals. That decision was reversed by an appellate court, and in a statement federal police said Tuesday the migration patterns had returned to normal.

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This was not the first time the northern state of Roraima tried to curb the influx of Venezuelans. It had already urged the appellate court to close the border in April. Soon after that request was denied, Roraima asked the federal government for nearly \$50 million to pay for public services for migrants. Last week, Roraima officials made it mandatory for Venezuelans to present their passports if they wanted to receive such services.

"With measures like the border closure, Roraima wants to pressure the federal government into reacting," said Eloi Martins Senhoras, an international relations professor at the Federal University of Roraima. "The state doesn't have the economic means to welcome all these migrants and refugees in a sustainable manner."

Over the past years, tens of thousands of Venezuelans have taken refuge in Brazil to flee the economic hardships in their home country.

But Marilene da Souza, a Brazilian who volunteers with an evangelical church to provide services to Venezuelans, said many continue to suffer even after arriving.

"It's chaos. The people who arrive are hungry, don't have any money, and have been walking on the highway for days," she said in a phone interview from Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima. "Once they get here, we often don't have enough space for them, so they're forced to live on the streets."

After the border reopened, local television showed hundreds of Venezuelans lining up to cross into Brazil.

