**TITLE**: Why we need food corridors

**SUBTITLE**: An alternative for refugees and migrants

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* **The problem:** Hunger among refugees and migrants is rife.
* **Why it matters:** The problem has become increasingly worse over the past few years.
* **The solution:** Food corridors for refugees and migrants.

A version of this article was published in Portuguese, with adaptations, on the Brazilian Federal Senate webpage (<https://www12.senado.leg.br/publicacoes/estudos-legislativos/tipos-de-estudos/textos-para-discussao/td309>).

The concept of corridors generally is important to enable strategies that aim to balance the dynamics of flows of different profiles, whether to recover depressed flows or to relieve the pressure of hypertrophied flows. The ecological corridors are a good example of a strategy that aims to balance the dynamics of the flow of flora and fauna assets in degraded areas, as a result of disordered human development.

In Brazil, the concept of ecological corridor was established by Federal Law 9.985/2000. According to article 2, XIX, of this law, ecological corridors are portions of natural or semi-natural ecosystems, interconnecting conservation units, which allow the circulation of genes and the movement of biota between them, facilitating the dispersion of species and the recolonisation of degraded areas, as well as the maintenance of populations that need areas for their survival that are longer than individual units.

When we think of international flows, we can consider what [Tostes (2011)](https://www.academia.edu/33597127/TRANSFORMA%C3%87%C3%95ES_URBANAS_DAS_PEQUENAS_CIDADES_AMAZ%C3%94NICAS_AP_NA_FAIXA_DE_FRONTEIRA_SETENTRIONAL) calls a cross-border corridor. According to the author, who analyses the particular case of the border between France (French Guiana) and Brazil, this corridor is the place of intersection of physical, social, economic, diplomatic, environmental, spatial, cultural and infrastructure conditions that aim to establish relations between two neighbouring countries. Cross-border corridors can be one of the main precepts for the economic integration of countries and the interaction and consolidation of relations between peoples through communications and means of transport (HASS, 1970).

From one corridor to another

The increase in migratory flows over the past few years contributed to the launch of the pilot project ‘humanitarian corridors’, the result of a collaboration protocol signed between a consortium of religious organisations: the community of Sant'Egidio, *Caritas Italiana*, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and Mesa Vaudoise, as well as the Italian Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. The mentioned humanitarian corridors are important to guarantee a minimum of security and social assistance in the movement of migrants and refugees to the countries of destination. The validity of these corridors makes it possible to develop reflections on the causes of contemporary migrations.

In a survey that we carried out in the city of Oiapoque/AP (on the border between Brazil and French Guiana) in October 2021, there was a question posed to foreign and Brazilian migrants. Migrants’ answers to the question “if you are a migrant, would you stay in any city along the migration path if that city offered consistent food opportunities?” show a clear trend: the problem of hunger is an important, often determining, factor in motivating the migration of vulnerable people. For most migrants interviewed in the city of Oiapoque/AP, lack of food is a motivating factor for migration: 64% of all migrants interviewed in this city said they would stay in any city along the migration path if this city offered constant possibilities of food.

In order to verify how hunger can be one of the decisive causes of migration, the same question was asked in another strategic border area of ​​South America, more precisely in the city of Santana do Livramento/RS, on the border between Brazil and Uruguay. For the majority of migrants interviewed in this city, lack of food is also a decisive factor in motivating migration: 53% of all migrants interviewed in this city said they would stay in any city along the migration path if that city offered consistent food opportunities.

Among the invisible vulnerable migrants (people who were hungry at the time of the survey but were not registered in any register for social policies, nor received any financial assistance from public authorities) interviewed in the city of Santana do Livramento/RS, the guarantee of constant food is even more important: 100% of these vulnerable migrants answered “yes” to the question. Based on the results of the surveys mentioned above, it can be considered that the constant supply of food along the main migratory routes can reduce the pressure of population flows on the destination of these routes. This is the purpose of the proposed ‘food corridor’ concept.

Let them eat cake

The organisation of food corridors based on social policies aimed at the low-income population can be important for the proposed objective. The principle of the proposed food corridors is simple: low-income people, when well served by social policies, tend to prioritise food for their family members. Brazilian Bolsa Família Programme (PBF) is a good example of this trend. Asked how they invest the financial resources they receive, with the possibility of choosing up to three options among those available in the survey, the beneficiaries of this programme who live in the cities of Oiapoque/AP and Santana do Livramento/RS answered as available in the following tables:

Table 1: Where beneficiaries of Bolsa Família Programme invest the financial resources they receive (sample of the city of Santana do Livramento/RS)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Food | 100% |
| School supplies | 0% |
| Clothing | 7% |
| Medication | 30% |
| Gas | 7% |
| Electricity | 70% |
| Medical treatment | 15% |
| Water | 30% |
| Other options | 18% |
| No reply | 0% |

Table 2: Where beneficiaries of Bolsa Família Programme invest the financial resources they receive (sample of the city of Oiapoque/AP)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Food | 100% |
| School supplies | 0% |
| Clothing | 7% |
| Medication | 40% |
| Gas | 100% |
| Electricity | 53% |
| Medical treatment | 0% |
| Water | 0% |
| Other options | 0% |
| No reply | 0% |

The research made it possible to verify the importance of cash transfer programs such as Bolsa Família Programme for the food and nutrition security of its beneficiaries, as 100% of them (in the two analysed cities) responded that they prioritise the purchase of food with the financial resources they receive. The proposed food corridor, to be effective, must have the same methodology for identification, registration, management of financial benefits and management of strategy conditionalities as the aforementioned Brazilian programme.

You can’t march on an empty stomach

Based on the research carried out, food is a strategic issue to motivate, or not, the migration of many low-income families, similar to other motivations such as armed conflicts or environmental disasters. In this context, it is possible to develop, within the scope of academic and political work, a food corridor project in border areas, based on social programmes aimed at the most vulnerable families, such as the Brazilian Bolsa Família Programme, complemented by public food programmes such as popular restaurants, community kitchens or food banks.

Existing cross-border or even humanitarian corridor structures can be complementary to the proposed food corridors. If humanitarian corridors are important in favoring the safety of movements towards centers of migratory attraction, generally in more developed countries, food corridors can help to reduce the pressure on migratory destinations or even facilitate the return of migrants to their places of origin. Therefore, it is possible to expect a better balance between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of migratory flows.

Last but not least, the proposed corridor can even be designed taking into account broader clean development strategies, within the scope of climate change policies, such as the global carbon market proposed by the United Nations, because studies – which can be object of future analysis – indicate that hunger and poverty can still exert pressure on the environment, with more significant consequences in biomes of greater ecological complexity. These are the considerations that are presented to provide guidance to the Committee for the development of its general comment No. 6.