



## Context

Increased numbers of Venezuelans continue to leave to the Caribbean due to serious threats to their lives, freedom, safety, and limited access to basic human rights, including health care, medicines, education, and food. By the start of 2021, an estimated 195,979 Venezuelans had sought protection, basic rights, and essential services in the Caribbean. From this rapidly increasing figure, in 2020 an estimated 17,000 settled in Aruba, 17,000 in Curaçao, 114,500 in the Dominican Republic, 23,300 in Guyana and 24,000 in Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>1</sup> A significant segment of the Venezuelan population in the above-mentioned host countries are school-aged children. In Trinidad and Tobago, as of 31 March 2021, of 17,106 Venezuelans registered with UNHCR 2,850 were children between the ages of 5 and 17, which represented 16.7% of the registered population<sup>2</sup>. Once settled, Venezuelan migrant and refugee children and youth encounter challenges in accessing education throughout the Caribbean sub-region, particularly in non-Spanish speaking countries such as Aruba, Curaçao, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago. Although Caribbean countries are bound by international legal obligations to provide education to all children, in practice, accessing formalized and accredited education remains a challenge.<sup>3</sup> Even in countries where official access is granted for public primary and secondary schooling, Venezuelan children and youth face administrative, financial, language and cultural barriers. Access to tertiary education and cases of xenophobia and bullying in schools remain challenging as well. COVID-19 has also presented both challenges and opportunities for refugee and migrant children to access education in sub-regional countries.

1 For further information on people reached by the R4V activities by sector in the Caribbean, please see the [Consolidated Statistics for the R4V Caribbean – December 2020](#).

2 UNHCR Trinidad and Tobago, March 2021. Data on school aged children is not available for Aruba, Curaçao and the Dominican Republic.

3 All 5 countries ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## Situation, Needs and Challenges – Sub-regional Overview

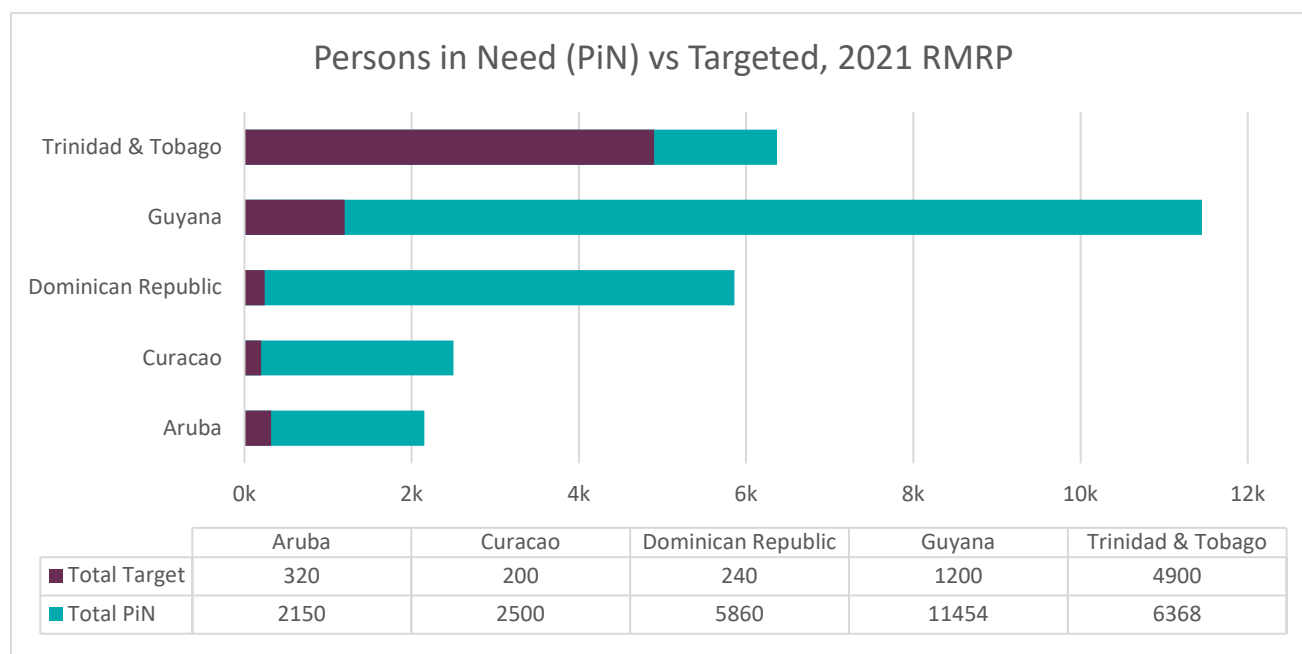


Figure 1: People in need of and targeted for education assistance in the Caribbean. Source: 2021 RMRP.

Except for the **Dominican Republic and Guyana**, where refugee and migrant children have open access to basic education, the access to primary and secondary education remains a priority area of intervention in **Aruba, Curaçao, and Trinidad & Tobago**. In **Aruba and Curaçao**, children have access to primary and secondary schools but are required to provide mandatory school insurance, and in the case of Aruba, a “local guarantor”. In both islands, classes are conducted in Dutch, Papiamentu and English for Curaçao. In **Trinidad and Tobago**, foreigners must provide student permits to attend schools which is not available for many children due to the irregular status of their parent(s). At the start of 2021, [RMRP partners planned to target](#) assistance to 6,230 children and youth from Venezuela and 630 members of host communities. Many refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the Caribbean, and by extension their children do not have regular status. Furthermore, unaccompanied children are often not captured via assessments conducted by host countries, or refugee registration centres. Moreover, in some Caribbean countries there is a lack of procedures and legislation regarding integration and inclusion of Venezuelan children into classrooms, directly impacting their ability to access educational services. Further challenges include absence of student permits which allows foreigners the legal rights to stay and study in a country. Even in countries where access to education is available, language barriers, high costs of school supplies including stationary, textbook, uniforms, transportation and meals, often discourage families from enrolling their children into available programs. Additionally, parents often lack awareness on education systems and available educational programs and enrolment procedures in host countries.

Total PiN:	28,300
Total Target:	6,860

Moreover, in some Caribbean countries there is a lack of procedures and legislation regarding integration and inclusion of Venezuelan children into classrooms, directly impacting their ability to access educational services. Further challenges include absence of student permits which allows foreigners the legal rights to stay and study in a country. Even in countries where access to education is available, language barriers, high costs of school supplies including stationary, textbook, uniforms, transportation and meals, often discourage families from enrolling their children into available programs. Additionally, parents often lack awareness on education systems and available educational programs and enrolment procedures in host countries.

With regards to **Guyana** in particular, existing schools lack the capacity to accommodate ever-growing needs, including of indigenous Venezuelan children. Many teachers also lack experience and capacity to work with second-language learners, to promote cultural integration and the expertise needed to assist children who suffer from trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Teachers are also not trained in child-friendly and culturally responsive techniques to use with students requiring special education and are often not familiar with strategies for promoting protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. These limitations require that R4V partners in Guyana prioritize education interventions to bridge existing gaps.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in schools being shut-down regionally, upending established systems and rapidly propelling them towards digital learning. This unexpected shift revealed gaps that needed urgent attention, including many teachers not being proficient in managing and facilitating online classes. Consequently, these disparities have affected the holistic development, mental health and academic performance of host community and Venezuelan students. The unanticipated closure of schools during lockdowns further affected access to education for the Venezuelan refugee and migrant population who lacked access to regular technology and connectivity for online education modalities. The demand for devices exceeded capacity and could not always be met. Another major concern was the impact on mental health which is linked to the context in which refugee and migrant children are living without access to face-to-face learning, impact of lockdowns due to COVID-19, lack of spaces for socialization, lack of a trusting environment and lack of regular status, inability to access national exams and formalized and accredited certification and more.

Unpredictable infection patterns left working parents with limited options when many would be required to present themselves for work but due to other measures would have no care givers for their children. An R4V partner report on the impact of COVID-19 in Trinidad & Tobago demonstrated that the onset of COVID-19 has had many negative impacts on learners who are trying to adjust to this new education norm.

## Aruba

There are currently 1,000 Venezuelan<sup>4</sup> children registered in Aruban schools and R4V partners estimate that there are more on the island not registered with any school/education program, or who have not been captured in partner data. While Venezuelan children have access to formal primary and secondary schools in Aruba, administrative requirements, transportation costs and language barriers continue to compromise access to education for this group. Lack of a regular status and documentation present further challenges in meeting administrative requirements, such as the mandatory school insurance and a local ‘guarantor’ to pay for school insurance for the enrollment Venezuelan children in schools. The school curriculum in Aruba is mainly in Dutch and Papiamentu which creates an additional challenge for Venezuelan children who are accustomed to a Spanish curriculum. Lack of accreditation of studies for Venezuelan children and youth in an irregular status that attend Aruban schools is another major concern as they lack a Civil Registry Department (Censo) number which is required for the issuance of certificates. This lack of diplomas impacts the ability of Venezuelans to continue their education and integrate into the labour market, be it in Aruba or upon their return to Venezuela. Finally, several reports from the field have noted certain levels of bullying in presential classes. Such experiences are known to impact the mental health and academic performance of students and while some may overcome these challenges, the effects on those who do not, can be detrimental.

## Curaçao

In Curaçao, children over the age of four can register in the public education system. Access to education for Venezuelan children in an irregular status however is hampered by a lack of documentation, and although they can attend classes, they will not attain accredited certificates/diplomas. Even with proper documentation, language barriers, inability to pay for private insurance for school enrolment as well as for stationary, uniforms and transportation may prevent many Venezuelan children from enrolling and attending school. The language of teaching in the school system are Papiamentu, Dutch and English which poses another layer of challenges for children who are accustomed to the Spanish curriculum in Venezuela. Regarding tertiary education, lack of recognition of Venezuelan diplomas, lack of access to universities for Venezuelans in an irregular status and language barriers often decrease motivation to pursue enrolment. COVID-19 preventative measures have impacted

---

<sup>4</sup> Data provided by school boards via the Education Working Group in Aruba.

education norms on the Dutch island where host community and Venezuelan children are struggling to adapt to the evolving and rapid changes in education to meet distance and sanitary/hygienic protocols.

## Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic grants all children, including Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the legal right to primary and secondary education, hence all school-aged Venezuelan children are in theory able to enroll in public and private schools. Tertiary education, however, remains a challenge. An estimated 87% of Venezuelans do not have a regular status,<sup>2</sup> which creates barriers in accessing formal higher education. The lack of regular status further impedes their access to the formal labour market and financial systems, and thus has significant negative repercussions on prospects for local integration. Nonetheless, a regularization/normalization process<sup>5</sup>, launched on 5 April 2021 seeks to provide non-resident status to approximately 100,000 Venezuelans currently living irregularly in the country, which will allow access to student stay permits. Venezuelans also encounter barriers in validating their secondary level and university diplomas in the Dominican Republic and are unable to find work within their area of expertise. In September 2020, authorities provided trainings to prepare teachers to facilitate remote classes. There was a gradual return in cycles to the physical classrooms in April 2021. Under the slogan “Caring for the joy and safety of the reunion,” the Ministry of Education and of Public Health presented the protocol for return to classrooms in a gradual, voluntary, progressive, controlled manner, establishing preventive, operational and follow-up health measures. Re-opening of in-person classes is expected in May 2021, after recommendation of the vice-president of the Dominican Republic and coordinator of the Health Cabinet.

## Guyana

The presence of Venezuelan children since 2018 in Guyana where the education infrastructure is already stretched, has resulted in saturated schools. Many of the refugee and migrant children are indigenous Venezuelans. Although data on the integration of Venezuelan children in the national schooling system is limited, language and cultural differences have been identified as main barriers to education. Capacity building and development for teachers on child-friendly and inclusive approaches for students with special educational needs, as well as on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse are also among the main gaps. Teachers also lack training in second language teaching methodologies. Professional and language trainings are necessary for adult Venezuelan learners to help them find livelihood opportunities in Guyana. Additionally, there is a lack of recognition of Venezuelan certificates and degrees by the Guyanese education authorities which prevents them from accessing the formal labour market within their area of expertise.

## Trinidad and Tobago

In Trinidad and Tobago, the national policy requires that children have student permits issued by the Ministry of National Security before they can enroll in the education system. Legal status limits the access to primary and secondary education. To ensure the right to education of children on the move, a local NGOs and R4V appealing partners provided an alternative since 2019. Starting in the 2019-2020 academic year, Venezuelan children gained access to education through the “[Equal Place](#)” programme developed by some R4V partners.

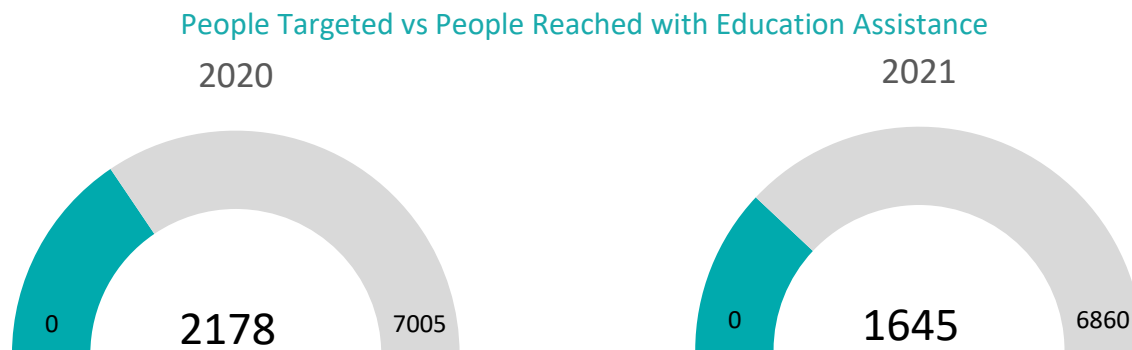
---

<sup>5</sup> In January 2021, in a landmark resolution, the DR government established a regularization/normalization pathway currently in irregular status. Resolution N° 00119-2021, made public on 22 January, represents positive steps towards allowing Venezuelans who regularly entered the country between January 2014 and March 2020 to apply for the migratory category of non-resident and obtain temporary work and student stay permits, without having to return to their country of origin. For more information, please see it [here](#).

The programme, anchored in the national curricula, makes content available through an e-learning platform that is available to all primary and secondary-level children who cannot access the local formal system. While the programme utilized a blended approach since its inception, with the COVID-19 pandemic, Equal Place has been running 100% online. Furthermore, online services enabled Equal Place to grow by 37% the number of children supported. R4V partners have been working to strengthen Equal Place’s educational programming to include English as a Second Language (ESL) in partnership with the University of West Indies (UWI) and psychosocial support services. Currently, Equal Place is incorporating the transferrable skills framework to support adolescents in having a sense of agency, develop their citizenship, and acquire skills for a changing world of work. On the other hand, resources remain limited, as well as the number of education staff guiding pupils through face-to-face sessions. As of April 2021, 1,500 or 60% of all of school age (5-17 years) in the country, remain without access to education. Furthermore, internet connectivity and cost of internet-enabled devices continue to be gaps.

## Response and Achievements

**Overall**, at the end of 2020, 2,178 students were provided with educational opportunities. This was followed by continued expansions of education programs in 2021.



In **Aruba**, partners offered after-school remedial classes and other educational programmes. In **Aruba** and **Curaçao** partners assisted with CBI and second language classes for Venezuelan refugee and migrant children. Curaçao partners completed two rotations of after-school Dutch classes, reaching close to fifty Venezuelan children. In both islands, many of these activities were suspended due to COVID-19. NFI-school kits and material assistance were provided to the most vulnerable Venezuelan families to address some of the financial barriers that prevent children from attending school. In Aruba, following reports of an increase in the number of children awaiting the opening of additional Dutch language support classes (called “Prisma” classes) partners advocated for access to education for refugee and migrant children with the Department of Public Schools and the Director of the Catholic School System (SKOA). In this framework, an Education working group was established under the R4V National Platform to ensure that Venezuelan children and youth have access to education, diploma validation and certification of their studies at the end of their studies. In 2020 the [Government of Aruba announced](#) that the Netherlands had allocated funds to start online educational programs targeting refugees and migrants. This has culminated in partners collaborating with the Aruban Adventist School (Soaza School), an institution which provides [educational opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers](#) on the island, and is taught in English and Spanish, with accompanying second language classes in Dutch. This is with the long-term aim of students being able pursue undergraduate degrees in North America and Europe. Additionally, requests have emerged for the Education Working Group’s support with training on Trauma-Informed Learning and Education in Emergencies.

In the **Dominican Republic** 'La Universidad Autónoma' reached a Memorandum of Understanding with the Venezuelan Government to accredit degrees from Venezuela once refugees and migrants present the stamped original copy of their degree from their home country. Partners also continued to assist refugee and migrant children and youths with NFIs including stationary, textbooks, bookbags and more.

Within the 'Equal Place' educational program in **Trinidad and Tobago**, uptake for online services grew by 49% as the number of children served moved from 600 to 1,235 children. Online services also enabled more stable attendance, with about 1,022 students attending regularly. Equal Place also created employment opportunities for 40 facilitators, from both the refugee/migrant and host populations. Before the onset of COVID-19 measures, approximately 540 of the aforementioned students attended classes at physical spaces provided by partners. During the lockdown, with Equal Place switching to a fully online modality, R4V partners worked to ease the digital gap and distributed approximately 1,100 tablets for use at home, so learners could participate in online classes.<sup>6</sup> 31 teachers were also given devices to ensure they could support learners. Additionally, R4V advocacy efforts led to the Catholic Education Board of Management offering spaces to Venezuelan children registered during the Government's registry efforts in June 2019. While waiting for the final approval of the Ministry of National Security, the Catholic Education Board of Management identified 140 students to be registered in Catholic Board Schools. They were expected to start classes in September 2020, representing a pathway for R&M children to be a part of mainstream education. However, due to COVID-19 closures, the project has been put on hold. Through R4V partners, 46 refugees and asylum seekers in TT between the ages of 17 and 20 were nominated to study University-level courses online. The program is a collaboration between [EdX](#) and [Hamad Bin Khalifa University](#) (HBKU) of Qatar, and offers vouchers for refugees and asylum-seekers to take online courses which may also count towards the [microbachelors](#) and [micromasters](#) degrees offered by EdX.

In **Guyana**, partners developed the capacity of 10 local teachers on English as a Second Language (ESL) and, in 2019, 174 Venezuelan and returning Guyanese children took part in ESL after-school classes. Additionally, 185 out-of-school children participated in a partner's community-based ESL classes as a way of fostering social cohesion and promoting integration of refugee and migrant children into the national education system. Members of the T&T EWG<sup>7</sup> delivered six training sessions to 40 teachers of local schools which are jointly run by the Catholic Education Board of management (CEBM) and the Ministry of Education. Trainings were based on the rights of refugees & asylum seekers, culturally responsive and child friendly teaching, child safeguards, managing the educational environment, the impact of trauma on learning, and supporting the integration of refugee and migrant children into Education Systems. One implementing partner also met with the Minister of Education in August 2020 to [discuss](#) the Venezuelan refugee and migrant situation, and on how the authorities and partners could collaborate to increase access to education. The same implementing partner handed over copies of its most recent children's publication, "Un Cuento De Esperanza" to the Ministry of Education in April 2021 and the government indicated authorities are working on a Migrant Education Support Unit to ensure migrant children and their parents get necessary support.



*Dominican Republic R4V partners distribute Education kits in 2020 ©IOM*

<sup>6</sup> T&T information courtesy of UNHCR TT (Internal Reports), May 2020.

<sup>7</sup> EWG-Education Working Group.

As the impacts of the pandemic have been prolonged, many R4V partners in most Caribbean sub-regional countries have attempted to provide tele-counselling psycho-social support services to refugee and migrant children and their parents.

## Way Forward

Some countries in the subregion reformulated educational programs to cope with the context of the pandemic. As a follow up to this plan, R4V partners will continue their advocacy with the authorities throughout the sub-region to include Venezuelan refugee and migrant children in national school systems by securing access in primary schools and minimizing administrative and logistics barriers. Across the subregion, advocacy efforts to include all refugee and migrant children and youth in primary, secondary and tertiary education, regardless of status, will continue. Additional efforts to provide second-language classes for Spanish speaking students will also continue, which will allow children from Venezuela to better integrate in the public education system and overall local communities. Moreover, advocacy for formalized certification and diploma recognition is needed. Options to expand the capacity of schools to absorb a higher number of Venezuelan students is also a main priority. In the meantime, partners will continue to provide materials and basic equipment to enable access to remote modalities of learning. Once face to face learning re-starts, school feeding programs and psycho-social support, including counselling will resume. Additionally, increasing educational opportunities, particularly in language acquisition for adult refugee and migrant individuals will remain key.