



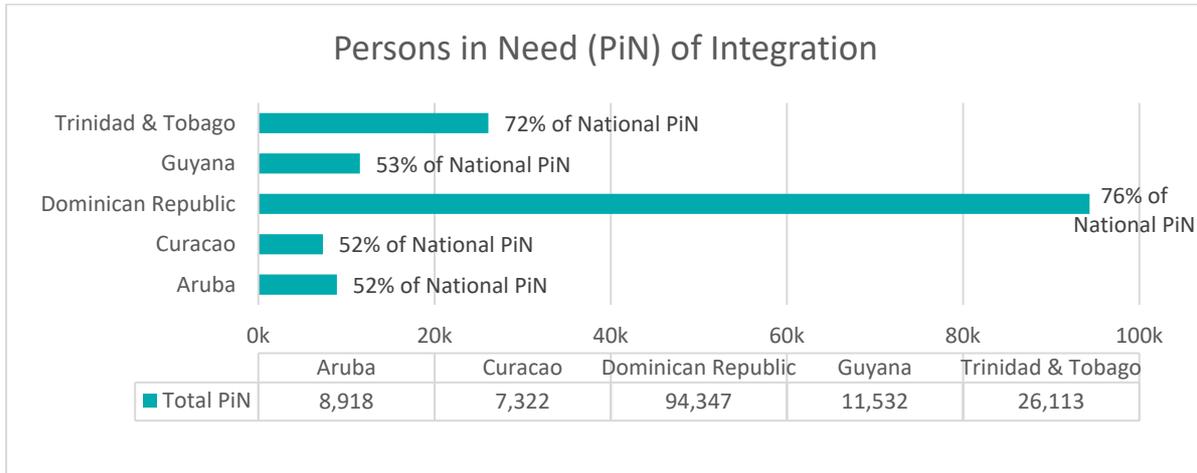
CURRENT POPULATION AS OF AUGUST 2023

213,120



PEOPLE IN NEED OF INTEGRATION

148,232



Source: 2023 R4V Regional Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis (RMNA)

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

Caribbean sub-regional countries continue to receive and host thousands of Venezuelans, as well as other refugee and migrant groups, causing concern over the perceived strain on the resources of host countries. The Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba and Curacao hosts the largest number of refugees and migrants per capita globally; the Dominican Republic hosts the largest absolute number of Venezuelans in the Caribbean with 124,000 in the country in 2023, while Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago host Indigenous populations and other refugees and migrants from Venezuela. All sub-regional countries are concerned about their capacity to accommodate and provide for these refugee and migrant populations. In 2023, socio-economic integration was identified by R4V partners as the second most significant need for refugees and migrants from Venezuela after protection. In 2023, it is estimated that some 70% (148.3K) of people will need integration support across the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, refugees and migrants from Venezuela face several obstacles to socio-economic integration including limited employment opportunities, language barriers, limited recognition of prior studies and professional titles, restricted access to higher education, discrimination, and xenophobia. Lack of access to regular status and documentation continues to be reported as the primary concerns.

1 UNHCR Trinidad and Tobago has registered a total of 42 nationalities within their database as of 2023.

2 Breakdown of persons in need across the Caribbean sub-regional countries: 52% (8918) in Aruba, 52% (7322) in Curacao, 72% (94347) in the Dominican Republic, 53% (11532) in Guyana; and 72% (26113) in Trinidad and Tobago

3 Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis https://rmp.r4v.info/en

4 Refugee and Migrants Needs Analysis (RMNA) Caribbean Chapter 2023. https://www.r4v.info/en/document/rmna-2023-needs-analysis

### Lack of access to regular status, work permits, and employment

Many Venezuelans lack access to regular status and struggle with increasing [entry requirements](#) such as visas imposed by neighbouring Caribbean countries. In some sub-regional countries, their lack of access to regular status and work permits restricts their access to basic rights and services like formal employment, education, healthcare, banking/financial services, and social protection systems. As a result of a lack of documents, refugees and migrants are vulnerable to abuse and [exploitation](#) and have limited opportunities for integration. Refugees and migrants face increased job insecurity and difficulties meeting basic needs such as food and shelter. R4V partners have recorded cases of Venezuelans suffering violence from intimate partners who have used custody of their children and the threat of taking away their documents or removing financial support.<sup>5</sup> Rising living costs and widespread unemployment across the sub-region compound these challenges. In 2023, those living in the Caribbean reported experiencing livelihood disruptions and high unemployment rates.

Although many Venezuelans entered **Aruba** and **Curaçao** regularly with visas or work permits, most have been unable to renew them and find themselves in an irregular situation. Work permits are costly and must be requested by a sponsoring employer, preventing their access to formal employment opportunities and self-reliance. Venezuelans are also cautious about receiving work permits through employers due to reported cases of labour exploitation. Moreover, guarantors are required for work and stay permits. Also, refugees and migrants in irregular situation cannot access health services in these countries without incurring significant debts. Due to insufficient documentation, Venezuelans in Aruba and Curaçao experience segregation and social and economic exclusion. In the first half of 2023, the Ministry of Justice in Curaçao announced that they are developing a migrant registration policy called, “riba luga” (meaning “in your place”).<sup>6</sup>

The **Dominican Republic’s** Normalization Plan for Venezuelans (PNV) facilitated some integration through work permits and access to vocational training.<sup>7</sup> However, approximately 43,000 of the estimated 100,000 to 116,000 Venezuelans in an irregular situation in the country could register for this program, for which registration has not been re-opened since 2021.<sup>8</sup> Numerous Venezuelans in the Dominican Republic possess high levels of education and professional qualifications. Nevertheless, as labour laws only allow for the employment of foreign workers with regular status, Venezuelans’ lack of access to it significantly affects their ability to secure employment and fulfill their basic needs, heightening their vulnerability to labour exploitation. Furthermore, many formal work opportunities within service sectors<sup>9</sup> depend on the flow of tourists. Regardless of their status, Venezuelans have access to basic health and primary education in the Dominican Republic.<sup>10</sup>

In **Guyana**, while the government issues three-month temporary stay permits to Venezuelans upon entry (extendable for successive six-month periods), allowing refugees and migrants to regularize their status, these permits do not grant them the right to work. A sponsoring employer is required to access work permits in Guyana, leading many into informal labour and putting them at risk of exploitation. In **Guyana**, Venezuelans receive free life-saving medical care at public health facilities, and Venezuelan children are able to attend local public schools. Indigenous Warao from Venezuela have also been able to settle in Guyanese Amerindian

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<sup>5</sup> Venezuelan women face high levels of violence from Guyanese men – IDB report.05 September 2022. <https://www.kaieteurnews.com/2022/09/05/venezuelan-women-face-high-levels-of-violence-from-guyanese-men-idb-report/>

<sup>6</sup> The “riba luga” project/migrant registration policy will focus on official research regarding undocumented individuals on the Island, focusing on their numbers, origin, and activities, with the primary goal being registration; it was clarified that participants would not face detention or deportation, as many undocumented individuals desire integration rather than living in secrecy, often driven by concerns related to residence and work permits.

<sup>7</sup> R4V Caribbean, Update on the Normalization Plan for Venezuelans in the Dominican Republic, 2023, <https://www.r4v.info/en/document/update-normalization-plan-venezuelans-dominican-republic> and Blindspot B&HR and IOM, Análisis de Oportunidades de Inclusión Laboral Para Migrantes Venezolanos En República Dominicana, 2022, [https://dominicanrepublic.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd911/files/documents/An%C3%A1lisis%20de%20los%20sistemas%20de%20mercado%20en%20la%20RD\\_v260722%20Final.docx.pdf](https://dominicanrepublic.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd911/files/documents/An%C3%A1lisis%20de%20los%20sistemas%20de%20mercado%20en%20la%20RD_v260722%20Final.docx.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Directorate General for Migration, Dominican Republic (May 2023).

<sup>9</sup> IOM, Informe Ejecutivo- Mercado Laboral y Mano de obra extranjera en el sector turístico en República Dominicana (15 August 2023)

<sup>10</sup> Directorate General for Migration, Dominican Republic (May 2023).

communities that offer them some support. However, strained resources, the lack of access to work permits, and language barriers hinder their integration.

In 2019, the **Trinidad and Tobago** Government launched a [registration framework for Venezuelans](#), allowing registered nationals to apply for a six-month work permit. Over 16,500 Venezuelans registered to work legally that year, and authorities have extended this policy five times. In 2021, some [13,800](#) Venezuelans re-registered, and as of January 2023, the Minister of National Security confirmed that over [9,000](#) Venezuelans have updated their registration cards. On 12 June, the Government announced the framework's [latest extension](#) until 31 December 2023. However, those who arrived after 2019, have not been able to renew their registration, or were otherwise unable to access these permits are left in an irregular situation and unable to access formal labour markets, pushing them into precarious informal and low-paid work and increasing the risk of exploitation, arrest, detention, and deportation. In [July 2023, the High Court ruled](#) that the 1951 Refugee Convention holds no enforceability, implying that all migrants, including asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants, fall under the Immigration Act and can thus be detained and/or deported. Lacking documentation and regular status hinders their access to financial services like banking and loans. However, by the end of 2021, The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago directed Commercial Banks to [ease due diligence for vulnerable individuals and accept government-issued cards for migrants lacking national IDs](#). Language poses another integration barrier. Prior to July 2023, refugee and migrant children did not have the right to attend schools in Trinidad and Tobago as they were ineligible for a student permit. However, the government announced its decision to include refugee and migrant children into the national school system at primary levels, based on specific prerequisites.

### **Social Exclusion, Discrimination, and Xenophobia**

Limited employment opportunities, rising costs, and already stretched social systems have contributed to increasing xenophobia and discrimination against Venezuelan refugees and migrants. This includes discrimination faced by women and girls who are often considered sex workers, children bullied in schools, and evictions carried out by landlords. While xenophobia is not a widespread phenomenon in **Aruba** and **Curaçao**, the increase in the Venezuelan population without the development of social cohesion programmes and the perceived threat that Venezuelan refugees and migrants pose as competition in the labour market exposes them to intolerance and social exclusion. In **Trinidad and Tobago**, instances of discrimination against Venezuelan refugees and migrants of other nationalities continue to be reported and are observed in media and public discourse. Meanwhile, in the **Dominican Republic**, although many Venezuelans express the perception that their culture is similar to their host country, some report experiencing xenophobic incidents, including bullying in schools, at their workplaces, on public transportation, and at government offices.

### **Access to higher education and validation of degrees and qualifications**

Although Venezuelan refugee and migrant children have access to primary and secondary education in most sub-regional countries, they still face [obstacles](#), including costly and bureaucratic processes for the recognition and accreditation of professional titles, degrees, and qualifications, preventing many from accessing tertiary education and employment commensurate with their professional qualifications. In **Aruba** and **Curaçao**, access to university is impeded by high international student fees. In the **Dominican Republic**, 34 per cent of Venezuelans possess university degrees from their country of origin; however, the process to secure recognition of certificates is lengthy and complicated, requiring validation of credentials by the Venezuelan government. In **Guyana**, like the other sub-regional countries, income generation is negatively affected by a lack of validation of academic certificates, which prevents Venezuelans from working in the formal sector. In **Trinidad and Tobago**, to validate foreign credentials and qualifications, the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago requires original documentation, which is sometimes difficult for refugees and migrants to access. The application costs also act as a financial barrier.<sup>11</sup> These challenges underscore the importance of R4V Partner response efforts.

## Response and Achievements

Across the Caribbean subregion, R4V partners continue to promote the socio-economic and cultural integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Efforts have included supporting access to regular status and improving livelihood opportunities, combatting xenophobia, promoting access to education and healthcare, and fostering

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

social cohesion. In 2023, partners collaborated with governments, civil society, and the private sector to advocate for refugees' and migrants' rights and inclusion. Access to regular status and work permits, credential recognition, skills training, and language classes remain priorities.

## Social Cohesion Activities

Partners across the sub-region carried out activities to enhance social cohesion between refugees, migrants, and host communities. **Dominican Republic** and **Trinidad and Tobago** partners launched communication/advocacy campaigns promoting social cohesion in the framework of the “Inclusive Cities, Communities of Solidarity” project (Ciudades incluyentes, Comunidades solidarias in Spanish) to show refugees' and migrants' positive contributions to the socio-economic and cultural landscapes of host communities. Advocacy efforts carried out by the Trinidad and Tobago Education Working Group, the U.S. Embassy, and other partners led to positive results, with the government of Trinidad and Tobago in mid-2023 agreeing to include registered refugee and migrant children in public schools. Partners in **Trinidad and Tobago** also provided self-defence workshops, bringing Venezuelan and local women together to build skills and share information on gender-based violence prevention and response. The training promoted women's resilience, empowerment, and social integration through solidarity and support networks. Partners also increased efforts to combat xenophobic sentiments through awareness campaigns, workshops, media engagement, and policy advocacy. Social media campaigns reached thousands in Trinidad and Tobago, while radio programs in Guyana promoted coexistence. Also, partners in the **Dominican Republic** held waste management workshops, bringing Venezuelans and locals together. Second language classes were also provided to Venezuelans in **Aruba, Curaçao, and Guyana** to help break barriers and improve communication in the host countries.

In **Guyana**, partners facilitated access to healthcare through translation/bilingual services and mobile clinics providing check-ups while continuing to support English as a Second Language (ESL) after-school tutorials in schools with a high refugee and migrant population. ESL classes are also extended to refugee and migrant adults to facilitate access to jobs and other aspects of their daily lives. Additionally, the government has translated the Grade Six exam papers into Spanish, with plans for bilingual workbooks in core subjects, and has undertaken initiatives like Spanglish competitions to foster integration among refugee, migrant, and local children. In June, the president announced the intention to make it compulsory in primary schools across Guyana. To fight against gender-based violence (GBV), the Government has implemented a bilingual option for its GBV hotline to help Spanish speaker file their report. By September 2023, the [authorities included the word Policia](#) on the official police vehicles.

Cultural activities like festivals, concerts, and workshops were organized across the subregion. For example, in **Trinidad and Tobago**, R4V partners organized an [Amazing Race event focused on SDG 16](#) (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) to promote social cohesion and the inclusion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Teams of Venezuelans and locals collaborated in challenges, raising awareness of refugees' and migrants' contributions, and learning about each other's cultures, including performing Venezuelan music together. A steelpan competition also had Venezuelan and local participants learn a Venezuelan song together. In 2022, R4V partners also produced and screened a documentary called *The Challengers*, which told the story of cultural integration through a sporting lens second documentary.<sup>12</sup> These events facilitated positive interactions between communities to foster mutual understanding and integration.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ip0h0yvM4V4>

## Economic Integration

In the **Dominican Republic**, R4V partners organized information hubs providing thousands of refugees and migrants with information on the Normalization Plan for Venezuelans (PNV) and access to services. In **Aruba**, R4V partners continue to work with the government to enhance access to work permits and offer support to help refugees and migrants cope with the rising cost of living and unemployment, preventing them from covering their basic needs. Interventions included online education, telehealth, and strengthening of cash-based interventions. Mental health needs grew among refugees and migrants, and partners provided support through counselling, in-house visits, and medication aid. **Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dominican Republic** partners focused efforts on entrepreneurship training and financial support for small businesses. For instance, in **Trinidad and Tobago**, the hydroponics training program SHAPE brought together Venezuelan migrants and local youth to build agricultural livelihood skills. The initiative promoted economic inclusion and social cohesion by jointly empowering participants to use sustainable farming practices.

The participatory approach facilitated integration while enhancing vulnerable groups' resilience. Partners promoted vocational courses and small business support in Guyana and the Dominican Republic.



*Thanks to the Normalization Plan for Venezuelans in the DR, small migrant businesses have been able to formalize and strengthen their business lines.*

### Active Partners\*

**Aruba:** HIAS, PADF, *VeneAruba Solidaria*

**Curaçao:** IOM, PADF, *Human Rights Defence Curaçao, Salú pa Tur Foundation, Venex Curaçao Foundation*

**Dominican Republic:** UNHCR, UN Habitat, *Fundación de Emigrantes y Refugiados Sin Fronteras Para El Mundo (FERFM), Dominican Institute for Integrated Development, Heartland Alliance International, Venezuelan Emigrant Foundation (FEV)*

**Guyana:** IOM, HIAS, UNHCR, *Blossoms Inc, Guyana Sex Workers Coalition, Ministry of Education*

**Trinidad and Tobago:** UNHCR, UNODC, UN Habitat, PADF, *La Casita, Women's Institute for Alternative Development, Family Planning Association, Living Water Community*

\* Appealing Partner, Implementing Partner. Based on partners reporting monthly activities to the R4V Platform.

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