

# EDUCATION

July 2023



EDUCATION  
SECTOR

## Introduction

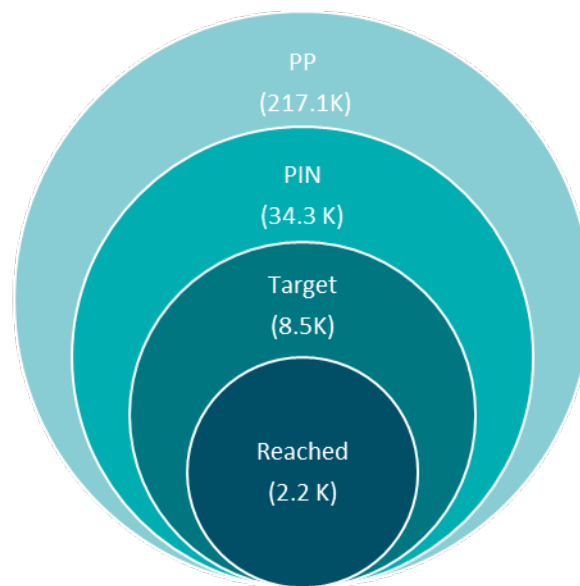
In 2023, an estimated 34, 000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Caribbean will require education. Among overarching [key needs](#) identified by partners in the Caribbean Sub-region for them are: access to socio-economic rights like health care, formal employment, and education. Among the Venezuelans who have migrated to countries in the sub-region (Aruba, Curaçao, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago), a significant number are school-aged children. International and regional human rights law as well as national laws in most Caribbean countries covered as part of the R4V platform, recognize education as a fundamental right for children, regardless of migratory status and all five sub-regional countries are signatories to the [1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). While refugee and migrant children in countries like Aruba, Curaçao, Guyana, and the Dominican Republic have unrestricted access to basic schooling, various barriers hinder the enrolment of these children in existing programs. Practical challenges persist and these countries face challenges in delivering comprehensive and quality education to refugees and migrants including administrative, financial (such as the high costs of school supplies, uniforms, transportation, and meals), and cultural barriers.

Other difficulties include accessing higher education, lack of recognition of foreign degrees, including the lack of recognition of high school diplomas, administrative fees for apostille and translations. Separately, xenophobic attitudes sometimes contribute to incidents of bullying in schools, compounding the issue. Many parents also lack awareness of available educational programs and enrolment procedures in host countries and families face difficulties registering their children due to these obstacles. Meanwhile, a much more restrictive situation is found in Trinidad and Tobago where school-aged refugee and migrant children from Venezuela cannot enrol in public schools, including early education and school readiness programmes, due to legal, administrative, financial and language barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13), Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 28 and 29), revised European Social Charter (Article 17) and – for EU MS – to Article 14(1) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Chart 1 shows the population breakdown of the number of refugees and migrants.



### Key

*PP* – Projected Population of the number of refugees and migrants in the Caribbean sub-region by the end of 2023.

*PIN* – Persons in Need in the Education sector.

*Target* – Persons targeted with education related activities.

*Reached* – Persons who have benefitted up to June from education related activities.

## Context

### Aruba and Curaçao

Aruba and Curaçao both have laws mandating the education of all children, regardless of migratory status as highlighted in Aruba's compulsory education act and Curaçao's National Ordinance on compulsory education. However, challenges persist in meeting the educational needs of refugee and migrant children, particularly administrative barriers restricting diplomas for foreign born children and high hidden costs to parents of public education. Limitations also continue concerning capacity and language support. In both countries, Dutch is the medium of instruction, while Spanish-speaking refugees and migrants from Venezuela struggle with Dutch proficiency. In late 2020, the Ministry of Education in Aruba made substantial changes to the curriculum, including abolishing the previous PRISMA programme for Dutch language acquisition, switching to multilingual schooling; however, further support is required in this regard. Though it is possible for undocumented migrant children to access their diplomas when culminating their studies in Aruba, it is increasingly difficult for them to access tertiary education as they are charged the highest rates given to international students. Further, they are required to have a valid ID to receive their diplomas; however, since getting a passport is unreachable for many refugees and migrants, the Aruban authorities are accepting provisional identification documents in its lieu. These, however, cost of fifty dollars (USD 50.00) which is a large amount for vulnerable families to spend. Limited access to diplomas and accreditation in both countries further restricts educational opportunities and hinders integration into the formal labour market. Additional barriers include obligatory insurance purchase which is costly, documentation requirements,

and high costs for school materials and transportation. In Aruba, high school fees and added costs of utilities at school, such as air conditioning, have raised financial burdens for both the host community and refugees and migrants in 2023. The Aruban Catholic school board, Stichting Katholiek Onderwijs Aruba (SKOA), identified the need to provide sexual education training for their fifth and sixth grade elementary school teachers in response to a noted increase in youth pregnancies generally. Field reports have also highlighted 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. In Curaçao, practical and administrative barriers, including documentation, language barriers and parents' lack of information on registration processes, contribute to limited school attendance and lower educational outcomes. Efforts have been made to expand access to education, such as the establishment of an education working group and the separate development of an online program for Spanish-speaking migrants in Aruba, financially supported by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and which is currently funded by three R4V partners. The Aruba National Education Plan 2030 focuses on expanding access to education for displaced persons providing them with entry-level programs. In 2021, its education working group was established to address the access of refugee and migrant children to schools in the country. The group includes the Ministry of Education, R4V partners, NGOs and various organizations and school boards. An inter-agency partnership was also established to protect the rights of children in Curaçao. According to media outlets,<sup>1</sup> the Ministry of Education confirmed that 1,622 undocumented children are attending school in Curaçao in 2023. Based on the current data, the number of undocumented children attending school is 5% of all the school going children.

## Dominican Republic

School access in the Dominican Republic is open to all, but enrolling in education programs can be difficult due to certain prerequisites. To enrol in the Dominican Republic, schools request identity documents which are often unavailable.<sup>2</sup> However, the system is more lenient for primary learners, allowing them into classrooms even if they lack some required records. In contrast, secondary level learners must present identification documents, which many children of refugees and migrants lack, leading to their exclusion from education. Children with disabilities or specific needs face added obstacles due to limited public institutions catering to them and the high costs of private educational programs. According to a [2023 profiling report by the Inter-American Development Bank \(IDB\)](#) on the Dominican Republic, Venezuelans residing there possess high levels of education. Of the interview sample, 29% completed secondary school, 18.2% pursued technical education, 17.8% had some college studies (incomplete), and 34% obtained a university degree. Respondents emphasized the importance of their children's education, with 95% of school-aged children from Venezuelan households enrolled in school. However, the same report revealed that one out of ten Venezuelans experienced discrimination in various locations, including educational institutions. Main education challenges faced by refugee and migrant populations in the Dominican Republic encompass limited access to higher education, including tertiary education. Furthermore, obtaining recognition and accreditation for Venezuelan certificates has proven difficult, even for Venezuelans registered with the Normalization Plan. ([Update on the Normalization Plan for Venezuelans - Dominican Republic | R4V](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> Antiliaans Dagblad, "1622 kids zonder papieren" 10 May 2023

<sup>2</sup> R4V, Participatory Assessments: Dominican Republic, 2021.

## Guyana

In Guyana, the national education system is accessible to all, but the lack of schools is a challenge for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, including Indigenous Venezuelan children. According to the Ministry's data, as of 18 July 2022, there were 2,036 refugee and migrant children, with 90 percent from Venezuela, who were enrolled in formal education in Guyana.<sup>3</sup> Venezuelan refugee and migrant children enrolled in the formal education face language barriers to integrate and follow the curriculum in English. Both infrastructural and cultural obstacles hinder their education, particularly in rural/remote areas with insufficient school capacity and facilities. Limited enrolment spaces and inadequate infrastructure result in delayed registration where children are placed on waiting lists, impeding their educational progress. Furthermore, many teachers lack the necessary training and skills to effectively teach second-language learners, as English is the main language of instruction, and many refugees and migrants speak Spanish or indigenous languages. There is a shortage of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and the remote location of communities and the absence of language support in schools, has led to marginalization, exclusion, bullying, and protection risks for non-English speaking learners. The education system has gaps regarding professionals who can provide support to children who have experienced trauma and provide culturally responsive techniques for students with special needs and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. Adult Venezuelan learners face limited opportunities for professional and language training, as their certificates and degrees from Venezuela are not recognized by Guyanese authorities, restricting their access to the formal labour market.

## Trinidad and Tobago

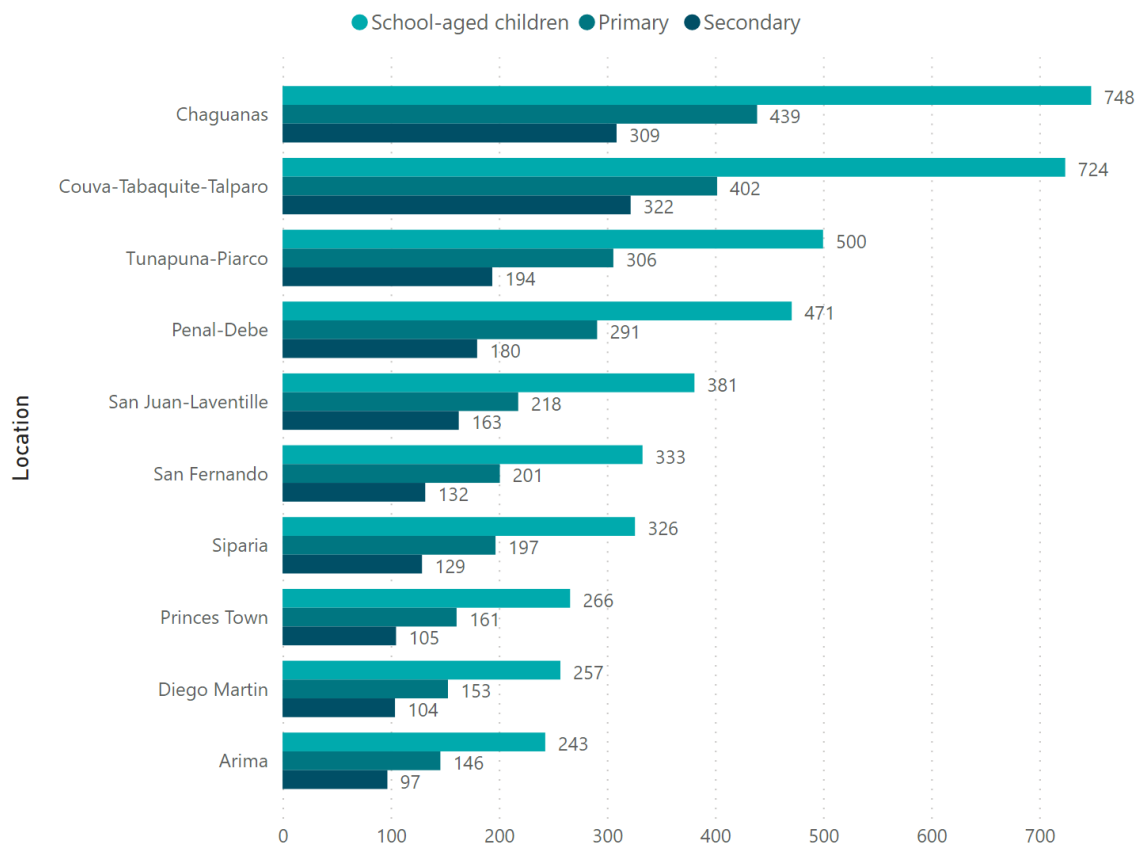
Trinidad and Tobago has been receiving Venezuelan refugees and migrants since 2016, with increased numbers in 2017 and 2018. In 2019, the government conducted a registration exercise to provide temporary renewable permits to over 16,000 adults and 2,000 children. However, these permits only allowed the adult population to work and stay and did not allow their children to attend schools. In Trinidad and Tobago, non-national children need a student permit from the Immigration Division to be enrolled in the education system. Due to their legal status, most refugee and migrant children are not eligible for the student permit.

The Catholic Education Board of Management (CEBM) pledged to integrate refugee and migrant children and identified the capacity to enrol children within their primary schools. Other denominational school boards have agreed to integrate refugee and migrant children with the appropriate legal and administrative framework. Stakeholders, including R4V partners and other humanitarian actors, have supported Roman Catholic (RC) Schools as they were the only ones that moved ahead to accept Venezuelan children in their schools. Partners provided furniture, equipment, supplies, and training 131 teachers (120 females and 11 males) in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), a curriculum for transferable skills, and training on the identification of learning disabilities. While education in emergencies stakeholders continue to provide alternative learning opportunities to children of refugees and migrants through the [Equal Place program](#), parents in Trinidad and Tobago expressed that their children face difficulties in engaging in online learning on a consistent basis, primarily due to the absence of reliable internet access. Parents have also expressed financial difficulties including rising food costs, which strain their resources away from education-related expenses. The lack of access to education for approximately 5,000 children (3,000 primary school age and 2,000 secondary school age) has led to the emergence of unregulated educational spaces, posing child protection risks such as abuse, human trafficking, and forced labour.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, Guyana, Risk Management and Migrant Support Unit (RMMSU) (2022)

Chart 2 showing the 10 most critical geolocations with high demand for school enrolment in Trinidad and Tobago.



## Responses/Achievements

- **Aruba** has made significant strides in its education sector, including providing educational information to refugees and migrants from Venezuela, advocating for diploma access, combating xenophobia, and supporting language acquisition and cultural integration. One partner's program facilitated the enrolment of 145 children in 2021-2022, offering language courses and support for the local DAWERE program, an accredited online education programme that allows Venezuelan adolescents to obtain their High School Diploma. Partners also covered incidental costs for Venezuelan children to ensure their enrolment. The Education Working Group focused on back-to-school activities, providing school kits and tuition support. Additionally, partners and the authorities have agreed that the department of education will refer children that need financial assistance to get provisional IDs. Two partners have agreed to cover the fifty-dollar charge for this.
- In **Curaçao**, a specialized class was established for adults to learn Papiamentu, with participants progressing from level A1 to A2. This aimed to overcome language barriers and enhance linguistic integration. R4V partners supported refugees and migrants with enrolment procedures, finances, and information. An inter-agency child protection assessment is planned for 2023.

- In the **Dominican Republic**, R4V partners supported 1,996 children and adolescents in accessing early childhood and formal education services. Referrals were made to relevant institutions, school support kits were distributed, and child-friendly spaces were established. Information sharing campaigns reached over 30,000 individuals.
- In **Guyana**, R4V partners focused on eliminating language barriers and providing supplemental tutorials and teacher training. They also advocated for increased access to education through collaboration with authorities for children of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, including Indigenous Venezuelan children. Further, Guyana's Ministry of Education has partnered with international organizations, who fund a programme for the provision of after-school English Classes for Venezuelan children enrolled in the formal education system and Venezuelan children are being included in the government-funded support initiative "Because We Care" cash grant.
- **Trinidad and Tobago's** Education Working Group continues to advocate for the rights of refugees and migrants to education. To ensure there are educational pathways, partners in education have early education programmes that include school readiness so that children who are 3-4 years old can transition to lower primary in formal and non-formal modalities. The "Equal Place" hybrid education program continues to cater to primary-level children unable to attend local schooling. The pathway to secondary education includes access to DAWERE; the Venezuelan accredited secondary education program.
- All interventions integrate ESL, provide psychosocial support, and adolescent participation and empowerment through a transferrable-skills curricula. Overall, these efforts have facilitated education access, addressed language barriers, and supported the integration of refugee and migrant children into the educational environment in various Caribbean sub-regional countries.

## Priorities and Way forward for Education in the Sub-Region

Across the sub-region, subject to funding, and as highlighted in the [RMRP 2023-2024](#), partners will continue to provide support for children and adolescents to access formal education (when they have access to public systems) by delivering services that facilitate entry (e.g., enrolment support, counselling, transportation) and cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to cover related expenses such as enrolment fees, registration fees, transportation, insurance, uniforms, etc. Additionally, support will be given to refugee and migrant children and adolescents who do not receive assistance from national education systems. In the case of Venezuelan refugees and migrants who lack access to education, efforts will be made to identify those who are not attending school and the reasons for their non-attendance to provide specific responses, including internet access and technological support. Alternative educational programs will be provided or coordinated to enrol refugee and migrant children. Information and support will also be offered to access translation services, validation, and accreditation of academic certificates. Furthermore, parents and guardians will be sensitized about the Caribbean education systems through informative sessions. Capacity building will be promoted within local education systems to find sustainable solutions for the integration of refugee and migrant children and adolescents and their access to quality education. This will involve advocating to the authorities for the integration of children and adolescents at all levels of public education, regardless of their legal status, and reducing administrative barriers to enrolment. This will include advocacy for amendments to education policies that will allow for the inclusion of refugee and migrant children into national systems. Advocacy for school certification and accreditation will also be pursued. Teachers and community volunteers will receive training to address learning needs and provide specialized learning opportunities. Efforts will be made to combat xenophobia and support integration in schools through

interventions such as second language acquisition, extracurricular support, sports, and recreational activities to foster social cohesion and combat bullying, particularly among Indigenous children (in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago).

To address the unique situation in Trinidad and Tobago, partners propose a planned and coordinated approach to integrate refugee and migrant children into the national education system, that aligns with the country's developmental goals outlined in Vision 2030, particularly focusing on social justice, the most vulnerable groups, and a modern education system. To ensure accessibility, the involvement of additional denominational school boards is crucial, enabling refugee and migrant children to enrol in nearby schools and reducing associated expenses. A few denominational school boards have expressed their willingness to participate in this endeavour. Donor governments, bilateral and multilateral organizations, as well as other regional governments responding to the Venezuelan outflow, are prepared to provide support for a smooth and efficient transition of displaced children into the national education system. Moving forward, advocacy efforts as a part of the response to the education needs of refugee and migrant children from Venezuela will be essential. This advocacy will entail engaging stakeholders including relevant ministries, and planning consultations to determine possible integration processes as an initial phase. A phased-approach plan will be developed, encompassing the identification of key resources, investments in infrastructure and technology, the modernization of the education sector, fostering intercultural competencies, introducing cultural aspects of school life in Trinidad and Tobago, engaging parent-teacher associations, conducting learning assessments, providing tailored support, and implementing other necessary measures to facilitate the integration. Additionally, the plan will include monitoring and evaluation to derive valuable insights applicable beyond the integration of refugee and migrant children.