



## Education Sector Background Notes

July 2020

### Context

In recent years, increased numbers of Venezuelans have continued to flee to the Caribbean due to serious threats to their lives, freedom, safety and limited access to their basic human rights, including health care, medicines, education and food. By the first quarter of 2020, an estimated 113,500 Venezuelans sought refuge in the Caribbean, including 17,000 in Aruba, 16,500 in Curaçao, 34,000 in Dominican Republic, 22,000 in Guyana, and 24,000 in Trinidad and Tobago. A significant segment of the Venezuelan population in the above-mentioned host countries are school-aged children. For instance, in Trinidad and Tobago, as of 31 May 2020, there were 1,966 children aged 5 to 17 out of 15,965 Venezuelans registered with UNHCR, which represented 12% of the registered population. In Guyana, among 2,090 Venezuelan refugees and migrants biometrically registered in late 2019 and early 2020, there are 652 children between the age of 5 and 17, that being 31% of the total.<sup>1</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 practise accessing formalized and accredited education remains a challenge.<sup>2</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 to quality education and limitations on accessing tertiary education not to mention the occasional xenophobia which has translated into cases of bullying at school.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Trinidad and Tobago, June 2020. Data on school aged children is not available for Aruba, Curaçao and the Dominican Republic.

<sup>2</sup> 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

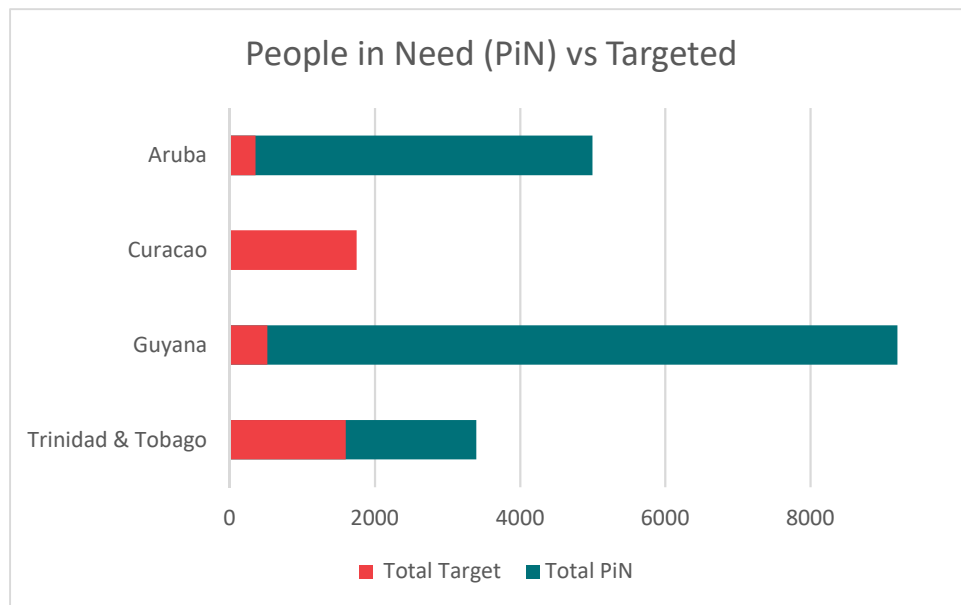


Figure 1: People in need of and targeted for education assistance in the Caribbean. Source: 2020 RMRP.

With the exception of the Dominican Republic, where refugee and migrant children have the right to access education, access to primary and secondary education is a key area of intervention in Aruba, Curaçao, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago. At the start of 2020, RMRP Partners planned to target assistance to 4,300 children and youth from Venezuela and 2,705 members of host communities. Many refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the Caribbean do not have regular status, nor do their children.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, unaccompanied minors, 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, language barriers, high costs of school supplies including stationary, textbook, uniforms, transportation and meals which often discourage families from enrolling their children into available programs. Additionally, parents often lack awareness on host countries education systems and available educational programs and enrolment procedures. With regards to Guyana in particular, existing schools lack the capacity to accommodate the ever-growing needs due to the outflows of refugees and migrants from Venezuela. Many teachers also lack experience and capacity in working with second-language learners, cultural integration as well as lack the expertise needed to assist children who suffer from trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Teachers are also not trained in child-friendly techniques to use with students requiring special education or strategies for promoting protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Consequently, these gaps affect the holistic development, mental health and academic performance of Venezuelan students. The unanticipated closure of schools during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic further affected access to education for this population and while some of these programs relied on online modalities, limited access to technology created an additional gap.

Total PiN:	<b>20,100</b>
Total Target:	<b>7005</b>

<sup>3</sup> The exceptions are Guyana, where the Government has rolled out biometric registration of Venezuelans with the support of R4V partners, and Trinidad and Tobago, as the Government conducted a one-off registration exercise for two weeks in June 2019, registering over 16,500 Venezuelans.

## Aruba

While Venezuelan children have access to formal primary and secondary schooling in Aruba, administrative requirements, transportation costs and language barriers continue to compromise access to education for this group. Lack of documentation presents challenges in meeting administrative requirements, such as the mandatory school insurance and a local ‘guarantor’ to enroll Venezuelan children in schools. The school curriculum in Aruba is mainly in Dutch and Papiamentu which creates an additional barrier for Venezuelan children who are accustomed to a Spanish curriculum in Venezuela. Lack of accreditation of studies for undocumented Venezuelan children and youth that attend Aruban schools is another major concern as undocumented individuals in Aruba lack a Civil Registry Department (Censo) number which is required for the issuance of certificates. This lack of diplomas will impact 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 school. 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 4 are allowed to register in the public education system. Access to education for unregistered Venezuelan children 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 prevent many Venezuelan children from enrolling and attending school. The language of teaching in the school system is in Papiamentu, Dutch and English which poses another layer of challenges for children, especially those who are accustomed to the Spanish curriculum while in Venezuela. Regarding tertiary education, lack of recognition of Venezuelan diplomas, lack of access to universities for undocumented Venezuelans and language barriers often hinders Venezuelans’ motivation and subsequently their enrolment.

## 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; what remains a challenge however is access to tertiary education. Indeed, there is an estimated 87% of Venezuelans who do not have a regular migratory status,<sup>2</sup> which creates barriers in accessing formal higher education. The lack of documentation impedes their access to tertiary level education, the formal labor market and financial systems, and thus has significant negative repercussions on prospects for local integration. Venezuelans also encounter barriers in validating their secondary level and university diplomas in the Dominican Republic which means that many are not able to find work within their area of expertise.

## Guyana

The presence of Venezuelan children since 2018 in Guyana where the education infrastructure is already stretched, has resulted in saturated schools. Many of these 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 acquisition and teaching methodologies for second-language students. 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 the individuals them from accessing the formal labour market within their area of expertise.

## Trinidad and Tobago

Access to primary and secondary schools is limited for Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago as student permits are required for foreigners to attend schools.<sup>4</sup> Prior to 2019, Venezuelan children had access to alternative educational programs facilitated through local NGOs. Since the school year 2019-2020, over a thousand Venezuelan children have gained access to accredited education through the “Equal Place” programme developed by the Education Working Group established by R4V partners.<sup>5</sup> The programme consists of an e-learning platform in Spanish and English that is available to all primary and secondary-level children who cannot access the local formal system. This program is complemented with regular face-to-face sessions with facilitators from both the local and refugee and migrant communities. In agreement with authorizing bodies, students who successfully follow the curricula obtain a recognized certificate. The number of learning spaces through which to connect to the online platform remains limited, as well as the number of education staff guiding pupils through face-to-face sessions. Transportation and other educational costs and limited internet connectivity sometimes discourage families from enrolling their children in the learning spaces. As with all the countries of the sub-region, physical learning centers were closed due to Covid-19. Hence R4V partners ensured that Venezuelan children continue to have access to education through the Equal Place Programme, which has shifted from a blended format to being fully online and whose e-learning platform will be upgraded with additional content and functionalities in order to improve interaction between facilitators and students.

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<sup>4</sup> Protection in the absence of legislation in Trinidad and Tobago, Forced Migration Review (October 2017). <https://www.fmreview.org/latinamerica-caribbean/nakhid-welch>

<sup>5</sup> Equal Place: Education Program. <https://help.unhcr.org/trinidadandtobago/faqs/equal-place-education-programme/>

## Response and Achievements

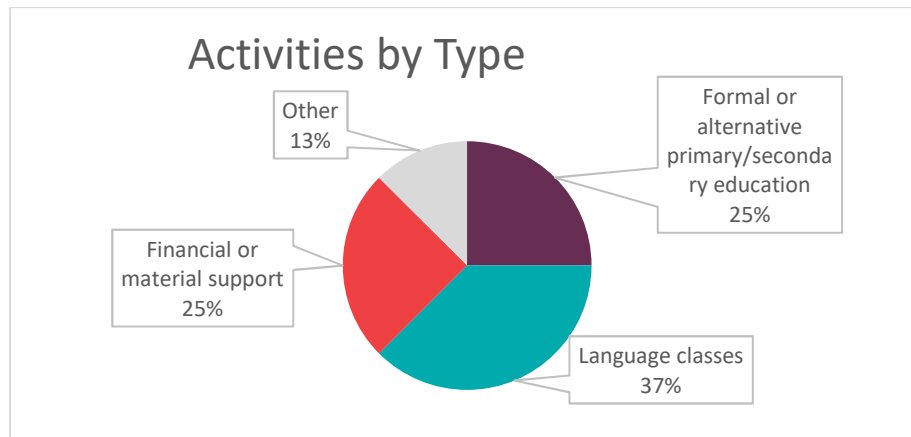


Figure 2: Thematic areas of activities by R4V partners in the Caribbean. Source: 2020 RMRP.

In Aruba, partners offered after-school remedial classes, educational programmes and CBI for Venezuelan refugee and migrant children but many of these activities were suspended due to the COVID-19 situation. The 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 due to the cost of transportation and school supplies. On 25 June the Government of Aruba announced that Holland had allocated funds to start online educational programs targeted at migrants.<sup>6</sup> The program will follow the American K-12 system,<sup>7</sup> and will be taught in English and Spanish, with accompanying second language classes in Dutch. This is with the long term aim that students might pursue undergraduate degrees in North America and Europe.<sup>8</sup> In the Dominican Republic ‘La Universidad Autónoma’ reached a Memorandum of Understanding with the Venezuelan Government to accredit degrees from Venezuela once Venezuelan refugees and migrants present the stamped original copy of their degree from their home country.

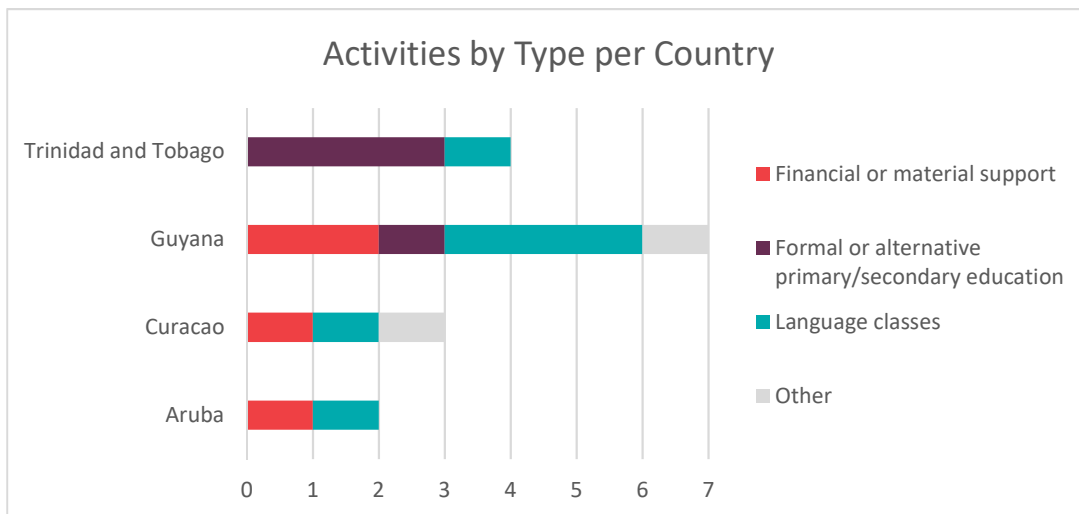


Figure 3: Number of activities by type in the Caribbean. Source: 2020 RMRP.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GabineteWeverCroes/videos/281585103190740/?vh=e&d=n>

<sup>7</sup> K-12 (spoken as "k twelve", "k through twelve", or "k to twelve"), from kindergarten to 12th grade, is an American expression that indicates the range of years of supported primary and secondary education found in the United States, which is similar to publicly supported school grades prior to college levels.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GabineteWeverCroes/videos/281585103190740/?vh=e&d=n>

1495

People reached with education activities  
in 2020\*

Overall, 8,206 students were provided with Educational support services throughout the Caribbean sub-region in 2019, marking a promising move toward integrating Venezuelan refugees and migrants into Caribbean societies all through educational efforts. This was followed by continued expansions of education offerings in 2020. Such is exemplified in Trinidad and Tobago, where 1,299 Venezuelans pre-registered and were placed on waiting lists for placement in R4V educational programs. Eventually 1,116 Venezuelans, including 547 girls and 569 boys, enrolled in accredited educational programs through the ‘Equal Place’ educational program. 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 were attending 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 1100 tablets for use at home, so learners could participate in online classes.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, R4V advocacy efforts led to the Catholic Education Board of Management offering spaces to Venezuelan children registered during the Government’s registry operation in June 2019. While waiting for the final approval of the Ministry of National Security, the Catholic Education Board of Management has identified 119 students to be registered in Catholic Board Schools. They are expected to start classes in September 2020 and this represents a major headway as it paves the way for refugee and migrant children to be a part of mainstream schooling. 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.

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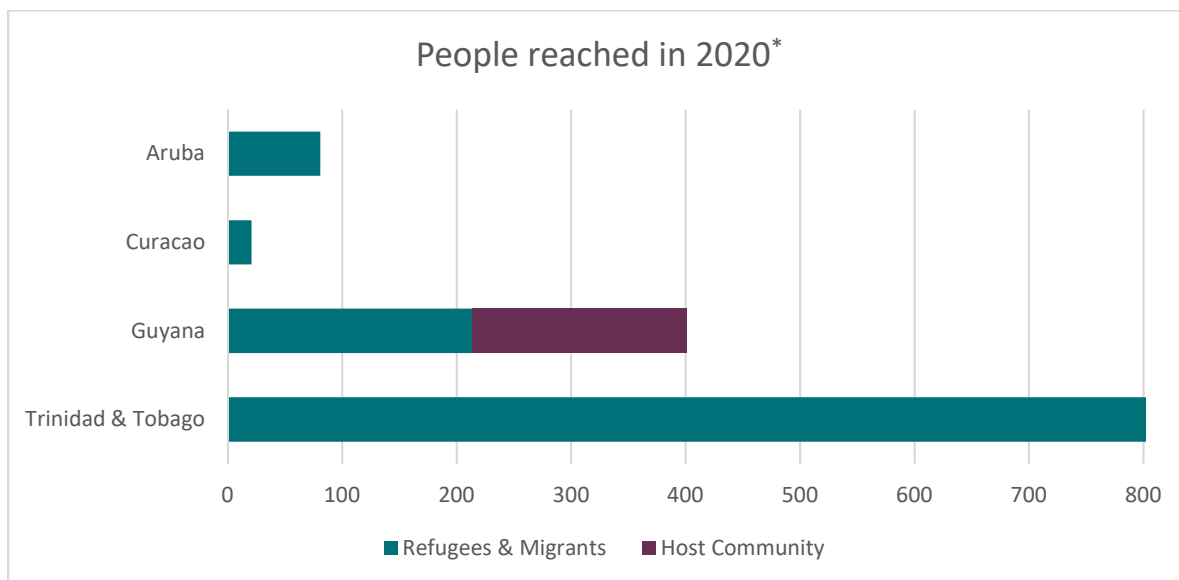


Figure 4: Total beneficiaries reached by education activities in the Caribbean. Source: R4V partners.

<sup>9</sup> All country data extracted from RMRP 2020 for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73277>; TT information courtesy of UNHCR TT (Internal Reports), May 2020.

\* Through June 2020.