

Education

THE GATEWAY TOWARD SUSTAINABLE FUTURES FOR FORCIBLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

Education as a protection mechanism can



- Keep children safe from child exploitation and abuse.
- Avoid recruitment of children and youth by gangs or other criminal organizations.
- Reduce risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), teenage pregnancy, and child marriage.
- Provide children and youth with safe spaces to learn and grow up among peers.
- Promote social integration and peaceful coexistence.
- Support the development of livelihoods, self-reliance, and resilience.

Context

Forced displacement creates a barrier for children to access education in new communities or countries. Administrative, language, cultural and practical hurdles often make it difficult for displaced children to enrol or stay in school across Central America and the Caribbean.

On top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered closure of schools, non-formal learning programmes, after-school centres, and universities in all countries under the Panama Multi-Country Office (MCO). Three out of every five children in the world who lost a school year during the pandemic live in Latin America and the Caribbean. On average, schools in region have been completely closed for 158 days from March 2020 to February 2021, far more than the global estimate (95 days). The most vulnerable children and youth, and those who cannot access distance education are more likely to never return to school, and even become at-risk of child marriage and/or labour, gang recruitment, GBV, and teenage pregnancy. To mitigate the impact of school closures, Governments strive to reinforce access to quality distance learning and urgently start implementing blended learning models. Yet, refugees and other displaced populations have had to prioritize other life-threatening needs within their expenditure plans.

Education is fundamentally protective. The lack of access to education exacerbates the vulnerabilities and risks for displaced children and youth. For refugees and asylum-seekers education is the path to rebuilding their lives. Early childhood programmes and pre-school education enhance development and reinforce psycho-emotional resilience. Primary and secondary education levels build literacy and solidify other relevant skills and capacities. Completion of these education levels facilitates access to technical or higher education, which represents the steppingstone towards employment. Additionally, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) further supports the development of livelihoods, self-reliance, and socioeconomic resilience. Finally, language training promotes social integration and access to services, including lower-level education for children and youth.

UNHCR, therefore, places great importance on the inclusion of displaced children and youth in national education systems. In this sense, UNHCR advocates for States' commitment to give refugee children and youth access to the full range of educational opportunities – from pre-primary to higher, as well as TVET, and non-formal education that leads to recognized certification, at the same level of nationals. By supporting and strengthening education opportunities for both displaced and local children and youth across all countries; to build stronger and more inclusive communities.

Milestones

In **Aruba and Curaçao**, UNHCR provided support to 78 Venezuelan children through the back-to-school cash-based assistance packages, which included the costs of enrolment and insurance fees, school supplies and transportation costs.

In **Guyana**, UNHCR provided English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to 286 refugees and migrants, and assisted 28 students with school-related materials, including digital devices for remote education access. Additionally, 34 teachers received training on language teaching methodology and academic material development through capacity building workshops.

At the beginning of 2021, UNHCR and partners trained 100 teachers in **Panama** on psycho-emotional tools for the gradual return to school and to accompany children and their families in this process. Moreover, 70 children received tablets to facilitate access to remote or blended education, and 75 families benefitted from cash interventions for school supplies.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, more than 1,050 refugees, asylum-seekers, and other eligible children access distance accredited education services through Equal Place (EP). As of July 2021, UNHCR delivered 400 tablets to support the EP online modality and facilitate access and daily participation for all children.

Financial gaps

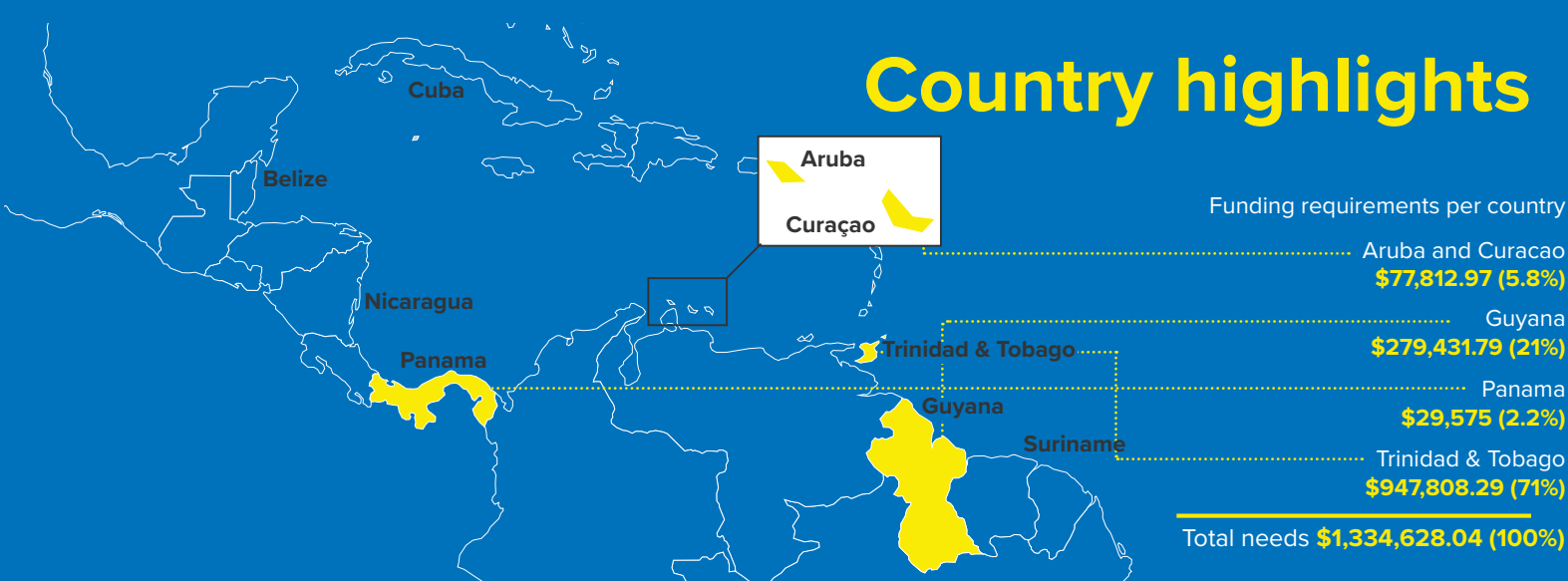
With additional funding and support, UNHCR could strengthen access to regular quality learning opportunities that help children and adults learn, thrive and develop their potential, build individual and collective resilience, and contribute to peaceful coexistence.

UNHCR seeks to support governments and foster the conditions, partnerships, collaboration, and approaches that lead to refugee, asylum-seeker, other displaced persons, and their host communities to access inclusive education and training in national systems. These include primary, secondary, and tertiary education; and skills-training programmes that lead to certified professional and TVET education access.

With additional funding, UNHCR could support

- **1,560** refugee, asylum-seeker, and other displaced persons (displaced people) attend language classes
- **800** displaced children access primary education
- **800** displaced children access secondary education
- **300** displaced children stay in school and achieve academic permanence

Country highlights



ARUBA AND CURAÇAO

While Venezuelan children have access to formal primary and secondary schooling in Aruba, administrative requirements, transportation costs, and language barriers continue to compromise their access to education. Moreover, mandatory insurance costs constitute a barrier since many families cannot afford these fees. 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 number (Censo), which is required for the issuance of certificates that would allow them to eventually integrate into the labour market. Finally, bullying and xenophobia might also affect displaced children who manage to enrol.

In Curaçao, children over the age of 4 can register in the public education system. Access to education for unregistered Venezuelan children, however, is hindered by a lack of documentation; 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 supplies, uniforms, and transportation prevent many displaced children from enrolling and attending school. The lack of recognition of diplomas issued in Venezuela, lack of access to universities for people in an irregular status, and language barriers often hinder enrolment into tertiary education.

Prioritized specific needs

- Support Dutch language classes for displaced children, seeking better integration into the national education system and increased school performance.
- Support the Department of Education to increase capacity of special education institutions, advocating for the inclusion of displaced children with special education needs.
- Increase the cashed-based assistance for covering the enrolment, insurance, and transportation fees for the out-of-school children.
- Create opportunities for technical, vocational, and adult education opportunities.
- Advocate for diploma and certification recognition.

In Guyana, all children have the right to access education regardless of their status. However, many refugee children are not enrolled in school mainly due to space limitations in the existing public schools in certain areas, the lack of schools in the communities where they live, or the distance to school that are sometimes in very remote areas. Additionally, language barriers limit children and adults from integrating into society and obtain an education or employment. In response, UNHCR has been providing English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for out of school children since 2019. During the pandemic, the methodology veered towards online language training for children and adults. Furthermore, UNHCR's educational support also provide guidance to parents on enrolling children into schools, support persons to access needed services, and foster social cohesion within and across communities through outreach and dialogue.

GUYANA

Prioritized specific needs

- Support school permanence and local integration of displaced children.
- Strengthen ESL programmes to broaden geographical reach.
- Prioritize community-based ESL classes for out of school children and afterschool classes for enrolled children in region 1.
- Reactivate the school meals programmes for extremely vulnerable children.
- Create a "shadow teachers" programme to support the inclusion of displaced children in public schools.



PANAMA

Refugees, asylum-seekers, and other displaced populations generally have access to the national education system, and most school-aged children are enrolled in primary or secondary levels. However, Panama closed its schools in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and has delivered education virtually ever since. Panama continues to be the country with the highest number of days of full school closure, according to a UNICEF [report](#).

The prolonged suspension of classes and the subsequent transition to the virtual platforms have implied important challenges for the vulnerable populations, especially due to lack of equipment, limited access to mobile connectivity, inadequate spaces to study, and the growing reliance on caregivers as educators at home. Furthermore, the economic impact of the COVID-19 health crisis has also triggered a mass transition of students from the private sector to the public system, which could saturate the existing quotas in educational centres and put a strain on the available space once blended or face-to-face classes resume. Education officials estimate that by the end of 2021, 70% of the schools could reopen, especially since 85% of teachers and 15% of administrative staff have already been vaccinated.

Prioritized specific needs

- Promote school permanence through the support of displaced vulnerable families with electronic devices, connectivity, and cash and voucher assistance (CVA) for school supplies.
- Strengthen advocacy for the inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeker children in the public education system.
- Promote access to education as means of social integration.

Of the over 20,800 refugees and asylum-seekers currently registered with UNHCR, some 4,500 are children (roughly 70% of whom are school-aged). Close to 86% of UNHCR's registered population of concern are Venezuelan¹.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Local regulations do not allow for refugees and asylum-seekers to access public education even though Trinidad and Tobago ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 2000, and developed the National Draft Education Policy 2017-2022, which states that education is a basic human right for all children regardless of status. UNHCR and other partners created [Equal Place](#), a programme designed to provide access to quality, accredited education to eligible children. Furthermore, UNHCR, UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and several local NGOs have formed the Education Working Group (EWG) to address and coordinate matters related to the access to education for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Prioritized specific needs

- Strengthen the Equal Place programme to become integrated into the local system.
- Strengthen advocacy with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Security to allow mainstreaming of forcibly displaced children into the local education system, including children with specific needs.
- Promote technical, vocational, and adult education opportunities.

¹ Figures as of 30 June 2021.