



INTEGRATION

LIZACIÓN DE LOS VENEZUELANOS EN EL CARIBBEANO
SUB-REGIONAL PLATFORM

May 2021

DE RENOVACIÓN O CAMBIO DE CATEGORÍA MIGRATORIA
DE LOS EXTRANJEROS ACOGIDOS AL
PLAN NACIONAL DE REGULARIZACIÓN DE EXTRANJEROS
(PNRE)INTEGRATION
SECTORESTIMATED POPULATION
BY THE END OF 2021

224,000

PEOPLE IN NEED OF
INTEGRATION

304,914

PEOPLE TARGETED FOR
ASSISTANCE RELATED TO
INTEGRATION

7,070

Context

Integration is defined as “*the two-way process of mutual adaptation between [refugees and] migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby [refugees and] migrants are incorporated into the [legal], social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community*”. Integration allows the host community to benefit from skills, expertise, and knowledge of refugees and migrants as they become self-reliant and contribute positively to the receiving country. The process has positive impacts on the coexistence between the host society and refugees and migrants, both as individuals and as groups.

The legal status and access to rights and social services of refugees and migrants underlies integration, a process that cannot occur in isolation. It **intersects with several areas**, including employment, labour opportunities, non-discrimination, social cohesion, public health, education, stay-permits, nationality security, as well as the protection of human rights. In the context the pandemic, *the inclusion of refugees and migrants into COVID-19 vaccination campaign will be considered to be a part of the integration process*.

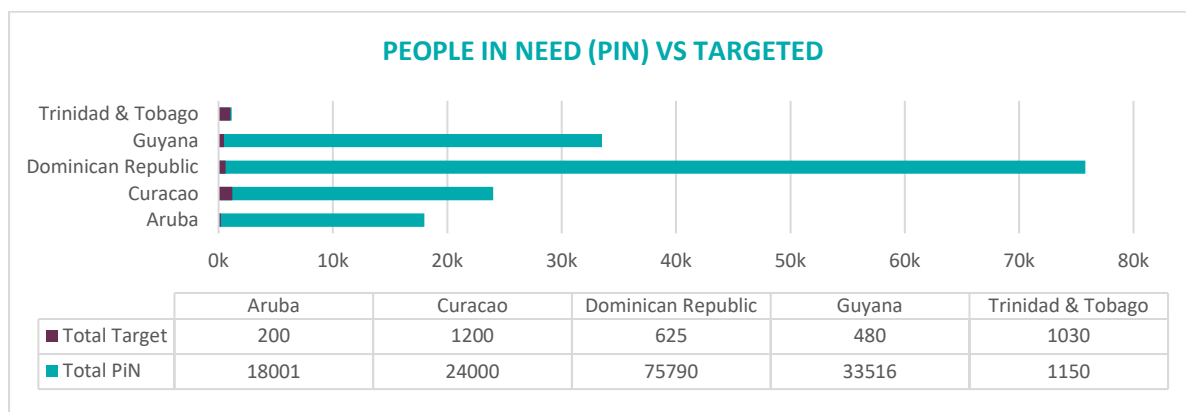
Despite acute humanitarian needs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the five national platforms have continued to make efforts to implement integration activities as the prospects for Venezuelans across the sub-region demonstrate the need for enhanced focus on long-term planning and solutions.

Over recent years, rising numbers of Venezuelans fleeing life-threatening widespread food and medicine shortages, spiraling inflation and violence in Venezuela, have sought protection in the Caribbean. As of December 2020, 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 Tobago¹. *Partners estimate that by the end of 2021 over 170,000 Venezuelans and 36,000 people from host communities will be in need of assistance and protection in the Caribbean*. This total of over 214,000 estimated population in need in the Caribbean in 2021 represents an increase of almost 10 per cent as compared to the 194,600 estimated for 2020².

¹ For further information R4V activities in the Caribbean, please see the [Caribbean Subregional Platform End of Year Report 2020 \(r4v.info\)](#).

² 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](#).

Due to irregular status and the lack of alternative legal pathways to regularization for some refugees and migrants, perspectives for Venezuelans’ integration in the Caribbean sub-region are often very limited. Moreover, *the COVID-19 pandemic has made integration less attainable*, putting an additional strain on Venezuelans and the societies where they live. Very often, social security and welfare schemes do not include refugees and migrants, especially those undocumented. Depending on the Caribbean country, access to education and healthcare is either challenging or non-existent. Coupled with the economic downturn, **many refugees and migrants are left with very few resources to meet their basic needs**, and more individuals have become dependent on the already limited humanitarian assistance.



Source: 2021 RMRP

Situation, Needs and Challenges- Sub-regional Overview

As numbers of Venezuelans in the Caribbean continue increasing despite COVID-19 related movement restrictions and border lockdowns, concerns about **growing pressure over public resources of host countries have risen** where local populations manifest that the influx is straining already vulnerable labour markets and limited resources. In Aruba and Curaçao, two of the countries hosting the world’s largest number of refugees and migrants per capita, there are rising **concerns over absorption capacity**. Trinidad and Tobago also continuously expressed apprehension about lacking resources to cope with the needs of refugees and migrants. This lack of resources, coupled with **cultural and language barriers**, has led to an increase in intolerance and xenophobia in most Caribbean R4V countries, where Venezuelans are often perceived as threats and competition on the job market, and driving down salary rates by accepting lower rates for work in the informal sector. Furthermore, prevalent opinions stigmatizing Venezuelans as sex workers makes their integration into host countries and the fostering of peaceful co-existence in local Caribbean communities that receive them more difficult. There are also misconceptions regarding Venezuelans who are often blamed for the spread of COVID-19 in the host countries.

Additionally, the **lack of regular legal status** of many Venezuelans and barriers to regularization pathways, including newer requirements to obtain a visa directly in their home country, continue to affect **access to basic rights** such as formal accredited education, formal labour markets, health and financial systems. In turn, this context exposes Venezuelan refugees and migrants to risks of abuse and exploitation and hinders opportunities for integration.

Even in countries where official access to public primary and secondary schooling is granted to all children including R&Ms, there are **administrative, financial, language and cultural barriers to education**, and opportunities to access tertiary education throughout the region remain limited amidst a general move to remote learning modalities, brought about by the pandemic. This has imposed additional challenges for learners who do not have access to technology and connectivity. There have also been occasional reports of xenophobia and bullying in schools against Venezuelan children. On the other hand, the lack of English, Papiamentu and Dutch language skills is a major barrier to accessing fairly paid jobs for many Venezuelans, further compounded by limited day care alternatives for single parents or caregivers. In addition, legal barriers and the temporary nature of the work exemption permit prevents employers from hiring Venezuelan refugees and migrants because of uncertainties over turnover.

All these factors present challenges to integration, making them key areas of intervention for R4V partners across the Caribbean sub-region.

Aruba

Promoting integration of Venezuelans in the Aruban society continues to be a main priority for RMRP partners in 2021. Integration remains **challenging due to the generalized lack of regular status and sporadic cases of xenophobia**, including denigrating comments against Venezuelan women made in public spaces, bullying in schools and discriminatory attitudes by other Latin American communities.

The irregular status and lack of accessible legal pathways prevent most Venezuelans in Aruba from securing formal employment and livelihood opportunities. Moreover, [refugees and migrants are required to identify guarantors to apply for work and stay-permits](#). For Venezuelans registered with the government, access to work permits is a **challenging, uncertain and tedious process, often deterring them from applying**. While xenophobia is not a widespread phenomenon on the island, the unanticipated and sudden increase in the Venezuelan population without the development of social cohesion programmes, and the perceived “threat” that refugees and migrants pose as competition in the labour market, exposes them to intolerance and rejection.

The negative impact of COVID-19 restrictions on Aruba’s tourism-dependent economy has made integration more challenging for Venezuelans and has [led a significant number of individuals to return to their country of origin and left others facing eviction or other economic hardships](#). As of December 2020, approximately 6,000 refugees and migrants, of various nationalities, including Venezuelans lost their jobs and subsequently their guarantors, increasing their risk of becoming irregular. [Restrictions to stay in regular status remained linked to work availability](#), but jobs continued to be prioritized for Arubans.

R4V partners engaged in advocacy efforts including the regional *Acortemos Distancias (One Step Closer) anti-xenophobia campaign*, with a strong emphasis on initiatives to raise awareness and promote unity between host community and refugees and migrants. One of the associated events took place on 08 March 2021 where a unity-walk and awareness campaign to advocate for the equal rights for women and celebrate International Women’s Day.

Curaçao

The Curaçaoan government estimates that approximately **10,000 documented Venezuelan** migrants and refugees may have [overstayed their short to long-term residency permits](#), including the 4,000 regularized Venezuelans registered at the civil registry as of July 2019. There are further estimates of **over 6,000 possibly undocumented Venezuelans arrived through irregular entry channels** into the country.³ Borders with Venezuela have been closed since early 2019. This, combined with pandemic measures, have resulted in notable decreases in overall entries, although Venezuelans reportedly continue to travel irregularly by boat.

Venezuelans in Curaçao suffer the effects of an **irregular status**. Most work in the informal sector, putting them at risk of socio-economic insecurity, maltreatment, and exploitation. Venezuelans living with an irregular status cannot access formal, public social safety nets nor health care. **Lack of recognition of their diplomas** also prevents them from accessing the formal job market. This combined with a **lack of knowledge of local languages** (Dutch and Papiamentu), often creates barriers to integration. **Xenophobia** has been observed since the beginning of the Venezuelan influx to Curaçao, particularly within the competitive job market.

In 2020 and well into the first quarter of 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the economy of Curaçao, curtailing livelihood options and income generating opportunities for refugees, migrants and local communities. Threats to livelihoods and layoffs in major companies set off a series of actions ranging from protests to arson and looting. Among refugees and migrants, there were documented cases of **landlords forcibly evicting Venezuelan tenants**, who are unable to keep up with rent payments.

By March 2021, the government revealed [an offer of residency permit for refugees and migrants who entered the island before April 2020](#), overstayed their permits and were [residing irregularly on the island](#). This provided a very limited pathway for some undocumented refugees and migrants to regularize their stay in Curaçao, as

³ R4V National Platform, Curaçao, 2019, Internal Report

the offer required applicants to have private medical insurance, proof of employment, a valid passport, birth certificate and police certificate of good character, most of which are not easily obtainable for refugees and migrants from Venezuela in Curaçao.

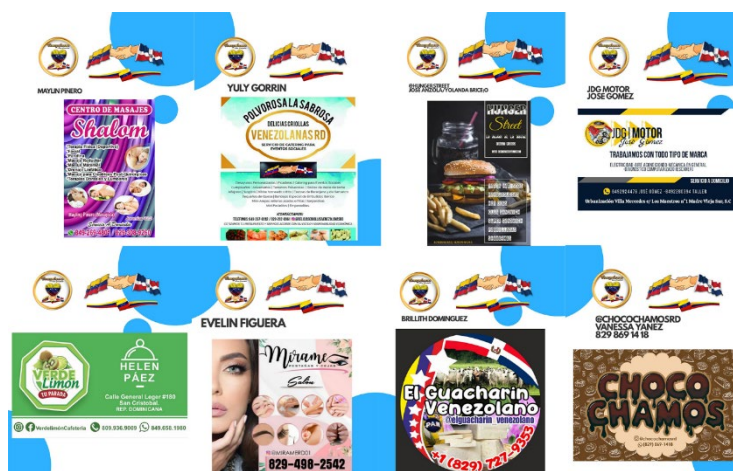
Dominican Republic

In the Dominican Republic, the landscape for integration of Venezuelans into local society differs slightly from other Caribbean countries. On the one hand, **language is not an obstacle** and on the other, Dominican labour laws do not limit hiring foreign workers to only those who hold regular migratory status as employers can apply for work permits on their behalf; **there is even an interest by some employers to hire Venezuelan nationals**, though challenges associated with irregular status deters employers from hiring. The cost of securing work permits is high, and there is no guarantee that a worker will remain within their employ once registered, nor is there any certainty of how long the regularization process could take. Venezuelans have **access to primary public healthcare and basic education systems** in the country. An R4V study on livelihoods of Venezuelans in the Dominican Republic and the ILO's 2020 research '*Promoción de Medios de Vida para personas Venezolanas en Republica Dominicana*' demonstrated that although many Venezuelans have **strong educational backgrounds and professional experience**, most are not able to access formal employment due to their irregular status in the country. As this the case for the majority of Venezuelans, many struggle to meet their basic needs and are at increased risk of labour exploitation. Venezuelans also encounter barriers to pursuing **tertiary education and validating their university diplomas**.

Alternatively, some Venezuelans started small businesses, although many lack the seed capital and face **hindrances in accessing loans**, another obstacle to potential entrepreneurial activities, **financial inclusion and social cohesion**. In turn, despite the impact of COVID-19 on successful businesses, many managed to keep afloat.

The usual process for accessing residence or work visas is complex, and begins, in accordance with the provisions of immigration and labour legislation, at the Dominican Republic consulate in the country of origin. This, in the case of Venezuelans who were already in the DR increased the cost of the process that included **airfare, penalties for late stay and even costs to accelerate procedures in Venezuela**.

The return of Venezuelans to their country also bore significant risk because there was no guarantee that their visas would be approved, not to mention the risk of persecution that some may face. After the COVID-19 outbreak, it became very difficult for Venezuelans to apply for these residence and work visas. A regularization/normalization process⁴ was launched on 5 April 2021 and plans to provide non-resident migratory status to 100,000 Venezuelans currently living irregularly in the country.



Mosaic showing some of the small business helped by R4V partners in the DR with seed capital

Guyana

The **open-door policy** of the Government of Guyana and its willingness to assist displaced Venezuelans have been commendable. Venezuelans in Guyana have **access to life-saving medical care, free of charge** at public

⁴ 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](#).

health facilities **Venezuelan youth attend local schools**; and indigenous refugees and migrants from Venezuela have found a **haven in Guyanese Warao indigenous communities**. However, the large influx has put a strain on the capacity to absorb the current demand. The Government also allowed the issuance of **temporary, three-month stay permits** which allow refugees and migrants to regularize their presence in the country, however this permit does not grant them the right to work legally. These measures have helped to provide temporary protection for these refugees and migrants, however, more remains to be done in paving a pathway for their integration into the local Guyanese communities.

The **lack of work permits** for Venezuelans is among the main issues preventing integration and putting them at risk of exploitation while keeping them in a precarious socioeconomic situation. The impacts of COVID-19 and subsequent closure of businesses have further reduced labour opportunities for **Venezuelans and some have been moving to mining areas**, where protection risks are heightened. Moreover, the **lack of recognition of degrees and certificates** from Venezuela also prevents Venezuelans from accessing formal jobs that corresponds to their skills. While the co-existence between Venezuelan population and the host community in Guyana remains generally peaceful, some xenophobic acts are reported intermittently.

Trinidad & Tobago

As the influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants continues, the twin-island nation of **Trinidad and Tobago** is faced with numerous challenges to integration. The primary challenge to the progression of integration efforts lies in perceptions surrounding Venezuelan refugees and migrants. From a local perspective, there are concerns over the limited capacity in the nation's job market and the state's economic capacity to cater for the needs of a large refugee and migrant population. [*Government officials have even argued that Trinidad and Tobago's status as a Small Island Developing State \(SIDS\) limits its capacity to host refugees and migrants.*](#) This, combined with xenophobia and the perception of Venezuelans' links to criminal activity, create difficult grounds for promoting integration within the host society.

While the registration exercise conducted by the authorities in June 2019 was a commendable, positive and promising step toward promoting integration for some 16,500 Venezuelan adult and 2,500 children already living in the country, those who arrived after the registration exercise, or who were unable to register, continue to struggle to access basic services and livelihoods. The R4V platform estimates that 24,000 Venezuelans have settled in the country in 2020. After the government-led registration process, Venezuelans wanting to enter Trinidad and Tobago were required to apply for a visa in their country of origin. Additionally, from 8 March to 9 April 2021, Venezuelans registered in June 2019 were invited to do a [*re-registration exercise*](#), requiring them to [*update their details*](#) to be granted six-month extensions on their stay permits. As of 29 March, approximately 13,800 Venezuelans from the eligible 16,523 participated in the exercise.

Lack of a regular status prevents Venezuelans from accessing the formal labor market, causing many of them to work informally in precarious conditions and putting them at risk of exploitation. It also prevents Venezuelans from accessing financial services, including bank accounts and loans. Language is another obstacle preventing their integration.

Other barriers to integration are that Venezuelan youth and children have no access to formal, public education and certification, preventing them from social and cultural inclusion and limiting prospect opportunities for professional development. Furthermore, xenophobia and discrimination against refugees and migrants in general, including in the workplace, continue to be noted in the media and public opinion.

Achievements

Promote livelihoods, access to work, recognition of diplomas, vocational training, and language courses

To ensure a long-term and cohesive approach to integrating Venezuelan refugees and migrants, R4V partners collaborate with the private sector, government institutions, and civil society organizations. Throughout the subregion, R4V partners advocate with national authorities for **easier access to work and stay permits** and the easing of procedures for formalizing employment arrangements; matters which are core to the integration

efforts. **Accreditation of Venezuelan diplomas** and professional skills have also featured as key discussion points, and partners focused efforts on assisting Venezuelans who can access the labor market to **review their skills and find appropriate jobs**. In particular, Trinidad and Tobago has placed emphasis on the development of skills in sectors where there is a labour shortage and in alignment with the country's development needs. Refugee and migrant women were trained in basic sewing skills to make reversible bags, as well as masks and bags made from recyclable materials to sell. Vocational trainings extended to Basic make-up, Pinata and Party Decoration, creating avenues for self-employment. Furthermore, activities were undertaken relating to empowering 200 participating Venezuelan refugee and migrant women and young adults through skill development and micro enterprise inclusion. R4V partners also liaised with companies about vacancies, providing technical support, oversight, and host community navigation for agricultural and construction workers. Support was also provided for refugees and migrants to participate in established small business such as the San Rafael Collective, producers and distributors of handcrafted soaps.

In Guyana, partners supported traditional **livelihood activities** such as hammock weaving for Guyanese and Venezuelan Warao women, while business development online courses have been delivered R4V partners also embarked on a Small Business Grants Project, which consisted of a series of online courses including small business development, marketing and accounting. Moreover, partners provided four-month cosmetology courses and internship programs and are collaborating with the National Agricultural Research Institute to provide farming opportunities by providing refugees and migrants with tools and plant seeds, in areas such as Lethem (Region 9) and Mabaruma and Port Kaituma (Region 1) where job opportunities are limited. **In Aruba, refugees and migrants were enrolled in vocational training and assisted to launch** a community business dedicated to the production and selling of Venezuelan food.

Additionally, appealing agencies, in consultation with government authorities, continue to work on improving **access to education** and are providing access to **language, cultural and psycho-social support**. Most Caribbean RMRP partners support second language courses to increase individuals' marketability and ensure their ability to carry out duties efficiently while on the job. In Guyana, for instance, R4V partners provide **English as a Second Language classes** in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and local communities to bridge language gaps, and foster integration in schools and communities. In Curaçao, Venezuelan children attending school were provided with after school Dutch and Papiamentu classes. In **Aruba** partners facilitated 8-week language courses in English, Dutch and Papiamentu, with the aim of helping Venezuelans transition more smoothly into Aruban life. In Trinidad and Tobago, partners referred 235 participants to a 90-hour course of English as a Second Language, facilitated through the University of the West Indies.



In May 2020 at an event hosted by the National Immigration Institute, R4V partners launched a joint market assessment on livelihoods for the Venezuelan population in the Dominican Republic. The study highlighted the skills and expertise that Venezuelan refugees and migrants bring to the Dominican Republic, underscoring the fact that they are an added resource to the country's national strategy.

Read it [here](#)



Reduce xenophobia and promote co-existence and sensitization

RMRP partners working in the integration sector focused on the promotion of social cohesion and curbing of xenophobia and discrimination through advocacy efforts, including through the development of **awareness, sensitization and anti-discrimination initiatives** geared at combatting xenophobia were complemented to create awareness and promote unity between host community and refugees and migrants. Additionally, R4V partners established a **counter-xenophobia working group**, with the aim of discussing integration issues and of advocating for co-existence.

To promote social cohesion in Trinidad and Tobago, *anti-xenophobic messages* were posted through the *United Nations Information Center* in the Caribbean on *Facebook* and *Twitter* reaching 5,624 people. In the Dominican

Republic, partners launched the communication campaign titled "Bajo el mismo sol" ("Under the Same Sun") that reached, more than 175,000 Venezuelans and host community members. Additionally, free medical attention continued to be provided to both Venezuelans and Dominicans during medical brigades.

Socioeconomic integration

RMRP partners further ensured that Venezuelans benefitted from Cash-Based Interventions (CBI), financial inclusion and income-generating activities. Increased challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic required R4V partners to ramp up efforts and work with local foodbanks, local parishes and national donors to supply basic needs such as food and hygiene products to Venezuelans in need. In an attempt to cope with the COVID-19 context, partners established support hotlines and moved many services such as registration, psycho-social support, access to information and educational programs to online modalities. Additionally, advocacy with financial institutions to adjust their Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements⁵ continues, in an effort to promote financial inclusion.

Cultural integration

In 2020, some positive steps in advocating for the integration of Venezuelans took place and were met with excellent responses. All Caribbean countries engaged in a series of festivals to mark World Refugee Day 2020. Some celebrations included music concerts, art expositions, bilingual story telling activities and screenings of films, with the purpose of promoting commonalities, nudging changes in perspectives and ultimately fostering integration through social activities.



Sácale Lo Pie music video. [Watch here](#)

Social integration fairs were hosted in the Dominican Republic. Separately, thanks to a joint initiative by R4V and the Office of National Immigration, a video clip featuring Dominican singer Xiomara Fortuna, in Spanish and Haitian Creole, was released on social media on 13 May 2020. The song *Sácale Lo Pie* is an Afro Caribbean tune that promoted stay at home measures and solidarity during the pandemic.

Other examples of cultural integration in the sub-region, is the partnering of a renowned Venezuelan and Dominican orchestras to create the binational Dominican-Venezuelan symphony orchestra, hosting charity galas with a varied programme of classical music and folklore from both countries. Some of the events are supported by R4V partners.

In 2021, in Guyana, one partner started collaborating with a Cuban radio program host where discussions revolve around various topics on displacement and integration. The objective is to bring Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Guyanese, and returnees to discuss specific topics, including cultural views. R4V partners will participate in the discussion to bring awareness about xenophobia and more.



2020 World Refugee Day concert. [Watch here](#)



One of the most recent renderings into 2021 being an artistic presentation of Lilliam's party (Parranda de Lilliam).

⁵ Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements are verification requirements for creating an account or accessing a service which often require potential customers to provide valid identification or proof of address; something many R&Ms are unable to do.

Integration through Inclusion in COVID-19 Vaccination Campaigns

COVID-19 vaccination campaigns were launched in all Caribbean countries, where all persons, including refugees and migrants in an irregular status, were included in inoculation plans, apart from the Dominican Republic. All five countries announced that medical and other front-line workers, and particularly vulnerable persons, including older refugees and migrants, would be among the first to receive vaccines, with other groups gaining access, based on availability of the vaccinations. With the exception of Aruba and Curacao, prioritization of the groups in the initial stages and had not yet been fully defined. Further, procurement of the vaccines has not been completed, hence when they can be made available to the various groups, including Venezuelans, is yet to be clear. R4V partners continued discussions with governments in all countries and will support the campaigns wherever possible including implementing information hotlines, reaching out through social media outlets, translating materials into Spanish to improve communications with refugees and migrants on COVID-19 and vaccination updates. In Curaçao, where public health services do not reach refugees and migrants, [the R4V partner clinic is ramping up efforts](#) to ensure that all persons in an irregular status are immunized. The vaccination program offered through the allocated health services opened in May, introducing a walk-in option, thereby not requiring pre-registration, which was a deterrent for irregular refugees and migrants to vaccinate. In addition, mobile vaccination units have been introduced and free transport provided.

Way Forward

Though the perception across the Caribbean sub-region is that the Venezuelan crisis is likely to provoke economic difficulties in host countries – all heightened during the pandemic – numerous studies show that the presence and subsequent integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants can contribute positively to the economy of their host countries. [blog linked to the International Monetary Fund, Venezuela’s influx has the potential to raise GDP growth in receiving countries, if accompanied by the effective policies](#). Similarly, in the Caribbean, economies can benefit from the contributions of refugees and migrants once they are effectively integrated into domestic labour markets. Some refugees and migrants have skill sets that differ from that of locals and might therefore be able to seek distinct job opportunities within the local labor market.

Based on these assumptions, and with the objective of including Venezuelans into the fabric of host societies, R4V partners continue to advocate for regularized status and the development of policies conducive to their integration. These efforts are complemented by other priority areas, including **labour market assessments, mapping of skills among the Venezuelan community, dissemination of information on how to sponsor job permits, sensitization on labour rights and against labour exploitation, and ensuring that the response to integration needs is development-oriented with a view towards maintaining stability.**

Among these areas of intervention, support for livelihoods and income generation opportunities via training, entrepreneurship and language/cultural development offers prospects for enhanced socioeconomic integration. Initiatives will also prioritize job-fairs and strengthening national employment agencies. By providing the right conditions and advocating for more integration opportunities, these efforts can help refugees and migrants to thrive and contribute to their host community in a meaningful way, [bringing mutual adaptation and promoting a peaceful co-existence](#).⁶

⁶ Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for migrants and Refugees, Policy guide prepared by interagency team coordinated by the United Nations Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in close collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).