

# Children on the move: Social protection and public response—Venezuelan migration in Latin America and the Caribbean

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**The number of Venezuelans fleeing the economic, political and social crisis** in the country has been rapidly growing over the last few years. From late 2018 to February 2021, 2.8 million people had fled the country, leading to a total of 5.4 million displaced individuals. Almost 80 per cent of them moved to other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), particularly Colombia, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil in South America; Panama in Central America; and Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean.

Displaced Venezuelans, particularly children and women, face several risks and vulnerabilities in all stages of the migratory process (e.g., exposure to child labour, lack of access to education and supportive policies; gender-based violence). Social protection policies have enormous potential to mitigate these risks, but non-nationals usually face legal and administrative challenges to access social protection systems.

Against this background, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNICEF LACRO) developed a report analysing the access of displaced Venezuelans to the national social protection systems of the seven main host countries (Palomo, Machado, and Sato 2022). It discusses the potential of social protection systems to protect and integrate migrants; analyses legal frameworks that guarantee the access of non-nationals; shows how intraregional migration flows contributed to setting up migratory governance in LAC; and indicates sources of financing to expand social protection to non-nationals. The main findings regarding the access of displaced Venezuelans to basic services (i.e. health care and education) and social protection systems are summarised below:

- **Education:** Except for Trinidad and Tobago, all analysed countries allow displaced children to enrol in public schools, regardless of their migratory status. The main barriers are practical challenges, such as lack of school vacancies, particularly in cross-border areas, and validation of education documents to recognise previous achievements. Good practices to overcome the latter (e.g. relaxing requirements to access schools) were identified in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.
- **Health:** Statutory coverage of basic healthcare and emergency services is available to Venezuelan children and their families in all analysed countries, regardless of their migratory status. In Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Panama, and Peru, they can also access maternity and child health services, vaccines and treatment against

sexually transmitted infections. However, in practice, migrants face practical difficulties such as lack of information, costs, and language barriers (in Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago) to access health services.

- **Social registries:** The study only found evidence that Venezuelan families are being included in the Brazilian and Chilean social registries. Problems such as lack of documentation, as well as human and structural limitations prevent social workers and social registries to identify the most vulnerable people.
- **Cash transfer programmes:** Only Brazil and Chile specify the eligibility of Venezuelan families for their cash transfers. Eligibility is restricted to regular migrants, registered in the social registries and who comply with other eligibility criteria these programmes. The exclusion of undocumented migrants means that, in practice, some of the most vulnerable individuals are not covered.
- **School feeding programmes:** The study found eligibility restrictions for migrant children enrolled in schools running school feeding programmes. Therefore, except for Trinidad and Tobago—which imposes restrictions for undocumented children to access education—all countries allow migrant children to access school feeding programmes once they are included in the educational system. Therefore, this type of programme is the most accessible social assistance benefit for non-national children.
- **Social services:** Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru offer social services on a universal basis, with a focus on children and adolescents. They have allowed the inclusion of Venezuelan children and adolescents among the beneficiaries of social services.
- **Emergency programmes:** Documented Venezuelan migrants were eligible to emergency cash transfer programmes that were created during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, Chile, and Colombia.

#### Reference:

Palomo, N., A. C. Machado, and L. Sato. 2022. "Niñas, niños y adolescentes en movimiento: dimensión y respuesta pública desde la protección social. Un análisis de la migración venezolana en países de América Latina y el Caribe." *Research Report* No. 71. Brasília and Panama City: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.