



©UNICEF Colombia / 2023 / Ossa

UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

COLOMBIA

Reaching the final mile for all migrant children to access education

13 June 2023

Historically, there has been regular migration between Colombia and Venezuela; however, in recent years, more Venezuelans have migrated due to economic hardship and political strife in their country. Today, over 2.5 million Venezuelans are seeking [regular migratory status in Colombia](#), and there is an undetermined number of irregular Venezuelan migrants in the country. These migrants—who are searching for better and safer lives—face multiple barriers in accessing education and social services, including lack of knowledge of the Colombian education system, lack of legal requirements and inadequate documentation. Furthermore, school dropout and retention remain pervasive issues in the country, with [2.6 million children out of school](#), including at least 32,000 from Venezuela.

In response, the Government of Colombia adopted an [open-door policy](#) that offers regularization pathways for migrants to access services legally in the country. In 2018, the Ministry of National Education established formal guidelines to address legal barriers and promote education access for Venezuelan migrants. To date, 586,917 Venezuelan refugee and migrant children are enrolled in the school system, representing 6 *per cent* of total enrolment of children in the Colombian education system. Additionally, 61,959 Venezuelan children under five years old are enrolled in early childhood education (ECE) facilities delivered by the Government.

In 2021, the Government launched the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV) to regularize the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia. Adopting a comprehensive approach, UNICEF is working with the Government to enhance the effective integration of Venezuelan children and adolescents, focusing on specific retention measures within the school system while also promoting the fulfilment of rights on protection, health and nutrition. To raise awareness of the ETPV among migrant communities, UNICEF has supported pre-registration processes in workshops, mainly in border territories, and assisted in scheduling appointments for onsite biometric registration and delivering temporary protection ID cards. Ultimately, UNICEF aims to address barriers experienced by Venezuelan migrant children, both at school and community levels: our goal is to improve basic early literacy outcomes,

ensuring effective integration with host community children and supporting their learning trajectories in Colombia.

RESULTS

- Since 2021, with strategic and technical support from UNICEF, the Government of Colombia has supported approximately 334,505 children and adolescents (51 *per cent* girls) to transition back to formal education and strengthen their foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Of these, 47,786 are migrant or refugee children.
- Additionally, in 2022, UNICEF Colombia reached about 98,000 children (including 14,000 migrant children) and 781 teachers with learning-based interventions, resulting in a 5.6 percentage improvement in reading and writing skills.
- In 2022, around 730,000 Venezuelan children advanced in their regularization process in Colombia, with UNICEF providing support to 225,000 of them. UNICEF assisted in data quality control and verification, registration campaigns at schools and biometric registration across the country.
- To bridge learning gaps, UNICEF supported a [formative evaluation](#) process called '[Evaluar para Avanzar](#)' (Evaluate to advance), led by the Ministry of National Education. It set out to identify learning losses in schools and help teachers design specific individual recovery plans to close those gaps. This evaluation reached over 5 million students (over 58 *per cent* of all students in the country) including over 300,000 migrants and refugees.
- UNICEF also prioritised curricular flexibility for accelerated learning attainment among migrant children and adapted the '[Aprendamos Todos a Leer](#)' (Let's all learn to read) programme in 14 migrant settlements (Atlántico, Arauca, La Guajira and Norte de Santander), strengthening the educational capacity of 51 female community leaders and benefitting over 800 children and adolescents. Congruently, this

community engagement has resulted in stronger social cohesion and improved relations between the host community and refugees and migrants.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Reaching the last mile.** UNICEF has been thinking outside the box to reach the most vulnerable children and bridge them back to school. One method was training the 51 female community leaders, who had already opened their homes to receive out-of-school children, with early literacy methodology and tools.
- **More training is needed to combat prejudices.** Public officials must expand their portfolios to identify biases and barriers in the regularization process and make necessary corrections. UNICEF Colombia developed a virtual training programme called '[Transformando](#)' to provide information, cases and practical tools to promote the rights of migrant children. In 2024, UNICEF will transfer 'Transformando' to public institutions, including the education sector.
- **Flexibility must be built into programming.** By working closely with national and regional authorities, local institutions and UNICEF field offices, UNICEF has been able to adapt its approach quickly and focus on settlements that house the most disadvantaged migrant families lacking access to education and other essential services.

NEXT STEPS

To improve early learning outcomes, UNICEF is expanding '[Aprendamos Todos a Leer](#)' in 10,000 schools to reach 25 *per cent* of all Colombian schools. UNICEF will continue to ensure that out-of-school children in settlements have access to public education services provided by the Government, including ECE modalities. By adopting a [social and behaviour change](#) approach, UNICEF is also working to strengthen institutional and community capacities in education, health and nutrition. The goal is to promote positive behaviours that uphold the rights of migrant children and adolescents.

Cost effectiveness: In 2022, UNICEF provided US \$3.38 million to support Venezuelan migrant children living in Colombia, including technical support to the Government, trainings, advocacy, distribution of learning materials and data management. These interventions have aided over 225,000 children with their registration, protection and transition back to formal education.

For more information, please contact:

UNICEF Colombia Country Office: col-consultas@unicef.org
© UNICEF June 2023