

PROGRAM EVALUATION | CAPSTONE RESEARCH

Evaluation of the ‘Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean’ Program

Humanitarianism Under the Guise of International Development and Increasing Politicization

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Program Evaluated	Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean (SVMC)
Implementing Organization	Pan American Development Foundation (PADF)
Funder	U.S. Department of State — Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)
Program Value	USD \$3.1 Million
Host Countries	Trinidad and Tobago; Guyana
Target Population	40,000+ Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago
Methodology	Mixed methods: six confidential interviews + employment data for 15,000+ migrants

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Abbreviations and Definitions

Term	Definition
Assistance	Aid provided to address the physical, material and legal needs of persons of concerns to UNHCR. This may include cash, food items, medical supplies, clothing, shelter, seeds and tools, as well as the provision of infrastructure, such as schools and roads.
Child	"Every human below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier," as defined in Article 1 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus.
Displacement	The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or place of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.
Durable solutions	The means by which the situation of persons of concern to UNHCR can be satisfactorily and permanently resolved through ensuring national protection for their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.
Host community	A community that has large populations of refugees or internally displaced persons, whether in camps, integrated into households, or independently.
Host country	The country in which a non-national stays or resides, whether legally or irregularly.
Implementing partner	A partner organization which signs an implementing agreement with and receives resources from UNHCR to carry out a specific project under its own responsibility.
Legal stay arrangement	The arrangement put in place by a state to regularize the presence on its territory of a non-national that fulfils the conditions of entry, stay or residence as established by domestic law in accordance with regional and international standards.
Local integration	A durable solution for refugees that involves their permanent settlement in a host country.
LWC	Living Water Community; asylum and refugee implementing partner of the UNHCR in Trinidad and Tobago.
Migrants	There is no universally accepted definition of the term migrant; the word migrant is used as an umbrella term to refer to any person who moves within a country or across a border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.
Non-refoulement	A core principle of international human rights and refugee law that prohibits States from returning individuals in any manner whatsoever to territories where they be at risk of persecution, torture, or other forms of serious or irreparable harm.
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
PADF	Pan American Development Foundation.

PRM	U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migrants.
Protection	All activities aimed at achieving full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of international human rights, refugee, and humanitarian law.
RSD	Refugee Status Determination Procedure — The legal or administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional or national law.
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals. 17 Goals that form part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
SVMC	Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean — the program evaluated in this document.
T&T / TT	The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
Trinis*	Trinidad and Tobagonians (colloquial term used by interviewees).
UN	United Nations.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
Venes*	Venezuelans (colloquial term used by interviewees).

** Abbreviations marked with an asterisk were provided directly by confidential interviewees and reflect terms in common use among practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago. Abbreviations and definitions were drawn from the UNHCR Master Glossary: <https://www.unhcr.org/glossary/>.*

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I would like to thank all of those who helped in the successful delivery of this final product. With your encouragement, advice on ways to improve writing and research skills, and pushing through some unbelievable barriers — none of this work would have been possible. It has been a long and challenging two years, and yet there is a sense of underappreciated strength and resolve that comes over me as I prepare to close this chapter in my academic career.

I would also like to thank all the confidential interviewees who took the time out of their day, amid a global pandemic, to have an extensive conversation about a highly complex and terrible situation that continues to impact the lives of millions of Venezuelans — even those I call my friends. These interviewees risked their names in the hope of broadening the knowledge gap on what is happening on the ground in Trinidad and Tobago — and I want you to know that the work you do is valued and appreciated.

Thank you —

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Respectfully,

Johnnie Williams

Key Evaluation Findings at a Glance

Evaluation Question	Finding	Notes
Socioeconomic integration of Venezuelan migrants	UNCLEAR	<i>Data gaps prevent definitive assessment</i>
Access to legal stay arrangement	PARTIAL	<i>18,000 received minister's permit; outcomes inconclusive</i>
Durable solution to language barriers established	NO	<i>No programs reported by PADF</i>
Cross-cultural activities / communications campaigns	UNCLEAR	<i>No direct evidence; likely indirect resourcing</i>
Venezuelan children's access to education	NO	<i>40% of population; formal system closed to them</i>
Prevention of GBV, sexual exploitation, trafficking	UNCLEAR	<i>State officials implicated in trafficking (CARICOM 2019)</i>
Overall change in situation for Venezuelans in T&T	UNCLEAR	<i>Humanitarian crisis persists for the majority</i>

Color Key: ■ NO ■ UNCLEAR ■ PARTIAL

Executive Summary

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the ‘Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean’ (SVMC) program in Trinidad and Tobago — a two-year, USD \$3.1 million humanitarian initiative implemented by the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) and funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

The evaluation’s central finding is unambiguous: SVMC failed to achieve its stated goals. The program did not produce measurable outcomes for the more than 40,000 Venezuelan migrants living in legal limbo in Trinidad and Tobago. More significantly, PADF prioritized its international development mandate over its humanitarian obligations — a violation of core humanitarian principles that exacerbated conditions for an already vulnerable population and perpetuated the politicization of the humanitarian response.

This evidence-based evaluation draws on six confidential interviews with on-the-ground practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago, quantitative employment data for more than 15,000 Venezuelan migrants, a literature review of scholarly materials and government documents, and additional resources provided by PADF.

Keywords: SVMC, Venezuelan migrants, Trinidad and Tobago, Pan American Development Foundation, PADF, humanitarian aid, program evaluation, PRM, forced migration, Caribbean

Researcher's Note

In 2020, the researcher contacted a representative at the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), Trinidad and Tobago, to conduct a stakeholder interview for a separate but related capstone project. At the time, the researcher teamed with another individual to conduct a comparative study of the socioeconomic impact of Venezuelans in Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago. After a 75-minute interview, the researcher saw an opportunity to highlight the Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago and asked PADF if it were possible to work together on a research effort. PADF, Trinidad and Tobago, agreed to sign the terms of reference (ToR) with the researcher to explore the impact Venezuelans could have on the island nation given the 2030 National Development Plan and amid COVID-19. However, at the end of 2020, the researcher took an academic leave of absence, leaving the research project undone.

In the fall of 2021, the researcher returned to university and looked to finish the capstone project with PADF. In that same year, PADF had completed the 'Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean' (SVMC) program, and the organization did not answer the researcher's repeated attempts to finish the project. Given the circumstances and the requirement of a completed study, GWU officials at the Elliott School of International Affairs permitted the researcher to complete the original work if it were feasible or devise a new project. Given the extensive amount of research and work done, the researcher determined that a program evaluation was the best way to move forward and an excellent way to conclude if SVMC was effective in obtaining its goal. The following assessment represents the culmination of the initial work that began in 2020 and a thorough review of any developments in the last two years. Unfortunately, the situation remains unchanged for thousands of Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore the work of this capstone project is still needed.

Given this context, it is impossible to base the findings of this evaluation on a logic model, as the researcher signed the ToR amid the implementation of the SVMC program. The results are grounded on whether the program achieved its intended goal. It did not, and as a result the researcher offers recommendations to improve future actions.

Introduction

The relationship between development and humanitarianism remains in a nebulous state, and consequently, those in desperate need of relief are becoming increasingly more vulnerable. This is evident from this evaluation of the ‘Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean’ (SVMC), a two-year international development focused program, disguised as humanitarian aid for Venezuelans in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. The SVMC program was implemented by the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), an organization that has a 60-year reputation for addressing issues of concern for people in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) through a wide range of programs.¹ It should be noted that PADF is the nonprofit arm of the Organization of American States (OAS), and it has maintained a consultative status of the United Nations since 1974.² These relationships mean that PADF essentially carries out the work that aligns with OAS, and the organization can partner with the UN system to address human rights through its mechanisms.

In 2019, PADF received \$3.1 million in humanitarian funding to implement the organization’s two-year ‘Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean’ (SVMC) program in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. The goal was to protect and assist those who fled into the previously mentioned countries, hoping to escape the protracted crisis happening in Venezuela. However, almost two years later there are no measurable outcomes and no evidence that SVMC did anything to change the situation for Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago.

This evidence-based evaluation determined that SVMC was doomed to fail as far as humanitarian action is concerned, and PADF failed to prioritize humanitarian principles when the organization put its interest of international development ahead of life-saving emergency assistance. In so doing, the organization exacerbated the situation for Venezuelans and perpetuated the politicization of the response to the humanitarian situation in Trinidad and Tobago. As humanitarian funding for the Venezuelan migration crisis and similar events continues to be a challenge, it is imperative that donors of international aid carefully consider who is awarded money to implement response efforts and their intentions, and the humanitarian principles that are supposed to guide such action.

¹ Pan American Development Foundation. Who We Are. <https://www.padf.org/who-we-are/>.

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Civil Society Participation: Consultative Status – Pan American Development Foundation.

Venezuelan Migration Crisis

The crisis in Venezuela is extremely complex, but the issues for the country grew worse when then-President Hugo Chávez died in 2013, leaving behind his handpicked successor Nicolás Maduro to lead the country. He accelerated both authoritarian control and chaos in Venezuela, laying the groundwork for the ongoing humanitarian crisis disaster that has had far-reaching effects both in and out of the country.

Currently, more than six million people have fled Venezuela, seeking to escape the protracted crisis that does not seem to be ending anytime soon, and seeking refuge in neighboring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.³ The response to Venezuelans has varied from each country across the region. Some governments are helping and others not responding at all. The situation exacerbated the humanitarian needs of Venezuelans and further exposed them to the vulnerabilities that are still being witnessed throughout the region. To help address the crisis, the multilateral humanitarian system headed by the United Nations rolled out its inter-agency platform ‘Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Venezuela’ (RMRP), which is now known as the ‘Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela’ (R4V).⁴ This plan would coordinate the regional efforts to help ease suffering and deliver emergency assistance to those who have fled Venezuela. Moreover, R4V was created to help those governments that did not have a legal framework, the structural and functional capacity, or the economic resources to help Venezuelans to develop and strengthen their capabilities or use the existing mechanisms in the UN system to adequately serve as a host country.

Funding and International Response Gaps

Despite the growing number of Venezuelans needing humanitarian assistance and now a coordinated response, there is still a lack of attention from the international community, and there is more than a USD \$851 million-dollar (about 59.4 percent) funding gap for R4V.⁵ There are many reasons why these needs are unmet. However, for the context of this document the rationale is threefold.

First, there was no multilateral system in the Americas to respond. A source explained “following the end of the Central American wars in the 90s, UNOCHA diverted its efforts and financial resources to other parts of the world so when the humanitarian crisis began in earnest in 2014, the response was reactionary.”⁶ This absence of UNOCHA, the organization that typically coordinates humanitarian efforts and has the institutional knowledge, technical assistance, and proven experience in handling such crises, left countries in LAC — which are historically senders of

³ UNHCR. "Venezuelan situation" <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/venezuela-emergency.html>.

⁴ UNHCR and IOM. Regional Inter-Agency Coordination for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. "RMRP 2022" <https://www.r4v.info/en/document/rmrp-2022>.

⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁶ Confidential interview conducted with human rights advocate in Washington DC; 2020. Duration: 55:19.

migrants — to host the largest flow of migrants in the history of the Americas without the support or infrastructure in place to do so.

Second, those who have fled Venezuela are caught in a legal snafu. A source explained “the initial migratory flow out of Venezuela was upper- and middle-class individuals. As the population grew, the social stratification of those who left changed and with it the driving factors of the migration flow – leaving governments in the region a skeleton structure of a humanitarian response system.”⁷ Given that there was no system in place to determine asylum and the rationale as to why Venezuelans were fleeing was not explicitly known, it was hard to determine a classification of the migratory flow. Broadly speaking, Venezuelans are not considered ‘refugees’ and the conditions that have caused them to leave is not ‘forced migration’ and thus there is no formal protection system for this migratory flow under current codified international laws.

Third, the humanitarian response to Venezuelans had been politicized in 2019. In May of that year, Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, continued to rebuke Maduro, calling for a military intervention to remove the president from power. A source explained “OAS no longer appeared to be independent ... Almagro failed to remember that Member States of the organization greatly depended on funding and oil subsidies – especially those Caribbean states.”⁸ To make matters worse, the U.S. government repeatedly condemned and penalized the Maduro regime. The Trump administration signed Executive Order 13884, which introduced sanctions directed on officials,⁹ declared Maduro illegitimate and a threat to democracy and human rights.¹⁰ Moreover, the U.S. deepened its economic sanctions of Venezuela and appropriated humanitarian aid with the signage of P.L. 116-94.¹¹ Under this conjecture, it can be discerned that the conclusion of all these events has created a void in both the availability for international humanitarian funding and the international response itself.

⁷ Confidential interview conducted with a human rights advocate in Washington, DC; 2020. Duration: 55:19.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Congressional Research Service. Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions. Updated January 22, 2021. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10715.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United States Congress. Public Law 116-94-Dec. 20, 2019.: Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020.

Background: Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago is cursed by its geographical location in the context of the Venezuelan migration crisis. The island nation, which is home to about 1.4 million Trininis,¹² is just seven miles or 20 minutes by speed boat¹³ off the northeast coast of Venezuela. The two countries have a shared historical past that is not fully explored in this document, but their bilateral relations are intrinsically woven around Venezuela's extractive commodities.¹⁴ Before the U.S. sanctions in 2019, Trinidad and Tobago imported 72.37 barrels of oil per day. By 2020 this fell to 2.85 barrels, a 95.99 percent difference due to trade restrictions brought on by the U.S. government.¹⁵

Correspondingly, the government of Trinidad and Tobago continued to work to implement its national development priorities as outlined in the Vision 2030, fulfilling its obligation as a member state of the U.N. and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda.¹⁶ The government acknowledged it needed to shift from a dependency on oil, create new sustainable economic sectors, and transform the country for the 21st century.¹⁷ This ambitious goal included language that seeks to “leave no-one behind ... provide a basis for inclusion of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people in economic development planning.” By signing onto the SDG agenda, Trinidad and Tobago was legally, in the context of soft law, beholden to help ease the suffering of those who had or were fleeing to their country.

Whose Problem and What Protection Mechanism?

Currently, there are more than 40,000 Venezuelans in peril and legal limbo.¹⁸ The problem in Trinidad and Tobago for Venezuelans is twofold: there is no established mechanism to process asylum requests, and there also is a lack of political will to do something about the situation. While the island nation has long been a destination for irregular migrants, there are about 21,000 registered refugees from about 40 countries on the island today, according to the UNHCR.¹⁹ However, there is no mechanism to determine refugee status in Trinidad and Tobago, despite the country adopting a framework to create one in 2014.²⁰

¹² World Bank. Data: Trinidad and Tobago. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/trinidad-and-tobago>.

¹³ Confidential interview conducted with a migration and diaspora expert in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs. Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela Strengthen Ties.

¹⁵ CEIC. Trinidad and Tobago Crude Oil: Imports. <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/trinidad-and-tobago/crude-oil-imports>.

¹⁶ Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Planning and Development: Vision 2030.

¹⁷ UNHCR, Department of International Protection, Protection Information Section. Master Glossary. <https://www.unhcr.org/glossary/>.

¹⁸ Teff, Melanie. Forced into Illegality: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Trinidad and Tobago. Refugees International, 27 Jan. 2019.

¹⁹ UNHCR. Fact Sheet: Trinidad and Tobago. (October 2021).

²⁰ Teff, Melanie. Forced into Illegality: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Trinidad and Tobago. Refugees International, 27 Jan. 2019.

In 2015, tourism was used as a pretext for people to escape the deepening crisis unfolding in Venezuela. The government of Trinidad and Tobago observed that Venezuelan tourism to the island increased by 316 percent, from 6,000 registered arrivals in 2014 to 25,000 in 2015.²¹ Before this influx, Venezuelan tourists could travel to the island without a visa and stay for 90 days.²²

Because of the influx of arrivals and pressure from the public, there was heightened scrutiny on how to respond to the Venezuelan situation. A source explained “the government of Trinidad and Tobago initially argued resources on the island were finite and there were no mechanisms to protect Venezuelans in the way they needed.”²³ To make matters worse, the Ministry of National Security relied on detention and deportation to fix the problem.²⁴ By 2018, law enforcement cracked down on irregular migrants; an estimated 440 people were detained and another 82 were deported after giving up their passport and paying a security bond of about USD \$300.²⁵

²¹ Hidalgo, Milena. "Cold Welcome For Venezuelans in Trinidad." Institute for War and Peace Reporting, August 17, 2017.

²² Confidential interview conducted with a migration and diaspora expert in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Teff, Melanie. Forced into Illegality: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Trinidad and Tobago. Refugees International, 27 Jan. 2019.

²⁵ Ibid.

Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean (SVMC)

The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) awarded more than USD \$3.1 million in humanitarian aid to PADF to implement a two-year program, Supporting Venezuelan Migrants in the Caribbean (SVMC). A source explained that “SVMC is a short-term intervention program funded by PRM. Our goal is to partner with local organizations in host communities already working to deliver emergency assistance or to push policy changes at the local and national levels through advocacy.”²⁶ SVMC is the only humanitarian assistance program that the U.S. government has funded, and at the time of writing, there are no additional financial resources obligated. The U.S. Congress has appropriated USD \$656 million in aid, of which USD \$413 million accounts for humanitarian assistance, helping more than 4.8 million people since 2017.²⁷ This funding has supported the local integration of Venezuelans in 16 host countries in LAC.²⁸

The program was intended to provide Venezuelans in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago protection, assistance, and sustainable solutions that led to their socioeconomic integration in host communities and countries. SVMC would achieve the enthusiastic goal through three key objectives:

1. Increase the access of legal status for Venezuelan migrants
2. Promote the social integration of Venezuelans in host communities
3. Improve the lives of Venezuelan migrants and other vulnerable populations

²⁶ Confidential interview conducted with a representative working with the program implementer in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

²⁷ United States, Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Delivering Life-Saving Humanitarian Relief to Venezuelans in Need.

²⁸ Ibid.

Scope and Methodology

The purpose of this evidence-based evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the SVMC program in Trinidad and Tobago, while also determining the feasibility of the socioeconomic integration of Venezuelans in the country during and post-COVID-19.

Objectives (Figure 1: Key Evaluation Questions)

To assess whether program goals of the SVMC program were attained, the following seven key evaluation research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent has the program successfully increased the socioeconomic integration of Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago?
2. Have Venezuelans gained access to a legal stay arrangement in T&T?
3. Has the Pan American Development Foundation established a durable solution to address language barriers?
4. Are there cross-cultural activities or communications campaigns to help improve the lives of vulnerable Venezuelans?
5. Do Venezuelan children have access to education in Trinidad and Tobago?
6. Has the Pan American Development Foundation helped prevent and mitigate other risks such as gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking?
7. Has SVMC helped change the situation for Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago?

Methodology

To answer the research questions, the researcher used a mixed methods approach, collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data against the main objectives of the SVMC program.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative component of this evaluation consisted of six interviews, in which four interviewees were individuals performing on-the-ground humanitarian response in Trinidad and Tobago. All interviews were held virtually from Washington, D.C., as the COVID-19 pandemic prompted travel restrictions worldwide, and on average the conversations ranged between 42 and 75 minutes each. For the sake of confidentiality, the sources will remain unnamed in this research, as there was a concern that speaking on the matter could negatively impact the interviewee/partner organization's relationship with the government of Trinidad and Tobago, and as a result the target population. There was also a literature review of scholarly materials, government documents, and additional resources provided by PADF.

Themes from Qualitative Analysis

1. Interviewees repeatedly expressed the registration period was a missed opportunity to understand the skills that Venezuelans possessed. There was a consensus that there was a lack of clarity on the migrant registration form and the questions asked, indicating the need to explore how to better collect data, provide analysis, and care during a humanitarian emergency. However, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago could stand to absorb Venezuelans, regardless of skillset, as the country was still reeling from the economic effects of COVID-19. Under the 2030 Vision, it was a national priority to contend with both a relatively small native population that was working and a growing brain drain.
2. There was a need for a longer migrant registration period. The first registration period lasted only 14 days, and there was so much misinformation about basic logistical details that many Venezuelans were unable to register. At the time it was unclear if the government of Trinidad and Tobago would permit another opportunity in the future.
3. Increased attention to the Venezuelan situation in Trinidad and Tobago was needed. The problem itself was vastly overlooked because the population flow was smaller on the island, especially when compared to Colombia or other countries that shared a land border with Venezuela. Moreover, practitioners on the ground had a sense that government officials were becoming increasingly concerned about a possible backlash against helping Venezuelans, as many officials knew that the economic security of Trinidad and Tobago was heavily dependent on bilateral relations with Venezuela, and the need to do something had been woefully politicized by U.S. actions and the OAS.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative component includes information on Venezuelans who voluntarily answered questions about personal identifying information and employment history. This data was collected by two partnership organizations, Living Water Community and UNHCR in 2018. The researcher was provided a dataset reflecting employment information for more than 15,000 people, indicating their work history while in Venezuela and then in Trinidad and Tobago. There were more than 339 various positions in total. The researcher consolidated this information into 27 various industries.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions caused this study to be conducted remotely from Washington, D.C. There was never an opportunity to do fieldwork with Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago or build solid relationships with key stakeholders on the ground. As a result of the travel restrictions and life amid the new pandemic normal, the research process was severely impacted.²⁹

As mentioned earlier, some program implementers/partner organizations contacted for this study hesitated to provide raw data or participate in a research interview. The concern was raised as a precautionary measure, as these individuals worried that the government of Trinidad and Tobago would respond negatively to information that could denigrate officials. Due to the sensitivity of the matter, some data discussed has been excluded from this report.

²⁹ "COVID-19 What You Need to Know" Trinidad and Tobago. 2022. <https://www.visittobago.gov.tt/covid-19-what-you-need-know>.

Time could have invalidated this research. Before signing the ToR with PADF, the organization had already begun implementing the SVMC program. There were more than likely already assessments being completed by other research-minded organizations on the Venezuelan situation in Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, an academic leave of absence prevented this study from being completed by the expected due date of May 2020. In March 2022, the researcher conducted a 1.5-month review of relevant materials to assess recent developments. Any updates have been reflected in this document accordingly.

Data and Findings

Evaluation Question 1: Socioeconomic Integration — UNCLEAR

There remains a gap in the knowledge of the socioeconomic dimensions such as education, income, and occupation for Venezuelans. Partner organizations collected occupation data from more than 15,000 Venezuelans on a voluntary basis in 2018. There is no way to verify if the data collected is valid, as many Venezuelans fled to Trinidad and Tobago without documentation to prove employment history or levels of education. When asked about the absorption of Venezuelans into the formal economy, a source explained that “Trinidad and Tobago can benefit from Venezuelan migrants, as they are highly skilled workers and are being underutilized in an economy that could use a technologically savvy workforce.”³⁰

The charts below (Figures 2 and 3) reflect this data and show the various employment opportunities that Venezuelans had in their homeland and those who were able to find work in Trinidad and Tobago.

Figure 2: Work Experience — Venezuelan Migrants (Pivot Table)

Industry	T&T	Venezuela	Jobs Lost/Gained
Administration	26	1,046	-1,020
Agriculture	409	353	+56
Communications	2	16	-14
Construction	1,664	1,270	+394
Corporate	3	42	-39
Culture	6	7	-1
Education	581	3,602	-3,021
Entertainment	19	144	-125
Family Services	71	216	-145
Financial	102	271	-169
Food and Hospitality	1,260	1,290	-30
Government	0	269	-269
Health	14	223	-209
Housing	168	65	+103
Legal	0	108	-108

³⁰ Confidential interview conducted with a representative working with an independent consultant who conducts advocacy work in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 50:01.

Manufacturer	194	205	-11
Marine Infrastructure	2	47	-45
Marketing	2	31	-29
Military	0	111	-111
Oil	3	99	-96
Other	1,869	3,175	-1,306
Public Sector	210	514	-304
Retail	2	29	-27
Science and Technology	60	417	-357
Tourism	0	4	-4
Transportation	134	795	-661
Unemployed	9,116	1,572	+7,544
TOTAL	15,917	15,921	4

Figure 3: Work Experience — Venezuelans (Bar Chart). The bar chart visualization referenced in the original research document illustrates the industry-level comparison between T&T and Venezuela employment data shown in Figure 2 above. The underlying data is fully reproduced in the table above.

Evaluation Question 2: Legal Stay Arrangement — PARTIAL

The government of Trinidad and Tobago has only held two registration periods for Venezuelans to obtain a minister’s permit. This document allows Venezuelans who have registered to move from an irregular to a regular migration status, allowing recipients to gain the right to work, access to education, and a legal form of identification. However, there is contention around the minister’s permit. A source explained “approval of the permit is at the sole discretion of the minister of national security, there are no parameters on eligibility requirements, and with respect to the employment sectors there is no formal system to process minister permit holders.”³¹ At the current juncture, more than 18,000 Venezuelans have received some semblance of a legal stay. The outcomes of the minister’s permit remain inconclusive.

It is also worth noting that humanitarian practitioners on the ground in Trinidad and Tobago consider five categories that represent Venezuelans in the context of legal status. The source explained the categories are:³²

1. Minister’s permit holders: those individuals who registered during the migration registration process

³¹ Confidential interview conducted with a representative working with the program implementer in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

³² Confidential interview conducted with representative from a partnership organization in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 42:01.

2. **Work permitted:** those individuals who already had an existing authorization through an employer and paid associated fees
3. **Asylum seekers and refugees:** those individuals who entered the country, requested asylum, initiating the refugee process
4. **Refugees:** those individuals whose asylum was approved and received an identification card from UNHCR indicating as such, legally guaranteeing them protection from non-refoulement under international humanitarian laws
5. **Others:** those individuals who might have entered the country through a legal status at some point, their visa expired, and they never left (overstayers), as well as irregular migrants who never entered on a legal pathway

Evaluation Question 3: Language Barriers — NO

It is well-documented that language barriers still exist for Venezuelans who predominantly are Spanish speaking, in Trinidad and Tobago, cutting the population group off from most Trininis from a linguistic perspective. PADF has not reported any instances that demonstrated the organization found a durable solution to the language barrier.

Evaluation Question 4: Cross-Cultural Activities — UNCLEAR

No evidence supports that PADF has helped establish cross-cultural activities or communication campaigns. The organization likely aided partner organizations by allocating a certain number of financial resources to an organization embedded on the ground already doing the work.

Evaluation Question 5: Children’s Access to Education — NO

Venezuelan children do not have access to education in Trinidad and Tobago. In the public school system, there are government-run and denominational schools on the island. Although funded through the government, the latter has complete discretion over who is allowed access to education. Some denominational institutions that offer primary education are willing to let Venezuelan children in, but space is limited, and a permit to attend school is needed. The Ministry of Education is still considering the matter of granting school permits to Venezuelan children.

Conversely, there are some mechanisms to educate children in host communities. LWC and UNHCR offer temporary education services. A source explained “education of Venezuelan children is rudimentary ... the facilities are run by well-intentioned volunteers who might have been in the education profession at some point, but they are no longer educators, and the infrastructure where children are receiving schooling is not conducive to meet their educational needs.”³³

Access to education for children amid the humanitarian situation would have been a good performance indicator that the SVMC program was a success. Currently, children account for roughly 16,000 or 40 percent of the estimated 40,000 Venezuelans living in Trinidad and

³³ Confidential interview conducted with a representative working with the program implementer in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

Tobago.³⁴ Globally, children account for more than half the world's refugee population and their psychosocial, development, and education needs are often unmet and the last to be addressed.³⁵

Evaluation Question 6: Prevention of GBV, Trafficking — UNCLEAR

There is no evidence that supports PADF has helped to protect or prevent further risks to vulnerable groups directly. The organization more than likely helped these population groups by allocating a certain number of financial resources to a partner organization on the ground already working on protection matters.

Moreover, in 2019, a study on human trafficking by CARICOM reported that law enforcement and state officials on the island were the driving factors in the human trafficking problem between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago.³⁶ The damning report was a clear indication that corruption and abuse of power were prevalent and being done at the hands of the very people entrusted to protect and serve.

Evaluation Question 7: Overall Program Impact — UNCLEAR

On an individual basis, it is more than likely that the SVMC program helped to change the situation, and that is commendable given the circumstances that exist. However, for most of the Venezuelan population living in Trinidad and Tobago, the humanitarian problem persists.

³⁴ UNHCR and IOM. "UNHCR and IOM saddened at deaths of refugees and migrants in shipwreck off Venezuela coast." December 15, 2020.

³⁵ Confidential interview conducted with a representative working with the program implementer in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

³⁶ Seemungal, Joshua. 2020. "CARICOM report: T&T officers involved in sex trafficking." Guardian (Trinidad and Tobago), July 19, 2020.

COVID-19

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious respiratory disease that brought life across the globe to a near standstill.³⁷ In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the virus a pandemic because of the growing number of infected people and the rapid person-to-person transmission. Currently, COVID-19 is responsible for the deaths of more than 6.2 million people globally, there are more than 505 million confirmed cases, and 11.3 million vaccine doses have been administered.³⁸

Moreover, in Latin America and the Caribbean, COVID-19 remains a problem for the region, but it is even more difficult for countries hosting Venezuelans. Their human and economic needs are perceived as an additional challenge for governments whose budgets and resources are already limited.

In response to COVID-19, the government of Trinidad and Tobago closed national borders to all travelers, even nationals, in March 2020.³⁹ More than 3,807 Trinis have died due to COVID-19, and there are an estimated 142,919 reported cases, which accounts for roughly 204 new patients daily. There are at least 1.5 million vaccine doses, including boosters, that have been administered, resulting in about 45 percent of the country's total population being fully vaccinated.

Venezuelans already in Trinidad and Tobago were eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine to help stop the spread of the virus, according to the prime minister.⁴⁰ This posture aligns with the access to universal healthcare on the island. However, a source explained "xenophobia at the hands of some healthcare practitioners, not legal access, accounts for why some Venezuelans are not receiving health care."⁴¹ Establishing mechanisms to address vaccination and other COVID-19-related healthcare is an issue the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan has planned to tackle, but pandemic-related funding requests remains unmet.⁴²

Moreover, there was widespread news from Facebook and other social media platforms that law enforcement officials were also spreading explicit xenophobic messages, framing irregular migration as a vector for COVID-19 and encouraging citizens to report suspicious activity (Figure 5).⁴³ Comments were enabled, allowing Facebook users to express their opinions, which could have impacted public discourse on Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago.

³⁷ Chappell, Bill. 2020. "Coronavirus: COVID-19 Is Now Officially A Pandemic, WHO Says." National Public Radio, March 11, 2020.

³⁸ World Health Organization. WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard. <https://covid19.who.int>.

³⁹ U.S. Embassy Trinidad & Tobago. Closure of Trinidad and Tobago Borders Midnight March 2022, 2020. March 21, 2021.

⁴⁰ Loop News. "COVID-19 vaccine for Venezuelans in T&T who need it, says PM." February 18, 2021.

⁴¹ Confidential interview conducted with a representative working with the program implementer in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

⁴² UNHCR and IOM. Regional Inter-Agency Coordination for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. "RMRP 2022" <https://www.r4v.info/en/document/rmrp-2022>.

⁴³ Figure 5 Source: Confidential interview conducted with a representative working with the program implementer in Trinidad and Tobago; 2020. Duration: 1:11:33.

Recommendations

After examining the SVMC program, this assessment identified three specific issues of concern that if allowed to persist will keep Venezuelans in a precarious situation while they are in Trinidad and Tobago: the lack of humanitarian funding, the politicization of the humanitarian response, and an absence of political will at almost all levels of government in Trinidad and Tobago. Given these findings, should PADF choose to implement another program in Trinidad and Tobago in the future, the organization should do the following:

1. Establish relationships with national and multinational corporations to understand the labor and workforce development needs assessment to understand the skillsets required to meet 21st century work demands. They should also develop public-private partnerships to assess the skillsets of Venezuelans and which industries they could help scale-up to promote new industries and jobs — future-proofing the country’s economy while addressing the shortage of laborers and the aging population. Also, they should partner with the Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Planning and Development to implement measurable goals through the untapped potential of the Venezuelan workforce, as these government agencies look to implement the national development plan for 2030 goals.
2. Develop a standard application employment form or an add-on to the existing “Form 17A” that better captures the skillset of Venezuelans. This new document/extra space gives registrants a better chance to expand on their work experience(s) rather than simply listing a snapshot of their ‘profession’ or ‘occupation.’
3. Prioritize humanitarian efforts over international development. While the SDGs are an important goal for all U.N. member states that adopted the measure and PADF’s mission, this agenda does not take precedence over the immediate needs in humanitarian responses. To do so violates the integrity of the U.N. policies worldwide and the humanitarian principles.
4. Devise a country-specific humanitarian program that has measurable indicators and considers diplomatic and political constraints of the host country to deliver real-world solutions. This should include measurable indicators, as the SVMC program was too broad and not quantifiable. Also, it must keep in mind that while there might be best practices or lessons learned from PADF’s programming for Venezuelans in Colombia, it is an outlier in terms of its response. PADF should not apply a one-size-fits-all approach for Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago.
5. Clearly define the role as an organization and understand that perhaps sometimes the best thing to do is nothing — especially if it means making the situation worse.

Conclusion

Managing the Venezuelan migration crisis is not an easy undertaking. The multilateral system has the tools: specialists, political insight, and the framework to come up with real-world answers to this problem. However, its weaknesses, especially its limited authority, could prove to be too difficult for the system to respond appropriately. Along the same lines, threats such as xenophobia can stop collaborative efforts on the ground throughout the region.

Based on the findings presented in this evaluation, the following conclusion is drawn of the SVMC program in Trinidad and Tobago. The program, regardless of how well-intentioned, failed to accomplish its goal of safeguarding, supporting, and producing durable solutions for more than 40,000 Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago. The program implementer failed to fully consider the role it was assuming when it accepted U.S. humanitarian aid and allowed the OAS to dictate its priorities. Moreover, PADF never expected to accomplish the program goals, as the SVMC never explicitly stated measurable goals that could be used to track progress or demonstrate a need for additional funding in the future. To make matters worse, PADF is complicit in the politicization of the humanitarian response for Venezuelans and the effects of this remain unclear. The protracted crisis in Venezuela persists, and the gap in international funding remains. Donors, aside from those listed in this document, should carefully consider PADF's priorities and relevance in the delivery of aid amid complex emergencies.

Appendix A: Statistics of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in LAC and Elsewhere

Source: International Organization for Migration (as of October 2019)

Country / Region	Number
Colombia	1,400,000
Peru	860,900
Chile	371,200
Ecuador	330,400
Brazil	212,400
Costa Rica	94,600
Mexico	46,100
Other European Countries	43,888
Dominican Republic	30,000
Trinidad and Tobago	21,000
Guyana	17,000
Aruba	16,000
Curaçao	16,000
Uruguay	13,700
Oceania	7,427
Other American Countries	6,474
Paraguay	3,800
Asia	510
Africa	553

Appendix B: Multilateral System SWOT Discussion Summary

Strengths — Internal Factors (+)	Weaknesses — Internal Factors (-)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experts who can provide technical knowledge on migration policy to support host countries • Established (and evolving) legal norms and practices to advance human and economic conditions of migrants • Readiness and desire to lead on-the-ground efforts to advance initiatives for the integration of migrant populations into host communities • Capacity to encourage and strengthen partnerships to bolster humanitarian and diplomatic efforts • Watchdog capability: monitoring the situation in host countries and countries of origin, investigating violations against human rights, and reporting on concerted efforts to manage the crisis • Forum capacity: able to host platforms such as conferences, workshops, and general assembly gatherings to garner additional support and awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal authority and autonomy: no legitimate jurisdiction to make decisions on behalf of Members and migrants that fall outside of designated authority • Lack of funding: unable to provide human services such as health care, housing, education, and food assistance in the mid- and long-term due to a lack of financial resources • Hierarchical: the system encourages rigid bureaucratic behavior like groupthink, which discourages innovative approaches • Unaccountable: the multilateral system does not answer to everyday citizens. There is no formal mechanism for public opinion, oversight, nor ways to reward or penalize organizations working in the best interest of migrants
Opportunities — External Factors (+)	Threats — External Factors (-)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional cooperation: some host countries such as Colombia, Argentina, and Costa Rica have agreed to work together under the Quito Action Plan, sharing information and best practices • Diaspora: Venezuelans living abroad can send remittances, advocate for policy change, and draw international attention to events unfolding in their homeland and host communities • Newly Acquired Seat: Venezuela's newly acquired seat on the UN Human Rights Council could help address the migration crisis • Guaidó's international support: Juan Guaidó has the internal backing of the Constituent Assembly and external support from nation-states and non-governmental actors • Oil reserves: Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world. This resource could help bring social relief to displaced Venezuelans through a new and improved "Oil for Food" program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception: some governments consider the Venezuelan migration crisis to be a regional or sub-regional issue, not a global challenge • Wavering commitment: not all nation-states in LAC can dedicate efforts to providing humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan migrants • Sanctions: the U.S.-led embargo against government officials and PDVSA will continue to affect people negatively in Venezuela, as oil revenue historically funds social programs • Geopolitics: President Maduro has limited, yet powerful allies, which include Russia, China, Turkey, and Cuba. This geopolitical bloc will prove adversarial to the international community • Xenophobia: some nation-states in LAC that have become inundated with Venezuelans are experiencing an increase in resentment to migrants. Violence, anti-immigrant legislation, and deportations are some ways discontent has been shown

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• U.S. Support: The U.S. government backs President Guaidó, giving more than \$61 million for humanitarian assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal Definitions: the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol are outdated and do not reflect the nuances of forced migration• Overcrowded: too many actors such as governments, NGOs, and the private sector vying to influence issues that transcend state boundaries
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Appendix C: Key Legal Instruments (Figure 6)

Law	Level	Purpose
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)	International	Established 30 fundamental human rights to be universally protected
Geneva Conventions (1949)	International	Basis of international humanitarian law. Child health included the protection of the wounded and the sick, health, and public health personnel and humanitarian aid.
Refugee Convention (1951)	International	Defined the word refugee as, "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."
Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959)	International	Established that all people owe children the right to: means for their development; special help in times of need; priority for relief; economic freedom and protection from exploitation; and an upbringing that instills social consciousness and duty.
Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967)	International	Removed the geographical and time limits that were part of the 1951 Convention.
American Convention on Human Rights (1978)	Regional	Expanded "to consolidate in this hemisphere, within the framework of democratic institutions, a system of personal liberty and social justice based on respect for the essential rights of man."
Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984)	Regional	Expands the definition of refugees to "...persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order".
Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights (1988)	Regional	Specifically addressed economic, social and cultural rights.
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	International	Established 40 substantive rights for children grouped into 3 categories: protection, promotion, and participation. Established that life, physical integrity, health and social security, a balanced diet, name and citizenship, family, etc. are protected.

Appendix D: Stakeholder Analysis (Figure 7)

Stakeholder	Interests	Fears	Needs	Motivations	Hesitations
Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago Honorable Lisa Morris-Julian	Ensure that all legalized citizens maintain the same level of education before the arrival of undocumented Venezuelan nationals	The education system will be overwhelmed by the arrival of Venezuelans, who will cause additional burdens such as language and cultural barriers	Ensure that all citizens have access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education that allows them to compete in the global market of the 21st century	The National 2030 Vision is an ambitious goal, and its success relies on a diverse workforce that starts with a robust education system	Poor governance and administrative problems continue to be a challenge for the country's complex education infrastructure
Ministry of Health Trinidad and Tobago Honorable Terrance Deyalsingh	Ensure the health of Trinbagonians amid COVID-19 and maintain the same level of healthcare services to local populations	Venezuelan nationals will overwhelm the national healthcare system, reducing the Ministry's ability to meet the needs as outlined in the national 2030 Vision plan	Capacity to store and maintain health records of displaced populations whose home government cannot relay information to temporary healthcare workers, increasing the likelihood that diseases such as malaria and other infectious illnesses could spread to Trinbagonians	Public health concerns, especially amid COVID-19, will push public health practitioners to either increase their efforts to providing Venezuelans with more extensive healthcare or encouraging medical professionals to pressure government officials to enact stricter immigration laws	The government controls who receive or does not receive healthcare benefits
Local Populations: Trinbagonians	Greater competition for scarce resources; domestic politics in turmoil	Increase in the number of job applicants for jobs; lower wages due to increase in workforce; insecurity, increase in crime; larger labor force could translate into increase in the informal economy	Health and education investment; lack of proper infrastructure to absorb Venezuelans; migration amplifies negative perceptions	Venezuelans bring a different set of skills, which can create new business networks and knowledge diffusion; during the 1980s, Venezuelans welcomed Colombians fleeing FARC and Paramilitary violence	Successful integration and assimilation would mean that Venezuelans will be reluctant to return to their country of origin; both countries facing an unprecedented situation coinciding with the biggest migration crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean

<p>U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) Acting Assistant Secretary Nancy Izzo-Jackson</p>	<p>Protect and ease suffering; resolve the plight of Venezuelans fleeing their country of origin; build and maintain global partnerships; ensure compliance with international norms and standards</p>	<p>Regional instability</p>	<p>Appropriated funds from Congress; U.S. government policy objectives; intraregional and regional peace and security; diplomacy</p>	<p>Intraregional and regional peace and security</p>	<p>Unclear. The agency must follow directives outlined by the executive and legislative branches of U.S. government</p>
<p>Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad & Tobago</p>	<p>Integrating within host community</p>	<p>Continued public and official backlash, mistreatment due to xenophobia; continued legal limbo</p>	<p>Limited access to legal, health, and education services; language barriers; pathway to legal status</p>	<p>Will relations between governments in Trinidad & Tobago and Venezuela affect the feasibility of continued stay? Are cultural and ethnic differences impacting service provisions?</p>	<p>Uncertain future; lack of legal protections; fear of deportation</p>

About the Author

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