



# A Learning Assessment of In and Out-of School Venezuelan Refugee Children and their Colombian 1st to 5th Grade Counterparts in Cucuta

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We would like to thank the Secretary of Municipal Education of Cucuta for allowing us to work with public schools in Cucuta and for helping us convene educators in Colombia to share the results; Luker Foundation for sharing with us EGRA and EGMA tools who had been developed for Colombia, and to Freedom Center and their team of enumerators for collecting the data. We would also like to thank the Tinker Foundation who made this research study possible with their generous support.



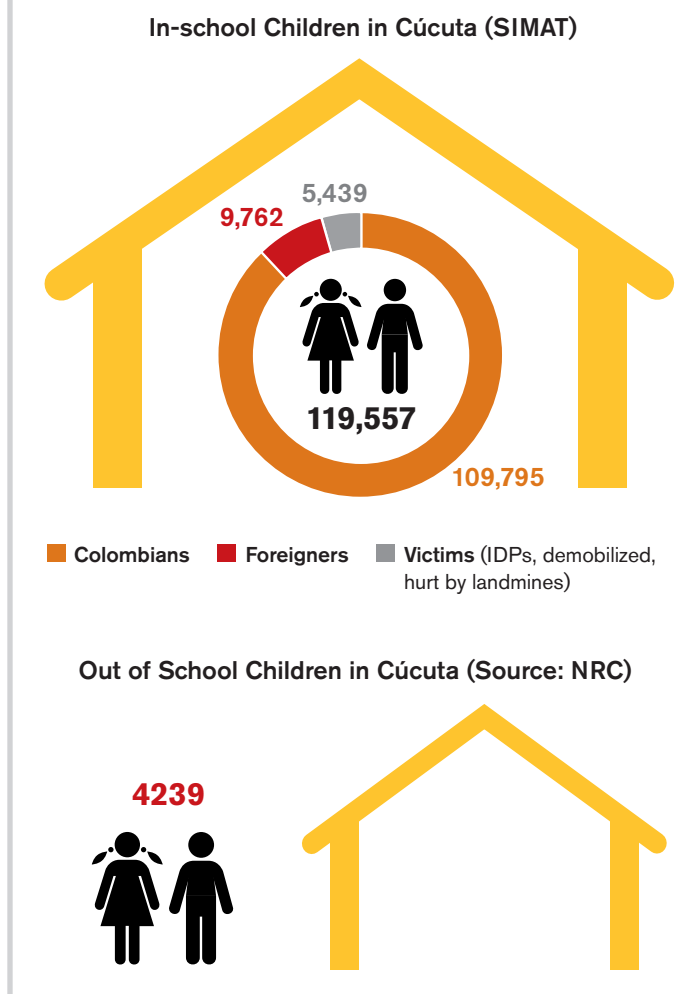
## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Since 2015, over 3 million people have fled Venezuela<sup>1</sup> and more than 1.8 million Venezuelan refugees now live in Colombia,<sup>2</sup> 300,000 of which are school-aged children.<sup>3</sup> Venezuelan refugees in Colombia have experienced significant adversity. They have been forced to leave their homes, friends, and schools and seen their family's finances disintegrate. Their parents stress as they struggle to put food on the table, pay for school, or obtain medical care. Many have faced separation from their parents and loved ones.

As the crisis persists, children must have access to learning opportunities. Education provides children with a much-needed sense of stability and can enable them to learn and heal in a protective, predictable environment. Unfortunately, and despite the help of policies that aim to guarantee that all refugee children in Colombia have a right to school, many Venezuelan children in the region continue to face challenges accessing safe, quality education. Although Colombia's national policies allow Venezuelan children to enter the public-school system, approximately half have no access to any form of education. The reasons behind this vary; some live far from schools and are unable to pay for transportation; others cannot afford the resources for school supplies. Children may be turned away by school personnel who lack the space and materials to absorb additional children. A census of out of school children conducted by NRC indicated that there are 4239 out of school children living in Cucuta, out of which 1,585 are Venezuelan refugees, 1,272 are Colombian victims of violence (IDPs, demobilized or hurt by landmines), 847 are Colombian hosts and 535 returnees (See Figure 1).

But the educational challenges facing these children go beyond access to schools. When Venezuelan children do enroll in Colombian schools, they often face barriers to learning. The Colombian public-school system, though officially open to these students, struggles to absorb them and meet their unique needs. Public school teachers are not prepared to educate increasingly large groups of students while at the same time addressing new social tensions and xenophobia in the classroom. Space and resource constraints are often exacerbated due to new arrivals, and demand for education among Venezuelans is high.<sup>4</sup> More than 246,473 Venezuelans have entered Colombian schools—an increase of 130,000 since November 2018.<sup>5</sup> In Cucuta alone, SIMAT reported that 117,646 children registered in school, out of which 12,740 are foreigners and 5439 are victims of the Colombian armed conflict (internally displaced, demobilized from illegal armed groups, or hurt by landmines) (See Figure 1). These students have often missed years of school or experienced the trauma of displacement. Schools in Cucuta are already under-resourced and are struggling to absorb and provide for these children in a way that guarantees their well-being and learning and that their human right to a quality education is respected.

Figure 1. Number of in and OOS children in Cucuta (SIMAT)



## THE PRESENT STUDY

Educators and policymakers in the region currently lack evidence about the learning needs of Venezuelan child refugees. Regional and national actors cannot pursue evidence-informed programming and policies that ensure Venezuelan children's learning and development in Colombia without addressing that current lack of evidence.

With support from Tinker Foundation, the IRC conducted a learning assessment in Cucuta to fill this information gap. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are the literacy, numeracy, and SEL skills of Colombian students and in and OOS Venezuelan refugee children in Cucuta?
- How do literacy, numeracy and SEL skills of Colombian and Venezuelan refugee children vary by sex, age, school status (in-school vs. out of school), and socio-economic status?



## METHOD

### > Participants

The research sample includes data from 1648 primary school-aged children (804 Colombians and 844 Venezuelan children) in Cucuta, an urban area along the Colombia and Venezuela's shared border, with a high prevalence of Venezuelan refugees. Researchers collected a random and representative sample of 1,219 in-school children in grades 1 to 5th, by randomly selecting 20 public schools in Cucuta (out of the 63 that exist in the city) and inviting 12 randomly selected children per grade to participate in the study. Researchers also identified a convenience sample of 429 out-of-school Venezuelan refugee children who had been identified by UNICEF, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Compassion to receive psychosocial support services, and recruited them to participate in the study before they received any services.

### > Instruments

- **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA):** EGRA is a performance-based literacy assessment designed by RTI International and adjusted in Colombia by Luker Foundation. It captures letter sound identification, familiar words, and non-words. EGRA also uses grade-level passages to capture oral reading fluency and reading comprehension.
- **Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA)** is a performance-based numeracy assessment designed by RTI International and adjusted in Colombia by Luker Foundation. It measures various aspects of children's numeracy, including number discrimination, missing number, addition, subtraction, equations, and word problems.
- **Battery of SEL tools:** We used scenario-based scales to evaluate key social-emotional skills:
  - **Empathy (ICFES, 2013):** 12 vignettes ask children to imagine seeing others experiencing difficult situations (e.g. a classmate gets punished unfairly) and identify how they would feel about it: I would feel bad (1), I wouldn't care (0), I would think it's funny (0). Scores range from 0 to 100% and are a percent estimate of the times the participant chose an empathetic response.
  - **Children's Stories (Dodge et al, 2015):** Five scenarios ask children to imagine that a peer does something negative to them (e.g. spill water in their drawing) but without providing any information on why he/she acted in that way.
    - Hostile attribution scores are estimated based on whether children think the actions had a hostile intent (1) or occurred by accident (0). Scores range from 0 to 1, and represent a percent estimate of the times the participant attributed hostile intent to an ambiguous scenario, with higher scores indicating higher levels of hostile attribution bias.
    - Anger and sadness intensity scores are estimated by asking children to identify the emotions they would feel (e.g. calm, surprise, anger, sadness) and with what intensity using a 4-point Likert scale (e.g. not sad at all=0, a little sad/angry=1; sad/angry=2; very sad/angry=3, extremely sad/angry=4. The final score represents is an average of participants' answers across 5 scenarios. Scores below 1 can be interpreted as low levels of sadness/anger intensity, and scores above 3 can be interpreted as high levels of sadness/anger intensity.
    - Three conflict resolution scores are estimated based on how children would respond to these negative situations across 5 scenarios: An aggression score (relational, verbal or physical), disengagement and prosocial problem solving.
  - **Choices (Diazgranados & Selman, 2016):** Five scenarios ask children to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with how different witnesses' respond to situations of bullying they observe at school or the neighborhood: 1) Upstand against perpetrators: Level of agreement/disagreement with witnesses who express disapproval to perpetrators or befriend the victim, 2) Upstand-authority: Level of agreement with witnesses who tell teaches or parents, 3) Disengagement: Level of agreement with responses in which witnesses walk away or do nothing about the bullying, 4) Join perpetrators: Level of agreement with responses in which witnesses also start excluding, offending or assaulting a victim.
  - **Victimization:** Children indicate how often they have been excluded, offended or physically assaulted by others in the last two weeks.

**Table 1** Participants by schooling status, nationality and grade currently enrolled or last grade completed

	In-school (n=1,219) from 22 randomly selected public schools in Cucuta		Out of School (n=429) identified by UNICEF, NRC and Compassion	
	Colombians	Venezuelans	Venezuelans	Total
Grade 1	98	76	185	359
Grade 2	148	98	54	300
Grade 3	174	72	51	297
Grade 4	170	83	37	290
Grade 5	198	102	86	386
<b>Total</b>	<b>788</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>1632</b>



## > Process

Data was collected through Freedom Center, a local firm with expertise administering EGRA, EGMA and educational tests in various regions of Colombia. Trained enumerators attended a 3-day training to review how to obtain consent from parents and assent from children, and how to administer questionnaires and tests. In the month of November 2019 enumerators met individually with enrolled children in their schools and with OOS children at UNICEF, NRC and Compassion, and conducted the assessments for approximately one hour of their time, using tablets. EGRA and EGMA tests administered to in-school Colombian and Venezuelan migrant children corresponded to the grade they were enrolled in Colombia. EGRA and EGMA administered to OOS migrant children corresponded to the last grade they attended while they were in still school in Venezuela. All data was analyzed by researchers from IRC's Airbel Impact Lab. IRC's IRB board provided ethical approval for the study.

## ANALYSIS

To identify the literacy, numeracy and SEL skills of children, we used regression models to estimate average learning scores of Colombians, and the differences observed between them and both in-school and OOS migrant Venezuelan children. Additionally, we estimated the percentage of students with zero scores, below and above grade-level benchmarks.

In Colombia, the national standards of language indicate that, among other literacy skills, by the end of third grade children should be able to comprehend different types of texts and their functions, such as manuals, cards, posters, newspapers. By fifth grade, they should also be able to comprehend descriptive, narrative, informative, explicative, and argumentative texts. For ORF, we used Colombian standards for each grade.<sup>6</sup> For timed literacy tasks, we set other benchmarks by estimating the mean score obtained by children who were able to meet answer 80% reading comprehension questions correctly.

The national standards of math indicate that by the end of third grade children should be able to use diverse strategies to solve problems that include additive and multiplicative situations. By fifth grade, among other skills, children should also be able to resolve equations. Given that Luker Foundation developed EGMA subtasks with grade-level items, we set numeracy benchmarks at 80%.

We used multi-level regression models to disaggregate findings by nationality (Colombian and Venezuelan), enrolment status (in-school, out-of-school), sex, age, grade, disability status and socio-economic status.



PHOTO: JUAN ARREDONDO/IRC



# RESULTS

## 1. What are the literacy skills of Colombian students and in and OOS Venezuelan refugee children in Cucuta?

**In-school Colombian children exhibit medium levels of literacy skills.** Average ORF and reading comprehension scores of Colombian students are below the benchmark for each grade. On average, third, fourth, and fifth grade students understand 70% of what they read in grade-level reading passages, 10% points below the 80% benchmark. Letter sound identification is skill few children have developed in Colombia—by fifth grade, the great majority of Colombian students in Cucuta are not able to identify letter sounds correctly—though this is not a surprising finding given that teachers in the region do not use phonemic awareness as a method of instruction.

**In-school Venezuelan refugee children exhibit similar levels of performance as Colombians, and in some cases, significantly higher reading skills.** We do not observe any significant difference between in-school Colombian and in-school Venezuelan children in the great majority of reading subtasks

across grades. In some cases, however, we observe differences that favor Colombians (familiar word reading for grade 2 students and non-word reading for 4th graders) and other times favor Venezuelan refugees (ORF for 1st and 5th grade students and reading comprehension for 1st graders). On average, first and fifth grade Venezuelan students read 10.90 and 8.7 more words per minute than Colombian students, respectively. First grade Venezuelan refugee children also show higher levels of reading comprehension than first grade Colombians.

**OOS Venezuelan migrant children are lagging behind their in-school peers, with significantly lower levels of literacy skills than both Colombians and Venezuelans.** OOS Venezuelan refugee children exhibit significantly lower levels of reading skills than in-school children across the great majority of reading outcomes for all grades. Children who were registered in third grade in Venezuela but are currently out of school in Colombia read 50.16 words per minutes, which is 28.93 less words per minute than Colombians and understand 46% of grade-level reading passages, which is 23.67% less than Colombians.

Table 2. Average EGRA scores for in-school Colombians by grade, and differences with in-school and OOS migrant children from Venezuela

	Group	Letter Sound Knowledge (% correct)	Familiar Word (% correct)	Non-words (% correct)	Oral Reading Fluency (cwpm)	Reading Comprehension (% correct)
Grade 1	In-school Colombians (Mean)	6.72	51.47	37.96	32.4	40.2
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	-0.47	7.74	7.44	10.90*	14.66**
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-6.57***	-34.50***	-25.23***	-20.69***	-29.92***
Grade 2	In-school Colombians (Mean)	5.14	83.14	64.26	63.84	81.89
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	1.17	-6.95*	-4.24	-6.13	-4.14
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-1.42	-34.42***	-25.94***	-22.88***	-40.29***
Grade 3	In-school Colombians (Mean)	6.51	90.23	76.37	79.09	69.68
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	0.28	-0.06	-3.17	-1.35	-0.41
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-6.36***	-26.49***	-26.24***	-28.93***	-23.67***
Grade 4	In-school Colombians (Mean)	7.24	95.41	85.12	96.77	67.06
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	0.92	-3.00	-4.97*	-6.40	-4.86
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-0.74	-29.08***	-30.45***	-46.16***	-28.52***
Grade 5	In-school Colombians (Mean)	7.1	96.9	89.77	99.44	68.94
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	0.24	-0.57	-0.04	8.70*	4.71
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-5.41***	-10.29***	-12.63***	-15.38***	-18.36

Note: Statistical significance is marked as \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001.



Figure 2. ORF and reading comprehension level by nationality and schooling status

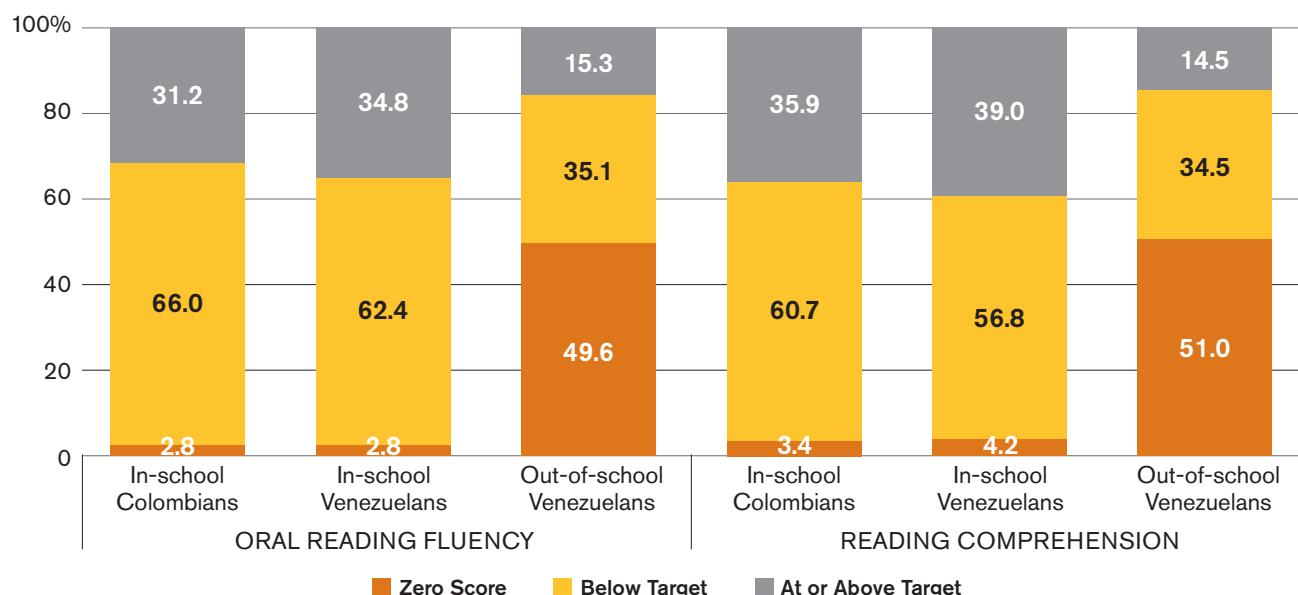


Figure 2 shows the percentage of learners according to their levels of performance in ORF and reading comprehension. We observe that 68.83% of in-school Colombian participants in Cucuta do not meet ORF standards and 64.09% do not meet reading comprehension standards. In-school Venezuelan refugees are significantly ahead of Colombians in both outcomes, while OOS Venezuelan refugees are significantly behind their in-school Colombian and Venezuelan counterparts.

## 2. What are the math skills of Colombian students and Venezuelan refugee children in Cucuta?

**Colombian children in Cucuta show low math skills.** By third grade, students in Colombia are expected to both solve and formulate math problems in situations that require additions, subtractions and multiplications. However, we observe that, on average, 3rd grade Colombian students are only able to answer correctly 59.4% of simple additions, 42% of simple subtractions, 28% of grade-level word problems and 11.72% of grade-level equations. By fifth grade, students answer correctly 80% of additions, but only answer 58.83% of subtractions, 45% of word problems and 11% of equations correctly.

**In-school Venezuelan children exhibit similar math levels than Colombians, but first and fifth grade Venezuelan migrant students outperform their Colombian counterparts.** We do not observe many differences in the math skills of Venezuelan and Colombian in-school children in grades 2nd-4th, but first and fifth grade Venezuelan refugees significantly outperform Colombians in 5/5 and 4/5 math subtasks, respectively. On average, fifth grade in-school Venezuelan children answered correctly 12.16% more additions, 9% more subtractions, 8.27% more word-problems and 6.28% more equations than Colombian students.

**Out-of-school Venezuelan children show the lowest math skills, and lag behind in-school children, both Colombians and Venezuelans.** OOS children who were last enrolled in third grade answered correctly 15.73% less additions, 13.21% less subtractions, 14.81% less word problems and 7.73% less equations than their in-school third grade Colombian counterparts. Venezuelan refugees who had last been enrolled in fifth grade, answered correctly 12.16% less additions, 9.09% less subtractions, 8.27% less word problems and 6.28 less equations than in-school Colombians.





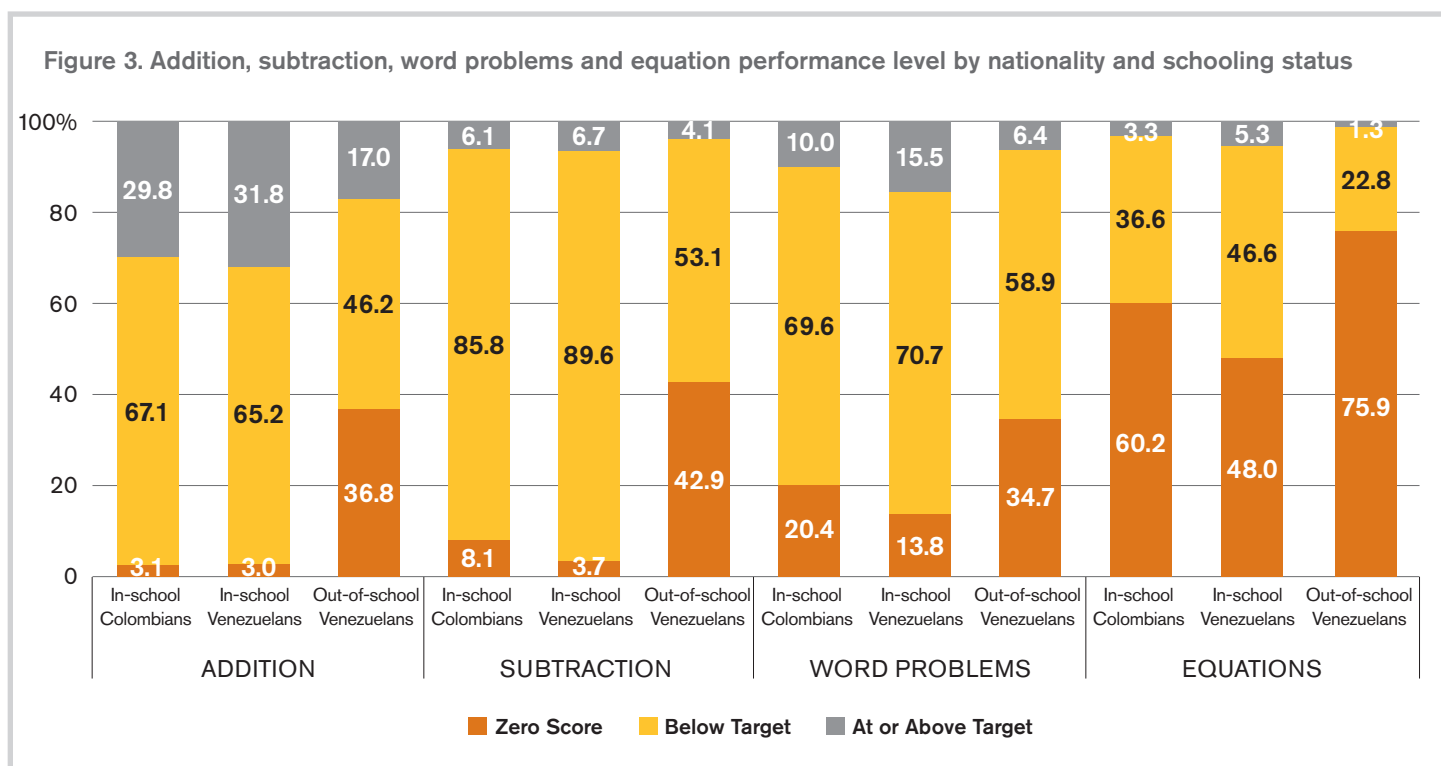
**Table 3. Average EGMA scores for Colombian in-school children by grade, and differences with in-school and OOS Venezuelan refugees**

	Nationality and School Status	Number Sense (% correct)	Missing Number (% correct)	Addition (% correct)	Subtraction (% correct)	Word Problems (% correct)	Equations (% correct)
Grade 1	In-school Colombians (Mean)	74.49	28.16	37.06	21.5	-	25.31
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	4.72	7.23*	3.89	12.41***	-	9.30*
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-40.09***	-15.82***	-21.20***	-12.17***	-	-16.28***
Grade 2	In-school Colombians (Mean)	87.57	46.35	50.86	35.39	25.48	15
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	-0.22	2.53	-3.64	1.92	1.34	1.22
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-21.17***	-11.35**	-12.14**	-9.98**	-6.34	-2.80
Grade 3	In-school Colombians (Mean)	91.09	55.46	59.4	42.21	28	11.72
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	0.57	3.57	2.71	3.21	9.50*	5.50
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-16.20***	-21.63***	-13.79***	-10.53**	-11.28**	-5.34
Grade 4	In-school Colombians (Mean)	96.41	64.88	73.18	51.9	39.41	9.12
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	-1.71	0.18	-1.61	2.41	-1.20	0.40
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-12.25***	-15.99***	-15.73***	-13.21***	-14.81**	-7.73*
Grade 5	In-school Colombians (Mean)	-	69.19	80.2	58.83	45.31	11.16
	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	-	0.02	4.54*	0.94	11.27**	6.78**
	OOS Venezuelans (Difference)	-	-15.70***	-12.16***	-9.09***	-8.27*	-6.28**

Note: Statistical significance is marked as \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of learners according to their levels of performance in addition, subtraction, word problems and equations. We observe that more than 70.2% of Colombians do not meet addition standards, 93.9% do not meet subtraction

standards, 90% do not meet word problems standards and 96.7% do not meet equation standards for their grade. Comparatively, lower proportions of in-school Venezuelan refugee children but much larger proportion of OOS Venezuelans are behind.







### 3. What are Colombian and Venezuelan refugee children social-emotional skills in Cucuta?

Colombian students in Cucuta show medium SEL skills. In-school Venezuelan refugee children exhibit significantly higher SEL skills than in-school Colombians. Interestingly, both groups show significantly lower SEL skills than their OOS Venezuelan refugee counterparts. On average, OOS

Venezuelan children show higher levels of empathy, lower levels of hostile attribution bias, lower levels of sadness and anger intensity than Colombian students. OOS Venezuelan children who witness bullying are also less likely to disengage or join perpetrators, and more likely to tell an authority about the bullying than Colombian children. **Also interestingly, OOS Venezuelan refugees experience significantly lower levels of victimization than their in-school counterparts in in Cucuta.**

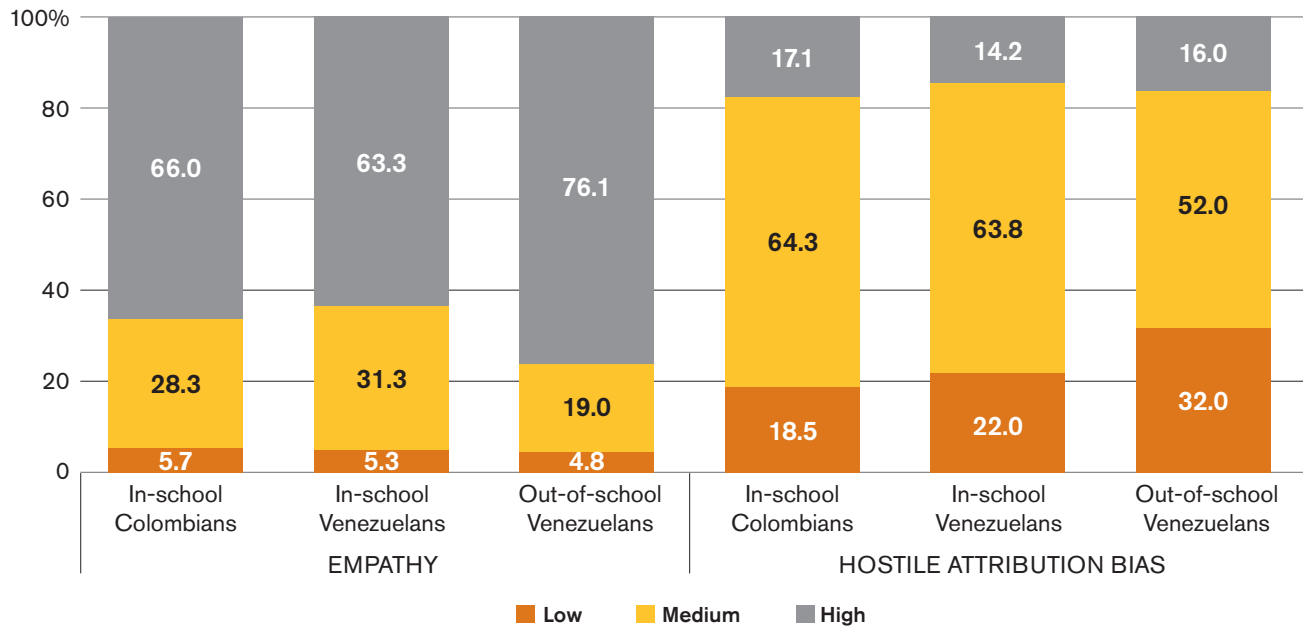
Table 4. Average SEL scores for in-school Colombians and differences with in and OOS Venezuelan refugees

SEL (scale)	In-school Colombians (Mean)	In-school Venezuelans (Difference)	Out-of-school Venezuelans (Difference)
Empathy (0-1)	0.76	-0.01	0.07***
Hostile Attribution Bias (0-1)	0.5	-0.04*	-0.07***
Sadness Intensity (0-4)	0.98	-0.13**	-0.28***
Anger Intensity (0-4)	0.71	0.02	-0.22***
Conflict Resolution–Aggression (0-1)	0.08	0.01	0.03*
Conflict Resolution–Disengagement (0-1)	0.11	-0.01	0.00
Conflict Resolution–Problem Solving (0-1)	0.81	0.01	-0.03
Witnesses' Attitude Towards...			
Disengagement (0-3)	0.99	-0.03	-0.13***
Joining Perpetrators (0-3)	0.94	-0.04	-0.07*
Upstand Against Perpetrators (0-3)	1.94	-0.02	0.05
Upstand–Help the Victim (0-3)	2.19	0.01	-0.02
Upstand–Report to an Authority (0-3)	1.96	-0.01	0.08*
Victimization (0-3)	0.35	0.07*	-0.06*

Note: Statistical significance is marked as \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001.



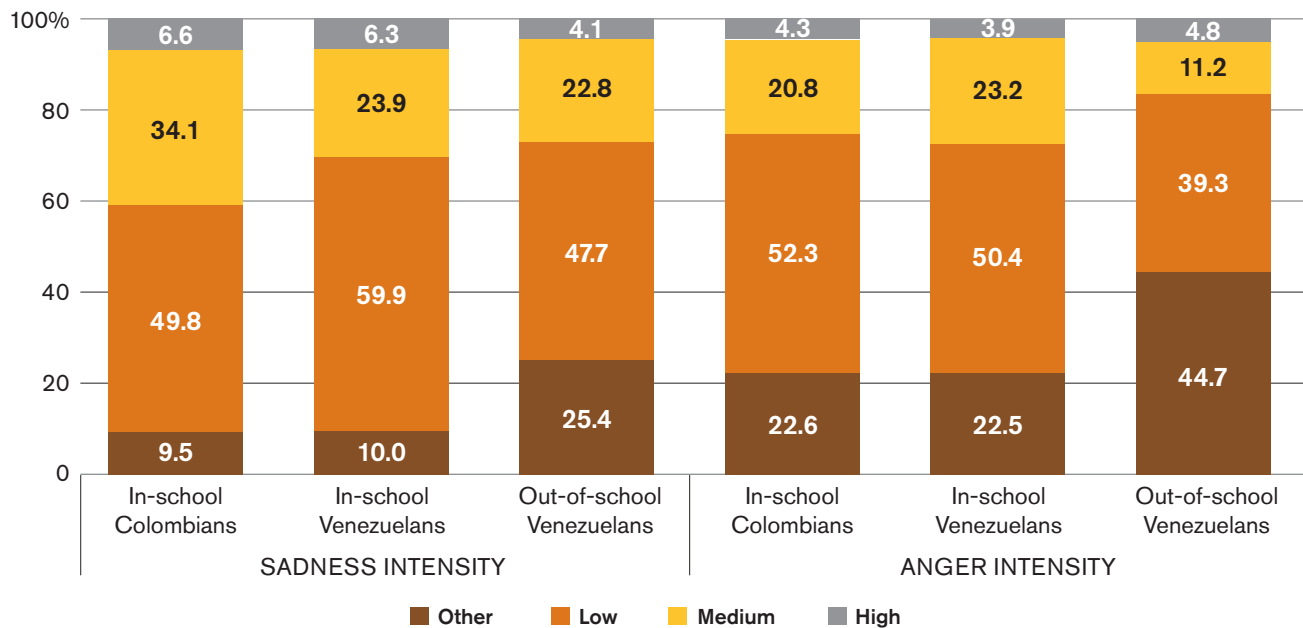
**Figure 4. Levels of empathy and hostile attribution bias by nationality and schooling status**



When asked to imagine scenarios in which a negative situation happens to peers they like and dislike, 66% of in-school Colombians and 63% of in-school Venezuelans showed high levels of empathy, compared to a much higher 76% of OOS Venezuelan refugee.

When asked to imagine ambiguous scenarios in which a peer hurt them, we observe that OOS Venezuelan refugees also show significantly lower levels of hostile attribution bias than in-school Colombian and in-school Venezuelan students (See Figure 4).

**Figure 5. Sadness and anger intensity by nationality and schooling status**



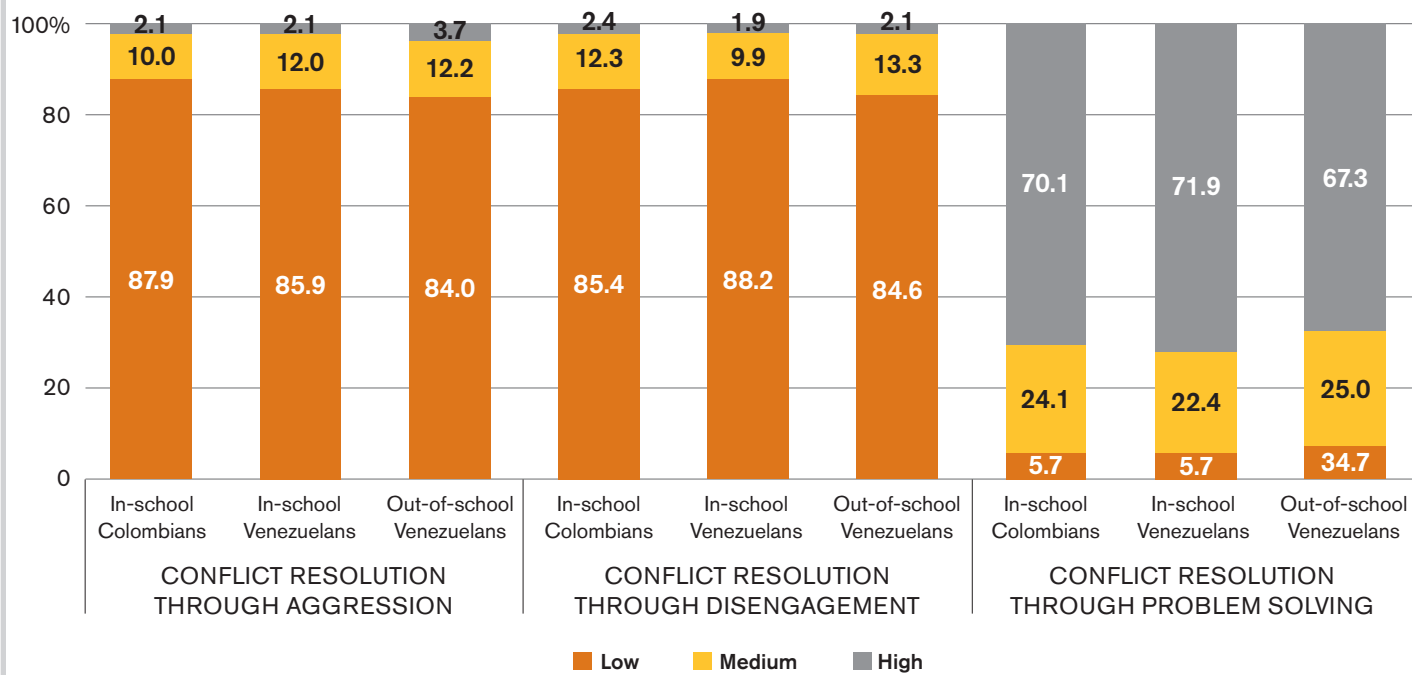


When asked to imagine being hurt by a peer in ambiguous scenarios, in-school Colombians were more likely to show an emotional orientation toward sadness than toward anger, and on average, they self-reported low levels of sadness intensity (.98) and anger intensity (.71). Again, OOS Venezuelan refugees showed lower levels of sadness and anger intensity than their in-school Colombian and Venezuelan counterparts (See Figure 5).

As a response to conflict, Colombian children showed low orientations to use of aggression (.08) and disengagement (.11) and moderately high orientation toward the use of prosocial conflict resolution (.81) skills. We observe that approximately 70% of children in the sample were highly supportive of prosocial problem-solving strategies and only a small minority were highly supportive of aggression and disengagement (See Figure 6). We do not observe statistically significant differences in the conflict resolutions strategies used by in-school Colombian and in and OOS Venezuelan refugees.

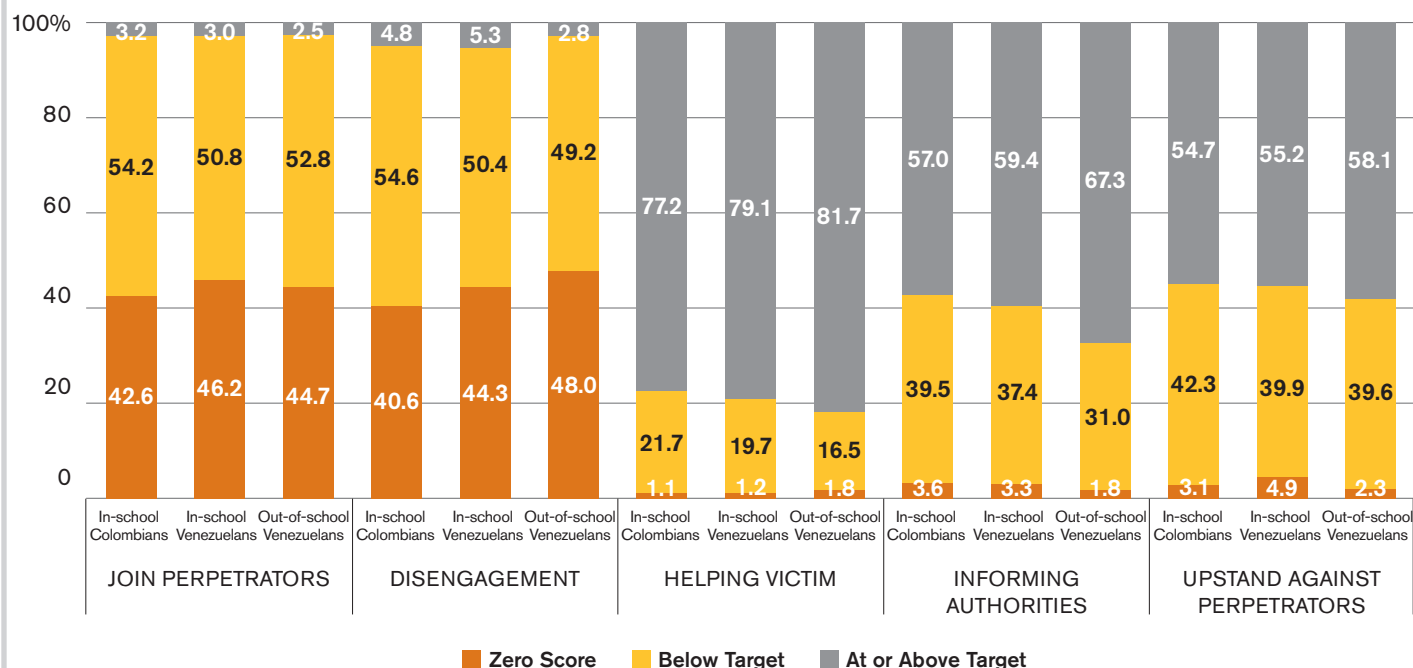


**Figure 6. Percentages of children according to their orientations toward conflict resolution strategies by nationality and schooling status**





**Figure 7. Percentages of children according to their levels of agreement/disagreement with witnesses' responses to bullying by nationality and schooling status**



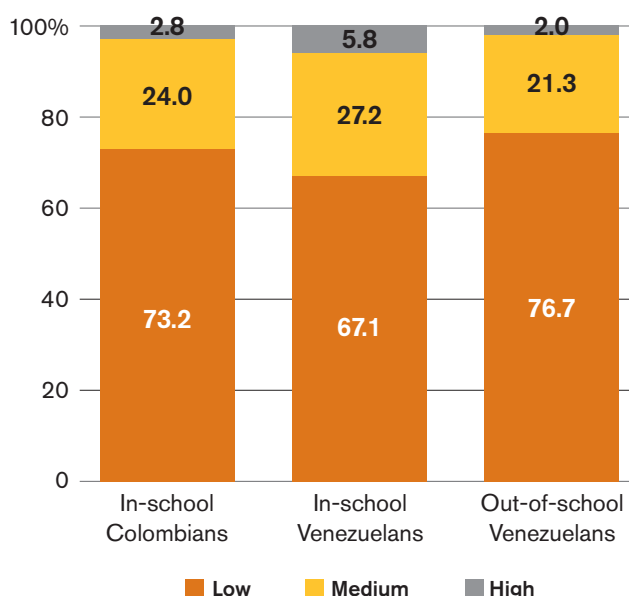
## > Witnesses Responses to Bullying

When participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with witnesses' responses to bullying, Colombian children provided the highest endorsement to witnesses who become friends with the victim (2.19), then to those who express disagreement to perpetrators in public (1.94) and those who inform an authority (1.96). They also expressed disagreement with witnesses who do nothing about the bullying (.99) and those who join perpetrators (.94). While in-school Venezuelan refugees show similar attitudes than in-school Colombians, OOS Venezuelan children are less supportive of witnesses that join perpetrators, those who do nothing about the bullying, and those who inform an authority. Figure 7 shows the percentage of in-school Colombians, in-school Venezuelans and OOS Venezuelans according to their levels of agreement with witnesses' responses to bullying in school.

## > Victimization

Approximately 26.8% of in-school Colombian children report having experienced victimization at least once in the last two weeks, versus 33% of in-school migrant Venezuelan children and 23.3% of out-of-school Venezuelan children (See Figure 8). In-school Venezuelan students are more likely than Colombians to suffer victimization and OOS Venezuelan children experience less victimization than their in-school Colombian and Venezuelan counterparts.

**Figure 8. Percent of children who report different levels of victimization by nationality and school status**





#### 4. How do the literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills of children in Cucuta vary by nationality, schooling status, by gender, age, disability, and socio-economic status?

Table 5 shows the relationships between demographic characteristics and students' literacy, numeracy and SEL skills, after controlling for other variables included in the table. We find that:

- **Nationality:** Venezuelan children exhibit higher math skills than Colombians, but similar language skills. Venezuelan children exhibit similar SEL skills than Colombian students, except for sadness intensity where they show higher control than Colombians.
- **Schooling status:** Being in school has a positive association with academic outcomes but a negative association with SEL skills. Being in school is associated with lower levels of empathy, higher sadness and anger intensity, higher hostile attribution bias. Being in school is associated with supportive attitudes toward witnesses of bullying who join perpetrators or toward those who do nothing about the bullying, and with less support for witnesses who upstand against perpetrators or who report the bullying to authorities. Finally, being in school is also associated with higher levels of victimization.
- **Gender:** Girls show the same language skills than children but are lagging boys in math. Girls are significantly more empathetic than boys and show higher sadness intensity but lower anger intensity than boys.
- **Age:** Older children show higher literacy and numeracy skills than younger children. Equations were an exception, possibly because the tasks for lower grade students included addition and subtractions, and the task for higher grade children included multiplications and divisions, which are significantly harder. Older children have better SEL skills than younger children, as they report less sadness intensity and less use of aggressive strategies to solve conflicts and less experiences of victimization than younger children.
- **Disability:** Children with disabilities show significantly lower SEL skills than non-disabled children and they are also more likely to experienced victimization.
- **Socio-economic status:** We do not observe differences in the academic performance of children from different SES backgrounds in the sample, but there are some differences in their SEL skills. Children from more advantaged SES backgrounds exhibit lower sadness intensity than children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and they report higher levels of agreement with witnesses who report bullying to authorities.

**Table 5. Relationship between literacy, numeracy and SEL outcomes, and demographic characteristics, after controlling for other variables**

Outcomes	Nationality	Registered in School	Female	Age	Grade	Disabled	Socio-economic Status
Letter Sound		+				+	
Simple Word		+		+	+		
Non-word		+		+	+		
Oral Reading Fluency		+		+	+		
Reading Comprehension		+			+		
Number Sense		+			+		
Missing Number		+	-		+		
Equations	+	+	-		-		
Addition		+	-	+	+		
Subtraction	+	+	-	+	+		
Word Problems	+	+	-		+		
Empathy		-	+			-	
Hostile Attribution Bias		+					
Sadness Intensity	-	+	+	-			-
Anger Intensity		+	-				
Conf. Res Aggression				-		+	
Conf. Res Disengagement					-		
Conf. Res Problem Solving					+	-	
Witness-Disengagement		+			-	+	
Witness-Join Perpetrators		+			-		
Witness-Upstand Against Perpetrators		-			+		
Witness-Help Victim							
Witness-Report Authority		-			+		+
Victimization		+		+	-	+	



## LIMITATIONS

The present study collected survey and assessment data in literacy, numeracy, and SEL from in-school Colombian and Venezuelan children, as well as from out of school Venezuelan children. The data is observational, and therefore, describes children's literacy, numeracy and SEL levels, but does not establish causal relationships between variables.

The sampling strategy included data from a representative group of 1st to 5th grade students of public schools in Cucuta, using a random sample of 1,219 students in 20 public schools from Cucuta. The study used a convenience sample of 419 out of school Venezuelan refugees who had been identified by three NGOs operating in Cucuta, which were not chosen randomly, and therefore, may not be representative of out of school Venezuelan refugees in the region. Finally, given that the sampling strategy did not include out of school Colombian children, the present study cannot fully disentangle the unique associations between nationality, schooling status and learning levels.

Future studies can collect data on learning levels, SEL skills and victimization from other locations, using more rigorous selection method to sample OOS children, that also include OOS Colombians, to understand the situation better and respond accordingly at the policy level.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Colombian school system's decision to integrate Venezuelan refugees into public schools is important and praiseworthy. At the same time, that system is currently overwhelmed and access is not assured, as many Venezuelan migrant children continue to be out of school. For children who are in school, the medium-to-low levels of learning foundational academic skills are concerning and warrant attention to ensure schools are delivering quality and achieving outcomes. Furthermore, there is reason to believe being in school can be detrimental for the social-emotional development and wellbeing of children, given the higher level of social-emotional skills and lower levels of victimization exhibited by out-of-school children.

- **Access:** This research underscores the importance of ensuring that Venezuelan refugees have access to education opportunities as a necessary first step—but that access alone is insufficient, and that these opportunities must be safe and supportive in order for students to reap benefits of school for their academic as well as social-emotional learning and well-being.
  - We recommend strengthening the school system's capacity to both meaningfully integrate Venezuelan children into the classroom and deliver a higher quality of education to ensure attendance, retention, safety and holistic learning for all students.
- **Literacy:** Colombian and migrant children from Venezuela exhibit medium levels of literacy skills. There are not significant differences in the reading skills of in-school children from both nationalities. Being OOS or having a disability is associated with significantly lower reading outcomes.
  - We recommend ensuring that both Colombian and Venezuelan children have access to performance-based academic support and to provide out of school children with remedial support so they can catch up with their peers and transition successfully back into the formal school system. Additionally, we recommend identifying low performing schools according to students' performance in national assessments, and provide low-performing schools with targeted, evidence-based interventions to improve students' reading skills.
- **Numeracy:** In-school Colombian and Venezuelan refugees both exhibit low levels of math skills, but Colombian children have poorer performance than in-school Venezuelans. OOS children and girls have significantly lower math skills than in-school children and boys in Cucuta.
  - We recommend providing math support to all children and schools across the board, both in terms of providing the lowest performing students with access to remedial supports and providing professional development opportunities for teachers to strengthen math teaching in schools.



- **SEL:** Colombian and Venezuelan children have medium SEL skills. Both in and OOS Venezuelan children exhibit significantly better SEL skills than Colombian children, but OOS Venezuelan children exhibit better SEL skills than Venezuelans who attend school. Overall, OOS Venezuelan refugee children report higher empathy, lower levels of hostile attribution bias and lower sadness and anger intensity in response to conflict than Colombians. In-school Venezuelan children report less hostile attribution bias and less sadness intensity than their in-school Colombian counterparts. We therefore conclude that while attending school has helped Venezuelan refugee children learn foundational academic skills and catch up with regards to their literacy and numeracy, there are aspects of the school environment that may negatively affect their SEL and wellbeing. In-school children, males and children with disabilities exhibit lower SEL skills than OOS children, girls and non-disabled children.
  - We recommend providing funding and support to evidence-based interventions that promote SEL skills so that children can regulate their emotions, get along well with peers, appreciate and respect diversity, and build positive conflict resolution strategies. Ensuring that SEL programs have a distinct component to address issues of personal identity, group identity and culture can help teachers and students appreciate similarities and respect and value diversity, which is critical to promote the healthy development and integration of children from different backgrounds into the school environment.
- **Victimization:** The data shows that being in school in Cucuta, regardless of one's nationality, is associated with higher levels of victimization. In-school Colombian and Venezuelan children in Cucuta both reported more experiences of victimization than OOS Venezuelan migrant children, which suggests that schools may not be safe and supportive for children. This is especially the case for migrant Venezuelan students, nearly a third of whom report victimization. In-school children, children with disabilities, and younger children are at higher risk of victimization than out-of-school children, non-disabled children, and older children.
  - We recommend providing trainings to teachers and school personnel to ensure they acquire the tools and skills they need to create safe, protective, inclusive learning environments and to prevent and respond to instances of violence, discrimination and bullying. Trainings could focus on the use of positive discipline and restorative justice and the creation of a strong culture of participation and engagement among students.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p 4.

<sup>2</sup> Migracion Colombia, Accessed May 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/platform>. <http://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/noticias/265-abril-2020/mas-de-1-millon-825-mil-venezolanos-estarian-radicados-en-colombia.html?highlight=WyJuaVx1MDBmMW9zliwidmVuZXpvaGFub3MiLCJuaVx1MDBmMW9zliHlZlhmV6b2xhbm9zIl0=>

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, "More than 300,000 Venezuelan children in Colombia need humanitarian assistance—UNICEF" 29 April 2019. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-300000-venezuelan-children-colombia-need-humanitarian-assistance-unicef>

<sup>4</sup> 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p 10.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, "More than 300,000 Venezuelan children in Colombia need humanitarian assistance – UNICEF" 29 April 2019. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-300000-venezuelan-children-colombia-need-humanitarian-assistance-unicef>

<sup>6</sup> Grade 1: 40 words per minute, Grade 2: 65 words per minute, Grade 3: 85 words per minute, Grade 4: 105 words per minute, Grade 5: 125 words per minute