



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

MPS Quick Reference Guide to Venezuela and Venezuelan Culture for Educators and Staff

Where Is Venezuela?

Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) lies at the northern edge of South America. It is about twice the size of the state of California. On the north, it touches the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. Its neighbors are Guyana to the east, Brazil to the south, and Colombia to the west. The distance from Venezuela to Wisconsin is about 2,842 miles. A direct flight from Milwaukee to Caracas may take about 6 hours.



Geography

Venezuela includes the Andes Mountains and Maracaibo Lowlands in the northwest, central plains called the Llanos, and the Guiana Highlands in the southeast. The Orinoco is the major river system. Lake Maracaibo is the largest lake in South America, and Angel Falls is the world's highest waterfall.

Capital and Largest City: Caracas, located on the northern edge of the country.

Population: 28.8 million (according to the [World Bank](#) 2023). For comparison, the United States has a population of 334.9 million.

Climate

Venezuela has a hot and humid tropical climate that is more moderate in the highlands. The coastal cities can get extremely hot, but cities in valleys such as Mérida, Caracas, Los Teques, and San Cristobal are more temperate. Mountain villages are cooler.

Venezuelan Culture

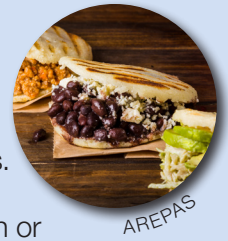
People and Languages: Venezuelan culture represents a fusion of Spanish, African, and indigenous cultures. The Spanish language is the most widely spoken. About 40 indigenous languages are recognized, and the most widely spoken indigenous language is Wayuu (Guajiro). Arabic, Chinese, English, and Portuguese are the most common world languages spoken in Venezuela.

Religion: About 88% of the population is Christian, primarily Roman Catholic (71%) and Protestant (17%). About 8% of Venezuelans are without religion, and almost 3% follow other religions, including Santería. There are small Muslim, Druze, Buddhist, and Jewish communities.

Cuisine: Venezuelan cuisine is influenced by European (French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish), West African, and indigenous traditions. It varies greatly by region. A popular Venezuelan dish is arepas, a thick corn or flour tortilla filled with cheese, meat, and vegetables. Pabellón Criollo is considered the national dish of Venezuela. Other popular items are hallacas, picadillo, and tequeños, which have been passed down through generations.

Education: Venezuela has a 12-year system of education. Children are required to attend school at age six, and education is mandatory until age 15. Students in public schools wear uniforms and attend school in two shifts, in the morning or afternoon. Higher education remains free. The literacy rate in Venezuela is more than 90%.

Clothing: Modern Western-style clothing is typically worn as everyday wear. Traditional clothing is influenced by Caribbean, French, and Spanish styles and is generally worn during celebrations. The traditional dress of Venezuelan women is a long, decorative dress or skirt and white blouse. Men wear the *liqui liqui*, which is a simple jacket worn with pants.



AREPAS



Why are Venezuelans coming to the U.S.?

Ongoing economic and political unrest led to a massive emigration of Venezuelans (about 25% of the population). In 2023, a large number of Venezuelan migrants reached the U.S.–Mexico border to seek asylum in the United States. According to the United Nations refugee agency, “Asylum is a form of protection which allows an individual to remain in the United States instead of being removed (deported) to a country where a person fears persecution or harm. Under U.S. law, people who flee their countries because they fear persecution can apply for asylum.” If they are granted asylum, this gives them protection and the right to stay in the United States. Those who are granted asylum are called *asylees*. Additionally, [Lutheran Social Services](#), [Hanan Refugees Relief Group](#), and the [International Institute of Wisconsin](#) help refugees locate housing, jobs, and other services.

Source: Center for Strategic & International Studies (www.csis.org) and UNHCR (<https://help.unhcr.org/usa/applying-for-asylum/what-is-asylum/>).

How can educators support students?

MPS educators should use their training and skills in welcoming newcomers.

- ▶ Approach students with a lens of empathy and trauma-informed care.
- ▶ Create a core group of support involving school psychologists, social workers, nurses, and counselors who can provide guidance with health, clothing, and housing information.
- ▶ Newcomer students have a variety of academic and language backgrounds ranging from students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) to students who have strong academic skills in their home language.
- ▶ **Use LanguageLine (mpsmke.com/language) via mConnect to access an interpreter over the phone.**
- ▶ **Use these links to request translation (for written materials) or interpretation (oral) via mConnect at mpsmke.com/translation or mpsmke.com/interpreter.**
- ▶ For resources to combat bullying/harassment, visit stopbullying.gov or www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/aanhpi-massa-factsheet-201606.pdf.
- ▶ Families from Venezuela have the option to enroll their students in bilingual dual language programs. MPS also offers ESL services in a number of schools.



Language Considerations

Become familiar with your students' English proficiency levels. Use the Infinite Campus pathway for English language proficiency (ELP) verification: **Index > Student Information > English Learner > EL Assessment**
For further information about the significance of ELP levels in learning English, contact your school's ESL specialist.



Whom can educators contact within MPS?

For assistance, contact your school social worker, school nurse, school psychologist, or school counselor depending upon needs.

Instructional Coach/Family Engagement (ELs)

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What agencies can provide information and support?

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Cultural Orientation | Voces de la Frontera | https://vdlf.org/ |
| | Centro Hispano Milwaukee | https://www.micentro.org/ |
| | Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Wisconsin | https://hccw.org/ |
| | United Community Center | https://www.unitedcc.org/ |
| | Latino Entrepreneurial Network of Southeastern Wisconsin, Inc. | https://latinoentrepreneurialnetwork.org/ |
| | League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) of Wisconsin | https://lulac.org/ |
| Community Organizations | Catholic Charities | https://www.ccmke.org/RIS |
| | Wisconsin Department of Children and Families | https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/refugee |
| | UN Refugee Agency | https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/ |

This list is for information only.

Helpful Phrases

Learn how to say a few phrases in your student's language.

| English | Written in Spanish | Spanish Pronunciation |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Hello | <i>Hola</i> | <i>OH-la</i> |
| How are you? | <i>¿Cómo estás?</i> | <i>ko-mo ess-TAHS</i> |
| Goodbye | <i>Adiós</i> | <i>ah-dee-OHS</i> |
| Thank you | <i>Gracias</i> | <i>GRAH-see-ahs</i> |

Classroom Resources & Recommended Readings

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM) Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS)

Américas Award Collection

The Américas Award commends U.S.-published children's and young adult books that portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinx in the United States and provides teachers with recommendations for classroom use.

Learn more about the Américas Award here: https://wisconsin-uwm.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01UWI_ML:MIL&collectionId=81319791250002124

Pura Belpré Collection

Outstanding books for children and youth that celebrate the Latino cultural experience written or illustrated by book creators of Latinx heritage. Learn more about the Pura Belpré Award here: https://wisconsin-uwm.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01UWI_ML:MIL&collectionId=81328181810002124

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International Children's and Young Adult Literature Collection

Initiated in 2021, the collection highlights experiences from outside the United States, both in original languages and in translation. Learn more about the ICYAL here: https://wisconsin-uwm.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01UWI_ML:MIL&collectionId=81321514550002124&sortItemsBy=title

Learn more about the ICYAL here: https://wisconsin-uwm.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01UWI_ML:MIL&collectionId=81321514550002124&sortItemsBy=title