



Venezuela - Country Focus

Venezuela

Country Focus

November 2023



Manuscript completed in November 2023

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

PDF ISBN 978-92-9403-486-1 doi: 10.2847/208878 BZ-05-23-287-EN-N

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Acknowledgements

This report was drafted by COI experts from the EUAA Country of Origin Information Sector.

The following national asylum and migration departments reviewed this report:

- France, Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (OFPRA), Division de l'information, de la documentation et des recherches (DIDR)
- Netherlands, Immigration and Naturalisation Service, Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (OCILA)
- Canada, Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), Research Directorate (RD)

Furthermore, this report was reviewed by an external expert, Tamara Taraciuk Broner. Ms. Taraciuk Broner is director of the Peter D. Bell Rule of Law Program at the Inter-American Dialogue. Before joining the Dialogue, she worked at Human Rights Watch for 17 years, where she covered Venezuela and was later acting Americas director. Ms. Broner has carried out extensive field research throughout Latin America documenting human rights violations and has an extensive research and publication record on issues such as judicial independence, freedom of speech, discrimination, and harassment of civil society organisations in the region.

The review carried out by the mentioned departments and expert contributes to the overall quality of the report but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EUAA.



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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care within a limited timeframe. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Any event taking place after the finalisation of this report is not included. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the introduction.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee,’ ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EUAA nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 25 October 2023. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).



Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
CDJ	Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia (Centre for Defenders and Justice)
CICPC	Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas (Corps of Scientific, Penal and Forensic Investigations)
CLAP	Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción (Local Committees of Supply and Production)
CUPAZ	Cuadrillas de Paz (Peace Brigades)
DGCIM	Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence)
ELN	Ejército Nacional de Liberación (National Liberation Army)
EMC	Estado Mayor Central (General Central Command)
FAES	Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales (Special Action Force)
FANB	Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (Bolivarian National Armed Forces)
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNB	Guardia Nacional Bolivariana (Bolivarian National Guard)
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights



Term	Definition
ICC	International Criminal Court
IGC	Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons
MP	Ministerio Público (Public Ministry)
OAS	Organization of American States
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OVCS	Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflicts)
OVP	Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons)
OVV	Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (Venezuelan Observatory of Violence)
PNB	Policía Nacional Bolivariana (Bolivarian National Police)
PROVEA	Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos (Venezuelan Program Education-Action on Human Rights)
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)
SEBIN	Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional (Bolivarian National Intelligence Service)



Term	Definition
TSJ	Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (Supreme Court)
UCAB	Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Andrés Bello Catholic University)
UN	United Nations
UN FFMV	United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	US dollars



Introduction

This EUAA COI Country Focus report on Venezuela is intended to provide an overview of the key relevant issues for the assessment of claims for international protection. This report is an update to the [EUAA COI Report on Venezuela: Country Focus \(2020\)](#), which should be read in conjunction with this report. This report is thus intended to capture a selection of the main issues relevant to international protection in the assessment of claims from Venezuela, where updated information was specifically requested by the Latin America COI Specialist Network.

On the trends in international protection claims from Venezuelans in Europe, between January and June 2023, Venezuelans lodged 36 000 applications in the EU+ making them the third largest group of applicants for international protection. This level of applications represented an increase of 41 % compared to the first half of 2022. Indeed, during this period, Venezuelan monthly applications rose from 4 800 in January to 7 000 applications in June, which forms part of a longer-term trend of increased applications going back five years only interrupted by COVID-19. During the first half of 2023, the vast majority of applications were lodged in Spain (>90 %) and 99 % were first-time applications.

The EU+ recognition rate for international protection was around 2 % during the first half of 2023, and 3 % in 2022. However, Spain, the EU+ country that issues the vast majority of decisions on Venezuelan applications, tends to issue decisions granting a national form of protection, accompanied by residence permits on humanitarian grounds, rather than international protection.

At the end of June 2023, there were 39 000 Venezuelan cases awaiting a first instance decision across the EU+. This represents a 12 % increase compared to the end of June 2022.¹

Methodology

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference for the update were developed in response to consultations with the EUAA-IGC² Country of Origin Information (COI) Specialist Network on Latin America, as well as a survey of information needs gathered from the network. The COI network is comprised of COI experts from across EU+ countries³ national asylum authorities and participating IGC states. EUAA's COI sector analysed the results and created the terms of reference. The terms of reference are available in [Annex 2: Terms of Reference](#).

The reference period for the report is July 2020 to 24 October 2023.

¹ Analysis by the European Union Agency for Asylum.

² IGC (Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees) participating states are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States

³ EU+ includes EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland.



Collecting information

Public sources

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources, as well as oral source interviews from 15 July 2023 to 15 September 2023. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, and to update the report in relation to the opposition primaries that took place 22 October 2023.

This report has relied upon mainly Spanish-language sources in order to provide added value to the available COI. The expert drafter who wrote this report did so in English using Spanish and English sources. Legislation only available in Spanish was informally translated from Spanish into English by the expert drafter. Due to the volume of Spanish sources used, for the citation of all non-English sources, this report does not signal in the citation that a source is translated. This is for maximal readability and efficiency. In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include:

- COI reports by governments;
- Information from civil society, advocacy groups, and NGOs;
- Human rights reports by governments and NGOs;
- Reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations (UN);
- Venezuelan government publications, including public statements, laws, policies, media outlets, and reports to the UN;
- Venezuela-based media and social media;
- Academic publications and think tank reports; and
- Reports of organisations specialised in specific topics, such as armed and criminal groups.

All sources used are listed in [Annex 1: Bibliography](#).

Oral sources

In addition to using publicly available documentary sources, three oral sources were interviewed and included in the report. All sources were assessed for their background, publication history, reputability, seriousness of their research, and recognition of their credentials by peers, the media, and international bodies. All interviews conducted by the expert drafter were in Spanish.

All oral sources are described in [Annex 1: Bibliography](#).



Quality control

This report was produced in line with the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#) and the [EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Guide \(2023\)](#). To ensure that this report is aligned with the EUAA COI Report Methodology, it was peer-reviewed by COI specialists from France, the Netherlands, and Canada. Additionally, an external expert and regional specialist, Tamara Taraciuk Broner, served as an expert reviewer. All the comments from reviewers were duly considered and implemented to the extent possible, under time constraints. The majority of peer reviewers were able to read both Spanish and English and were able to assess the quality of sources used.

Structure and use of the report

This report is a targeted update to the [EUAA COI Report: Venezuela – Country Focus \(2020\)](#). This report structured as follows:

- Chapter 1: Provides an overview of the main developments and structures in the justice sector, security forces, and around the issue of monitoring of the population by the state.
- Chapter 2: Deals with changes to the humanitarian situation.
- Chapter 3: Covers the security situation in detail, including problems of extortion, presence and activities of main armed actors, as well as the security situation at the border and in the Mining Arc of the Orinoco.
- Chapter 4: Covers the main profiles that may be relevant for international protection, including political opponents, demonstrators, journalists, government employees and deserters from the security forces, among others.

Maps

Two maps of Venezuela are provided below. A UN map of Venezuela from 2020, as well as the 2021 official map of the Venezuelan government. Venezuela considers the Esequibo region, which is administered by Guayana, as Venezuelan territory, as shown on the second map.⁴



Map 1. Venezuela.⁵

⁴ France 24, Venezuela plantea nacionalizar a habitantes de territorio en disputa con Guyana, 23 October 2023, [url](#); BBC News, Por qué se agudizó la disputa por el Esequibo, la zona que enfrenta a Guyana y Venezuela desde hace casi dos siglos, 4 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵ Map 1: UN, Venezuela Overview Map, 20 May 2020, [url](#)



⁶ Map 2: Venezuela, Mapa físico de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2021, [url](#)



1. Overview

Nicolás Maduro has been President of Venezuela since the death of Hugo Chávez in 2013, and, in 2018, secured another 6-year mandate in elections not considered fair by the international community.⁷ Over the past years, Maduro has taken advantage of the concentration of power that began during the Chávez government to gradually consolidate control over the executive, dismantle checks and balances in other branches, and weaken the political opposition.⁸ The government and the political opposition signed a deal to hold Presidential elections in the second half of 2024.⁹ It is unclear whether María Corino Machado, the winner in the primaries held by the opposition in October 2023 to elect the frontrunner for the presidential elections, will be able to participate since she was disqualified from holding public office for 15 years.¹⁰

Sources pointed to a sense of ‘normalisation’ in the country due to the greater availability of foreign currency, the increasing recognition of the Maduro government by the international community, and less visibility of mass repression.¹¹ However, the country continues to face economic hardship and a dire humanitarian emergency.¹² Between 2018 and August 2023, nearly 7.7 million Venezuelans have left the country.¹³ Additionally, repression of political opponents, dissenters, activists, and human rights defenders, continued.¹⁴ The ‘democratic and civic space’ underwent a ‘progressive closure’ with regards to freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and participation in public affairs.¹⁵ Furthermore, the state’s response to demonstrations and expressions of dissent has shifted from past large-scale visible repression to forms of targeted repression, whereby authorities target specific profiles as a way to send a message and discourage further demonstrations and expressions of dissent.¹⁶

Several armed groups operate in Venezuela, including *sindicatos*, *megabandas*, drug cartels, and Colombian armed groups.¹⁷ Main criminal activities include extortion, drug trafficking,

⁷ International Crisis Group, Navigating Venezuela’s Political Deadlock: The Road to Elections, 16 August 2023, [url](#), p. i-ii

⁸ International Crisis Group, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

⁹ Reuters, Venezuela, opposition sign election deal; US weighs sanctions relief, 18 October 2023, [url](#); euronews, El Gobierno y la oposición venezolanos acuerdan unas elecciones “justas” para 2024, 18 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰ Reuters, Venezuela bars leading opposition candidate Machado from holding office, 1 July 2023, [url](#); The Washington Post, She’s the front-runner in the race to oust Maduro. He’s out to block her., 21 July 2023, [url](#)

¹¹ Taraciuk, Tamara, in Atlantic Council, What’s next for the international response to Venezuela, 18 September 2023, [url](#); Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

¹² Taraciuk, Tamara, in Atlantic Council, What’s next for the international response to Venezuela, 18 September 2023, [url](#); BBC News, Venezuela’s slow economic recovery leaves poorest behind, 4 February 2023, [url](#); UCAB, Encovi 2022, October 2022, [url](#), p. 42

¹³ R4V, Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela [Last updated 11 June 2023], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴ UN, HRC, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 7 October 2022, 13 October 2022, [url](#), p. 2; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 7, 34, 40

¹⁵ UN FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 18 September 2023, [url](#), paras. 12, 53

¹⁶ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; VOA, Venezuela: Condenan a seis líderes sindicales a 16 años de prisión por “conspiración”, 1 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7



illegal mining,¹⁸ kidnappings, robberies,¹⁹ and fuel smuggling.²⁰ Criminal groups often operate with the cooperation or tolerance of state security forces.²¹ Civil authorities at all levels reportedly use gangs and *colectivos* to target dissidents²² and to maintain public safety.²³

1.1 Population

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (República Bolivariana de Venezuela), or Venezuela, is a federal presidential republic that consists of 23 states (*estados*), one capital district (*distrito capital*), and one federal dependency (*dependencia federal*).²⁴ Venezuela has an estimated population for 2023 of 30 518 260.²⁵ The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) platform²⁶ indicated that between February 2018 and August 2023, around 7.7 million Venezuelans left the country, including 6.5 million to other Latin American countries.²⁷ Of the population, 88.4 % live in urban areas, with major urban centres in the country being Caracas (2.97 million), Maracaibo (2.36 million), Valencia (1.98 million), Barquisimeto (1.25 million), Maracay (1.24 million), and Ciudad Guyana (964 000).²⁸ According to the unofficial National Survey on Living Conditions 2022 (*Encuesta Nacional sobre Condiciones de Vida*, Encovi, 2022),²⁹ the population surveyed that year identified themselves as 67 % Mestizo, 29 % White, and 4 % Black.³⁰

1.2 Economy

Venezuela's mainly state-controlled economy has been in a state of 'extended economic hardship'³¹ and collapse since 2014-2020 due to factors such as reduced oil production, US sanctions,³² widespread corruption, poor governance and state mismanagement, hyperinflation, oil dependence,³³ and, in recent years, further compounding effects of the

¹⁸ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Transparencia Venezuela, *Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁹ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

²⁰ Transparencia Venezuela, *Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²¹ UCAB, *Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela* – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3; InSight Crime, *Rise of the Criminal Hybrid State in Venezuela*, July 2023, [url](#), p. 5

²² InSight Crime, *Rise of the Criminal Hybrid State in Venezuela*, July 2023, [url](#), pp. 11-12; Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

²³ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

²⁴ US, CIA, *Factbook: Venezuela*, 12 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁵ US, CIA, *Factbook: Venezuela*, 12 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁶ Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), a platform by the IOM (International Organization for Migration) and the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

²⁷ R4V, *Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela* [Last updated 11 June 2023], n.d., [url](#)

²⁸ US, CIA, *Factbook: Venezuela*, 12 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁹ The Encovi survey is a household survey of over 6 000 households in Venezuela covering measures such as food security, citizen security, demographics, and others. It is produced by the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, in Caracas, in the absence of government statistical information. UCAB, *¿Qué es la encovi?*, n.d., [url](#)

³⁰ UCAB, *Encovi 2022*, October 2022, [url](#), p. 10

³¹ Reuters, *Venezuelan economy grew above 15% in 2022, president says*, 13 January 2023, [url](#)

³² El País, *Venezuelan economy seeks growth, while stuck in political crisis and 'Chevron effect'*, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

³³ CFR, *Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of a Petrostate*, 10 March 2023, [url](#)



COVID-19 pandemic, and lockdowns.³⁴ The economy shrunk by 80 % over the past ten years, but has seen a small recovery in consumption, production, and imports since 2020 as some state controls have been relaxed and the use of US dollars permitted.³⁵ The government indicated that its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew 17.7 % in 2022,³⁶ while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated the growth at 8 %.³⁷ However, the UN remarked that there were continued challenges negatively affecting essential public services, transportation, education, and access to healthcare.³⁸ The economy is mainly driven by oil production, and Venezuela's oil sector has been devastated by poor state investment, drops in prices of oil, and sanctions, as well as being affected by corruption and organised crime.³⁹ As of June 2023, oil production has reportedly picked up.⁴⁰

Venezuela has been in a cycle of hyperinflation since 2017, with improvement in 2022.⁴¹ While inflation improved compared to previous years [130 000 % in 2018 and 686.4 % in 2021⁴²], it reportedly reached 305 % in 2022,⁴³ and was over 400 % as of June 2023.⁴⁴ Venezuela's inflation rate is still among the highest in the world.⁴⁵ Inflation and devaluation continue to hamper salaries and pensions.⁴⁶ Teachers and school staff, for example, are reportedly 'unable to survive on their salaries' and are forced into other alternatives of income or abandoning their professions altogether.⁴⁷ Fuel shortages, and a drop in seed production and the import of fertilisers and machinery are also reported.⁴⁸

Venezuela is among the most unequal economies in the world,⁴⁹ with wealth being concentrated in Caracas and other urban areas.⁵⁰ In 2022, overall poverty rates and extreme poverty rates declined relative to 2020-2021; however, overall inequality increased in the country.⁵¹ The Encovi survey reported that, in 2022, 81.5 % of the population lived in monetary poverty and 53.3 % in extreme monetary poverty; a drop from 90.9 % and 68 %, respectively,

³⁴ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

³⁵ BBC News, 3 Ways Colombia Can Help Venezuela's Economic Recovery, 29 August 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Venezuelan economy: Maduro capitalises on moderate recovery, 28 December 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 4; Reuters, Venezuelan economy grew above 15% in 2022, president says, 13 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁷ IMF, Real GDP growth, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 4

³⁹ InSight Crime, Theft and Corruption Hinder Venezuela's Oil Industry, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰ InSight Crime, Theft and Corruption Hinder Venezuela's Oil Industry, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹ BBC News, Cómo salió Venezuela de la hiperinflación y qué significa para la golpeada economía del país, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴² BBC News, Cómo salió Venezuela de la hiperinflación y qué significa para la golpeada economía del país, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴³ Reuters, Venezuela inflation accelerating, heightening risk of return to hyperinflation, economists say, 5 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Reuters, Venezuela opposition presidential hopefuls back eventual debt restructuring, 19 July 2023, [url](#); Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas, La inflación anualizada se situó en 429% en junio 2023, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁵ UCAB, Encovi 2022, October 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁶ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 4

⁴⁷ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 6

⁴⁸ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 18

⁴⁹ BBC News, Venezuela's slow economic recovery leaves poorest behind, 4 February 2023, [url](#); UCAB, Encovi 2022, October 2022, [url](#), p. 42

⁵⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 4

⁵¹ C See also: UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 4; ACAPS, Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)



in 2021.⁵² Providing a different perspective on the issue, HumVenezuela, an 'independent platform developed by Venezuelan civil society for the monitoring, documentation and follow-up' of the humanitarian situation in the country,⁵³ reporting in March 2022, stated that 19.7 million people live in 'multidimensional poverty' and 94.5 % of the population was unable to make sufficient income to cover the costs of food and basic services such as housing, transportation, health, education, and clothing.⁵⁴ Inflation and devalued currency negatively affected incomes, salaries, and pensions.⁵⁵ The minimum monthly wage is about 5 USD per month,⁵⁶ while the poorest 10 % of Venezuelans subsist on approximately 8 USD per day.⁵⁷ Salaries for public school teachers are a minimum of 10 USD per month, while university professors earn 60-80 USD monthly.⁵⁸ The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) remarked that despite exiting hyperinflation and seeing slight economic improvements in 2022, including some improvement in poverty and extreme poverty levels, 'these have not translated into the well-being of the population in general.'⁵⁹ They qualified that the 'serious difficulty' of acquiring a basic basket of food goods and the 'sufficient means for a decent life' constituted a 'transversal constant' despite slight improvements in the economic outlook.⁶⁰

1.3 Government

In relation to election developments, in May 2018, President Nicolás Maduro won a second six-year term during a presidential election that was not considered fair or free by the international community.⁶¹ In December 2020, a new National Assembly was elected which gave back President Maduro total control of the legislature.⁶² The results of the legislative elections were not recognised by the EU and countries including the US, Brazil, and Colombia.⁶³ In October 2023, the government and the opposition signed a deal to allow fair and transparent presidential elections in the second half of 2024.⁶⁴ The deal, signed in Barbados, also foresees that the EU and the UN will oversee the vote.⁶⁵ Sources indicated

⁵² UCAB, Encovi 2022, October 2022, [url](#), p. 41

⁵³ HumVenezuela, About us, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁴ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 26

⁵⁵ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 4. See also: Infobae, La canasta básica en Venezuela aumentó su precio en un 61 % en un año, 22 March 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Venezuela teachers march for better pay amid sky high inflation, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶ El País, Venezuelan economy seeks growth, while stuck in political crisis and 'Chevron effect', 10 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁷ BBC News, Venezuela's slow economic recovery leaves poorest behind, 4 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Reuters, Venezuela teachers march for better pay amid sky high inflation, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 54

⁶⁰ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 54

⁶¹ OAS, OAS Permanent Council Agrees "to not recognize the legitimacy of Nicolas Maduro's new term", 10 January 2019, [url](#); The Guardian, Venezuela elections: Maduro wins second term, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶² DW, Venezuela: Maduro wins total control of legislature, 7 December 2020, [url](#); Reuters, U.S., EU say they do not recognize Venezuela parliamentary vote, 7 December 2020, [url](#)

⁶³ Reuters, U.S., EU say they do not recognize Venezuela parliamentary vote, 7 December 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Reuters, Venezuela, opposition sign election deal; US weighs sanctions relief, 18 October 2023, [url](#); euronews, El Gobierno y la oposición venezolanos acuerdan unas elecciones "justas" para 2024, 18 October 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Reuters, Venezuela, opposition sign election deal; US weighs sanctions relief, 18 October 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Barbados Deal Sets Venezuela on a Rocky Path to Competitive Polls, 20 October 2023, [url](#)



that, once the deal was signed, the US, as a response, temporarily lifted some of the sanctions against Venezuelan oil, gas, and gold, for at least six months.⁶⁶

In relation to Venezuela's human rights record, on 27 September 2018, a group of states including Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay, and Peru requested the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate 'crimes against humanity allegedly committed in the territory of Venezuela.'⁶⁷ In 2020, the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC 'concluded that there is a reasonable basis to believe that crimes against humanity, particularly in the context of detention, have been committed in Venezuela since at least April 2017.'⁶⁸ Investigations were initiated in November 2021 and were suspended in April 2022 at the request of the Venezuelan government to defer the investigation.⁶⁹ The ICC prosecutor, however, filed an application to reopen the investigation in November 2022 as the deferral requested by the government 'was not warranted.'⁷⁰ On 27 June 2023, the Pre-Trial Chamber I authorised the ICC Prosecution to resume the investigation.⁷¹ On 3 July 2023, the Venezuelan government submitted a notice of appeal against the Pre-Trial Chamber I's decision; the Appeals Chamber subsequently convened a hearing on 7-8 November 2023.⁷² Additional information on the status of the investigation could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

In June 2023, the Secretary of the OAS indicated that in Venezuela '[t]here are no visible advances either in the democratic functioning of the country or in the protection of human rights, the situation of political prisoners or the justice system.'⁷³ The Secretary of the OAS also indicated that there is no 'separation of powers,' and all institutions 'have collapsed.'⁷⁴ Sources indicated that Venezuela lacks separation of powers, leading to arbitrary and illegal practices for the benefit of the ruling party.⁷⁵

Information transparency from the government remained a challenge, as official statistical information is not provided by the government.⁷⁶ Most requests under the Law of

⁶⁶ France 24, Estados Unidos levanta temporalmente las sanciones sobre el petróleo, el oro y el gas de Venezuela, 19 October 2023, [url](#); DW, EE.UU. levanta sanciones sobre petróleo y gas a Venezuela, 19 October 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁷ ICC, Venezuela I: Situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela I, ICC-02/18, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸ ICC, Venezuela I: Situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela I, ICC-02/18, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁹ ICC, Venezuela I: Situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela I, ICC-02/18, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁰ ICC, Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim A. A. Khan KC, following the application for an order under article 18(2) seeking authorisation to resume investigations in the Situation in Venezuela I, 1 November 2022, [url](#)

⁷¹ ICC, Situation in Venezuela: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I authorizes the resumption of the investigation, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷² ICC, Venezuela I situation: ICC Appeals Chamber to hold hearing on appeals against authorisation to resume investigations on 7 and 8 November 2023 – Practical information, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷³ Swissinfo.ch, Almagro: Venezuela no está lista para volver al Sistema Interamericano de Derechos Humanos, 20 June 2023, [url](#); Infobae, Luis Almagro dijo que Venezuela no está lista para volver al Sistema Interamericano de Derechos Humanos: "No hay avances visibles", 20 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Swissinfo.ch, Almagro: Venezuela no está lista para volver al Sistema Interamericano de Derechos Humanos, 20 June 2023, [url](#); Infobae, Luis Almagro dijo que Venezuela no está lista para volver al Sistema Interamericano de Derechos Humanos: "No hay avances visibles", 20 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁷⁶ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.



Transparency and Access to Information of Public Interest (Ley de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información de Interés Público) are reportedly unanswered.⁷⁷

1.4 Judicial system

This section provides an overview of the structure and efficiency of the judicial system. Criminal prosecutions in Venezuela fall under the responsibility of the Public Ministry (MP, Ministerio Público).⁷⁸ However, the MP has been restructured over the years through both legal reforms and Supreme Court (TSJ, Tribunal Supremo de Justicia) sentences that have impacted its ability to effectively carry out its mandate.⁷⁹ Acceso a la Justicia, a Venezuelan NGO that promotes access to justice and the separation of powers, provides the following examples:

- The Corps of Scientific, Penal and Forensic Investigations (CICPC, Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas) was granted greater autonomy through legal reforms in 2012, hindering the MP's ability to effectively coordinate investigations.
- In June 2017, a ruling of the TSJ granted the Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría del Pueblo) 'procedural representation' in cases involving human rights violations, creating an unconstitutional duplication of powers that difficult assigning responsibilities for the prosecution of such cases.
- In July 2017, a ruling of the TSJ granted judges the power to order the MP to carry out an investigation that the MP would have otherwise considered without merits.⁸⁰

According to Acceso a la Justicia, the judicial system in Venezuela meets, in theory, all international standards; however, all these standards are violated in all phases of the judicial process and persons being investigated face obstacles and arbitrary decisions from prosecutors, public defendants, the jail system, and judges.⁸¹ Sources indicated that the justice system in Venezuela lacks independence,⁸² with the continuing erosion of the rule of law, lack of transparency in the selection of judges, precarious working conditions, and political interference.⁸³ The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela (FFMV) further noted that it has

⁷⁷ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 66; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 47

⁷⁸ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 28. See also: Venezuela, Ley Orgánica del Ministerio Público, 2007, [url](#), Art. 16

⁷⁹ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 29-30. See also: OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 2, 50

⁸⁰ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 29-30

⁸¹ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 72. See also, OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 13-16; HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

⁸² Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 17; UN, HRC, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 7 October 2022, 13 October 2022, [url](#), p. 2; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 14

⁸³ UN, HRC, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 7 October 2022, 13 October 2022, [url](#), p. 2; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 14



grounds to believe that the criminal justice system in Venezuela has been used by the State to ‘criminalize real or perceived critics of, or opponents to, the Government, particularly journalists, trade unionists, human rights defenders, and political activists,’ by charging them with ‘arbitrary, and often serious, criminal accusations, and often subjecting them to prolonged trials marred with violations of due process.’⁸⁴ In January 2020, the National Assembly (AN, Asamblea Nacional) passed a law allowing the reappointment of TSJ justices who, in turn, continued to exercise discretionary powers to appoint or remove provisional judges.⁸⁵ In April 2022, the National Assembly re-elected 60 % of the justices of the TSJ, in open contradiction with the Constitution, which only allows a 12-year period, and subsequently elected persons loyal to the government as well as two former members of the military who are in active reserve.⁸⁶ In August 2022, the National Assembly appointed, on an interim basis, the Director of the Office of Public Defence (DP, Defensa Pública), a position that had been vacant since 2010.⁸⁷ The DP is the government body responsible for guaranteeing the right to legal defence to persons involved in judicial proceedings who do not have resources to pay for a private lawyer.⁸⁸ Sources indicated that in early 2022, the National Assembly modified the Organic Law of the TSJ to transfer the power to appoint the Director of the DP from the TSJ to the National Assembly, in open contradiction to the Constitution.⁸⁹

Sources indicated that in 2018, the MP eliminated the merit-based selection and appointment process for prosecutors and declared all positions of that Ministry as ‘positions of trust,’ whereby all appointments and dismissals are ‘discretionary.’⁹⁰ According to sources consulted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Venezuela, since appointments are dependent on ‘personal and partisan links,’ judges and prosecutors violate the right to an impartial trial for political opponents and dissidents, and persons perceived as such by the government.⁹¹ Sources also indicated that judges at all levels are ‘routinely ordered’ by the government, including by high-ranking government officials, on how to adjudicate cases.⁹² Additionally, in an effort to not contradict high government officials, judges issue rulings against particular individuals in line with public statements previously made by these officials against these individuals.⁹³

⁸⁴ UN FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 18 September 2023, [url](#), para. 62

⁸⁵ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 11

⁸⁶ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 17; HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), pp. 29-31; Transparencia Venezuela, Asamblea Nacional designó nuevo Defensor Público General, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), pp. 29-31; Transparencia Venezuela, Asamblea Nacional designó nuevo Defensor Público General, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), pp. 29-31; Transparencia Venezuela, Asamblea Nacional designó nuevo Defensor Público General, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰ OHCHR, El sistema de justicia venezolano desempeña un papel importante en la represión del Estado contra los opositores al gobierno, 16 September 2021, [url](#); Acceso a la Justicia, Eliminada la carrera funcional en el Ministerio Público, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹ OHCHR, El sistema de justicia venezolano desempeña un papel importante en la represión del Estado contra los opositores al gobierno, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

⁹² OHCHR, El sistema de justicia venezolano desempeña un papel importante en la represión del Estado contra los opositores al gobierno, 16 September 2021, [url](#); Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 71

⁹³ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 71



Judges routinely order pre-trial detentions, including of political prisoners, as a common rather than an extraordinary measure, and extend detention periods without valid evidence, with some pre-trial hearings taking up to four years with the person in detention.⁹⁴ According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons (OVP, Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones), out of the 33 558 inmates in Venezuelan jails by December 2022, around 53 % were under pre-trial detention.⁹⁵ In some instances, judges also ‘legalised’ arbitrary detentions by issuing arrest warrants retroactively, including periods where detainees were incommunicado.⁹⁶ OHCHR documented at least 135 cases of persons, including 10 women, who remained on 30 April 2023 on pre-trial detention beyond the legal limit, and 39 persons who were sentenced despite having exceeded the pre-trial detention limit.⁹⁷ Pre-trial detentions can last more than three years and requests for release were either denied or unanswered.⁹⁸ Limits of criminal proceedings, although reduced through an amendment to the Criminal Procedural Organic Code (Código Orgánico Procesal Penal) in 2021, continued to be ‘systematically unenforced.’⁹⁹

Without providing details, sources indicated that legal representatives reportedly face barriers in accessing files, videos, and transcripts from hearings,¹⁰⁰ and that judges and prosecutors reportedly threaten detainees with longer sentences if they use private lawyers instead of public defendants.¹⁰¹ Public defendants are under the Office of the Public Defence, an institution that lacks independence.¹⁰² Additionally, the justice system routinely misuses the ‘forfeiting of legal representation’ clause included in the Criminal Procedural Organic Code to replace private lawyers with public defendants.¹⁰³ Also, information obtained through torture is admitted as evidence by tribunals.¹⁰⁴

The National Assembly amended the Organic Code of Military Justice (Código Orgánico de Justicia Militar) in September 2021, establishing that civilians cannot be tried by military courts.¹⁰⁵ However, the TSJ ruled in December 2021 that military courts can try civilians ‘with the sole requirement of a reasoned order by a military judge.’¹⁰⁶ About 875 of the 15 770 civilians arbitrarily detained between 2014 and June 2022 were prosecuted in military

⁹⁴ OHCHR, El sistema de justicia venezolano desempeña un papel importante en la represión del Estado contra los opositores al gobierno, 16 September 2021, [url](#); Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 67; HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁵ OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), p. 26

⁹⁶ OHCHR, El sistema de justicia venezolano desempeña un papel importante en la represión del Estado contra los opositores al gobierno, 16 September 2021, [url](#); Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 66

⁹⁷ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 38

⁹⁸ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 38

⁹⁹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 12

¹⁰⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 45

¹⁰¹ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁰² Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁰³ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁰⁴ OHCHR, El sistema de justicia venezolano desempeña un papel importante en la represión del Estado contra los opositores al gobierno, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 13

¹⁰⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 13



courts.¹⁰⁷ Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

In November 2019, the government created national prosecutors to investigate cases of trafficking of women; however, the trafficking in men, boys, and transgender people is not included and, as of August 2022, one prosecutor had been assigned for the whole country.¹⁰⁸ According to the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello), the government does not provide information on assistance provided to victims, or the status of investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of human traffickers.¹⁰⁹

According to the Venezuelan government in a written submission to OHCHR, during 2022, 362 public officials were indicted, 185 accused, and 47 convicted in cases of torture and ill treatment.¹¹⁰ OHCHR, however, noted that no information was available on trial proceedings against these officials.¹¹¹

Sources reported on the application of the Constitutional Law against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance (Ley Constitucional contra el Odio, por la Convivencia Pacífica y la Tolerancia), also known as the Anti-Hate Law, against critics of the government.¹¹² The use of the Anti-Hate Law to criminalise human rights defenders, political opponents, and journalists is ‘widespread,’ with the OHCHR documenting 32 cases of persons charged with ‘incitement to hatred’ or ‘public instigation.’¹¹³ Offences under this Law are punishable by imprisonment of up to 20 years.¹¹⁴

1.4.1 Detention conditions

Sources reported on the detention conditions faced by detainees,¹¹⁵ including dark cells, restricted access to sanitary facilities, torture, sexual violence, and solitary confinement.¹¹⁶ Additionally, prisons lacked physicians and adequate medical facilities, and detainees rely on family members to obtain medicines.¹¹⁷ Sources also report that detainees have been exposed to mistreatment amounting to ‘torture’ by prison guards and state security agents, including

¹⁰⁷ Foro Penal, Reporte sobre la represión en Venezuela. Semestre I-2022, 21 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁸ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁹ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 51

¹¹¹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 51

¹¹² OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 49; HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

¹¹³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 65

¹¹⁴ HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 121-134; UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 40-41

¹¹⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 40-41

¹¹⁷ OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), p. 13; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 131



heavy beatings with objects; electric shocks, including to reproductive organs; asphyxiation with plastic bags; waterboarding; stress positions; rape, including with wooden sticks; insertion of pins inside fingernails; threats of rape directed at detainees or their family members; forced nudity; touching of sexual organs; threats to mutilate genitals; and psychological torture.¹¹⁸ Some detainees have sustained serious and/or permanent physical and psychological injuries, including loss of sensory or motor skills, injuries to reproductive organs, miscarriage of pregnancy, psychological trauma, and depression.¹¹⁹ Torture takes place to obtain confessions and information, and to punish, humiliate, intimidate, coerce, or extort detainees.¹²⁰ Extortion within prisons is common by both other prisoners and authorities, with ‘protection’ fees ranging from 5 to 50 USD; non-payment usually results in acts of torture and homicide.¹²¹ Additionally, the lack of effective control over prisons by authorities have led to the creation of ‘self-government’ systems run by inmates, most notably the *pranes*, criminal bosses who run criminal organisations from within the prisons,¹²² which favours the existence of intra-prison violence,¹²³

1.4.2 Protection program for those involved in judicial proceedings

Venezuela enacted Law for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses, and Other Persons Intervening in a Judicial Process (Ley de Protección de Víctimas, Testigos y demás Sujetos Procesales) in 2012 and amended it in 2021.¹²⁴ Article 44 of the Law indicates the following:

‘Article 44. The Office for the Assistance of Victims in Human Rights-related Issues of the Public Ministry will have the following powers:

1. Guarantee the protection and comprehensive assistance to direct and collateral victims, witnesses and other persons participating in judicial procedures, in cases of violation of human rights, in accordance with the principles of interdependence, indivisibility and progressiveness of human rights.
2. Provide comprehensive care services with multidisciplinary teams in the legal, psychological, and social areas, to direct and collateral victims in cases of violation of human rights.

¹¹⁸ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 39, 42, 44, 46. See also: OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 42-43. See also: OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 42; OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), pp. 54, 63

¹²¹ OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), p. 55; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 128

¹²² OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), pp. 50-54

¹²³ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 121, 129; OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), p. 50

¹²⁴ Venezuela, Ley de Protección de Víctimas, Testigos y demás Sujetos Procesales, 2012 (amended 2021), [url](#)



3. Receive from victims, witnesses and other persons participating in judicial procedures the requests for protection measures¹²⁵ related to this Law, in cases of violation of human rights.
4. Carry out risk assessments for the applicants.
5. Process, before the jurisdictional bodies, the request for the protection measures required by victims, witnesses and other persons participating in judicial procedures, in accordance with the corresponding regulations.
6. Carry out the corresponding follow-up before the body designated by the Court for the implementation of the agreed protection measures.
7. Process matters concerning the updating of the agreed measures, in terms of the data of the beneficiaries, the body designated for the materialization, phases of the criminal process and any other information relevant to the case.
8. Carry out comprehensive training activities to organizations designated for the implementation of protection measures, on human rights and the rights of victims in general.
9. Others established in the Regulations and Resolutions.¹²⁶

Additional information, including implementation of the Law, could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

In an interview with EUAA, Roberto Briceño-León, Professor of sociology at the University of Central Venezuela and director of the Laboratory of Social Sciences (LACSO, Laboratorio de Ciencias Sociales), indicated that state agencies responsible for providing protection, including the MP and the Office of the Ombudsperson, do not fulfil this obligation in practice, despite requests made by citizens. Victims of crime prefer not to file a request in this regard as it could expose them to further targeting.¹²⁷ Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

1.5 State security forces

In Venezuela, policing has a civilian character and falls under the Ministry of the Interior.¹²⁸ The country has 147 policing bodies, including 123 municipal police, 23 state police, and the country-wide Bolivarian National Police (PNB, Policía Nacional Bolivariana), which includes the Special Action Force (FAES, Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales).¹²⁹ Other policing bodies include

¹²⁵ The protection measures are included in Chapter III of the Law for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses, and Other Persons Intervening in a Judicial Process. Venezuela, Ley de Protección de Víctimas, Testigos y demás Sujetos Procesales, 2012 (amended 2021), [url](#)

¹²⁶ Venezuela, Ley de Protección de Víctimas, Testigos y demás Sujetos Procesales, 2012 (amended 2021), [url](#)

¹²⁷ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

¹²⁸ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹²⁹ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7



the Inspector General (Comisionaduría de Derechos Humanos); CICPC, which is responsible for criminal investigations; and the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB, Guardia Nacional Bolivariana), which provides support in public safety even though it is part of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB, Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana). The FANB consist of the National Army (Ejército Nacional), the Navy (Armada Nacional), Military Air Force (Aviación Militar) and the GNB.¹³⁰ Two other 'secondary' bodies include the Bolivarian National Militia (Milicia Nacional Bolivariana) and the Presidential Guard (Guardia de Honor Presidencial).¹³¹

Sources indicated that security forces are accused of committing human rights abuses such as torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including sexual and gender-based violence, and killings consistent with extrajudicial executions.¹³² CICPC is accused of committing extrajudicial executions in the context of security operations, and since it is the responsible body for investigating crimes, it is considered an institution 'highly politicised and influenced by political decisions.'¹³³ Sources indicated that state security forces have been involved in arbitrary detentions and torture of detainees.¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch documented cases of arbitrary detention and instances of torture against persons considered collaborators of guerrilla groups, or for having on their cell phones videos and photos of attacks by state security forces in neighbourhoods.¹³⁵ Security forces suspected of crimes and violations continue to work in security agencies such as FANB and PNB, with some of these individuals being promoted in 2022.¹³⁶

The killing of citizens during 'security operations continued.'¹³⁷ These deaths occur in the context of combating criminality, but are considered by sources to be 'extrajudicial executions.'¹³⁸ The UN FFMV reported, for example, that during operation *Trueno*, conducted by a joint civilian and military command including the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions (DAET, Dirección de Acciones Estratégicas y Tácticas), between May and September 2022 in the states of Aragua, Yaracuy, Guárico, Miranda, and Anzoátegui, and with the objective of dismantling criminal groups, 345 people were detained and 72 killed.¹³⁹ Authorities reportedly carried out searches and detentions without warrants, and that those killed, according to relatives, did not confront state security forces and were 'summarily

¹³⁰ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹³¹ Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Defensa, Fuerza Armada, n.d., [url](#)

¹³² Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-23; UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 9

¹³³ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 24

¹³⁴ HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#); Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-23

¹³⁵ HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 27

¹³⁷ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 36; UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#); OVV, Aumentan las ejecuciones extrajudiciales en las zonas más pobres de Venezuela, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹ UN FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 18 September 2023, [url](#), paras. 93-94



executed.¹⁴⁰ The UN FFMV indicated that, according to NGOs, 716 persons were killed by state security forces in 2022,¹⁴¹ while the Use of Lethal Force in Venezuela Monitor (MUFLVEN, Monitor del Uso de la Fuerza Letal en Venezuela), an interdisciplinary think tank based in Venezuela that documents cases on the use of lethal force by state security forces, indicated that 876 persons were killed in 2022.¹⁴² According to the UN FFMV, these deaths are likely to be underreported due to fear of reprisals and limitations to access the places where incidents took place, among others.¹⁴³ Investigations into these deaths are slow and family members of victims reported ‘persistent difficulties’ accessing casefiles, undue procedural delays, repeated change of prosecutors, and the absence of forensic analyses.¹⁴⁴ Forensic experts consulted by Human Rights Watch indicated that, based on the examination of photographs of some of the crime scenes, the bodies of victims appeared to have been moved, with powder residue around the entry wounds indicating close range shooting, and weapons, including guns and grenades, planted.¹⁴⁵

The Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM, Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar), which is part of the FANB, is the agency responsible for conducting counterintelligence, preventing subversive activities, and protecting the President.¹⁴⁶ Its Director reports directly to the President and the headquarters are located in Caracas.¹⁴⁷ DGCIM is composed of several directorates, including the Special Directorate of Criminal and Forensic Investigations (DEIPC, Dirección Especial de Investigaciones Penales y Criminalísticas), which is reportedly accused of investigating, arresting and interrogating, often under torture and other forms of ill-treatment, potential targets at the DGCIM headquarters.¹⁴⁸ Another directorate, the Special Affairs Directorate (DAE, Dirección de Asuntos Especiales), is not included in the formal organisational chart of the DGCIM and reportedly has ‘significant autonomy’ and is often involved in carrying out the ‘dirty work’ of DGCIM, including torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detentions, and short-term forced disappearances.¹⁴⁹ DGCIM collects information on targets through tips, military sources, informants, infiltration of opposition parties, and telephone and digital surveillance, often without warrant.¹⁵⁰ DGCIM routinely plants or manipulates evidence to frame targets, including weapons or political propaganda, and conducts extensive electronic and telephone surveillance.¹⁵¹ Detentions are often carried

¹⁴⁰ UN FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 18 September 2023, [url](#), paras. 93-94

¹⁴¹ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴² MUFLVEN, Personas fallecidas por intervención de la fuerza pública, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 54

¹⁴⁴ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 55

¹⁴⁵ HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 28

¹⁴⁷ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 29-30

¹⁴⁸ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 30-32

¹⁴⁹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 32

¹⁵⁰ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 36

¹⁵¹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 38



out without warrant, based on false evidence and, in some cases, excessive use of force.¹⁵² In some cases, DGCIM also kidnap family members of targeted persons to force their surrender.¹⁵³ The DGCIM use torture to obtain confessions or false accusations and, in some instances, extort detainees to transfer 'large sums of money' to DGCIM officials.¹⁵⁴ There are allegations that the President orally instructs the Director of the DGCIM on targets to be detained, and that the Director has participated in interrogations or operations involving high-profile cases.¹⁵⁵

The Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN, Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional), which is under the Ministry of the Interior, is responsible for conducting civilian intelligence and counterintelligence activities with the mandate to 'neutralize potential or real threats to the State.'¹⁵⁶ Considered 'Maduro's political police,'¹⁵⁷ SEBIN is composed of several directorates, including two that are outside of its official structure: the Directorate of Technological Intelligence (Dirección de Inteligencia Tecnológica), which conducts telephone surveillance and monitoring of political targets, and the Division of Coordination and Protection of Democratic Order (División de Coordinación y Protección del Orden Democrático), which carries out arbitrary detentions.¹⁵⁸ Substantive orders reportedly come from the President and the Vice-President via the SEBIN Director.¹⁵⁹ SEBIN's main targets include civilians who are real or perceived government opponents or high profile critics, including opposition politicians, journalists, student leaders, leaders of protests, and persons working for NGOs.¹⁶⁰ SEBIN conducts surveillance of targets and reportedly provide daily updates to the President on their movements.¹⁶¹ SEBIN agents are accused of conducting detentions without warrant nor informing the reason of detention, using excessive force during arrests, planting evidence, and routinely justifying detentions by alleging that they were carried out *in flagrante delicto*.¹⁶² Detainees are often held incommunicado in covert detention centres, routinely interrogated without a lawyer present, extorted, and forced, under duress, to sign confessions for crimes they did not commit.¹⁶³ There are also reported instances of torture

¹⁵² UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 37

¹⁵³ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 37

¹⁵⁴ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 38-39

¹⁵⁵ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 50. This source also includes a detailed information on DGCIM's structure and activities.

¹⁵⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 51

¹⁵⁷ Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁵⁸ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 53

¹⁵⁹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 58

¹⁶⁰ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 59

¹⁶¹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 59

¹⁶² UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 60. See also, Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), p. 65

¹⁶³ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 61-62



and the commission of other human rights violations, usually committed within the few first days of detention, with methods including beatings, electric shocks, asphyxiation with plastic bags, threats to kill or rape detainees or their family members, and sexual violence.¹⁶⁴ These acts were committed to force confessions or to degrade, humiliate or punish detainees.¹⁶⁵ In some instances, detentions and acts of torture were also carried out against family members of targeted persons.¹⁶⁶

1.6 Monitoring of the population

Voice of America (VOA) reported that, according to a former government official who worked on information technology security in the Ministry of the Interior, Venezuela has developed a surveillance system to monitor the population, including facial recognition technology and the blocking of digital platforms including Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.¹⁶⁷ According to the former official, Chinese companies such as ZTE, Huawei, and China National Electronics Import & Export Corporation (CEIEC) provide the government of Venezuela with technical assistance to implement cyber surveillance mechanisms against dissidents and the political opposition.¹⁶⁸ The government has also instituted a comprehensive censorship apparatus dedicated to blocking web pages and creating social media accounts to disseminate its narrative and propaganda, and manipulate the flow of information.¹⁶⁹

Considered by the government the ‘central axis’ for the delivery of its social programs, the Homeland Card (Carnet de la Patria) was created in 2017 to deliver social programs ‘more efficiently.’¹⁷⁰ Among the social programs accessed through the Homeland Card are healthcare, housing, pre-natal care, youth programs, and access to food and other basic staples provided through the Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP, Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción).¹⁷¹ The Card includes a QR code that is used to collect the different bonuses offered by the government.¹⁷² In 2021, the government made the Homeland Card a requisite to access the CLAP food boxes, with no exceptions,¹⁷³ and every member of the household must have a card and scan it when receiving the food box.¹⁷⁴ Also,

¹⁶⁴ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 66-67. See also, Acceso a la Justicia, La administración de justicia penal en Venezuela, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 9-10

¹⁶⁵ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 66-67

¹⁶⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 70

¹⁶⁷ VOA, “Autoritarismo digital de China” a la medida de Venezuela, 7 December 2021, [url](#). See also: US, Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, The New Big Brother: China and Digital Authoritarianism, 21 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-35

¹⁶⁸ VOA, “Autoritarismo digital de China” a la medida de Venezuela, 7 December 2021, [url](#). See also: US, Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, The New Big Brother: China and Digital Authoritarianism, 21 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-35

¹⁶⁹ Redes Ayuda, Error 404: Democracia no encontrada, Informe 2.0, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁷⁰ Venezuela, Carnet de la Patria arriba a seis años, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Venezuela, Carnet de la Patria arriba a seis años, 20 January 2023, [url](#); Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

¹⁷² Venezuela, Carnet de la Patria arriba a seis años, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷³ El Diario, Pago del CLAP solo se permitirá a través del carnet de la patria, 13 May 2021, [url](#); El Cooperante, Quienes no escaneen el Carnet de la Patria no recibirán bolsas CLAP, 2 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ El Cooperante, Quienes no escaneen el Carnet de la Patria no recibirán bolsas CLAP, 2 February 2021, [url](#)



vehicle owners must possess the Homeland Card and register their vehicles with the Patria System to have a subsidised quota of 120 litres of gasoline per month.¹⁷⁵ The Homeland Card was also required to have access to the COVID-19 vaccine¹⁷⁶ and surgical procedures.¹⁷⁷

Venezuelan newspaper El Nacional reported that the Homeland Card is an evolution of the Tascón List,¹⁷⁸ and was created to systematise social control.¹⁷⁹ The Homeland Card was implemented with the assistance of Chinese telecommunications company ZTE as part of a broader program to monitor and exert control over the population.¹⁸⁰ In order to access programs and subsidies offered by the government, citizens must register in the Homeland System (Sistema Patria), providing, among others, identification number, telephone number, date of birth, sex, and address.¹⁸¹ Users are also required to fill out surveys before accessing a benefit, and these surveys request information on aspects such as the health of the applicant and his or her socioeconomic profile.¹⁸² According to Víctor Amaya, journalist with the Venezuelan news source TalCual, the use of the Homeland Card as such has decreased as the Homeland System platform and its application are being used instead to access government benefits.¹⁸³

In 2022, the government launched '1x10,' a 'civilian-military and police initiative to provide a response and solution to the needs and problems of the community.'¹⁸⁴ This initiative encompasses VenApp, an application that allows 'direct connectivity with the Government of Venezuela'¹⁸⁵ and the Homeland System.¹⁸⁶ Through VenApp, users can report breakdowns in the supply of public services¹⁸⁷ such as water, gas, and electricity,¹⁸⁸ and access government benefits.¹⁸⁹ Sources, however, noted that, in order to use the application, users must give

¹⁷⁵ El Diario, Pago del CLAP solo se permitirá a través del carnet de la patria, 13 May 2021, [url](#);

¹⁷⁶ El Diario, Pago del CLAP solo se permitirá a través del carnet de la patria, 13 May 2021, [url](#); Crónica Uno, "Si no tienes carnet de la patria no tienes vida", denunció adulto mayor que no fue vacunado en Carabobo, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ El Independiente, "Para operar a nuestro hijo en Venezuela nos exigían el carné de la patria", 22 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ The Tascón List was a list that contained the names of people who signed a 2003 petition to revoke the mandate of then President Hugo Chávez. The list was published on the internet by National Assembly congressman Luis Tascón in 2004 and was used by government agencies to target those who signed the petition, including by dismissing them from their jobs or rejecting their applications for employment. OAS, IACtHR, Ref. Caso San Miguel Sosa y otras vs. Venezuela – Escrito autónomo de Solicitudes, Argumentos y Pruebas, Héctor Faúndez Ledesma, 1 July 2016, [url](#), pp. 196-197

¹⁷⁹ El Nacional, DD HH de la UCAB: Carnet de la patria es una mutación de la lista Tascón, 4 October 2018, [url](#). See also: UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-12

¹⁸⁰ VOA, "Autoritarismo digital de China" a la medida de Venezuela, 7 December 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Como ZTE ayuda a Venezuela a implementar un control social al estilo chino, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ El Comercio, Bonos 2023 vía Carnet de la Patria en Venezuela: ¿Cómo consultar si soy beneficiario?, 26 July 2023, [url](#); El Diario, Pago del CLAP solo se permitirá a través del carnet de la patria, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸² Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Journalist, interview with EUAA, 18 August 2023

¹⁸³ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

¹⁸⁴ Venezuela, CLIP, Sistema 1 x 10 del Buen Gobierno nace con sustento científico, 25 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Venezuela, VenApp: Una aplicación soberana del Gobierno Bolivariano al servicio del pueblo para mejorar los servicios públicos, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Venezuela, 1X10 del buen gobierno, May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁸⁷ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; El Estímulo, VenApp: lo que hay tras la app promocionada por el gobierno venezolano, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ Venezuela, 1X10 del buen gobierno, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 12-13

¹⁸⁹ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023



consent to access information from the device including the name, email address, telephone number, location.¹⁹⁰

Sources also indicated that an additional form of surveillance is through the community councils (*Consejos populares*).¹⁹¹ Community councils are organisations located in communities that coordinate the provision of social programs such as the CLAP food boxes and the delivery of gas.¹⁹² According to Mirla Pérez, professor of political science at the Central University of Caracas (UCV, Universidad Central de Venezuela), each community has a ‘systemic scale’ made up, from the bottom, of a street chief (*jefe de calle*), who controls and conduct surveillance at the street level; a territorial chief (*jefe territorial*), who manages the street chiefs; the Units of Battle Hugo Chávez (UBCH, Unidades de Batalla Hugo Chávez¹⁹³), that congregate territorial and street chiefs; and the community councils, made up of, among others, street and territorial chiefs, and report to UBCH.¹⁹⁴ In order to be a street or territorial chief, the person must be a member of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV, Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela).¹⁹⁵ Sources indicated that the street chief has a comprehensive knowledge of, and conducts surveillance over, all inhabitants in his/her street.¹⁹⁶ They reportedly report on persons considered ‘counterrevolutionaries’ or critics of the government, and cut them off from the supply of gas and CLAP food boxes in reprisal.¹⁹⁷

1.7 2023 primary elections

The primary elections to choose the candidate from the political opposition for the 2024 presidential elections were held on 22 October 2023.¹⁹⁸ María Corina Machado, former lawmaker, won the primary elections with 93 % of the vote, followed by former lawmaker Carlos Prospero with 4 %.¹⁹⁹ In June 2023, the Comptroller General of the Republic (CGR, Contraloría General de la República) had disqualified and banned María Corina Machado from

¹⁹⁰ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; El Estímulo, VenApp: lo que hay tras la app promocionada por el gobierno venezolano, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Swissinfo.ch, El “vigilante” popular para el control social en Venezuela, 25 March 2021, [url](#); La Gran Aldea, Las elecciones del PSUV y la “obligación” de no ser elegidos (I Parte), 25 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹² Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Swissinfo.ch, El “vigilante” popular para el control social en Venezuela, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³ The UCBH are the social base of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, PSUV). PSUV, Las UBCH, 10 November 2013, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ La Gran Aldea, Las elecciones del PSUV y la “obligación” de no ser elegidos (I Parte), 25 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; La Gran Aldea, Las elecciones del PSUV y la “obligación” de no ser elegidos (I Parte), 25 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Swissinfo.ch, El “vigilante” popular para el control social en Venezuela, 25 March 2021, [url](#); La Gran Aldea, Las elecciones del PSUV y la “obligación” de no ser elegidos (I Parte), 25 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ Swissinfo.ch, El “vigilante” popular para el control social en Venezuela, 25 March 2021, [url](#); La Gran Aldea, Las elecciones del PSUV y la “obligación” de no ser elegidos (I Parte), 25 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ Reuters, Machado dominates Venezuela presidential primary, but unclear if she can run, 24 October 2023, [url](#); PBS, Former lawmaker Maria Corina Machado dominates opposition’s presidential primary in Venezuela, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Reuters, Machado dominates Venezuela presidential primary, but unclear if she can run, 24 October 2023, [url](#); PBS, Former lawmaker Maria Corina Machado dominates opposition’s presidential primary in Venezuela, 23 October 2023, [url](#)



running for public office for 15 years.²⁰⁰ However, sources indicated that Machado considered the decision ‘irrelevant’ and that she will continue running for the primary elections.²⁰¹ The primary elections were held without government support and faced challenges such as the relocation of polling stations, long queues, and lack of gasoline and public transport in some areas.²⁰² Sources reported that around 1.6 million people voted in the primaries.²⁰³ Two days after the elections, President Maduro indicated that the elections were a ‘farse’ and that the voter turnout was ‘inflated.’²⁰⁴

Sources indicated that the government was accused of engaging in disinformation campaigns and blocking the website where Venezuelans could consult the location of their polling stations.²⁰⁵ In June 2023, the National Assembly initiated a process to substitute all members of the National Electoral Council (CNE, Consejo Nacional Electoral), five years before the end of their term, through the appointment of a 11-member commission, almost all of them belonging to the ruling party.²⁰⁶ According to Human Rights Watch, ‘[a]n electoral council fully controlled by Maduro’s allies would make implementation of the reforms needed to ensure Venezuelans’ right to participate in free and fair elections very unlikely.’²⁰⁷ Additional information on the final composition of the CNE at the time of publication could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

Under a deal signed by the government and the opposition in October 2023, fair and transparent presidential elections would take place in the second half of 2024.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ Reuters, Venezuela bars leading opposition candidate Machado from holding office, 1 July 2023, [url](#); The Washington Post, She’s the front-runner in the race to oust Maduro. He’s out to block her., 21 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁰¹ The Washington Post, She’s the front-runner in the race to oust Maduro. He’s out to block her., 21 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁰² Reuters, Machado dominates Venezuela presidential primary, but unclear if she can run, 24 October 2023, [url](#); PBS, Former lawmaker Maria Corina Machado dominates opposition’s presidential primary in Venezuela, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁰³ Los Angeles Times, Machado consolida su ventaja del 92% en las primarias opositoras de Venezuela con escrutinio al 65%, 23 October 2023, [url](#); AP, El gobierno de Venezuela desacredita las elecciones primarias de la oposición: “Ha sido una farsa”, 25 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Los Angeles Times, Machado consolida su ventaja del 92% en las primarias opositoras de Venezuela con escrutinio al 65%, 23 October 2023, [url](#); AP, El gobierno de Venezuela desacredita las elecciones primarias de la oposición: “Ha sido una farsa”, 25 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ Infobae, A una semana para las primarias de la oposición en Venezuela: las claves del proceso que desafía al régimen de Maduro, 15 October 2023, [url](#); Efecto Cocuyo, Ataque a las primarias: desde el mazo de Diosdado hasta la IA se usaron para desinformar sobre las elecciones, 15 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ HRW, Venezuela: Increased Threats to Free Elections, 22 June 2023, [url](#); CNN, Comisión de primarias opositoras en Venezuela no descarta asistencia técnica del poder electoral y conforma comisión mixta con el Consejo Nacional Electoral, 25 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ HRW, Venezuela: Increased Threats to Free Elections, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ Reuters, Venezuela, opposition sign election deal; US weighs sanctions relief, 18 October 2023, [url](#); euronews, El Gobierno y la oposición venezolanos acuerdan unas elecciones “justas” para 2024, 18 October 2023, [url](#)



2. Humanitarian situation

2.1 Healthcare system

The government carries out the Mission Barrio Adentro (Misión Barrio Adentro)²⁰⁹ and the Unified System for Accessing Medicines (SUAF, Sistema Unificado de Atención Farmacéutica²¹⁰) with the stated purpose of facilitating access to healthcare to impoverished neighbourhoods.²¹¹ However, Venezuela's health system has been in a state of collapse for 'years' due to deterioration of infrastructure, lack of medical equipment, poor maintenance, lack of public services, deficiencies in the provision of medicines and medical supplies, and power and water cuts, in addition to corruption in the health sector,²¹² and underfunded and understaffed health centres.²¹³ Cervical and breast cancer treatments, for example, are often unavailable or inaccessible, and the cost to the patient of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine exceeding 100 USD.²¹⁴ There is a lack of reliable government data on endemic diseases and vaccinations.²¹⁵

In 2022, the Venezuelan Medical Federation (Federación Médica Venezolana) deemed the crisis in hospitals 'a health holocaust'.²¹⁶ The same Federation reported that 98 % of hospitals in Venezuela lack medications, have failures in laboratories, and lack water and electricity.²¹⁷ The same source indicated that of the 301 hospitals in Venezuela, more than 80 % are 'in ruins and [have been] abandoned for many years'.²¹⁸ HumVenezuela similarly indicated that, as of March 2022, 82.8 % of hospital care, 87 % of specialized ambulatory care, and 92 % of primary care facilities reported inoperative services.²¹⁹ Physicians for Health (Médicos por la Salud), a Venezuelan network of physicians that documents the state of healthcare in the country, indicated in its 2022 annual report that the situation of the healthcare system in Venezuela is

²⁰⁹ Mission Barrio Adentro is a social program created in 2003 for the delivery of healthcare in low-income neighbourhoods. The program includes clinics for the provision of preventive care and first aid, diagnosis centres, rehabilitation, treatment of chronic conditions, and financing of medical treatments and surgeries. Venezuela, MPPEFCE, Misión Barrio Adentro | Dos décadas atendiendo la salud del pueblo venezolano, 16 April 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁰ The SUAF is a social program run by the Ministry of Health to provide medicines with a discount of up to 70 %. Venezuela, MPPS, Sistema Unificado de Atención Farmacéutica realiza jornada de atención en La Pastora, 13 June 2023, [url](#); Atures, Sistema Unificado de Atención Farmacéutica sigue llevando medicamentos a precios accesibles al pueblo amazonense, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

²¹¹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 8

²¹² Transparencia Venezuela, Crisis sanitaria, hospitales muestran abandono y pérdidas, 7 April 2022, [url](#); IRC, Emergency Watchlist 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 67; DW, Health in Venezuela, in intensive care, 30 June 2022, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Salud en Venezuela: Un Privilegio hecho en corrupción, 2023, [url](#); HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 33-35

²¹³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 8

²¹⁴ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 9

²¹⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Salud en Venezuela: Un Privilegio hecho en corrupción, 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁶ El Pitazo, Federación Médica Venezolana: crisis hospitalaria se traduce en el holocausto a la salud, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁷ El Pitazo, Federación Médica Venezolana: crisis hospitalaria se traduce en el holocausto a la salud, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁸ Agencia EFE, En Venezuela no hay garantía a la salud, denuncia federación médica, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁹ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 34



‘critical,’ and that the situation has shifted over the years from being ‘temporary’ to ‘chronic.’²²⁰ According to the same source, 11 % of hospitals possess a functioning electricity generator, 45.9 % of emergency rooms and 70 % of surgery rooms experience shortages of medical supplies, and 80 % of tomography and magnetic resonance and 31 % of X-ray equipment are not operational.²²¹ Limited access to health services particularly affected those in need of life-saving treatments such as those awaiting organ transplants.²²² Specific types of care such as vaccines, obstetric care, and women’s cancers of the cervix and breast were frequently ‘unavailable or inaccessible.’²²³ Deficiencies in laboratory, x-ray, and ultrasound services reached 79 % inoperability in 2022.²²⁴

HumVenezuela reported that there were 19 million people who had lost access to health services in Venezuela due to inoperative services, and 16.6 million did not have the means to cover health expenses.²²⁵ Sources indicated that in 2022, patients died due to the lack of medicines and medical care,²²⁶ and power and water failures at hospitals,²²⁷ including 261 documented by Médicos por la Salud.²²⁸ Hospitals lost electrical power for an average of four hours per day in 2022 and 21 % had an intermittent water supply.²²⁹

Medicine costs fell onto patients and their families, and hospitals nationwide were estimated to only cover the costs of 35-40 % of emergency supplies and 60 % of emergency medicines.²³⁰ HumVenezuela noted that the factors that had the greatest impact on the collapsed health system are the departure of trained medical staff, permanent shortages of medications, medicines and basic healthcare supplies, highly deteriorated medical infrastructure, as well as the deteriorations in health indicators, lack of acute care in hospitals, and lack of access to medicines.²³¹

Health workers lacked safe working conditions and living wages, as well as being subject to acts of violence, intimidation,²³² and threats [600 in 2021].²³³ An investigative journalism team including Venezuelan news sources TalCual and El Pitazo, and Spanish news source

²²⁰ Médicos por la Salud, Informe anual 2022: Encuesta nacional de hospitales, [url](#), p. 2

²²¹ Médicos por la Salud, Informe anual 2022: Encuesta nacional de hospitales, [url](#), pp. 2-7

²²² UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 8

²²³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 8-9. See also: HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 34-36

²²⁴ DW, Health in Venezuela, in intensive care, 30 June 2022, [url](#)

²²⁵ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 34

²²⁶ Agencia EFE, En Venezuela no hay garantía a la salud, denuncia federación médica, 20 April 2022, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 69

²²⁷ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 67

²²⁸ Médicos por la Salud, Informe anual 2022: Encuesta nacional de hospitales, [url](#), p. 4

²²⁹ El Impulso, Médicos por la Salud: Al menos 4 horas a la semana están sin luz los hospitales del país, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

²³⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 8

²³¹ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 34-36

²³² OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 63-64; DW, Health in Venezuela, in intensive care, 30 June 2022, [url](#)

²³³ Infobae, Monitor Salud reportó 600 amenazas a trabajadores sanitarios que denunciaron el estado de la salud en Venezuela, 14 January 2022, [url](#)



Runrunes, among others, visited a number of health centres and reported on the lack of security personnel, including from a division of CICPC tasked with investigating crimes against healthcare centres.²³⁴ The same source reported that, according to medical personnel interviewed, robberies are ‘common’ and that personnel in some healthcare centres evaluate the possibility of hiring private security out-of-pocket.²³⁵ Wages for the health sector were described as ‘critically low.’²³⁶ The emigration of trained health personnel contributed to declining health indicators.²³⁷ There were reportedly 50 000 health professionals who migrated outside Venezuela, seeking better conditions and salaries following the deterioration of the health sector.²³⁸ The Venezuelan Program Education-Action on Human Rights (PROVEA, Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos) reported that by 2021, 70 % of medical personnel and 80 % of nursing personnel left the country.²³⁹ People who criticised deficiencies in the health system faced detention and arrest.²⁴⁰

2.2 Food security

The loss of livelihoods has resulted in deprivation of access to food in Venezuela.²⁴¹ Sources indicated that there were 12.3 million people facing food insecurity, including 2.1 million facing severe food insecurity in 2022.²⁴² The government continued making efforts to improve living conditions, such as through the CLAP food boxes system, which have given access to basic food items to over 6 million people.²⁴³ However, the average cost of CLAP box represents about 30 % of the average monthly minimum wage, and Venezuelans continue to experience difficulties accessing enough food for nutrition.²⁴⁴ According to the Venezuelan Observatory on Finances (Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas), the average cost of a food basket in June 2023 was about 355 USD.²⁴⁵ The International Rescue Committee (IRC) indicated that food insecurity remains ‘rampant’ as food, cooking gas, and essential items remained unaffordable for many Venezuelans.²⁴⁶ HumVenezuela reported that food shortages were not the main cause of restricted food access in 2022, but rather deterioration in food production,

²³⁴ openDemocracy, La inseguridad llega hasta los pasillos de los hospitales en Venezuela, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

²³⁵ openDemocracy, La inseguridad llega hasta los pasillos de los hospitales en Venezuela, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

²³⁶ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 12

²³⁷ DW, Health in Venezuela, in intensive care, 30 June 2022, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Salud en Venezuela: Un Privilegio hecho en corrupción, 2023, [url](#)

²³⁸ El Pitazo, Federación Médica Venezolana: crisis hospitalaria se traduce en el holocausto a la salud, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

²³⁹ DW, Health in Venezuela, in intensive care, 30 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 12; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 63

²⁴¹ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 28-30

²⁴² IRC, Emergency Watchlist 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 66; HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 29

²⁴³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 5

²⁴⁴ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 5

²⁴⁵ Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas, Caen las remuneraciones reales en el segundo trimestre de 2023, 18 July 2023, <https://observatoriodefinanzas.com/caen-las-remuneraciones-reales-en-el-segundo-trimestre-de-2023/>

²⁴⁶ IRC, Emergency Watchlist 2023, 2023, [url](#), pp. 66-67



and increased costs of food caused most people to spend more than half their incomes on food.²⁴⁷

2.3 Basic services

HumVenezuela reported that deteriorated living conditions resulted from depleted income sources, increasing the gap between resources and costs of living.²⁴⁸ Failures in access to water services, aqueducts, sanitation, electricity, domestic gas, communications, and public transit affected 67.7 % of the population in 2022.²⁴⁹ In 2022, there were 19.1 million people with severely restricted access to water.²⁵⁰ In Caracas, for example, NGO Ciudad Monitor reported in July 2023, that citizens in the metropolitan area lack access to running water for 65 % of the time, while other parts of the country are totally disconnected from the water supply, mainly in Amazonas, Zulia, and Carabobo.²⁵¹ Venezuela also faces a chronic housing shortage that has been exacerbated since 2019, causing 3.8 million people to live in inadequate housing and 2.5 million to live in overcrowded conditions.²⁵²

There were at least 206 protests regarding basic services in Venezuela in the first three months of 2023.²⁵³ The protests were mainly centred on electricity shortages, lack of drinking water, and lack of domestic/household gas.²⁵⁴

El País reported that between 2015 and 2018, the suicide rate for men in Venezuela rose from 3.8 to 9.3 per 100 000, and is currently approximately 8 per 100 000.²⁵⁵ The Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV, Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia) indicated that, according to its own research as authorities do not publish statistics, there are approximately 1.2 suicides per day.²⁵⁶ Especially concentrated in the Mérida State, the increase in suicides is attributed by experts to the economic and humanitarian crisis, resulting in increasing inequality.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁷ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 29

²⁴⁸ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 26-27

²⁴⁹ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 26-27

²⁵⁰ HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), p. 38

²⁵¹ HumVenezuela, Monitor Ciudad: Los venezolanos gastan cinco sueldos mínimos mensuales para surtir de agua potable sus hogares, 22 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁵² HumVenezuela, Follow-up report on the Impacts of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela Following the Confinement due to the COVID Pandemic, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 26-27

²⁵³ OVCS, Conflictividad durante el primer trimestre de 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 12

²⁵⁴ OVCS, Conflictividad durante el primer trimestre de 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 12; The full map of protests is available at this source.

²⁵⁵ El País, Venezuela's economic crisis has led to a surge in suicides, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁵⁶ OVV, La huella de la crisis económica eleva los suicidios en Venezuela, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ OVV, La huella de la crisis económica eleva los suicidios en Venezuela, 15 June 2023, [url](#); El País, Venezuela's economic crisis has led to a surge in suicides, 14 June 2023, [url](#)



2.4 Migration

Venezuelan forced migration accounts for the second largest movement of displaced persons in the world.²⁵⁸ There are no official statistics available from the government on migratory movements; however, the R4V platform compiled statistics from the main receiving countries taking in Venezuelan migrants that estimated that, as of August 2023, over 7.7 million Venezuelans have left the country since February 2018, with more than 6 million of them located within Latin America, mostly in Colombia.²⁵⁹

Sources reported that the Vice-President of the National Assembly indicated in January 2021 that the legislative body would enact a law to confiscate the properties of those who left Venezuela.²⁶⁰ Additional information on the enacting of the proposal could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this report. Clarín, an Argentinian news source, reported that between January and February 2021, ten attempts at confiscating the properties of Venezuelan migrants were reported in the municipality of Libertador.²⁶¹

2.4.1 Returnees

Return migration was reportedly occurring in 2022.²⁶² El País reported that, according to UCAB estimates, about 3 to 6 % of the over 7 million Venezuelans who have left may now be returning to the country.²⁶³ A survey by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) with 269 migrants returning to Venezuela, conducted between 6 September and 12 October 2022, found that 27 % of respondents decided to return due to a lack of access to basic services in the host country, being unable to make a living, or due to discrimination, lack of life prospects in the new location, and lack of regularization opportunities.²⁶⁴ Upon return to Venezuela, the main concern was lack of livelihoods/income and access to food.²⁶⁵

The government created in August 2018 the Return to the Homeland Plan (Plan Vuelta a la Patria), a program aimed at facilitating the return of Venezuelans to the country.²⁶⁶ The Plan is focused on Venezuelans who cannot pay for their own return.²⁶⁷ Venezuelans must register into the Plan and manifest their intention to return voluntarily to Venezuela and, once in the

²⁵⁸ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 9

²⁵⁹ R4V, Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela [Last updated 11 June 2023], n.d., [url](#)

²⁶⁰ Clarín, Casas tomadas en Venezuela: el plan del chavismo para confiscar las viviendas de quienes se fueron del país, 3 February 2021, [url](#); DW, La confiscación como arma política en Venezuela, 26 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁶¹ Clarín, Casas tomadas en Venezuela: el plan del chavismo para confiscar las viviendas de quienes se fueron del país, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁶² MMC, Returning to Venezuela: Drivers, Expectations, and Intentions, December 2022, [url](#), p. 3; BNN Bloomberg, Venezuelan Migrants are coming home as Maduro embraces capitalism, 8 March 2022, [url](#); The Washington Post, Many people have fled Venezuela. These migrants are returning. 26 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁶³ El País, Going home to Venezuela after years of exile: 'It's a different country', 16 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ MMC, Returning to Venezuela: Drivers, Expectations, and Intentions, December 2022, [url](#), p. 3

²⁶⁵ MMC, Returning to Venezuela: Drivers, Expectations, and Intentions, December 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²⁶⁶ Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo, El Plan Vuelta a la Patria suma 10 mil repatriados, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo, El Plan Vuelta a la Patria suma 10 mil repatriados, 28 November 2018, [url](#)



country, they are registered in the social protection system.²⁶⁸ By May 2023, around 30 000 Venezuelans have returned under the Plan.²⁶⁹ According to the government, between 2020 and January 2023, over 300 000 Venezuelans returned outside the Plan.²⁷⁰ However, sources indicated that there is no large-scale return to Venezuela.²⁷¹ According to a COI report on Venezuela produced by Landinfo, the Norwegian COI unit, it is difficult to know the real number of returnees as a ‘small number’ have returned through the Homeland Plan, while others have returned on their own.²⁷² UCAB indicated that the national government did not report what type of care, if any, was provided to victims of human trafficking upon their return after being repatriated or deported to Venezuela, ‘or whether authorities coordinated efforts with foreign governments to ensure the protection of said victims.’²⁷³

The Landinfo report indicated that ‘it is difficult to know’ what would be the situation of persons who, having participated in protests in the past, return to Venezuela, as the country’s judiciary ‘suffers from major shortcomings and there is a lack of legal certainty in the country.’²⁷⁴ Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report. According to Briceño-León, in theory, internal relocation is possible, but victims prefer to leave the country because relocation to other areas can expose them to targeting by criminal groups out of suspicion of being informants of rival groups.²⁷⁵ Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

²⁶⁸ Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo, El Plan Vuelta a la Patria suma 10 mil repatriados, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Relaciones Exteriores, Venezuela garantiza retorno de migrantes bloqueados en la frontera entre Chile y Perú, 6 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ Swissinfo.ch, Gobierno de Venezuela dice que más de 300.000 personas han retornado al país, 14 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁷¹ Norway, Landinfo, Venezuela: Tidligere og nåværende protestaksjoner, og retursituasjonen for personer som deltok i de store demonstrasjonene i 2017–2019, 30 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Venezuela: Situatieschets, 8 August 2023, [url](#), p. 52

²⁷² Norway, Landinfo, Venezuela: Tidligere og nåværende protestaksjoner, og retursituasjonen for personer som deltok i de store demonstrasjonene i 2017–2019, 30 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁷³ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3

²⁷⁴ Norway, Landinfo, Venezuela: Tidligere og nåværende protestaksjoner, og retursituasjonen for personer som deltok i de store demonstrasjonene i 2017–2019, 30 May 2023, [url](#), p. 5

²⁷⁵ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.



3. Security situation

3.1 Security issues

Briceño-León indicated that over the past three years, criminal activities that had diminished during previous years such as robbery, kidnapping, and extortion, increased.²⁷⁶ The same source explained that the legalisation and rising availability of foreign currencies, particularly US dollars, Colombian pesos at the Colombian border, and Brazilian reais at the border with Brazil, led to an increase in the commission of these crimes.²⁷⁷ The same source further indicated that the increasing dollarisation of the economy has also led to the disappearance of small, local criminal gangs and their absorption by larger criminal structures.²⁷⁸

In 2022, OVV documented 9 367 violent deaths in the country, representing a rate of 35.3 per 100 000 inhabitants.²⁷⁹ These deaths consisted of 2 328 homicides; 1 240 deaths in the context of ‘security operations,’ which are catalogued by authorities as deaths from ‘resisting authority’; and 5 799 that are considered ‘under investigation,’ which may include homicides or deaths from ‘resisting authority.’²⁸⁰ Additionally, 1 370 cases of disappearance were reported in 2022.²⁸¹ The states with the highest rates of violent deaths include Capital District (61 per 100 000 inhabitants), La Guaira (50), Miranda (48), Bolívar (43), Guárico (41), and Carabobo (41).²⁸² In 2022, Venezuela was the country with the highest rate of violent deaths after Honduras (35.8 per 100 000 inhabitants) and followed by Colombia (26.1), Ecuador (25.9), Mexico (25.2), and Belize (25).²⁸³ For 2021, OVV reported 11 081 violent deaths (a rate of 40.9 per 100 000 inhabitants), consisting of 3 112 homicides, 2 332 deaths in the context of ‘security operations,’ and 4 003 catalogued by authorities as ‘under investigation.’²⁸⁴

Venezuela is a major transit country of illicit drugs originating in Colombia.²⁸⁵ The Paraguaná Cartel, which operates in the states of Falcón, Carabobo, Zulia, and Anzoátegui, is dedicated to the trafficking of drugs, smuggling of gasoline, and engaging in corruption at seaports.²⁸⁶ The organisation reportedly does not often resort to violence to control territories as it has the

²⁷⁶ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

²⁷⁷ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

²⁷⁸ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

²⁷⁹ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 4

²⁸⁰ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸¹ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸² OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²⁸³ InSight Crime, Balance de InSight Crime de los homicidios en 2022, 8 February 2023, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁵ US, Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 215; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 18

²⁸⁶ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 115-117



protection and support of authorities.²⁸⁷ Sources also report that high-ranking members of the FANB are involved in the facilitation of drug trafficking through Venezuela.²⁸⁸

Extortion has been increasing in the country due to improvements in the economy and more availability of cash.²⁸⁹ Victims of extortion include businesses that use foreign currency in their operations such as those dedicated to the import of goods and services; businesses that were not affected by pandemic restrictions such as freight companies; rural industry, including cattle ranchers; small businesses;²⁹⁰ sea ports;²⁹¹ car dealers; appliance stores; physicians; and private schools and clinics.²⁹² Extortion fees are set according to the purchasing power of the victim, ranging from 5 USD per week to 50 000 USD per month.²⁹³ Extortion is mostly carried out by organised criminal groups and guerrilla organisations.²⁹⁴ Extortion takes place through threats made via pamphlets, telephone calls, burning of victims' vehicles, shooting at victims' residences, placing explosive devices at victims' properties, sending wreaths, and sending texts, audio messages, photos, and videos via WhatsApp.²⁹⁵ For example, sources reported the case of three fishermen in Barranquitas, Zulia state, who were killed at sea in January 2023 by a local gang known as 'El Yiyi' for refusing to pay the extortion fee.²⁹⁶ The killing was filmed and posted on social media as a message to other fishermen 'to align themselves with the demands of the gang.'²⁹⁷ Sources also reported that in February 2023, a criminal group arrived at a butcher store shooting indiscriminately at clients, injuring four and killing the butcher, for refusing to pay the extortion.²⁹⁸

Extortion by government officials and security forces also increased.²⁹⁹ Government officials often request the payment of a bribe to 'finalise' or 'speed up' administrative procedures.³⁰⁰ Similarly, citizens and trucking companies are often detained illegally at checkpoints to press the payment of a 'fee' in exchange for passage or to not impose them with a fine.³⁰¹ The 'fee'

²⁸⁷ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 120

²⁸⁸ InSight Crime, Cartel of the Suns, 14 May 2022, [url](#); Infobae, Maduro, el Cartel de los Soles y una nueva ola represiva, 31 January 2023, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 20

²⁸⁹ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 11; VOA, Atentados, extorsiones y secuestros amenazan el "pequeño rebote" económico en Venezuela, 8 September 2022, [url](#); Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

²⁹⁰ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; VOA, Atentados, extorsiones y secuestros amenazan el "pequeño rebote" económico en Venezuela, 8 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁹¹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²⁹² Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

²⁹³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 140, 146

²⁹⁴ OVV, Extorsiones en Lara: un delito que avanza silencioso, 24 February 2023, [url](#); El Nacional, Observatorio de Violencia alerta de un aumento de la extorsión de grupos delictivos en Venezuela, 20 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ El Nacional, Observatorio de Violencia alerta de un aumento de la extorsión de grupos delictivos en Venezuela, 20 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ El Nacional, Observatorio de Violencia alerta de un aumento de la extorsión de grupos delictivos en Venezuela, 20 June 2023, [url](#); El Pitazo, Zulia | Banda dedicada a la extorsión asesina a tres pescadores en Barranquitas, 7 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ El Pitazo, Zulia | Banda dedicada a la extorsión asesina a tres pescadores en Barranquitas, 7 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ El Nacional, Observatorio de Violencia alerta de un aumento de la extorsión de grupos delictivos en Venezuela, 20 June 2023, [url](#); Noticia al Día, Seis heridos dejan ataques a tiros a una carnicería y un supermercado en Maracaibo: Presumen extorsión (Fotos+Video), 18 February 2023, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; France24, Comerciantes venezolanos denuncian ser víctimas de extorsión policial, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

³⁰¹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 27; OVV, Informe anual de violencia 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 12



for truck companies, for example, consists of cash or some of the product they are transporting.³⁰² Some government officials have also been involved in cattle rustling with local criminal organisations to extort cattle ranchers with large sums of money.³⁰³ Most extortion of this type are made by GNB, PNB state and municipal police forces,³⁰⁴ and CICPC.³⁰⁵

There are no reliable statistics on extortion.³⁰⁶ Most victims do not file complaints due to fear of retaliation and lack of confidence in the justice system.³⁰⁷ Sources indicated that state response to extortion is inefficient.³⁰⁸ In response to extortion in Lara state, some rural businesses created ‘security brigades’ to combat extortion by public officials and criminal organisations.³⁰⁹ These brigades reportedly have around 2 000 weapons and authorities do not have any control over these groups.³¹⁰ Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

3.2 Armed actors

Several armed groups operate in Venezuela, including *sindicatos* (see section [3.2.2 Sindicatos](#)), *megabandas* (see section [3.2.3 Megabandas](#)), drug cartels, the National Liberation Army (ELN, Ejército Nacional de Liberación) from Colombia, and dissident groups of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo), also known as FARC dissident groups.³¹¹ The main illicit activities present in the country include extortion, drug trafficking, illegal mining,³¹² kidnappings, robberies,³¹³ and fuel smuggling.³¹⁴ According to a study by Transparency Venezuela (Transparencia Venezuela), the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International, the economy of fuel smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal mining, for example, reaches around 21.7 % of the country’s GDP.³¹⁵

³⁰² France24, Comerciantes venezolanos denuncian ser víctimas de extorsión policial, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁰³ InSight Crime, Criminal Groups Ally With State Forces for Cattle Theft in Venezuela, 27 July 2023, [url](#); albertonews, Banda liderada por José Ávila y Toshira Sánchez está matando y vendiendo todo el ganado robado de Carabobo (Fotos), 10 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 29

³⁰⁵ El Nacional, Observatorio de Violencia alerta de un aumento de la extorsión de grupos delictivos en Venezuela, 20 June 2023, [url](#); Globovisión, Detienen a un CICPC y un PNB por extorsionar a personas investigadas, 7 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ OVV, Extorsiones en Lara: un delito que avanza silencioso, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ OVV, Extorsiones en Lara: un delito que avanza silencioso, 24 February 2023, [url](#); VOA, Denuncias sobre muerte y extorsión en el campo venezolano, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ VOA, Denuncias sobre muerte y extorsión en el campo venezolano, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ OVV, Extorsiones en Lara: un delito que avanza silencioso, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁰ OVV, Extorsiones en Lara: un delito que avanza silencioso, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

³¹¹ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

³¹² Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 6

³¹³ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

³¹⁴ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 6

³¹⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 27



Criminal armed groups often operate with the cooperation, or tolerance of state security forces.³¹⁶ According to InSight Crime, police chiefs and local politicians have assumed direct control over gangs and *colectivos* to use them as a ‘clandestine armed wing to carry out dirty work’ to target dissidents.³¹⁷ Briceño-León similarly indicated that authorities at the national and local levels grant greater control to criminal groups over territories to maintain public safety and target dissidents and demonstrators.³¹⁸ The same source explained that former ‘peace zones,’ which were never legally created, evolved when public administrations established agreements with criminal groups to maintain order and target dissidents in exchange of greater territorial control and tolerance of criminal activities such as smuggling and extortion.³¹⁹ Examples of this dynamic include the ELN’s control over areas in Zulia and Apure, and Tren de Aragua’s control over areas in Aragua and Carabobo.³²⁰ Briceño-León provided the example that when an armed actor does not control demonstrations in its area of influence, authorities withdraw their support and act against that actor.³²¹ According to Briceño-León, some armed groups receive funds from the government via the inclusion of its members in the payrolls of public institutions, the delegation of the delivery of CLAP food boxes so groups could resell some of the items included in these boxes, and donations for ‘recreational’ or cultural activities, or for the creation of “enterprises”.³²²

3.2.1 *Colectivos*

Colectivos were initially created as community, social or student organisations, but over time changed their objectives to engage in the control of territory to proselytise in support of the government, engage in criminal activities,³²³ and carry out intelligence activities.³²⁴ *Colectivos* are present throughout the country and have the support of the state.³²⁵ A 2023 paper by Briceño-León on *colectivos*, and published in the journal *Espacio Abierto*, explained that *colectivos*

‘exercise a shared or collaborative governance that can be considered as duality in power or as a hybrid political order, in which it shares the territorial domain with the State, acting in a parallel or overlapping manner, where the group acts to favour the interests of the government and the government acts in favour of the group, which is

³¹⁶ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3; InSight Crime, Rise of the Criminal Hybrid State in Venezuela, July 2023, [url](#), p. 5

³¹⁷ InSight Crime, Rise of the Criminal Hybrid State in Venezuela, July 2023, [url](#), pp. 11-12

³¹⁸ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

³¹⁹ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

³²⁰ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

³²¹ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

³²² Briceño-León, Roberto, Las seis dimensiones de la gobernanza criminal y los grupos armados no estatales, in: La gobernanza criminal y el Estado: Entre la rivalidad y la complicidad, Briceño-León, Roberto and Olga Ávila (Eds.), Editorial Alfa, 2023, pp. 27-28

³²³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 129; InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal 'Colectivos' Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#);

³²⁴ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 8

³²⁵ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 9



why they stopped being a subversive political movement to become an expression of constituted power.³²⁶

Sources indicated that *colectivos* also have effective territorial control over some of the areas of the country and impose social norms, control the distribution of public services and programs,³²⁷ and vet political activities.³²⁸ Briceño-León provided the example of *colectivo* 23 de Enero, based in Caracas, which prohibits the entry of political activists of the opposition in their territory; bans inhabitants from holding political meetings at their homes or proselytising against the government; prohibits inhabitants from filming or taking pictures of the state of buildings, schools, or healthcare centres; and controls the distribution of CLAP food boxes.³²⁹

Sources indicated that *colectivos* are the *de facto* service providers in several areas of the country,³³⁰ carrying out activities such as:

- Opening and closing of water pipes, giving them the discretion to decide which streets and houses receive water;³³¹
- Distribution of CLAP food boxes;³³²
- Distribution of gas cylinders;³³³
- Distribution of gasoline by charging a 'fee' to allow drivers skip long queues;³³⁴ and
- Regulation of the transit of bus companies through social housing areas, including the charging of transit 'fees'.³³⁵

Colectivos recruit militants of the PSUV or beneficiaries of social programs administered by the state, and all members must be registered with the PSUV.³³⁶

Some *colectivos* have a political orientation³³⁷ and mobilise voters, often under threats, for a particular candidate.³³⁸ *Colectivos* also act as a paramilitary shock-force to repress anti-

³²⁶ Briceño-León, Roberto, La gobernanza de los 'Colectivos' de Caracas y el Estado en Venezuela, Espacio Abierto, Vol. 23, No. 2, April-June 2023, [url](#), p. 122

³²⁷ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 9; Briceño-León, Roberto, La gobernanza de los 'Colectivos' de Caracas y el Estado en Venezuela, Espacio Abierto, Vol. 23, No. 2, April-June 2023, [url](#), pp. 127, 130

³²⁸ Briceño-León, Roberto, La gobernanza de los 'Colectivos' de Caracas y el Estado en Venezuela, Espacio Abierto, Vol. 23, No. 2, April-June 2023, [url](#), p. 127

³²⁹ Briceño-León, Roberto, La gobernanza de los 'Colectivos' de Caracas y el Estado en Venezuela, Espacio Abierto, Vol. 23, No. 2, April-June 2023, [url](#), pp. 127-128

³³⁰ InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal 'Colectivos' Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#); UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 9

³³¹ InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal 'Colectivos' Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

³³² UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 9; InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal 'Colectivos' Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

³³³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 129, 136

³³⁴ InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal 'Colectivos' Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 129, 136

³³⁵ InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal 'Colectivos' Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

³³⁶ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 136

³³⁷ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 129, 136; El Tiempo, Dossier Venezuela: la historia desconocida de 'los Colectivos de Caracas', 18 May 2023, [url](#)

³³⁸ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 129, 136; UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 10



government demonstrations and political dissidents,³³⁹ including through raids, beatings, and point-blank shootings.³⁴⁰ Since *colectivos* have control over their areas of presence and operation, they can ‘easily’ identify political opponents and dissidents, prohibit demonstrations or the exhibition of dissent, and mobilise residents to participate in pro-government demonstrations.³⁴¹ Briceño-León quoted a member of the colectivo 23 de Enero as indicating that when an anti-government protest takes place, the *colectivo* waits until the demonstration subsides to later target participants as they control the census of the CLAP distribution and know where every person lives in the neighbourhood.³⁴² A research article by InSight Crime indicated for example that, in Lara state, the Comuna Taroa colectivo, one of the largest in the state, threatened residents in a Barquisimeto neighbourhood with the suspension of public services and the delivery of provisions if they did not vote for pro-government candidates and, in some instances, took residents against their will to voting centres, and also prevented voting centres from closing in violation of the electoral authority.³⁴³ *Colectivos* have reported ties with intelligence agencies, including DGCIM and SEBIN, to assist in the identification of targets.³⁴⁴ According to sources consulted by the UN FFMV, ‘DGCIM relied on a network of so-called “accredited workers” (*acreditados*) throughout the country to take part in operations. These often belonged to *colectivos* and worked *ad honorem*, as they received no regular pay but could access other benefits, such as an official DGCIM accreditation and access to money and assets taken from detainees.’³⁴⁵

Some other *colectivos* engage in licit business activities such as manufacturing of clothes, construction, agricultural production, transportation, telecommunications, and the administration of bakeries and local markets.³⁴⁶ Other *colectivos*, however, engage in criminal activities³⁴⁷ such as extortion, kidnappings, smuggling of gasoline, expropriation of private

³³⁹ El Tiempo, Dossier Venezuela: la historia desconocida de 'los Colectivos de Caracas', 18 May 2023, [url](#); Infobae, Un oficial de la GNB y jefe de la policía en Apure usó a los “colectivos” como grupos de choque y amenazó a los maestros que protestaban, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

³⁴¹ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 11

³⁴² Briceño-León, Roberto, La gobernanza de los ‘Colectivos’ de Caracas y el Estado en Venezuela, Espacio Abierto, Vol. 23, No. 2, April-June 2023, [url](#), p. 127

³⁴³ InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal ‘Colectivos’ Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 16; UN, FFMV, Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: Crimes against humanity committed through the State's intelligence services: structures and individuals involved in the implementation of the plan to repress opposition to the Government, 20 September 2022, [url](#), paras. 51, 64

³⁴⁵ UN, FFMV, Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: Crimes against humanity committed through the State's intelligence services: structures and individuals involved in the implementation of the plan to repress opposition to the Government, 20 September 2022, [url](#), para. 51

³⁴⁶ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 10

³⁴⁷ InSight Crime, Los colectivos, las Cupaz y la búsqueda del híbrido perfecto, 11 July 2023, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 129-135; InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal ‘Colectivos’ Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#)



property,³⁴⁸ control of street-level drug trafficking,³⁴⁹ and running illegal casinos.³⁵⁰ Other sources indicated, however, that *colectivos* have been lowering their profile and, in some areas, became less politically active as the benefits they receive from the government are reportedly dwindling, thus increasing their role in criminal activities.³⁵¹

In 2019, President Maduro created the Peace Brigades (CUPAZ, Cuadrillas de Paz), which, according to the government, are a group of civilian ‘volunteers’ to ‘keep the peace in Venezuela.’³⁵² However, sources also indicated that the CUPAZ consist of armed civilians and act as an umbrella organisation of *colectivos*.³⁵³ According to InSight Crime, CUPAZ are engaged in extortion, robberies, kidnapping, and street-level drug trafficking.³⁵⁴ The following map indicates the presence and activities of CUPAZ, as reported by InSight Crime:

³⁴⁸ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 129-135; InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal ‘Colectivos’ Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ Briceño-León, Roberto, La gobernanza de los ‘Colectivos’ de Caracas y el Estado en Venezuela, Espacio Abierto, Vol. 23, No. 2, April-June 2023, [url](#), p. 126

³⁵⁰ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 12

³⁵¹ Grey Dynamics, Colectivos: Maduro’s Venezuelan Militias, 1 January 2022, [url](#); InSight Crime, In Lara, Venezuela, Criminal ‘Colectivos’ Control Public Services, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁵² InSight Crime, Maduro’s Peace Defender Squads Are Anything But Peaceful, 12 July 2023, [url](#); El Pitazo, ¿Qué son las Cuadrillas de Paz que promueve el Gobierno?, 27 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³ InSight Crime, Maduro’s Peace Defender Squads Are Anything But Peaceful, 12 July 2023, [url](#); TalCual, Maduro activa las Cupaz y milicianos para «plan especial antigolpe» en todo el país, 21 August 2023, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ InSight Crime, Maduro’s Peace Defender Squads Are Anything But Peaceful, 12 July 2023, [url](#)



Where and How Do the Cupaz Operate in Venezuela?



Map 3. Presence and activities of the CUPAZ³⁵⁵

A research report produced by the UCAB, based on a survey conducted among victims of displacement by *colectivos*, indicated that the profile of victims of *colectivos* is diverse, and includes high school and university students, professionals, and business persons, mostly men, and that threats and other violent activities often extend to family members, including children.³⁵⁶ Most incidents of targeting by *colectivos* were due to political motivations, including participation in, or support of, demonstrations; support of political opposition parties; and criticism of the government.³⁵⁷ Additionally, business persons and manufacturers who are critical of the government are subjected to extortion, theft of their products, and attacks

³⁵⁵ InSight Crime, *Maduro's Peace Defender Squads Are Anything But Peaceful*, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ UCAB, CDH, *Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio*, June 2023, [url](#), pp. 22-23

³⁵⁷ UCAB, CDH, *Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio*, June 2023, [url](#), pp. 23-24



against their property; resisting extortion, refusing to be part of the *colectivo*'s network, or rejecting demands to 'donate' products to the CLAP food boxes are also targeted.³⁵⁸

Some of the targeting modalities used by *colectivos*, as documented by UCAB, include the detention of demonstrators to hand them over to authorities, beatings, verbal aggression, threats, extortion, kidnapping, shootings, destruction of property, theft, attacks against the victims' houses, threatening telephone calls with information on the victims' workplace or the whereabouts of the victims' children, and painting the victims' houses with graffiti.³⁵⁹

Sources reported that in November 2022, several female students protested the visit of Vice-President Diosdado Cabello at their educational institution by hanging a banner critical of the government.³⁶⁰ The students were held by members of *colectivos* who 'pulled the fingernails' of some as reprisal.³⁶¹ According to UCAB, the level of targeting usually increases over time and also involves family members. UCAB documented the cases of targeted persons who, after relocating or seeking refuge elsewhere, their family members and/or friends were detained, beaten, or threatened by *colectivos* to obtain the location of the person. *Colectivos* usually demand the victim to cease all political activities and also use extortion as a politically motivated action presenting it as a 'contribution to the revolution' in exchange of ceasing the targeting.³⁶² Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

3.2.2 *Sindicatos*

Sindicatos are criminal structures that originated in construction workers' unions that later started to obtain labour contracts in the building industry through intimidation and extortion.³⁶³ Over time, these groups evolved into criminal structures that expanded to other sector, including mining.³⁶⁴ *Sindicatos* are dedicated to the control of illegal mining activities and extorting workers, miners, businesses and others who work in or around illegal mines in the Mining Arc of the Orinoco (Arco Minero del Orinoco).³⁶⁵ *Sindicatos* provide 'authorization' to operate or work in the mines, as well as 'protection' to individuals, including those who run

³⁵⁸ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 24

³⁵⁹ UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 24

³⁶⁰ Infobae, Colectivos chavistas arrancaron las uñas a estudiantes que protestaban contra la visita de Diosdado Cabello a Mérida, 3 November 2022, [url](#); NTN24, Nuevo caso de tortura en Venezuela: colectivos chavistas arrancaron uñas a estudiantes, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

³⁶¹ Infobae, Colectivos chavistas arrancaron las uñas a estudiantes que protestaban contra la visita de Diosdado Cabello a Mérida, 3 November 2022, [url](#); NTN24, Nuevo caso de tortura en Venezuela: colectivos chavistas arrancaron uñas a estudiantes, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

³⁶² UCAB, CDH, Temor colectivo: La intimidación de colectivos armados como causa de solicitud de refugio, June 2023, [url](#), p. 25

³⁶³ International Crisis Group, Gold and Grief in Venezuela's Violent South, Report No. 73, 28 February 2019, [url](#); Briceño-León, Roberto, Las seis dimensiones de la gobernanza criminal y los grupos armados no estatales, in: La gobernanza criminal y el Estado: Entre la rivalidad y la complicidad, Briceño-León, Roberto and Olga Ávila (Eds.), Editorial Alfa, 2023, pp. 26-27

³⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, Gold and Grief in Venezuela's Violent South, Report No. 73, 28 February 2019, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61

³⁶⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61; Runrunes and Correo del Caroní, Viaje a la fosa de la devastación del Arco Minero – En busca de oro: Grupos armados invaden tierras y acorralan a comunidades indígenas, 18 December 2022, [url](#)



currutelas (places that sell sexual services).³⁶⁶ According to UN FFMV report, when a member of a *sindicato* wants to have sex with someone in mining areas, that person cannot refuse or they will be beaten; punished, including rape, sexual violence, cutting of the hair, and the disfiguring of the face; or killed.³⁶⁷ Some *sindicatos* run their own illegal mining operations and have in their payroll surveillance teams, logistical teams that provide mining supplies to their mines, and shock forces to defend and impose norms in their territories.³⁶⁸ Since 2020, *sindicatos* have been consolidating power over their territories and have expanded their areas of influence to other communities, local gangs, and members of state security forces.³⁶⁹ Some *sindicatos* call themselves The System (*El sistema*), and impose social norms, maintain ‘peace’ in their territories, solve family disputes or disputes among businesses, and approve the trading of property through ‘tribunals.’³⁷⁰ They also reportedly supply food and medicines, and develop infrastructure projects at local schools in an effort to be recognised by the community as entities that provide order due to the absence of the state.³⁷¹ According to Transparency Venezuela, those who ignore their rules are subjected to public punishments including beatings and mutilations ‘to send a message.’³⁷² The most notorious *sindicatos* or *sistemas* in the Mining Arc area include the following:

- Tren de Guayana: Created in 2010 in the state of Bolívar. It is currently made up of around 500 members and reportedly has ties with officers from the office of the governor of Bolívar and Brigade 51 of the FANB. It is dedicated to the trafficking of drugs and illicit minerals, killings, extortion of local businesses, and forced recruitment, including of adolescents.³⁷³
- Totó and Zacarías gang, also known as Banda de El Perú or Base de El Perú [sic]: Created in 2013 and is considered one of the most powerful criminal organisations in Bolívar state. The gang engages in direct confrontations with state security forces, particularly DGCIM; is dedicated to trafficking of illicit minerals, killings, and extortion of local businesses; and is known for displaying gruesome crimes such as the dismemberment of its victims.³⁷⁴
- Barrancas *sindicato*: Operates in the states of Monagas, Delta Amacuro, and Bolívar, as well as alongside the Orinoco River. It has around 300 members and is dedicated to the trafficking of minerals and drugs, smuggling of gasoline, extortion, trafficking in persons, and forced recruitment, including of children.³⁷⁵
- Organización R: Created in 2018, it has linkages with organised criminal organisations dedicated to illegal mining, and reportedly assisted a state mining company in the displacement of other criminal organisations, particularly Tren de

³⁶⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 113-114

³⁶⁷ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 113-114

³⁶⁸ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61

³⁶⁹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61

³⁷⁰ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 61-62

³⁷¹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 62

³⁷² Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61

³⁷³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 89-91

³⁷⁴ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 92-94

³⁷⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 143-147. See also: El Pitazo, ¿Cómo opera El Sindicato de Barrancas?, 15 January 2022, [url](#)



Guayana, from mining areas of interest to the state. Organización R is accused of committing killings, illegal mining activities, trafficking of weapons, and extortion. It also carries out ‘philanthropic’ activities such as the provision of food, healthcare, and education in its areas of operation.³⁷⁶

- Fabi Enrique González, also known as ‘Negro Fabio,’ a *pran*, or an imprisoned gang leader who leads, from jail, a criminal organisation. It is dedicated to extortion, killings, kidnapping, trafficking of weapons and gold, forced displacement of indigenous peoples, and trafficking of persons. Sources consulted by Transparency Venezuela indicated that González enjoys relative freedom despite two arrest warrants issued against him and reportedly has the support of government officials and state security forces.³⁷⁷

3.2.3 *Megabandas*

In Venezuela, *megabandas* are also known as *trenes*, criminal structures dedicated to, among others, killings, drug trafficking, and extortion.³⁷⁸ These organisations are usually led by *pranes*, imprisoned criminals who have some control over the interior of the prisons by imposing rules and charging ‘protection’ fees to other prisoners.³⁷⁹

Tren de Aragua is Venezuela’s most powerful and largest criminal organisation.³⁸⁰ It has between 4 000 and 5 000 members, under a solid hierarchy, and has branches in several countries in the Americas, including Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Brazil, and Costa Rica.³⁸¹ According to sources, Tren de Aragua experienced a fast expansion in South America due in part to the migration flows of Venezuelans in this region.³⁸² The main leader is Héctor Guerrero, also known as ‘Niño Guerrero,’ who has lieutenants, including in jail, who control criminal activities carried out by the organisation within Venezuela and abroad.³⁸³ Tren de Aragua’s main criminal activities include illegal mining; trafficking of drugs and weapons; trafficking in persons; kidnapping; extortion; forced recruitment, including of children; killings;

³⁷⁶ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 95-97

³⁷⁷ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 98-100

³⁷⁸ OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), p. 55

³⁷⁹ OVP, Informe anual 2022: El hambre es sinónimo de Muerte en las cárceles venezolanas, 2023, [url](#), pp. 50-55; Briceño-León, Roberto, Las seis dimensiones de la gobernanza criminal y los grupos armados no estatales, in: La gobernanza criminal y el Estado: Entre la rivalidad y la complicidad, Briceño-León, Roberto and Olga Ávila (Eds.), Editorial Alfa, 2023, p. 27

³⁸⁰ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 104; Infobae, Extorsión, prostitución, asesinatos, robos y narcotráfico: la banda venezolana “Tren de Aragua” se convirtió en una multinacional del crimen, 1 April 2023, [url](#); Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

³⁸¹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 104; Infobae, Extorsión, prostitución, asesinatos, robos y narcotráfico: la banda venezolana “Tren de Aragua” se convirtió en una multinacional del crimen, 1 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁸² Courrier international, Banditisme. Le Tren de Aragua, cette mafia qui prospère sur les malheurs de la diaspora vénézuélienne, 26 August 2022, [url](#); InSight Crime, Tren de Aragua, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

³⁸³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 106-107; Infobae, Extorsión, prostitución, asesinatos, robos y narcotráfico: la banda venezolana “Tren de Aragua” se convirtió en una multinacional del crimen, 1 April 2023, [url](#)



and robbery.³⁸⁴ It also subcontracts local gangs to carry out some of these activities.³⁸⁵ According to Briceño-León, Tren de Aragua also finances people who want to migrate by providing them with money and connections to arrive at their destination.³⁸⁶ Tren de Aragua also has female members, usually family members of established members of the organisation, who reportedly control some CLAPs and Community Councils, and collect extortion fees.³⁸⁷ Briceño-León indicated that Tren de Aragua is ‘highly sophisticated,’ structured as a federation, with a clear leader and local factions or cells that have a large degree of autonomy.³⁸⁸ In some areas, Tren de Aragua operate as a franchise, whereby imprisoned leaders in Aragua grant permits to local criminal gangs elsewhere to use the Tren de Aragua’s name, resources, connections, weapons, and allies to carryout criminal activities.³⁸⁹ The same source indicated that Tren de Aragua operates with the knowledge and tolerance of authorities.³⁹⁰ Tren de Aragua has linkages with organisations such as the Gaitanist Self-defence Forces of Colombia (AGC, Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia), also known as the Gulf Clan (Clan del Golfo),³⁹¹ and First Capital Command (PCC, Primeiro Comando da Capital) of Brazil.³⁹²

The criminal group led by Erick Alberto Parra, also known as ‘Yeiko [or Yeico] Masacre,’ operates in the municipalities of Santa Rita, Cabimas, and Miranda, in Zulia state, as well as in other countries such as Colombia, Ecuador and Chile, and is dedicated to extortion, kidnappings, smuggling of gasoline, killings by hire, street-level drug trafficking, sexual exploitation of migrants, and forced recruitment of adolescents.³⁹³ Parra deserted the military in 2014³⁹⁴ and is currently under an Interpol arrest warrant.³⁹⁵

Other *megabandas* include:

- El Koki, which is present in Caracas and the state of Miranda, and Richardi, located in the states of Carabobo, Cojedes, Zulia, and Trujillo. These bands are dedicated to trafficking of gold, drugs, and weapons, as well as extortion, kidnapping, killings,

³⁸⁴ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 110-111. See also: Infobae, Extorsión, prostitución, asesinatos, robos y narcotráfico: la banda venezolana “Tren de Aragua” se convirtió en una multinacional del crimen, 1 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁸⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 110-111. See also: Infobae, Extorsión, prostitución, asesinatos, robos y narcotráfico: la banda venezolana “Tren de Aragua” se convirtió en una multinacional del crimen, 1 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁸⁶ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

³⁸⁷ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 112-113; Briceño-León, Roberto, Las seis dimensiones de la gobernanza criminal y los grupos armados no estatales, in: La gobernanza criminal y el Estado: Entre la rivalidad y la complicidad, Briceño-León, Roberto and Olga Ávila (Eds.), Editorial Alfa, 2023, p. 24

³⁸⁸ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

³⁸⁹ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

³⁹⁰ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

³⁹¹ International Crisis Group, Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, 9 August 2022, [url](#), p. 16; Fundaredes, #Boletín41 | Bandas criminales adoptan estructuras de la guerrilla y exhiben identidad corporativa, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁹² El País, El principal grupo criminal brasileño se rearma con un millar de emigrantes venezolanos, 8 February 2021, [url](#); InSight Crime, Tren de Aragua, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

³⁹³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 137-139

³⁹⁴ El Estímulo, Yeico Masacre: CICPC captura a seis miembros de su banda en Maracaibo, 30 August 2023, [url](#); InSight Crime, Yeico Masacre, 13 February 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ InSight Crime, Yeico Masacre, 13 February 2023, [url](#); Fundaredes, #Boletín41 | Bandas criminales adoptan estructuras de la guerrilla y exhiben identidad corporativa, 5 July 2022, [url](#)



attacks with explosives, theft, and forced recruitment, including of children.³⁹⁶ One of El Koki's founder leader was killed by the CICPC in 2022, and the leader of Richardi, Néstor Richardi Sequera, is imprisoned in the Tocuyito prison, Carabobo.³⁹⁷

- Wilaxis, based in Petare, Caracas, has between 150 and 200 members.³⁹⁸ It is dedicated to extorting formal and informal merchants, kidnapping, and controlling the micro-trafficking of drugs.³⁹⁹
- Tren del Llano, present in Guárico state,⁴⁰⁰ is dedicated to extortion, kidnapping, and the smuggling of drugs.⁴⁰¹

Criminal groups usually recruit children and adolescents from the neighbourhoods where they operate and exert influence.⁴⁰² Recruitment usually consists of providing children and adolescents with luxuries, over time. Once they are required to be part of the band, they cannot refuse as it would expose them to targeting.⁴⁰³

3.2.4 National Liberation Army (ELN, Ejército Nacional de Liberación)

The ELN, a guerrilla group from Colombia, has a presence in over 40 municipalities in eight Venezuelan states,⁴⁰⁴ including Amazonas, Barinas, Táchira, Zulia, Monagas, Apure,⁴⁰⁵ Anzoátegui, and Bolívar.⁴⁰⁶ Alongside the Venezuela-Colombia border, the ELN operates 'with near-total impunity'.⁴⁰⁷ Contrary to its status in Colombia where the ELN is a guerrilla group that acts against the Colombian government, in Venezuela it is tolerated and supported by the Venezuelan state.⁴⁰⁸ The ELN initially used Venezuela as a hideout from Colombian military operations; however, it is currently involved in illicit criminal activities and have extended their areas of operation inside Venezuela.⁴⁰⁹ The ELN has made inroads inside Venezuelan communities, particularly alongside the border with Colombia.⁴¹⁰ In many of these communities, the ELN is the *de facto* authority, regulating economic activity and imposing

³⁹⁶ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 121-125, 141

³⁹⁷ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 121-122

³⁹⁸ InSight Crime, Wilaxis Alexander Acevedo Monasterios, alias 'Wilaxis', 20 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ InSight Crime, Wilaxis Alexander Acevedo Monasterios, alias 'Wilaxis', 20 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; InSight Crime, Tren del Llano, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ InSight Crime, Tren del Llano, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰² Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁴⁰³ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁴⁰⁴ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito's Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 148-149; InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito's Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito's Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – Venezuela, Colombia, and the ELN at the Crossroads of Peace, 3 October 2022, [url](#); Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

⁴⁰⁸ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia's Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia's Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 149, 151, 155

⁴¹⁰ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 149



social norms and a justice system that includes the resolution of domestic disputes and cases of infidelity.⁴¹¹ It is also engaged in the distribution of CLAP food boxes.⁴¹² The ELN also engages in the indoctrination of children at local schools about ‘imperialism, class struggle, and the legitimacy of the ELN’s revolution.’⁴¹³

The ELN restarted peace negotiations with the Colombian government in November 2022 in Cuba.⁴¹⁴ A six-month cease-fire, starting on 3 August 2023, was agreed between the government and the ELN.⁴¹⁵ A fourth round of negotiations took place between 14 August and 4 September 2023 in Caracas.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#). See also: InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito’s Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

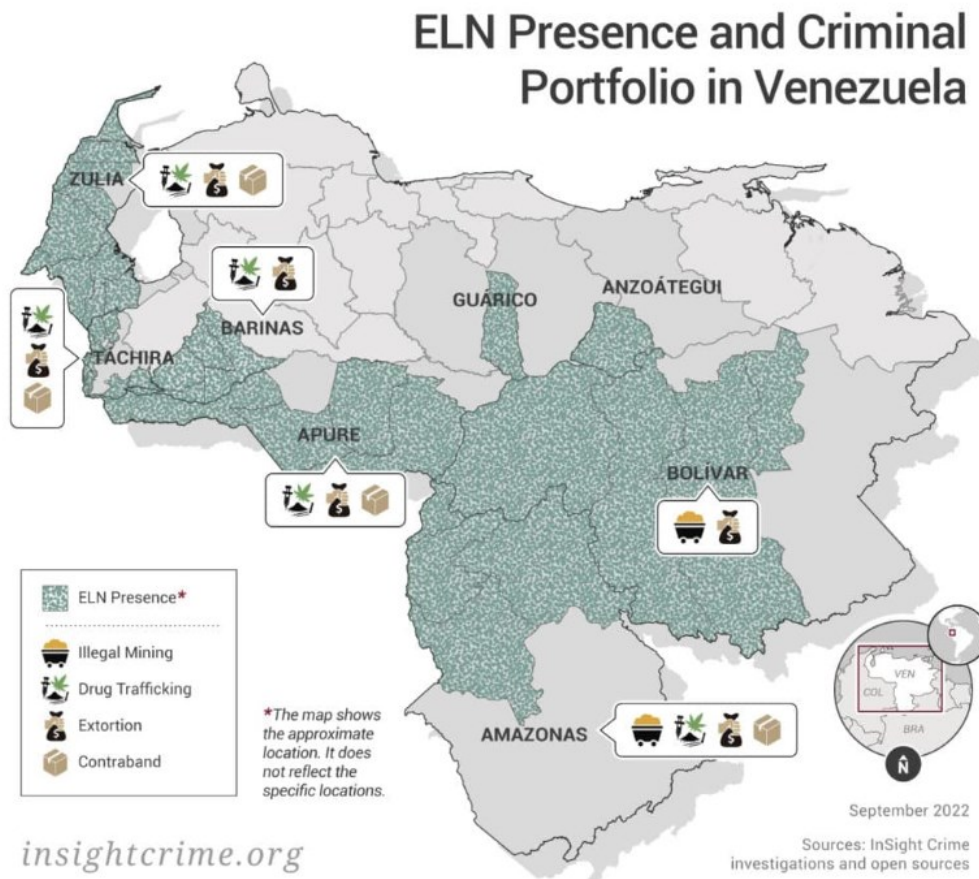
⁴¹² Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 149

⁴¹³ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito’s Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁴ El País, Proceso de paz con el ELN: cese al fuego, sedes y puntos de la agenda en las negociaciones con el Gobierno de Gustavo Petro, 12 June 2023, [url](#); CNN, Así han sido los procesos de paz entre el Colombia y ELN durante años y estos han sido los resultados, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ El País, Proceso de paz con el ELN: cese al fuego, sedes y puntos de la agenda en las negociaciones con el Gobierno de Gustavo Petro, 12 June 2023, [url](#); CNN, El Gobierno colombiano y el ELN acuerdan cese del fuego nacional y bilateral por 6 meses, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹⁶ DW, Ayuda humanitaria y atención a reclusos: los acuerdos del ELN y el Gobierno de Colombia en Caracas, 5 September 2023, [url](#); Swissinfo.ch, Gobierno de Colombia y la guerrilla del ELN cierran en Caracas el cuarto ciclo de diálogos, 4 September 2023, [url](#)



Map 4. ELN presence and criminal portfolio in Venezuela.⁴¹⁷

The ELN has about 2 350 members, half of which operate in Venezuela.⁴¹⁸ The ELN engages in forced recruitment of Venezuelans, including of minors, but also recruits ‘voluntarily’ due to the country’s poverty and the economic crisis.⁴¹⁹ In January 2022, for example, the ELN broke into a house in a rural area of Apure and took away at gunpoint a 14-year-old girl and her 18-year-old brother and, according to neighbours, their bodies were later found after a clash with a FARC dissident group.⁴²⁰ Human Rights Watch also reported the case of a 34-year-old man in a rural area of Apure who was forced to join the ELN under the threat of killing his four sons; three days later, he was killed in an armed confrontation with FARC dissidents.⁴²¹ Some of the leaders of the ELN in Venezuela are young Venezuelan citizens,⁴²² and ELN also recruits

⁴¹⁷ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito’s Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 150; InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito’s Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁹ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁰ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴²¹ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴²² Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 149

and/or force indigenous youths to act as ‘guides’ or to transport drugs.⁴²³ According to InSight Crime, the ELN ‘is not a rigidly hierarchical, centrally commanded insurgency but a federation of semi-autonomous regional networks known as War Fronts. The ELN’s decision-making process requires these often-fractional fronts to come to a consensus for major decisions.’⁴²⁴

The ELN has been accused of invasion and appropriation of private property; trafficking of gold and drugs; smuggling of food, animals and gasoline; money laundering; killings; imposition of curfews; extortion; setting up of illegal checkpoints; and forced recruitment, including children and migrants.⁴²⁵ In Zulia state, for example, the ELN controls numerous clandestine airstrips for drug trafficking, and along the border with Colombia, it controls numerous illegal border crossings used by migrants and traffickers who must pay a transit ‘fee’ to the ELN.⁴²⁶ It has also been involved in regional elections by stationing armed combatants at polling stations and forcing residents to vote for a particular candidate.⁴²⁷ The ELN engages in armed confrontations for territorial control with criminal organisations such as Tren de Aragua, the Barrancas *sindicato*,⁴²⁸ and FARC dissident groups.⁴²⁹ Civilians are often caught in the middle of confrontations and there are accusations that the ELN killed civilians accused of collaborating with rival groups.⁴³⁰ Human Rights Watch, for example, reported the killing in January 2022 of a father and his two sons by the ELN after the armed group accused him of being an ‘informant’ of a FARC dissident group.⁴³¹ The ELN has established alliances with criminal organisations such as the Sinaloa cartel from Mexico, for the trafficking of drugs; Brazilian organised criminal groups such as Comando Vermelho and Familia do Norte, for trafficking minerals; and ‘tens’ of local gangs to collect ‘taxes’ from drug traffickers operating in their areas of influence and operation.⁴³² Sources also reported on the collaboration between the ELN and Venezuelan state security forces, including in joint operations to displace FARC dissident groups from Venezuelan territory,⁴³³ and that Venezuelan forces have been complicit in the commission of abuses.⁴³⁴ Human Rights Watch reports that two ELN combatants and a FANB soldier executed a man in January 2022 in a rural area of Apure

⁴²³ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Venezuela and the ELN’s Love-Hate Relationship with Drug Trafficking, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Venezuela, Colombia, and the ELN at the Crossroads of Peace, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 149, 151, 155; InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Venezuela, Colombia, and the ELN at the Crossroads of Peace, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Venezuela and the ELN’s Love-Hate Relationship with Drug Trafficking, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁷ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁸ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 149; InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito’s Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁹ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – How Venezuela Became a Cemetery for the ex-FARC Mafia Leadership, 3 October 2022, [url](#); HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁰ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – How Venezuela Became a Cemetery for the ex-FARC Mafia Leadership, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴³¹ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴³² Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 149

⁴³³ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – How Venezuela Became a Cemetery for the ex-FARC Mafia Leadership, 3 October 2022, [url](#); HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)



state, accusing him of being an ‘informant’ of FARC dissidents.⁴³⁵ The ELN also has influence over municipal mayors and councillors.⁴³⁶

3.2.5 FARC dissidents

FARC dissident groups originated when some members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FACR-EP, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo) refused to demobilise after signing the peace agreement with the government in 2016.⁴³⁷ Dissident groups operate both in Colombia and Venezuela.⁴³⁸ FARC dissidents initially used Venezuela as a hideout from Colombian military operations; however, despite its involvement in illicit criminal activities and their continuing presence in the country, several of their top commanders have been killed in Venezuela.⁴³⁹ At least two FARC dissident groups, the General Central Command (EMC, Estado Mayor Central),⁴⁴⁰ and Segunda Marquetalia, are present in at least 17 municipalities in the bordering states of Apure, Barinas, Amazonas, Zulia, and Táchira.⁴⁴¹ According to Colombian authorities, around 2 400 combatants of FARC dissidents were in Venezuela by October 2021, around 1 800 more than in 2019.⁴⁴² FARC dissidents engage in forced recruitment, including of children as young as five-years old, migrants, and indigenous persons.⁴⁴³ Methods of recruitment range from offering a salary, to threats or pressure to join the groups.⁴⁴⁴

In many communities along the border with Colombia, FARC dissidents are the de facto authority, imposing their own social norms and justice system, and regulating economic activity.⁴⁴⁵ FARC dissident groups are also accused of killing persons perceived to be cooperating with rival groups.⁴⁴⁶ *Segunda Marquetalia* reportedly has political connections with the Venezuelan government as well as financial resources, but lacks the military power of EMC.⁴⁴⁷

⁴³⁵ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁶ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Pablito’s Plan: Rise of the ELN in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁷ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 156; InSight Crime, ExFARC Mafia, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 156; Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

⁴³⁹ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – How Venezuela Became a Cemetery for the ex-FARC Mafia Leadership, 3 October 2022, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 149, 151, 155

⁴⁴⁰ The EMC was created with dissident groups that refused to demobilise, under the leadership of Néstor Gregorio Vera, also known as ‘Iván Mordisco,’ and Miguel Botache Santillana, also known as ‘Gentil Duarte.’ InSight Crime, Central General Staff – Ex-FARC Mafia, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 156. See also: InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – How Venezuela Became a Cemetery for the ex-FARC Mafia Leadership, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴² Reuters, EXCLUSIVE Some 1,900 Colombian guerrillas operating from Venezuela, says Colombia military chief, 1 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 163-164

⁴⁴⁴ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 164

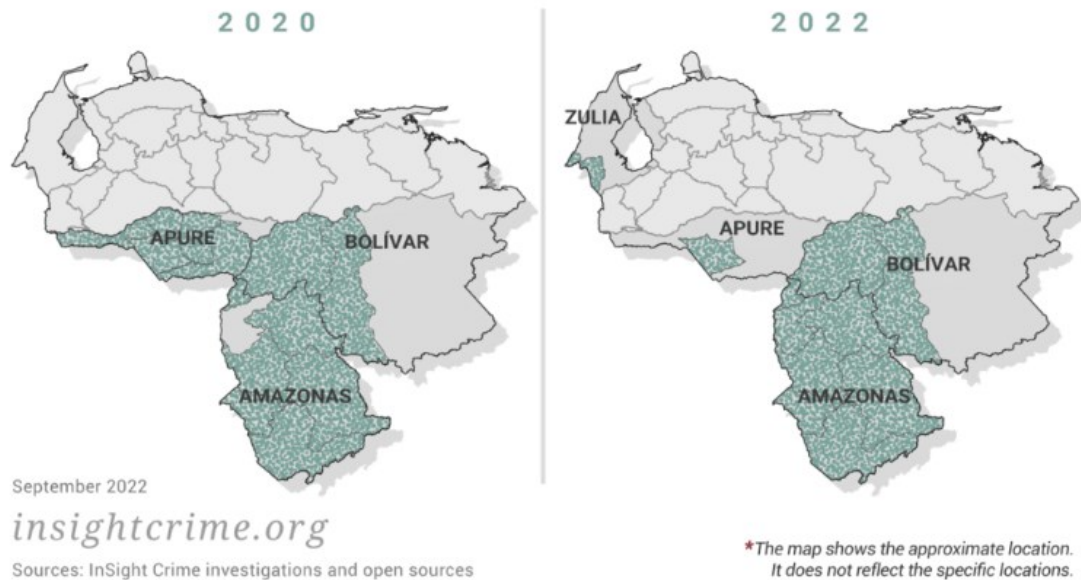
⁴⁴⁵ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – Rebels and Paramilitaries: Colombia’s Guerrillas in Venezuela, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁷ InSight Crime, ExFARC Mafia, 1 June 2023, [url](#)



Evolution of the Ex-FARC Mafia's Presence in Venezuela



Map 5. Evolution of the Ex-FARC mafia's presence in Venezuela.⁴⁴⁸

Criminal activities attributed to FARC dissidents include trafficking of minerals and drugs, smuggling of gasoline, extortion,⁴⁴⁹ kidnapping, and forced recruitment, including children and migrants.⁴⁵⁰ They also control illegal border crossings between Venezuela and Colombia, which are used to smuggle gasoline and persons.⁴⁵¹ FARC dissident groups engage in armed confrontations among them and with other local actors.⁴⁵² EMC, for example, have engaged in clashes with Segunda Marquetalia, FANB, and ELN.⁴⁵³ Among the associates of FARC dissidents in Venezuela are the Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG, Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación), the Sinaloa cartel, and Comando Vermelho.⁴⁵⁴ FARC dissidents also have alliances with security forces and political actors, including senior government officials.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁴⁸ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – How Venezuela Became a Cemetery for the ex-FARC Mafia Leadership, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 156, 163-164; InSight Crime, ExFARC Mafia, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 164

⁴⁵¹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 161

⁴⁵² Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 157; InSight Crime, ExFARC Mafia, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 157

⁴⁵⁴ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 162; InSight Crime, ExFARC Mafia in Venezuela, 13 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ InSight Crime, ExFARC Mafia in Venezuela, 13 October 2021, [url](#)



In March 2023, the government of Colombian President Gustavo Petro established a negotiation with the EMC FARC dissident group as part of his policy of 'total peace' to dismantle armed groups in Colombia.⁴⁵⁶

3.3 Security situation at the border with Colombia

Armed groups operating on both sides of the border include the ELN, FARC dissident groups, the Patriotic Forces of National Liberation (FPLN, Fuerzas Patrióticas de Liberación Nacional),⁴⁵⁷ and Colombian paramilitary groups.⁴⁵⁸ Armed groups are accused of committing abuses such as killings; forced recruitment, including of children; and forced displacement.⁴⁵⁹ These crimes often take place with the complicity of Venezuelan security forces and the lack of efficacy of Colombian authorities.⁴⁶⁰ The ELN has an important presence in the Catatumbo area due to the demobilisation of the FARC-EP, the dwindling of the Liberation Popular Army (EPL, Ejército Popular de Liberación), and its increasing military power.⁴⁶¹ According to Briceño-León, armed groups entered into an agreement to parcel out the control of the Orinoco river, which is used to smuggle goods and traffic drugs from the processing centres in the Amazon to areas in the Caribbean coast.⁴⁶²

In January 2022, for example, armed confrontations between the ELN and FARC dissidents in Colombia's Arauca department and Venezuela's Apure state led to the internal displacement of 3 860 people within Arauca, the displacement of 3 300 people from Apure to Arauca, the killing of 'dozens' of persons accused by the ELN of collaborating with FARC dissidents, and the forced disappearance of people, some of whom were later found dead.⁴⁶³ In February 2022, a FARC dissident group detonated a car bomb near a building in Saravena, Arauca, which was used by several human rights organisations as headquarters, claiming that the building was an ELN 'urban command center headquarters'.⁴⁶⁴

Border states such as Apure, Táchira and Zulia are particularly affected by extortion from criminal groups to finance their criminal operations and implement social control measures in their areas of operation.⁴⁶⁵ Venezuelan security forces, including the FANB, FAES, GNB, and the National Anti-extortion and Anti-kidnapping Command (CONAS, Comando Nacional Antiextorsión y Secuestro), are also accused of committing abuses including looting,

⁴⁵⁶ VOA, Colombia iniciará mesa de diálogo con disidencia FARC, 13 March 2023, [url](#); Swissinfo.ch, Disidencias de FARC dicen que aún no se habló que Venezuela sea garante en diálogo de paz, 17 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵⁸ Swissinfo.ch, ONG de Venezuela denuncia extorsiones de grupos irregulares contra ganaderos, 18 May 2023, [url](#); HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁹ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia's War Migrated to Venezuela – Venezuela and the ELN's Love-Hate Relationship with Drug Trafficking, 3 October 2022, [url](#); Swissinfo.ch, ONG de Venezuela denuncia extorsiones de grupos irregulares contra ganaderos, 18 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶² Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁴⁶³ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ Swissinfo.ch, ONG de Venezuela denuncia extorsiones de grupos irregulares contra ganaderos, 18 May 2023, [url](#)



extrajudicial executions, and illegal detentions.⁴⁶⁶ OHCHR also reported cases of sexual violence against indigenous girls by members of FARC dissident groups in the state of Amazonas.⁴⁶⁷

Displacement in the area is also critical.⁴⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch indicated that Venezuelans who had been displaced to the Vichada department in Colombia lacked access to food, drinking water, and healthcare, and that indigenous Venezuelans were living in the shores of the Meta River in improvised shelters.⁴⁶⁹ Sources also reported that armed groups have threatened some displaced persons and that displaced children are exposed to forced recruitment.⁴⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch reported the case of a family in rural Apure that was accused by the ELN in January 2022 of giving food to a FARC dissident group and ordered to leave the area under the threat of forcibly recruiting their children aged 8 and 15; however, when the family was crossing into Colombia, the husband was detained by the ELN and forcibly disappeared.⁴⁷¹

Armed groups, particularly Colombian guerrillas and paramilitary groups, impose social restrictions and norms,⁴⁷² including curfews, prohibitions to commit crimes such as rape or murder, regulation of fishing, and closing times for bars.⁴⁷³ Rules and norms are enforced through threats, kidnappings, forced labour, child recruitment, murder, and extortions.⁴⁷⁴

State response is ‘non-existent’⁴⁷⁵ and the judiciary seldom investigates despite compelling evidence of widespread human rights abuses.⁴⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch quoted Venezuelan authorities as indicating that state security forces ‘have destroyed guerrilla camps and drug laboratories, and arrested 35 members of armed groups’; however, these operations appear to be targeted against FARC dissident groups.⁴⁷⁷

Venezuela reopened its borders with Colombia on 1 January 2023 after being closed in February 2019,⁴⁷⁸ and with Aruba and Curaçao on 1 May 2023 after being closed for over four years.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁶⁶ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁷ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 27

⁴⁶⁸ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Guerrillas colombianas se disputan zona clave del narco en frontera venezolana; mueren 23 en enfrentamiento, 4 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁹ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁰ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷¹ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷² Swissinfo.ch, ONG de Venezuela denuncia extorsiones de grupos irregulares contra ganaderos, 18 May 2023, [url](#); HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Swissinfo.ch, ONG de Venezuela denuncia extorsiones de grupos irregulares contra ganaderos, 18 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ HRW, Venezuela: Security Force Abuses at Colombia Border, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ HRW, Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ DW, Venezuela y Colombia completan reapertura de frontera común, 1 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ TalCual, Tras cuatro años cerrada frontera marítima Venezuela-Aruba es reabierto, 1 May 2023, [url](#)



3.4 Security situation at the Mining Arc of the Orinoco

The Mining Arc of the Orinoco is mostly located in the state of Bolívar, with small areas in the states of Amazonas and Delta Amacuro, and is an area rich of strategic minerals such as gold, diamonds, coltan, and bauxite.⁴⁸⁰ The Mining Arc was declared a ‘National Strategic Development Zone’ in February 2016 by president Maduro.⁴⁸¹ Around 170 indigenous communities live in the Mining Arc area.⁴⁸² Transnational mining companies operate in the area alongside illegal and small-scale miners who have been historically present in the region.⁴⁸³ The rise of prices of minerals has also increased illegal mining activities which has an impact on the economic and humanitarian situation in the country.⁴⁸⁴ It is estimated that around 75 % of the mining in Venezuela is carried out illegally.⁴⁸⁵

Sources indicated that the security situation in the Mining Arc is of ‘deep concern’ due to human rights violations such as killings, kidnappings, torture, exploitation of miners, child labour, human trafficking, sexual violence, forced prostitution, and trafficking of weapons.⁴⁸⁶ Violent attacks against indigenous leaders have been reported in the Mining Arc area.⁴⁸⁷ In Bolívar state, sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and sexual exploitation, against women, girls, indigenous persons, and LGBT individuals, are ‘commonplace,’ and are perpetrated by both State actors and criminal groups.⁴⁸⁸ Children as young as 11 years old are forced into prostitution and sexual exploitation in mining areas.⁴⁸⁹ There are also reports of sexual violence committed by State agents at checkpoints throughout Bolívar state.⁴⁹⁰ Internal

⁴⁸⁰ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 78, 81; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁸¹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 81; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁸² Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁸³ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 79; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁸⁴ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 79; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁸⁵ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁸⁶ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 77, 86, 91; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 33-35

⁴⁸⁷ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 34

⁴⁸⁸ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 112; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 35, 75

⁴⁸⁹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 115; UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁹⁰ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 116



displacement takes place in the Orinoco Mining Arch area, particularly of indigenous peoples.⁴⁹¹

Actors present in the region include criminal groups led by *pranes*, as well as *sindicatos*, ELN,⁴⁹² and FARC dissidents.⁴⁹³ Criminal groups are heavily armed and routinely clash with other groups and/or state security forces for the control of mining areas and transportation routes.⁴⁹⁴ Some clashes have resulted in the death or injury of unarmed civilians.⁴⁹⁵ In large areas of the Mining Arc, criminal groups exert de facto control⁴⁹⁶ through violent incursions in mines, illegal checkpoints, extortion, and a system of justice that includes public beatings, amputations, and killings.⁴⁹⁷ Sources also reported that there exists collusion between criminal groups and state security forces.⁴⁹⁸

Authorities often do not investigate crimes committed by criminal groups,⁴⁹⁹ and the government is ‘completely’ silent on the security situation in the Mining Arc area.⁵⁰⁰ According to UCAB, the government does not provide information on ‘efforts to stop the forced recruitment of Venezuelan women, men, or children by irregular armed groups in the context of the Orinoco mining arc, sea routes to Trinidad and Tobago, [and] the border with Brazil or Colombia.’⁵⁰¹

As a response to criminal activities in their territories and incursions by both criminal groups and state security forces, indigenous communities established security groups called

⁴⁹¹ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, 2022, [url](#), p. 75

⁴⁹² UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), paras. 79-80, 90; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), Ch. 2

⁴⁹³ InSight Crime, The Colombo-Venezuelan Guerrillas: How Colombia’s War Migrated to Venezuela – How Venezuela Became a Cemetery for the ex-FARC Mafia Leadership, 3 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 79; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 36

⁴⁹⁵ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 87

⁴⁹⁶ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4; UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 87; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61

⁴⁹⁷ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 87; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61

⁴⁹⁸ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 86; Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 61

⁴⁹⁹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 86

⁵⁰⁰ Transparencia Venezuela, Economías ilícitas: Al amparo de la corrupción, June 2022, [url](#), p. 204. See also: UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

⁵⁰¹ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 3



Territorial Guards (Guardias Territoriales).⁵⁰² These groups set up security checkpoints in indigenous areas and engage criminal groups due to the failure of the state to provide protection.⁵⁰³ As retaliation, indigenous leaders have been targeted by criminal groups and state security forces.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 92

⁵⁰³ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 92

⁵⁰⁴ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 93



4. Profiles

4.1 Political opponents, activists, and human rights defenders

Sources indicated that the targeting and repression of political opponents, dissenters, activists, and human rights defenders, continued.⁵⁰⁵ The UN FFMV indicated that the ‘democratic and civic space’ have been experiencing ‘progressive closure’ with regards to freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and participation in public affairs.⁵⁰⁶ Sources indicated that state response to demonstrations and expressions of dissent has shifted from large-scale to targeted repression, whereby authorities target specific profiles as a way to send a message to discourage further demonstrations and expressions of dissent.⁵⁰⁷ Targeting is carried out against those deemed the ‘internal enemy,’ whereby dissent or criticism of the government is often criminalised.⁵⁰⁸ Targeting of political opponents included ‘excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, extrajudicial execution and enforced disappearance,’ as well as intervention in the affairs of political parties and restrictions to participation in civic and democratic spaces.⁵⁰⁹ Sources indicated that repression and targeting of dissent is part of a policy of criminalisation instituted by the government.⁵¹⁰

According to the UN FFMV, ‘real and perceived dissidents and Government opponents were targeted for detention on the basis of criteria that included their alleged participation in plots against the Government, their leadership roles or leadership potential, their roles within the political opposition, their public criticism of the Government and, in some cases, their potential to be subjected to acts of extortion.’⁵¹¹ Also, members of political parties and militants continue facing harassment and intimidation when they participate in electoral campaigns.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁵ UN, HRC, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 7 October 2022, 13 October 2022, [url](#), p. 2; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 7, 34, 40

⁵⁰⁶ UN FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 18 September 2023, [url](#), paras. 12, 53

⁵⁰⁷ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; VOA, Venezuela: Condenan a seis líderes sindicales a 16 años de prisión por “conspiración”, 1 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁸ UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁰⁹ UN, HRC, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 7 October 2022, 13 October 2022, [url](#), p. 2. See also: UCAB, Concerns and recommendations of the Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University on Venezuela – Submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to its pre-session review of Venezuela, August 2022, [url](#), p. 10

⁵¹⁰ CEPAZ, Se agudiza la persecución y criminalización contra las organizaciones de la sociedad civil venezolana, 12 July 2023, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 34, 111; CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵¹¹ UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 November 2022, [url](#), para. 35

⁵¹² UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 70-71



Arbitrary detentions on political grounds continued, with at least 282 people still in detention.⁵¹³ Detainees on political grounds have limited access to food and medical treatment.⁵¹⁴ Family members of people detained on political grounds face threats, reprisals, and they and their lawyers are denied access to detainees.⁵¹⁵

The Office of the Comptroller General (Contraloría General de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela) disqualifies members of political parties from participating in electoral processes⁵¹⁶ without a notice or warning, hindering their right to a defence.⁵¹⁷ In 2022, around 30 persons were disqualified from running for elected office, mostly from opposition parties including the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV, Partido Comunista de Venezuela) and the Democratic Unity Table (MUD, Mesa de la Unidad Democrática).⁵¹⁸ Individuals who criticized the government face threats and fear not being protected, which in turn “hinders freedom of expression and the right to protest”.⁵¹⁹

NGOs working on human rights issues face increasing legal and operational barriers, including funding restrictions,⁵²⁰ smear campaigns, stigmatisation, and harassment.⁵²¹ Between 1 January and 30 June 2023, the Centre for Defenders and Justice (CDJ, Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia), a Venezuelan NGO that advocates for the rights of human rights defenders and the respect for institutional and justice principles in the country, documented 309 attacks against defenders of human rights, an increase of 44 % when compared to the same period in 2022.⁵²² Among the attacks reported by CDJ were stigmatisation (191 cases), intimidation and harassment (70 cases), threats (35 cases), and arbitrary detention (4 cases).⁵²³ Human rights advocates are characterised as ‘enemies’ and ‘saboteurs’ and are charged, or threaten to be charged, with terrorism and organised crime-related offenses.⁵²⁴ In June 2022, Javier Tarazona, director of FundaRedes, an NGO that advocates for the protection of human rights

⁵¹³ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#). See also: HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

⁵¹⁴ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵¹⁵ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵¹⁶ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 71; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 22

⁵¹⁷ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 71; EU, Election Observation Mission, Venezuela: Regional and municipal elections 2021, Final Report, 21 November 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁵¹⁸ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 22

⁵¹⁹ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵²⁰ UN, HRC, Venezuela: Draft NGO law, reaching a point of no return in the closure of the civic space, 30 January 2023, [url](#); CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵²¹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 98; CEPAZ, Persecución y criminalización en Venezuela: Patrones y categorías de sujetos, Primer semestre 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 6-8

⁵²² CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵²³ CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵²⁴ CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 25 July 2023, [url](#)



with focus on bordering states with Colombia, Brazil, and Aruba and Curaçao, was detained for exposing links between state security forces and illegal armed groups, and, as of the writing of this report, he was awaiting trial⁵²⁵ on charges of ‘incitement to hatred,’ ‘treason,’ and ‘terrorism.’⁵²⁶ In July 2022, three human rights defenders were arrested by SEBIN agents and charged with crimes defined in the Organic Law against Organised Crime and Financing of Terrorism (Ley Orgánica Contra la Delincuencia Organizada y Financiamiento al Terrorismo).⁵²⁷ In August 2022, two human rights defenders from the Coalition for Human Rights and Democracy (Coalición por los Derechos Humanos y la Democracia) were notified by CICPC that they were being investigated for publishing a report that denounced alleged cases of torture and other human rights violations in Venezuela.⁵²⁸

Protests continued, with demands focusing on improved salaries, and economic, social, and cultural rights.⁵²⁹ OHCHR documented the detention in January 2023 of three workers who were demonstrating for better salaries and were later charged with ‘conspiracy, instigation, and incitement to hatred.’⁵³⁰

4.2 Demonstrators

Small protests are still repressed by authorities,⁵³¹ but in the case of large-scale protests, authorities usually wait for the protest to end and later detain the leaders or organisers, or those who were very vocal.⁵³² Authorities also reportedly detained family members of these profiles to send messages that the risk of organising or leading or participating in a protest can extend to the family.⁵³³ For example, sources reported on the case of six union activists who were detained in 2022 after participating in demonstrations demanding better wages and labour conditions, and were sentenced in August 2023 to 16-years imprisonment for the crimes of ‘conspiracy.’⁵³⁴ Sources reported that, according to the General Attorney, the sentenced persons were not union leaders but ‘criminals,’ and that they were tied to a ‘clandestine group’ and a ‘fugitive, military deserter, based in Colombia.’⁵³⁵

⁵²⁵ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 108; HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)

⁵²⁶ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 108

⁵²⁷ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 109

⁵²⁸ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 110

⁵²⁹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 67

⁵³⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 67

⁵³¹ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁵³² Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁵³³ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁵³⁴ VOA, Venezuela: Condenan a seis líderes sindicales a 16 años de prisión por “conspiración”, 1 August 2023, [url](#); El País, Ola de indignación en Venezuela por la condena de seis sindicalistas acusados de conspiración y terrorismo, 8 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵³⁵ France 24, “No son líderes sindicales”: fiscal defiende condenas por “conspiración” en Venezuela, 4 August 2023, [url](#); El País, Ola de indignación en Venezuela por la condena de seis sindicalistas acusados de conspiración y terrorismo, 8 August 2023, [url](#)



Sources indicated that the government is delegating the repression of protests to criminal groups in an effort to evade international scrutiny, minimise political costs, and stem allegations of extrajudicial executions.⁵³⁶ Additionally, according to Briceño-León, authorities do not have the capacity to deal with demonstrations like in the past due to, among others, the decreasing number of police officers, with many emigrating or losing confidence and trust on policing bodies.⁵³⁷

Sources indicated that political protests have decreased while protests demanding better socioeconomic conditions have increased.⁵³⁸ According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflicts (OVCS, Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social), 4 351 protests were registered between January and June 2023, an increase of 12 % when compared to the same period in 2022.⁵³⁹ The same source indicated that 86 % of these protests were related to economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues, with labour rights representing 72 % of the total number of protests, while 14 % of the protests were related to political rights.⁵⁴⁰

4.3 Journalists

Journalists face constant targeting, including threats of reprisals,⁵⁴¹ harassment, arbitrary detention, stigmatisation, and obstruction of news coverage.⁵⁴² Independent newspapers and television stations have virtually disappeared, and radio stations self-censor their content as well as those of their guests during radio programs.⁵⁴³ In 2022, between 16⁵⁴⁴ and 26 outlets were closed by the state nationwide.⁵⁴⁵ Independent media outlets continue facing barriers to operate in the country, including prohibitive fees for the renewal of permits⁵⁴⁶ and the imposition of legal obligations and administrative processes with few legal guarantees.⁵⁴⁷ Some broadcasters have replaced news, opinion or citizen complaint programs with other types of programs to avoid targeting from authorities.⁵⁴⁸ Websites, including of national and international media, civil society organisations, and digital services, are blocked without formal order or notification,⁵⁴⁹ including Efecto Cocuyo, Crónica Uno, and El Nacional.⁵⁵⁰ From 2021

⁵³⁶ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023.

⁵³⁷ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁵³⁸ Amaya, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023; OVCS, Conflictividad social Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 2023, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁵³⁹ OVCS, Conflictividad social Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 2023, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁵⁴⁰ OVCS, Conflictividad social Venezuela: Primer semestre 2023, 2023, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁵⁴¹ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#); IJNet, Journalists in Venezuela are fighting against self-censorship, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴² OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), paras. 43-44

⁵⁴³ Briceño-León, interview with EUAA, 13 September 2023

⁵⁴⁴ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 62

⁵⁴⁵ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 46

⁵⁴⁶ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 46; UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 62

⁵⁴⁷ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 46

⁵⁴⁸ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 62

⁵⁴⁹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 63

⁵⁵⁰ HRW, World Report 2023: Venezuela, 2023, [url](#)



to June 2022, telecommunication companies received, 1.5 million interception requests and over one million metadata requests from authorities.⁵⁵¹ Between January and April 2023, Espacio Público, an NGO that advocates for the rights of journalists in Venezuela, documented 55 cases comprising one or more instances of violations of the rights of journalists, including 26 instances of censorship, 22 of intimidation, 16 threats, and 12 of judicial harassment.⁵⁵² In 2022, the same source documented 227 cases comprising 468 violations, including censorship (199 instances), restrictions to operate (91), intimidation (83), and harassment (44).⁵⁵³

4.4 Government employees

In March 2022, the National Budget Office (ONAPRE, Oficina Nacional de Presupuesto) issued an unpublished directive which lowered the salary and eliminated economic benefits to public servants.⁵⁵⁴ Unions, universities and pensioners separately launched legal challenges of the directive, but the TSJ ruled them ‘inadmissible’ as the directive was not published and therefore, “‘did not exist’,” and fined the plaintiffs for ‘misuse of judicial recourse.’⁵⁵⁵

Sources indicated that in 2022, government workers, including teachers, healthcare workers, and other state employees, organised demonstrations to protest low salaries and living standards.⁵⁵⁶ Government employees, union leaders and organisations that advocate for the rights of workers are targeted by the government.⁵⁵⁷ According to the UN FFMV, the government has responded with ‘orchestrated repression,’ including threats, dismissals, and arrests of leaders and participants of mobilisations, especially those in the education and health sectors, who protest the low wages and working conditions.⁵⁵⁸ Sources indicated that public servants and teachers who participated in demonstrations in 2022 and 2023 have been targeted by the government, including arbitrary detentions, surveillance, and unjustified dismissals.⁵⁵⁹ Students and members of the academic community are targeted for political reasons, including through the imposition of salary tables that are insufficient to obtain basic food supplies.⁵⁶⁰ Healthcare workers continued facing stigmatisation, criminalisation, and

⁵⁵¹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 64

⁵⁵² Espacio Público, Situación general del derecho a la libertad de expresión e información enero – abril 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ Espacio Público, Informe 2022: Situación del derecho a la libertad de expresión e información en Venezuela, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁴ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 23; OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 81

⁵⁵⁵ Acceso a la Justicia, Informe anual 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 23. See also: OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 81

⁵⁵⁶ BBC News, “Los salarios de hambre”: cómo el gobierno de Maduro redujo los ingresos de los funcionarios públicos y desató una nueva ola de protestas en Venezuela, 23 August 2022, [url](#); VOA, ¿Puede Venezuela subir salarios como exigen los trabajadores públicos?, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022, Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 82

⁵⁵⁸ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#). See also: PROVEA, Situación de los derechos humanos en Venezuela – Derechos laborales, 9 May 2023, [url](#), P. 14; CEPAZ, Crece la arremetida contra periodistas y trabajadores públicos, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁹ CEPAZ, Crece la arremetida contra periodistas y trabajadores públicos, 4 May 2023, [url](#); VOA, Denuncian persecución por protestas en Venezuela: “a los líderes sindicales nos ponen contra la pared”, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 85



targeting, particularly since April 2022, when the government implemented a policy to “fight against hospital mafias” whereby ‘secret inspectors’ are incorporated in healthcare centres to identify personnel who steal medicines or illegally charge patients or practice medicine.⁵⁶¹ Within ten days after the implementation of the policy, over 40 doctors were detained without mention to a specific crime or reason.⁵⁶²

On 16 June 2023, PROVEA reported that two workers from a motor company were arbitrarily detained by the DGCIM for participating in demonstrations, and were accused of “boycott, conspiracy to commit crimes, and incitement to hate”.⁵⁶³ In January 2023, a human rights activist and professor at the Caracas Metropolitan University (Universidad Metropolitana de Caracas) was arbitrarily detained by the CICPC shortly after she met with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Caracas.⁵⁶⁴ She was released a few hours later without comment from authorities.⁵⁶⁵

Judges and prosecutors who have rejected political pressure on the adjudication of cases have been targeted, defamed, and intimidated, and several of them had to leave the country out to fear of reprisals.⁵⁶⁶

4.5 Deserters from state security forces

The Military Disciplinary Law (Ley de Disciplina Militar) indicates that the ‘unauthorized and unjustified absence from the assigned military unit, establishment or installation’ is considered a ‘serious’ offence.⁵⁶⁷ Section IV of the Military Justice Organic Code (Código Orgánico de Justicia Militar), as amended in 2021, indicates the following on desertion:

‘Article 523. A soldier who illegally separates himself from active duty commits the crime of desertion; and for its determination, it will be enough that the intention to commit the crime is revealed from the acts carried out.

Article 524. In the absence of the circumstances referred to in the previous article, in peacetime, desertion is presumed, unless there is sufficient justification, when officers:

⁵⁶¹ OAS, IACHR, VI Annual report of the Special Rapporteurship on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (REDESCA) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), 2022, 6 March 2023, [url](#), para. 1814

⁵⁶² OAS, IACHR, VI Annual report of the Special Rapporteurship on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (REDESCA) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), 2022, 6 March 2023, [url](#), para. 1814

⁵⁶³ PROVEA, 2 trabajadores de Sidor, motor productivo de Venezuela, fueron detenidos arbitrariamente el domingo por el Gobierno «obrero» de Nicolás Maduro, 16 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁴ VOA, Denuncian persecución por protestas en Venezuela: “a los líderes sindicales nos ponen contra la pared”, 2 February 2023, [url](#); MercoPress, Venezuelan human rights activist arrested after meeting with UN High Commissioner Volker Türk, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ VOA, Denuncian persecución por protestas en Venezuela: “a los líderes sindicales nos ponen contra la pared”, 2 February 2023, [url](#); MercoPress, Venezuelan human rights activist arrested after meeting with UN High Commissioner Volker Türk, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ OHCHR, El sistema de justicia venezolano desempeña un papel importante en la represión del Estado contra los opositores al gobierno, 16 September 2021, [url](#);

⁵⁶⁷ Venezuela, Ley de Disciplina Militar, 2016, [url](#), Art. 37



1. Do not report to their posts within six days following a report-to-duty date set by superiors.
2. Are absent for six consecutive days from the place fixed by superiors as their residence.
3. While on duty, do not report to their superiors within six days following the date indicated in the itinerary.
4. Do not report to their posts six days after having finished their permit or having learned of its expiration.
5. When in the situation of availability or belonging to the reserve, they do not attend the call to service six days after the notification.

Article 525. Those who incur in any of the crimes provided for in the previous article, will be subjected to a prison sentence of two to four years and separation from the Armed Forces.⁵⁶⁸

A notification issued by the General Inspector of the Venezuelan Navy to a number of military personnel, whereby they are subjected to investigation by the Investigation Council, indicated that desertion carries the ‘aggravated circumstance’ of ‘premeditation’ and that the applicable penalty is increased by 50 %.⁵⁶⁹

Requests for discharge from the military are routinely denied by superiors⁵⁷⁰ for reasons including that the applicant ‘holds too much information’ or that ‘it would have an adverse political effect.’⁵⁷¹ According to a journalist interviewed by EUAA for this report, since superiors delay decisions on discharging applications for over two years, military personnel usually end up deserting before a decision is made.⁵⁷² According to the same source, authorities target and harass deserters and publish their names in the official gazette.⁵⁷³ Additionally, the UN FFMV indicated that family members of detained military personnel face threats, reprisals, and they and their lawyers are denied access to detainees.⁵⁷⁴

According to the Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría del Pueblo) of Colombia, military personnel who deserted the FANB and crossed into Colombia have been ‘easily identified’ and threatened by the ELN and FARC dissidents in border areas.⁵⁷⁵ The same source indicated that despite the assistance that was promised by the Colombian government to military deserters from Venezuela, they have not been receiving humanitarian assistance.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁶⁸ Venezuela, Código Orgánico de Justicia Militar, 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁹ Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Defensa, Cartel de notificación, [2023], [url](#); Venezuela, Ley de Disciplina Militar, 2016, [url](#), Art. 41

⁵⁷⁰ Journalist, interview with EUAA, 18 August 2023. See also: La Pública, Chile, la tierra prometida no lo es para los venezolanos, 31 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷¹ La Pública, Chile, la tierra prometida no lo es para los venezolanos, 31 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷² Journalist, interview with EUAA, 18 August 2023

⁵⁷³ Journalist, interview with EUAA, 18 August 2023

⁵⁷⁴ UN, FFMV, Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Alerta Temprana No. 005 de 2021, 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 28

⁵⁷⁶ Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Alerta Temprana No. 005 de 2021, 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 28



Military deserters who return to Venezuela are considered ‘deserters’ or ‘traitors of the homeland.’⁵⁷⁷ Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

4.6 Rural sector

Sources indicated that small and large-scale farmers as well as cattle owners are the subject of extortion by criminal groups, and violence in rural areas is ‘likely underreported.’⁵⁷⁸ Farmer leaders have been subjected to arbitrary detention, violence, threats, and forced displacement, including their family members, for defending land rights and protesting living conditions.⁵⁷⁹ Additionally, applications for land regularisation made by small-scale farmers are not processed in a timely manner by the National Land Institute (INTI, Instituto Nacional de Tierras), and lands previously adjudicated are arbitrarily revoked.⁵⁸⁰ In December 2022, a land leader was charged with ‘instigation to hatred’ for denouncing corruption in the INTI branch in Barinas state, and although he was released the same month, charges remained against him.⁵⁸¹

Indigenous human rights defenders are also targeted by State and non-state armed groups, including through threats, violence, displacement and killings, for defending ancestral territories from drug trafficking and illegal mining.⁵⁸² In some cases, targeting extends to entire indigenous communities.⁵⁸³

4.7 LGBTI

For background information on the situation of LGBTI people, covering the period 1 June 2019 to 18 June 2020, see [EUAA COI Report: Venezuela Country Focus](#).

Consensual same-sex sexual activity has not been criminalised since Venezuela enacted its first Penal Code (1836).⁵⁸⁴ In recent developments, the military no longer criminalises same-sex relations; in February 2023, the Supreme Court overturned the only statute that punished homosexuality (by imprisonment of one to three years); annulling Article 565 of the Code of Military Justice.⁵⁸⁵

There were no known restrictions on freedom of expression and no known legal barriers on freedom of association for LGBTI people, according to the International Lesbian, Gay,

⁵⁷⁷ Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Alerta Temprana No. 005 de 2021, 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 28; La Pública, Chile, la tierra prometida no lo es para los venezolanos, 31 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁸ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 19

⁵⁷⁹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 19

⁵⁸⁰ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 20

⁵⁸¹ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 20

⁵⁸² UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 29

⁵⁸³ UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 4 July 2023, [url](#), para. 29

⁵⁸⁴ ILGA, ILGA Database – Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁸⁵ IPS, The LGBTIQ+ Community Still Oppressed in Venezuela, 30 March 2023, [url](#)



Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA).⁵⁸⁶ However, LGBTI organisations were small, lacked resources, and had little influence, as many were dismantled in 2014-2019 due to laws against foreign financial support.⁵⁸⁷

There is a lack of official statistics about violence and discrimination against the community.⁵⁸⁸ However, LGBTI people continued to encounter discrimination,⁵⁸⁹ including in access to medical and public health services;⁵⁹⁰ as well as being ‘exposed to situations of violence,’⁵⁹¹ and ‘discriminatory violence.’⁵⁹² There were 14 reports of hate crimes made to OHCHR between May 2021-April 2022.⁵⁹³ The civil society organisation, Venezuelan Observatory on Violence LGBTIQ+, reported that in 2022 there were 97 cases of violence and discrimination; 72 against individuals and 25 cases against civil society organisations.⁵⁹⁴ According to the same source, 40 out of the 97 cases occurred in the capital district.⁵⁹⁵ The same report recorded 11 murders of people from the community, 8 of whom were men presumed to be homosexual.⁵⁹⁶ In the first four months of 2023, 60 cases of violence and discrimination were recorded by the same source.⁵⁹⁷

Discrimination by state and non-state actors based on sex is prohibited under the law; however, there is no provision related to sexual orientation and gender.⁵⁹⁸ Same sex unions are not recognised.⁵⁹⁹ There is no legal allowance for same-sex marriage, domestic partnerships, or adoption.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁸⁶ ILGA, ILGA Database – Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁸⁷ Norway, Landinfo, Venezuela: Forhold for LHBT+-personer [Venezuela: Conditions for LGBT+ People], 16 June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁸⁸ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 158

⁵⁸⁹ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/2023 – Venezuela, 27 March 2023, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 51-53

⁵⁹⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 51-53

⁵⁹¹ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 158

⁵⁹² USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 51-53

⁵⁹³ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 51-53

⁵⁹⁴ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, Rompiendo el silencio: informe sobre violencias a personas LGBTIQ+ 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 13-14, 23-24; See also: Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, I Boletín, 19 October 2022, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 160

⁵⁹⁵ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, Rompiendo el silencio: informe sobre violencias a personas LGBTIQ+ 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 13-14, 23-24

⁵⁹⁶ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, Rompiendo el silencio: informe sobre violencias a personas LGBTIQ+ 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 13-14, 23-24; See also: Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, I Boletín, 19 October 2022, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 160

⁵⁹⁷ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, Discriminaciones y violencias contra las personas LGBTIQ+: balance enero – abril de 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 52; HRW, World Report 2021, Country Profiles: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity – Venezuela, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁹ HRW, World Report 2021, Country Profiles: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity – Venezuela, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁰ Equaldex, LGBT Rights in Venezuela, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 51-53



President Maduro stated in 2021 that LGBTI rights were ‘not a priority’ and authorities continued to ‘deprioritise’ issues affecting this population.⁶⁰¹ Legal protection against discrimination against LGBTI persons was lacking in many areas. In employment there is a 2012 law that prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and a 2011 housing law that prevents discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.⁶⁰²

According to professor Javier Corrales, interviewed by Landinfo in 2020, LGBTI people do not expect assistance from police and in those cases that do end up in the judicial system, they are handled as ordinary crimes.⁶⁰³ Crimes against LGBTI persons were often not properly investigated,⁶⁰⁴ and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) reported that the ‘State’s opacity persisted’ regarding incidents of violence.⁶⁰⁵ There were reports that police were involved in perpetrating violence against LGBTI persons.⁶⁰⁶

In May 2022, the Public Ministry created a specialised office to investigate human rights violations against LGBTI persons.⁶⁰⁷ Further information on the functioning of this office could not be found within the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this report.

⁶⁰¹ UK, Human Rights and Democracy – The 2021 Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office Report, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 69-70

⁶⁰² ILGA, ILGA Database – Venezuela, n.d., [url](#); HRW, World Report 2021, Country Profiles: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity – Venezuela, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰³ Norway, Landinfo, Venezuela: Forhold for LHBT+-personer [Venezuela: Conditions for LGBT+ People], 16 June 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁰⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 51-53

⁶⁰⁵ OAS, IACHR, Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2022 – Chapter IV.b: Venezuela, 1 April 2023, [url](#), para. 159

⁶⁰⁶ Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, I Boletín, 19 October 2022, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Venezuela: Forhold for LHBT+-personer [Venezuela: Conditions for LGBT+ People], 16 June 2021, [url](#), p. 3; Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus: Venezuela - Seksuele minderheden en transgenders [Sexual minorities and transgender people], 4 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-13

⁶⁰⁷ El Nacional, Ministerio Público anunció la creación de fiscalía que atenderá delitos contra personas LGBTQ+, 11 May 2022, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 – Venezuela, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 51-53



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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

Reference period: July 2020-October 2023, with emphasis on 2023

This report is meant to provide a targeted, brief update on a selection of specific topics relevant for international protection considerations in Venezuela, specifically in relation to evolving needs identified by the COI Specialist Network on the Americas for the recent months. The report will complement and update certain topics already covered in the 2020 report and refer back to it where relevant. It will provide an overview of the reference period's developments since July 2020, with a particular focus on 2023.

On advice from the external reviewer, the reference period was increased to October 2023, to include the results of the opposition primaries.

Overview

- Population
- Economy
- Government
- Judicial system
- State security forces, including developments and integrity
- Legislation
- Availability of statistical information

Armed groups, areas, activities (recruitment, extortion), and targeted persons

- *Colectivos*
- Other irregular armed groups and gangs
- State protection

Political opponents and activists, including low-level profiles

- Including main parties
- Demonstrations
- Treatment of participants in protests
- Surveillance by the state

Treatment of government employees (including security forces), current and former, who support the opposition

- Reprisals for non-participation in government events
- Ability to resign
- Monitoring by the state



Treatment of draft evaders from military service

- Treatment, including reprisals and penalties

LGBTIQ

Registration system

- Carnet de la Patria
- State tracking lists, such as the Tascon List

Treatment of returnees, including asylum seekers

Security situation at the border

- Activity of main groups, including Colombian armed groups,
- Targeting of Venezuelans/civilians
- State response

Internal mobility, freedom of movement





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