

VENEZUELA

Situational update and 2019 outlook

The socioeconomic crisis in Venezuela continued to deteriorate throughout 2018, leading to further collapse of services, deterioration of health facilities, food security, and nutrition among the population, and one of the biggest mass displacements in South America's history. In December 2018, inflation stood at 2,500,000%, and this is expected to keep increasing. Food availability is hampered by import restrictions, and price increases reduce access to food, medicine and other basic goods. The economic crisis is exacerbated by the deepening political crisis. This is characterised by the erosion of democratic institutions and growing civil discontent. The standoff between the government and the opposition is exacerbating the risk of armed confrontation, and the likelihood of international intervention seems increasingly likely.

NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

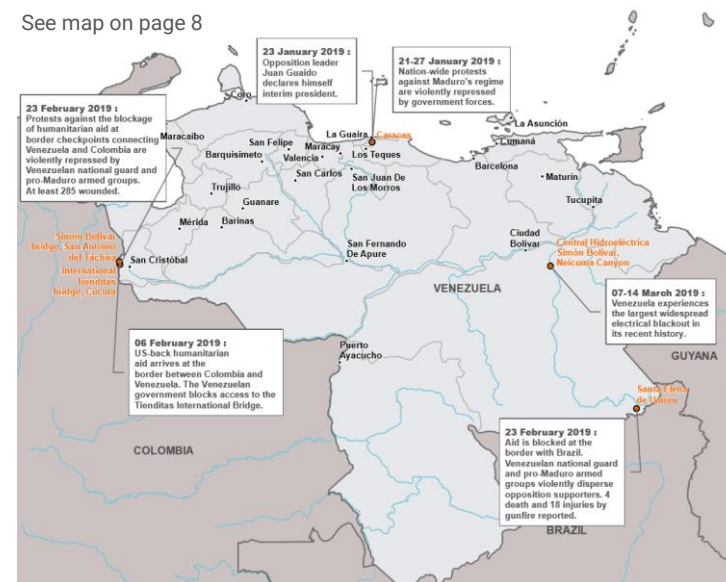


Not required Moderate Major
IMPACT



Very low Moderate Major

See map on page 8



Anticipated scope and scale

Inside Venezuela, inflation is expected to keep spiralling, leading to increased poverty, deterioration of living conditions, increased food and medicine shortages, more deaths caused by the failure of the health system, and paralysis of commerce, and education. There is a risk that internal tensions and growing pressure from international stakeholders could lead to armed confrontation, and growing discontent amongst the population that is increasingly likely to trigger large-scale civil unrest. There is no indication that the influx of Venezuelans will slow down in the near future, and the number of refugees from Venezuela is expected to reach 5.3 million by the end of 2019. Neighbouring countries' capacities and basic services are likely to be further strained.

Key figures



5.3 million
Venezuelan refugees by the end of 2019



283,880% increase
of the price of a food basket in 2018



70% of hospitals reporting
power outages & lack of drinking water



7,523 casualties
from police and military violence in 2018

Humanitarian constraints



The Venezuelan government largely denies the scale of humanitarian needs and restricts access for international humanitarian organisations, and blocked the entry of US humanitarian aid in February 2019.

Limitations

The exact number of people in need, and sectoral needs inside Venezuela are largely unknown. Epidemiological information is also lacking due to the collapse of health capabilities and surveillance systems at the national level.

Crisis impact

The deepening political and socio-economic crisis in Venezuela has led to the collapse of services, deterioration of humanitarian conditions within the country, and one of the biggest mass displacements in the history of South America. Due to a significant drop in national oil production (54% since 1998), and international prices since 2016, Venezuela is estimated to have lost 18% of its GDP in 2018, and accumulated 159% of its GDP in public debt. Between 2014 and 2017, Venezuela had lost almost 39% of its economic activity per capita, and hyperinflation stood at 2,500,000% at the end of 2018. In addition, price increases reduce access to food, medicine, and other basic goods, while the general availability of food is hampered by import restrictions (El Nacional 04/10/2018, IMF 10/2018, FAO 16/01/2019, Harvard University 10/2018).

Presidential elections took place on 20 May 2018, four months before the scheduled date, with parts of the opposition boycotting the vote (NYT 01/03/2018). With a 46% turnout according to the election board, Maduro was declared president with 67.7% of the vote. The opposition declared the turnout was in fact much lower, alleged further irregularities and did not recognise the results. Several countries indicated that they had not recognised the results, including the US and Latin American governments of the Lima group (BBC 21/05/2018, The Guardian 21/05/2018). Protests in reaction to the socioeconomic situation persisted throughout the rest of 2018, while the opposition, despite experiencing strong internal divisions, intensified its calls for a transitional government. Neighbouring countries and international powers also called for a negotiated transition of power to find a way out of the crisis (Crisis Group 23/11/2018)¹.

Latest developments: In January 2019, the opposition-controlled National Assembly declared Maduro's second term illegitimate, and, using a constitutional disposition, designated its leader Juan Guaido, as interim president. He immediately declared his intention to put together a transition government and to organise a presidential election in the next year. In the following days, he was recognised by about 50 states, including the United States, Brazil, Ecuador, and most Western European countries (Le Monde Diplomatique 03/2019). Between 21 and 27 January, nation-wide protests against Maduro's regime were violently repressed by government forces (El Universal 28/01/2019).

In the beginning of February, tensions at the border escalated when the US and Venezuelan opposition attempted to deliver aid across the borders separating Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela, but were blocked by the Venezuelan security forces. Protests ensued, and were met with force from Venezuelan authorities, causing over 300 injuries

and at least 4 deaths along Venezuela's borders with Colombia and Brazil (Caracas Chronicles 24/02/2019, Al Jazeera 25/02/2019, BBC 25/02/2019).

In the beginning of March 2019, Venezuela experienced a major nation-wide power and communications outage, impacting scarce food supplies, water pumps, and endangering hospital patients, with some 21 casualties reported. Many schools, public offices, and businesses were closed as a result. The power cut is likely to have been the result of years of mismanagement and obsolescence of the electrical system. Maduro, however, blamed the outage on an 'electromagnetic attack' from the US. The blackout led to another wave of protests, during which Maduro requested the help of colectivos (pro-government armed groups) to repress (InSight Crime 18/03/2019, Al Jazeera 12/03/2019, NPR 11/03/2019, The Guardian 11/03/2019: 13/03/2019).

Migration: Since 2015, the crisis has prompted over 2.7 million people to leave Venezuela, out of which only about 1.4 million have regular status in the countries they fled to. The number of Venezuelans abroad went from 700,000 to over 1,600,000 between 2015 and 2017, and some 1.1 million more fled between 2017 and the beginning of 2019. The reasons for leaving are varied, and include political persecution and shortages of food, medicine, and other essential goods. Many are in need of international protection, and since 2014, 408,500 Venezuelans have applied for asylum, including 248,000 in 2018 alone. In 2014, just over 4,000 Venezuelans applied for asylum (UNHCR 03/2019, UNHCR 13/03/2018, IOM 24/04/2018). In 2018, migration outside Venezuela continued, with 5,000 Venezuelans leaving the country on average every day (UNHCR 22/02/2019). According to a Gallup survey conducted in 2018, 36% of Venezuelans said they would like to leave Venezuela permanently if they could, including a majority (51%) of Venezuelans aged 15 to 29 (Gallup 29/01/2019).

Needs vary depending on the country, but many Venezuelans in host countries are in urgent need of food, nutrition, health, and WASH assistance. Protection assistance is also crucial, including legal help with documentation in order to access healthcare and employment. Many Venezuelans remain in an irregular situation (due to lack of documentation, long waiting periods, high application fees, etc.), leaving them without rights and access to services and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (R4V 14/12/2018).

Health

Health infrastructure: According to the Encuentra Nacional de Hospital conducted between 1 – 10 March 2018 and surveying some 40 hospitals across Venezuela, the health system continues to deteriorate. Service provision has been affected by the closure of health facilities, deterioration of infrastructure, shortages of medicines, and protests

¹ For more details on the origin of the current crisis, please check previous ACAPS special report

from medical staff. Almost 70% of hospitals reported intermittent power outage and lack of safe drinking water. 79% of public hospitals lack regular water supply in 2018, including 25% that reported receiving no water at all (National Assembly Venezuela, Médicos por la Salud 2018, CHE Health 09/2018).

Shortages of medicines and health supplies: Shortages of medicines and health supplies have been widely reported. 95% of medical supplies and equipment are imported, and when imports fell by 70% between 2012 and 2017, the medical sector was heavily affected. In 2018, health facilities reported lacking on average about 50% of medical supplies required (CHE Health 09/2018, National Assembly Venezuela, Médicos por la Salud 2018). Shortages of medicine have led to the emergence of a black market, raising safety concerns over the quality and appropriateness of medicines sold to people who cannot afford them in the legal way (Financial Times 08/02/2019).

Health staff: The health sector is further impacted by low salaries and the absence of medical staff. 55% of medical personnel in the country have reportedly resigned from their jobs and/or migrated outside the country (CHE Health 09/2018, National Assembly Venezuela, Médicos por la Salud 2018).

Diseases: The dysfunctions of the health system have led to the resurgence of diseases that used to be eradicated, such as malaria, which saw a 205% increase across the country in recent years (Financial Times 08/02/2019). Between 2017 and 2018, 2,500 deaths of people requiring dialysis for kidney deficiencies have been attributed to deficiencies of the health system (IACHR 09/01/2019). 6,400 cases of measles including 76 deaths (CFR 1.2%) have been recorded between mid-2017 and the end of 2018. 2,400 cases of dengue fever were reported in 2018 alone, and 150 people have died of diphtheria since July 2016, the case fatality rate having increased from 6% in 2017 to 20% at the beginning of 2019 (USAID 01/03/2019).

It is particularly challenging for HIV patients to find antiretroviral drugs, and an estimated 79,000 people have stopped getting treatment since 2017. Exact numbers are currently unknown, but over 5,000 HIV patients have died in 2018 alone, a significant increase from the 1,800 deaths recorded in 2014 (Caracas Chronicles 21/02/2019, IACHR 09/01/2019).

Mental health policies have historically been neglected in Venezuela, and people with mental health conditions (schizophrenia, dementia, depression, bipolar disorders, anxiety, attentional deficit, intellectual disability, autism, etc.) are heavily impacted by the collapse of the health system: the number of people in psychiatric institutions has reduced from 23,000 to 3,500 (CHE Health 09/2018). The social and economic stresses caused by the current crisis are certain to aggravate mental health issues.

Food security and livelihoods: Since 2017, national food production has reduced by over 60%, and imports dropped by over 70%, leading to significant shortages of food and alarming levels of food insecurity across the country (CHE Health 09/2018, Provea 2017).

Food is distributed by the government following Maduro's 'Plan de la Patria', initially established by Hugo Chávez. The plan aims at strengthening food production and distribution of food boxes through the CLAP (*Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción*). Distribution, however, is conditioned by ownership of a 'fatherland card', introduced by Maduro as an instrument to control who has access to social programmes and oversee who has voted (Los Angeles Times 05/02/2019, Provea 2017, El Cooperante 21/01/2017). The CLAP distribution is highly irregular, and often the content of the boxes does not cover basic food needs (Reuters 25/01/2019).

Inflation has had a devastating impact on the purchasing power of Venezuelan households. In January 2019, a basic food basket containing 60 items cost about 360,115 Venezuelan Bolivars (VES). Between January 2018 and January 2019, the price of a basic food basket increased by 283,880%. In order to purchase a food basket, a household would have to earn 20 times the minimum monthly salary (VES 18,000) (CENDA 18/02/2019). In 2017, food prices in Venezuela increased by 2,616%. (Reuters 08/01/2018).

Since 2008, agriculture began to fall and be replaced by imported products. The crisis has had a significant impact on agriculture, with the current level of production only able to cover 25% of national consumption according to the National Association of Farmers (Fedegro). In the last 11 years, agricultural production has dramatically dropped (65% in corn, 68% in rice, 95% in sorghum, 62% in sugarcane, 70% of coffee) and many producers have gone bankrupt as a result of the economic crisis and other factors such as expropriations, price control, or state monopoly of inputs (CHE Health 09/2018).

Nutrition: There is no official data available for malnutrition rates in Venezuela, but the prevalence of malnutrition has been increasing due to food shortages and high prices of food, from 3.6% in 2013 to 11.7% in 2017 (FAO 16/01/2019). Consultations for severe malnutrition in hospitals have increased from 2% to 14% (IACHR 09/01/2019).

In recent years, malnutrition has reached emergency thresholds for children under 5, with 50% exhibiting some degree of malnutrition, and some 280,000 at risk of death due to undernourishment. Pregnant women and population in impoverished parts of the country are also more vulnerable to malnutrition (IACHR 09/01/2019, CHE Health 09/2018).

Protection: According to the Rule of Law Index 2019, Venezuela ranks last in the world, meaning that security forces are not being held accountable for serious human rights violation perpetrated. Venezuela also ranked last between 2014 and 2018 (World Justice Project 2019, 2018, 2015, 2014).

Credible accounts of extrajudicial killings by government security forces have been reported. In impoverished areas where the population largely depends on state-sponsored social programmes, pro-Maduro armed groups (colectivos) are particularly active, using fear and repression as a strategy of social control. Poor areas in Caracas and all over the country register the highest number of victims killed in clashes with the authorities (Amnesty International 20/02/2019, The Guardian 22/06/2018, Caracas Chronicles 02/02/2018). A panel of experts mandated by the Organisation of American States (OAS) documented some 8,292 extrajudicial killings and 12,000 arbitrary detentions at the hands of the government since 2014 (R2P 15/03/2019).

Between April and June 2017, crackdown on protests resulted in the death of over 100 people (R2P 15/03/2019). In 2018, the Venezuelan Observatory on Social Conflict (Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social) registered at least 12,715 protests (equivalent to 35 protests per day), a 30% increase from 2017 (9,787 protests) (Noticiero Digital 18/01/2019).

Mass protests demanding change in the government took place after Maduro's inauguration in January 2019, including in impoverished neighbourhoods of Caracas that had been historically pro-Maduro. From 21-25 January 2019, over 900 arbitrary arrests (including 770 on 23 January only) and 41 deaths from gunshot wounds were reported (Amnesty International 20/02/2019, R2P 15/03/2019).

Protests against the blockage of US-sponsored humanitarian aid along the borders with Brazil and Colombia on 23 February turned violent when security forces and colectivos started using force against civilians. 14 people were killed, 287 wounded (including 59 by gunfire) and over 50 detained as a result (Crisis Group 04/03/2019).

Education: Access to education has deteriorated as a result of the crisis. As many as 70% of school-aged children do not attend school on a regular basis, and at least 15% exhibit significant delays in their education. The reasons for this are multiple, one major barrier to education has been the fact that the Venezuelan government does not comply with its obligation to offer free education. Education establishments mostly stopped receiving state funding, and a lot of teachers stopped receiving their salaries (an estimated 40% of the teaching staff has left the country). Due to hyperinflation, the costs of schooling have skyrocketed, and the majority of parents have to pay the equivalent of 30 times the minimum monthly salary for their children to attend school. Some school-aged students had to leave school and find work in order to support their families, while others are having to take care of their siblings and/or other family members due to migration within the family (CHE Education 11/2018).

Almost all (95%) of schools exhibit some degree of deterioration, either WASH-related (at least 4,000 schools experience water shortages ranging from 7 days to 3 months) or

electricity shortages. Due to the lack of functioning hygiene facilities in schools, proliferation of chronic illnesses has been reported, and malnutrition rates are aggravated by school food programmes provisions have deteriorated in quality and quantity. The quality of education has also been affected, with schools lacking material, support for teachers, functioning library, and services for children with special needs having been interrupted for the most part (CHE Education 11/2018).

Access to education is also majorly disrupted due to malfunctioning roads and public transportation. At the border with Colombia, many students are crossing the Simon Bolivar bridge every day to attend school. In February 2019, the bridge was blocked by Venezuelan forces to prevent the aid caravan from entering the country and affecting some 4,000 schoolchildren. A 'humanitarian passage' was opened later on to allow students to come and go. However, the border closure led to the development of informal crossings (known as 'trochas') controlled by armed groups from both countries, raising serious protection concerns (Al Jazeera 16/03/2019).

WASH: Access to clean water is increasingly difficult due to the collapse of basic services, exacerbating water and sanitation problems. Only 18% of the population residing inside Venezuela receives clean water in a continuous and consistent way (CHE Agua 10/2018).

Distribution and access to safe water across the country is unequal and challenging, with the majority of water sources being located in the Southeastern part of the country, yet only 10% of the population is living here. The majority of the Venezuelan population lives in the rapidly urbanising North, but has only access to about 15% of water sources. As a result, households reportedly resort to stockpiling water, leading to potential unsafe consumption, and increasing the risk of waterborne diseases (IFRC 05/03/2019). The implications are particularly serious for the health sector. (CHE Health 09/2018).

The latest available information regarding collection of residual waters is from 2011, when the National Institute of Statistics estimated 30% of residual water was redistributed to the population, as opposed to 84% of water recollected and 48% in 1998 (CHE Agua 10/2018).

The power outage that affected the country in mid-March 2019 further aggravated the situation, majorly disrupting water pumps and water provision (IRIN 14/03/2019).

Vulnerable groups affected

Poor households are disproportionately affected by the crisis. The proportion of Venezuelans living in poverty has increased since 2014, and according to the ENCOVI survey, 92% of the population lives in poverty, including 61% in extreme poverty. In 2014, 48.4% of the population was living in poverty, including 23.6% in extreme poverty (CHE Health 09/2018). Prior to that, the Economic Commission of Latin America and the

Caribbean estimated that poverty in Venezuela went from 25% in 2012 to 32% in 2013 (Finanzas Digital 27/01/2015).

Due to the collapse of the health system, children, patients with chronic conditions, people with disabilities, and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable. According to the latest available data, maternal mortality increased by over 65% from 2015 to 2016, and 756 deaths were recorded in 2016. Analysis from The Lancet found that in 2016 the infant mortality rate was 21.1 deaths per 1,000 live birth, nearly 1.4 times the rate in 2008 (15 deaths per 1,000 live birth). Although no new data is available, it can be assumed that those rates have grown alongside the deterioration of the health system in the past few years (The Lancet 01/03/2019, Government of Venezuela 31/12/2016). 25,000 pregnant women did not receive prenatal care, and some 7,500 were only checked in the eighth and ninth months of their pregnancy (Caracas Chronicles 21/02/2019, CHE Health 09/2018).

Many children with disabilities are deprived of an education due to the lack of equipment adapted to their handicap in schools (CHE Education 11/2018).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

The Venezuelan government does not recognise the scale of humanitarian needs in Venezuela and has largely refused to accept international humanitarian aid (Miami Herald 08/02/2018). The government has restricted the shipping of medical supplies and medicines into Venezuela as well as relief operations inside the country (NPR 13/06/2017). In February 2019, Venezuelan authorities blocked the entry of US humanitarian aid, setting up barricades, firing tear gas, and targeting protestors. In addition, Maduro closed the borders with Colombia and Brazil, preventing any aid from entering the country (The Conversation 07/03/2019, BBC 20/02/2019).

The nature of the political crisis adds to the operational constraints: road blockages are frequent during protests, while blackouts and rationing affect the availability of electricity (Reuters 16/03/2018).

Aggravating factors

Drought

In 2016, Venezuela was affected by a drought induced by an El Niño episode, the worst in almost 50 years. Levels at the Guri hydroelectric dam, which generates over 80% of the country's electricity, dramatically dropped, prompting the government to ration water and reduce electricity consumption. This has led to blackouts in six western states, and has increased the number of people living in situations of poverty and extreme poverty (IFRC 05/03/2019). In addition, according to the FEDENAGA (Federación Nacional de Ganaderos), over 51,000 heads of cattle died as a result of the drought (CHE Agua 10/2018).

An El Niño episode of weak intensity was confirmed in early 2019, and is likely to result in low levels in the hydroelectric dams. The impact is likely to be felt as early as March 2019 (IFRC 01/02/2019).

ELN in Venezuela

In the last two years the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional/National Liberation Army) from Colombia has been expanding its power in Venezuela; its presence has been reported in at least half of Venezuela, particularly in the states of Táchira, Zulia, Apure, Amazonas, and Bolívar, reaching the eastern border with Guyana. The group has engaged in cattle and gasoline smuggling, extortion, recruitment, drug trafficking and illegal mining. (InSight Crime 13/11/2018) It has also engaged in the distribution of subsidised food packages, normally the exclusive responsibility of the Venezuelan government, in order to gain trust of the population and strengthen ties with Maduro's administration. (InSight Crime 09/02/2018) The conflict between the ELN and EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación / Popular Liberation Army) in Colombia has also poured over the border into Venezuela, causing displacement and deaths of civilians.

The Venezuelan government has never publicly criticised the ELN presence and violent attacks within its borders. It is therefore possible to claim that the Venezuelan government has been tolerant of the ELN, turning to the group as an ally in its effort to assert control over territories where the government lacks a legitimate presence. (InSight Crime 16/10/2018) The ELN and the dissidents of FARC are seemingly taking advantage of Maduro's 'tolerance' in order to maintain the status quo and keep their criminal activities going in Venezuela, affirming their power in case of an unsuccessful peace deal in Colombia. The economic crisis of the country is also facilitating recruitment of Venezuelans among ELN ranks and fuelling its financial resources through extortion and control of illegal entry points at the border. (InSight Crime 16/10/2018)

Generalised violence

Other armed groups in the border region include the EPL and the post-demobilisation armed group Los Rastrojos and Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia/Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC), also known as Los Urabeños (InSight Crime 14/03/2018, 08/03/2019).

Colectivos have been allowed to act with impunity in exchange for their support in repressing anti-government protests, and have been involved in criminal activities such as kidnapping, extortion, and drug trafficking (InSight Crime 18/03/2019).

High levels of criminal violence have been reported across the country. In 2018, the Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia reported 10,422 homicides and 7,523 people

having died from police and military violence. While this is a decrease from the 2017 homicide numbers (16,026), the number of victims of police and military brutality have increased from the 5,535 casualties in 2017 (Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia 27/12/2018, 05/01/2018).

Response capacity

Regional response

On 3 September 2018, the Ecuadoran Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a regional meeting in Quito involving 12 countries to devise joint efforts to address the influx of Venezuelan refugees and develop a harmonised response. They reaffirmed the importance of cooperating on key issues such as the provision of legal information, access to regular status and asylum, the fight against sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), trafficking, and xenophobia, and called for increased support from the international community (UNHCR 16/10/2018, R4V 30/09/2018, Government of Ecuador 04/09/2018).

On 22 November 2018, the second regional meeting took place in Quito, which involved around 200 delegates from 13 countries in the region. As a conclusion, the Quito Action Plan on Human Mobility of Venezuelan citizens in the region was signed. The countries that signed are Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay (MFA 23/11/2018). Amongst other things, the Quito Action Plan establishes regional mechanisms for information exchanges, seeks to facilitate documentation recognition, applications and access to regular status, as well as labour integration and social protection measures (R4V 14/12/2018). Brazil, Mexico, and Panama had signed the declaration of Quito in September but not the Action Plan, but were invited to follow the plan as soon as possible (Government of Ecuador 23/11/2018).

The “Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela Jan-Dec 2019” was published on 14 December 2018 (R4V 14/12/2018, GTRM 24/11/2018).

International response capacity

The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform was established in September 2018 by IOM and UNHCR. It is at the centre of coordination efforts, and aims to develop a regional approach and facilitate the response. The platform currently has around 40 participants (UN agencies, NGOs, donors, and international financial institutions) (R4V 14/12/2018).

Inside Venezuela, the Pan American Health Organization is cooperating with the Venezuelan Ministry of Health to strengthen the health system and provide medicines, vaccines, and other medical supplies (PAHO 09/2018). In late 2018, UNICEF also has an

agreement with the government for supplying medicines, health, and nutrition supplies for women and children inside Venezuela (UNICEF 26/11/2018). Between 2018 and 2019, the International Committee of the Red Cross has more than doubled their budget for responding to the crisis inside the country, from 9 million CHF to 19 million CHF. Their focus is for the most part on the areas of health and sanitation (ICRC 01/03/2019).

Outlook for key drivers

Hyperinflation, persisting economic deterioration, and collapse of services inside Venezuela

Venezuela’s economy keeps spiralling and its economic capacities are expected to deteriorate further, with the IMF predicting inflation to reach 10,000,000% by the end of 2019 (IMF 10/2018). The consequences of oil sanctions imposed on Venezuela will soon be felt by the population, especially the poorest households (Crisis Group 04/03/2019, The Independent 26/01/2019).

In addition to increasing wages and revaluating the monetary system based on the ‘Petro’, the government implemented an Economic Recovery Programme on 20 August 2018. It is too early to evaluate the impact, but already, the IMF warns that the implementation of inappropriate policies aimed at stabilising the economy in the current fragile socioeconomic situation could have the opposite effect and aggravate the crisis (IMF 10/2018, FAO 16/01/2019).

Recuperation from economic collapse will be long and difficult. A study from Harvard University looking at trajectories of countries that had suffered economic catastrophes found that it would take Venezuela 35 years to recover its pre-crisis GDP with a 1.8% GDP annual growth rate (Harvard University 10/2018).

The situation for Venezuelans inside the country is increasingly difficult – access to food, medicine, and basic services is challenging. The March 2019 country-wide electric failure shows the continuous collapse of basic services provision, and further deterioration is to be expected as the crisis deepens, with increased food shortages, deaths caused by the failures of the health system, paralysis of commerce, education, and increased poverty (El Stimulo 12/03/2019). Shortages of food, malnutrition, and food insecurity are likely to be exacerbated by an El Nino episode that was confirmed in the beginning of 2019 (IFRC 01/02/2019).

Political deadlock leading to civil unrest, potential foreign intervention, and/or internal armed conflict

Pressure from international actors calling for a change in the leadership of the country and threatening military intervention to oust Maduro could lead to an armed confrontation between the government (the military remains to this day largely loyal to Maduro) and the opposition backed by foreign actors, the US more specifically (R2P 15/03/2019, IFRC 01/02/2019). The US government has hinted at military intervention should Maduro refuse to step down from power, while Russia and China have shown support to the Venezuelan government (Reuters 03/02/2019). Should tensions escalate, foreign military intervention could lead to a conflict situation within the country, significantly worsening the current humanitarian situation and leading to further displacement.

The socio-political situation within the country remains uncertain. A survey of almost 2,500 Venezuelans conducted between 12 September and 7 December 2018 by the Pew Research Centre found that dissatisfaction with the regime and the current situation is growing in Venezuela. 83% said the current situation is bad, including 60% who said it is really bad. Only 13% trust the national government a lot, and 20% somewhat trust it to do what is right for Venezuela. People aged 18-29 are the demographic the most opposed to the current regime. Despite widespread disapproval of the current government, 71% of people surveyed still identified with PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, Maduro's party) (IACHR 09/01/2019, Pew Research Centre 25/01/2019).

Since he proclaimed himself interim president, opposition leader Juan Guaido has consistently called for mass demonstrations across the country. Since the beginning of the crisis, the main focus had been demanding basic services such as food, medicine, and water. People are now calling for political change, even in working class neighbourhoods that had historically been pro-Maduro. As discontent grows, civil unrest is likely to increase, and there is a risk that mass demonstrations could be violently repressed by Venezuelan authorities and pro-Maduro paramilitary groups (Al Jazeera 12/03/2019, Reuters 05/03/2019).

The erosion of popular support of Maduro is not necessarily coupled with support for the opposition. The current protests are more a sign of the population wanting to oust Maduro rather than complete adherence to an opposition that is still largely perceived as neoconservatives close to Washington. Within the opposition, it is still unclear what political project they will put forward should they come to power. If the opposition does not manage to find a way out of the crisis, there is a risk its popularity may decline and the political impasse persists (Le Monde Diplomatique 03/2019, Crisis Group 04/03/2019).

Increase of migration from Venezuela, deterioration of access to basic services in host countries, and increase of protection concerns

Approximately 3.4 million Venezuelans have already fled the country since 2014, and this number is expected to rise to 5.3 million by the end of 2019, including 2.2 million in Colombia alone (IFRC 01/02/2019).

As the crisis in Venezuela keeps deteriorating, host countries are increasingly struggling to respond to the influx of Venezuelans. The rising number of people entering neighbouring countries is putting a strain on basic services, and impacting host communities. The provision of public goods (such as health care, electricity, water, transportation, and security) in neighbouring countries hosting Venezuelan refugees is likely to further deteriorate. Venezuelan refugees are also at risk of facing growing xenophobia from host communities, as well as exploitation, trafficking, and SGBV (R4V 14/12/2018, IMF 10/2018).

Despite the implementation of the Quito Action Plan, policies implemented in neighbouring countries such as restricting the number of entries, and tightening passport requirements, are likely to worsen the situation of Venezuelans trying to flee their country, especially in border areas where migrants are at risk of being stranded. With no legal mechanisms put in place to protect them, protection concerns are likely to increase for vulnerable groups, particularly people without documentation or indigenous people (Centre for Global Development 06/08/2018).

Without a political solution and the development of a comprehensive approach between governments, a long-term situation of protracted displacement is likely to develop in the region (R4V 14/12/2018, Centre for Global Development 06/08/2018).

Information gaps and needs

- The overall number of people in need inside Venezuela and the scale of humanitarian needs is unknown. There is a lack of data on specific sectoral needs of people in need inside Venezuela.
- Lack of data on internal displacement.
- Lack of geographical breakdown of humanitarian needs within Venezuela.
- Lack of health data due to the dysfunction of health capabilities and epidemiological surveillance systems at the national level.
- The Venezuelan government stopped releasing official information about education in 2015.

Country : Venezuela

Humanitarian and political developments

