

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

- On 28 July 2024, Venezuela held presidential elections that sparked massive protests and a violent response from the Government, as large parts of the population believed that electoral fraud had taken place. Independent pollsters claim that the National Electoral Council's official results were incongruent with exit polling (Carter Center 30/07/2024; Crisis24 30/07/2024).
- Since 29 July, Venezuelans, mostly from the opposition, have been protesting in the main streets of cities across the country, claiming that Edmundo González Urrutia – the opposition candidate – had won the election. María Corina Machado (a prominent opposition figure) claims there is evidence that González won 84% of votes (El Pitazo 30/07/2024). Protests were initially peaceful, but **by 22 August, 27 people had been killed and 200 injured, mostly in Caracas**, as a result of the violent response by the police, Peace Defender Squads (known by the Spanish acronym Cupaz), and 'colectivos' (France24 22/08/2024; Monitor de Víctimas X 06/08/2024; El Diario 01/08/2024; El Tiempo 31/07/2024). The Cupaz are groups created by the Maduro Government in 2019 to defend the regime, and colectivos are armed groups allied with the Government who control the streets (Insight Crime 12/07/2023).
- On 29 July alone, there were between 180–210 protests in 20 of Venezuela's 23 states (El Diario 01/08/2024; El Tiempo 31/07/2024). While the majority of protests have been in Caracas, protests have also erupted in several states, mostly in Anzoátegui, Carabobo, Miranda, and Zulia (Foro Penal 18/08/2024). **Caracas has been militarised since 29 July, and police and colectivos have violently suppressed protests using both tear gas and firearms** (Efecto Cocuyo 05/08/2024; El Mundo 01/08/2024).
- The Government has imposed hefty penalties on protesters, making mass arrests and charging protestors with obstruction of public roads and instigating hatred, which carry a penalty of 6–10 and 10–20 years' imprisonment respectively (DW 02/08/2024).
- **According to the Government, 2,400 people were detained between 28 July and 17 August** (Infobae 17/08/2024; EFE 07/08/2024; La Prensa Gráfica 12/08/2024). Independent organisations have noted that detainees include women, children, and people with disabilities. Most of those detained were arrested in the capital, Caracas, and the nearby Carabobo and Anzoátegui states, where there is strong opposition to the Government (Foro Penal 18/08/2024). **The national authorities have not allowed detainees access to private or NGO lawyers** (PROVEA 04/08/2024). Maduro has announced the creation of two new prisons to hold protestors (El País 02/08/2024).
- At least four mayors from different regions have been detained and others removed from their posts by state security, owing to their support for the opposition movement. While some detainees have been released, two opposition leaders remained missing by 18 August (TalCual 18/08/2024; Efecto Cocuyo 10/08/2024; El Pitazo 08/08/2024 and 05/08/2024; El País 21/06/2024).
- In Caracas, self-imposed confinement has become widespread, as fear of repression and arrest continues. Videos of violence against opposition members circulate on social media, and public transport cannot pass through some areas of the city because of insecurity. This has restricted people's mobility, preventing some from getting to work (ABC 02/08/2024). Stores remained closed for several days as a result of fear of looting and damage during protests (Vision 360 30/07/2024; Infobae 30/07/2024). Education was disrupted and it resumed by the beginning of August.
- By 22 August, the scale of humanitarian needs remained unknown. The Venezuelan Government is also blocking online news content, limiting information (CNN 12/08/2024). There was no information on price increases since 29 July, which would affect access to food and other supplies.
- Transportation both within and to leave the country has been affected. This situation is likely to continue, as several airlines have suspended flights until at least 31 August (Crisis24 05/08/2024). The Government has also suspended flights from the Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru, and other countries in the region after breaking diplomatic relations (Crisis24 13/08/2024 and 31/07/2024).
- There have also been protests outside Venezuela (Runrun 30/07/2024; BBC 30/07/2024). On 17 August, protests took place in over ten cities across the world, including Bogotá, Madrid, and Mexico City, where Venezuelans and supporters marched for transparency around the 28 July election results (CNN 17/08/2024). Rallies, protests, and social unrest are likely to increase in the coming weeks.

DRIVERS OF THE CURRENT CRISIS

Tension after national elections

Protests against Nicolás Maduro since the 28 July elections have been met with a violent government response, including the use of teargas and firearms. Some international organisations and other countries (including Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States) also do not trust the official results and have demanded the release of supporting documents. Despite these demands, Maduro asserts the results' legitimacy – supported by countries such as Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Russia – but has failed to disclose disaggregated results by polling station, which would confirm the official count (Carter Center 30/07/2024; Crisis24 30/07/2024). According to polls and testimonies, areas of Caracas that traditionally supported Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chavez, shifted to the opposition. Many are afraid, however, to speak publicly for fear of government reprisal (BBC 31/07/2024).

Political tension and discontent

Widespread protests since 2013 show growing dissatisfaction with Maduro. Since his rise to power in 2013, the country has grappled with a severe economic crisis aggravated by falling oil prices, corruption, mismanagement, hyperinflation, and international sanctions. These factors have led to rising poverty, increasing unemployment, and widespread displacement, both within and beyond Venezuela's borders (The Conversation 02/08/2024; HRW 24/10/2016).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- Protection risks are likely to increase as protestors are forcefully met and detained by the police. Protests, clashes, and roadblocks can be expected to continue in locations across Venezuela, especially in major cities, including Barquisimeto, Caracas, Maracaibo, San Cristobal, and Valencia. Disruptions are likely to affect transportation, access to health facilities and education, and other essential services (Crisis24 05/08/2024 and 30/07/2024).
- Protests could increase in the coming weeks, as some were held on 17 August and opposition leaders are encouraging people, particularly abroad, to continue (France 24 17/08/2024; El País 17/08/2024). If repression and detentions continue, there will likely be an increase in protection needs.
- If protests continue, the Government's imposed curfew and people's self-imposed confinement could increase as a result of repression and fear of clashes (BBC 09/08/2024; ABC 02/08/2024).
- Prior to the elections, polls showed that around one-quarter (18–22%) of Venezuela's population was debating whether to leave the country if Maduro was re-elected (El País

27/07/2024). Fear of retaliation, crackdown, arrest, and lack of employment and income could also drive the further displacement of Venezuelans. If the civil unrest and Maduro administration persist, the number of Venezuelans migrating to neighbouring Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, and Peru, will also likely continue (Insight Crime 29/07/2024). While a number of Colombian cities bordering Venezuela are not prepared for the arrival of more migrants and refugees, some countries – such as Chile – have started preparing protocols to receive more displaced Venezuelans (El Tiempo 31/07/2024; El País 01/08/2024).

- Migration through the Darien Gap toward North America is also likely to increase (Infobae 30/07/2024; TA 29/07/2024; Insight Crime 29/07/2024). The Darien Gap path between Colombia and Venezuela has been used by people on the move since the late 1990s. In the last decade, however, Venezuelans as well as Colombians, Ecuadorians, Haitians, and other nationalities have increasingly resorted to using this dangerous route in the hopes of gaining asylum in North America, particularly as visa restrictions prevent them from using other means of travel (CFR 22/07/2024; HRW 10/10/2023). As Panama has implemented restrictions, such as visas and barbed wire fences, informal crossings are expected, increasing protection and health risks (BBC 18/07/2024).
- The US is considering new sanctions and has refused to recognise a new government in Venezuela until voting records are verified and made public. The US already reimposed some sanctions on Venezuela's oil sector in April 2024, claiming the Maduro Government had violated an October 2023 US-backed electoral roadmap agreed with the opposition. This indicates US willingness to impose sanctions in support of the Venezuelan democratic process (AJ 18/04/2024; Reuters 17/04/2024). Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and eight other North and South American countries, alongside 22 EU countries, have demanded transparency in the election results (El País 16/08/2024). Regional isolation is expected to affect Venezuela's economy (Reuters 01/08/2024; Insight Crime 29/07/2024). In the past, economic sanctions have contributed to increasing unemployment, reducing income levels, increasing food shortages, and limiting access to basic services.
- Economic crisis over the past decade has made Venezuelans highly dependent on remittances. This dependence will likely only increase if the country's economy is further affected by economic sanctions. In previous years, economic sanctions – including the freezing of state assets, complications to bank transfers, and impediments to remittances – have affected remittances from abroad. In 2023, remittances were estimated to have reached USD 3.725 billion (4% of GDP), 10% more than in 2022 (FEWS NET 22/07/2024).
- Venezuela's weakened economy coupled with potential international sanctions could lead to an increase in illicit activities, such as cocaine production and illegal gold mining, which are already on the rise. By April 2024, it was estimated that deforestation had increased by nearly 39% compared to 2022, mainly because of mining (Insight Crime 29/07/2024; Correo del Caroní 05/04/2024; El País 14/03/2023). This situation may increase the strength of armed groups and protection risks for civilians (primarily) in Amazonas, Apure, Táchira, and Zulia states (Pares 02/02/2024).

HUMANITARIAN AND ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

- Since 29 July, the Venezuelan Government has cancelled all flights arriving from the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Peru in response to these countries' criticism of the election (Crisis24 05/08/2024; DW 30/07/2024; The Guardian 01/08/2024). By 19 August, flights between these countries and Venezuela were still disrupted. This suspension is expected to last until 31 August, with 17 airlines affected (El Tiempo ve 19/08/2024). Flight suspensions will cause extensive disruptions, as most flights going to or coming from Venezuela transit through Panama and the Dominican Republic (Crisis24 30/07/2024). This could also hinder humanitarian access and aid.
- Flight and ground transport disruptions, as well as protests and violent clashes, are likely to continue in Venezuela until the end of August 2024 (Crisis24 05/08/2024). On 29 July, security forces and colectivos blocked roads leading to the Caracas city centre, where large protests were concentrated (BBC 29/07/2024). Further road blockages are likely to occur as result of the militarisation of Caracas since 29 July, likely leading to curfews and limited access to parts of the city (Efecto Cocuyo 05/08/2024; El Mundo 01/08/2024).
- Media censorship means that general information on humanitarian needs and access constraints is limited. Since 29 July, several journalists reporting on protests and government repression have been detained (Infobae 04/08/2024; NTN24 04/08/2024).
- By 30 July, the Venezuelan Government had announced the expulsion of several foreign diplomats, including those from Argentina, who opposed the election results (Crisis24 30/07/2024). Humanitarian NGOs and journalists are at risk of expulsion or detention, as the Government has accused them of supporting the opposition. Between July–August, the Government ordered the closure of five NGOs (El País 15/08/2024).
- On 14 August, the Venezuelan National Assembly approved the 'Law on Control, Regularization, Operations and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organisations' (AP News 15/08/2024; BBC 15/08/2024). This law imposes bureaucratic requirements on NGO establishment and activities, exposing organisations to criminalisation for non-compliance (USAID 13/03/2024; OHCHR 30/01/2023; AI 18/01/2024).

CRISIS IMPACTS (CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED)

Protection

- By 22 August, 27 people had been killed in the protests (France24 22/08/2024; El Tiempo 05/08/2024; Monitor de Víctimas X 06/08/2024). As of 4 August, approximately 40 people were also missing (SWI 04/08/2024; PROVEA 04/08/2024). At least four mayors from different regions have been detained by state security as a result of their alleged support for the opposition (El Pitazo 05/08/2024). According to family members, some detained opposition members are being transferred to the Helicoide, a detention centre known for torture (Efecto Cocuyo 17/08/2024; El Pitazo 08/08/2024). The authorities have prevented detainees' access to both private and NGO lawyers (PROVEA 04/08/2024).
- There are high protection needs in Venezuela, as opposition members and supporters who participated in protests have been killed, harassed, and threatened by the colectivos and Cupaz (NYT 18/08/2024). It has been reported that some of these groups are already resorting to extortion, threats, and attacks, as well as the fact that rivalries exist between different armed gangs and the Cupaz (France 24 16/08/2024; Insight Crime 12/07/2023).
- Journalists are at high risk of detention, as Venezuelan authorities have charged four journalists with 'terrorism', which carries a possible sentence of 30 years in prison (CNN 10/08/2024; VOA 08/08/2024). Between 28 July and 13 August, there were at least 70 attacks on journalists, including 18 cases of restricted access, 30 acts of intimidation and threats, nine detentions (four journalists are still in prison), nine expulsions of foreign journalists, and four physical attacks (RSF 13/08/2024; VOA 08/08/2024). Journalists and humanitarian workers have also had their passports cancelled, restricting their movement and forcing them to remain in the country (El Espectador 08/08/2024).
- In bordering areas, particularly areas where restrictions have increased (such as Panama), there is a risk that gangs and armed groups will gain influence and smuggle, hire, and take advantage of those trying to leave Venezuela.

Displacement

- Since 29 July, the border between Venezuela and Colombia has remained open. Mayors of 12 municipalities on the Colombia-Venezuela border are asking the Colombian Government for support, as they lack the financial and physical resources to receive an influx of migrants and refugees (Caracol Radio 03/08/2024; Infobae 30/07/2024). The restrictiveness of crossing the Darien Gap and entering Panama, alongside the passport and visa requirements for Ecuador, will result in many Venezuelans having no choice but to stay in neighbouring Colombia (Lahora 05/08/2024; BBC 18/07/2024).

- There is a risk that negative perceptions of people on the move or xenophobia could rise in host towns and communities, as well as among elected officials. Such has occurred in Bucaramanga, Colombia, where the mayor linked migrants and refugees to insecurity. Since May 2024, Colombian authorities in Bucaramanga have intensified the deportation of Venezuelans who have committed crimes (El Espectador 29/05/2024; Infobae 22/05/2024). An increase in deportations also occurred during Colombia's regional elections in October 2023, when various candidates associated insecurity with Venezuelan migrants and refugees, even proposing the establishment of larger prisons for them (ColombiaCheck 18/10/2023; Barometro 29/09/2023). The strengthening of these narratives, both locally and at the national level, in Colombia and other countries could mean the temporary status given to people arriving from Venezuela may be limited/scrapped.
- The Venezuelan Government has directly threatened opposition leaders and journalists, who are likely to leave and seek asylum abroad. The two main opposition leaders, Edmundo González Urrutia and María Corina Machado, are being investigated by the prosecutor's office and could be arrested for 'instigating insurrection' after both called on police and military to stop the 'repression' (SWI 06/08/2024; Infobae 05/08/2024).
- By the end of 2023, there was an increase of 661,800 Venezuelan refugees and migrants across North and South America (UNHCR accessed 20/08/2024). In the last two decades, there have been 7.7 million migrants and refugees from Venezuela, 40% (around three million) of whom are based in neighbouring Colombia (IOM accessed 05/08/2024; El País 05/08/2024).

Livelihoods

- Inaccessibility resulting from insecurity and protests caused stores and several industries to close (ABC 02/08/2024; El País 30/07/2024). By 20 August, some commercial activities had resumed, but fear of clashes meant many places remained closed. By 17 August, some areas of Caracas and other cities remained inaccessible as a result of protests and the violent police and colectivos response (NTN24 17/08/2024).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Poverty and economic crisis

- Up until February 2024, 82% of Venezuelans lived in poverty and 53% in extreme poverty, with incomes insufficient to afford the basic food basket (OHCHR 14/02/2024). High poverty rates create barriers to individuals meeting their basic needs, perpetuating cycles of deprivation and inequality. In June 2024, the Central Bank of Venezuela reported an annual inflation rate of 54%, but the Venezuelan Observatory of Finance instead put that number at 68%. It is difficult to access reliable data on monthly price increases, as official government reports have been questioned by independent entities (France 24 29/07/2024; Bloomberg 23/07/2024).
- Unemployment is one of the main reasons people have left Venezuela over the past decade. In 2023, the official unemployment rate stood at 6%, as reported by the Government (Trading Economics accessed 08/08/2024). Independent and academic research organisations reported, however, that, in actuality, 48% of the productive population was unemployed (Maduradas 07/06/2024). According to NGO reports, one-third of Venezuelan women are unable to generate enough income to be self-sufficient, and 52% of women engage in informal economic activities to cope with the lack of formal employment (Equal Times 06/02/2023).

Health

- Since April 2024, there has been a shortage of essential medicines – particularly those for diabetes, hypertension, depression, seizures, and infections – resulting from hyperinflation, poverty, and the lack of state support in importing medicine. There is also a shortage of doctors and nurses in the hospital network. According to the Venezuelan Medical Federation, around 42,000 professionals have left the country because of low salaries and difficult working conditions (Infobae 25/04/2024; France 24 08/04/2024). Less trade and the lack of supplies are likely to increase prices and scarcity, which could hamper access to medicine for people with chronic diseases or those injured in recent protests.
- There is a risk of increasing mental health needs among people on the move and those who experienced recent violence. The stress and anxiety resulting from forced migration, coupled with precarious living conditions, are causing deteriorating mental health conditions in Venezuela. Psychiatric medicine is scarce in the country (El País 18/03/2024).

Food security

- As a result of economic crisis, Venezuela has experienced food insecurity since 2008. According to July 2024 forecasts, Venezuela will experience Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels of food insecurity between June 2024 and January 2025 (FEWS NET 22/07/2024). In 2023, 45.2% of the Venezuelan population was food insecure, equivalent to 13 million people (HumVenezuela 11/2023).
- It is estimated that, in 2024, approximately two million people (7% of the total population) in Venezuela are in urgent need of food assistance (FAO 07/2024). In the current conditions of violence and civil unrest, it is likely that access to income and food will be further affected, increasing food insecurity among certain populations.
- In the current situation, voucher and food distribution could be further restricted. The Government is expected to only distribute vouchers to its supporters, as such has previously been the case in times of food scarcity (Portafolio 31/05/2017; BBC 03/06/2016). People are highly dependent on state food vouchers, which are provided every 21 days and worth USD 40. High inflation, however, means that such vouchers are usually insufficient, and people may still need to rely on humanitarian aid. By July 2024, the price of the basic food basket in Venezuela surpassed USD 550 (Bloomberg Línea 21/07/2024; SWI 22/04/2024). People may also resort to consumption and livelihood-based coping strategies, including reduced portions and borrowing money, as such also increased in past periods of heightened food insecurity (FEWS NET 26/03/2024).
- Economic crisis and international sanctions have led to food and medicine shortages in Venezuela since 2010. While these shortages have decreased since 2019, political tension, protests, and a lack of international legitimacy may contribute to furthering food and medicine shortages. Data is limited and no figures have been provided by the Government (TalCual 13/01/2024; HumVenezuela 11/2023).

Climate conditions

- Access to food could be affected by above-average temperatures, which have affected agriculture primarily in localised areas of Anzoátegui, Bolívar, Falcón, Guárico, Lara, and Monagas states, reflected in poor vegetation health (FEWS NET 22/07/2024). There has also been intense rainfall in some areas of Venezuela, particularly in Portuguesa, aggravated by a tropical wave with storm activity (Efecto Cocuyo 15/08/2024). The rain in Portuguesa caused one death, damage to over 40 houses, the overflowing of a river, and damage to nearby roads (El Diario 19/08/2024; NTN24 19/08/2024).
- The Caribbean hurricane season could also affect crops in Venezuela's coastal regions. The northwest of the country is expected to experience 45% above-average precipitation between September–November 2024, while the southern regions are expected to

be dry and have 50% below-normal precipitation (IRI accessed 16/08/2024). Heightened precipitation increases the potential for mosquito breeding in northern areas, such as Zulia and Caracas capital district, which also increases the risk of vector-borne diseases.

Economic sanctions

- The US, EU, and UK have imposed sanctions on Venezuela. The US initially introduced sanctions in 2006 for anti-terrorism and anti-narcotics trafficking purposes. In 2014 and 2017, the US imposed visa restrictions and targeted sanctions on individuals implicated in 'antidemocratic actions, human rights violations, and anticorruption', along with wider sectoral and financial sanctions, including measures to prevent the Maduro Government from accessing US financial markets (CRS 24/04/2024; CFR 4/11/2022). The EU adopted a sanctions regime in November 2017, extended until January 2025, which allows it to impose travel restrictions and asset freezes on Venezuelans implicated in serious human rights violations and suppression of democracy. The EU has also imposed an arms embargo (EU Sanctions Map accessed 19/08/2024). The UK implemented a similar sanctions regime in 2019, following its exit from the EU (Govt. of UK 31/01/2019).
- Critics argue that these sanctions regimes have aggravated Venezuela's economic crisis and associated humanitarian needs (CRS 24/04/2024; CFR 04/11/2022). Despite humanitarian exemptions, overcompliance with sanctions and financial institutions' risk intolerance have led to financial and operational constraints for humanitarians (Wilson Center 03/2023).

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

- Humanitarian organisations are present in all of Venezuela's 23 states (OCHA 30/06/2024).
- Up until 30 June, only 11% (USD 68 million) of the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan had been funded, lower than the average 20% funding for other countries HRP plans. By 7 August, around 1.4 million people were receiving aid, but five million are meant to be targeted in 2024 (OCHA 10/07/2024). Nutrition and education are the least funded sectors (OCHA 10/07/2024).
- The UN has nine agencies, funds, and programmes with a presence in Venezuela, including the UNHCR, FAO, IOM, UNAIDS, PAHO/WHO, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF (UN Venezuela accessed 12/08/2024). The IOM has published a Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2024, which considers recent developments (IOM 31/12/2023). Other organisations also have a presence in the country, such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, International Committee of the Red Cross, and local NGOs.

MAP OF PROTESTS REPRESSED ONLY ON 29-30 JULY 2024



Source: Observatorio de Conflictos de Venezuela (03/08/2024)