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EASO publishes a COI report: Venezuela Country Focus



On 20 August 2020, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) report titled ‘Venezuela Country Focus’.

This COI report is a joint initiative of EASO and the Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC)[1].

The report addresses the main topics and questions raised by international protection authorities, decision-makers, and COI researchers. It covers recent developments in the economy, political and security situation, and the humanitarian situation. The report also discusses the most recurring targeted profiles by the government and its security forces. It describes activities of armed pro-government civilian groups (colectivos), including targeted profiles, modus operandi, relation with the government and security forces, and state response for victims of colectivos. Final chapters describe identity and courts documents, entry and exit procedures, and the situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (LGBT) persons.

Some findings of the report include:

- The mass emigration of Venezuelans constitutes one of the largest in recent Latin American history. While the number of Syrians who left their country reached 6.5 million in seven years (2011-2017), the

number of Venezuelans who left their country reached 4 million in four years (2015-June 2019).

- Venezuela has one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America, despite a decrease in 2019. Armed groups, both domestic and foreign, operate in Venezuela, with distinct objectives, modus operandi, political loyalties and relations with the state.
- Colectivos exert political and social control in neighbourhoods where they operate, and have become instrumental in the use of coercive control over protests through the use of violence and often in coordination with security forces.
- The nature of protests changed in the first months of 2019, with more targeted demonstrations emerging to protest the deterioration of living standards and the humanitarian situation. Security forces allegedly subjected persons who participated in protests to 'serious abuse and ill-treatment' while in detention in order to punish them, force confessions, or incriminating others.
- Authorities allegedly engaged in forced disappearances, including for political reasons, to impede the defence of the person while the detention is carried out. Security forces have also allegedly been involved in extrajudicial executions.
- Venezuela has established a complex system to eavesdrop, harass, and digitally and physically monitor the population, including through the CLAP food boxes and the Homeland Card (Carnet de la Patria). Social control has intensified during the pandemic.
- A systematic and widespread policy of repression in Venezuela for those who are critical of the government was identified by sources. The government and security forces target journalists to silence on what is occurring in the country. Human rights advocates and members of civil society organisations are prosecuted under both the criminal justice system and the military penal jurisdiction, as an 'exemplary punishment' to block the work of other human rights organisations. The 'Law Against Hate' has been one of the legal instruments used for these prosecutions.

The report was drafted by an independent COI expert, James Restrepo, in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology. The report draws on information from 14 oral sources interviewed for this report, apart from a large variety of publicly available sources. It was reviewed by experts from: Canada - Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC); Norway - Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo; Switzerland - State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Division Analysis (Länderanalyse SEM), and United States - Refugee Asylum and International Operations (RAIO), US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Venezuelan applications for international protection in the EU+ increased considerably since early 2019 and peaked between November 2019 and February 2020. In 2019, Venezuelans launched twice as many applications, over 45 000, as in 2018. In the first quarter of 2020, the number remained similar to the last quarter of 2019 (over 13 000) but already in late March applications began to decrease in the context of restrictive measures to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Spain has remained the main destination country: in the period January 2019 – March 2020 about nine in 10 applications in the EU+ were lodged in Spain.

The report can be downloaded from the EASO COI portal.

[1] IGC 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.

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