



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Venezuela – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

13 January 2025

Maduro sworn in for third term in office

On 10.01.25, Nicolás Maduro was sworn in as president for a third term despite international protests. The pro-government Supreme Electoral Council (CNE) declared Maduro the winner after the election held on 28.07.24, having garnered 52 percent of the vote. However, it did not provide itemised figures for the count. The opposition's unity candidate, Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, claimed to have won the election with 67 percent of the vote and is recognised as the winner by the US, Canada and several Latin American countries (cf. BN of 29.07.24, 05.08.24, 26.08.24 and 07.10.24). Gonzalez left Venezuela in September 2024 after an arrest warrant was issued against him. Contrary to his announcement that he would return to the country on the day of the swearing-in ceremony and take over the presidency, he did not enter the country. He called on the military not to recognise Maduro. Opposition leader María Corina Machado, who was briefly detained during a rally on 09.01.25, stated that Gonzalez should be sworn in later "if the conditions are right".

Meanwhile, the US has increased the reward for information leading to Maduro's arrest to USD 25 million. The US, the EU and the UK have also adopted new sanctions.¹

20 January 2025

Arrests in the context of Maduro's swearing-in, kin liability

According to the NGO Foro Penal (Penal Forum), at least 90 arrests were made again (as of 17.01.25) in the run-up to and after Nicolas Maduro's controversial swearing-in on 10.01.25, most of them on 09.01.25 in connection with opposition protests, among other things. According to her party Vente Venezuela (Come Venezuela), opposition leader María Corina Machado was also briefly detained (cf. BN of 13.01.25). Attorney General Saab denied this and spoke of a staged coup by the opposition. In addition, numerous political activists and members of opposition parties (including former presidential candidate Enrique Marquez (Centrados), human rights defenders and journalists were again arrested. In several cases, relatives and NGOs spoke of disappearances, some of which lasted several days. A few of those affected have since been released, most recently including the director of the NGO Espacio Público (Public Space), Carlos Correa. In the course of the arrests, there have reportedly also been cases of kin liability. According to opposition politician González Urrutia, his son-in-law was taken away by people dressed in black while he was taking his children to school in Caracas on 07.01.24; his whereabouts initially remained unknown. According to the constitutional lawyer María Alejandra Díaz Marín, relatives of hers were also arrested on pretextual grounds, and she was threatened with the arrest of her children if she did not hand herself in. Díaz Marín had already been temporarily banned from practising as a lawyer in November 2024 as part of a disciplinary sanction after she lodged a constitutional complaint in connection with the non-publication of the itemised

presidential election results. Machado's mother's house was reportedly also surrounded by security forces once again, and the electricity in the neighbourhood was cut off.

The police and military presence had been significantly increased around the swearing-in ceremony, and various colectivos (pro-government groups) had also been recruited by Interior Minister Cabello, among others, to "defend the Bolivarian revolution", as he put it. Online intimidation campaigns and numerous website blockades were also reported. According to government sources, more than 100 foreign nationals were arrested in recent weeks in the run-up to the swearing-in ceremony due to allegedly planned plots. No background information on these events has been released.²

Prison conditions and circumstances of release

Based on information provided by the Committee of Relatives and Friends for the Freedom of Political Prisoners (Clippve) on 28.12.2024, those most recently released from prison had to sign a declaration prior to their release stating that their human rights had been respected and that they had received adequate medical and nutritional care. The independent Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons (OVP) also criticised the release conditions for juveniles at the end of 2024. For example, they were reportedly forced to record videos in which they supposedly confirmed that they had spent their time in prison under good conditions. According to the OVP, these individuals were also prohibited from speaking to the media under threat of re-imprisonment. In addition, a recently published report by Clippve again criticises the prison conditions for persons detained for political reasons as precarious and inhumane. According to the report, Clippve has, for example, received specific reports of torture, ill-treatment, prolonged solitary confinement and denial of family and lawyer visits from the prisons El Helicoide, La Boleita, Rodeo I, Tocuyito, Tocarón, Yare III and the women's prisons INOF and la Crisálida. The report also criticises the denial of medication and medical care and the precarious hygiene conditions there, as well as in other prisons and police stations.³

27 January 2025

Gang leader killed in security operation

According to Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, gang leader Wuileisys Alexander Acevedo Monasterios, alias Wilexis, was killed on 22.01.25 during clashes with the CICPC police unit in the low-income neighbourhood of Petare. He was one of Venezuela's most wanted criminals, accused of extortion, homicide, kidnapping and drug trafficking, among other things; a large bounty had long been placed on his head for information on his whereabouts. According to Insight Crime, the Wilexis gang had dominated the José Félix Ribas community in the Petare neighbourhood since around 2017 and had filled the state power vacuum that had arisen by taking over various functions in the areas of security, jurisdiction and the fight against poverty through social programmes. It also exercised social control, repeatedly imposing curfews or other restrictions. The gang, numbering around 200 members, is also said to have been active in other sectors of Petare. In the past, there have been repeated armed clashes between the gang and security forces, as well as rival groups, which have frequently resulted in civilian deaths. The government has also accused the criminal group, among other things, of collaborating with western powers and, most recently, the opposition.⁴

03 February 2025

Tren de Aragua: raids in Chile - arrests, declaration of terrorist organisation

According to Chilean security authorities, several members of a local cell (Los Piratas) of the Venezuelan transnational criminal group Tren de Aragua have been arrested in raids carried out in Santiago since 22.01.25. Members of this cell are alleged to have been involved in the killing of former Venezuelan military officer and refugee Ronald Ojeda in February 2024 (cf. BN of 22.04.24). In addition, the leader of Los Piratas, Gámez Salas (alias El Turco), had previously been arrested in the US. On 20.01.25, US President Donald Trump had already signed a decree to have the Tren de Aragua organisation, among others, classified as a foreign terrorist organisation.⁵

10 February 2025

Suspicion of kin detention, release of election-related detainees and Americans

According to Vente Venezuela (Come Venezuela), following a previous unsuccessful attempt to arrest the party coordinator in Bolívar, Douglas Rodríguez, his 80-year-old mother-in-law and her carer were arrested without a search warrant by officers from the domestic intelligence service, SEBIN, during a raid carried out on his house in Puerto Ordaz on 31.01.25. Their whereabouts are currently unknown.

As of 03.02.25, the NGO Foro Penal (Penal Forum) put the number of people detained for political reasons at 1,196, including four minors. In recent weeks, numerous releases of people arrested in connection with the 2024 elections have been recorded. Six US citizens imprisoned in Venezuela were also recently released during a visit by US special envoy Richard Grenell.⁶

03 March 2025

Deportations from the US to Venezuela, including alleged deserters

According to the US State Department, two flights carrying around 190 people deported to Venezuela had already landed on 10.02.25 (cf. BN of 17.02.25). The deportations took place following a trip by US special envoy Richard Grenell to Caracas in January 2025, during which six US citizens who had been imprisoned in Venezuela were also released.

According to US reports, several suspected members of the transnationally operating criminal gang Tren de Aragua were also among those returned. Venezuelan Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello contradicted this statement. However, he stated that 17 people had "unfinished business" with the justice system, mostly for unspecified offences dating back between seven and 15 years. According to Cabello, there were also two ex-military personnel of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (FANB)) on the flight who had deserted. He said that investigations into this, including by the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (DGCIM)), had already begun. However, no further information has been provided on the identities of these individuals. In this context, a human rights defender warned of the lack of trial guarantees and the politicised legal system in Venezuela. At the same time, she stated that it should first be checked whether ex-military personnel were actually on the flight, whether they had deserted or whether this public announcement fulfilled another purpose, such as curbing desertion through intimidation.⁷

Death in custody

On 24.02.25, another member of Vente Venezuela (Come Venezuela) died in custody. While opposition politician María Corina Machado and the relatives of the deceased accuse the state of failing to provide medical care, the authorities have not yet commented on the circumstances of Reinaldo Araujo's death. Araujo was arrested on 09.01.25 after visiting a doctor in connection with a protest. Since November 2024, he is already the fourth person allegedly detained for political reasons in the wake of the protests following the 2024 presidential elections to have died in custody (cf. BN of 25.11.24 and 23.12.24).⁸

Arrests and convictions

Luis Somaza, a politician from the opposition party Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) and the former head of office during Juan Guaidó's interim presidency, was arrested in Caracas back on 12.02.25. According to Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, he is accused of corruption in connection with the receipt of funds from USAID, among other things. Another Voluntad Popular party member was also arrested by the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service, SEBIN, in the state of Apure on 27.02.25. The opposition party described the arrest as arbitrary.

According to the online news website La Patilla (The Watermelon), one of its reporters was arrested on 20.02.25 by members of SEBIN. His whereabouts initially remained unknown, and there was no further information available. His relatives are said to have reported the disappearance to the Attorney General's Office.

On 24.02.25, Nelson Piñero, a member of the opposition Encuentro Ciudadano (Citizens' Encounter) party, who was arrested by SEBIN in the state of Carabobo in November 2024, was also sentenced to 15 years in prison for publications on social media, according to his party.⁹

17 March 2025

Releases

According to Attorney General Tarek William Saab, 110 people who had been imprisoned following the 2024 presidential elections were released again at the beginning of March 2025. According to media reports citing the NGO Committee for the Freedom of Political Prisoners (ClippVe), the released prisoners included a person with schizophrenia and a person suffering from severe depression. Their relatives had previously repeatedly complained about the withholding of medical care in detention and demanded their release on humanitarian grounds.¹⁰

UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances in Venezuela

In a statement issued on 28.02.25, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances said that it had received complaints from various sources (including NGOs, relatives and lawyers) about the practice of enforced disappearances from Venezuela, including in the context of the 2024 presidential elections and during and after Nicolas Maduro's inauguration in January 2025, and called on the Maduro government to put a stop to them, disclose the whereabouts of those affected and comply with international laws. It stated that there were also findings that habeas corpus applications had not been pursued or in some cases had not been accepted. In addition, the expert panel speaks of a systematic pattern of enforced disappearances, usually short-term, in which several actors (including the domestic and military intelligence services, the judiciary, the Attorney General's Office, the National Police and the Bolivarian National Guard) are involved. According to the committee's statement, these actors sometimes denied having detained a person after arrest or refused to disclose their specific whereabouts. The committee also sees the ongoing practice of enforced disappearances as a means of intimidating society, which is "fuelled by widespread impunity and selective justice".¹¹

Medical situation: treatment situation for chronic kidney disease

Recently, NGOs (ONTV and ATV), but also those affected themselves, have repeatedly criticised the shortage or non-availability of immunosuppressant drugs (for example, mofetil mycophenolate) dispensed as aid in the state pharmacies of the Venezuelan Social Security Institute (IVSS) (Farmacias de Alto Costo (high-cost pharmacies)) and warned of serious risks for transplant recipients, such as rejection reactions. At the end of February 2025, ONTV spoke of a "critical shortage in the last five months" in this context; it said states affected by the lack of deliveries included Aragua, Zulia, Barinas and Caracas. It mentioned that in addition to transplant patients, lupus patients, for example, had also been affected by a lack of or limited access to medication in the public healthcare system. According to people with specialist expertise, switching to private pharmacies with greater availability of medication was not an option for many of those affected for financial reasons.

In theory, the Venezuelan Social Security Institute (IVSS) also covers the treatment costs for dialysis services in the public healthcare system. However, there have been repeated reports in recent years that there are not enough dialysis stations in the country, as relevant units have repeatedly been closed due, among other things, to a lack of maintenance, for example. Recurring water and electricity outages and the lack of consumables (filters, solutions) and transport options to the relevant care facilities have also had a negative impact on the care of kidney patients. Government sources reported that a new dialysis unit was recently delivered to a hospital in Caracas on 07.03.25, and further units have been announced. However, there are no official figures on the extent to which this will contribute to improving the situation.

According to the President of the Venezuelan Medical Association, the serious health crisis in the country continues. The hospital survey (ENH) regularly published by the NGO Médicos por la Salud (Doctors for Health) also recently found that out-of-pocket costs (for example, for consumables during treatment) were once again high, particularly for childbirth.¹²

24 March 2025

FFM and UNHCHR updates before the UN Human Rights Council

On 18.03.25, the UN-mandated Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela (FFM) pointed out in its report to the Human Rights Council that there is still evidence of the state's use of "persecution for political reasons" in Venezuela. The FFM also criticised the numerous documented cases of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances between September 2024 and January 2025. An update from the Deputy High Commissioner for

Human Rights (UNHCHR) dated 20.03.25 also addresses the economic, humanitarian and medical situation in the country: it states that around 7.6 million people are still in need of humanitarian aid. It further states that reports on the "shortage of essential medicines and medical consumables", which patients still often have to provide themselves for treatment, continue, as do reports on the unaffordable cost of medicines for most patients. It mentions that there have also been reports of salaries being suspended in the public sector and redundancies (for example, of teaching staff). The statement also refers to ongoing reports of torture and the withholding of medical treatment in detention, as well as restrictions on freedom of expression and the activities of NGOs.

On 19.03.25, a Venezuelan NGO also published a letter from, among others, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders addressed to the Venezuelan government, which back in December 2024 had criticised the alleged cancellation of passports of human rights defenders for political reasons and demanded information on the legal basis for this and the exact number of people affected, among other things.¹³

31 March 2025

Arrests of relatives of two military officers in exile

According to media reports, three relatives of a military dissident in exile who was formerly imprisoned in Venezuela for involvement in a conspiracy and escaped from the Ramo Verde military prison in 2017 were arrested between 22.01.25 and 24.01.25. Although Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello confirmed their arrest on 13.02.25 for allegedly supporting "terrorist plans" or being involved in a conspiracy, their exact whereabouts are still unknown, according to relatives. In another case also, the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence, DGCIM, is said to have arrested relatives of a military officer who was likewise abroad and was accused of conspiracy. The NGO Provea and relatives speak of enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests for the purpose of using them as possible leverage against the two ex-military officers, contrary to the government narrative.¹⁴

05 May 2025

Economic situation: bonuses increased instead of minimum wage

On 30.04.25, president Maduro announced an increase in the "bonus" against the economic war for people working in the civil service, which is to be increased from its most recent maximum of 90 USD to a maximum of 120 USD. This is referred to as the integral minimum wage, together with the unchanged actual minimum wage of 130 Bolívares (currently much less than 2 USD) and a food voucher ("Cestaticket" (40 USD)). Trade unions called for protests to be held against this measure too for 01.05.25, criticised the "starvation wages", and instead called for earnings to be increased in real terms, since the increased bonuses had no influence whatever on social benefits, etc.¹⁵

Freedom of the press

According to the RSF's annual freedom of the press ranking, published on 02.05.25, Venezuela currently ranks 160th out of 180 countries. This means that it ranks third-worst in Latin America, after Cuba (165) and Nicaragua (172). (Self-)censorship and criminalisation of media professionals is said to play a major role in Venezuela, there having also been several arrests among reporters, particularly in the period around the 2024 presidential elections. Financial restrictions also had a major influence on independent reporting. The NGO Espacio Público furthermore speaks of a significant increase in the number of arrests because of free expression of opinion (online) regarding the presidential elections, intimidation, increased supervision of the public debate, and 23 closures of communication media.¹⁶

12 May 2025

Opposition members sheltering in diplomatic compound leave Venezuela

According to media reports, the five staff members working for the opposition's presidential campaign who had been seeking asylum in the Argentinian embassy for more than a year have left Venezuela. They are reported to have arrived in the USA on 06.05.25. Whilst US secretary of state Rubio described the event as a rescue operation,

Venezuelan interior minister Cabello attributes the exit to negotiations. A sixth staff member surrendered to the authorities several months ago, and died under house arrest in February 2025 as a result of illness.¹⁷

26 May 2025

NGO suspends activities due to anti-NGO law

The foundation Alimenta la Solidaridad, which had operated approx. 240 kitchens in disadvantaged parts of the country providing more than 12,000 children with a daily lunch, has ceased its activities as per 15.05.25. The organisation stated as the reason for this the potential negative impact of the NGO regulation and funding law (so-called “anti-ONG law”) (cf. BN of 19.08.24), which was said to criminalise the humanitarian work done by NGOs and pose dangers for the safety of their employees. Transparencia Venezuela (a regional office of Transparency International) already ceased working within Venezuela in December 2024 because of the same law, and moved abroad.¹⁸

Human rights defenders arrested

According to reports, human rights defenders and persons (alleged to be) engaging in opposition activities are still being arrested. For instance, Eduardo Torres, a lawyer for the NGO Provea, which helps persons detained on political grounds, was allegedly detained on 09.05.25. His detention was confirmed by the authorities on 13.05.25. Torres’ passport was already cancelled in October 2024, together with the passports of other (alleged) opposition activists, media professionals and human rights defenders (cf. BN of 21.10.24). He was said to have received threats several times in the past because of his work. According to chief prosecutor Saab, he was accused of terrorism and treason, amongst other charges. Furthermore, a human rights activist and lawyer in San Cristobal, as well as the executive director of the organisation Médicos Unidos in Táchira state, had also been briefly detained only days before Torres. The latter had reported from there several times of shortages of medicines and the precarious healthcare infrastructure.¹⁹

Deaths of persons with prior medical conditions detained on political grounds after release from detention

According to media reports, two persons with prior medical conditions who had been detained on political grounds died in May 2025 after having been released from detention several months previously. Most recently, a man suffering from chronic kidney disease reportedly died on 16.05.25. A woman who had been detained in the protests that followed the 2024 presidential elections, and who suffered from type 1 diabetes, had died on 10.05.25, only a few months after her release. Relatives and NGOs are accusing the authorities of not providing adequate healthcare in detention, something which is alleged to have led to a serious, lasting deterioration of the health condition of the two individuals who have since died. According to the NGO Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón, roughly 80 people with serious health issues are still incarcerated, and the precarious detention conditions (poor food, water and healthcare) are making their conditions worse still. Solitary confinement and inhumane treatment were said to furthermore have psychological effects. There were also reports in May 2025 of the suicide and attempted suicide of detainees in Tocarón prison who had been detained in the wake of the 2024 presidential elections.²⁰

Parliamentary and regional elections; detentions for alleged conspiracy in the run-up to the elections

According to reports, parliamentary and regional elections were held on 25.05.25. Large sections of the opposition are said to be boycotting the elections, whilst only a few of the others are standing for election. According to reports from the government-friendly National Electoral Council (CNE), the turnout was approx. 42 %, with the governing alliance obtaining almost 83 % of the ballot. Only Cojedes governorate was won by an opposition politician. Elections (purely symbolic) were also held in the newly-established, contested Guayana Esequiba governorate, to which Venezuela lays claim (cf. BN of 25.03. and 15.05.24).

According to interior minister Cabello, more than 70 people had been detained in the run-up to the parliamentary and regional elections prior to 23.05.25, including large numbers of foreign nationals. The government is accusing these people of conspiring to violently disturb the elections, but no evidence of this has been presented. Media reports, based partly on information provided by the opposition, in turn speak of arbitrary detentions of opposition

politicians, including Juan Pablo Guanipa (Primero Justicia), as well as trade union representatives, human rights defenders, and media workers.²¹

16 June 2025

Economic situation: Chevron licence runs out; impact forecast

The licence of US energy group Chevron as the partner of state oil company PDVSA for business activity (general licence 41) in Venezuela expired as per 27.05.25. The US administration ultimately did not extend this exceptional arrangement under the still-valid sanction regime. Persons with economic expertise presume that this will lead to a marked drop in crude oil production in Venezuela and to declining revenues. This will cause the Venezuelan economy, which is heavily dependent on oil revenues, to lose a major source of foreign currency, with a negative impact on exchange rate stability. A further devaluation of the national currency (Bolívar) was to be expected, as was an acceleration of inflation, and hence in the medium term also a drop in Venezuela's GDP. There are also reports of impending job losses.

In this context, there is also the recently-announced possibility for local authorities and public service-providers to increase their fees and to collect advance taxes from companies. These measures should at least partly compensate for the forecast loss of revenues, but at the same time would impose further burdens on companies in the private sector. President Maduro already announced an economic state of emergency in April 2025, thus making it possible to rescind tax relief.²²

Detentions in connection with parallel exchange rate and of economic researchers

According to information from the office of the chief public prosecutor, at least 58 persons had been arrested in raids carried out by the national police in several states since 21.05.25 because they had disseminated or publicised the parallel dollar rate via digital platforms. The government is accusing these individuals of "destabilising the economy" by "driving up the currency rate with their false publications". They were therefore reportedly accused amongst other things of terrorism, money laundering and conspiring to destabilise the economy. A number of such websites had also been taken off the internet or blocked.

The gap between the parallel dollar rate and the official exchange rate of the central bank (BCV) has increased considerably once again since the second half of 2024. Experts however consider the official exchange rate to be undervalued.

Additionally, several economists had recently been detained: On 12.06.25, the SEBIN arrested the former finance minister under Chávez and critic of the Maduro government, Rodrigo Cabezas, in Maracaibo. Another economist had also been detained amongst other individuals. The Venezuelan Finance Observatory (OVF) criticised the detentions of these individuals, who it said were doing their best to ensure that objective economic data were published for a better assessment of the situation in the country.²³

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
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