

Document #2071683

IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (Author)

Venezuela: Requirements and procedures to obtain the Homeland Card (Carnet de la Patria); content, appearance, and security features; social services available for holders; availability of documentation to prove that a person does not possess the card; sample (2020–January 2022) [VEN200881.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources report that the Homeland Card [Fatherland Card] was introduced by the government in 2016 (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018; Director 3 Jan. 2022). According to an article by Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), a national public broadcaster and state-owned television channel affiliated with the Ministry of Popular Power for Communication (Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Comunicación) (VTV n.d.), the Homeland Card was launched to provide economic and social protections for Venezuelans in response to the economic and trade embargos and sanctions imposed by the US on Venezuela (VTV 25 Dec. 2020). Conversely, other sources report that, for the government, the Homeland Card is a [translation] "method of control" (OMCT, et al. Mar. 2020, 49), a "technology to monitor citizen[s]" (US 30 Mar. 2021, 17), or a tool for "monitoring and discrimination" (EU Aug. 2020, 34). Sources indicate that a Homeland Card is required to access to government benefits such as food (OMCT, et al. Mar. 2020, 49; OVCS Apr. 2020, 20; US 30 Mar. 2021, 17–18), social services, and economic aids (OMCT, et al. Mar. 2020, 49; US 30 Mar. 2021, 17–18). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020* states that, as a result, "[c]itizens essentially had no choice but to obtain the card," despite its "known" use for tracking purposes (US 30 Mar. 2021, 18).

According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Homeland Card-contingent social programmes and their beneficiaries are administered by "local structures of the governing parties, as opposed to Government institutions" and, according to "interviewees" [1], cardholders' political activities are "monitor[ed]" by said local structures (UN 5 July 2019, para. 23). However, the Venezuelan government states in a response to the OHCHR report that Homeland Card program beneficiaries are determined "without discrimination" and by "the diverse State institutions responsible for each of the programs" (Venezuela 5 July 2019, para. 33).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of the doctorate program in education at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB) in Caracas, whose research interests include education, society and politics in Venezuela, stated that the Homeland Card has [translation] "unconstitutionally" replaced the national identity card (*cédula de identidad*) as the primary method of identification for Venezuelans, as it has become the required document to present for access to certain public services instead of the national identity card (Director 3 Jan. 2022). The same source notes that the government uses the number of Homeland Card registrations as a [translation] "false" proxy for the number of supporters it has within the country (Director 3 Jan. 2022).

1.1 Elections

According to sources, the Homeland Card is used to track who has or has not voted (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018; Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022). The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), a research and advocacy organization for human rights in the Americas (WOLA n.d.), the Homeland Card is "tied to" the "voting machinery" of the governing party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV) (WOLA 17 May 2018). Sources indicate that the Homeland system only records if, but not how, an individual voted; however, "some" (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018) or "many" (Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022) voters believe that the government can access that information (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018; Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022).

In an article published by Nueva Información Útil y Sencilla (NIUS), a Madrid-based digital news source (NIUS n.d.), during the 2018 presidential elections, the incumbent candidate and current president Nicolás Maduro stated that "anyone who has a homeland card has to vote" and mentioned the possibility of a bonus prize for those who do so with their Homeland Card (NIUS 14 Oct. 2020). In a case reported by Reuters, state workers claimed that "when scanning their [Homeland] cards during a presidential election" in May 2018, a superior at their government offices requested that they "message photos of themselves at polls back to managers" and a list held by the Justice ministry and reviewed by the same sources indicated the "state employees who didn't vote" (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018).

Efecto Cocuyo, a Venezuelan news source, reports that [translation] "street leaders" and community leaders tied to the ruling party confiscated the Homeland Cards of many Venezuelans during the 2020 elections to ensure they would show up to the polling stations and cast their ballots under supervision, following which they would be allowed to retrieve their card (Efecto Cocuyo 6 Dec. 2020). According to an organization in Venezuela, Youth Vote (Voto Joven), whose electoral observation report was cited by Efecto Cocuyo, 23.3 percent of observers reported seeing the Homeland Card used at polling stations rather than the national identity card (Efecto Cocuyo 6 Dec. 2020). NIUS reports that during the 2017 elections for the National Constituent Assembly (Asamblea Nacional Constituyente), Maduro announced that all cardholders were required to vote and register that they voted at stalls run by "Chavistas" or PSUV members (NIUS 14 Oct. 2020). A 2020 report on Venezuela by a coalition of human rights NGOs [2] states that across various electoral cycles, voters were required, after voting, to register at a governing party stand near the polling station using their Homeland Card (OMCT, et al. Mar. 2020, 49).

2. Homeland Card

According to the Director, the Homeland Card is not currently being issued in its [translation] "physical form" due to a "lack of supplies" (Director 3 Jan. 2022). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that registering in the Homeland system can be done online without a physical card (TalCual 6 Jan. 2020; Director 3 Jan. 2022). The Director added that this has increased Homeland Card enrolment among Venezuelans who are not supporters of the government's policies, since without a physical card they can avoid the [translation] "humiliation" of having to show their Homeland Card to government officials [on demand] (Director 3 Jan. 2022).

2.1 Content, Appearance, and Security Features

A sample of a Homeland Card could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources state that the Homeland Card is a [laminated (Director 3 Jan. 2022)] physical card (Director 3 Jan. 2022; Transparencia Venezuela [2019], 1). Sources also indicate that the card is electronic (Wilson Center Apr. 2018, 2; Transparencia Venezuela [2019], 1; WOLA 17 May 2018). Sources note that the card is linked to a database that includes a range of personal and socioeconomic data on its users (Wilson Center Apr. 2018, 2; EU Aug. 2020, 113; Reuters 14 Nov. 2018). According to images of the Homeland Card published by media sources, the front of the card includes the following elements:

- "CARNET DE LA PATRIA" written on the very top against a dark blue banner;
- "REPÚBLICA BOLIVARIANA DE VENEZUELA" written directly underneath against the white backdrop of the rest of the card;
- Personal information on the left side with the following fields:
 - *nombres* (given names)
 - *apellidos* (last names)
 - C.I. [*cédula de identidad*] (national identity card [number])
 - *f/ de nacimiento* (d[ate] of birth)
 - *f/ emisión* (d[ate of] issue)
- Portrait photograph of the cardholder on the right side
- Yellow, blue, and red striped banners [the Venezuelan national flag colours], at the top left and bottom right corners that span approximately a quarter and half of the width of the card, respectively (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018; LatinAmerican Post 27 Aug. 2018; ABC Internacional 23 Mar. 2020).

According to images of the Homeland Card published in media sources, the back of the card has the following features:

- Coloured background of dark blue and red/orange;
- The Venezuelan coat of arms in the top left corner;
- Two information fields towards the top left corner:
 - *serial* (serial number)
 - *código* (code)
- A QR code in the bottom left corner;
- Two human silhouettes in shades of yellow to the right of the QR code;

- On the top right a gradually fading (from top to bottom) repetition of the words "CARNET DE LA PATRIA" written in yellow font;
- On the bottom right, a multicoloured grid comprised of two rows of four square cells, each of which contains a coloured heart; above the grid is inscribed "VENEZUELA," while below it is printed the word "INDESTRUCTIBLE" (*El Nacional* 22 Mar. 2020; VTV 25 Dec. 2020).

Sources state that the Homeland Card QR code is connected to an online platform created in partnership with the Chinese authorities (Director 3 Jan. 2022) or that the QR codes were generated by a Chinese state-affiliated company to connect to the Homeland ID database (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018).

2.2 Requirements and Procedure to Obtain

Information on the requirements and procedure to obtain a Homeland Card was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Director, the national identity card is required to apply for the Homeland Card (Director 3 Jan. 2022).

In 2020, the Government of Venezuela tweeted the following directions for requesting a homeland card:

- Log in to the homeland platform
- Under "'perfil'" (profile), select "carnet de la patria"
- Click on "'solicitar carnet de la patria'" (request Homeland Card) (Venezuela 9 Feb. 2020).

According to the Director, applicants must answer questions on existing health conditions and electoral participation, as well as on whether they already receive any social benefits from the national government (Director 3 Jan. 2022). Similarly, *US Country Reports 2020* indicates that the applicants are required to present "proof of political affiliation" and answer questions about their social service benefits (US 30 Mar. 2021, 34).

3. Homeland System

According to sources, the Homeland system [fatherland database] (Sistema Patria) is a digital platform used by the government to administer social benefit programs (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021; Transparencia Venezuela [2019], 1, 2; UN 10 Sept. 2021, 3). Sources report that the Homeland system is linked to the Homeland Card and holds the database of Homeland Card subscribers (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021; Director 3 Jan. 2022). *El País*, a Madrid-based newspaper, indicates that the Homeland system has no "physical offices" (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021).

Sources indicate that there are approximately 21 million Homeland system users as of 2021 (UN 10 Sept. 2021, para. 11; Venezuela n.d.), [out of a total population of approximately 28 million (Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022; World Bank [2020])]. However, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Venezuela-based senior analyst with International Crisis Group whose research focuses on political issues the Andes region, especially in Venezuela, speaking on their own behalf, notes that data on numbers of cardholders comes from the government, as, to their knowledge, there is no publicly available database (Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022). *El País* reports that seniors and civil servants have been incentivized through bonuses to enrol (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021). Reuters similarly states that, according to "more than a dozen state workers," public sector employees are "facing particular pressure to enroll"

in the platform (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018). *El País* reports that since March 2021, workers at universities, schools, and "all public sector organizations" have had their salaries paid through the Homeland system, despite complaints of reduced pay in the first half of the month of its launch (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021).

According to Reuters, the Homeland database was hacked in May 2017 by "anti-Maduro activists" to "expose Maduro secrets"; screenshots of Homeland Card account data, sent to Reuters by the hackers, "included phone numbers, emails, home addresses, participation at Socialist Party events and even whether a person owns a pet" (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018). According to *El País*, complaints of identity theft as well as blocked accounts within the Homeland platform have prompted registered users "to go to the PSUV [ruling political party] party workers who 'scan the card and check the ID number'" to resolve platform issues (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021).

4. Homeland Social Services and Benefits

According to the Homeland platform official website, 14.2 million people directly receive a benefit through the system every month (Venezuela n.d.). However, the OHCHR reports that "reduced Internet coverage and power outages" present "challenges" for equal access to Homeland system digital tools, "particularly in rural areas and for low-income persons" (UN 10 Sept. 2021, para. 11).

4.1 Food Subsidies

Sources report that food kits are also accessible through the Homeland Card (Transparencia Venezuela 3 Apr. 2020, 3; Director 3 Jan. 2022). Transparencia Venezuela, Transparency International's Venezuelan chapter (Transparencia Venezuela n.d.), specifies that the government-funded kits are distributed by the Local Committees for Supply and Production (Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción, CLAP), made up of elected members from various community groups and organizations [translation] "aligned with the politics and ideology of the [PSUV] government," who are assigned to various streets or communities and assess the household food needs, communicate them to the ministry in charge (Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y los Movimientos Sociales), and deliver the kits to households (Transparencia Venezuela 3 Apr. 2020, 3–4). Sources report that delivery of the kits is made upon electronic payment of the subsidized cost for the kit (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018; Transparencia Venezuela 3 Apr. 2020, 5), exclusively via the Homeland Card since May 2017 (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018). According to the Venezuelan government, as of 2019, 6 million households or 24 million people received monthly food kits through CLAP deliveries (Venezuela 5 July 2019, para. 32).

4.2 Medical Subsidies

According to sources, the Homeland Card gives access to subsidized medicine through a program called 0800 Salud (0800 Health) (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018; NIUS 14 Oct. 2020). According to NIUS, 0800 Salud is a telephone service where cardholders can receive medical advice as well as medications that are otherwise [translation] "impossible" to obtain or priced "out of the reach of the majority" (NIUS 14 Oct. 2020). Sources also report that the Homeland Card is mandatory to access medication through the 0800 Salud service (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018) or that [translation] "[t]he first question asked by operators is whether the caller has a homeland card" (NIUS 14 Oct. 2020). Infobae, a Spanish-language news website from Argentina, reports interviews with multiple Venezuelans with chronic conditions who, even after presenting the Homeland Card and being promised access to subsidized medication, have not received the promised medication (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018).

4.3 Education Subsidies

LatinAmerican Post, a news website on Latin American issues, reports that students can access financial aid for education through the Homeland Card (LatinAmerican Post 27 Aug. 2018). According to a government announcement, in February 2020, Maduro announced the launch of the "Bono de Escolaridad 100%," a new financial assistance program for [translation] "student age" individuals, noting that the scholarship would be paid through the Homeland Card and each student would have to register to receive it (Venezuela 7 Feb. 2020). *US Country Reports 2020* indicates that since 2018 the Maduro government has been issuing "educational financial incentives" to reward those with a Homeland Card, a policy that, according to "NGOs and university students," is "discriminatory," "politicize[s]" access to scholarships, and "restrict[s] academic freedom" (US 30 Mar. 2021, 26). The Director stated that, as of May 2017, [translation] "at least" 50,000 student scholarships have been given out through the Homeland system (Director 3 Jan. 2022).

4.4 Other Subsidies and Bonuses

According to sources, the Homeland Card provides subsidies on gasoline (LatinAmerican Post 27 Aug. 2018; Director 3 Jan. 2022; *El País* 24 Apr. 2021). LatinAmerican Post indicates that citizens can also obtain hygiene supplies through the Homeland Card (LatinAmerican Post 27 Aug. 2018). The Director reported that holders of the Homeland Card also have access to subsidized metro and train fare and various government-issued bonuses and programs (Director 3 Jan. 2022). Infobae reported, for example, that a monthly bonus of 1.3 million bolivares (VEF) [C\$3.50], enough to buy [translation] "almost" 60 eggs or "more than" a kilogram of meat, was issued to "independent workers" registered as such in the Homeland system to encourage them to remain at home during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Infobae 18 Aug. 2020). According to *La República*, a Spanish-language daily newspaper based in Perú, the Peace, Love, and Prosperity Bonus (Bono Paz, Amor y Prosperidad), worth 12 VEF [3], was disbursed through the Homeland Card in December 2021 (*La República* 8 Dec. 2021). According to *El País*, a 2019 Christmas bonus was issued to public servants, and many other "randomly" issued monthly or weekly bonuses that end up "doubling or trebling" workers' salaries are also administered through the Homeland system (*El País* 20 Apr. 2021). *El País* also reports that Homeland Card holders can receive bonuses for sharing pro-government content on social media (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021).

4.5 COVID-19 Treatment

According to *US Country Reports 2020*, media sources reported that, in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Venezuelan government "used the [Homeland] card to prioritize testing and distribute medical and financial assistance" (US 30 Mar. 2021, 34). Sources stated that, as of April 2021, COVID-19 vaccines could only be obtained through the Homeland Card system (Bloomberg Línea 14 Apr. 2021; UN 10 Sept. 2021, para. 18), though the government did launch a separate vaccination platform through the Ministry of Health in May 2021 (UN 10 Sept. 2021, para. 18).

According to *El País*, the vaccine rollout for senior citizens through the Homeland system has been "random," with eligible recipients being informed via text message that they had been selected through a "lottery" for a vaccine dose (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021). The same source reports that, in the neighbourhood of Caracas investigated in the article, the vaccination initiative was overseen by the district's legislative assembly, which is "controlled" by the PSUV (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021). *El País* further reports that civil society, including "epidemiologists, doctors, academics, NGOs, human rights activists and opponents of Maduro," criticized the use of the Homeland database to distribute vaccines since it excludes some of the population (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021). The same source cites the Director of Convite, a non-profit that "distributes humanitarian aid" to seniors in Venezuela, as stating that the Homeland Card system leaves out any Venezuelans who do not have a cellphone or internet, or who choose not

to sign up for the Homeland Card (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021). On 29 May 2021, a letter published on the website of the Federation of Colleges of Bioanalysts of Venezuela (Federación de Colegios de Bioanalistas de Venezuela, FECOBIOVE), signed by 40 medical and academic organizations, and addressed to the OHCHR, called for an end to vaccine discrimination in Venezuela, and cited testimonies of the denial of COVID-19 vaccines by state healthcare personnel to individuals who were not registered in the Homeland system in a hospital in Valencia, in the state of Carabobo (FECOBIOVE 29 May 2021).

5. Situation and Treatment of Persons Not in Possession of a Homeland Card

The Senior Analyst stated that "[t]here is evidence" that Venezuelans viewed as "disloyal" are "deprived of services, including food, medicine, and housing" (Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022). According to the OHCHR, between 1 June 2020 to 30 June 2021, reports "continued" of food assistance being denied to individuals, "allegedly" for criticizing the government (UN 10 Sept. 2021, para. 11).

According to *El País*, citing Convite, "some 10% of Venezuelans are not on the [Homeland] platform as they lack cellphones or cell coverage, both requirements to access the system, or because they did not want to apply for a homeland card" (*El País* 24 Apr. 2021). According to one of the founders of the PSUV, a former minister under the Hugo Chávez government, cited in a Reuters article, the Homeland Card is a form of "'blackmail,'" and "'Venezuelans with the cards now have more rights than those without'" (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018). The Senior Analyst indicated that government-funded services are increasingly contingent on the Homeland Card, making it "hard to live without"; refusing to obtain a Homeland Card is a freedom "generally" limited to those "not in the greatest need" (Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022). Similarly, the Director stated that Venezuelans have been [translation] "practically forced" to register in the Homeland system to access "much-needed benefits," pointing to the results of the 2021 National Survey of Living Conditions (Encuesta Nacional sobre Condiciones de Vida, ENCOVI) [4], [which found that 96 percent of the population lives in [translation] "poverty" and 77 percent in "extreme poverty" (Proyecto ENCOVI Sept. 2021, 48)] (Director 3 Jan. 2022).

Reuters reports that in August 2018, pensioners gathered to protest outside of social security offices, decrying the requirement to register for the Homeland Card in order to access their pensions (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018). *El País* states that seniors not in the Homeland system receive 1.8 million VEF [C\$5] in pension income compared to 3 million VEF for those in the system (*El País* 20 Apr. 2021). In 2018, Reuters reported the case of an elderly Venezuelan with diabetes who was denied an insulin prescription by a state doctor because he was not "enrolled" (Reuters 14 Nov. 2018). According to Infobae, a lieutenant in Venezuela's Bolivarian National Guard (Guardia Nacional Bolivariana) was sentenced to "almost" five years in prison for [translation] "breaking the Homeland Card in public," "instigating rebellion and lack of military decorum" (Infobae 8 Apr. 2019).

5.1 Ability to Confirm Who Does Not Possess a Homeland Card

The Senior Analyst indicated that they were not aware of any "publicly available database" that could be used to verify whether an individual has been issued a Homeland Card (Senior Analyst 2 Jan. 2022). The Director stated the following:

[translation]

To check if a Venezuelan has a Homeland Card or not, just enter their national identity card [number] into the [Homeland] platform. If it is not accepted, it is because they are not registered in the system. (Director 3 Jan. 2022)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The UN report is based on fact-finding mission to various countries, including a mission to Venezuela in June 2019 that included interviews with government officials, including from the opposition, and "representatives of the Catholic Church, the business sector, universities, students, trade unions, and human rights organizations, approximately 200 victims, the diplomatic community and the United Nations Country Team" (UN 5 July 2019, para. 3, 4).

[2] The report was co-authored by the Centre for Defenders and Justice (Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia, CDJ), the Committee for Family Members of Victims of the Events of February–March 1989 (Comité de Familiares de las Víctimas de los Sucesos de febrero – marzo de 1989, COFAVIC), the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale pour les droits humains, FIDH), the World Organization Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT), and the Caracas Vicariate of Human Rights (Vicaria de Derechos humanos de Caracas) (OMCT, et al. Mar. 2020).

[3] According to Al Jazeera, Venezuela launched a new currency that cut six zeros from the Venezuelan bolivar (VEF) in October 2021 (Al Jazeera 1 Oct. 2021). The same source quotes Venezuela's central bank as indicating that the VEF "will not be worth more or less; it is only to facilitate its use on a simpler monetary scale" (Al Jazeera 1 Oct. 2021).

[4] For the 2021 National Survey of Living Conditions (Encuesta Nacional sobre Condiciones de Vida, ENCOVI), conducted by the Proyecto ENCOVI housed at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB), 17,402 households were surveyed in 22 states between February and April 2021 (Proyecto ENCOVI [2021]).

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Internet sites, including: Acceso a la Justicia; Agencia Carabobeña de Noticias; Amnesty International; Associated Press; The Carter Center; CNN; CubaNet; ecoi.net; EU – Public Register of Authentic Identity and Travel Documents Online; Factiva; France 24; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; Keesing Technologies – Keesing Documentchecker; Organization of American States – Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; UN – Refworld; Venezuela – Consejo Nacional Electoral, Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Interiores, Justicia y Paz.

Associated documents

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Venezuela

Query response on Venezuela: Requirements and procedures for obtaining the Homeland Card (Carnet de la Patria) (2020 - January 2022)

[Venezuela : information sur les exigences et la marche à suivre pour obtenir la carte de la patrie \(Carnet de la Patria\); le contenu, l'apparence et les caractéristiques de sécurité; les services sociaux offerts aux titulaires; l'existence de documents servant à prouver qu'une personne ne détient pas de carte; spécimen \(2020-janvier 2022\) \[VEN200881.EF\]](#) (Response, French)

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