



Document #2139619

# IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (Author)

Venezuela, Costa Rica, & Ecuador: The Tren de Aragua criminal group, including their activities and areas of operation, targets, ability and motivation to track individuals; state response, including relationship with authorities (2024 – February 2026)  
[ZZZ202535.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

## 1. Overview

Sources indicate that Tren de Aragua is "Venezuela's largest gang" (Kneip 2024-08-20) or "the only Venezuelan gang that has successfully projected its power abroad" (InSight Crime 2025-04-25). According to a partially redacted report by the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) [1] published in April 2025, Tren de Aragua is a "transnational gang based in Venezuela" with a presence in "at least seven South America[n] and Caribbean countries" (US 2025-04-07, 1).

IBI Consultants, a "private national security consulting firm" with offices across the Americas that researches transnational organized crime in Latin America (IBI Consultants n.d.), indicates that between 2018 and 2023 Tren de Aragua became a "transnational network" following Venezuelan migration into Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile and, "to a lesser degree," Bolivia and Brazil (IBI Consultants [2025-03], 9). The NIC states that Tren de Aragua has spread to "Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States, in particular," noting that authorities in Nicaragua and Panama have "also reported encountering" Tren de

Aragua "affiliates" (US 2025-04-07, 1). Citing a report by the Strategic Intelligence Center (Centro de Inteligencia Estratégica – CIES) [2], *El Universo*, an Ecuadorian news publication, reports that Tren de Aragua is [translation] "believed to have a presence" in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Brazil and Costa Rica (2025-02-05).

The NIC reports that the organization operates in "loosely-organized cells of localized, individual criminal networks," and notes, citing "reporting" from the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), that Tren de Aragua leaders "probably" have "varying degrees" of communication with "some" cells in other countries "although other cells probably operate and coordinate amongst themselves independently" (US 2025-04-07, 1). In an interview with Inter-American Dialogue (The Dialogue) [3], the Deputy Director of Content at InSight Crime [4] indicated that Tren de Aragua "operates more like a loose network of criminal franchises than a centralized organization" (The Dialogue 2025-09-25, 3). IBI Consultants states that while Tren de Aragua has a "clear chain of command," its "local franchises" implement leaders' orders "as they see fit within the guidelines in the controlled territory" (IBI Consultants [2025-03], 9). InSight Crime indicates that since Venezuelan authorities' "takeover" of Tren de Aragua's "headquarters" in the Tocarón prison in Aragua state [in September 2023 (InSight Crime 2025-04-25)], the organization "has no ideology or central ethos and little organizational unity" (InSight Crime 2025-08-17a). The same source adds that following this "takeover," there is "less evidence of coordination or even cooperation" between the organization's "different affiliates" (InSight Crime 2025-08-17a).

The NIC reports that "some self-described" Tren de Aragua "criminal entities or individuals" use the organization's name for "reputational benefits" despite lacking "direct ties" with Tren de Aragua's leadership (US 2025-04-07, 1). InSight Crime notes that Tren de Aragua's name is used by a "wide range of copycat gangs" who have "nothing to do with the group" in order to "project fear" (InSight Crime 2025-08-17a).

In early 2025, Tren de Aragua was designated as a "terrorist" entity by the governments of Canada (Canada 2025-02-20) and the US (US 2025-01-20).

## 2. Areas of Influence and Operation

### 2.1. Venezuela

According to InSight Crime, following Venezuelan authorities' raid of Tocarón prison, "remnants" of Tren de Aragua "remain" in Aragua state, "albeit weakened" (InSight Crime 2025-04-25). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of political science at the US Naval Academy, whose research focuses on governance in Latin America including in Venezuela, indicated that following the raid on Tocarón prison, Tren de Aragua maintains "residual influence" in the states of

Aragua and Carabobo, as well as the "urban peripheries" of Caracas (Associate Professor 2025-12-25). According to the same source, Tren de Aragua has become "more decentralized," "hidden domestically" and operates under a "hybrid network" that includes urban cells and a "territorial enclave" in the state of Bolívar (Associate Professor 2025-12-25). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a PhD candidate in political science at Universidad de Los Andes in Colombia, who has published articles on Tren de Aragua and who is also a faculty member at Universidad de La Salle in Colombia, indicated that the organization's "dominance" is "concentrated in strategic nodes" where the group has "training and logistics centers" in select municipalities in Aragua, Miranda and Carabobo states, such as Santos Michelena and Santiago Mariño in Aragua (PhD Candidate 2025-12-23). The same source stated that Tren de Aragua has "hegemonic control" over the trails used for irregular migration in the states of Táchira and Zulia and has "consolidated its presence" in the states of Sucre and Delta Amacuro (PhD Candidate 2025-12-23).

Sources indicated that Tren de Aragua has a "consolidated" presence (PhD Candidate 2025-12-23) or holds a "consolidated territorial enclave" (Associate Professor 2025-12-25) in Bolívar state (Associate Professor 2025-12-25; PhD Candidate 2025-12-23). A 2025 InSight Crime article reports that Tren de Aragua "currently maintains operations" in Bolívar state through the Las Claritas Syndicate (Sindicato de las Claritas), a "powerful illegal gold mining gang" in the town of Las Claritas (InSight Crime 2025-04-25). Located at kilometer 88 of the highway, Las Claritas is a mining town that is part of the Sifontes Municipality in Bolívar State (Asociación de Mujeres por el Bienestar y Asistencia Recíproca n.d.). Citing [translation] "cyber monitoring investigations," a March 2024 Venezuela Supreme Court (Tribunal Supremo de Justicia) judgement indicated that a "large part" of Tren de Aragua is "currently" based within Venezuela and is led from the mines along sector 88 of the highway in Bolívar state (Venezuela 2024-03-21). International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) states that Tren de Aragua controls "several" mining zones in Las Claritas located near the Brazilian border (Crisis Group 2025-07-29). InSight Crime, citing "multiple sources interviewed" in Bolívar state, notes that Tren de Aragua members, including its leader, were spotted in Las Claritas following authorities' intervention at Tocarón prison (2025-08-17b). InSight Crime also reports that the town of Las Claritas is a "gang stronghold" (2025-08-17a). The PhD Candidate noted that the group is involved in illegal gold mining projects in the Orinoco Mining Arc [5] (2025-12-23).

## 2.2. Costa Rica

The Institute for Peace and Development (Instituto para la Paz y el Desarrollo, IPADES), a Costa Rican academic and training centre (IPADES n.d.), states, citing a criminologist, that "transnational criminal networks such as Tren de Aragua ... operate from prisons and have established

cells" in Costa Rica (IPADES 2025-08-05). The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), an "independent civil society organization, headquartered in Geneva" (GI-TOC n.d.), reports in its 2025 crime index for Costa Rica that Tren de Aragua has been "identified" in Costa Rica "among migrants" (2025-11-10a, 5). Citing a Venezuelan journalist specializing in organized crime, the BBC indicates that Tren de Aragua is "believed to be" in Costa Rica (BBC 2023-09-21). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Judicial Investigation Agency (Organismo de Investigación Judicial, OIJ), Costa Rica's judicial police (Costa Rica n.d.), indicated that since 2024, "the greatest influx" of individuals "associated with" Tren de Aragua "occurred" in the Greater Metropolitan Area [6], adding that the OIJ registered a "stronger presence" of such individuals in San José (Costa Rica 2025-12-23).

According to the Costa Rica Public Prosecutor's Office [also translated as Public Ministry, Attorney General's Office or Office of the Prosecutor General] (Ministerio Público), in July 2025 the Deputy Prosecutor's Office Against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (Fiscalía Adjunta contra la Trata de Personas y Tráfico Ilícito de Migrantes) conducted [translation] "raids" to "dismantle" an "alleged criminal network ... linked to Tren de Aragua" comprised by "at least 12 Venezuelan nationals" who "operated primarily" in Costa Rica's Greater Metropolitan Area (Costa Rica 2025-07-15). The same source adds that, as part of their operation, authorities conducted [translation] "raids" in Barrio México and the Merced district in San José, Jacó in the canton of Garabito, and the canton of Alajuela (Costa Rica 2025-07-15).

### 2.3. Ecuador

According to *El Comercio*, a daily news publication in Ecuador, [translation] "in recent years," Tren de Aragua "has managed to expand internationally, including in Ecuador" (2025-01-30). In an interview with the Research Directorate, a professor at an Ecuadorian university with expertise on transnational organized crime indicated that in Ecuador, the organization "does not pose a massive problem" because of the size of the Venezuelan migrant population relative to other countries in the region, and because of the "consolidation" of "criminal governance" [7] nationally by "local" criminal organizations (Professor 2025-12-31). According to Transparencia Venezuela, the national chapter of Transparency International [8], Tren de Aragua's presence is "not particularly impactful" in Ecuador owing to the established presence of other criminal groups (2025-04, 14). The same source notes that the organization "restricted its operations" in the country to "Venezuelan migrant sectors" (2025-04, 14). In contrast, citing the Director of a research program on conflict and violence at the Universidad Central del Ecuador, *El Universo* states that Tren de Aragua [translation] "does not have a presence in the country" due to "the hegemony of other criminal organizations" (2025-02-05).

Transparencia Venezuela notes that there have been "doubts" about the "true links" of "some of the criminal gangs" in Ecuador that "claim to belong to Tren de Aragua" (2025-04, 32). The same source adds that it is "unclear" whether "some" of these "criminal gangs" in Ecuador are a "franchise" of Tren de Aragua or whether they use the organization's name to "negotiate with local groups and to instill fear and terror among Venezuelan migrants" (Transparencia Venezuela 2025-04, 32). An October 2025 article by the Director and Senior Fellow of the Center for Global Development (CGD), a US-based research and advocacy think tank that aims to "reduce global poverty and inequality" (WEF n.d.), notes the presence of Tren de Aragua cells operating in Ecuador, based on "recent reports" (Bahar 2025-10-28). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Ecuadorian Organized Crime Observatory (Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado, OECO) [9] indicated that "no structured cell operating in the country has been identified yet" (OECO 2026-01-28a).

According to the Professor, Tren de Aragua is "mostly based" in Ecuador's border regions next to Peru and Colombia, noting that it "can be seen" in Huaquillas [near the Ecuador-Peru border] and the Rumichaca border crossing [near the Ecuador-Colombia border] (2025-12-31). The same source stated that Tren de Aragua asserts "control" over the Rumichaca and Huaquillas border crossings (Professor 2025-12-31). *El Universo* reports that Tren de Aragua groups were [translation] "allegedly identified" in the city of Tulcán along the border with Colombia, as well as in Ambato and Baños in Tungurahua province in the center of the country (2025-02-05). Primicias, an Ecuadorian digital news outlet, indicates that there is "evidence" of Tren de Aragua's presence in "at least" 2 provinces, namely Carchi and Tungurahua (2023-11-02).

### 3. Activities

Sources report that Tren de Aragua's criminal activities in Venezuela and abroad include the following:

- Armed robbery (IBI Consultants [2025-03], 10) or theft (InSight Crime 2025-04-25);
- Contract killings (IBI Consultants [2025-03], 10; InSight Crime 2024-03-11);
- Cybercrime (GI-TOC 2025-11-10b, 4; InSight Crime 2025-04-25);
- Drug trafficking (Spain 2025-11-07; The Guardian 2024-11-01; GI-TOC 2025-11-10b, 4);

- Extortion (GI-TOC 2025-11-10b, 4; InSight Crime 2025-09-10; Zubillaga & Hanson 2025-03-03);
- Human trafficking (InSight Crime 2025-09-10; Zubillaga & Hanson 2025-03-03; US 2024-08-19, 2);
- Kidnapping (InSight Crime 2025-04-25; The Guardian 2024-11-01);
- Loan sharking outside Venezuela (IBI Consultants [2025-03], 10; InSight Crime 2025-04-25);
- Human smuggling (InSight Crime 2025-09-10; The Guardian 2024-11-01);
- Drug dealing (InSight Crime 2025-09-10; Zubillaga & Hanson 2025-03-03; IBI Consultants [2025-03], 10);
- Mining (Crisis Group 2025-07-29) or illegal mining (InSight Crime 2025-08-17b);

InSight Crime notes that Tren de Aragua cells outside Venezuela engage in drug dealing, kidnapping, human trafficking, robberies and "small-scale international" drug trafficking, adding that each cell's criminal portfolio depends on "local conditions" (2025-04-25).

### 3.1. Venezuela

According to the Associate Professor, Tren de Aragua's "core" activities within Venezuela include extortion, kidnappings, contract killings, and "armed enforcement" (2025-12-25).

Sources report that Tren de Aragua engages in [illegal (InSight Crime 2025-04-25)] gold mining in Las Claritas (Crisis Group 2025-07-29; InSight Crime 2025-04-25). According to the Associate Professor, in the town of Las Claritas, Tren de Aragua functions as a mining syndicate by "taxing production, regulating access to mining zones, and controlling ancillary services" (2025-12-25). According to the *Miami Herald*, a US newspaper serving the South Florida region, the Las Claritas Syndicate, an organization "reportedly linked" to Tren de Aragua, is one of the "most prominent" criminal groups that is "establishing illegal checkpoints" along the Cuyuní River, an area claimed by both Guyana and Venezuela (2025-06-11). The same source indicates that the Las Claritas Syndicate is extorting money from miners and rules areas with "minimal government presence" (*Miami Herald* 2025-06-11).

The PhD Candidate stated that Tren de Aragua exerts "hegemonic control" over the paths used for irregular migration (2025-12-23). The US Department of State, citing "NGOs that monitor human trafficking in border regions," reports that Tren de Aragua, among other criminal

groups in the area, "manage[s] illegal border crossings with Colombia and allow[s] or participate[s] directly in human trafficking" (US 2024-08-19, 2). According to the PhD Candidate, in the states of Sucre and Delta Amacuro, Tren de Aragua "manages maritime routes" for human trafficking and drug and weapons trafficking toward the Caribbean (2025-12-23).

### 3.2. Costa Rica

Sources report that Tren de Aragua's criminal activities in Costa Rica include the following:

- Human trafficking (Costa Rica 2025-12-23) or sexual exploitation (Teletica 2025-07-15);
- Migrant smuggling (Costa Rica 2025-12-23; GI-TOC 2025-11-10a, 5);
- Money laundering (Costa Rica 2025-12-23);
- Homicide and attempted homicide (Costa Rica 2025-12-23; Teletica 2025-07-15);
- Fraud (Costa Rica 2025-12-23);
- Deprivation of liberty (Costa Rica 2025-12-23);
- Violations of a drug-related legislation (Costa Rica 2025-12-23);
- Extortion (Costa Rica 2025-12-23; GI-TOC 2025-11-10a, 5);
- Illegal carrying of a permitted weapon (Costa Rica 2025-12-23);
- Identity theft or impersonation (Costa Rica 2025-12-23);

### 3.3. Ecuador

Sources report that Tren de Aragua's criminal activities in Ecuador include the following:

- Drug trafficking (Professor 2025-12-31; Mongabay 2025-10-22);
- Extortion (Primicias 2025-09-30; El Universo 2025-02-05; Ecuador 2024-05-01);
- Contract killings (Bahar 2025-10-28; Mongabay 2025-10-22; Primicias 2023-09-27);

- Kidnappings (OECD 2026-01-28a; Bahar 2025-10-28; Primicias 2023-09-27);
- Migrant smuggling (OECD 2026-01-28a; Professor 2025-12-31; GI-TOC 2025-11-10c, 3);
- Human trafficking (OECD 2026-01-28a);
- Sexual exploitation of Venezuelan migrants (Professor 2025-12-31);
- Weapons trafficking (Mongabay 2025-10-22; OECD 2026-01-28a).

## 4. Targets

Information on individuals targeted by Tren de Aragua, particularly those in Costa Rica and Ecuador, was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 4.1 Venezuela

The Associate Professor indicated that the "primary victims" of Tren de Aragua are "economically vulnerable populations" such as transport workers, small business owners and informal vendors (2025-12-25). The same source noted that Tren de Aragua targets these groups "because they generate predictable income yet lack effective access to state protection or legal recourse" (Associate Professor 2025-12-25). The PhD Candidate stated that Tren de Aragua extorts merchants and civilians under the threat of violence (2025-12-23). GI-TOC similarly reports in its 2025 crime index for Venezuela that Tren de Aragua, among other criminal groups operating in Venezuela, exercises "territorial control through violent extortion schemes targeting businesses, industries and individuals" (GI-TOC 2025-11-10b, 3).

According to the Associate Professor, "across regions," women and migrants are "disproportionately exposed to sexual exploitation, trafficking, and intimidation" in connection to Tren de Aragua's "criminal economies" (2025-12-25). The PhD Candidate indicated that migrants are the "most frequent" targets of human smuggling and trafficking by Tren de Aragua, "particularly in the border areas of Táchira and Zulia" (2025-12-23). According to the same source, Tren de Aragua leverages its control over irregular migration trails to "extort entire families," noting that "in many cases" the organization "force[s] them to transport illicit drugs or weapons" (PhD Candidate 2025-12-23).

The Associate Professor noted that in Bolívar, "wildcat miners [10], mining suppliers, sex workers and local residents" are taxed and socially

controlled by Tren de Aragua (2025-12-25). Citing "documented cases," the PhD Candidate stated that Tren de Aragua has killed "former" police officers and military personnel who opposed its mining-related activities in the states of Bolívar or Aragua (2025-12-23).

## 4.2 Costa Rica

The OIJ indicated that since 2024, members of Tren de Aragua had "primarily" recruited Venezuelan nationals who were "highly vulnerable due to a lack of economic resources," including individuals who headed their households and single mothers (Costa Rica 2025-12-23). According to Teletica, a Costa Rican television broadcaster, in July 2025, authorities raided [translation] "at least" 3 hotels in San José operated by a Tren de Aragua cell that held dozens of women captive for the purpose of sexual exploitation (2025-07-15).

## 4.3 Ecuador

Transparencia Venezuela notes that in Ecuador, Tren de Aragua has "restricted its operations" to "Venezuelan migrant sectors" (2025-04, 14). The Professor indicated that Tren de Aragua's "primary targets" are Venezuelan women and children (2025-12-31). The OECO indicated that the individuals who face a "higher risk" of being targeted by Tren de Aragua include "undocumented migrants, lone travelers, unaccompanied women and children, and migrants with [a] lack of resources," as well as Venezuelan nationals (2026-01-28a). According to the same source, in urban areas, Tren de Aragua "systematically extort[s]" Venezuelan businesses such as barbershops, beauty salons, laundromats and nightclubs (OECO 2026-01-28a).

# 5. Ability and Motivation to Track Targets

Information on Tren de Aragua's ability and motivation to track its targets, particularly in Costa Rica and Ecuador, was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## 5.1. Venezuela

According to the Associate Professor, Tren de Aragua "retains a fairly high capacity to track targets across Venezuela," owing to its reliance on "network-driven" "informal intelligence systems, including neighborhood lookouts, transport workers, prison-based communications, digital messaging platforms, and corrupt or complicit officials" (2025-12-25). The group "pursues targets to enforce unpaid extortion, punish perceived betrayal or cooperation with authorities, secure control over revenue-

generating activities, or prevent challenges to its authority" (Associate Professor 2025-12-25). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Associate Professor indicated that publicly "punish[ing]" individuals who do not comply bolsters Tren de Aragua's "reputation" in terms of its "reach" and "inevitability" (2025-12-25). According to the PhD Candidate, the use of lethal violence in Bolívar state by Tren de Aragua aims to "se[t] precedents within the community to deter any challenge to its power" (2025-12-23).

## 5.2. Costa Rica

Citing the work of their units specializing in organized crime, human trafficking and related offenses, the OIJ provided the information in the following paragraph:

Tren de Aragua showed "a strong capacity" to track and "control its targets" through its "subdivided cells." A "designated" leader "managed" and "coordinated" a group of women for "sexual encounters," "allowing for total control and dominance over the victims." The group had personal information about the victims' families and used "threats of harm [against the family members] as a means of coercion" against those that "attempted to escape or refused to work" (Costa Rica 2025-12-23).

## 5.3. Ecuador

The Professor indicated that Tren de Aragua and its members in Ecuador track their targets through the Venezuelan diaspora and through their control over border crossings in Rumichaca and Huaquillas (2025-12-31).

# 6. State Response

## 6.1. Venezuela

InSight Crime reports that Tren de Aragua has had a "complex" relationship with government actors, and notes that, based on "multiple sources" it interviewed, the gang had "corrupted local and regional officials" (2025-04-25). The same source notes that during the Venezuelan authorities' 2023 raid on its base at Tocarón prison, the organization "appear[ed] to have received advanced warning [of the raid], and no high-ranking gang members were captured" at that time (InSight Crime 2025-04-25). The PhD Candidate indicated that the state's response was "ambivalent and questionable," noting that the raid on the organization's base occurred "under conditions that allowed the prior escape of its main leaders" (2025-12-23). The April 2025 NIC report, citing "reporting" from

DHS, states that Tren de Aragua's main leaders escaped the Tocarón prison, "possibly assisted by low-level Venezuelan military and political leaders" (US 2025-04-07, 2). InSight Crime, citing unnamed "[s]ources interviewed in Aragua," reports that the organization's leaders "negotiated with the government and agreed on an escape plan days before the prison takeover" (2024-07-12). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Citing redacted and media sources, the NIC indicates that "Venezuelan intelligence, military, and police services" perceive Tren de Aragua as "a security threat ... and operate against it in ways that make it highly unlikely the two sides would cooperate in a strategic or consistent way" (US 2025-04-07, 2). According to the Associate Professor, since the 2023 prison raid, "no other major documented nationwide crackdown inside Venezuela explicitly focused" on Tren de Aragua has taken place (2025-12-25). The same source indicated that authorities "have occasionally affirmed" having "eliminated" or "heavily degraded" Tren de Aragua while also "frequently" denying its "ongoing relevance," noting that this suggests "tacit tolerance or negotiated coexistence, particularly where illegal mining revenues and political interests converge" (Associate Professor 2025-12-25). According to InSight Crime, the organization's presence in Las Claritas indicates that "Tren de Aragua elements still have some state backing" and "enjoy impunity" while "working with elements of the Maduro regime" [11] (2025-08-17a). InSight Crime reports that in exchange for "operating power" in Bolívar state, the Las Claritas Syndicate "must work to ensure Maduro's continued hold on the presidency" (2025-08-17b). Citing "locals interviewed," the same source notes that on election days the organization "coerced" residents into voting for candidates from the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV) (InSight Crime 2025-08-17b).

The PhD Candidate noted that security forces carry out "low-intensity operations against minor cells" (2025-12-23). The NIC reports that in late January 2025, "at least" 2 Venezuelan National Guard units carried out arrests of Tren de Aragua members in "separate operations" (US 2025-04-07, 2). The same source, citing media reports, indicates that since "at least" 2016, law enforcement "have periodically engaged in armed confrontations" with Tren de Aragua (US 2025-04-07, 2).

## 6.2. Costa Rica

According to sources, in December 2025 Costa Rican law enforcement arrested a Venezuelan national for being a [translation] "suspected" Tren de Aragua member (CRHoy 2025-12-11; Mundo Escazu 2025-12-11). Teletica reports that in July 2025, the OIJ raided [translation] "at least" 3 hotels in San José operated by a Tren de Aragua cell (2025-07-15). The Public Prosecutor's Office notes that in July 2025, authorities carried out 7

raids to [translation] "dismantle" an "alleged criminal network" tied to Tren de Aragua that sexually exploited Venezuelan women (Costa Rica 2025-07-15). According to sources, Costa Rican authorities arrested and detained a Tren de Aragua member in October 2024 for being wanted in Chile for [translation] "contract killing" crimes (CRHoy 2025-05-14; AP 2024-10-30). CRHoy, a Costa Rican digital news platform, reports that in May 2025, OIJ officials delivered the individual to Chilean law enforcement agents for extradition (CRHoy 2025-05-14).

### 6.3. Ecuador

According to sources, in January 2025 Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa designated Tren de Aragua as a [translation] "terrorist group" (*El Comercio* 2025-01-30; Primicias 2025-01-30). The OECO indicated that the designation "was consistent" with an executive order issued by the US government [on January 20, 2025 (US 2025-01-20)] that "recognized" Tren de Aragua as a "foreign terrorist organization" (OECO 2026-01-28a). In follow-up correspondence with the Research Directorate, the OECO noted that the national authorities' designation of Tren de Aragua "is more of a functional tool for international interoperability in law enforcement than a reflection of a comprehensive domestic security strategy" (2026-01-28b). The Professor stated that despite the designation, authorities have conducted "very little enforcement action" against Tren de Aragua and have prioritized action against other local gangs that pose a "greater threat" (2025-12-31).

Media sources report that in September 2025, 2 Venezuelan individuals who are [translation] "suspected" Tren de Aragua members were arrested while they were participating in national protests (*El Comercio* 2025-09-23; Infobae 2025-09-23) against fuel prices (Infobae 2025-09-23). According to sources, the President accused Tren de Aragua of financing the September 2025 protests led by indigenous organizations (CanalN 2025-09-24; AFP 2023-09-23). Lupa Media, an Ecuadorian digital news source, reports however that [translation] "no public evidence has been shown to confirm" the authorities' allegations of a relationship between the demonstration and Tren de Aragua (Lupa Media 2025-09-23).

Primicias reports that in September 2025, national police [translation] "dismantled" an extortion "network" targeting business owners in the canton of El Guabo in the province of El Oro, arresting 3 people, including a Tren de Aragua member (2025-09-30). According to sources, in June 2025 the army arrested [translated] an "alleged member" of Tren de Aragua in the canton of Playas, seizing firearms (Radio Pichincha 2025-06-18; *Expreso* 2025-06-18). Sources indicate that in May 2025, authorities arrested 6 individuals in the province of Orellana, including [translation] an "alleged member" of Tren de Aragua, noting that the army seized firearms (*La Hora* 2025-05-16; *El Comercio* 2025-05-15). The Attorney General's Office (Fiscalía General del Estado) reports in May 2024 that

authorities detained members of Tren de Aragua for [translation] "allegedly ... extorting" Ecuadorian citizens in exchange for "'providing security'" (Ecuador 2024-05-01).

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 NIC is a US government "center for long-term strategic analysis" that reports to the Director of National Intelligence and connects the US intelligence community and policy makers (US 2021-04-09). [\[back\]](#)

[2] CIES is an Ecuadorian government body that produces [translation] "strategic intelligence" to "generate alerts and provide timely advice" for government decision-making (Ecuador n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[3] The Dialogue is a think tank based in Washington DC that aims to advance "democratic resilience" and "sustainable development" in the Americas (The Dialogue n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[4] InSight Crime is a think tank and media organization focused on organized crime in the Americas (InSight Crime n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[5] The Orinoco Mining Arc is a minerals-rich area in southern Venezuela that runs across the states of Amazonas, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro and was designated for mining by President Maduro (Rendon, Sandin & Fernandez 2020-04-16, 2). [\[back\]](#)

[6] Costa Rica's Greater Metropolitan Area consists of the cities of San José, Heredia, Cartago and Alajuela (Costa Rica 2025-08-22). [\[back\]](#)

[7] A GI-TOC report defines criminal governance "as instances in which armed criminal groups set and enforce rules, provide security and other basic services – such as water, electricity or internet access – in an urban area, which may be a part or the whole of an informal settlement or a neighbourhood" (GI-TOC 2021-12, i). [\[back\]](#)

[8] Transparency International is an international non-profit NGO aiming to "stop corruption and promote transparency" through advocacy, campaigning, and research (Transparency International n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[9] The OECO is an initiative funded by the US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and implemented by the Pan

American Development Foundation that examines the dynamics of transnational organized crime in Ecuador (OECD n.d).<sup>[back]</sup>

[10] Wildcat miners are small-scale "informal" miners (CFR 2024-11-15).<sup>[back]</sup>

[11] Sources report that the US military captured President Nicolás Maduro in early January 2026 and that his Vice President, Delcy Rodríguez, has since become Interim President. (*The Guardian* 2026-01-22; Reuters 2026-01-05).<sup>[back]</sup>

## References

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 2023-09-23. "[Presidente de Ecuador afirma que banda Tren de Aragua financia protesta indígena.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-25]

Asociación de Mujeres por el Bienestar y Asistencia Recíproca (AMBAR). N.d. *[Diagnóstico de los derechos humanos de las mujeres mineras del municipio Sifontes, Las Claritas Estado Bolívar.](#)* [Accessed 2025-12-18]

Associated Press (AP). 2024-10-30. "[Chile confirma detención en Costa Rica de sicario del Tren de Aragua que actuaba en ciudad turística.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-24]

Associate Professor, US Naval Academy, Maryland. 2025-12-25. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Bahar, Dany. 2025-10-28. "[Data Against Fear: What the Numbers Say About Venezuelan Migrants and Crime in Ecuador.](#)" Center for Global Development (CGD). CGD Note 393. [Accessed 2026-01-22]

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 2023-09-21. Norberto Paredes. "[Cómo opera el temido Tren de Aragua, la sangrienta megabanda de Venezuela que se ha expandido por América Latina.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-19]

Canada. 2025-02-20. Public Safety Canada. "[Government of Canada Lists Seven Transnational Criminal Organizations as Terrorist Entities.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-29]

CanalN. 2025-09-24. Alvaro Vega Lavado. "[Protestas en Ecuador: Noboa acusa al Tren de Aragua de financiar.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-25]

Chile. 2025-07-03. Ministerio Público de Chile. "[SACFI logra prisión preventiva para 16 imputados extranjeros por lavado de activos.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

Costa Rica. 2025-12-23. Organismo de Investigación Judicial (OIJ). Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Costa Rica. 2025-08-22. Museo Nacional de Costa Rica. "[Descripción Gran Área Metropolitana](#)." [Accessed 2025-12-19]

Costa Rica. 2025-07-15. Ministerio Público. "[Fiscalía desarticular presunta red de trata de personas vinculada al Tren de Aragua](#)." [Accessed 2025-12-19]

Costa Rica. N.d. Organismo de Investigación Judicial (OIJ). "[Declaración Estratégica](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-22]

Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). 2024-11-15. Will Freeman. "[Illegal Gold Finances Latin America's Dictators & Cartels. The United States Must Lead the Fight Against It](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-28]

CRHoy. 2025-12-11. Daniel Córdoba. "[Detienen a extranjero vinculado al Tren de Aragua cuando solicitaba permanencia legal en Costa Rica](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-24]

CRHoy. 2025-05-14. Johan Rojas. "[Ejecutan extradición a Chile de sicario del Tren de Aragua capturado en Costa Rica](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-24]

Ecuador. 2024-05-01. Fiscalía General del Estado. "[Fiscalía procesa a 3 aprehendidos por el delito de extorsión](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-22]

Ecuador. N.d. Centro Nacional de Inteligencia. "[Centro Nacional de Inteligencia](#)." [Accessed 2025-12-17]

*El Comercio*. 2025-09-23. Ana Guerrero. "[Detenidos en el paro, supuestamente relacionados con Tren de Aragua, entraron ilegalmente a Ecuador](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-25]

*El Comercio*. 2025-05-15. "[Ejército capturó a un presunto integrante del Tren de Aragua en Orellana](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-25]

*El Comercio*. 2025-01-30. "[Daniel Noboa declara al Tren de Aragua como grupo terrorista](#)." [Accessed 2025-12-19]

*El Universo*. 2025-02-05. "[¿El Tren de Aragua estaría creando alianzas con grupos criminales de Ecuador?](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-19]

*Expreso*. 2025-06-18. Richard Josue Jimenez Mora. "[¿El Tren de Aragua está en Ecuador? Ejército captura a presunto miembro](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-25]

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). 2025-11-10a. "[Costa Rica](#)." *Global Organized Crime Index*. [Accessed 2025-12-21]

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). 2025-11-10b. "[Venezuela.](#)" *Global Organized Crime Index*. [Accessed 2025-12-21]

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). 2025-11-10c. "[Ecuador.](#)" *Global Organized Crime Index*. [Accessed 2026-01-30]

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). 2021-12. Antônio Sampaio. *Criminal Governance During the Pandemic: A Comparative Study of Five Cities*. [Accessed 2026-02-16]

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). N.d. "[Our Story.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-29]

*The Guardian*. 2026-01-22. Aram Roston. "[Venezuela's Delcy Rodríguez Assured US of Cooperation Before Maduro's Capture.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-24]

*The Guardian*. 2024-11-01. Tiago Rogero. "[Tren de Aragua: Are Trump's Claims About a Violent Street Gang Overblown?](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

IBI Consultants. [2025-03]. Pablo Zeballos & Douglas Farah. *Tren de Aragua: The Case of Chile and Regional Implications: Expansion, Structure and Methodologies*. Fundación Taeda. [Accessed 2025-12-16]

IBI Consultants. N.d. "[About Us.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-16]

Infobae. 2025-09-23. "[Dos presuntos miembros del Tren de Aragua fueron detenidos en Ecuador durante las protestas por el aumento del diésel.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-25]

InSight Crime. 2025-09-10. Jeremy McDermott. "[Behind the Curtain: Venezuela's 'Cartels' and the US Missile Strike Explained.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

InSight Crime. 2025-08-17a. Jeremy McDermott. "[Separating Fact from Fiction with Tren de Aragua.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-17]

InSight Crime. 2025-08-17b. "[Bolívar: A New Sanctuary for Tren de Aragua?](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-24]

InSight Crime. 2025-04-25. "[Tren de Aragua.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

InSight Crime. 2024-07-12. "[Héctor Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, Alias 'Niño Guerrero'.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-28]

InSight Crime. 2024-03-11. "[High-Profile Chile Murder Shows Tren de Aragua's Sophistication.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

[InSight Crime](#). N.d. "About Us." [Accessed 2025-12-16]

Instituto para la Paz y el Desarrollo (IPADES). 2025-08-05. "[Insecurity in Costa Rica: International Forum Exposes Causes and Solutions](#)." [Accessed 2025-08-05]

Instituto para la Paz y el Desarrollo (IPADES). N.d. "Nosotros." [Accessed 2025-12-19]

Inter-American Dialogue (The Dialogue). 2025-09-25. "[What Is Behind U.S. Airstrikes in the Caribbean?](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-16]

Inter-American Dialogue (The Dialogue). N.d. "About." [Accessed 2025-12-16]

International Crisis Group (Crisis Group). 2025-07-29. "[A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South](#)." [Accessed 2025-12-23]

Kneip, Lucie. 2024-08-20. "[Amid Rising Insecurity in Venezuela, the US and its Partners Must Prepare for a New Wave of Migration](#)." Atlantic Council. [Accessed 2026-01-24]

*La Hora*. 2025-05-16. "[Tren de Aragua: un presunto integrante de la organización criminal venezolana fue capturado en Orellana](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-25]

Lupa Media. 2025-09-23. Cindy Bermeo. "[¿El Tren de Aragua financió el paro? Esto es lo que sabemos](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-25]

*Miami Herald*. 2025-06-11. Antonio Maria Delgado. "[Gunfire and Gold: How Venezuela Is Using Criminal Gangs in Border Conflict with Guyana](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-22]

Mongabay. 2025-10-22. "[El mar tomado: pescadores sobreviven entre piratas, narcos y extorsiones en Ecuador](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-22]

Mundo Escazu. 2025-12-11. "[Migración detiene extranjero vinculado al tren de Aragua](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-24]

Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado (OECO). 2026-01-28a. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado (OECO). 2026-01-28b. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado (OECO). N.d. "[About OECO](#)." [Accessed 2026-01-22]

PhD Candidate, Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia. 2025-12-23. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Primicias. 2025-09-30. "[Desde Quito operaba una red de extorsionadores que afectaba a comerciantes de El Oro.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-29]

Primicias. 2025-01-30. "[Ecuador declara al Tren de Aragua como grupo terrorista de crimen organizado.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-28]

Primicias. 2023-11-02. "[Estos son los indicios de la presencia del Tren de Aragua en Ecuador.](#)" [Accessed 2026-02-10]

Primicias. 2023-09-27. "[Tren de Aragua se camufla en los '300 del Diablo' en Tungurahua.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-28]

Professor, University in Ecuador. 2025-12-31. Interview with the Research Directorate.

Radio Pichincha. 2025-06-18. Edison Paucar. "[El Ejército detuvo a presunto miembro del Tren de Aragua.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-25]

Rendon, Moises, Linnea Sandin & Claudia Fernandez. 2020-04-16. "[Illegal Mining in Venezuela: Death and Devastation in the Amazonas and Orinoco Regions.](#)" Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), CSIS Briefs. [Accessed 2026-02-17]

Reuters. 2026-01-05. "[Delcy Rodriguez Formally Sworn in as Venezuela's Interim President.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-24]

Spain. 2025-11-07. "[La Policía Nacional desarticula por primera vez una célula del 'Tren de Aragua' asentada en España.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

Teletica. 2025-07-15. Susana Peña Nassar. "[OIJ golpea 'célula' del Tren de Aragua en Costa Rica e investiga presunto cautiverio de mujeres.](#)" [Accessed 2026-02-11]

Tercera Dosis. 2024-05-05. Juan Pablo Luna & Juan Andrés Guzmán. "[El Tren de Aragua es el resultado de las políticas de mano dura'.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

Transparencia Venezuela. 2025-04. "[Tren de Aragua: Criminal Network Without Borders.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-19]

Transparency International. N.d. "[About.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-23]

United States (US). 2025-04-07. National Intelligence Council (NIC). "[Venezuela: Examining Regime Ties to Tren de Aragua.](#)" (SOCM 2025-11374) [Accessed 2025-12-16]

United States (US). 2025-01-20. White House. "[Designating Cartels and Other Organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-29]

United States (US). 2024-08-19. Department of State. [Report to Congress on The State-Sponsored Extraction and Sale of Gold from Venezuela's Orinoco Mining Arc, and from National Reserves in Venezuela such as Canaima National Park.](#) [Accessed 2025-12-23]

United States (US). 2021-04-09. Office of the Director of National Intelligence. "[National Intelligence Council Releases Global Trends Report on the 'More Contested World' of 2040.](#)" [Accessed 2025-12-16]

Venezuela. 2024-03-21. Tribunal Supremo de Justicia. [Solicitud de extradición activa del ciudadano Gerso Isaac Guerrero Flores, al Reino de España.](#) Extradition, No. AA30-P-2024-000141 of 2024. [Accessed 2026-01-29]

World Economic Forum (WEF). N.d. "[Center for Global Development.](#)" [Accessed 2026-01-29]

Zubillaga, Verónica & Rebecca Hanson. 2025-03-03. "[What Is Tren de Aragua? How the Venezuelan Gang Started – and Why US Policies May Only Make It Stronger.](#)" The Conversation. [Accessed 2025-12-23]

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Amazon Underworld; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data; assistant professor with expertise on Venezuelan gangs at a university in the US; Costa Rica – Observatorio de la Violencia; criminology consultant with a publication on organized crime in Costa Rica; criminology professor at a Venezuelan university who has provided expert commentary on Tren de Aragua; director of a policy advisory group with a publication on Tren de Aragua; Fundación para la Conservación y el Desarrollo Sostenible; Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime; InSight Crime; International Crisis Group; Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado; Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia; Orinoco Research; postdoctoral fellow at a US university with expertise on organized crime in Latin America and a publication on Tren de Aragua; professor at a university in Ecuador with expertise on organized crime in Ecuador (3); Venezuelan journalist with expertise on Tren de Aragua; Venezuelan sociologist with expertise on urban violence in Latin America and publications on Tren de Aragua.

Internet Sites, including: Amazon Underworld; Americas Society/Council of the Americas; Animal Político; ArmandoInfo.com; Aula Blog; Brookings Institute; Caracas Chronicles; CBC; Center for a Secure Free Society; CNN;

Columbia Broadcasting System; Corporación Turca de Radio y Televisión; Costa Rica-Observatorio de la Violencia, Poder Judicial; Deutsche Welle; Ecuador – Consejo de la Jefatura; Efecto Cocuyo; El Mostrador; El Mundo [Spain]; El País; Fundación para la Conservación y el Desarrollo Colombia; Human Rights Watch; International Coalition Against Illicit Economies; Invisibles; La Nación [Paraguay]; LatAm Journalism Review; Los Angeles Times; Migration Policy Institute; The New York Times; NTN24 [Colombia]; Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia; Open Democracy; Peru – Centro de Estudios Estratégicos del Ejército del Perú; Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft; Small Wars Journal; TalCual; The Independent [UK]; Tico Times; UN – UNDP; US – Department of the Treasury; Univisión Noticias; Washington Office on Latin America; W Radio [Colombia].

## Associated documents

Document ID 2139619 Translation / language version

20 February 2026 | [IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#) (Author)

Costa Rica, Ecuador, Venezuela

**Query response on Venezuela, Costa Rica and Ecuador: Transnational criminal organisation Tren de Aragua: (2024 - February 2026) (areas of influence and operation; activities; targets; tracking of individuals; state response)**

[Venezuela, Costa Rica & Équateur : information sur le groupe criminel Tren de Aragua, y compris ses activités et ses zones d'opération, ses cibles, sa capacité et sa volonté de retrouver des personnes; la réponse de l'État, y compris la relation du groupe avec les autorités \(2024-février 2026\) \[ZZZ202535.EF\]](#) (Response, French)

fr

[ID 2139620](#)

---

### ecoi.net description:

Query response on Venezuela, Costa Rica and Ecuador: Transnational criminal organisation Tren de Aragua: (2024 - February 2026) (areas of influence and operation; activities; targets; tracking of individuals; state response)

### Countries:

Costa Rica, Ecuador, Venezuela

**Source:**[IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#) (Author)**Published:**

20 February 2026

**Original link:**<https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=459101&pls=1>**Document type:**

Response

**Language:**

English

**Available on ecoi.net since:**

4 May 2026

**Document ID:**

2139619

---

Austrian Red Cross  
Austrian Centre for  
Country of Origin and  
Asylum Research and  
Documentation  
(ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße  
32, 1041 Wien  
T +43 1 589 00 583  
F +43 1 589 00 589  
info@ecoi.net

Contact  
Imprint & Disclaimer  
F.A.Q.  
Data Protection Notice

---

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

