



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Venezuela: Information on the requirements and procedures to leave Venezuela by land, air, and sea, including whether a person who is targeted or wanted by the government or a colectivo is able to leave; information on the impact of currency inflation on the ability to leave the country (2015-August 2017)

Publisher [Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#)

Publication Date 31 August 2017

Citation / Document Symbol VEN105967.E

Related Document (s) [Venezuela : information sur les exigences et la marche à suivre pour sortir du Vénézuéla par voie terrestre, aérienne ou maritime; information indiquant si une personne prise pour cible ou recherchée par le gouvernement ou un colectivo peut quitter le pays; information sur la conséquence de l'inflation sur la capacité à quitter le pays \(2015-août 2017\)](#)

Cite as Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Venezuela: Information on the requirements and procedures to leave Venezuela by land, air, and sea, including whether a person who is targeted or wanted by the government or a colectivo is able to leave; information on the impact of currency inflation on the ability to leave the country (2015-August 2017)*, 31 August 2017, VEN105967.E, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5aa92e574.html> [accessed 28 January 2019]

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1. Exit Requirements and Procedures

Sources indicate that, in order to leave Venezuela, it is necessary to have a passport (Journalist 24 July 2017; IOM Caracas 28 July 2017). The website of the Venezuelan embassy in Santiago de Chile states that Venezuelan citizens can enter and leave Venezuela with a valid Venezuelan identity card (*Cédula de Identidad*) in lieu of the passport to travel to Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay (Venezuela 10 Jan. 2017). Article 7 of the Law on Nationality and Citizenship (*Ley de Nacionalidad y Ciudadanía*) states that

[translation]

Venezuelans who have another nationality must make use their Venezuelan nationality for their entry, stay, and departure of the territory of the Republic, and must be identified as such in all civil and political acts (ibid. 2014)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Caracas office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) stated that minors under 18 need a valid exit permit if they are traveling without one or both parents (IOM 28 July 2017). According to the same source, Venezuelan nationals traveling as tourists must possess of a return ticket and applicable visas in accordance with the migration policies of the country they will be visiting (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The IOM Representative indicated that, according to "external sources," the passport issuance process in Venezuela has taken "more time than usual" since 2015 (ibid.). *El Nuevo Herald*, a Miami-based newspaper, reports that Venezuela is experiencing problems issuing passports inside the country and it could take [translation] "several" months to obtain one (*El Nuevo Herald* 9 Feb. 2017). According to sources, people with "urgent travels" may apply for a provisional passport (Venezuela n.d.; IOM 28 July 2017).

2. Currency Inflation

Media sources report that in Venezuela, inflation reached 800 percent in 2016 (*Toronto Star* 10 Apr. 2017; Reuters 20 Jan. 2017). Reuters indicated that the Central Bank of Venezuela (Banco Central de Venezuela, BCV) reported to the International Monetary Fund that in 2016, inflation in Venezuela was 274.4 percent (Reuters 20 April 2017). Sources report that, according to information provided by the National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional), inflation reached 176 percent in the first half of 2017 (Agencia EFE 7 July 2017; Globovisión 7 July 2017). The IOM representative in Caracas stated that

[s]ince the establishment of [the foreign currency] policy, back in 2003, ... access to foreign currencies is limited or has more ... restrictions. Recently, the country authorized auctions to provide natural persons with trimestral access to certain amounts of USD but it seems to be a demanding process. It is important to note that the USD current official rate is 2.700 Bolívares Fuertes [VEF] and the equivalent in the parallel market has already surpassed the 8.000 mark. (IOM 28 July 2017)

The BBC reports that Venezuela adopted an exchange rate system in March 2016 that includes a [translation] "protected" or "preferential" rate (Dipro) of 10 VEF per US dollar, which is used for the provision of goods and services as well as for cash remittances considered "priority," and a floating rate (Dicom) that starts at 206 VEF per US dollar, which is used to calculate currency exchange for oil exports and to pay for airline tickets to travel abroad (BBC 10 Mar. 2016). People who wish to travel abroad pay a rate of 1,500 per cent higher than before, because under the previous system, people would pay 13 VEF per US dollar when obtaining foreign currency to travel (ibid.).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Bogotá-based freelance journalist who covers Latin American affairs and has reported for Deutsche Welle and NPO Radio, a Dutch public radio station, stated that Venezuelans encounter the following challenges as a result of the currency inflation:

- [i]t is very difficult to obtain US dollars;
- [i]t is difficult to obtain [VEF] through ATMs; for example, the ATMs are often empty and cannot dispense any money or the maximum amount to be retrieved is often very limited;

- [i]t is common for Venezuelans to use their credit cards;
- [t]he use of bitcoins in Venezuela is popular, given its stability. (Journalist 24 July 2017)

Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Leaving Venezuela

3.1 Leaving Venezuela by Air

According to the website of Global Affairs Canada,

[t]ravellers departing from any international airport in [Venezuela] are required to pay an exit tax and an airport fee. These taxes are included in the cost of airplane tickets for flights departing from Simón Bolívar International Airport. Amounts payable and methods of payment vary depending on the airport. (Canada 17 July 2017)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the CEO of the Canadian Venezuelan Engagement Foundation (CVEF) [1], indicated that Venezuelans leaving Venezuela by air have to pay a tax departure fee which is normally included in the ticket price (CVEF 19 Jul. 2017).

Sources indicate that it is financially difficult for people to leave Venezuela by air (ibid.; *The New Yorker* 10 Apr. 2014). The CEO of CVEF stated that a conventional salary is between C\$20 and C\$50 per month (CVEF 19 July 2017). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reports that the average Venezuelan earns around US\$15 per month (CBC 30 July 2017). The IOM Representative stated that "[d]ue to the current policy on foreign currency, international air tickets can only be paid in US [d]ollars or [e]uros, so people need a valid banking account to make transactions in these two currencies" (IOM 28 July 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Sources indicate that affluent people leave by plane (*The Washington Post* 1 Jan. 2017; Journalist 24 July 2017).

Sources report that there are airlines that have suspended bolivar-denominated sales of airline tickets (AFP 14 Mar. 2014; *The New Yorker* 10 Apr. 2014). Sources indicate that airlines have reportedly experienced problems in repatriating their sales in VEF (ibid.; BBC 16 July 2015). According to sources, several airlines have suspended their flights to and from Venezuela, including Avianca (CBC 30 July 2017; *El País* 27 July 2017; *Miami Herald* 26 July 2017), United Airlines, Air Canada, Lufthansa (ibid.; *El País* 27 July 2017), Aeroméxico, Gol, Tiara Air, Alitalia and Latam (ibid.).

3.2 Leaving Venezuela by Land

Sources indicate that due to the high price of airline tickets, Venezuelans leave the country by land (*El Nacional* 8 Feb. 2017; IOM Caracas 28 July 2017). *El Nacional*, a Caracas-based newspaper, reports that there are two bus companies in Caracas: Rutas de América, which offers travel from Caracas to destinations such as Quito and Guayaquil at a cost of US\$150; and Rutas Ormeño, which offers connections at their terminal in Bogotá to various destinations in South America, including Argentina, Ecuador, Chile and Peru (*El Nacional* 8 Feb. 2017). These bus companies accept VEF to pay for tickets (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2.1 Colombia

The Associated Press (AP) reports that Colombia has received more Venezuelans than any other country, and many of these Venezuelans come from lower and middle classes (AP 22 June 2017). Other sources indicate that more than 120,000 Venezuelans crossed the border into Colombia in July 2016 seeking food (*The New York Times* 25 Nov. 2016; *Miami Herald* 12 Aug. 2016) and medicine (ibid.). According to AP, the Venezuelan government has officially denied that its citizens are fleeing to Colombia and has stated that, on the contrary, Colombians are fleeing to Venezuela (AP 22 June 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that the border with Colombia is porous (AP 22 June 2017; *The Guardian* 17 July 2017) and "largely unprotected" (ibid.). AP reports that "[t]he most desperate cross illegally through one of hundreds of 'trochas,' unpaved dirt roads along Venezuela's porous 1,370 mile (2,200-kilometer) border with Colombia" (AP 22 June 2017). TeleSUR, a Venezuelan television network, reports that the Colombian and Venezuelan presidents have indicated that there are around 247 trochas or illegal crossings along the border between the two countries (TeleSUR 13 Aug. 2016). *The Guardian* reports that most people follow these paths to avoid immigration controls (*The Guardian* 17 July 2017). *The Washington Post* cites Christian Kruger, Director General of the Colombian Immigration Department (Migración Colombia) (Colombia 29 Aug. 2017), as stating that "it would be logistically impossible to shut down the 1,400-mile border between the countries, which is heavily forested and crisscrossed by smuggling trails" (*The Washington Post* 1 Jan. 2017). According to *The Washington Post*, "[t]here are no formal immigration checks at the busy crossings, so Venezuelans can freely enter Colombia as tourists, and it is unknown how many aren't going back" (ibid.).

Sources indicate that the Simón Bolívar bridge is used to cross the border between San Antonio del Táchira and Cúcuta (*El País* 17 July 2016; *Miami Herald* 18 July 2016). According to the Journalist, when crossing the border through the Simón Bolívar bridge, the passports of Venezuelans are checked by Venezuelan authorities on the Venezuelan side and by Colombian authorities on the Colombian side (Journalist 24 July 2017). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

El Nacional reports that Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro, announced that, as of August 2015, crossings into Colombia will be permitted only to people who are authorized by the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana, FANB) and the Administrative Service of Identification, Migration and Immigration Affairs (Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, SAIME) (*El Nacional* 9 Dec. 2016). *El Nacional* further reports that those who seek to cross the Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander bridges must appear on a list developed by authorities (ibid.). In order to appear on the list, citizens must provide travel documents beforehand at the FANB located in the San Antonio del Táchira international airport (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2.1.1 Border Closures

According to sources, Venezuela closed its border crossings with Colombia in August 2015 (*Miami Herald* 12 Aug. 2016; *El Nacional* 9 Dec. 2016) and reopened in August 2016 (AFP 20 Dec. 2016; *El País* 12 Aug. 2016a). According to *El País*, a Madrid-based newspaper, five land points between the border of Colombia and Venezuela were reopened in August 2016 (ibid.). According to *The Washington Post*, Maduro had "abruptly" closed Venezuela's border with Brazil and Colombia on multiple occasions and then ordered their reopening with little notice (*The Washington Post* 1 Jan. 2017).

3.2.1.2 Migratory Card

According to TeleSUR, the crossing between Cúcuta and San Antonio de Ureña was reopened on 13 August 2016 with the implementation of the Migratory Card for Border Traffic (*Tarjeta Migratoria de Tránsito Fronterizo*) for citizens of both countries (TeleSUR 13 Aug. 2016). TeleSUR cites Victor Bautista, Border Director of the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as stating that this system only authorizes movement between Cúcuta and San Antonio de Ureña, and that people who wish to go to other departments of Colombia or states of Venezuela must follow a different process that includes the obligatory use of a passport (TeleSUR 13 Aug. 2016). *El País* cites Cristian Kruger as stating that, as of 12 August 2016, persons crossing the border on a daily basis for work, education, health or family reasons, will need the Migratory Card for Border Traffic and it has to be stamped every time the border is crossed (*El País* 12 Aug. 2016b). In order to obtain the Migratory Card for Border Traffic, the applicant must fill out an application form which includes information fields such as name, last names, identity document number, place of residence, intended entry point into Colombia and the reason for the travel or visit (ibid.). The Migratory Card for Border Traffic is valid only in specific areas within Colombia, depending on the bridge used for crossing: valid only in Maicao, when entering through Paraguachón in La Guajira; valid only in Arauca, when entering via the José Antonio Páez bridge; valid only in Puerto Carreño, when entering via Vichada; and valid only in Cúcuta, when crossing to the department of Norte de Santander (ibid.). If a Venezuelan wants to travel to Colombia for vacation or to visit family or friends in other parts of the country, he or she must be in possession of a passport and a transportation ticket, provide evidence of the place of residence and economic capacity to stay in the country (ibid.). According to the website of the Colombian Immigration Department, the Migratory Card for Border Traffic was valid until 30 April 2017 and as of this date, Venezuelans could only enter Colombia through a Pre-Registration Certificate (*Constancia de Pre-Registro*), available online, a Border Mobility Card (*Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza*, TMF), or with a stamped passport (Colombia 29 Aug 2017). According to the IOM Representative, the TMF has been a valid document to cross the border since 1 May 2017 (IOM 28 July 2017). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2.2 Brazil

Sources indicate that one of the crossing points into Brazil includes Roraima (*The New York Times* 25 Nov. 2016; Deutsche Welle 13 Dec. 2016). Human Rights Watch indicates that, according to Brazilian Federal officials, most recorded entries occur at the crossing between Santa Elena de Uairén, Venezuela, and Pacaraima, Brazil, while other entries occur without informing Brazilian authorities (Human Rights Watch 18 Apr. 2017). According to *The Washington Post*, Pacaraima is surrounded by an indigenous reserve that spans along the border which makes it "easy" to cross into Brazil (*The Washington Post* 1 Jan. 2017).

According to sources, Venezuelans can enter Brazil without a visa (ibid.; IOM 28 July 2017; Deutsche Welle 13 Dec. 2016) and remain in Brazil for 90 days (ibid.; *The Washington Post* 1 Jan. 2017). According to sources, there is a new migration program for Venezuelans to obtain temporary residence in Brazil (*The Guardian* 17 July 2017; IOM 28 July 2017), which was implemented in February 2017 (ibid.). *The Guardian* cites Maria Canineu, the Brazil Director of Human Rights Watch, as stating that in March 2017, "the Brazilian government introduced a two-year temporary residence option, but the low value of the Venezuelan currency makes the \$96 it costs more than many can afford" (*The Guardian* 17 July 2017). Human Rights Watch states that the new rules on obtaining the two-year residency permit, in place for a year as of 2 March 2017, may be extended and require Venezuelans to go to

a Federal Police office and present a form with personal information, two pictures, a valid ID or passport, a birth certificate or consular document certifying where they were born, and a certificate stating they do not have a criminal record in Brazil, and state that they do not have a criminal record in Venezuela. (Human Rights Watch 18 Apr. 2017)

3.3 Leaving Venezuela by Sea

The IOM Representative stated that Venezuelans are not authorized to leave the country by sea (IOM 28 July 2017). Sources indicate, however, that there are Venezuelans fleeing by sea (Journalist 24 July 2017; CVEF 19 July 2017; *The New York Times* 25 Nov. 2016). Sources indicate that those who leave the country by sea do so as a result of low income and the inability to pay for airplane tickets (ibid.; CVEF 19 July 2017). According to Fox News, "Venezuela's northernmost point is less than 20 miles away from Dutch territory, so this has become the route of choice for dozens trying to flee" Venezuela (Fox News 13 Sept. 2016). Other sources similarly indicate that Venezuelans use makeshift rafts to reach Curaçao and other Caribbean islands (*The Washington Post* 1 Jan. 2017; *Miami Herald* 12 Aug. 2016). The Journalist explained that leaving Venezuela by sea is often done in an "illegal" way, bypassing authorities via the Paraguaná Peninsula, and that it is difficult to measure the number of people who leave in this way (Journalist 24 July 2017).

According to *The New York Times*, Curaçao placed new visa restrictions on Venezuelans in 2015 (*The New York Times* 25 Nov. 2016). The same source states that

[t]he small Caribbean islands neighboring Venezuela are far less hospitable [than Brazil] saying they simply cannot absorb the onslaught. The closest to Venezuela's coast, Aruba and Curaçao, have effectively sealed their borders to poor Venezuelans since [2015] by making them show [US] \$1,000 in cash before entering - the equivalent of more than five years of earnings in a minimum-wage job. (ibid.)

Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. People Who are Targeted or Wanted by the Government

Sources indicate that people who are targeted or wanted by the government risk their passports be declared as "lost" (CVEF 19 Jul. 2017; Journalist 24 July 2017). The Journalist explained that passports, for example, of members of the political opposition, may be "randomly cancelled" or denied renewal, "which means that such individuals would be unable to leave the country through official means" (ibid.). Univisión, a Spanish-language television network based in the US, indicates that the documents of Henrique Capriles and Luis Florido, representatives of the opposition, were invalidated as they appeared "lost" or "stolen" in the system (Univisión 18 May 2017). The IOM representative stated that

[a]lthough the IOM has not been officially informed about these restrictions, the media reports that members of the National Unity Board (Mesa de Unidad Nacional, MUD) have been refused the right to leave the country through legal sentences ... It is important to note that these actions were later justified by members of the Venezuelan migration authorities, stating that these passports had been reported as stolen. [A r]epresentative of SAIME also informed that these complaints were just a strategy from opposing politicians and journalists to destabilize the country. (IOM Caracas 28 July 2017)

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.

Note

[1] The CVEF is a Montreal-based non-governmental organization "created by a group of Venezuelan exiles involved in the defense for [h]uman [r]ights, the multilevel engagement between the Venezuelan Diaspora and the different stakeholders from the Government of Canada, the promotion of educational programs and training via internships and settlement services for refugees" (CVEF n.d.).

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Internet sites, including: Caribisch Netwerk; CNBC; Correo del Caroní; *De Volkskrant*; Een Vandaag; *El Estímulo*; Euronews; Globovisión; *Kaiteur News*; Legalmondo; Mercopress; *NRC Handelsblad*; PanAm Post; Revista Venezolana; *Stabroek News*; Venezuela – Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería; Viajeros.com; World News Info.

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