

Impacts of the CHE on Living Conditions

The Complex Humanitarian Emergency (CHE) that the country is going through has seriously affected other areas of daily life that are essential to ensure people's dignity. The emergency deepens the impacts upon the water and sanitation, food and nutrition, education, and health sectors; therefore, decision-making must assess these situations for the implementation of an adequate humanitarian response consistent with the needs of the context. The breakdown of the country's institutions caused 96.2% of the population to be in a situation of poverty, of which 79.3% are in extreme poverty and 64.8% in multidimensional poverty. This situation exposes people to severe levels of deprivation, in addition to the collapse of basic services that have resulted in 50% of people suffering daily interruptions of electrical services and 24% of the population does not receive domestic gas in cylinders in their community.

Poverty

During the last 6 years, the Gross Domestic Product (nominal GDP) experienced a cumulative contraction of 65% and, between 2012 and 2018, public spending fell by 27.6%. The real salary fell from 266.50 USD per month to 3.40 USD in the last decade and the loss of purchasing power affected 79.3% of the population (ENCOVI 2019/2020). In consequence, in 2019, 27.4 million people lived in poverty with insufficient income to cover a basic basket of goods and services; 16.4 million of these people fell into extreme poverty between 2016 and 2019 and at least 18.5 million fell into a condition of multidimensional poverty, in which they face multiple deficiencies in health, education and standard of living (ENCOVI 2019/2020).

In the midst of this widespread poverty, 5.1 million people depended on State economic assistance in 2019, subject to discriminatory mechanisms of political control. In the midst of the crisis, people who have been displaced, already vulnerable, also served as support for those who remained in the country. At least 9.1 million Venezuelans received remittances from family and friends abroad, although in extremely low amounts in comparison to the cost of living.

Housing and basic services

The lack of housing, including physical deficiencies or precariousness and environmental conditions, affected 8.5 million people in 2019; 22% lived in inadequate housing and 1.7 million lived in houses built with non-resistant or precarious materials. According to ENCOVI 2019/2020, 13% of people lived in overcrowded housing. Between 2017 and 2019, the public sector reduced housing construction by 68%, providing 4,820 new homes in 2019 (PROVEA). The private sector built 1,000 homes, registering a 99% cumulative construction drop (Real Estate Chamber of Venezuela).

Regarding basic services, 90% of the population had poor electricity service (ENCOVI 2019/2020). During 2019, the country suffered at least 5 nationwide general cuts (blackouts) in the electricity supply for several days. The National Interconnected Electricity System operated at 12% of its installed capacity (Corpoelec), causing at least 14.3 million people to suffer daily interruptions in electrical service, while 26% experienced interruptions several times a day every day (OVSP). This situation forced at least 70% of the population to have to modify their routine activities.

Analysis

The 2019 WFP study found that the supply of domestic gas, especially necessary for cooking, was irregular for 72% of the population (WFP). At least 13.8 million people received a gas container or “cylinder” every two months or did not receive it at all in their community (OVSP), generating the need to resort to the use of unconventional sources of fuel and the felling of trees. Due to the lack of domestic gas, 53% of people changed the way they cook their food and 43% decreased the number of meals per day.

Mobility, communications and information

The deterioration of the public and private vehicle fleet and the shortage of fuel led to severe mobility restrictions for 9 million people due to the lack of public transport, and approximately 190 thousand children and adolescents could not attend school regularly (ENCOVI 2019/2020). Regarding fuel, in 2019 gasoline reserves fell by 85%; 93% of service stations that supply the population were closed or inoperative due to shortages and 81% of public transport units were not operative. In addition to restricting the free movement of people, the gasoline shortage also affected supply chains and supply of basic goods and services throughout the country.

In a context of reduced mobility, the loss of connection for communication purposes increased the probability of incommunicado. Between 2016 and 2019, mobile phone service subscriptions decreased by 52% (CONATEL) and 17.9 million people had communication problems due to failures or lack of mobile telephony, in addition to the fact that at least 31% were not subscribed to a mobile phone service.

State opacity policies and censorship practices caused independent media to adapt to digital formats, facing institutional blockades of their web pages. In 2019, 60% of households did not have internet service and 35% of people did not use it. These are restrictions on access to information that affect the ability to make informed decisions.

Environment

Bolívar and Amazonas were the states most affected by the deterioration of environmental conditions caused by gold mining. According to the limited existing data, related to the behavior of mining activity and their spatial locations, currently, the 10 main rivers of these states are contaminated by the presence of mercury.

The exploitation of the Orinoco Mining Arc accentuated the levels of inequality in the region and the vulnerability of people in these locations, especially women, who are exposed to serious situations of violence. Based on the information collected, at least 1.7 million people are potentially affected by mercury poisoning, and it is possible that some 570 thousand have experienced moderate to severe health effects (Clima 21).

At the environmental level, the loss of tropical humid forests in the Venezuelan territory during the 2016-2019 period increased around 190% (54.4 kha) in comparison to the 2002-2015 period (18.7 kha) (Global Forest Watch). 43% of the population lives in the states with the greatest forest loss, 15.8 million live in areas affected by the decrease in river flow and 9.2 million in areas where floods occur.

Violence and abuse of power

Venezuela is the country with the most deaths of people from violent causes in Latin America. In 2019, 16,506 died from these causes. Of these, 4,582 were young people between 18 and 29 years of age and 494 boys, girls and adolescents under 18 years of age. Between 2014 and 2018, 2,889 people died from suicide (OVV) and, in 2017, 22% of the population reported having been a victim of violent acts (ENCOVI 2019/2020).

During 2019, 2,744 people were arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, with 34,748 arbitrary detentions occurring in the last 5 years. Between 2018 and 2019, 114 people were arbitrarily detained for expressing themselves on social networks and the media (Public Space). At least 574 people were subjected to torture between 2018 and 2019 and 23 of those died (PROVEA).

According to official figures, between 2016 and 2019, at least 17,849 people were killed by security forces. Of the 4,890 investigations that the Public Ministry reports having initiated, only 0.3% advanced to the trial phase and only in 1 of the 4,890 cases was the perpetrator convicted (OACNUDH). 85.3% of court judges are freely appointed and removed, a situation that compromises their stability and independence (Armando Info).

According to figures from the Supreme Court of Justice itself, between 2017 and 2019, the cases resolved by the courts decreased by 72.7% (Access to Justice).

Forced migration

The impact of the CHE on the living conditions of the Venezuelan population caused the forced migration of 5.2 million people (R4V), most of them in the last 5 years, to find economic sustenance, access to food and protect themselves from threats to their lives. 41% of the people surveyed in 2019 by the UNHCR who were in transit or within a few months of having left the country stated that violence was one of the reasons for their displacement, having good reasons to believe that their lives would be in danger if they returned to the country. Added to these reasons are all the obstacles and restrictions that they face when moving (lack of identification documents, exposure to risks and xenophobic practices in transit and host countries).

The ENCOVI 2019/2020 indicated at least 1 family member was forced to emigrate in 19% of Venezuelan households. Until 2019, around 11 million people in the country had the intention to migrate and 500 thousand people, of the 2 million in pendular migration, required humanitarian assistance (R4V). By August 2019, the IOM confirmed that there were at least 89 deaths of Venezuelans during attempts to emigrate.