

COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN VENEZUELA

Anzoátegui

Report 2019/2021



The state of Anzoátegui is the sixth largest state in Venezuela, with 43,300 km², and is the seventh most populated, with 1,566,938 inhabitants in 2021 according to INSO-ENCOVI data¹. Its territory is divided into 21 municipalities, it has access to the Caribbean Sea and the insular region to the north, and to the southeast it borders the fluvial plain on the Orinoco River. Due to its multiple factors and extensive de-structuring at the institutional, legal, political, social and economic levels, Anzoátegui, along with the rest of Venezuela, is experiencing a large-scale Complex Humanitarian Emergency.

According to the Interdisciplinary Group to Address the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in the state of Anzoátegui,² the Covid-19 pandemic has been a trigger for the deepening of the deinstitutionalization of the State and the severity of the Complex Humanitarian Emergency (CHE) between 2019 and 2021. The group considered that the most important problems of the state are located in the education and health sectors.³ In education, there is concern about the rising dropout rate and the conditions of public schools, as well as the precariousness of the infrastructure, the deficiencies in school meals, and the terrible living conditions of educators, among others.⁴ Regarding health, the problems that most affect the sector are the deterioration of the infrastructure of health care centers, the lack of medical personnel, the paralysis of health programs and the lack of medical supplies. The situation of vulnerability of the elderly in the state is also notorious.

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The pandemic aggravated the non-attendance of children and adolescents in basic and secondary education

1. With the pandemic, school campuses were left empty and homes became the space for remote school activities. Parents were not prepared to help their children with homework and educators were left without the tools to offer classes remotely. Students also lacked computers and Internet service. Even though years ago the State implemented technological rooms in the schools and distributed canimitas (State-provided notebooks), all of this deteriorated over time, so that the distance learning modality could not be carried out, ensuring standards of coverage and quality of education⁵. In the municipality of Sotillo, for example, where one of the main cities of Anzoátegui (Puerto La Cruz) is located, out of a classroom with an average of 35 students, only five were able to connect, from their homes, and the parents did not even go to school to pick up their homework⁶. Non-attendance at school increased, with the risk of desertion⁷. In these conditions of severe access difficulties and absences in the school process⁸, it is not possible to ensure that students who have passed the grade will be prepared to face the next step in the learning process⁹.
2. In addition, students in elementary and secondary education are not well fed, because their homes are increasingly impoverished¹⁰. The private system, with great effort, partially managed to catch up with distance education and to complete the 2020-2021 school year, but this was not the case in the public sector, regardless of whether the students were approved, with or without the delivery of the assignments. According to approximate data from the Venezuelan Teachers Union (Sinvema), Anzoátegui Section, only half of the enrolled students have returned to on-site classes. In general, the return to classes is usually slow, but given the crisis in the living conditions of families, it is foreseeable that this will become a trend.

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The deterioration of the schools' infrastructure increased during the time they were uninhabited

3. 57% of the youth did not complete middle school or high school¹¹. They drop out in 4th and 5th year and are migrating from the state¹². Children and adolescents are leaving their desks to go out and work to support their

In Anzoátegui, students drop out of school to do some kind of work in order to earn a living at home

homes, and those who graduate from high school have no aspirations of entering university. This puts at risk the individual and social development of these people and the population of the state. The dropout rate from high school to migrate out of the country or to take to the streets and work to bring food home is 59%. These are young people who have no opportunities for development. They go from a desk to being a public bus collector, to picking up garbage to help their families.

4. The infrastructure of the schools was further deteriorated and suffered thefts, robberies and looting during the period in which they were left uninhabited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, not being prepared to receive the students. There are institutions where all the bathroom fixtures were stolen, and they continue to be ransacked¹³. The Belén María Sanjuán Educational Unit and Cacique Cayaurima, which is located next to a garbage dump, have had an eviction order since 2016, due to serious structural damage, but they continue to operate¹⁴. Many campuses do not have desks, blackboards, cleaning materials, and there is no access to services such as electricity, internet and drinking water. In the Rural School Centers (Núcleos Escolares Rurales) the situation is much more dramatic, especially due to the lack of transportation¹⁵. It is only due to the perseverance of the teachers that there are classes. For the last four years the schools have not received materials (books, computers, etc.). Parents no longer have the purchasing power to help in cleaning, lunchroom and kitchen tasks, and the institution lacks the minimum to receive the children and teachers. The serious problem of electricity and water is preventing normal activity. There are no light bulbs, the wiring has been stolen, there are no sanitation conditions, and there is no food¹⁶.

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The School Feeding Program is not sufficient for the nutritional requirements of students and teachers

5. Children and adolescents are not receiving the necessary food and many cases of severe malnutrition have been reported. Since 2020, thanks to international humanitarian aid, the School Feeding Program (PAE) has improved in some schools, but access to food remains deficient. In a week of school activities, the PAE only arrives two days and consists of only rice and sardines. As there are few children, they are extending the supplies for three or four days a week. In many schools, parents and representatives are asked to collaborate, either in money or items to complete the food. In terms of food, assistance has been provided, but not protection, i.e., "food is given to the children, but they are not being fed to get them out of their malnutrition situation".
6. Teachers' salaries, although improved, are still insufficient. Thanks to these increases, the exodus of teachers to other countries or other work activities was probably stopped, but there are teachers in very poor health, with chronic illnesses, because they do not have medication to control blood pressure, diabetes or cancer, and they do not have health insurance. In relation to the agreements with the government for collective bargaining and salaries, the commitments made have not been fulfilled, and the lack of economic resources limits many teachers to go to school. In the Sotillo Municipality, for example, it has been reported that teachers have neither health services nor adequate feeding, and they go to school hoping to be able to take advantage of the food that may be left over from the PAE¹⁷.
7. The Ministry of People's Power for Education (MPPE) absorbed the teachers of Anzoátegui, assigned to the governor's and the mayor's offices. There is a nationwide trend towards recentralization of teaching personnel. The monitoring of national and state schools in Anzoátegui showed that most of the teachers were transferred to the payroll of the MPPE¹⁸, which translates into a greater politicized control of the educational contents. In the midst of the pandemic, there were complaints of discrimination in the access to COVID-19 vaccines. There were cases in which the Hugo Chavez Battle Units (UBCH) decided which teachers were vaccinated and which not, according to their political affiliation with the government.

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In health, the majority of elderly people living alone have been left behind and are helpless

8. Nursing homes that depend on government subsidies to house the elderly have serious problems with the supply of medicines and have had to admit older adults to the emergency rooms of health centers because they have no way to care for them. These people have usually been abandoned by their relatives, who have become impoverished or have to emigrate, leaving them behind. They are being fed because eventually, help has come from other civil society organizations. It is also difficult to find trained caregivers to meet the needs of these older adults.

9. In the reopening of the Intensive Care Unit of the Pediatric Hospital of Anzoátegui¹⁹, eight beds were opened, of which only two can function because there are no personnel to cover the other six. There is a deficit of practicing physicians and nurses in the public sector, which tends to become greater every year, because the hospital cannot offer a salary level to cover the basic needs of the personnel. Many health professionals continued to work in these hospitals, even with low salaries, because they were prestigious training centers. But, now, in public hospitals there are closed services, such as hospital wards and operating rooms. Some are retiring, others are emigrating. There is also a training crisis. Postgraduate programs had to close because there are no applicants and because the hospital no longer has the conditions to become a teaching center.

The shortage of physicians and health personnel continues to increase in the state's main public hospitals

Health programs were paralyzed and people with chronic health conditions no longer find medical care

10. In 2021, only 7% of the planned Pap smears were performed on women, and this is due to the fact that the hospital centers have focused on Covid-19 and have abandoned the care of other health conditions. The Luis Razetti University Hospital, which is the type IV referral center in the state, does not receive people for internal medicine with diabetes, hypertension or cerebrovascular accidents. When these people arrive at another hospital there is little to do and they will most likely die. Preventive

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health care has been abandoned and attention to other epidemics, such as malaria, is being forgotten. This happens because there are no health policies and the institution is adrift.

11. In most public health centers there is a lack of supplies to perform the most basic medical procedures. A supply of 20 boxes of saline solution may seem a lot, but that represents only 450 units, and if in a single day 450 people are attended, that is all, not to mention that a single laboring woman would need a total of 10 units. There is also concern about the lack of trained human resources to manage, direct or lead the recovery of the health sector and that is why reactive and not structural decisions are made.
12. Currently, there is no understanding of the structure and management of the Ministry of Popular Power for Health (MPPS), the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security (IVSS) and the Institute of Social Welfare of the Armed Forces (IPSFA), all of which are competent institutions in health decisions and are responsible for facilities that must guarantee the right to health of the Venezuelan population.

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