

COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN VENEZUELA

Monagas

Report 2019/2021



The state of Monagas is located in northeastern Venezuela. It borders the state of Sucre to the north, the Gulf of Paria to the northeast, the state of Delta Amacuro to the east, the state of Bolívar to the south, and the state of Anzoátegui to the west. Monagas sits in the Region of *Los Llanos* in the Venezuelan plains. 931,111 people live in an area of 11,158 sq. mi¹. It comprises 13 municipalities and 43 parishes. Its main cities are Maturín (the state capital), Punta de Mata, Caripe, Caripito and Temblador. Since the 1920s, when the first fields in the state were discovered, oil extraction became one of the main drivers of the economy, although residents traditionally engaged in agriculture and cattle raising. Today, both activities present an important contraction.

The Interdisciplinary Group for the Complex Humanitarian Emergency (GIEHC) in the state of Monagas made use of a study of 11 communities in several working-class neighborhoods in the city of Maturin. The study covered the issues of access to healthcare and medicines, basic services, food, the quality of education, and the situation of violence and citizen security in public spaces². In particular, the study revealed severe problems in the situation of the elderly, children, or teenagers that put their lives, integrity, and safety at risk.

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Chronic diseases are growing due to a lack of medical care in public health centers and the transfer of costs to people due to the high shortage of medicines and supplies for treatment

1. Chronic health problems, such as hypertension and diabetes, have increased in the state of Monagas. Three insulin-dependent people in one family were found to lack access to treatment or health care due to a lack of medical and nursing personnel³. In the communities of working-class neighborhoods, the possibility of receiving medical attention and finding and buying the necessary medicines for treatment is minimal. Instead, people diagnose themselves, use whatever medicines they find, or resort to medicinal

plants with innocuous effects, which has become a new public health problem. Although the services of the public health system are free by constitutional rule, there is no way for people to be treated if they do not take care of buying all the supplies and medicines that health personnel require, due to high levels of shortages in health centers⁴. Many cancer patients do not show up for their checkups and treatment because they cannot afford the price of USD 300. Some of these medications must be taken for 10 years and hospitals and social security no longer provide them, nor do they have diagnostic equipment⁵.

2. Child malnutrition has increased, and it has also become noticeable among the elderly population. There is a greater number of cases of elderly people with low weight and malnutrition. Most of them eat what they can get for the day. In the few food assistance programs for children, quotas have had to be opened for the elderly in situations of extreme vulnerability. Many of them, who live alone or are in charge of children and teenagers whose parents have migrated, have died due to starvation and also because they stopped receiving medical treatment for their chronic problems. Old-age pensions in Venezuela are not even enough for food⁶. In the Paraíso neighborhood, 19 elderly people with nutritional problems were found⁷.

Increases in the degree of economic and social abandonment of the elderly have led to more cases of borderline malnutrition and avoidable deaths due to lack of medical attention or access to medicines

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Severe shortages of drinking water force communities to resort to alternative sources. Those who can afford it use water trucks, while the rest must go to neighboring wells or fetch water from polluted rivers

3. The lack of all basic services is very severe, but drinking water, cooking gas, urban sanitation, landline telephone, and police surveillance and protection are the worst rated by the communities in the state of Monagas. The electrical service is critically deteriorated, especially when it rains and the transformers fail due to lack of maintenance⁸. In the case of drinking water, several sectors in central Maturin have seen the regional government begin to drill underground wells, but the pumps were damaged and stopped working. Also, as these waters

did not receive adequate treatment, they are usually smelly⁹. Other than wells, water trucks are used with a cost that varies according to distance, and 53 gallons of water end up selling at 10 to 11 USD. As a gesture of solidarity, the residents of some communities allow people from other neighborhoods to fill their containers under a special schedule. Other sectors go to the rivers to fetch water. Regarding electricity, some areas can spend between three and four hours without the service after an interruption. In many working-class communities, irregular connections to replenish the service have been made, which has resulted in deaths¹⁰.

4. The quality of education has significantly dropped in Monagas. Due to low wages, the teaching staff has emigrated, both from the field of education and the country. Teachers often turn to humanitarian organizations for clothes to wear. The Communal Councils intervene in the appointment of new teachers to fill the vacancies of those who have emigrated. They frequently choose people without credentials who are politically aligned with the government. Teachers are also being replaced with people from Misión Chamba Juvenil (a State-sponsored youth employment program) that lack any kind of pedagogical training¹¹.

Poor physical conditions of basic and higher education facilities, added to the high deficit of qualified teachers, did not allow a massive return to classes, after the interruption of face-to-face activities due to the pandemic

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5. School facilities present severe problems with physical infrastructure and services¹². Due to this level of deterioration and the lack of teachers, the call to return to school was not heeded by all children. Universities are in the same situation¹³. The crisis in education affects students and their families in equal measure, which is evidenced by the ever-increasing dropout rate¹⁴. The number of children and teenagers who drop out of school to do jobs that allow them to have food at their tables and help with other family expenses has grown rapidly. Similarly, there is a greater number of children and teenagers living on the streets, and more cases of prostitution in girls and teenagers, as well as domestic violence.

Crisis in education has generated a higher dropout rate. Many children drop out of school to work or end up on the streets due to extreme poverty and domestic violence

Violence and criminality are persistent problems in the state, accentuated by the lack of surveillance and protection by police security forces

6. Violence and criminality are persistent problems. In the state of Monagas, local media often reports on criminal activities directed by organized crime organizations and armed groups¹⁵. Due to the lack of police surveillance and protection, people have been forced to go home earlier. The body of a person killed in the street, for example, could take up to 16 hours to be picked up by the authorities.

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