

COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN VENEZUELA

Sucre

Report 2019/2021

In the northeastern region of Venezuela is located the state of Sucre, which is bordered to the north by the Caribbean Sea and to the south by the states of Monagas and Anzoátegui. It outstands towards the Caribbean in a double peninsula, bordered on the east by Araya and on the west by Cariaco, facing the Atlantic Ocean. Nearly 100 kilometers separate the city of Güiria from Port of Spain, capital of Trinidad and Tobago. The total extension of Sucre is 11,800 km² inhabited by an estimated population of 987,143 people¹, distributed in 15 municipalities that are divided into 57 parishes, and its capital is the city of Cumaná.

The Interdisciplinary Group to address the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in the state of Sucre, which participated in the preparation of this report, identified among the main problems that undermine the rights of people in the state: the rise in food prices that has brought hunger and malnutrition, the great decline of the health system, with increases in maternal and infant mortality, and the cancellation of education for children and adolescents with fewer resources, due to the Covid pandemic.

Furthermore, there is a deep contraction of economic production, with the loss of a large part of the industry. Fishing, an important economic activity that is a source of food for part of the population, has been paralyzed by fuel shortages. The situation of general poverty and the sustained deterioration of the quality of life keep people in a permanent survival situation.

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Breakdown of institutions and corruption created a profound health crisis, aggravated by the COVID pandemic

1. On several occasions during the past decades, the national government decreed emergencies in the health sector, but the decisions taken, instead of solving the problems, deepened the crisis. The violation of the right to health has been increasing with the deinstitutionalization and corruption, which in all its forms led to the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in the sector, aggravated by the COVID pandemic.

2. The Ministry of People's Power for Health has not published mortality yearbooks or epidemiological bulletins² since 2016³. The data that exist today are the product of monitoring work by civil society organizations, official government notifications to international agencies and estimates that they had to make in the absence of national statistics, complaints from health personnel, and journalistic work by digital media, many of which are now blocked in the country.

Denial in access to official statistics on mortality and diseases in the country has made alternative information necessary to protect the population's right to

Public health centers with severe shortage of supplies and medicines, and high inoperability of equipment, ambulances and health services

3. The public health centers in the state of Sucre present severe shortage of supplies and medicines, and in many times their efficacy and safety are not guaranteed. In 2019, the shortage reached 49% in the emergency area of the Dr. Andrés Gutiérrez Solís Hospital, located in Güiria, which provides care to a large part of the entire population of the Paria peninsula. This hospital does not have antibiotics or anti-inflammatory drugs. The imaging and X-ray

services were 72% inoperative and 51% of the operating rooms were out of service. Neither thermometers nor mechanical ventilators were available. Of the 40 beds available, only 20 were operational and the two ambulances were inoperative. In terms of specialized health personnel, this hospital only has one internist, one obstetrician and one orthopedic surgeon.

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4. A similar situation occurs at the Hospital Universitario Dr. Antonio Patricio de Alcalá, in the city of Cumaná. With a capacity of 140 beds, 40% have stopped operating. More than 70% of the surgical pavilions do not work or, if they do, only intermittently, and only 7% of the emergency services are fully operational. The situation at this hospital has worsened with the exodus of medical personnel, both residents and specialists, and approximately 30% of the nursing staff. The 331 rural centers that are part of the Sucre ambulatory network are technically inoperative, and the 18 Comprehensive Diagnostic Centers (CDI) are partially operational.

Irregularity of water and electricity in public hospitals causes insalubrity, which reduces health services, many overburdened or redirected to the pandemic

5. The deterioration of basic services in health centers is significant, such as the Patricio Alcalá University Hospital, which reports intermittent water and electricity services. In 2021, the hospital had between 6 and 12 hours a day of suspension of electricity service. Health unions warned about the critical unsanitary conditions in the adult emergency, intensive care, nephrology, and neonatology areas, as well as in the operating rooms. All persons end up being referred to the Dr. Santos Aníbal Dominicci Hospital in Carúpano, which has about 60 to 80 beds. However, as a result of the Covid pandemic, the hospital wards of the four services of that center were converted into units for the care of people with Covid. In 2019, according to the Chamber of the Pharmaceutical Industry, there was a 46% drop in units of medicines, such as analgesics, anti-inflammatory drugs and some antibiotics.

Increase in maternal and child deaths due to lack of prenatal care, deficit of specialists and shortage of supplies

6. In 2021, a spike in maternal deaths was recorded, exceeding those of 2018 and going back to the statistics of the 1970s. These deaths are related to the insalubrity and precariousness of the neonatal intensive care and delivery room areas. In the municipality of Bermudez, there has been an increase in the number of deaths of mothers and newborns treated at the Maternal-Children's Hospital of Carúpano. The causes of death are the lack of prenatal control due to the poor economic situation, the deficit of medical specialists and the

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shortage of supplies and medicines. The number of teenage pregnancies is much higher in the Altagracia parish of the Sucre municipality, which causes greater risks for the mother and her children.

Basic education schools in rural areas don't count with teachers, who don't have transportation or salaries to pay for travel

7. Cumaná, Carúpano and Güiria are the main cities of Sucre, but in the 1970' s and 1980' s there was a considerable investment in the creation of rural schools that increased the schooling of children and adolescents. They were remote places where teachers made great sacrifices to travel. Now the same situation is repeated, but due to lack of transportation, as a consequence of the scarcity of gasoline and the high cost of spare parts, in addition to the terrible

living conditions of the teachers, it is impossible for them to cover the costs of traveling to the schools. In addition, many of these schools had to close because of frequent thefts and vandalism of the infrastructure. In the schools, the School Feeding Program (PAE) is not functioning on a daily basis, but only when certain supplies arrive, which have been reduced by more than 90%. They only receive rice or pasta with some seasoning to give it flavor. And despite the efforts made by teachers for the return to school, there is no way to guarantee the quality of education. Schools do not have textbooks, teachers are untrained. Children go to school with a notebook and a pencil, they copy what the teacher puts on the blackboard and that's it.

8. Approximately 54% of elementary school students have no stability in class attendance, due to the lack of food, clothing and school materials. In secondary school, the dropout rate is 67% and in university, with the pandemic, the campuses are practically empty. The exodus of teachers has been massive. Both those who have gone to other countries or outside the state of Sucre, as well as those who were forced to dedicate to another activity in order to support their families. Private schools are facing difficulties in hiring area specialists because they

Massive teacher retirements and extreme economic deterioration in families increased school dropouts. The pandemic cancelled education for low-income children and adolescents

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are no longer available. On the other hand, the pandemic cancelled education. The online schooling system was not possible for the majority of Sucre families. According to ENCOVI data, 80% do not own a computer and more than 75% do not have a smartphone⁴. In some private schools an educational system was created where a pedagogical team sent work modules twice a week so that teachers could work with their students and this improved a little bit the accompaniment and desertion, but it did not eliminate it.

9. Food shortages are no longer the main problem in Sucre state. Today, families do not have the economic resources to buy it. People are eating poorly or have reduced consumption, and no programs are in place to address the deficiencies in food quality and quantity⁵. To cope with high food prices, families have sold assets, depriving themselves of their patrimony, in order to obtain food. In the middle class sectors, garage sales have increased for that purpose.

Nutritional deterioration responds to the extreme decline in economic income and the depletion of assets for eating. Reports indicate severe consequences of chronic and acute malnutrition in the child population

10. An investigation by the "Fundación de Derechos Humanos Estado Sucre - Incide", revealed that 90% of households spend almost 98% of their income on food expenses. The current precarious situation has led the population to look for alternatives, including young people dropping out school to work. In Caritas Venezuela reports, Sucre stands out as one of the states with a significant number of children under 5 years old suffering from severe acute malnutrition⁶. Some parents take turns to eat so as not to deprive their children of food. In the town of Caimancito, the first stop the children make before going to school, is a lady's house where they buy papelón to alleviate hunger, because there is no food in the schools and they do not know if there will be any in their homes. The children are showing low height and cognitive problems.

11. The state of Sucre has experienced a decline in production levels in the last four years. There are industrial zones that have become ghost towns. Less than 10% of them are functioning because businessmen have migrated, either to survive or because they have been vandalized. In addition, there is little or no production in the sugar factories in

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Cumanacoa and Cariaco, with the consequent paralyzation of companies and losses, even in the plantations.

Industrial and artisanal production has declined dramatically, turning areas where companies and farms used to exist into ghost towns

12. Production has also ceased due to the lack of inputs to combat the pests that destroy the crops, because Agropatria, a company expropriated by the State, is bankrupt. The same happens with the fishermen who do not have fuel to go to sea and do their daily work. This, in a state where the populations living from agriculture are much smaller in proportion to those living from fishing. The municipality Cruz Salmerón Acosta, for example, has only two fuel stations at the ends of the Araya peninsula. The long lines

and extortion that occur in the purchase and sale of fuel have even led fishermen to prefer to sell fuel rather than fish. All these variables influence not only the lack of food, but also the high cost derived from the decline of food production and distribution⁷.

References

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² Espacio Público. "Destituida Ministra de Salud tras publicación de boletines epidemiológicos" <https://espaciopublico.org/destituida-ministra-salud-publicacion-boletin/>

³ This occurred when the corresponding editions were released in 2015 and 2016, by gynecologist Antonieta Caporale, who ordered the publication of these reports in order to update them, and given that they had not been published since 2014.

⁴ ENCOVI. Entre emergencia humanitaria y pandemia. Available at: https://assets.website-files.com/5d14c6a5c4ad42a4e794d0f7/6153ad6fb92e4428cada4fb7_Presentacion%20ENCOVI%202021%20V1.pdf

⁵ El Pitazo. Sucre | 84 familias de Tarabacoa exigen agua potable y alimentos del Clap. <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/sucre-84-familias-de-tarabacoa-exigen-agua-potable-y-alimentos-del-clap/>

⁶ Caritas de Venezuela. Boletín Epidemiológico, primer trimestre 2021. <https://caritasvenezuela.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/12/BOLETIN-EPIDEMIOLOGICO-1ER-TRIMESTRE-2021-r-PARA-WEB.pdf>

⁷ El Post. Sembrar para comer y también para sobrevivir. <https://estoeselpost.com/sembrar-para-comer/>