

COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN VENEZUELA

Trujillo

Report 2019/2021

Located in the Andean region, the state of Trujillo, with its capital Trujillo, is bordered to the north by Zulia and Lara, to the east by Portuguesa, to the south by Barinas, to the southwest by Merida and to the west by Lake Maracaibo. Its 7,400 km² are inhabited by 767,289 people¹. It has 20 autonomous municipalities and 93 parishes, and its main cities are Trujillo, Valera, Boconó and Pampán. Although it has very rich soils for cultivation, the state of Trujillo has been one of the poorest states in Venezuela and poverty has increased alarmingly in recent years, due to the control exercised by the State over the productive processes.

The organizations that compose the Interdisciplinary Group to Address the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in the state of Trujillo², while preparing this report on the impact on human rights in the state between 2019 and 2021, highlighted among the main vulnerabilities: basic education schools in very poor conditions and with insufficient food, even though most of the students have returned to school; worrying increases in suicide rates, gang recruitment, violence, and child and adolescent trafficking, who are unprotected; a health system with no capacity for the care of people with health problems and a corrupt judicial system.

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Massive return to on-site classes due to the inaccessibility of remote education, but to physically deteriorated schools and without

1. In the state of Trujillo, the return to on-site classes in basic education is almost massive because the students themselves consider that they didn't learn anything from the virtual classes due to the COVID pandemic. Many children and adolescents had to wait for their parents' cell phones, when returning from work, to do school activities. However, the return to classrooms faces the great challenge of having to study in schools without water service and with severe infrastructure problems that

affect 95% of the campuses³.

2. In a visit to four municipalities in the state, people reported the deterioration of the school infrastructure, the lack of desks and internet. In the Liceo Antonio Nicolas Briceño, for example, the corridors look like caverns because there are no lights. In the urbanization La Floresta in the city of Valera, there are approximately 32 neighborhoods with a large population living in poverty and vulnerability. In all the schools of the sector, the physical deterioration of the facilities and the poor nutrition of the children is notable⁴. In the parishes of San Luis and Mercedes Diaz, desertion has been low, however, on-site activities have begun late, in contrast to the Catholic schools that began activities much earlier than the national kick-off date.

3. The School Feeding Program is sporadic and the aid from the Local Supply Committees (CLAP) arrive every three months⁵. In a survey on food donations to basic education schools by international humanitarian aid agencies, it has been found that these donations are only reaching children and adolescents in early and special education. The humanitarian response in terms of school nutrition is so far limited and insufficient. In addition, in most schools the infrastructure of the kitchens is quite defective. They are damaged and in some cases they work with "reverberos" or portable gas stoves. At the Fabricio Ojeda school, when it rains, the kitchen floods.

Feeding in basic education schools is sporadic and donations from the humanitarian response are limited and insufficient

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Malnutrition in children and adults is increasing, as well as the strategies of selling assets or meal deprivation to survive

4. Poor diets are increasing nutritional deterioration in both children and adults. Most of the population grows vegetables at home and eats legumes to avoid starvation. In the municipality of Candelaria, the deterioration caused by malnutrition in children and adolescents is serious⁶. Adults with malnutrition had to sell or change some of the appliances in their homes in order to eat. Many parents stop eating to feed their children and other people had to eat from

garbage dumps⁷.

5. The autonomous universities run extremely deficient budgets. The University Council decreed an emergency. The sanitary facilities are in very bad condition and have no water service. There is no internet on campus and thefts are constant. The cafeterias are out of service. The students of the Trujillo campus of Universidad de Los Andes requested to have on-site classes, but the terrible infrastructure conditions do not allow it, therefore, remote activities continued. The libraries have not been restocked due to lack of resources, so they have resorted to donations. Two years ago there was no money to pay for the web domain and the university was on the verge of losing it⁸. Academic quality has dropped because teachers and students lack technological tools. There is also no budget for academic promotions.

State universities without budget and with great physical and academic deterioration have caused massive desertion of students and professors

6. As a consequence of the great physical and academic deterioration, student desertion is very high in all universities in Trujillo, both public and private. Most of the students do not have time to study because they must work to help their families. After having three autonomous universities that depend on public funds, Trujillo now has only one. The number of students has dropped from eight thousand to two thousand. There are university careers that haven't opened because there are not enough students due to lack of public transportation. However, the professors continue to attend the students.

8. Suicide rates have increased among children and adolescents. A year ago a child committed suicide because there was no food at home and he couldn't help his family.

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Suicides, recruitment of children and adolescents by organized gangs and domestic violence worsened during the months of the pandemic

There is also child sexual exploitation. In 6 of the 20 municipalities of the State, especially in the municipalities of La Ceiba and Andres Bello, criminal gangs try to recruit children and adolescents, threatening them with rape if they resist. Acts of violence in homes have also increased. Parents' frustration with the economic situation, coupled with confinement, contributed to aggressive behavior against younger family members. Recently, an 18-month-old girl was

raped by a family member⁹. There are no domestic violence prevention programs in the state. In addition, Trujillo has become a state for human trafficking, including children and adolescents, especially of indigenous people. The extortion network operates with the complicity of officials. The Service for the Protection of Children and Adolescents is the only one in the entire state and it doesn't have enough counselors. The service also doesn't have spaces equipped to receive children and adolescents.

9. Most communities in Trujillo have been without water service for up to a month¹⁰ and failures in solid waste collection are serious. Some sectors are more affected than others with frequent power outages, happening up to three times a day. Communities located in the Panamerican axis, which is very vulnerable, go eight to nine hours without electricity service¹¹. In addition to deficiencies in the water supply and frequent power outages, there is also a shortage of fuel¹². The drop in the capacity to provide drinking water services in the state is of 89%¹³.

Severe failures in the access to basic drinking water, electricity and sanitation services, as well as gasoline shortages

Public hospitals do not have specialized medical personnel, supplies and medicines for the care of the people who seek their services

10. In Trujillo's public hospitals, there is a shortage of specialized medical personnel, and the few that remain must work double shifts to meet the demand. There are only integral community doctors. The shortage of nursing personnel is similar, most of them have left due to low salaries, persecution and labor harassment. In the Central Hospital of Valera, there used to be 90 pediatricians and today there are only 32 left, there are only 4 neonatologists and 1 neurosurgeon, most of

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them left the hospital due to labor harassment or threats, and others emigrated looking for better living conditions¹⁴.

The intensive care unit has 6 beds, with 2 of them assigned to pediatrics. There are only two pediatric wards, and the corridor that separates them have 15 lamps, with only 2 having a light bulb. The hospitals have no regular provision of supplies and medicines. At the Rafael Rangel Hospital in Boconó, the nursing staff doesn't even have a blood pressure monitor to attend hospitalized people in intermediate care. The bathrooms don't work due to lack of water¹⁵, as in the Pedro Emilio Carrillo Hospital in Valera, where people had to denounce these failures, and where the nutrition service doesn't work either, occasionally they give some food to the patients¹⁶.

Farmers eat what they manage to grow, leaving them without economic resources for an agricultural production they can commercialize

11. Farmers in Trujillo do not have the resources to cover production costs, which are increasingly higher. Furthermore, they are being affected by unfair government policies. The coffee included in the CLAP bags is paste made from coffee and corn¹⁷, and an 80% of the coffee production has been destroyed¹⁸. In the highlands of Trujillo, people consume what they grow, such as bananas and carrots, as well as milk, eggs and beef; while in the lowlands people grow bananas and cassava, which is what they eat.

12. La Ceiba, considered the third most violent municipality in the country¹⁹, is located in the Pan-American axis of Trujillo. People are extorted to pay "vaccines" to be allowed to work²⁰. Recently, a farmer had to leave the country for not paying the vaccines demanded by organized crime gangs. In the lowland areas of Trujillo, the State has no control over the territory. These gangs are in charge there, including the so-called "road pirates", who set up roadblocks to blackmail truck drivers.

Producers and workers are victims of extortion by organized crime gangs controlling territories

COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN VENEZUELA

Trujillo

Report 2019/2021



Corruption operates with total impunity both in the justice system and in public administration

13. Corruption has penetrated the public administration and judicial bodies. In Trujillo there are mafias within the courts. Judges and bailiffs charge for rulings. There are connections between private lawyers and judges who dominate the system and people deprived of their liberty are extorted by both parties. There is no impartial and independent justice. Cases of extortion are also seen in public entities of the mayor's office, where it costs up to US\$5 or more to obtain a cadastral record.

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COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN VENEZUELA

Trujillo

Report 2019/2021



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