



Indicative, non exhaustive list of
**CONFLICT-AFFECTED
AND HIGH-RISK AREAS**
under Regulation (EU) 2017/821

This report is an individual CAHRA report from the indicative, non-exhaustive, regularly updated list of conflict-affected and high-risk areas (CAHRAs) (as defined under Regulation 2017/821).

This report stems from a website presenting an indicative, non-exhaustive, and regularly updated list of conflict-affected and high-risk areas (CAHRAs) under Regulation 2017/821. This website and its associated reports were developed with funding from the European Union through call for tenders N° TRADE2018/G3/G11 (*Revised*).

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VENEZUELA

REGION(S)

Amazonas, Anzoátegui, Apure, Aragua, Barinas, Bolívar, Carabobo, Cojedes, Delta Amacuro, Dependencias Federales, Distrito Capital, Falcón, Guárico, Lara, Mérida, Miranda, Monagas, Nueva Esparta, Portuguesa, Sucre, Táchira, Trujillo, Vargas, Yaracuy, Zulia

AREA STATUS

 High-risk area

RELEVANT COMMODITIES

 Gold

Overview of assessment

Venezuela is considered a high-risk area under Regulation 2017/821. Several organisations have reported human rights and international law violations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB). In particular, the following issues have been identified.

The OHCHR, Amnesty International and HRW report ongoing violent repression of dissent by the government since 2014, which amount to crimes against humanity (Amnesty International, 2022 & 2023b; HRW, 2022, 2023 & 2024; OHCHR, 2020b). These organisations report a widespread pattern of extrajudicial killings, temporary enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture carried out with impunity by the police's Special Action Force (Fuerza de Acción Especial de la Policía Nacional Bolivariana [FAES]) and by armed pro-government gangs called 'colectivos' (Amnesty International, 2023a & 2023c).

In addition, military forces have been involved in the policing of public demonstrations with excessive force, and arbitrary detentions, with the military justice system often used to try civilians (Amnesty International, 2023a, 2023b & 2023c; OHCHR, 2019 & 2021b; HRW, 2024). Despite a slight decrease in the number of demonstrations in 2022, impediments to freedom of expression remain, with the use of repressive measures and arbitrary arrests and detention of political opponents, activists, union leaders and civil society organisations continuing (Crisis Group, 2022; HRW, 2023 & 2024; Amnesty International, 2023b & 2023d; OHCHR, 2023). HRW reports a slight decrease in instance of human right violations against government opponents, including sexual and gender violence, ill-treatment and torture, arbitrary arrests and detention, enforced disappearance or death. However there are reports of an increase in the use of targeted repression tactics, including to watch and harass political opponents (HRW, 2024).

The state of emergency declared in March 2020 to combat the COVID-19 pandemic reportedly led to an increase in arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings and has been used by authorities to intensify their control over the population (Amnesty International, 2022; OHCHR, 2021b; HRW, 2022 & 2023). Those arbitrarily detained included journalists, healthcare workers, human rights defenders and lawyers, political opponents, citizens perceived as dissidents, and military personnel accused of plotting against the government as well as, in some cases, suspects' family members (Amnesty International, 2022, 2023a, 2023c & 2023d; OHCHR, 2021a & 2021b; Crisis Group, 2022). Detainees have reported several forms of abuse, including verbal and physical assaults, beatings, and forms of torture such as electric shock, suffocation, near drowning and sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2022, 2023a & 2023b; OHCHR, 2021a, 2021b & 2023). The OHCHR also documents cases of prolonged detention and enforced disappearances (OHCHR, 2021a, 2021b & 2023). The justice system's lack of independence has reportedly translated into impunity for those responsible for these abuses, allowing the recurrence of such violations (OHCHR, 2021a & 2023; HRW, 2023 & 2024; Amnesty International, 2023b).

The OHCHR, Amnesty International and HRW reports several instances of censorship and attacks against the

press and human rights organisations. Media outlets and human rights organisations have reported cyberattacks, verbal harassment, physical assaults on workers, theft of equipment, arbitrary detentions and in some cases, forced closure (Amnesty International, 2023b & 2023c; HRW, 2023 & 2024; OHCHR 2021a). The situation reportedly worsened after the state of emergency was declared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Amnesty International, 2022; HRW, 2023; OHCHR, 2019 & 2021a). The OHCHR and Amnesty International further reports restrictive measures against media outlets, including a peak in radio station closures in 2022 and blockages of media websites (OHCHR, 2023; Amnesty International 2023c).

The ILAB reports that children in Venezuela engage in child labour, such as domestic and informal sector work. Children are also used in the worst forms of child labour, such as commercial sexual exploitation. This sometimes results from human trafficking, as Venezuelan law does not sufficiently prohibit the trafficking of children. Children are also reportedly exploited by criminal organisations. In addition, children from rural areas, Afro-descendant children, children with disabilities, pregnant girls and adolescent mothers reportedly face education barriers (ILAB, 2017).

The OHCHR and Amnesty International also report that Indigenous peoples face abuses in several forms, including the excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, ill-treatment, forced displacement, sexual and gender-based violence and violations of their rights to maintain their customs and traditions (Amnesty International, 2023a & 2023d; OHCHR, 2019, 2021b & 2023; HRW, 2023).

The OHCHR, HRW and Amnesty International report illegal gold mining in Venezuela, resulting in high levels of violence and widespread human rights abuses linked to disputes over the control of mines by organised criminal groups and, in some cases, security forces (Amnesty International, 2023a; HRW, 2023a & 2024; ILAB, 2017; OHCHR, 2020a, 2021b & 2023). These organised armed groups reportedly exercise control over the mines through violent beatings and corporal punishment of workers, while security forces reportedly collect bribes from them (HRW, 2021; ILAB, 2017; OHCHR, 2020a). The OHCHR and Amnesty International further report allegations of sexual violence against women and girls, trafficking and sexual exploitation in gold mining areas (OHCHR 2023; Amnesty International 2023a).

Illegal miners tend to be exploited by these groups, working and living in hazardous conditions and exposed to mercury contamination and diseases such as malaria. The use of mercury for gold extraction is illegal in Venezuela but is reportedly widely used in illegal mines with a serious effect on workers' health and the environment as well as neighbouring indigenous people (Amnesty International, 2021; OHCHR, 2020a & 2023; HRW, 2023 & 2024). Illegal mining has also led to attacks on Indigenous peoples in the Amazon region, violating their natural rights and forcing Indigenous children to work in illegal gold mines in slavery-like conditions (ILAB, 2017; OHCHR, 2019, 2020 & 2023; HRW 2023; Amnesty International 2023c). Amnesty international further reports human violations in illegal mining areas, including deaths, ill-treatment and impunity (Amnesty International, 2023b).

Relevance to the scope of Regulation 2017/821

Venezuela is considered relevant to the scope of Regulation 2017/821 for the following reasons:

- Venezuela is characterised by the presence of gold production activities, according to data from Opaxe (Opaxe, 2024).
- Artisanal gold mining activities are reported by OHCHR, HRW and Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2021, 2023a & 2023c; HRW, 2024; OHCHR, 2020a).
- Production activities for gold are reported in the British Geological Survey between 2014 and 2020 (BGS, 2024).

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