



## *Fact Sheet:* **HIGHER EDUCATION IN VENEZUELA**

### **Background**

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After decades of neglect and neoliberal policies under previous governments, the vast majority of the Venezuelan population, over 70%, was excluded from higher education.

In 1998, just 3% of GDP was spent on education. The former Education Minister, Aristóbulo Isturiz, said that Venezuela's previous education policy was based on two factors: privatization and exclusion.<sup>1</sup>

Following President Chavez's election, a new constitution was drawn up. Article 102 of the Constitution considers education to be a "human right and a fundamental social duty," and is complimented by Article 103, which establishes that "every person has the right to a full, high-quality, ongoing education under conditions and circumstances of equality... education offered at State institutions is free of charge up to the undergraduate university level."

### **Higher Education policy under the Chavez government**

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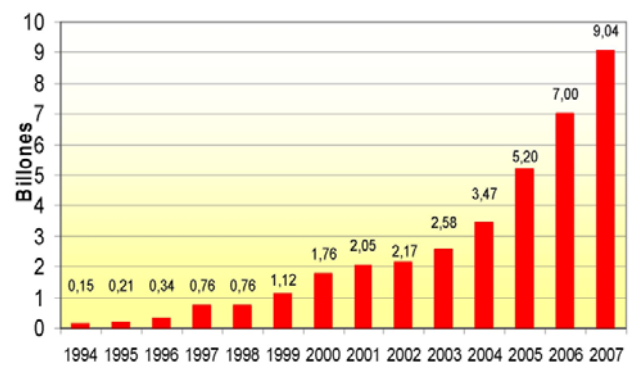
#### Huge increase in investment

There has been a huge increase in investment in higher education. Spending on higher

education has gone up 800% since the election of President Chavez.

The increase in spending is also indicative of the value that the Venezuelan government places on higher education. At a February 2011 meeting on education, the Venezuelan Ambassador to the UK and former Higher Education Minister in the Chavez government said that the government did not like to use the word "spending" in relation to funding education because "it is an investment that gives great social as well as economic returns"<sup>2</sup>

The graph below illustrates the sharp increase in education funding:



#### Massive expansion in capacity

Enrolment in higher education institutions has gone up by 200% since the election of President Chavez. There are over two million university students in Venezuela compared to

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<sup>1</sup> [http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1079#\\_ftn1](http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1079#_ftn1)

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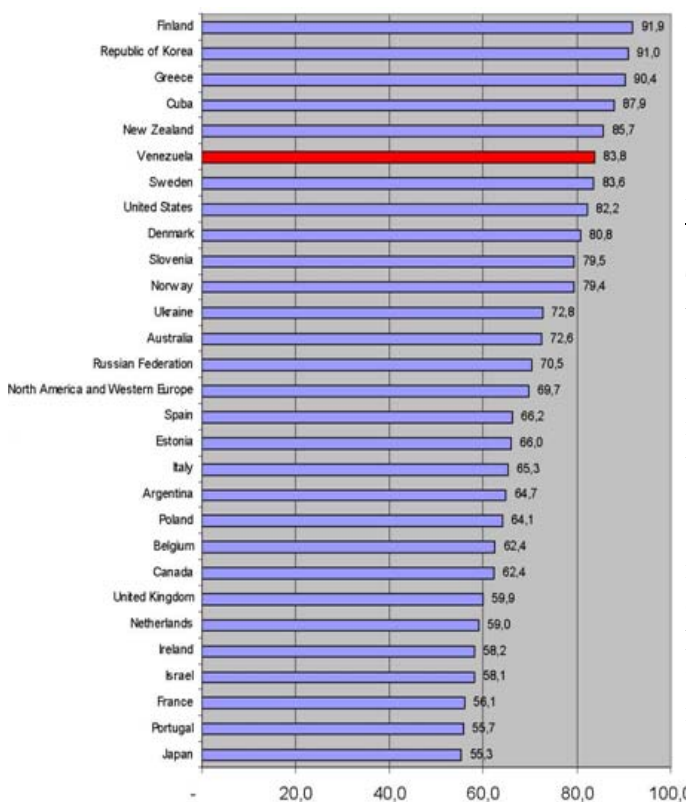
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.embavenez-uk.org/news/1368.asp>



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just 600,000 in 1998. Venezuela now has the second highest percentage of students in university in Latin America.

This graph with information supplied by UNESCO illustrates how Venezuela compares to developing countries in terms of university enrolment.



Thirteen new universities have been created in the 12 years of the Bolivarian Revolution:

### Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela (UBV)

It is one of the largest national universities in Venezuela and has campuses all over the country and focuses on inclusion of previously excluded sectors, a socialised education that

has at its core ties with the community. There are currently 230,000 students enrolled.

The former rector of the Bolivarian University in Caracas, Maria Ejilda Castellano, said that the institution is designed to benefit the poor precisely by encouraging the open exchange of ideas and that the Bolivarian University is based on UNESCO principles for education: "The professional produced by this institution will work for the transformation of society. She will be a critical thinker who can stimulate others and generate questions."

### Universidad Indígena de Venezuela

The Indigenous University of Venezuela is based in Bolivar State and was inaugurated in 2010. The university is the first of its kind in Latin America to cater exclusively to the 11 indigenous communities in Venezuela. The university offers a variety of programmes such as history, ethnology, indigenous languages, Spanish language, agriculture and ecology. It is an opportunity for the indigenous communities of Venezuela to reclaim their heritage and make decisions about how they want to educate themselves and strengthen indigenous traditions for future generations.<sup>3</sup>

Other key new universities include the Sports University of the People of the South, The National University of Arts, National Experimental University of Sur del Lago and the National Experimental University of Sur del Lago.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.embavenez-uk.org/news/1367.asp>

<sup>4</sup> <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5526>



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### Mission Sucre

Mission Sucre is a scholarship programme that was launched in 2003 to provide free university and ongoing higher education to over two million Venezuelan adults. Many of the new universities operate under the auspices of Mission Sucre.

In response to the opposition's false claims about the education law, tens of thousands of students took to the streets in defence of the law<sup>6</sup>

### New Education Law

In August 2009, the Organic Education Law was passed to democratise higher education and include professors, students, workers, and local community members in the decision-making process.

12th April, 2011

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The law stipulates students will have the right to an equal vote in the election of university authorities, evaluate professors and participate in self-evaluation, freely express opinions, access university administrative records, and receive a range of services including housing, transportation, meals, health care, and monthly stipends, among other rights. The law also establishes a series of university councils that are to be elected on each campus through a one-person, one-vote democratic system that includes students, professors, administrators, wage workers.

However, the Venezuelan opposition has criticised the law saying that it turns students into "state employees". Diana Raby Research Fellow at Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Liverpool said: "the idea that the reforms will turn students into 'state employees' is simply a thinly veiled attack on the student stipend which helps support thousands of lower-income students".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.embavenez-uk.org/news/1367.asp>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5807>