



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

Fact Sheet: **HOUSING IN VENEZUELA**

Background

A chronic shortage of suitable housing is one of the greatest challenges that the current Venezuelan government has inherited. **Decades of abandonment and devastating economic policies under previous governments** lead to mass migration from the rural areas to urban centres.

This stark imbalance between urban and rural populations is largely a result of the 1970s oil boom. Before that, roughly two-thirds of Venezuelans lived in rural areas. However, once the petrodollars began to flow in, a succession of governments began to neglect the countryside and focus its resources in the petro industry. Today, about **90% of Venezuela's 25 million people live in urban areas.**

With no political will to integrate or provide services for the millions flooding into Caracas, a sprawling and chaotic network of slums emerged covering the hill sides that surround the Venezuelan capital. For President Chavez, the slums represent "the result of a century of misery and abandonment by previous governments".

There is a current shortfall of 1.8 million homes in Venezuela. If the figures include existing homes that are built in high risk areas

or with insufficient access to public services, the figure rises to 2.5 million.¹

Effects of the 2010 floods

The 2010 floods have had a devastating effect on the country. The **heaviest rains in 40 years** hit Venezuela in early November **killing 35 people, leaving 130,000 people homeless**, infrastructure badly damaged and over 40% of Venezuelan territory affected.

To deal with the long term consequences of the floods, the Venezuelan government has set up a **\$2.3 billion (10 billion bolivars) special fund** for those affected. The funds, drawn from the National Reserve Fund, will

be used to aid "an integral reconstruction plan" for every community impacted by the rains.²

The government has earmarked \$1 billion USD for investment in new housing this year with the aim of creating "at least 25 thousand homes."³

In addition to this, President Chavez announced 9th of January that a further \$500

"Slums in Caracas are the result of a century of misery and abandonment by previous governments,"

President Hugo Chavez

¹http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/miscelaneas/mision_habitat.html

²<http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5842>

³<http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5685>



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million recovered from frozen U.S accounts will be also be used to construct housing.⁴

Housing policy under the Chavez government

Article 82 of the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution states: “Every person has the right to adequate, safe, comfortable, and hygienic housing with essential basic services, including a habitat that humanizes the family, the neighborhood, and community relations,” and stipulates that the fulfillment of this right is “the shared responsibility of citizens and the state.”⁵

To uphold every citizen’s right to suitable housing, the Chavez government has embarked on one of the most ambitious and far-reaching strategies in Latin America in recent years. A number of government missions laws have been passed to aid this.

Government Missions

Mission Housing Venezuela

The new strategy was announced in February 2011.

The mission’s strategy is based on **five key areas**:

The first is a census to identify which families don’t own homes or live in precarious conditions. The second area is the compilation of land records of where construction is possible. The third involves

⁴ <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5928>

⁵Venezuelan Constitution:

http://www.analitica.com/bitbliblioteca/venezuela/constitucion_ingles.pdf

finding out which construction companies of various types, including national and foreign companies, and communal council-run enterprises are willing to work towards housing solutions. The fourth area involves evaluating the types of financing that the private sector offers. The fifth area concerns the materials and technology that are available.

As part of the new mission, the government plans to present 1,700 apartments in the “residential city” of Fabricio Ojeda, currently under construction in Zulia state, to those needing housing. The “city” is being constructed on land donated by PDVSA, Venezuela’s state owned petroleum company. Chavez said the government would allocate the apartments, which will be subsidised 100% in some cases, 80% in others, and 20% in others. Priority will be given to those people who are in the refuges [due to the flooding emergency] and to families who live in the barrios, who are in an imminent situation of danger.

President Chavez also recently declared **17 “vital areas”** across the country totaling 2,703 hectares where the government plans to construct 150,951 houses. He was able to make the declaration under the emergency land law passed in January 2011, which aims to put unused or abandoned land towards housing construction. The land will come under control of the Presidential Commission for Housing. Under the new plans, the government aims to build two million homes between 2011 and 2017.

Mission Habitat 2003:

The program also seeks to develop suitable and integrated housing zones that also make available a **full range of social services from**



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education to healthcare. Under this programme, the government has set the target of providing universal suitable housing by the year 2021.

Mission Vuelta al Campo ("Return to the Countryside"): Mission Vuelta al Campo seeks to encourage impoverished and unemployed urban Venezuelans to return to the countryside.

Urban Land Law 2009

Venezuela's National Assembly passed the Urban Land Law unanimously in August 2009. The law states that "unused urban land must be at the service of the public" and regulates the use of such land with the aim of combating the housing deficit in.

The aim of the law is to **put an end to the latifundio, or large land ownership, in urban areas** which has contributed to the housing shortage in Venezuela.

Specifically, the law says that owners should sell their land to the state if the land is "occupied by buildings in a state of ruin, buildings with construction failures, that are deteriorated, that were constructed over 60 years ago or that have been declared uninhabitable."

The law also applies to land abandoned by its owners, land without construction and "any other land as decided by the National Executive" in urban areas. The government will then buy the land and put it to social use.⁶

Land titles

Venezuelans who live in self-built homes on occupied land, which is the case for nearly all of Venezuela's poor, can appeal to the government for title to the land.

Appeals can be made via Urban Land Committees, local neighbourhood committees that work on the principle of participatory democracy, that create maps of the local area. These maps are then verified by the National Technical Office and land titles are drawn up on the basis of this.

The reasoning behind the drive to provide land titles is the need to **democratise urban landholdings and provide residents with property rights to their informally constructed homes.** The project intends to give inhabitants security that the land they have been living on for many years now is theirs and that they will be protected from eviction.

An added bonus is that with these titles the opportunity of **economic activity increases** such as taking out bank loans. This becomes much easier when citizens have assets to their name.

However, it is not just a case of the government handing out land titles. President Chavez has emphasized that the delivery of land titles needs to be accompanied by further community projects to improve the quality of life for residents: "Wherever we deliver land titles, there should be a link to habitat projects, such as housing, water, electricity and programs to ensure local production and

⁶ <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/4726>



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development. It's not just the title, but the rehabilitation of spaces".⁷

By 2010 over 500,000 titles had been handed out with the accompanying provisions for public services.⁸

Law of Land and Development 2001

In delivering the land titles, the Venezuelan government also hopes to **reverse the trend migration to urban centres** by linking the countryside with the city through the granting of farmlands to urban residents.

"I want to go beyond urban lands. I want to grant rural lands to urban residents so they can go and work the land and have the credits, technology, and machinery to produce and process food products", explained President Chavez in September 2010.⁹ See also Mission Vuelta al Campo.

Indigenous communities receive land rights

Venezuelan Indigenous Rights Minister, Nicia Maldonado, said that during the past eight years the Venezuelan government has handed over almost a million hectares of land titles to the indigenous peoples of various regions of Venezuela.

Minister Nicia Maldonado assured that along with the recognition of land titles, the government will provide financial support for projects of integral development and housing

⁷ <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5643>

⁸ <http://www.radiomundial.com.ve/yvke/noticia.php?455431>

⁹ <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5643>

for the indigenous communities of Pumé, Yaruro, Kariña and Warao, the first peoples of the states of Apure, Anzoátegui, and Bolívar.¹⁰

International cooperation to boost housing

President Hugo Chavez and Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates recently signed a number of agreements between the two countries, including the construction of 12,512 houses by the **Portuguese** company Lena and three factories of premade housing materials, as well as other agreements to strengthen Venezuela's national production.¹¹

As many as 40,000 houses will be built in Caracas and other regions in the next two years through an agreement with **China** International Trust and Investment Corporation.¹²

Venezuela and **Iran** have also signed a number of cooperation agreements to promote housing and urban development in both countries, including the construction of 15,000 homes in the Caracas community of Mariche.

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For more news and information about Venezuela, please visit our website:

www.embavenez-uk.org

¹⁰ <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/2543>

¹¹ <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5398>

¹² http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=258506&Itemid=1



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