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### **Poverty in Venezuela**

How can a person be poor, but still make 1 million dollars a day? That's what's happening in Venezuela. Venezuela used to be part of the wealthy portion of Latin America. The country has the largest oil reserves in the world. Venezuela exports 1 million barrels of oil a day, but citizens live in poverty. In 2010, Venezuela exported 2.4 million barrels of oil a day. They made 6.1 million dollars. Where does the money go? The country has also in the past exported great amounts of coffee and fruit. Many of the problems with the economy are created by the governments corruption and selfishness. Ever since Hugo Chavez became president in 1999 Venezuela fell into a crisis.

### **Family Characteristics**

88.8% of the population live in urban areas while the 11.2% live in rural areas. Average families in Venezuela have 3 to 4 people in their household. Although in many cases, multiple families live in one house. Most families don't have access to water in their homes, and even basic necessities like shampoo and soap are scarce. Venezuelans rarely have three meals a day, breakfast in the morning, dinner at noon, and supper in the evening.

Venezuelans usually grow, steal, or beg for their own food. The lucky ones who have jobs and earn money stand in lines for hours to receive a food box from the government. As of March 1st monthly minimum wage is at \$6.03 US dollars. That is not enough to feed families because prices for food items are skyrocketing. In just three days, the price of an item can increase. At a market in down Caracas a carton of eggs could cost \$14.40 US dollars. This has resulted in many recently riots and looting. Venezuelans will go into stores and take everything from meat to sauce to cash in the register. (Otis, 2018) Citizens have lost an average of 25 pounds. (Sequera, 2018) Children and adults have been seen digging through trash bins looking for morsels of food.

News reporter Jose Ramos recently went to Caracas, the state's capital, to interview president Nicolás Maduro. Ramos showed Maduro a video of two kids looking through trash looking for food. Maduro stood up and ended the interview. He then confiscated the crew's cameras and asked Ramos to leave the country along with his colleagues. Maduro has taken the citizens' right of speech.

In Venezuela the education is free from kindergarten to 12th grade. Not many people however want to teach since the pay is so minimum. Only 20-30% of students end up going to college and earning a degree after high school. Although many children don't attend school because of their living situation. Families are more worried about setting food on the table than educating their children.

Hospitals in Venezuela could be compared to the 19th century due to hospitals lacking space, staff, medication, equipment, and technology. The number of dying infants has gone up over the past 2 years. "The death of a baby is our daily bread," said Dr. Olseydy Camejo a surgeon in Caracas, Venezuela. (Casey, 2016). Jobs are hard to find in Venezuela as a result of businesses closing down. They can't afford to stay open, no businesses means no jobs, no jobs means no work, which means no income for families. The few people who do have jobs earn about \$1.14 a month. Since a lot of Venezuelans live in poverty, they don't have access to food, hospitals/clinics, and electricity. Because there isn't much electricity, the government only works twice a week to save what little energy they have.

### **Venezuela's Demographics**

As of 2017, Venezuela has 32,567,401 million people. (Venezuela Population (LIVE)) Venezuela's government type is a federal republic, although most argue saying it is a dictatorship. The President, Nicolás Maduro, has been in office since April, 19th, 2013, being reelected in January 2019.

Even though Venezuela's government is corrupted, Venezuela is a very beautiful place and is just 8 degrees above the equator, which means that they have a very warm climate. Lowlands are usually tropical. Up in the mountain range, temperatures can drop below 48 degrees. Venezuela has a rainy season from May to December. During those months there is a possibility of flooding in low lying areas like Llano and many other valleys. The dry season in Venezuela is from November to April. With the climate in January and February being the cooler months. July and August are the hottest out of the months. (Venezuela) Farming is not common in Venezuela because of the lack of technology and equipment. In 1998 only 4% of Venezuela's land was used to grow crops.

### **Challenge and impact**

Venezuela has never been this close to collapsing. Life for citizens are only getting worse. Many Venezuelans have moved to neighboring countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru and Chile. A major reason for people leaving the country is because mothers need medication for their children. Many kids have malnutrition, and the number of infant deaths has been increasing over the years. The mortality rate for babies under 4 weeks old went from .2% in 2012 to 2% in 2017. Baby formula is difficult to find, so mothers have turned to cornstarch mixed with milk or cream of rice. However, this, of course, doesn't provide babies with the necessary nutrients to grow healthy.

Venezuela's streets are now filled with violence. Older children have also turned to gangs to obtain the food they need. Although most people wouldn't consider it real food, the kids organize fights and the winner receives food scraps found in garbage cans from the wealthy parts of Venezuela (Wight, 2018). Since children aren't educated, they don't have a chance at getting a proper job. This is a problem because then that generation has children, and their children will do the same thing, it's just a cycle. If Venezuela doesn't act quickly, they are in for a disastrous future.

### **Solutions and Recommendations**

A government's corruption isn't the easiest thing to fix, but it's possible. Many people believe a war should start, a revolution. Venezuelans, whether they're citizens or government workers, should not risk their lives when at the end of the day the country is poor because of an incompetent man. So first thing is getting Nicolás Maduro out of office. As of January 2019 Juan Guaidó had named himself as president of Venezuela. With his leadership skills and connections with the United States, he could be Venezuela's savior.

How ever many Venezuelans disagree, they call Guaidó a Trojan horse. They believe Trump wants to invade Venezuela to get a hold of the oil reserves. But Maduro isn't doing any good for the country. He declines food and medical aid from other countries(Venezuela's Most Vulnerable).

On February 22, Maduro closed the Brazilian border. He then ordered that the first three trucks of aid to be burned before they reached the border. Maduro will only accept aid under his conditions, which involves him getting political power. Citizens have gotten so tired of his actions to the point where Maduro had an assassination attempt in August 2018. It's important that he's out of office because if people, countries, or organizations try to help, he'll just take the money or reject the support.

In June of 2018, European commission gave Venezuela 47 million dollars. That wasn't used for Venezuela's benefit. Their president only helps the country if it benefits him in some way. Venezuela

makes a lot of money exporting oil. That money could be used to build larger hospitals, buy medical equipment, food aid, medication, and pay for electricity.

Lima Group has been recently meeting and coming up with strategies to help Venezuela. They could also ask for help from organizations like Save the Children and the United Nations Environment Program. They could be funded with the money Venezuela makes on oil exports and money other countries donate.

In Peru there is something called The Happiness Plan happening. Children in refugee camps have a safe space to act like children again. They are allowed to play, color, read ext. Many of the kids are there because they were left behind in Venezuela and have traveled to find their parents.

Once the country starts getting back on their feet again, they could make a program for adults to teach and offer them birth control. Raising a child is very expensive; it's an extra mouth to feed. By educating adults about the different contraception methods, we lower the number of births and that way parents don't have to worry about a malnourished child.

Venezuela needs a treatment program that focuses on HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria (AmerQuarterly). We could create a charity for people from other countries to donate to and also ask the World Health Organization to get involved.

Venezuela could also stop being so dependent on oil, because they have fruits and coffee to export too. If they face problems with the oil production, they will have other things to rely on. Money is also a big factor in Venezuela's downfall. The government needs to stop printing money to get out of debt, it will only lower the value of the currency. The exchange rate needs to also be fixed and stabilized. In addition, they must learn to budget and regular checks should be made to ensure money is being used for Venezuela's benefit. The government can also open up business so people can get jobs. They can also ask the citizens for help to pump out the oil. Once the government pays for the exported oil; they pay the citizens.

Another solution includes farming. Venezuela used to be a proud exporter of coffee, but now they trade oil with Nicaragua for coffee. Which is a total waste of oil product. Why trade something so valuable for something you already have, it's pointless. There's good farmland outside of Caracas; farmers could grow crops to feed the starving people and to also export. More economically advanced countries, like the United States, could donate farming equipment. Equipment prices in Venezuela have increased immensely since the collapse of the currency.

There is however a solution for everything. What could be old and useless to us could be new and helpful to them. People say great things take time, for Venezuela it's true. They are going to have to start from square one save themselves.

In conclusion, Venezuela has the resources to live on, they just have a dysfunctional government and economy. The socialist president is no good for the country. He only thinks about himself and he ignores his citizens. Something that's been breaking for years can't be fixed overnight. It's going to take a very long time, but it's possible to bring Venezuela to what it used to be before Hugo Chavez became president on February 2, 1999. Venezuela is going to have to completely restart to save themselves from further disaster. The country can't be saved with the economy and government system they have right now. Children are dying because the government can't budget. Citizens need to become a priority not a minority.

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