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18 May 2018

VEN106113.E

Venezuela: The homeland card (carnet de la patria), including issuance procedures, usage, and physical characteristics; extent to which homeland cards have been distributed (2016-May 2018)

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1. Homeland Card

The National Radio of Venezuela (Radio Nacional de Venezuela, RNV), the government's public radio station, reports that in January 2017, the government of Venezuela launched the homeland card, a [translation] "tool" to "broaden the policies to protect the people, increase efficiency and efficacy, and increase the deployment capacity of the national government" (RNV [2017]). The Ministry of People's Power for Communications and Information (Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Comunicación y la Información, MIPPCI) indicates that the homeland card is a

[translation] "means for social justice and inclusion that connects the people directly with their President; without red tape, bureaucracy, intermediaries and corruption" (Venezuela 22 Jan. 2018). Sources indicate that the homeland card is an identity document for the delivery of social programs by the government (TeleSUR 15 Jan. 2018; Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 5, 8) through its [translation] "missions" (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 5; RNV 2 Nov. 2017). Sources indicate that these "missions" include programs for people with disabilities, pregnant women (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 8; Venezuela 22 Jan. 2018), and university students (Venezuela 22 Jan. 2018). TeleSUR, a Latin American multimedia public service platform headquartered in Caracas, indicates that through the homeland card, the government has provided medicine, surgeries, housing, pensions, and employment for young people (TeleSUR 15 Jan. 2018). CE Noticias Financieras, a news source on Latin America, indicates that public transportation subsidies will soon be transferred to students, through the homeland card (CE Noticias Financieras 31 Jan. 2018). The Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International indicates that some of the programs include Youth Day Bonus (Bono del Día de la Juventud), Christmas Bonus (Bono Navideño), and Carnival Bonus (Bono de Carnaval) (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 8). Sources indicate that around 16,595,000 people have registered for the homeland card (TeleSUR 15 Jan. 2018; CE Noticias Financieras 3 Apr. 2018).

In April 2018, sources reported that Delcy Rodríguez, President of the National Constituent Assembly (Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, ANC), proposed a homeland card for business owners in order to [translation] "organize the relationship between the State and the private sector," and to assign raw materials and foreign currency (*El Universal* 6 Apr. 2018; *La Radio del Sur* 6 Apr. 2018). Further information on the homeland card for business owners could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.1 Mobile Wallet (Billetera Móvil)

Sources indicate that, in January 2018, the government launched the Mobile Wallet, a mode of payment linked to the homeland card (Venezuela 10 Jan. 2018; *El Nuevo Herald* 4 Jan. 2018). The website of the Vice-President of Venezuela

indicates that the Mobile Wallet can be used to purchase goods and services, as well as food from the Local Committees for Supply and Production (Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción, CLAP) [1] (Venezuela 10 Jan. 2018).

The National Anonymous Telephone Company of Venezuela (Compañía Anónima Nacional de Teléfonos de Venezuela, CANTV) indicates that the Mobile Wallet is an application that can be downloaded to a mobile phone and uses the homeland card's QR code [Quick Response Code] [2] to make purchases; it can be recharged at public banks or through deposits made by the government (Venezuela 13 Nov. 2017). Sources report that a holder of a Mobile Wallet can deposit or transfer from the homeland card, up to 300,000 Venezuelan bolívares (VEF) per month (*El Mundo* 29 Jan. 2018; *El Nuevo Herald* 4 Jan. 2018), about US\$3 (*El Nuevo Herald* 4 Jan. 2018). Further information on the Mobile Wallet could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Issuance

In order to obtain a homeland card, the MIPPCI requires an individual to:

- Be 15 years of age or older;
- Produce the original copy of their national identity card (*cédula de identidad*);
- Provide [translation] "general personal data"; and
- Have their picture taken (Venezuela 19 Jan. 2017).

The Venezuelan government set up 1,876 places to issue the homeland card, including governorates, public institutions, and the Bolívar squares in each state capital (Venezuela 19 Jan. 2017). The government also created 1,804 mobile units that operate throughout the country (Venezuela 19 Jan. 2017). Registration can also be done online (Venezuela n.d.). Sources indicate that the data provided by the applicant is [translation] "verified" by members of the We Are Venezuela Movement (Movimiento Somos Venezuela) [3] (*TeleSUR* 15 Jan. 2018; Venezuela 29 June 2017) and the Francisco de Miranda Front (Frente Francisco de Miranda, FFM) [4] (Venezuela 29 June 2017).

According to Transparency International, some of the questions that are asked when applying for the homeland card include monthly income and whether the person has: social media accounts, benefited from [translation] "missions" and which

ones, registration in the "Great Housing Mission," membership in a social movement, membership in a political party, membership in other organizations, membership or representation in a community council, membership in the CLAP, a complete set of teeth, and whether they receive CLAP boxes (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 14). *The Globe and Mail* similarly reports that the homeland card stores information about the socio-economic status of the person, as well as the benefits he or she receives and their place of residence (12 Mar. 2018).

RNV reports that, according to the FFM Coordinator, registering for the homeland card is [translation] "voluntary" and "no one has been forced" to obtain the card (RNV [2017]). *El Nacional*, a Venezuelan newspaper, reports that the Labour Minister has also reportedly indicated that [translation] "no one is forced to obtain the [homeland card] or risks facing reprisals" (*El Nacional* 12 Feb. 2017). However, sources indicate that public servants have been [translation] "forced" to obtain the homeland card (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 7; Infobae 25 Feb. 2018). *El Nacional* also reports that people working at mayor's offices, governor's offices, legislative bodies, and municipal and community councils, as well as employees of state-owned companies, pensioners, and university students have been [translation] "pressured" to obtain the homeland card (12 Feb. 2017). Further information on the issuance of the homeland card could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Physical Characteristics and Database Management

Information on the physical characteristics and database management of the homeland card was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that the homeland card contains a QR Code that stores information about the holder (*The Globe and Mail* 12 Mar. 2018; Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 5). According to the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International, government websites do not indicate which agency is collecting the data that is included in the homeland card (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 11).

4. Purpose

Sources indicate that the homeland card is required in order to access CLAP services (*The Times* 19 Nov. 2017; *El Nacional* 16 Aug. 2017; Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 1622). Transparency International indicates that it is needed to access various government benefits (14 Mar. 2018, 8). Sources also indicate that the homeland card is required to access medicines (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018; Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 16; *Miami Herald* 21 Nov. 2017), food (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 16; *Miami Herald* 21 Nov. 2017), health care, and to be appointed to government jobs, register at public universities, withdraw money from public banks, and obtain services at notaries (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 16). Sources report that the Ministry of Health created a hotline for patients with chronic illnesses to access medicines and one of the requirements is to have the homeland card (*El Nacional* 18 Dec. 2017; Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 25). *Crónica Uno*, a news source based in Venezuela, reports that Hospital Domingo Luciani, located in El Llanito [in the state of Miranda], requires the homeland card for cancer patients to book follow-up appointments (*Crónica Uno* 8 Dec. 2017). Sources quote the Vice-President, Tareck El Aissami, as saying during a televised council of government ministers that, with the homeland card, if a person needs a vaccination, the government will provide it free of charge (*El Nacional* 7 Sept. 2017; 2001.com.ve 5 Sept. 2017).

Sources indicate that, during the municipal elections of 10 December 2017, after casting their ballot, voters were asked to scan their homeland card at designated "red kiosks" (*puntos rojos*) located nearby polling stations (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018; *El Nacional* 11 Dec. 2017), which were reportedly set up and run by militants of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV) (Transparency International 14 Mar. 2018, 27; *El Nacional* 11 Dec. 2017). Sources quote the Minister of Communication and Information as saying that the "verification was a way to detect and track the movement of voters" (*El Nacional* 11 Dec. 2017; *El Carabobeño* 10 Dec. 2017).

Sources indicate that the homeland card is also required in order to obtain identity documents such as passports (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018; *El Nacional* 9 Apr. 2018).

Infobae, an Argentina-based news source, reports that the homeland card is not recognized as a valid identity document according to the Venezuelan Constitution (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018). The Organic Law on Identification (*Ley Orgánica de Identificación*) indicates the following:

[translation]

Article 13. The identity card constitutes the main identification document for civil, commercial, administrative and judicial acts and for all cases where its presentation is required by law. It shall be issued free of charge, and its use is personal and non-transferable. (Venezuela 2006)

The Globe and Mail reports that the homeland card has replaced the traditional national identity card and is required as a "prerequisite for common bureaucratic procedures and as a way to obtain government benefits" (12 Mar. 2018).

According to the FFM Coordinator, the homeland card [translation] "is not an instrument of exclusion," "nor a PSUV registry," and it is not a prerequisite to obtain the CLAP services (RNV [2017]). However, Infobae quotes Tulio Ramírez, a sociologist based in Venezuela, as indicating that the homeland card is a [translation] "mechanism of social control" and that many people obtain the homeland card on "a voluntary basis in order to survive" (25 Feb. 2018). Similarly, *El País*, a Spain-based newspaper, quotes María Gabriela Ponce, a sociologist based in Venezuela, as indicating that the homeland card is a "tool of control" and that "'Venezuelans view the [homeland card] as something that will allow them to receive what the government is distributing, and it is not necessarily related to a citizen's political affinities'" (*El País* 23 Feb. 2018). Infobae reports that the homeland card is, for some, a way to secure food in light of hyperinflation in Venezuela and the low income of its inhabitants (25 Feb. 2018).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Sources indicate that the CLAP are "food boxes" (*El País* 11 Dec. 2017; Infobae 25 Feb. 2018) that are sold by the government at subsidized prices (Infobae 25 Feb. 2018). *The Globe and Mail* reports that the CLAP is a "network centralized by military authorities [and] [that] [b]oxes are distributed in a discretionary manner to neighbourhood councils without formal oversight from elected officials" (*The Globe and Mail* 12 Mar. 2018). The same source indicates that the CLAP boxes "are not delivered regularly, their prices vary and their content is inconsistent" (*The Globe and Mail* 12 Mar. 2018).

[2] QR Codes are "two-dimensional codes readable by barcode readers on smartphones" (US 4 Aug. 2011).

[3] The Movimiento Somos Venezuela is an organization of [translation] "volunteers" created in June 2017 in order to address the "needs" of the population through the homeland card (Venezuela 27 Jan. 2018; TeleSUR 15 Jan. 2018). Sources indicate that the leader is Delcy Rodríguez (La Radio del Sur 6 Apr. 2018; *El Universal* 6 Apr. 2018), who is also the president of the ANC (*El Universal* 6 Apr. 2018).

[4] According to Venezuelan newspaper *Diario El Tiempo*, the FFM was created by Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro in 2003 and serves as a wing of the government to deliver social programs and support during electoral processes (*Diario El Tiempo* 6 July 2013).

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Date modified:

2018-06-25