



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Venezuela: Use of cédulas (national identity cards); extent to which cédulas have been distributed; whether the police and military routinely check cédulas; whether state authorities have a national computer network for sharing citizens' personal information; the new electronic cédula

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1. Use of Cédulas

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an official at the Embassy of Venezuela in Ottawa indicated that *cédulas* (national identity cards) are used daily and that they are "used for everything" (Venezuela 5 Mar. 2012). For example, cédulas are used to vote; travel domestically and internationally, including by plane and bus; stay in hotels; and make purchases (ibid.). She indicated that cédulas contain a number that is used to identify every citizen (ibid.).

According to Freedom House, since 2005, mobile telephone operators have been required to collect copies of subscribers' cédulas, as well their address, fingerprints and signature (18 Apr. 2011, 366). The country's Computer Crimes Act stipulates that this information must be "delivered to the state security agencies upon request" (Freedom House 18 Apr. 2011, 366). Freedom House also mentions that citizens who use computers in cybercafés are not required to register their cédula information before using the Internet (ibid.).

According to the Venezuelan embassy official, citizens can obtain a cédula at an identity office after they turn nine by providing a birth certificate as proof of identity (Venezuela 5 Mar. 2012). The Administrative Service of Identification, Migration and Immigration (Servicio Administrativo Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, SAIME), the government agency in charge of providing Venezuelan citizens with identification documents and passports (Venezuela 5 Apr. 2010), corroborates the statement that, in order for a Venezuelan citizen by birth to obtain a cédula for the first time, he or she must be at least nine years old and provide an original birth certificate (ibid. 22 May 2010a). SAIME also indicates that adults who are 18 and older and applying for a cédula for the first time must provide an original birth certificate and a detailed explanation of why they did not obtain a cédula earlier (ibid.).

2. Extent of Cédula Distribution

Historically, according to SAIME, many Venezuelans were not accounted for in official statistics and registries (Venezuela 21 Apr. 2010). Thus, in addition to the Venezuelan constitution, which guarantees that [translation] "'[a]ll persons have the right ... to obtain public documents constituting evidence of their biological identity'," a program entitled Identity Mission (Misión Identidad) was created to provide cédulas to "the thousands of forgotten Venezuelans," including indigenous persons and Venezuelans living in poor neighbourhoods and rural areas (ibid.). The social service program involves the participation of [translation] "designated state agencies" working in collaboration with the National Executive and SAIME (ibid.). SAIME indicates that there were 200 [translation] "mobile identification teams" deployed throughout the country to issue cédulas (ibid. 22 May 2010b). However, according to a 10 March 2012 article in the Caracas-based *Correo del Orinoco* newspaper, there are 27 mobile identification teams issuing cédulas in 10 locations in Venezuela.

As well, the US Department of State indicates that, based on information from a 2008 study carried out by the NGO Diversity and Sexual Equality Before the Law, transgendered persons are often denied identity documents (8 Apr. 2011, 59).

3. Police and Military Cédula Checks

According to the Venezuelan embassy official, the police and military "sometimes" check cédulas (Venezuela 5 Mar. 2012). As an example, she stated that, at times, the police or military will check cédulas when they are looking for someone (ibid.). She also stated that occasionally police and military personnel check cédulas on roads within the country and at borders (ibid.). This includes checking cédulas on buses to ensure that travellers are legal and "everything is in order" (ibid.).

4. National Computer Network

According to the Venezuelan embassy official, there is a national network for information-sharing that can be accessed by SAIME, the National Elections Centre, and the police (5 Mar. 2012). The official stated that the police can track down a suspect based on his or her cédula usage, and can also access the suspect's criminal record by using information on his or her cédula (Venezuela 5 Mar. 2012).

5. New Electronic Cédula

Media sources indicate that, with the negotiated support of Cuba, Venezuela is in the process of modernizing the cédula card system by developing an electronic version (*Correo del Orinoco* 31 July 2011; *The Economist* 11 Feb. 2010; *El Nacional* 2 Dec. 2011). Although the new electronic card was supposed to be issued in 2008 (ibid.; Venezuela 30 Apr. 2008), media sources indicate that it will be implemented in 2012, after the presidential election (*El Nacional* 2 Dec. 2011; *Correo del Orinoco* 31 July 2011). According to *Correo del Orinoco*, upon the completion of the new electronic cédula system, the government will reissue cédulas to all Venezuelan citizens (ibid.).

Sources indicate that the new electronic cédula will contain a chip that stores citizens' personal information (Venezuela 30 Apr. 2008; *Correo del Orinoco* 31 July 2011; *El Nacional* 4 Sept. 2011). According to the newspaper *El Nacional*,

the chip will contain the following personal information:·

- First and last name
- Cédula number
- Date of birth
- Civil status
- Fingerprint
- Photograph
- Address
- Handwritten signature
- Digital signature
- Tax payment information
- Information pertaining to dependants
- Voting area
- Driver's licence
- Social security number
- Medical history
- Blood type
- Whether or not the individual is a tissue and organ donor

(4 Sept. 2011)

El Nacional also reports that, according to a Venezuelan engineer who participated in the trade negotiations with Cuba and who is currently in the United States seeking asylum, the chip in the new electronic cédula will be similar to the chip used in identity documents in China (2 Dec. 2011). The engineer reportedly said that the technology of the new electronic cédula will enable the government to identify the movements of citizens and locate them (*El Nacional* 2 Dec. 2011).

Sources indicate that the government has begun the process of digitalizing the fingerprints of Venezuelan citizens (ibid. 4 Sept. 2011; *Correo del Orinoco* 31 July 2011; Venezuela 30 Apr. 2008). The number of fingerprints reportedly digitalized range from 20 million (*El Nacional* 4 Sept. 2011) to 22 million (Venezuela 30 Apr. 2008; *Correo del Orinoco* 31 July 2011).

According to *El Nacional*, the terms of the trade agreement with Cuba limits the participation of Venezuelan technicians in the cédula modernization process (4 Sept. 2011). Nevertheless, the Venezuelan government has assured citizens that Cuban technicians will not have access to the personal information on the database, and that only the Venezuelans will (*El Nacional* 4 Sept. 2011; *Correo del Orinoco* 31 July 2011). However, according to *El Nacional*, the trade agreement between Venezuela and Cuba has clauses indicating that Cuban officials are [translation] "managing the cédula file data" (2 Dec. 2011). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. In addition, *El Nacional* states that Cuban officials are also responsible for the

[translation]

technical programming, data collection, and delivery of identity documents to consulates and missions abroad, as well as managing movements through migration checkpoints at Maiquetía airport, [and providing] equipment to SAIME headquarters in [T]orre Aco de Las Mercedes, Caracas, and supplying 8 million blank electronic cédulas. (2 Dec. 2011)

El Nacional also reported that little information has been provided to Venezuelan citizens regarding the technical systems that will be put in place to ensure that unauthorized persons will not be able to read or change information on the cards (4 Sept. 2011).

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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: Asociación Civil Proyectos Inesalud; Colegio de Abogados de Caracas; Freedom House; Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos; Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz; and Servicio Administrativo Identificación, Migración y Extranjería.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International, *ecoi.net*, Human Rights Watch, Minority Rights Group International, *El Mundo*, United Nations Refworld, *El Universal*.

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