



[Home](#) > [Research](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

6 July 2005

VEN100186.E

Venezuela: Domestic violence, including legislation, recourse and services available to victims (2003-June 2005)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Although information on the situation of domestic violence victims was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, the Centre for Women's Studies at the Central University of Venezuela (Centro de Estudios de la Mujer de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, CEM-UCV) reported that from January to October 2003, 8,520 women reported mistreatment (*malos tratos*) to four governmental institutions and 11 NGOs across the country (2003; see also *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). According to *Country Reports 2004* "[v]iolence against women continued to be a problem, and women faced substantial institutional and societal prejudice with respect to rape and domestic violence" (ibid.).

With regard to legislation, the World Organisation Against Torture's 2003 report on violence against women provided the following summary of Venezuela's 1998 Law on Violence against Women and the Family:

The penalties to be applied in cases of domestic violence range from six months (in case of threats) up to ten years (in case of marital rape, in which case article 375 of the Penal Code is applied). If the sentence given does not exceed one year and the perpetrator is not a repeat offender it can be substituted for community service. The penalties stipulated can also be increased by half in cases involving aggravating circumstances. In addition, professionals including doctors, employers and civil servants who fail to report cases of domestic violence may be liable to pay a fine.

A very positive aspect of the law is that the perpetrator, besides serving the sentence, must take part in prevention and educational programmes following the advice of professionals and specialists who are part of the process. The law also establishes the civil responsibility of the offender, who, depending on the circumstances, must pay financial compensation to the victim (OMCT 2003, 336).

Various sources have also presented information on programs and institutions that have been set up to assist female victims of violence, including a telephone hotline, shelters and specialized agencies (OAS 16 Sept. 2004; *Mujeres Hoy* 4 Aug. 2004; Venezuela n.d.). Since November 1999, the National Institute for Women (Instituto Nacional de la Mujer, INAMUJER) has been operating a national telephone hotline (0-800-Mujeres) that offers free psychological and referral services to victims of violence (ibid.; *Mujeres Hoy* 4 Aug. 2004; OAS 16 Sept. 2004). From 2003 to June 2004, the national hotline handled 4,514 calls from women seeking assistance (ibid.), and staff fielded a total of 11,668 calls from 1999 to 2003 (*Mujeres Hoy* 4 Aug. 2004).

In addition, the government reported that its program of shelters (casas de abrigo) assisted 24 women and 52 children in 2004 (Venezuela n.d.). According to INAMUJER, although only one shelter was in operation in Aragua state during 2004, the government was planning to open a new shelter in Caracas on 13 December 2004 (ibid.; see also OAS Sept. 2004, 4). A 17 December 2004 press release from the Ministry of Health and Social Development (Ministerio de Salud y Desarrollo Social) announced the official opening of the Caracas-based shelter named "Elisa Jimenez."

With regard to specialized agencies, the National Defender of Women's Rights (Defensoria Nacional de los Derechos de la Mujer), the legal branch of INAMUJER, reportedly offers legal support to women who felt their rights were violated (OAS 16 Sept. 2004, 4; Venezuela n.d.). According to the INAMUJER Website, the National Defender assisted 2,612 women in 2004 (ibid.). Also in 2004, the Public Defender's (Defensoria del Pueblo) office created a Special Defender for Women (Defensoria Especial de la Mujer) unit to investigate human rights violations against women (OAS 16 Sept. 2004, 4).

Overall, authorities mentioned that various levels of government operated institutions that provide various services to women, including seven state-level organizations, five municipal-based agencies, two regional councils,

nine offices and one assistance centre (ibid., 5). In addition, non-governmental entities also offer assistance to women in the form of 35 women's houses (*casas de la mujer*), four offices, two assistance centres, and four foundations (ibid., 5). Specific information on the services each of these organizations provides could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Despite these efforts, news and human rights reports noted that women rarely reported cases of domestic violence (ALIA2 15 Mar. 2005; see also *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5) for reasons such as "fear, shame or social pressure" (OMCT 2003, 337). Moreover, police were generally "unwilling to intervene to prevent such abuses" and perpetrators were seldom indicted (ibid.; see also *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). Victims, on the other hand, were commonly unaware of their legal rights with respect to domestic violence (ibid.; OMCT 2003, 337).

However, some sources reported that government institutions such as the National Defender of Women's Rights and INAMUJER provided workshops to educate and train public servants, including police officers, about domestic violence issues, including information about the application of the law (Venezuela n.d.; *Venezuelanalysis* 1 Jan. 2005). In a January 2005 article that appeared on the independent political news Website, *Venezuelanalysis*, an INAMUJER official, Mercedes Aguilar, noted that her organization provides 24 education workshops each year to inform women about their rights under the law and instruct them on "how to report domestic violence" (ibid.).

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Agencia Latinoamericana de Informacion y Analisis 2 (ALIA2) [Caracas]. 15 March 2005. Sarah Wagner. "Venezuelan Women Celebrated International Women's Day." <<http://www.alia2.net/article4185.html>> [Accessed 29 June 2005]

Centro de Estudios de la Mujer de la Universidad Central de Venezuela (CEM-UCV). 2003. *Boletín en Cifras: Violencia contra las Mujeres*. <<http://cem.tripod.com.ve/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/boletinviolencia.pdf>> [Accessed 29 June 2005]

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004. 28 February 2005. United States Department of State. Washington, DC. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41778.htm>> [Accessed 14 June 2005]

Mujeres Hoy [Santiago, Chile]. 4 August 2004. "Venezuela trabaja contra la violencia." <<http://www.mujereshoy.com/secciones/2246.shtml>> [Accessed 27 June 2005]

Organization of American States (OAS). 16 September 2004. Inter-American Commission for Women (CIM). "Informe Nacional: Venezuela." Report presented at the XXXII Assembly of Delegates of the CIM, Washington, DC, 27-29 October 2004. (OEA/Ser.L/II.2.32, CIM/doc.14/04) <<http://www.oas.org/CIM/XXXII%20Asamblea%20de%20Delegadas/DOCUMENTOS/CIM-doc%2014.esp.doc>> [Accessed 27 June 2005]

Venezuela. 17 December 2004. Ministerio de Salud y Desarrollo Social. "INAMUJER pone en marcha su segunda casa de abrigo." <<http://www.msds.gov.ve/msds/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=142>> [Accessed 30 June 2005]

_____. N.d. Instituto Nacional de la Mujer (INAMUJER). "Inamujer." <<http://www.inamujer.gov.ve/inamujer.html>> [Accessed 23 June 2005]

Venezuelanalysis. 15 January 2005. Sarah Wagner. "Women and Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution." <<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/print.php?artno=1353>> [Accessed 30 June 2005]

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). 2003. "Violence against Women in Venezuela." *Violence Against Women: 10 Reports/Year 2002 for the Protection and Promotion of the Human Rights of Women*. <http://www.omct.org/pdf/vaw/publications/2002/eng_vaw_reports2002.pdf> [Accessed 24 June 2005]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet: Amnesty International, Comision Andina de Juristas [Lima], Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, ISIS Internacional, *El Nacional* [Caracas], United Nations (UNICEF and CEDAW), *El Universal* [Caracas], World News Connection (WNC).

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.