



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 9, 2018

In Venezuela, You Even Have to Wait in Line to Leave

Having endured decades of socialist misrule, Venezuelans are used to waiting in long lines for practically everything. But today, reports [Bloomberg](#), “the longest line in Caracas” is the one at the passport office, as Venezuelans seek an escape from hyperinflation, shortages, and civil unrest.

The United Nations [estimated](#) in August that 2.3 million people, 1.3 million of them suffering from malnutrition, have fled Venezuela, mostly for neighboring countries. Those neighboring countries, however, are slowly but surely withdrawing their welcome mats; only a few still accept Venezuelans with national identification cards but no passports.



Passports, therefore, are an extremely valuable commodity, especially since the government can't — or won't — [crank them out fast enough to meet demand](#). Those with the means to do so can bribe officials to get one, but that will cost them “more than \$2,000, over 68 times the monthly wage,” writes Bloomberg. Everyone else has to wait. “So the fetid streets around the hulking building downtown start getting jammed up before dawn. The assembled people nap, or tap away on phones, or stare off into the distance. National guardsmen, wearing green fatigues and assault rifles, typically arrive around 6:30 a.m. to corral the crowds and sometimes return at night to shoo away those camping out. Once the soldiers leave, the people return. And they get back in the lines to end all lines.”

Yes, there is more than one line to get a passport. In line number one, a person gets a number written on his arm or hand that allows him to get into line number two the next day. Only 500 people a day get a number, so the wait for one is often 48 hours or more. The second line gets one inside the building to apply for a passport, which could take another eight hours. The third one is for picking up that precious document.

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“It's just another offense, another humiliation — people are sleeping in the street with their children,” Antonietta Suarez, 27, told Bloomberg.

As of 5:00 a.m. on a Tuesday, Suarez had spent six hours on a bus getting from her hometown of Barquisimeto to Caracas and another nine hours in the first passport line, hoping to get a passport for her toddler so her whole family could emigrate to Chile.

Suarez and her husband started talking about leaving the country last year, as unrest began to mount and the economy continued its downward spiral.

“Everything is closing in around us. Everything keeps getting more and more difficult,” she said. “It's not the life I want. And it's not the life I want for my son.”



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Jesus Rojas, 26, traveled over 400 miles from his hometown of Puerto Ordaz to Caracas, having spent a year vainly attempting to obtain a passport from local offices. He has been unable to find decent work despite training in agricultural engineering and can't earn enough money growing his own crops.

"Echoing many around him in the morning chill," pens Bloomberg, "Rojas said he still loves the country, just not the government or the economy, what's left of it. 'I protested last year,' he said. 'I tried.' Now, 'we've resigned ourselves to simply getting out.'"

Rojas is moving to Argentina, which will take him without a passport, but then he won't be able to leave that country. Still, he told Bloomberg, this was "the last try. Either they give me a passport or I'm getting on the plane without it."

Emil Bellorin, 32, and Ismarlys Quijada, 31, made the 500-mile trip from Capuano to Caracas in hopes of getting passports for themselves and their three children, perhaps to emigrate to Peru.

They decided to move because life had become unbearable. Bellorin aptly compared the Venezuelan situation to a sinking ship, saying, "Every time you manage to plug a hole, two more appear." Quijada, meanwhile, dreads the long lines she must endure for such mundane things as school supplies and children's shoes.

The family is "willing to stay on the street here for several days," notes Bloomberg.

"You feel helpless, but at the end of the day it's just another line. You have to wait to buy food, at the bank for cash," Quijada said. "And now, to leave."

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