Contribution for the Fourth Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council on Venezuela – 2027

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE VENEZUELAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM FOR POLITICAL CONTROL PURPOSES:

University Autonomy, Academic Freedom, and Parallel Higher Education System (2022–2026)

A11 / A22 / A42 / B1 / B11 / B31 / D21 / D43 / E51

This report is a contribution to the 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of Venezuela submitted by the Human Rights Observatory of the University of Los Andes (ODH-ULA), the Women's Commission of the University of Los Andes (ULA Mujer Commission), Epikeia University Human Rights Observatory, the Council for Scientific, Humanistic, Technological, and Arts Development of the University of Los Andes (CDCHTA-ULA), the Faculty Association of the University of Los Andes (APULA), the Professional Union of the University of Los Andes (SIPRULA), the Employees Association of the University of Los Andes (AEULA), the Civil Association Aula Abierta, and the University Observatory (OBU). It is aimed at providing information on the transformation of the Venezuelan university system for political control purposes, in accordance with the obligations of the Venezuelan State regarding university autonomy, academic freedom, and the right to higher education. The report was prepared based on the monitoring and documentation of cases carried out by ODH-ULA between 2022 and 2025, on research conducted during the period under review, and on data from international organizations.

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Human Rights Observatory of the University of Los Andes (ODHULA)

Created in March 2014 and dedicated to the promotion and defense of academic freedom, university autonomy, and the right to science. It is an organization that contributes to the documentation, reporting, and dissemination of human rights violations. It is an organization focused on becoming a local, national, and international reference that promotes a culture of human rights, with autonomy, plurality, independence, and impartiality. Specifically, it carries out documentation, monitoring, follow-up, legal assistance, and human rights education activities in the states of Mérida, Táchira, and Trujillo. It conducts strategic litigation and has participated in public hearings before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. It contributed information on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy in the Second and Third Cycles of the Universal Periodic Review on Venezuela in 2016 and 2022. ODH-ULA is part of local and national human rights networks.

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EPIKEIA University Human Rights Observatory (EPIKEIA DDHH)

Created in May 2017. It is a non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion and defense of access to justice, democratic institutionality, academic freedom, university autonomy, and the right to science. Its mission focuses on fostering civic and democratic values and human rights in non-democratic contexts. Epikeia Human Rights promotes, in a didactic manner, a culture of human rights with plurality, independence, and impartiality, with a view toward the enjoyment and exercise of all rights for all people. It carries out research, documentation, follow-up, and systematization of human rights violations. It provides legal assistance to victims of human rights violations at the national and international levels through litigation strategies before protection bodies. It has submitted contributions to the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review on Venezuela. Epikeia Human Rights is part of local and national human rights networks.

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Commission for the Elimination of Gender Violence of the University of Los Andes (ULA Mujer Commission)

The Women's Commission of the University of Los Andes (ULA Mujer) was created by the University Council of the University of Los Andes in Mérida-Venezuela, in January 2020, to make visible and report human rights violations against women and to educate on human rights.

ULA Mujer is an independent and autonomous organization made up of a multidisciplinary team of university professors and researchers, as well as activists and volunteers. We have a team of lawyers to assist and accompany victims of gender-based violence within and outside the university context.

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Aula Abierta

Aula Abierta is a non-governmental organization that works for the defense of universities in Latin America, through initiatives for the promotion and defense of human rights in the university environment, especially academic freedom, the right to quality education, and freedom of association and peaceful assembly, through the participation of different university actors in networks (students, professors, authorities, researchers, workers) for the execution of communicational impact proposals (social media and audiovisual media) with the aim of disseminating and raising awareness among citizens through research-documentation

of situations related to human rights violations in the university environment and the execution of advocacy strategies before human rights bodies in Latin America.

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University Observatory (OBU)

Created in 2018 by the Human Development Laboratory (Ladeshu), the University Observatory (OBU) is a program whose objective is to study, analyze, and disseminate information on the living conditions of the university community in Venezuela, allowing for a broader dimension of the aspects to be improved in the pursuit of quality higher education, from a development and Human Rights approach.

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Council for Scientific, Humanistic, Technological, and Arts Development of the University of Los Andes (CDCHTA-ULA)

It is the entity responsible for promoting, coordinating, and funding research at the University of Los Andes, fostering the generation of knowledge in all areas of learning. Its work is fundamental to guarantee the right to science and to strengthen scientific, humanistic, technological, and artistic production as pillars of the country's academic and social development.

Faculty Association of the University of Los Andes (APULA)

It is the trade union organization that represents and defends the rights and interests of the teaching and research staff of the University of Los Andes. It works for the improvement of labor conditions and the protection of the academic career, within the framework of defending university autonomy and academic freedom as essential principles for quality higher education.

Professional Union of the University of Los Andes (SIPRULA)

It is the union organization that brings together the administrative and technical professionals of the University of Los Andes. Its mission is focused on the defense of labor rights, employment stability, and collective bargaining, actively contributing to the safeguarding of the institutionality and the integral functioning of the university.

Employees Association of the University of Los Andes (AEULA)

It is the trade union organization that represents the administrative and labor staff of the University of Los Andes. It is dedicated to the protection of their labor rights and the promotion of better working conditions, participating in the defense of the university's assets and in the consolidation of a just and democratic university community.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1. During the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Venezuela accepted eight recommendations related to the right to education, primarily aimed at guaranteeing access, quality and continuity of the educational system[1]. It also received recommendation 31.179, which called upon the State to put an end to the intervention of universities and to transform the parallel system of non-autonomous universities to guarantee their independence and academic freedom; this recommendation was noted but not accepted[2]. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that, during the period under review, no substantial progress was made in the implementation of these recommendations. On the contrary, restrictions on university autonomy, academic freedom and the right to higher education persisted and, in some cases, deepened.

2. The report analyses violations that occurred between 2022 and 2025, incorporating background from 2021 and subsequent developments up to July 2026 to assess the implementation of the third-cycle recommendations. The documented restrictions interdependently affect university autonomy, academic freedom and the right to higher education, as well as other related rights, such as personal liberty, freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to science and the labour rights of the university community. The evidence reveals a persistent pattern of State actions that has reduced the capacity of universities to fulfil their functions and has favoured the consolidation of a parallel higher education subsystem subordinated to the Executive Branch.

3. The political developments following 3 January 2026 did not alter the structural conditions described in this report. No measures were adopted to restore university autonomy, reverse underfunding or halt the expansion of the parallel higher education system. Consequently, the concerns raised during the third cycle of the UPR remain fully valid.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND CONCENTRATION OF STATE CONTROL

4. During the period under review, the Venezuelan higher education system continued to undergo a process of institutional transformation characterised by the progressive weakening of the autonomous universities and the consolidation of a parallel set of higher education institutions controlled by the Executive Branch.

5. This transformation unfolded through two simultaneous processes. On the one hand, the autonomous and experimental universities faced budgetary restrictions, suspension of elections for university authorities, administrative and judicial interventions, loss of academic staff and deterioration of their teaching and research capacities. On the other hand, the State promoted the expansion of universities, missions and higher education institutions whose creation, financing and management depend directly on the Executive Branch, forming a parallel university subsystem devoid of institutional autonomy.

6. The orientation of this public policy can be seen in the guidelines contained in the Organic Law on the Plan de la Patria 2019–2025, which defines higher education as an instrument for constructing the political, economic and social model promoted by the State and incorporates objectives aimed at aligning university training programmes with that project.[3]

7. The guidelines of the Plan provide for the alignment of training programmes, scientific research and university planning with the strategic objectives defined by the Executive, as well as the articulation of higher education with sectoral and territorial policies promoted by the Government. From the perspective of international standards on academic freedom and university autonomy, these orientations contradict the independence of higher education institutions to freely define their academic policies, curricula, research priorities and governance mechanisms.[4]

8. As a result, a dualisation of the higher education system has consolidated: while the autonomous universities lose institutional capacity, the parallel system continues to expand through new institutions and preferential allocation of public resources. Taken together, these processes reveal a State policy aimed at progressively replacing the constitutional model of the autonomous university with a politically subordinated higher education system.

RESTRICTIONS ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

9. Between 2022 and 2025, ODH-ULA documented 125 interventions that directly affected university autonomy. The greatest intensity was recorded in 2023, with 54 cases (43%), followed by 2024 with 45 cases (36%), 2022 with 26 cases (21%) and 2025 with 25 cases (20%). The autonomous universities concentrated the largest share of the violations, although interventions in experimental universities were also documented. The recurrence and diversity of these actions demonstrate that they do not correspond to isolated conflicts, but rather to a sustained pattern of State intervention in the university system. The Observatory of Universities, through its #MonitorOBU tool, recorded 115 complaints by higher education institutions regarding violations of university autonomy.[5]

Administrative Interventions

10. Administrative interventions constitute the most frequent modality of restriction on university autonomy. During the period under review, 98 actions of this nature were documented (78% of the total), carried out primarily through the so-called Gran Misión Venezuela Bella, the Presidential Commission for the Recovery of the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), the National Universities Council (CNU), the Office of Planning for the University Sector (OPSU), and state and municipal governments. Although many of these actions are presented as recovery or institutional strengthening programmes, in practice they involve the substitution of functions belonging to university governing bodies and an increasing interference by the Executive Branch in areas reserved for university self-governance.

11. In August 2025, the Presidential Commission for the Recovery of the UCV reported having restored 686 classrooms, 234 laboratories, 615 offices, 495 bathrooms, 142 clinics, 14 sports courts, 13 auditoriums, 13 amphitheatres, 9 gymnasiums and 5 operating theatres, as well as works of art and emblematic spaces.[6] These interventions were carried out without oversight by university authorities.

12. In addition, OPSU has abusively controlled student admissions by eliminating internal entrance examinations and arbitrarily assigning places beyond institutional capacity,[7] as well as by imposing budgetary guidelines and eliminating tuition fees.[8] By November 2025, the Directorate for Admission, Enrolment and Student Retention (DIGAIPE) of the University of Los Andes (ULA) reported that OPSU had arbitrarily assigned 65% of the admissions places across the different degree programmes of that university.[9]

13. Other administrative interventions consisted of obstructing the registration of university degrees and dispossessing autonomous universities of their patrimonial assets. On the one hand, at the Rafael Rangel University Campus (NURR) of the ULA, in Trujillo State, civil registry authorities systematically refused since 2018 to register the degrees of ULA graduates, owing to their refusal to recognise the signature of the authority legitimately appointed by the University Council of the ULA — the acting Vice-Rector Dean, Geovanny Castellanos.[10] On 18 April 2022, the University Council of the ULA referred to the situation of NURR graduates, stating that "the registration formality has implications for fundamental rights, such as the right to work and to education, making the intervention of an authorised official for the registration of such degrees necessary, thereby guaranteeing professional access to the labour market or to fourth-level education."[11]

14. On the other hand, the dispossession of the UCV's Northern Rental Zone constitutes one of the most serious interventions in the patrimonial assets of universities. The Rental Zone is located in a strategic area between Plaza Venezuela and the Francisco Fajardo motorway in Caracas, formally transferred to the UCV in 1974 through the Fundación Fondo Andrés Bello with the objective of generating own income for research and institutional sustainability.[12] In May 2025, the University Council of the UCV publicly denounced the unauthorised construction of a bus terminal and the installation of a commemorative statue by the Municipio Libertador Mayor's Office, without the university's consent, constituting an interference in its autonomy and in the administration of its heritage.[13]

Judicial Interventions

15. On the judicial front, the Supreme Court of Justice abusively intervened in university autonomy through injunctive measures that suspended university electoral processes, preventing the renewal of authorities subject to such interventions.[14] Between 2023 and 2025, under this form of judicial abuse, the universities affected were the University of Los Andes and the University of Carabobo.[15]

Parallel University System

16. The National Executive maintained its policy of strengthening the parallel university system, while deepening budgetary asphyxiation in the autonomous universities. To the 38 universities created by decree between 2001 and 2019,[16] three new universities were added: the National Experimental University of Electrical Specialisations (UNEXEE) in 2022,[17] the National University of Sciences "Dr. Humberto Fernández-Morán" in 2024,[18] and the Bolivarian University of Diplomacy for Peace in 2026.[19] This represents one new higher education institution every year and a half. 85% of public universities in Venezuela are part of the parallel system and 34% of them were created between 2014 and 2026.

17. In addition, three further university projects were announced: the National Interreligious University of Venezuela in 2023,[20] the University of Music "José Antonio Abreu" in 2025,[21] and the University of Yumare in 2024.[22] Furthermore, in 2022 the International University of Communications was inaugurated,[23] while in 2025 the National University of the Communes[24] was inaugurated as a transformation of the Bolivarian University of the Communes.

18. The State's investment in the parallel higher education system openly contradicts the budgetary restriction suffered by the autonomous universities. One example is the National University of Sciences "Dr. Humberto Fernández-Morán", which detailed in an institutional chronicle of 31 May 2025 "the construction in record time" of its campus in Los Altos de Pipe, Miranda State. The works encompass a physical infrastructure of 7,000 m² and demonstrate the priority accorded by the State to the expansion of the parallel higher education system.[25]

19. The authorities appointed to the governing boards of these new universities maintain close ties with the Executive Branch. For example, the rector of the National University of Sciences "Dr. Humberto Fernández-Morán", Gabriela Jiménez,[26] serves as a minister in the National Government,[27] while the rector of the National University of the Communes, Jorge Arreaza,[28] and the rector of the International University of Communications, Tania Díaz,[29] are members of the National Assembly for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela; both simultaneously hold positions of university management and senior political or governmental posts, which manifestly compromises the autonomy of these universities.

20. Complementarily, academic freedom is violated in these parallel universities, which were created with an explicit doctrinal component. A notable example is the International University of Communications, conceived as a centre for ideological and technical training in strategic communication, with the purpose of combating what the ruling party calls the "communicational hegemony of the right" and of articulating networks with international left-wing movements.[30] Among its postgraduate programmes is the Master's Degree in Political Communication and Counter-Hegemony, whose curriculum incorporates a strong

sectarian component incompatible with the principles of pluralism and freedom of expression.[31]

21. Thus, the Venezuelan State allocates preferential resources and attention to the parallel university system, consolidating a dual scheme that weakens traditional higher education and strengthens governmental control over the education of current and future generations. The consolidation of this institutional model has been accompanied by increasing restrictions on the civil and academic freedoms of the university community.

REPRESSION AND RESTRICTIONS ON THE CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

22. During the period under review, ODH-ULA documented a persistent pattern of restrictions on the civil and political rights of the university community. These actions affect personal liberty, academic freedom, freedoms of expression and association, and restrict the functioning of universities as spaces for independent knowledge production and democratic deliberation. The documented violations include arbitrary detentions, short-term enforced disappearances and various forms of harassment, intensified during the post-electoral context of 2024 but persistent throughout 2025 and the beginning of 2026.

23. During the period under review, ODH-ULA documented a pattern of use of arbitrary detention as a mechanism for restricting university activity, with 83 arbitrary detentions of members of the university community, including professors, students and other persons associated with higher education institutions. Between 2024 and 2025, OBU recorded a 79% increase in complaints concerning civil and political rights.[32] The situation changed from July 2024. Between July and October of that year, 47 detentions occurred,[33] equivalent to more than 50% of the total recorded throughout the entire period analysed, coinciding with the presidential elections and the subsequent repression of protests related to allegations of electoral fraud.

24. The closure of civic space has affected the agency and right to participation of university students. In a survey conducted in October 2021, 8 out of 10 students stated that they did not participate in political parties, community activities or volunteer initiatives. Within higher education institutions, the effect is similar: 79% do not participate in any group, club, movement or association within the university, and 9 out of 10 do not participate in cultural, scientific or environmental groups.[34]

25. International human rights protection bodies, such as the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, have documented the practices described herein. In its 2024 detailed findings, the Mission documented the detention of 22 students and 9 university professors in the post-electoral repressive context.[35]

26. The documented detentions share common characteristics: conducted without a judicial order, through illegal raids carried out by hooded officials or persons without visible identification, followed by the transfer of victims to detention centres characterised by serious deficiencies in detention conditions.[36] In several cases, the detained persons were held incommunicado during the first days following their apprehension and subjected to criminal proceedings based on broadly and imprecisely defined offences.[37]

27. At least 10 members of the university community were charged with offences such as terrorism, conspiracy, treason or incitement to hatred — a practice previously observed by the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission[38] and the Office of the High Commissioner,[39] without the available information evidencing the existence of sufficient objective grounds to justify such accusations. The recurrent use of these broadly worded offences, questioned for their vagueness and breadth, increases the risk of criminalisation of the exercise of fundamental rights and produces a chilling effect on the participation of the university community in matters of public interest.

28. Although the number of detentions decreased during 2025 compared with the post-electoral context, the repressive pattern did not disappear. In January 2025, a new wave of detentions was recorded in the context of the presidential inauguration,[40] and by year's end ODH-ULA had documented 28 new arbitrary detentions of members of the university community.[41] The continuity of these events confirms that the use of arbitrary detention was not limited to an exceptional episode of political conflict, but constitutes a persistent practice of restriction of academic freedoms and the university space.

29. Short-term enforced disappearances constitute one of the most serious forms of human rights violations documented.[42] Although this practice has been extensively documented by international human rights protection mechanisms in relation to Venezuela,[43] its use against members of the university community represents a matter of particular concern owing to the intimidatory effect it generates throughout the university space.

30. Between February 2024 and October 2025, ODH-ULA documented 10 cases of short-term enforced disappearances affecting professors and students. In most cases, the disappearance occurred immediately following the detention, through apprehensions carried out by hooded persons or persons without identification, using vehicles without licence plates and keeping the victims incommunicado while the authorities denied information about their whereabouts or the reasons for their deprivation of liberty, increasing the risk of ill-treatment and other serious human rights violations.

31. Among the documented cases are those of professors Rocío San Miguel,[44] Jesús Armas,[45] Javier Tarazona[46] and Carlos Correa,[47] whose periods of disappearance illustrate the use of this practice as a mechanism of intimidation against persons associated with the academic world and widely recognised for their academic activity, research, human rights defence or

participation in matters of public interest. Although not all victims belonged exclusively to higher education institutions, the documented pattern evidences the use of short-term enforced disappearances as a mechanism to restrict academic freedoms and the university space.

32. In addition to arbitrary detentions and short-term enforced disappearances, ODH-ULA documented a sustained pattern of harassment directed against members of the university community. Between 2022 and 2025, 20 incidents of this nature were recorded, evidencing the use of intimidation mechanisms intended to restrict the exercise of academic freedom, discourage participation in matters of public interest and limit the functioning of universities as spaces of critical thought.

33. During the period under review, ODH-ULA documented various modalities of harassment against members of the university community, which intensified significantly during 2024, in the context of the presidential elections and the subsequent repression of citizen protests. Among the practices recorded are the use of stigmatising discourse from official platforms,[48] physical aggression during student demonstrations,[49] acts of intimidation at complaint-receiving bodies,[50] surveillance of professors and students by State security agencies,[51] seizure of documents at university facilities,[52] threats made during judicial proceedings,[53] and the presence of armed officials on university campuses.[54] Particularly concerning modalities were also documented, including the infiltration of student groups to identify critics,[55] the opening of disciplinary proceedings for political reasons,[56] the expulsion of students and the summoning of members of the university community for alleged hate offences.[57]

34. Of particular concern is the use of official discourse aimed at stigmatising critical thinking developed within universities. In November 2024, during a session of the National Assembly, investigations were ordered into alleged manifestations of "hatred" and "neo-fascism" in universities,[58] associating academic debate and the plurality of opinions with threats to the political order. This type of pronouncement from senior public authorities increases the risk of persecution against professors and students and contributes to legitimising new forms of intervention in the university space.

35. The persistence of this pattern demonstrates that the restrictions documented during the period under review do not correspond solely to exceptional repressive measures, but to a persistent pattern of restrictions on the university space through the combination of administrative, disciplinary, police and discursive mechanisms.

BUDGETARY ASPHYXIATION

36. During the period under review, budgetary restriction continued to be the primary factor in the deterioration of the university system, progressively reducing the capacity of universities to fulfil their teaching, research and outreach functions.

37. Budgetary asphyxiation is evident in the hygiene and sanitation conditions of academic spaces. In 2023, 85% of the university community lacked access to continuously functioning bathrooms; 91% had no continuous water service; and 86% had no continuous electricity service.[59]

38. Academic infrastructure has also been severely affected. 68% of professors and students have no access to laboratories or consider them insufficient, while another 68% point to the insufficiency of specialist libraries. Furthermore, 88% have insufficient computers and 86% lack adequate materials for carrying out academic activities. The same OBU survey also reflects the impact of these deficiencies on research and outreach functions: 49% of respondents have not published any scientific article in the past five years and 82% carry out no outreach activities.

39. The precarious study and working conditions are experienced by health sciences students who carry out clinical placements and pursue postgraduate studies in healthcare facilities. The OBU ENOBU Health survey found that 69% of these students must purchase their own personal protective equipment. Similarly, 42% of postgraduate students receive no ongoing supervision from any attached staff member, and 66% have witnessed episodes of workplace harassment in healthcare facilities.[60]

40. Between 2022 and 2025, ODH-ULA documented 705 incidents related to budgetary restrictions, equivalent to 55.4% of all violations recorded during the period analysed. No other category reached a comparable level of recurrence, demonstrating that underfunding constitutes the primary mechanism through which the functioning of Venezuelan universities is weakened.

41. Budget-related incidents include complaints about the general budgetary situation of universities; the labour rights of university staff; the rights of students; the deterioration of university infrastructure due to lack of maintenance and investment; and damage to facilities from theft, burglary and vandalism.

42. Since 2008, the National Executive has maintained a regressive trend in the allocation of resources to the autonomous universities. During the period under review, this policy deepened. In 2022, some universities received only between 1% and 2% of their requested budget;[61] in 2023, the budget deficit exceeded 90%;[62] in 2024, the University of Los Andes received only 17.55% of the required budget;[63] and in 2025, both the Central University of Venezuela and the University of Los Andes received less than 4% of the resources requested for their operation,[64] while the Lisandro Alvarado Centre-Western University had a budget deficit between the amount requested and the amount approved by the government of 99.1%.[65]

DETERIORATION OF WORKING CONDITIONS OF UNIVERSITY STAFF

43. The policy of budgetary restrictions has had a particularly severe impact on the labour rights of university staff. During the period under review, the insufficiency of resources allocated to universities translated into a progressive loss of purchasing power of salaries, deterioration of working conditions and dismantling of historically recognised employment benefits.

44. The salary of university staff remains below the minimum standards necessary to guarantee dignified living conditions. In December 2025, the monthly remuneration of a professor in the highest category of the pay scale was approximately USD 1.80,[66] an amount even lower than the daily threshold then used to measure extreme poverty.[67] This situation is incompatible with the State's obligation to ensure sufficient remuneration to meet the basic needs of workers and their families.

45. The loss of wage income has been accompanied by the progressive dismantling of collective bargaining agreements in the university sector. In recent years, various administrative decisions adopted by the Executive Branch unilaterally modified essential components of employment conditions, reducing employment benefits previously acquired by university staff and weakening collective bargaining mechanisms.[68] These measures directly affected the economic stability of professors, researchers, administrative employees and non-academic workers, deepening the deterioration of working conditions in public universities.

46. As a consequence, by 2022 it was reported that 56% of ULA professors had been forced to sell or exchange personal belongings to buy food, and 86% had been forced to reduce their daily food portions.[69] In 2023, it was recorded that more than 80% of university professors had reduced their food portions.[70]

47. Labour precariousness has had consequences extending beyond the individual sphere of workers. The impossibility of meeting basic needs through a university salary has driven sustained processes of resignation, emigration and early retirement among highly qualified personnel, affecting the continuity of academic programmes, scientific research and teaching quality. ODH-ULA documented 64 incidents related to the loss of university staff during the period under review. In 2025, the Central University of Venezuela reported that it had lost between 44% and 50% of its teaching staff, while various degree programmes reported the partial suspension of academic activities due to an insufficient number of lecturers. At the ULA, a reduction of approximately 25% of teaching staff was recorded for 2024, attributed primarily to salary deterioration.[71]

48. This situation particularly affects universities dedicated to scientific research and the training of highly specialised professionals. The sustained loss of professors and researchers compromises the institutional capacity to develop research projects, train new generations of scientists and maintain quality academic programmes. Consequently, labour restrictions not only violate individual rights but also have a direct impact on the right to higher education and the right of Venezuelan society to benefit from scientific and technological development.

49. The decrease in the purchasing power of pensions and the deterioration of social protection mechanisms have particularly affected retired personnel in the university sector. The progressive dismantling of the university social security system has increased their economic vulnerability and has limited access to living conditions compatible with human dignity.

50. For example, by 2022 the pension of the highest-ranked retired staff did not exceed USD 10.59.[72] Like the salary, the pension has a merely symbolic character, since with such an amount no retired person can cover their most basic needs, not even those belonging to the highest pay scale.[73]

51. In that same year, as a consequence of the deterioration of the university social security system, retired professor Pedro José Salinas of the ULA was found in a critical state of dehydration, while his partner was found deceased at their home.[74] The case highlighted the situation of extreme vulnerability in which retired university personnel can find themselves due to insufficient income and the loss of social protection mechanisms.

52. In particular, retired staff have historically benefited from medical and funeral services, which were affected by the budgetary restrictions faced by universities. In practice, owing to State abandonment, retired persons frequently depend on family networks, solidarity support or remittances to cover healthcare costs, in addition to relying on children, relatives and friends abroad when available.[75]

53. The persistence of these conditions evidences the failure to implement the recommendations made to Venezuela during the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review regarding the right to an adequate standard of living and the protection of economic and social rights.

DETERIORATION OF CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT ACCESS AND RETENTION

54. Budgetary restrictions have directly affected the right to higher education through the deterioration of student welfare programmes, reducing the conditions necessary to guarantee access, retention and completion of studies under conditions of equality.

55. One of the principal effects of this policy has been the loss of effectiveness of the socioeconomic support system directed at the student population. During the period analysed, the university scholarship remained below five US dollars per month, an amount manifestly insufficient to help cover the minimum costs associated with remaining in the university system. The absence of periodic adjustment mechanisms in line with the cost of living has emptied this social protection instrument of its content, depriving it of its function as a mechanism for guaranteeing equality of opportunity in access to higher education.

56. In parallel, the deterioration of student food and transport programmes has increased the economic obstacles to pursuing university studies. ODH-ULA documented the progressive reduction of these essential services, traditionally conceived as components of the right to higher education and intended to ensure the retention of students from socially vulnerable sectors. The insufficiency of university canteens,[76] the reduction of transport routes,[77] and the budgetary limitations for sustaining these programmes have transferred increasing costs to families, restricting in practice effective access to university education.

57. The reduction of university canteens, transport and other services has increased the economic obstacles to accessing and remaining in higher education.[78]

58. These restrictions have had a significant impact on student retention. Several universities reported a sustained increase in dropout rates as a consequence of the deterioration of economic conditions and the inability of numerous students to meet the costs associated with their studies. In 2023, the University of Zulia reported that approximately 40% of its student population had abandoned their studies, while a ULA report estimated a reduction of more than 60% in student enrolment between 2012 and 2024.[79]

59. The persistence of these conditions demonstrates the failure to implement the recommendations accepted by Venezuela on the right to education and evidences that the measures adopted during the period under review were not oriented towards the progressive realisation of this right, but rather deepened the material limitations affecting access, retention and quality of higher education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

60. Fully restore university autonomy and guarantee that higher education institutions exercise their academic, administrative, financial, electoral and patrimonial competencies without undue interference from the Executive Branch, the Judiciary or any other State authority.

61. Adopt, within a specified timeframe, the measures necessary to hold free, periodic, democratic and participatory elections of university authorities in all institutions whose electoral processes remain suspended, restricted or subject to judicial or administrative intervention.

62. Review and render without effect the administrative, judicial or budgetary measures that substitute or limit the competencies of the legitimate governing bodies of universities, including those relating to student admissions, administration of university heritage, academic planning and budget management.

63. Ensure that the creation, reorganisation, financing and operation of public higher education institutions respect university autonomy, academic freedom, scientific independence, institutional pluralism and quality standards, preventing their subordination to official partisan or ideological orientations.

64. Establish a public, objective, transparent and non-discriminatory system for the allocation of resources to universities, including the annual publication of the budgets requested, approved and effectively transferred to each institution.

65. Guarantee sufficient, stable and predictable funding for public universities to enable the adequate fulfilment of their constitutional functions.

66. Immediately cease arbitrary detentions, short-term enforced disappearances, acts of harassment, surveillance, intimidation, stigmatisation and criminalisation against members of the university community for the exercise of academic freedom, freedom of expression, research, association or participation in matters of public interest.

67. Refrain from using broadly or imprecisely formulated criminal offences, including terrorism, incitement to hatred, treason or conspiracy, to criminalise the legitimate exercise of the rights and freedoms of students, professors, researchers, authorities and other members of the university community.

68. Promptly, independently, impartially and effectively investigate human rights violations committed against members of the university community, sanction those responsible and guarantee victims truth, justice, comprehensive reparation and guarantees of non-repetition.

69. Restore working conditions compatible with the right to an adequate standard of living for the teaching, administrative and non-academic staff of public universities, through adequate salaries and pensions, the recovery of social security systems and effective respect for collective bargaining agreements and trade union negotiations.

70. Adopt a national plan to recover and strengthen the teaching and research capacities of public universities, including measures aimed at halting the loss of highly qualified

academic staff, promoting their retention and fostering the return or reintegration of researchers and professors.

71. Guarantee sufficient resources to restore and strengthen scholarship, food, transport, health and other student welfare programmes, in order to ensure access, retention and completion of university studies under conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

72. Regularly produce and publish disaggregated, updated and verifiable information on university budgets, enrolment, dropout rates, teaching staff, scientific research, infrastructure and student welfare programmes, guaranteeing public access to these data.

73. Fully cooperate with international and regional human rights protection mechanisms and establish a national monitoring mechanism to implement recommendations relating to university autonomy, academic freedom, the right to higher education, labour rights and the right to participate in scientific life.

74. Repeal or reform norms and administrative practices incompatible with international human rights standards that permit undue intervention in universities, restrict university autonomy and academic freedom, or facilitate the criminalisation of members of the university community for the legitimate exercise of their rights.

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ANNEX

Institutions Created During the Period Under Review and Subsequent Relevant Developments, 2022–2026.

Parallel University System, 2022–2026

Year	Name	Legal Basis	Official Website
2022	National Experimental University of Electrical Specialisations (UNEXEE)	Created by Presidential Decree No. 4,715, published in Official Gazette No. 42,431, 2 August 2022	https://unexee.com/portal/
2024	National University of Sciences "Dr. Humberto Fernández-Morán"	Created by Presidential Decree No. 5,055, Official Gazette No. 6,863 Extraordinary, 11 December 2024	https://unc.edu.ve/
2026	Bolivarian University of Diplomacy for Peace	Created by Presidential Decree No. 5,340, Official Gazette No. 43,376, 15 May 2026	No official website at the time of publication