

VEPPEX

VENEZUELANS DEPORTED TO AFRICA

*The impossible passport and the risk of being trapped indefinitely in
third countries*

CENTRAL WARNING: Deporting a person without a valid passport to a remote country with which they have no ties can transform immigration expulsion into confinement of indefinite duration. Without documentation, stable status, or a genuine way out, the formal freedom to leave the receiving country may be purely theoretical.

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Executive summary

The United States has begun transferring Venezuelans to African countries that are neither their countries of nationality nor places with which they have family, historical, or migratory ties. On August 20, 2026, the first group of 20 deportees arrived in Liberia under an agreement providing for the reception of up to 1,200 people over twelve months. Liberian authorities confirmed that Venezuelan and Cuban nationals were among those transferred.

VEPPEX warns that the gravity of this policy does not end when the plane lands. For many Venezuelans, the transfer may begin a cycle of undocumented status, dependency, and migration confinement of uncertain duration. A deportee may arrive without a valid Venezuelan passport, with an expired document, or without effective access to a consular authority able to issue one. That absence may prevent the person from regularizing status, working lawfully, opening a bank account, traveling to another country, or boarding an international flight.

Liberian authorities have stated that deportees may apply for asylum or leave Liberia. Yet a formal right to depart is meaningless if a person has no passport, alternative travel document, visa, financial resources, or country willing to admit them. Under those conditions, an individual who is not serving a criminal sentence may remain effectively trapped for years, subject to immigration detention, supervised accommodation, or permanent dependency on authorities and humanitarian organizations.

MAIN CONCLUSION: A country cannot consider a deportation case resolved simply because another state physically accepts the person. There must be a legal, documentary, and humane solution that permits residence with rights or actual departure. Otherwise, deportation risks becoming exile and indefinite migration confinement.

1. Purpose and scope of the report

This report examines the specific risks faced by Venezuelans sent by the United States to third countries in Africa, with particular emphasis on Liberia. It does not claim that every deportee will be detained for life. It demonstrates that the absence of a passport, accessible consular representation, durable immigration status, and guarantees of admission to another country can result in a practical deprivation of liberty for an indefinite period.

This analysis is based on public information available through September 5, 2026, government statements, international news-agency reporting, U.S. court documents, and international protection standards. The failure to publish the bilateral agreements in full makes it impossible to determine the duration of the status granted, accommodation conditions, review mechanisms, and who assumes responsibility after transfer.

2. A policy already in operation

The agreement between the United States and Liberia is one of the broadest known arrangements under the third-country deportation policy. Liberia agreed to receive up to 1,200 non-Liberians in one year. The first flight, carrying 20 people, arrived at Roberts International Airport on August 20, 2026. Reuters reported, citing a Liberian official, that Venezuelans and Cubans were among the deportees.

The Liberian government has indicated that the new arrivals would be treated as guests, could seek asylum, and would be free to leave the country. Those assurances must be verified in practice. The duration of admission, the right to work, access to housing, health care and legal assistance, and what happens if a person is denied asylum and cannot travel to another state must also be clarified.

The expansion of similar agreements with African countries demonstrates that this is not an isolated case. VEPPEX nevertheless distinguishes among three categories: countries that negotiated or announced agreements; countries that have received deportees of any nationality; and countries where the transfer of Venezuelans has been publicly confirmed. As of the date of this report, Liberia is the confirmed African case and the central focus of the Venezuelan analysis.

3. The passport: the key many Venezuelans do not have

The documentation problem lies at the heart of this emergency. For a person deported to Liberia, an official statement that they are free to leave is not enough. International mobility normally requires a valid passport or recognized travel document, authorization to enter the destination country, and the means to make the journey.

3.1 The practical impossibility of obtaining one

Venezuela's passport issuance system depends on the Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Foreigners (SAIME) and a limited consular network. The official website of Venezuela's Ministry of Foreign Affairs lists certain embassies in Africa but does not identify a resident Venezuelan mission in Liberia. A person in Monrovia therefore has no nearby, clearly authorized Venezuelan consular office where identity can be verified, biometric data captured, and a passport issued.

The existence of an online portal does not by itself solve the problem. The process may require account access, prior documents, identity verification, payment of fees linked to the official exchange rate, an in-person appearance at an authorized office, and the ability to travel to the country where the competent mission operates. For a deportee without resources, defined status, or a travel document, reaching another consular jurisdiction may be legally and physically impossible.

The difficulty is even more serious for political targets, former military personnel, human rights defenders, or people singled out by Venezuelan authorities. Requesting documentation from the very state they fear may reveal their location and force them into a choice incompatible with their protection.

3.2 An expired document does not mean freedom of movement

Some countries have temporarily accepted expired Venezuelan passports for certain procedures, but this practice is not universal and does not guarantee airline boarding, transit through third states, or final admission. Liberia and every potential destination retain their own requirements. An expired document may establish identity while remaining useless for legally leaving the territory.

3.3 A Venezuelan identity card does not replace a passport in Africa

A Venezuelan national identity card may be accepted for certain regional travel in South America, but it does not ordinarily function as an international travel document in Africa. A person arriving only with an identity card, an identity copy, a U.S. removal order, or ICE papers does not thereby acquire a document that can be used to travel to a fourth country.

4. How deportation can become indefinite confinement

The phrase 'prisoners in Africa for life' reflects an understandable fear, but it must be stated precisely. There is no public basis to claim that Liberia has sentenced deported Venezuelans to life imprisonment. The real danger is different: a person who is formally free may remain physically unable to leave and become subject to movement restrictions, repeated administrative detention, or institutional dependency with no definite end date.

- Without a valid passport, the person may be unable to board an international flight or complete visa or transit procedures.
- Without residency or recognized asylum, the person may have no stable right to work, rent housing, or access services.
- Without income, the person cannot buy a ticket or support themselves while seeking a legal way out.
- Without a country willing to admit the person, even a provisional travel document may not produce an effective departure.
- If the temporary permission granted by Liberia expires, the person may face immigration detention or pressure to return to Venezuela.
- Without independent monitoring, it is difficult to verify the person's location, accommodation conditions, access to counsel, and actual freedom of movement.

THE PARADOX: They are told they may leave, but they are given no legal or practical means to do so. The door may be open in theory while remaining closed by the absence of documents, status, money, and a destination country.

5. Risk of de facto statelessness and immigration limbo

Deported Venezuelans remain Venezuelan nationals and are therefore not automatically stateless as a matter of law. They may nevertheless experience a form of de facto statelessness: they retain a nominal nationality but lack effective consular protection and documents that allow them to exercise basic rights or move internationally.

UNHCR recognizes that refugees and stateless persons often cannot use a national passport and, in some cases, require Convention Travel Documents or other instruments such as laissez-passers, emergency travel documents, or alien passports. The availability of these mechanisms depends on recognized status and the law of the receiving country. It cannot be assumed that every Venezuelan sent to Liberia will automatically receive one.

The agreement must establish who will document people who do not obtain asylum, how long humanitarian admission will last, whether they may work, and what remedy they will have against detention or another expulsion. Without binding answers, the deportee risks becoming legally invisible.

6. People protected against removal

The concern is particularly grave when a person has withholding of removal or protection under the Convention Against Torture (CAT) with respect to Venezuela. These protections are country-specific and do not by themselves confer permanent residence in the United States. U.S. case law recognizes that the government may attempt removal to a third country, but CAT prohibits transfer to any state where the person is more likely than not to be tortured.

In 2025, *Department of Homeland Security v. D.V.D.* addressed notice and the opportunity to raise fear concerning a third country. The Supreme Court stayed a broad lower-court order while litigation continued; the opinions in the case reveal the profound dispute over the process that must precede such transfers. VEPPEX maintains that no person should be placed on a flight without written notice, reasonable time, access to counsel, and an individualized assessment of risk in the receiving country.

The assessment must not be limited to direct torture by Liberian authorities. It must consider onward removal, inability to obtain documents, the risk of detention for irregular status, and the exposure of Venezuelan dissidents to transnational persecution networks.

7. Indirect return to Venezuela

The most serious danger is that the third country will function as a stopover. If a Venezuelan cannot integrate, obtain asylum, or travel lawfully, they may ultimately accept a 'voluntary' return that is in fact the product of hunger, destitution, detention, or a total absence of alternatives. The person could also later be expelled for lacking legal status.

A transfer that ultimately forces a person back to a place where they face persecution or torture may amount to indirect or chain refoulement. General diplomatic assurances do not replace an individualized assessment or an independent mechanism preventing subsequent return to Venezuela.

8. Questions the United States and Liberia must answer

1. How many Venezuelans were sent to Liberia, and what was their immigration status in the United States?
2. How many had a valid passport, an expired passport, or no passport?
3. Did they receive written notice of the destination and a meaningful opportunity to raise a CAT claim?
4. What document establishes their lawful admission to Liberia, and for how long?
5. May they work, live outside designated facilities, and move freely?
6. Which authority will issue travel documents to those unable to obtain a Venezuelan passport?
7. What will happen when a person is denied asylum and is not admitted by another state?
8. Is there a binding prohibition against subsequently sending the person to Venezuela?
9. Will they have regular and confidential access to lawyers, UNHCR, IOM, and independent monitors?
10. Who will assume financial and legal responsibility after the agreement ends?

9. VEPPEX recommendations

- **Preventive suspension:** Suspend further deportations of Venezuelans to Africa until the agreements are published and durable documentation, legal status, and protection are demonstrated.
- **Individual review:** Before transfer, verify identity, passport validity, health, family ties, history of persecution, and country-specific risk.
- **Guaranteed travel document:** Transfer no one without written confirmation of which authority will issue a recognized document if Venezuela does not issue a passport.
- **Legal status and employment:** Grant a status permitting residence, work, housing, health care, and access to courts, without indefinite reliance on humanitarian aid.
- **Ban on chain refoulement:** Include an enforceable clause preventing transfer to Venezuela or any place where the deportee faces torture or persecution.
- **Independent monitoring:** Permit regular access by UNHCR, IOM, human rights organizations, lawyers, and the press to locations where deportees remain.
- **Location unit:** Create a protected public registry confirming how many Venezuelans were transferred, where they are, and their legal status.
- **Congressional review:** Ask the U.S. Congress to hold hearings and require disclosure of the full agreements, costs, selection criteria, and guarantees.

10. Conclusion

The deportation of Venezuelans to Africa opens a particularly grave phase in U.S. immigration policy. The problem is not merely geographic distance. It is the transfer of human beings to unfamiliar territory without ensuring that they have documents, stable legal status, support networks, and a genuine lawful way out.

For a Venezuelan without a valid passport and effective access to a consular mission, the assertion that they can leave Liberia may become a fiction. Without a travel document there is no flight; without a country of admission there is no destination; without status there is no integration; and without independent review there is no safeguard against prolonged detention or onward removal.

VEPPEX does not claim that every Venezuelan will be imprisoned for life. It warns of something sufficiently grave and verifiable: if governments do not guarantee documentation, residence, or effective departure, these people may remain trapped indefinitely, deprived in practice of the ability to choose where to live, and exposed to a cycle of undocumented status, poverty, detention, and removal.

FINAL DEMAND: No Venezuelan should be deported to an African country without a valid passport or alternative travel document, durable legal status, the right to work, access to counsel, and a verifiable guarantee that the person will never be sent indirectly to Venezuela.

Principal sources

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- Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Official directory of Venezuelan embassies
- SAIME. Official passport information
- UNHCR. Travel documents for refugees and stateless persons
- Supreme Court of the United States. Department of Homeland Security v. D.V.D., 2025 order and opinions
- USCRI.** [Third Country Deportations Tracker](#)

VENEZUELAN POLITICAL PERSECUTEES IN EXILE (VEPPEX)

José Antonio Colina, President
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