

Caracas, May 11, 2026.

2026 OFAC General Licenses and their impact on the Hydrocarbons industry in Venezuela

Freddy Vásquez Bass
Of Counsel

I. Introduction

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's sanctions program against Venezuela has its origin in various Executive Orders (E.O.) issued by the President of the United States, including E.O. 13692, 13808, 13857¹, and especially E.O. 13884, which blocks the assets and interests of the Government of Venezuela.

E.O. 13884 gave the term "Government of Venezuela" the broadest interpretation, expressly including the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV), Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA), as well as any other person or entity that, directly or indirectly, acts on behalf of the State, any political-territorial subdivision, or entity whose ownership or control is under the Government, thus prohibiting *U.S. Persons*² from any transaction with these persons and entities, with the exception of those authorized by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), an agency attached to the U.S. Department of the Treasury. The penalty to *U.S. Persons* for violating OFAC's economic and trade sanctions is severe, and includes civil

¹ *National Archives and Records Administration. Federal Register.* The regulation of sanctions on Venezuela had its origin in Executive Order 13692 of March 8, 2015 (published document 2015-05677 (80 FR 12747), issued by former President Obama, referring to the blocking of property and interests related to the United States of certain persons and the entry of those persons into U.S. territory (84 FR 509). which decides additional steps for the Declaration of Emergency Regarding Venezuela.

² It includes U.S. citizens, U.S. permanent residents (*green card* holders), entities organized under U.S. law, any person or entity that is located within the U.S., regardless of nationality.

penalties, with the imposition of significant fines³, and criminal penalties, with the imposition of prison sentences (Primary Sanctions).

E.O. 13884 establishes restrictions that apply to persons and entities that are not *U.S. Persons*, which consist of not assisting, promoting or providing financial, material or technological support, as well as goods and services to sanctioned persons, and the person or entity responsible for the violation may be subject to sanctions such as being designated *Specially Designated Nationals* (SDN).⁴

As part of the regulation and documents of the Venezuela sanctions section that are gathered in the set of rules governing the regime of such sanctions called *Venezuela Sanctions Regulations* (VSR)⁵ of OFAC, this government agency has issued **General Licenses**, which apply to any person and entity that is within the scope of the provisions of the license and **Specific Licenses** whose beneficiaries are persons or entities that request them for their particular cases, which authorize and allow those who apply to them as the case may be, to carry out transactions and activities that are otherwise prohibited by the aforementioned Executive Orders., The oldest General Licenses for sanctions in Venezuela within those that are currently in force are from the year 2019.

During the year 2026, the U.S. Department of the Treasury, through OFAC, has relaxed the sanctions regime for Venezuela, issuing necessary measures focused mainly on the reactivation of oil activity, and recently financial activity, without implying a lifting or elimination of sanctions. This flexibility has been implemented through the progressive issuance of *General Licenses* (GL), which, as indicated above, act as dispensation or conditional and regulated exceptions within the existing prohibitive and sanctioning system, which authorize transactions and actions to carry out the activities authorized by the license.

³ [Ofactreasury.gov/civil-penalties-and-enforcement-information/](https://www.ofac.treasury.gov/civil-penalties-and-enforcement-information/). In 2025, the amount of sanctions imposed by OFAC was USD 265,746,819; in 2024 it was USD 48,790,404, and in 2023 the penalties were for USD 1,541,380,594.

⁴ *Specially Designated Nationals* (SDN) is a person, group of people, entities and even movable property, such as a ship, that the U.S. Department of the Treasury identifies as being involved in activities that threaten U.S. national security. When designated as an SDN, your property is blocked and any U.S. Person is prohibited from engaging in any transaction involving the provision of goods, services, or financial or business support.

⁵ 31 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) Part 591



The Licenses are of restrictive interpretation, they cannot be extended, or analogies can be made, what is authorized is what is indicated in the License. As indicated above, they do not suspend or lift the sanctioning regime, but instead enable, authorize the performance of specific transactions, under strict conditions of personal, material and temporal scope.

II. General Licenses and their amendments

The following are some of the General Licenses recently issued by OFAC to authorize transactions that have allowed a boost in the reactivation of activity in the oil industry in Venezuela.

1. GL 46B

General License 46, issued on January 29, 2026, initially modified by GL 46A of February 10 and subsequently by GL 46B of March 13 constitutes one of the main general licenses of the new authorization scheme.

GL 46B permits transactions to be made with the Government of Venezuela and PDVSA, as well as their affiliates, for the activities of entities regulated under U.S. law or any jurisdiction within the U.S. on or before January 29, 2025 ("established U.S. entity"), necessary for lifting, exporting, re-exporting, sale, resale, storage, marketing, purchase, delivery or transportation, including refining.

The license authorizes transactions related to petroleum, petrochemical products and petroleum derivatives.

This License authorizes the purchase, export, and sale of oil from Venezuela that has been extracted. It does not authorize exploration or production activities.

Non-U.S. Persons, non-U.S. affiliates, may transact or provide services to U.S. entities authorized by GL 46B, except that they are affiliated with Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, or China.



One of the most relevant elements of GL 46 is the functional legalization of Venezuelan oil trade under U.S. regulatory and financial control, in the fund created for such purposes (*Foreign Government Deposit Funds*) in execution of E.O. 14373 of January 9, 2026.

2. *GL 47 and GL 48A: Sale of U.S. diluents and supply of certain goods and services*

GL 47, issued on February 3, 2026, authorizes the sale of diluents from the U.S. to Venezuela.

GL 48, issued on February 10, 2026 and amended by GL 48A of March 13, authorizes the sale of goods, technology, software, and services for the exploration, development, and production of oil, gas, or petrochemicals, or for the transmission, storage, and distribution of electricity, from the United States or by a U.S. Person in Venezuela.

3. *GL 49A and GL 50A: Authorization of the negotiation and conclusion of contingent contracts for certain new investments and contingent contracts in oil and gas*

GL 49, issued on February 13, 2026 and amended by GL 49A of March 13, 2026, introduces authorization to negotiate and enter into "contingent contracts," such as *executory contracts*, outstanding pro forma invoices, preliminary agreements, pending bids eligible for acceptance, such as bids or proposals in response to public tenders, Binding Memorandums of Understanding or any other similar agreement.

GL 49 authorizes the negotiation and signing of "contingent contracts" for new hydrocarbon-related investments in Venezuela, including transactions prohibited by the VSRs, but does not authorize the execution of such contracts which must have a license by which their execution is authorized by OFAC, normally it must be a specific license.

GL 50A authorizes the transactions necessary for operating activities in the Oil & Gas industry in Venezuela to the oil entities BP PLC, Chevron Corporations, Eni S.p.A., Établissements Maurel & Prom SA, Repsol S.A. and Shell PLC.

4. *GL 52*



This license authorizes entities regulated under U.S. law or any jurisdiction within the U.S. on or before January 29, 2025 ("established U.S. entity") to transact with PDVSA and with entities in which PDVSA has a 50% or greater interest, or with the Government of Venezuela.

The transactions cover broad commercial activities in the hydrocarbons sector, including:

- A. The lifting, export, re-export, sale, resale, supply, storage, marketing, purchase, delivery or transportation of Venezuelan oil or petroleum derivatives.
- B. The provision to Venezuela of diluents, goods, services and technologies necessary for exploration, development or production activities in the oil, gas or petrochemical products sectors.
- C. The execution of new investment contracts for exploration, development or production activities in the oil, gas or petroleum products sectors of Venezuela.
- D. The constitution of new joint ventures or other entities in Venezuela related to such activities.
- E. All transactions that are ordinarily incidental and necessary for such activities, including the performance of due diligence processes and evaluations of a commercial, legal, technical, safety and environmental nature related to the foregoing.

GL 52 establishes a broader framework for the controlled resumption of business with PDVSA (which includes investments), GL 46B has more restricted application, it is limited to the trade and logistics of oil and petrochemicals of Venezuelan origin, with operational restrictions.

5. *If the aforementioned General Licenses are to be applied, they have the following common characteristics*
 - A. On any contract with the Government of Venezuela, PDVSA or its affiliates, the laws of the United States or any jurisdiction within the United States shall be competent to interpret the contract and any dispute resolution relating to the contract shall be heard in the United States.
 - B. Any monetary payments to the Government of Venezuela, PDVSA, or its affiliates, or any other blocked person, with the exception of a license to the contrary and

payment of national taxes, permits and *fees*, shall be transferred to the *Foreign Government Deposit Funds*.

- C. Payment terms do not include debt swaps, nor nominations in digital currencies issued by or on behalf of the Government of Venezuela.
- D. No frozen assets are unlocked.
- E. The prohibition of transactions with entities linked to Russia, Iran, North Korea, China or Cuba and blocked ships is maintained.
- F. Licensed transactions must be made while maintaining reporting duties and maintaining and recording traceability.

6. *Some aspects of the recent sanctioned transaction regime allowed by License*

- A. Conditional operational normalization of Venezuelan oil production and trade.
- B. Persistence of the structural sanctioning regime: there is no general lifting, only specific authorizations.
- C. It requires a high standard of compliance and financial traceability as an essential condition.
- D. Model of contingent contracts as a central legal tool.
- E. Return of the Venezuelan state banking system to regulated international transactions, key to oil payments.

7. *Final note*

The set of general licenses issued by OFAC in 2026 configures a hybrid model of controlled opening, beneficial for the increase of hydrocarbon production in the country, where compliance with transactions and their legality depend on strict compliance with conditions.

In this environment there is a significant change, today with the licenses that OFAC has issued, a restrictive regime of sanctions is glimpsed with a function essentially of control of execution and *compliance*, not of absolute restriction, of making operations more complex or avoiding the production and marketing of hydrocarbons which had been generated by the sanctions until 2025. generating the fall in oil production.

The licenses have allowed the necessary transactions to be carried out that could facilitate the increase in hydrocarbon production that has been planned for Venezuela. They could



contribute to Venezuela's reinsertion into international financial markets, even if they are not measures that imply the total lifting of sanctions. It should be borne in mind that the United States, through general or specific licenses, could have a decisive influence on the actors involved in the production and marketing of hydrocarbons in Venezuela.

Contacts:

LEGA Abogados
Office: +58 (212) 277.2200
Email: infolaw@lega.law
Website: www.lega.law

Freddy Vásquez Bass
Email: fvasquez@lega.law
T: +58 (212) 277 2200

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