

Cuba abolishes cash payments at gas stations



Soon only cashless possible: refueling in Cuba (source: own photo)

As the state-owned gas station operator CIMEX S.A. [announced](#) today (Tuesday), cash payments at its more than 1,000 branches nationwide are to be abolished by October 31. Customers will then only be able to fill up with Cuban giro cards, international credit cards, the digital payment app "Transfermóvil" and the single- and multi-value credit cards introduced a few months ago.

The measure is intended to curb the pervasive corruption at gas stations. Illegal diversion of gasoline has been a problem for decades. In an effort to dry up the black market for fuel, Fidel Castro sent thousands of social workers to gas stations in the mid-2000s. However, the campaign did not lead to lasting success: there is still a large black market for fuel, which has traditionally always undercut gas station prices. Since the currency reform, however, fuel has been priced at the 24:1 exchange rate, making it cheaper than in other countries – but supply remains limited. The fuel crises of recent years and months have further exacerbated the situation, which has been responded to by the introduction of digital payment methods. Now, the infrastructure has apparently reached the point where the government is confident that a complete switch to these channels can be made.

Parliament Speaker Esteban Lazo [announced](#) Monday at a meeting of the Council of Ministers that the decision taken at the last parliamentary session to "fight corruption and illegal activities" will be implemented quickly. Part of the measures is a program to "bankarize" the payment flows of the Cuban economy.

An important step to keep payment options low-threshold was the introduction of single-use prepaid cards for gasoline. These have been given several "features" in recent months: For example, the credit of up to five different prepaid cards can be combined for one refueling

transaction, and refunds via QR code are possible. Another option has been added with the universal payment app "Transfermóvil," which has already been used for years to pay for electricity and utilities and now has more than four million users. The financial services provider Fincimex also offers reusable chip cards that can be reloaded as often as required. This provides three alternative payment options in the event of card reader failures, which are not uncommon.

CIMEX has published a [schedule](#) for the conversion of each individual branch on its Facebook page. According to the schedule, the last gas station in Centro Habana will close its cash register on October 14, while the two gas stations in the popular tourist resort of Viñales will switch to cashless payment as early as September 7. The changeover is to be completed nationwide by the end of October. For travelers with rental cars, payment by international credit card is the easiest option; in the event of technical problems, the purchase of disposable credit cards ("tarjetas prepago desechables") is a good backup.

The fuel situation itself, meanwhile, has improved somewhat in recent months: following the fuel crisis in April, as a result of which the supply of diesel and gasoline had to be severely rationed, the quota measures have now been softened. If the switch to digital payment channels produces the desired results, the situation should tend to improve further.

[\(Cubaheute\)](#)