



Photo: Tanya Birkbeck/WFP

HAITI

Protection Analysis Update

SEPTEMBER 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Haiti has been experiencing a deepening political, security, and humanitarian crisis since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, with escalating gang-related violence and civil unrest, particularly in the West, Artibonite, and Centre departments. Weak rule of law institutions, constrained resources, and endemic corruption hinder the State's ability to protect and promote human rights. Armed violence exacerbates pre-existing humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities stemming from multiple socio-economic inequalities and frequent natural disasters.

The current context exposes the population to serious protection risks, with people caught between multiple armed actors (gangs, self-defense groups, and security forces). From 1 January until 31 August 2025, the Human Rights Service (HRS) of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 4,006 killings and 1,617 injuries. These casualties occurred as a result of gang attacks, security forces' operations against gangs, as well as through acts of "popular justice" carried out by self-defense groups and unorganized members of the population. Gangs use kidnapping as a systematic tactic for extortion. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains alarmingly high yet underreported, with 6,450 incidents primarily targeting women and girls, reported from January to the end of August 2025. Children are also affected by violence, face family separation, and are at risk of trafficking, including recruitment by armed gangs, where they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Additionally, restrictions on freedom of movement further expose people to violence and human rights violations and abuses, create significant barriers to basic services (including food, safe drinking water, healthcare and education), affect transportation of goods, and have resulted in shrinking humanitarian space that impedes the delivery of life-saving activities.

Since 2022, nearly 1.3 million people have been forcibly displaced within the country. Many have sought shelter within overstretched and strained host communities, while others reside in unsafe, overcrowded displacement sites with limited basic services. The Haitian social fabric has been deeply affected, families are separated, education and employment disrupted, and social protection further constrained. Simultaneously, Haitians who had left the country in pursuit of safety and economic opportunities, including in the Dominican Republic, are at risk of deportation, often without basic safeguards or respect for due process.

As part of the humanitarian reset, in Haiti, there is an opportunity to strengthen the protection approach by improving efficiency and better aligning resources with identified risks. Protection goes beyond delivering assistance or responding to incidents; it fundamentally requires efforts to reduce risks and build resilience. Investing in prevention, risk mitigation, and community-based protection strategies is essential to promoting individual agency and strengthening social cohesion.

The protection risks requiring immediate attention in the period covered by this analysis are:

1. **Killings, injuries, and attacks on infrastructures**
2. **Kidnapping, captivity and disappearance**
3. **Gender-based violence**
4. **Trafficking and exploitation of children through gang recruitment**
5. **Impediments and restrictions on freedom of movement and forced displacement**

URGENT ACTIONS NEEDED

- Advance institutional reforms and improve the performance of rule of law institutions, including the Haitian National Police (HNP) and the judiciary, to ensure accountability for systemic human rights violations and abuses by all armed actors, while also promoting victim-centered justice.
- Support community-based organizations and networks as key actors in the prevention, mitigation, and response to protection risks and needs.
- Promote complementarity between humanitarian, development, and human rights efforts to mitigate protection risks and address the comprehensive needs of individuals and communities.
- Strengthen intersectoral coordination, harmonize referral pathways, and provide technical support to enable timely, comprehensive, and person-centered protection responses.

CONTEXT

CASUALTIES		GBV INCIDENTS		KIDNAPPING		IDP		CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED GANGS	
5,623		6,450		472		1.3 M		302	
PERIOD	Source	PERIOD	Source	PERIOD	Source	PERIOD	Source	PERIOD	Source
Jan to 31 Aug 2025	OHCHR, 2025	Jan-to 31 Aug 2025	GBV AoR	Jan to 31 Aug 2025	OHCHR	As of June 2023	IOM DTM	2024	UNICEF

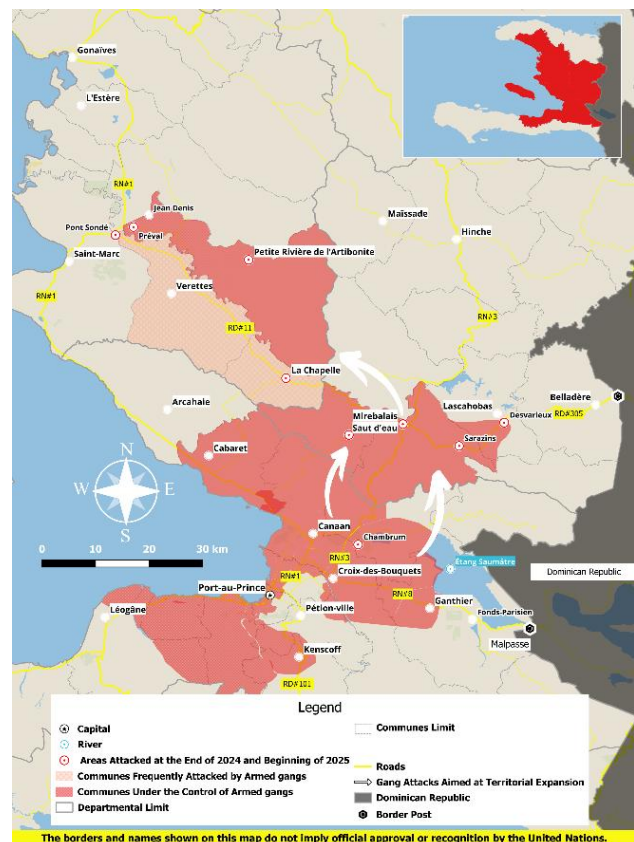
POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Haiti continues to face political instability, shaped by long-standing institutional weaknesses, socio-economic challenges, and escalating armed violence. The 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse deepened the crisis. In April 2024, under the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a Transitional Presidential Council (TPC) was established to guide a transition, appointing Gary Conille as Prime Minister to restore security and organize elections. He was replaced by Didier Fils-Aimé in November 2024. Since then, armed violence, political tensions, internal disagreements, and corruption allegations within the TPC and the government have stalled progress on security, constitutional, and electoral reforms. Public confidence remains low, jeopardizing the plan to hold free, fair elections and complete the transition by February 2026, as outlined in the political transition plan.

ESCALATION OF GANG VIOLENCE AND EXPANSION TO ARTIBONITE AND CENTER DEPARTMENTS

Since mid-July 2021, armed gangs in Haiti have expanded their territorial control and influence, committing widespread human rights violations and abuses, including killings, kidnappings, sexual violence, movement restrictions, and the destruction of public and private property, to subjugate communities and consolidate power. Major infrastructure and transit points, including land routes connecting key ports in Port-au-Prince, are partially controlled by gangs. International flights to the capital remain suspended after gangs opened fire on three planes in November 2024 – the second such incident that year.

Violence is increasingly spreading from the capital (West department) into other departments, particularly the Artibonite and the Centre. Recent gang attacks in these areas have triggered mass displacements and appear to be part of a strategic effort to further control key transportation routes connecting the capital to the north and east of the country, including toward the Dominican Republic border. This raises the risk of regional destabilization and further cross-border trafficking, including in arms, ammunition, and people.



WEAK RULE OF LAW INSTITUTIONS AND SECURITY FORCES INTERVENTIONS

Haiti's under-resourced and inadequately trained law enforcement struggles to protect the population and has been implicated in human rights violations, including summary executions. Meanwhile, the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission, deployed in June 2024 under a UN mandate, has had limited impact due to capacity constraints. In areas where state authority is absent, self-defense groups and non-organized members of the population have sought to counter gangs, but have also committed serious human rights abuses, including killings, sometimes with the involvement of police officers.

To counter rising gang violence and territorial expansion, the Haitian Government formed a special security Task Force in March 2025, reportedly under the coordination of the Prime Minister's office and supported by elements of the Prime Minister's Security Unit (USPM) and the General Security Unit of the National Palace (USGPN). Since late July 2025, police leadership has begun to coordinate with the Task Force, the MSS mission, and the Armed Forces (FAd'H) to combine drone operations with ground interventions.

Haiti's justice system remains deeply dysfunctional, hindered by structural challenges such as insufficient resources and pervasive corruption. These issues create barriers to victims' access to justice, perpetuate widespread impunity, and undermine public confidence in state institutions. As of 30 June, 7,163 people were detained in Haiti's prisons, 82% of whom were held in pre-trial detention, with some spending more time in detention awaiting trial than the sentences they would have served if convicted. The impact of this situation on children is particularly concerning, as minors are detained alongside adults. Detention conditions remain inhuman and degrading due to overcrowding and lack of food, clean water, and medical care.

BARRIERS TO BASIC SERVICES, MARGINALIZATION, AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES

Haiti faces some of the most severe social and economic inequalities in the Americas region, rooted in decades of political instability, entrenched corruption and impunity, economic crises, natural disasters, and externally imposed economic reforms. Weakened state institutions have limited the government's ability to deliver basic services, particularly in underserved areas under the control or influence of armed gangs. Access to social protection remains limited.

The population, notably those living in neighborhoods most affected by violence, continue to face numerous barriers to healthcare, education, and other essential services. For example, 45% of inpatient health facilities in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince are closed or destroyed, and only 36% remain fully operational. Violence and insecurity, including attacks on infrastructure, lack of affordable and/or safe transport, high medical fees, and limited health system capacity further hinder access. Similarly, UNICEF reports that as of 30 April 2025, 1,606 schools across the Artibonite, Center, North, and West departments have closed, a 60% increase compared to the beginning of the year.

The lack of civil documentation poses additional barriers to accessing rights and essential services, increasingly emerging as a structural protection risk. The situation is driven by a combination of discriminatory practices, and systemic gaps in legal and administrative frameworks. Such impediments to legal identity can act as a form of deprivation, systematically increasing vulnerability and eroding coping capacities, while also generating cascading effects across other protection risks. Without valid official identification, individuals may be excluded from humanitarian assistance, social protection programs, and basic services. For example, children without birth certificates cannot enroll in school, while adults face restrictions in receiving remittances, opening bank accounts, or securing formal employment. Internally displaced people, residents of marginalized areas, and people who have been deported are particularly affected. For example, 33% of those deported from the Dominican Republic returned without identification.

PROTECTION RISKS

RISK 1 Killings, injuries & attacks on infrastructure

According to the Human Rights Service (HRS) of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), between 1 January and 31 August 2025, at least 4,006 people were killed and 1,617 were injured. This represents an increase of 10% compared to the same period in 2024, when 3,462 killings and 1,650 injuries were documented. In 2025, most casualties were documented in the West department (79%), followed by the Artibonite department (14%) and the Centre department (5%). Men accounted for 86% of casualties, women for 12% and children for 2%.

Unlike previous years (2022-2024), most casualties in 2025 were caused during security force operations, followed by gang attacks, acts of “popular justice” by self-defense groups and non-organized members of the population, and summary executions by law enforcement officials.

Table 1: Context of Violence between 1 January and 31 August 2025

CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE	NUMBER OF VICTIMS	PERCENTAGE
Security forces operations against gangs	3,199	57%
Gang attacks against the population	1,681	30%
Acts of “popular justice” by self-defense groups and non-organized members of the population	546	10%
Summary executions by the Haitian National Police and the Public Prosecutor of Miragoâne	197	3%

During security forces operations against gangs, 83% of the casualties were gang members, while 17% were members of the population. Most security operations were conducted on the ground by specialized units of the Haitian National Police (HNP), sometimes supported by the Armed Forces of Haiti (FAd’H), the Protected Areas Security Brigade (BSAP), and the MSS mission. In the context of on the ground HNP operations, casualties among gang members occurred during exchanges of fire with the police, while members of the population were mostly hit by stray bullets as they went about their daily activities in the streets or inside their homes. This points to a lack of precautionary measures by the police to protect the population during law enforcement operations.

Other operations were carried out by the government’s special security Task Force, allegedly involving foreign Private Military and Security Companies, with the use of explosive drones. Since the beginning of these operations on 1 March 2025, and as of end of August, drone strikes have killed at least 494 people and injured 418 others. While the majority of victims were alleged gang members, the casualties also included 15 residents killed (among them seven children aged between 8 and 13) and nine others injured. Drone strikes have also resulted in the destruction of property occupied by, or located near, gang bases – including private residences, businesses, and at least one school.

Some police officers, notably from specialized units, continued to carry out summary executions of alleged gang members or individuals suspected of providing them support. Victims were typically intercepted during patrols or at checkpoints, interrogated, and based on their responses, shot on the spot. In certain cases, individuals were suspected of gang affiliation merely because they lived in gang-controlled areas or failed to present an identification document¹. There continues to be a lack of accountability for human rights violations involving police personnel.

¹ Between January and end of August, at least 154 people (135 men, 16 women, and 3 boys aged between 15 and 17) were summarily executed by the police.

Additionally, during the same period, the Public Prosecutor of Miragoâne summarily executed 43 individuals (all adult males) for their alleged affiliation with gangs or for common crimes, including theft, in total impunity. This brings the total number of people killed by this Public Prosecutor to at least 83 since early 2022.

At the same time, in areas under their control, gangs continue to tighten their grip through targeted killings and massacres. For example, on 11 September 2025, armed gangs carried out an attack in the locality of Labodrie (Arcahaie), killing at least 42 people, injuring 25 others, and burning approximately 70 private residences. Moreover, gangs have targeted key infrastructure, such as the Mirebalais hospital in Centre department, which was forced to temporarily close its doors following gang attacks in March 2025. In some neighborhoods, they have turned school premises into operational bases, such as the Maranatha school in Grand Ravine (Port-au-Prince), which has been occupied by the Grand Ravine gang since 2020. The building has subsequently become the target for drone strikes carried out by the Government's special security Task Force.

Self-defense groups have become the only security structures standing in some areas. While they have provided a certain degree of security in some zones, they have also been involved in serious human rights abuses, including the killing of individuals suspected of gang membership or of providing support to gangs but who, at the time of the incidents, were not armed or involved in violence. For example, in May 2025, a coalition of self-defense groups in Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite attacked residents of the Préval locality, accusing them of collaborating with a gang. During this attack, at least 55 individuals were killed while inside a church or while working in their fields. At least 30 residences were also set on fire by the self-defense groups' members.

Armed-gang violence is a leading cause of emotional distress in Haiti, with devastating and far-reaching consequences for the everyday lives of families. A notable and lasting consequence for families directly impacted by gang-related violence is the disruption of household livelihoods. When the head of a household is killed or seriously injured, other family members, including children, are often forced to assume additional responsibilities to meet basic needs. Injuries sustained from violence can significantly reduce a survivor's ability to work, and medical care is not always affordable or available. It is also not uncommon for gangs to burn residences and businesses during their attacks, forcing entire communities to flee their homes. The resulting strain often pushes families to adopt harmful coping strategies. These include transactional sex or withdrawing children from school to reduce expenses or involve them in income-generating activities. Children who lose one or both parents to violence face even greater risks. In the absence of a protective family environment, limited access to quality education, and a lack of youth-focused resilience programming, these children become highly vulnerable to human rights abuses, including trafficking and recruitment by armed gangs or other criminal networks.

TESTIMONIES | On 30 May 2025, gangs launched an attack on Pétion-Ville, the neighborhood where four sisters aged between 2 and 14, lived with their parents. The assault was part of a broader offensive across Pétion-Ville and the nearby commune of Tabarre, aimed at reclaiming territory lost by *Kraze Baryè*, an allied gang, in recent police operations. During the incursion, the gangs clashed with both police forces and local self-defense groups, but they also deliberately targeted the population. That day, gang members stormed the sisters' home, shooting them and two other family members dead before setting their bodies on fire.

Source: HRS of BINUH and OHCHR

Communities can mitigate the impacts of violence, foster cohesion, and reduce stigmatization. Grassroots organizations and faith-based initiatives play a critical role. For instance, in Cité Soleil, *La Famille Kizito* provides care for orphaned children who lost their parents to gang violence. Through its support, children have found refuge in foster homes, returned to school, benefited from extracurricular activities, had access to food, and began healing with access to psychological and medical care. Some civil society organizations have also established "peace clubs" in schools located in areas affected by armed violence. These clubs offer spaces for young people to learn dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution. Furthermore, the *Club des jeunes filles* empowers women and girls through decision-making, health, and psychosocial support. The *Scout program* builds youth resilience by strengthening practical safety skills and solidarity, thereby reducing reliance on harmful coping mechanisms.

These efforts are reinforced by humanitarian actors and, in some cases, integrated into the formal education system. International partners also provide training and resources that sustain these local mechanisms. Together, these capacities

do not eliminate the threat of attacks but mitigate their impact by empowering individuals, reinforcing collective resilience, and linking communities with broader protective systems.

RISK 2 Kidnapping, captivity and disappearance

Kidnapping for ransom by gangs remains a major risk in Haiti, with at least 472 victims documented between January and end of August 2025, a 54% decrease from the same period in 2024. Actual figures are likely higher as many families negotiate directly with perpetrators rather than involving the police. Most cases (60%) were documented in the Artibonite department, followed by the West (38%) and Centre (2%) departments. Ransom payments provide a lucrative source of income to sustain gang operations, while inflicting severe financial hardship on victims and their families.

No social category has been spared from kidnappings. Gangs have targeted drivers, passengers and passersby, restricting the population's ability to move freely across the territory, disrupting economic and social activities, and hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Such incidents have potential implications for the continuity of critical services and increase the vulnerability of already at-risk populations.

Several reports by local service providers and human rights organizations document extreme violence against kidnapping victims, who are sometimes held for extended periods. Women and girls face heightened risks of sexual violence while in captivity, including rape, often by multiple perpetrators, and sexual slavery. LGBTQ+ individuals are subjected to degrading and punitive treatment, including forced sexual acts framed as "correction". These acts reveal a pattern of gender-based discriminatory violence embedded within kidnapping practices.

The physical and psychological consequences for survivors are profound and long-lasting, with many experiencing post-traumatic stress. Other consequences resulting from the kidnapping may compound the trauma caused by the incident itself. These include social stigma, particularly when the survivor has been raped, and additional financial hardships – often involving the depletion of life savings, the sale of homes, or taking out bank loans – to pay ransoms or relocate for safety. The use of kidnapping as a tool to instill fear and control not only devastates individuals and families but also erodes community resilience and deepens mistrust in public institutions.

Recent media reports point to a pattern of unexplained disappearances of individuals, suggesting a deepening protection risk whose full scope remains opaque. Actors involved include armed gangs in the Canaan and Gressier communes (West department), and the Savien locality in the Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite commune (Artibonite department), and local self-defense groups. In the Artibonite department, over 20 cases were documented in 2024 involving alleged home raids by self-defense groups. Some victims were found dead and mutilated in relation to "ritual ceremonies", while others remain missing. In gang-controlled areas, disappearances often follow ransom non-payment, with bodies dumped in rivers or landfills. Meanwhile, families continue to report missing relatives, raising suspicions of either concealed fatalities or human trafficking routes. Recent accounts from local organizations indicate that girls as young as 12 and 13 have gone missing and are believed to be held in conditions of sexual slavery. Though these patterns are not yet confirmed as widespread, they suggest the possible emergence of criminal networks exploiting the absence of accountability. In February 2007, Haiti signed the UN Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances; however, the instrument has not yet been ratified.

TESTIMONIES | On 3 August 2025, members of the *Village de Dieu* gang stormed the *Nos Petits Frères et Sœurs* center, located in the Kenscoff commune, a facility that provides schooling, orphanage services, and comprehensive care for children with special needs. That morning, heavily armed gang members forced their way into the facility by smashing through a perimeter wall. They went directly to the section housing the children with special needs, from where they kidnapped eight people, including a child and a female missionary responsible for the center. The hostages were held captive for nearly a month before finally being released. Two weeks later, the gangs stormed the same orphanage and abducted three other people – two adults and one boy.

Source: HRS of BINUH and OHCHR

RISK 3 Gender-based violence

Alarming levels of sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) persist across Haiti, particularly in areas most affected by violence and displacement, as well as in more remote communities. Between January and August 2025, 6,450 new incidents were reported to the GBV services providers, representing an increase of 34% compared to the same period in 2024². Nearly half of all reported cases involved rape. Where information on perpetrators was available, armed gangs were identified as responsible for 75% of reported incidents. Gangs use rape, often collective, and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, to assert their power and control over the population, including minors. In some instances, survivors were assaulted in front of their children or after witnessing the killing of family members.

Most survivors (69%) are internally displaced persons, spread between host communities and makeshift displacement sites. Overcrowded, unsafe, and undignified living conditions in these sites, combined with a lack of basic services, continue to exacerbate vulnerabilities and increase the risk of exposure to violence and exploitation. The presence of armed actors around or inside displacement sites contributes to pervasive insecurity, with women and girls often avoiding certain areas. There are also reports of sexual exploitation, including those involving displaced persons' committees, as well as cases of women engaging in transactional sex with gang members for basic goods, protection, or social status.

Survivors frequently face severe physical, psychological, and social consequences, including sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, injuries, shame and guilt, and social rejection. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to psychological and emotional abuse. Despite the scale of the crisis and profound impacts on survivors, timely and comprehensive GBV care remains extremely limited. From January to August 2025, among survivors who managed to access care, 25% were able to do so within 72 hours after the incident³. There is only one medical actor providing 24/7 comprehensive GBV care in Port-au-Prince. Additional barriers to care include insecurity, distance, lack of affordable and/or safe transportation, a lack of knowledge and information of why and how to seek care, and stigma and fear of retaliation. Support services, including emergency shelter, financial assistance, and legal aid are

similarly inadequate. For example, emergency shelter is consistently identified as a priority need, but the number of functional shelters is limited. Those shelters, mainly run by Haitian organizations, often lack capacity, have restrictive admission criteria, and limit duration of stays. Sustainable funding is an added challenge, leading to fragmented and inconsistent shelter availability. As a result, many survivors remain exposed to violence, including re-victimization.

As with killings and injuries, GBV survivors continue to face significant barriers to justice and effective remedies. They often experience a disregard for basic rights when navigating the justice system, including breaches of confidentiality and privacy, lack of informed consent, and lack of respectful and dignified treatment. Complex and obstructive procedures can lead to re-traumatization and further discourage survivors from seeking justice. Impunity deepens the already wide gap between cases reported and those litigated. To address this, in late 2024, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security established a commission to prioritize the handling of sexual violence cases. Since its creation and across 18 jurisdictions, 268 cases of sexual violence have been investigated, and 36 cases adjudicated. Over the last year, emphasis has been placed on reinforcing the capacity of the Haitian National Police and magistrates within the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to effectively investigate and prosecute sexual violence crimes, particularly those committed by gang members. Furthermore, in April 2025, two specialized judicial units (*pôles judiciaires spécialisés*) were established, one of

TESTIMONIES | On 20 February 2025, as the Grand Ravine and Village de Dieu gangs began raiding localities in Kenscoff, until recently a mostly peaceful rural area on the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Four armed gang members violently broke into the family home of a 16-year-old girl. They attempted to force her father to rape her. When he refused, the attackers shot him dead, in front of his family, and then collectively raped both the girl and her mother. The two, along with other relatives, were held captive for several days in their home and forced to cook for their aggressors. Eventually, the family managed to escape, but as they fled, the gang members set the house on fire.

Source: HRS of BINUH

² The data on GBV incidents is derived from aggregated reports submitted by multiple partners, whose reporting capacities may vary monthly. Both the number of reporting partners and the figures may therefore fluctuate over time. Incidents are voluntarily disclosed by survivors in the context of service provision. No identifiable data is shared with the GBV Sub-Cluster by partners.

³ SGBV survivors should (be enabled to) seek care as early as possible to receive the most comprehensive care.

which is dedicated to serious human rights violations and mass crimes, including sexual violence, and the other to corruption and impunity. Both are expected to become operational in the last quarter of 2025.

RISK 4 Trafficking and exploitation of children through gang recruitment

Children continue to be significantly affected by violence, including various forms of trafficking and exploitation, often linked to their recruitment and association with armed gangs. Adopting a human trafficking perspective marks a critical shift: it places gang abuses against children within a broader human rights framework, underscores the need for stronger protection measures for all children under 18, and affirms that those involved are victims, not perpetrators. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children in armed conflict, established under Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), estimated that, in Haiti, 302 children (256 boys and 46 girls) were recruited and exploited by gangs in 2024. While these figures likely reflect only a fraction of the reality, qualitative evidence gathered by the Human Rights Service of BINUH, OHCHR, and UNICEF from state authorities and service providers confirms both the alarming rise of this phenomenon and its devastating impact on children's rights and communities.

This trend is fueled by a complex interplay of structural factors, exploited through the criminal governance established by gangs in the neighborhoods under their control. Child trafficking and exploitation by gangs frequently involve threats and violence against children and their families in neighborhoods where gangs act as social regulators. In other cases, children are driven to join gangs in search of economic support for themselves and their families, or out of a perceived sense of protection and belonging. The socio-economic situation of households plays a critical driver, as children from low-income and/or single-headed households face heightened risks. Some join armed gangs as a coping mechanism to address food insecurity and unmet basic needs, while others had already dropped out of school before joining gangs, often due to the inability to afford school fees, supplies, or uniforms. Furthermore, close ties with gang members can facilitate the recruitment of children, including girls who may reportedly enter into sexual relationships as a perceived means of protection from community violence. A parent's involvement in a gang can influence children to follow in their footsteps.

TESTIMONIES | Joseph (not real name) grew up in a neighborhood where gangs controlled daily life. He often saw armed men on the streets, some well-dressed, with expensive cars and surrounded by women. In August 2024, at 16 years old, Joseph was spending time with a friend involved in a gang when he heard about the money and sense of importance it offered. Despite his hesitation, he ultimately decided to join. He was first given a radio to monitor police movements, then a gun amid rumors of an imminent police raid. When he said he wanted to leave, the gang leader beat him repeatedly with a gun, breaking his hand, and threatened to kill him if he tried to escape. Despite his fear, Joseph fled soon afterwards, and in September 2024 someone from his community referred him to an organization that has since provided him with medical care, counseling and support to recover from the experience.

Source: Service Provider

Children associated with armed gangs, some as young as 10 years old, are exploited in a range of roles, including domestic tasks such as cleaning and cooking, surveillance of police movements, transporting ammunition, delivering extortion payment letters to businesses, as well as participating in clashes with other gangs. Girls face heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation and are often forced into sexual relationships with gang members. Once recruited, many children are unable to leave freely due to threats and fear of retaliation. Several have also reported remaining within gangs due to the absence of alternatives to earn an income. Rejection or violence from families and communities due to their association with a gang further compounds their isolation and creates additional barriers to reintegration.

Addressing the involvement of children with armed gangs in Haiti requires a holistic and integrated response. Social and education programs targeting at-risk children and youth, as well as support for their families, are essential to creating safe environments, building resilience and reducing vulnerability to recruitment by addressing poverty, social exclusion, and lack of socio-economic opportunities.

While social protection programs exist in Haiti, none specifically address the needs of children at risk of gang recruitment. The 2020 National Social Protection and Promotion Policy (NSPPP), overseen by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MAST), is not equipped to identify or target these children and their families in Port-au-Prince. A core constraint is the dysfunction of its social registry, SIMAST, which cannot operate effectively in gang-controlled areas. Alternatives are being tested, such as setting up kiosks in safe public spaces. Grassroots initiatives supporting family livelihoods have

demonstrated effectiveness but remain limited in scale and rely on unstable donor funding. Furthermore, to encourage school attendance and improve access to quality learning opportunities, public authorities, along with local and international organizations, continue to support initiatives such as awareness sessions on the risks of gang involvement, temporary learning spaces, and the enrollment of displaced children in functional schools.

Civic education initiatives, including human rights education, peaceful conflict resolution and psychosocial support, complement school efforts to build resilience. Because many schools cannot operate, community and faith-based organizations, with UN support, run child friendly spaces that provide food, basic services, psychosocial care, sports, and skills training. In February 2025, the government launched the Prejeunes Programme, with support from UNICEF, to prevent and respond to the recruitment of children and youth and support the reintegration of released children.

From a rule of law perspective, on 27 October 2023, the government, assisted by the UN, signed a “Protocol of Agreement on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered During Security Operations on National Territory” to ensure the proper handling of minors associated with gangs who are arrested or rescued by security forces. While some provisions of the protocol are being implemented, others remain pending. It is essential that security operations respect human rights when arresting minors in conflict with the law. At the same time, the national child protection system - including the police Brigade for the Protection of Minors (BPM) and the Institute of Social Welfare and Research (IBESR) - must be strengthened, as both institutions currently lack the financial and human resources required to meet the growing scale of needs of children associated with gangs.

RISK 5 Impediments and restrictions to freedom of movement and forced displacement

Armed gangs continue to impose serious restrictions on the freedom of movement of the population. Key transportation corridors leading to and from Port-au-Prince remain under control of armed gangs. Land routes to the main ports within the capital are also affected. Illicit taxation has emerged as a common practice and source of revenue among armed actors, including gangs but reportedly also involving elements of the Haitian National Police and self-defense groups.

Movement restrictions caused by violence, illegal checkpoints manned by gang elements, and police patrols in armored vehicles severely limit people’s access to basic services. Public transport is limited and often costly, with some drivers refusing to enter areas considered high-risk. As a result, many people are forced to wait long hours or walk long distances, exposing them to violence, including the risk of stray bullets. These challenges are compounded by the limited or non-functionality of healthcare and education systems in some areas, especially those most affected by violence and insecurity. Due to fear of reprisals, residents of certain areas often do not disclose their area of origin or residence.

Widespread violence, insecurity, and a deteriorating humanitarian situation continue to drive large-scale displacement, with nearly 1.3 million people currently internally displaced across the country. According to IOM, 83% of these internally displaced persons (IDPs), over half of whom are children (53%), are staying with host families, already overstretched and under significant strain. The vast majority of displaced people (91%) living in sites remain in Port-au-Prince.

Living conditions in displacement sites remain extremely precarious, marked by overcrowding, lack of safety, and inadequate service provision, which expose people to serious health and protection risks. Many are unable to return home due to ongoing insecurity or because their homes have been destroyed or ransacked. These threats are compounded by the presence of armed individuals in and around sites, substance abuse, and frequent incidents of violence, including gender-based violence and the risk of stray bullets. The physical environment is especially hazardous for children, older persons, and persons living with disabilities.

Despite an increase in the number of displacement sites in July 2025 (272), the overall IDP population in sites decreased compared to June, primarily due to the closure of some sites in Port-au-Prince. These closures are part of a government-led relocation initiative, framed as efforts to restore public facilities, particularly schools to their original functions. However, the lack of prior communication and coordination led to a process implemented with inadequate safeguards. Reports include forced eviction and the use of threats and violence by law enforcement.

Meanwhile, increasing deportations from the Dominican Republic and other countries, combined with the lack of a coordinated response to manage returns, often without basic safeguards, are compounding vulnerabilities and intensifying humanitarian needs. From January until end of July 2025, at least 178,345 people were forcibly returned.

RESPONSE

PROGRESS MADE ON PROTECTION

Progress has been made in addressing protection risks and providing timely responses, though efforts remain limited and uneven. In the area of GBV assistance, some survivors were able to access case management services, including medical care, psychosocial support, and temporary shelter. Additional support in prevention and risk mitigation included the distribution of dignity kits and economic reintegration assistance. Humanitarian actors were trained on GBV standards to strengthen quality and accountability in service delivery. On 9–10 July 2025, the Ministry on the Status and Rights of Women, with support from UNFPA and the GBV Sub-Cluster partners, convened a consultative workshop on GBV Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Updated service mappings and referral pathways, completed in May 2025, have improved coordination and access to essential services in high-risk areas. On child protection, new safe spaces were established through the *Espace Amis des Enfants* initiative in Bas Artibonite, offering structured psychosocial support, recreational activities, and essential protection services for children affected by violence and displacement. Civil documentation initiatives focused on sensitization campaigns and the issuance of birth certificates, enhancing the legal protection of vulnerable populations and supporting their access to basic rights and services.

Two new Community Resource Centers (CRCs) became operational in the Artibonite department in July 2025, adding to the two already operating in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. CRCs serve as physical platforms that connect people affected by crises, regardless of status, including IDPs and host communities, with humanitarian and social responders. These centers provide coordinated, equitable, and informed services ranging from information sharing, legal support, counseling, and mobile medical clinics to community workshops, vocational training, and informal education. CRCs offer an innovative model that aligns humanitarian assistance with evolving community needs. They also link emergency preparedness, response, transition, and stabilization phases of a response.

At the strategic level the 2020 National Social Protection and Promotion Policy (NSPPP) and the national protection strategy (2023), co-led by the *Office de la Protection du Citoyen* (OPC) and OHCHR, remain the overarching reference frameworks. The Protection Cluster continues to support their implementation, particularly in the areas of trafficking, migration, and protection of women, children, and vulnerable groups.

ACCESS-RELATED CHALLENGES AND ACTIONS

The humanitarian response in Haiti faces significant challenges, with OCHA recording nearly 500 access-related incidents between January and July 2025. Shifting frontlines, illegal checkpoints, threat of kidnapping, and extortion by armed actors create dynamic access conditions that necessitate engagement at all levels to ensure the safety and continuity of humanitarian activities. To navigate this environment, humanitarian actors often rely on indirect strategies and sustained negotiations, often leveraging visible, tangible assistance to build acceptance and facilitate access. Despite these efforts, the absence of centralized governance and persistent security threats continue to fragment operations and raise concerns about equitable access for the most vulnerable populations. Operational presence is largely confined to the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, with few actors in the Centre department and Bas Artibonite region.

On 2 May 2025, the United States designated Haiti's Viv Ansanm coalition and Gran Grif gang as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists. While aimed at disrupting the armed gangs' financial and operational networks, the move poses risks for NGOs operating in gang-controlled areas, including donor hesitancy and concerns over being seen as providing "material support" through humanitarian aid.

CRITICAL GAPS IN FUNDING AND POPULATION REACHED

Funding remains insufficient, with recent cuts from international partners further reducing support, including for LGBTIQ+ organizations that provide free sexual and reproductive health care, psychosocial support, and safe temporary shelter for marginalized communities. Despite a CERF-supported scale-up in 2023, protection risks may be deprioritized in upcoming response plans, including the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, raising concerns about the sustainability of services and the capacity to address growing vulnerabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK 1 Killings, injuries, and attacks on infrastructure

HAITIAN GOVERNMENT

- Adopt institutional reforms within the Haitian National Police to improve performance, respect human rights during operations, ensure accountability, and promote human rights compliance. This includes vetting high-ranking police officers and operational units fighting gangs, strengthening the capacity of the police inspectorate, and ensuring accountability for human rights violations committed by police officers in the course of their duties.
- Adopt regulations that guarantee transparency, accountability, and effective access to justice for victims of human rights violations during Task Force operations.
- Strengthen survivor-centred justice to address impunity, particularly in cases of gender-based violence and other human rights violations and abuses. This includes prioritizing the full operationalization of specialized judicial units to ensure accountability for mass killings and widespread sexual violence, while simultaneously strengthening and expediting the prosecution of other cases within the regular justice system.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Provide support to Haitian judicial institutions to investigate and prosecute major massacres through the specialized judicial units (*pôles judiciaires spécialisés*).
- Implement the UN sanctions regime, including the targeted arms embargo and combating illicit weapons and ammunition trafficking by increasing inspections of shipments destined for Haiti within neighboring countries' jurisdictions.
- Support community initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and safety through inclusive, locally-led approaches.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Increase support to grassroots organizations to implement community-based protection measures, focusing on preventing, mitigating, and responding to violence and exploitation.
- Expand communities' mental health and psychosocial support through the establishment of safe spaces and training of community leaders and frontline workers in Psychological First Aid (PFA).
- Strengthen inclusive local dialogue platforms and community-based early warning systems.

RISK 2 Kidnapping, captivity and disappearance

HAITIAN GOVERNMENT

- Provide protection, psychosocial support and reintegration services for released individuals and their families.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Establish intersectoral referral pathways in high-risk areas to strengthen protection and response to kidnapping.

RISK 3 Gender-based violence

HAITIAN GOVERNMENT

- Improve survivor-centred comprehensive GBV care and services, with the support of humanitarian actors and the international community. This includes expanding safe shelters and exploring models for integrated service centers.
- Strengthen safe, confidential, and community-based complaints and feedback mechanisms.
- Increase training and awareness on survivor-centered principles within the legal and justice systems.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Ensure gender-sensitive infrastructure in displacement sites, including lighting and WASH facilities.
- Expand medical and psychosocial service provision through mobile clinics and community-based referral systems.
- Strengthen livelihoods support to address harm coping mechanisms and support survivor reintegration, alongside awareness-raising on GBV prevention and services.

- Enhance multi-sectoral coordination across health, protection, legal, Camp Coordination and Camp Management and education sectors to expand safe entry points and harmonized referral pathways.
- Train community and faith leaders, and frontline workers on GBV prevention, risk mitigation, and response.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Provide direct, flexible funding to women-led and community-based organizations engaged in GBV response.
- Support legal and policy reforms, expand access to justice for survivors, and invest in capacity-building across health, protection, and social service sectors.

RISK 4 Trafficking and exploitation of children through armed gang recruitment

HAITIAN GOVERNMENT

- Expand social protection initiatives for at-risk children and youth, including comprehensive family support services, while also supporting reintegration efforts for those already associated by gangs. This includes:
 - Adopt a holistic and integrated program that addresses the criminal governance of gangs, strengthens social support for families with children at risk, promotes school attendance (including through school canteens, cash transfers, psychosocial activities in schools, etc.), and fosters civic education initiatives, while expanding youth vocational and employment opportunities.
 - Provide mental health care and child-friendly justice, fully operationalize the Protocol of Agreement on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered During Security Operations on National Territory, and reinforce the capacity of the Child Protection Brigade, the Institute of Social Welfare and Research, and the special courts for children to support this process effectively.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Support education services, including flexible non-formal learning where schools are inaccessible, and establish child-friendly spaces that offer psychosocial support and protection.
- Implement youth resilience programs, including secondary and accelerated education, vocational training, life skills development to promote economic, civic, and social participation.
- Support local organizations working with children associated with armed gangs and ensure the inclusion of family support mechanisms for sustainable and holistic reintegration.
- Conduct awareness-raising initiatives targeting law enforcement regarding child trafficking and exploitation.

RISK 5 Impediments and restrictions to freedom of movement and forced displacement

HAITIAN GOVERNMENT

- Adopt a national framework to internal displacement in close collaboration with humanitarian actors, promoting coordinated action and durable solutions that uphold protection standards and are grounded in safety, voluntariness, and dignity.
- Strengthen civil documentation, including resource allocation to local registries and support for community-based organizations offering legal counseling. Ease documentation requirements for humanitarian aid and public services.
- Promote community-driven social cohesion strategies, including in hosting areas.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Support community contingency planning in areas affected by or at risk of violence to strengthen local preparedness and response capacity.
- Assign qualified humanitarian partners to manage all major IDP sites and actively engage relevant actors to uphold humanitarian principles and maintain site security.
- Establish additional Community Resource Centers (CRCs) to provide services, referrals, and promote community participation.

Methodology

The methodology included key informant interviews with government officials, local and international NGOs, community-based organizations, and UN agencies. It included a desk review of secondary data, such as protection monitoring reports, multisectoral needs analysis, the HNO and HRP for Haiti 2025, and analysis of statistics on various databases.

Limitations

Due to limited resources, the methodology could not include surveys and focus group discussions to collect information directly from the affected people.

