



KEY PRIORITIES

100,000

REPORTED
RETURNS TO HAITI

High risk

OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST MIGRANTS

5.5

INFORM CLIMATE
CHANGE RISK
SCORE

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

On 15 September 2023, the Dominican Republic closed its land, air, and sea borders with Haiti and suspended the issuance of visas to Haitians in response to the construction of a canal in Haiti. The canal draws from the shared Massacre River and is intended to provide drought relief for Haiti's Maribaroux Plain. The Dominican Republic claims that the canal will affect the environment and Dominican farmers, violating a 1929 treaty governing Massacre River use (AP 15/09/2023 and 11/09/2023; CEPR 06/10/2023).

Following the border closures on 15 September, the UN urged a humanitarian exemption to allow Haitians to buy food and medical supplies from the Dominican Republic (OHCHR 18/09/2023; Miami Herald 16/09/2023). On 11 October, the Dominican Republic partially reopened the border, permitting Dominican vendors in border towns to sell basic goods, including food and medicine. It maintained a ban on the export of electronics and materials that could be used for canal construction, and on the entry of most Haitians for work, education, and medical purposes (AP 12/10/2023). Haiti declined to open one of the major border crossings on the Haitian side, at Ouanaminthe, demanding that the Dominican Republic fully open the border from its side first (Miami Herald 24/10/2023; ABC 12/10/2023; AP 12/10/2023; IOM accessed 31/01/2023). On 30 October, the Dominican Republic announced the resumption of a limited number of flights between the countries (Miami Herald 31/10/2023).

As at 24 October, more than 100,000 Haitians had returned to Haiti from the Dominican Republic in response to the border dispute (Miami Herald 24/10/2023). Returnees are citing harassment from Dominican security forces as the motivation for their return. The deportation of Haitians, which was already regular prior to the border dispute, has also intensified in recent weeks. There are reports of Dominican security forces committing violence and theft when raiding the homes of Haitian migrants (Al Jazeera 22/09/2023; GARR X 11/10/2023).

Humanitarian responders are concerned about the risk of violence against migrants, the loss of documents, education disruptions, and trafficking.

The border closures have also caused significant disruptions to livelihoods in Haitian and Dominican communities that sell and buy goods in binational markets (AP 15/09/2023; UNICEF 25/10/2023). There are also reports of protests at the Ouanaminthe border crossing in Haiti on 7–8 October and 21 October, to which Haitian police responded with tear gas and gunfire (Haiti Libre 09/10/2023; Gamax Live 09/10/2023; Crisis24 21/10/2022). If the border dispute and closures continue, there is a risk of further violence, displacement, and livelihood disruption, increasing needs in Haiti, which is already experiencing a complex humanitarian emergency.

INFORMATION GAPS

- The total number of Haitians who have returned from the Dominican Republic to Haiti is unclear. It is also unclear how many of them have been officially deported since the border closures or returned voluntarily or in response to pressure and harassment from Dominican authorities and host communities.
- It is unclear where the returnees and deportees are crossing into Haiti, and where they are settling. There are four official border crossings in Centre, Nord-Est, Ouest, and Sud-Est departments in Haiti, along with 96 unofficial crossing points along the border (IOM accessed 31/01/2023). As mentioned above, Haitian authorities have declined to open the Ouanaminthe border crossing, which connects to the Dominican market of Dajabon. Two other border gates, the first between Belladeres in Centre department (Haiti) and Elias Pina (Dominican Republic) and the second between Malpasse in Ouest Department (Haiti) and Jimani (Dominican Republic), have partially opened on both sides. It is unclear whether the fourth official land crossing, between Anse à Pitres in Sud-Est department (Haiti) and Pedernales (Dominican Republic), is open.
- There is minimal humanitarian reporting on the needs of returnees and deportees.

TERMINOLOGY

Most secondary sources reviewed for this report refer to Haitian migrants without consideration of their legal status and use the term as a catch-all to include economic migrants in regular or irregular situations, asylum seekers, and refugees.

The report uses the phrase 'returnees and deportees' to capture the mixed and as yet unclear circumstances surrounding the return of Haitians to the Dominican Republic given a lack of information on how many Haitians have been officially deported.

ANTICIPATED DEVELOPMENTS/IMPACTS

On 30 October, the Organisation of American States arrived in Port-au-Prince to gather information on the dispute after both countries requested its mediation (*Miami Herald* 31/10/2023; *EFE* 17/10/2023). The current position of Dominican officials is to keep the border partially closed until Haiti stops the construction of the canal (*Crisis24* 10/10/2023). Dominican President Luis Abinader is running for re-election in 2024 and has previously leveraged anti-Haitian sentiment to garner political support (*CEPR* 06/10/2023; *CMS* 23/10/2023). There is a risk of him refusing to genuinely engage in mediation efforts or increasing the deportation of Haitians to capitalise on anti-Haitian sentiment for political reasons (*Miami Herald* 24/10/2023).

The Haitian Government has insisted on the completion of the canal, which Haitians see as a point of national pride (*Miami Herald* 31/10/2023). This may also prevent the speedy and peaceful resolution of the dispute. Alternatively, any perceived capitulation by the Haitian Government risks spurring domestic discontent and increased violence. There are several reports of protests that have become violent at the Ouanaminthe border crossing in Haiti in recent weeks, although there is a lack of information on the involved parties and their aims (*Haiti Libre* 09/10/2023; *Gamax Live* 09/10/2023; *Crisis24* 21/10/2022). Past protests in Haiti against deportations from the Dominican Republic have prompted a violent response from Haitian police (*ACLED* 01/12/2022).

The continued border closures and displacement from the Dominican Republic to Haiti will aggravate existing needs in Haiti, which is already experiencing a complex humanitarian emergency with increasing gang violence, high food insecurity levels, and a cholera outbreak. As at 31 March, OCHA estimated that 5.2 million people, or nearly half the population, were in need (*OCHA* 31/03/2023; *UNICEF* 25/10/2023). While the exact number of returnees is unclear, even a small increase in the displaced population will increase existing needs and put pressure on a constrained humanitarian response. If the border closures are prolonged and/or tensions escalate, leading to increased displacement, the situation in Haiti may severely deteriorate. The humanitarian response is already under strain following an increase in

violence in Port-au-Prince in August, which displaced 40,000 people (*WFP* 30/10/2023). There is also a risk of hurricanes until the end of November, for which both the Government and humanitarians are reportedly underprepared (*OCHA* 21/09/2023; *IFRC* 20/10/2023).

CRISIS IMPACTS (CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED)

Livelihoods

Prior to the border closures on 15 September, tens of thousands of Haitian vendors typically travelled, passport-free, to over a dozen markets on the Dominican side of the border (*Miami Herald* 16/09/2023). The border closures have deprived many of these vendors of their main income source (*AP* 15/09/2023; *UNICEF* 25/10/2023). While Dominican authorities reopened the border for the trade of essential goods, it is unclear whether Haitian vendors can consistently access the Dajabon market in the Dominican Republic, given that Haitian authorities have not opened the Ouanaminthe border crossing. The export ban on construction materials has also prevented factories in Ouanaminthe from obtaining raw materials, causing financial losses in the Haitian free zones of Caracol and Codevi and the industrial zone in the capital, Port-au-Prince (*Miami Herald* 30/09/2023).

The value of cross-border trade between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is difficult to measure because of high informal trade volumes, particularly of food. Data from April 2020 recorded over 25% of Haiti's imports coming from the Dominican Republic and 85% of bilateral trade taking place overland (*IMF* 20/04/2020). This suggests that prolonged border closures may have a notable impact on livelihoods across Haiti.

Food security and nutrition

Around 4.35 million Haitians, nearly one-third of a population of 11.4 million, are estimated to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity levels through February 2024 (*IPC* 20/09/2023; *CIA* accessed 01/11/2023). Because of these high food insecurity levels, OCHA expects a significant increase in malnutrition cases in the coming months (*OCHA* 31/03/2023).

Ouest department, one of the two Haitian departments facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity levels, shares a border with the Dominican Republic (*IPC* 20/09/2023). There is currently no information on where recent returnees and deportees from the Dominican Republic are staying or whether they are receiving food from host communities. However, the influx of people in Ouest and other border departments may worsen food insecurity. The Famine Early Warning System Network predicts that the impact of closures and migrant returns on food security will only be temporary, mitigated by informal trade, seasonal food

and income sources, and year-end festivities. Dominican imports do not play a central role in Haitian food consumption, and prices have been stable or have decreased in Haiti since the dispute, except for small increases in Cap Haïtien and Ouanaminthe. That said, the proportion of the Haitian population facing IPC 3 food security may increase in Nord-Centre, Nord-Est, Ouest, and Sud-Est departments (FEWS NET 12/10/2023).

Shelter and WASH

As at 26 September, only 55% of the population in Haiti had access to clean drinking water, and 33% had access to basic sanitation facilities (WASH Cluster 26/09/2023). Shelter and WASH needs are particularly high among the large IDP population (nearly 200,000 as at 16 October), many of whom live in overcrowded shelters or sleep in the open (OCHA 16/10/2023; UNICEF 25/10/2023; UNSC 16/10/2023). This figure does not appear to include the reported 100,000 returnees and deportees from the Dominican Republic since the closures, whose arrival will likely increase the number of people living in poor shelters with inadequate WASH access.

Health

Following the border closures, healthcare facilities in Haiti were forced to limit their services because of medical supply shortages. These included clinics in Malpasse, which were cut off from Port-au-Prince by gang violence on the main road and which relied entirely on supplies from the Dominican Republic (Miami Herald 30/09/2023). There is no public information on whether this situation has improved since the Dominican Republic allowed the resumption of the cross-border trade of medical supplies on 11 October.

Increased returns from the Dominican Republic may increase the risk of disease outbreaks and transmission among displaced and host communities. Because of declined vaccine coverage, the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases in Haiti, including polio, diphtheria, and tetanus, is at a 30-year high. Violence-induced displacement has also increased the risk of outbreaks by forcing people into crowded shelters and preventing access to health services (PAHO 18/10/2023).

Cholera is a significant concern across Haiti, with nearly 65,000 suspected cases reported between October 2022 and September 2023. There are concerns about increasing cases during the current rainy season (October–November), including in Centre and Ouest departments on the border with the Dominican Republic (UNICEF 25/10/2023; WMO 08/2014).

Increased violence and social unrest resulting from the border closures could affect healthcare facilities and personnel, who are vulnerable to armed attacks. Ten health workers in Haiti were kidnapped in the first quarter of 2023 alone (OCHA 31/03/2023).

Protection

An unspecified number of Haitian migrants have been subject to violence and theft during raids by Dominican authorities following the border closures (Al Jazeera 22/09/2023; GARR X 11/10/2023). Dominican security forces have also been accused of violence against and mistreating Haitian migrants in the past. In September 2023, the UN condemned the arrest and deportation of pregnant and post-partum Haitian women when they sought medical care in the Dominican Republic (OHCHR 12/09/2023).

Returnees are also at risk of violence upon arrival in Haiti, where gangs and other armed groups cause significant protection concerns. The 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview projected that 1.9 million people would have protection needs in 2023 (OCHA 19/07/2023). Between March 2022 and March 2023, the number of people in need of protection increased by almost 100% (OCHA 31/03/2023). Poor-quality and overcrowded shelters and living conditions often increase the rate of sexual and gender-based violence in Haiti (UNICEF 25/10/2023).

Haiti's Support Group for Returnees and Refugees warned in September that the increased cross-border movement could raise the risk of trafficking (AP 15/09/2023). Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, particularly those with an irregular status, are at a particularly high risk of trafficking for sexual and economic exploitation (US DOS 2023).

As at 30 September, UNICEF's local counterparts had received an unspecified number of unaccompanied children from across the border (UNICEF 25/10/2023).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Political and security situation

Haiti has been in a political deadlock since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021. Current Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who was not elected and started ruling by decree, has failed to agree to a democratic transition with other political and civil society parties. This political dysfunction prevents a cohesive government response to the security crisis, which continues to deteriorate because of large-scale gang violence. Gang activities and control have expanded significantly since 2021 because of the political vacuum, the August 2021 earthquake, and resulting sociopolitical unrest (OCHA 31/03/2023). Criminal groups, many of which have links with prominent political figures, have reportedly become stronger under Henry's Government (HRW 14/08/2023). Since 2022, violence between two rival gangs, the G9 alliance and GPèp alliance, has been particularly intense in the capital, Port-au-Prince (Humanitarian Outcomes 02/08/2023). The UN estimates that gangs control nearly 90% of the capital. In response to gang violence, the Bwa Kale civilian defence movement was formed in April 2023 and has since lynched hundreds of alleged gang members. The Haitian police do not have the capacity and resources to combat this violence, and many police personnel have alleged links to gang members (GCR2P 31/08/2023).

Between 1 January and 30 September 2023, the UN recorded around 5,600 cases of armed group-related violence across Haiti, a significant increase from the same period in 2022 (UNICEF 25/10/2023). July–October 2023 saw a particular rise in killings, kidnapping incidents, and sexual violence cases, specifically in Port-au-Prince city and Artibonite department (UNSC 16/10/2023). In August, increased violence in Port-au-Prince killed hundreds of civilians, destroyed businesses, and forced 40,000 people to flee their homes. Those displaced are sheltering in more than 90 sites including schools, churches and abandoned buildings (WFP 30/10/2023).

Prior events of returns

Nearly 500,000 Haitians are living with an irregular status in the Dominican Republic. Dominican law enforcement regularly expels any Haitian who has failed to comply with a 2015 deadline to regularise their status (IOM accessed 31/10/2023). The Dominican Government had already increased the deportation of Haitians prior to the border closures, forcibly removing around 22,000 Haitians in August, around twice the typical monthly number (AP 15/09/2023).

Economic situation

Haiti is the poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean, with nearly 59% of the population living below the poverty line as at January 2023 (WB accessed 01/11/2023; UNICEF 05/01/2023). The country is in its third consecutive year of economic recession (Humanitarian Outcomes 02/08/2023; Health Cluster & WHO 07/09/2023). In July 2023, the year-on-year inflation rate in Haiti reached almost 40%, driven by high oil prices, poor weather conditions, and gang violence, which impede the supply of goods and services across the country (UNSC 16/10/2023).

A delay in the onset of the October–November rainy season and low overall rainfall levels in 2023 have increased fears of a poor harvest and high food prices in the coming months (UNSC 16/10/2023). Nearly 4.4 million people in Haiti are projected to experience IPC 3 or worse food insecurity levels until February 2024 (USAID 30/10/2023).

Climate and natural disasters

Haiti is prone to hurricanes, cyclones, storms, and earthquakes. Because of high deforestation levels, poor infrastructure, and weak governance, the country is highly vulnerable to the severe humanitarian impacts of natural disasters (CFR 03/10/2023). Haiti has an INFORM climate change risk score of 5.5/10, with a hazard and exposure score of 8.4/10 to earthquakes, 8.3/10 to tropical cyclones, 7.8/10 to epidemics, and 5.3/10 to tsunamis and droughts (EC accessed 01/11/2023). It scores a high 7.3/10 in terms of a lack of coping capacity, meaning that the national response capacity to mitigate impacts and address humanitarian needs resulting from climate hazards is challenged.

In June 2023, a heavy storm and associated flooding across Haiti affected 45,000 households, killing 58 people and damaging homes and agriculture. There were particularly significant effects in Ouest department, including areas close to the border with the Dominican Republic (OCHA 22/06/2023). More storms will possibly affect Haiti in November, the last month of the hurricane season (IFRC 20/10/2023). Increased displacement over the border may place additional strain on communities still recovering from the June storm.

Humanitarian constraints

The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan in Haiti is severely underfunded, at only 26% as at 14 September 2023. The lack of funding has significantly impeded humanitarian assistance delivery (OCHA 21/09/2023; OCHA 14/09/2023). Because of funding cuts, WFP has been unable to comprehensively respond to the most recent wave of displacement in Port-au-Prince and is restricted to providing only one meal per day to many of the 40,000 residents displaced by violence in the capital in August (WFP 30/10/2023).

Points

- Points Officiels
- Points Non Officiels

Legend

- Limites Administratives
- Limites Communes
- Limites Provinciales
- Capitales

Scale

0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 1100 1200 1300 1400 1500 1600 1700 1800 1900 2000 2100 2200 2300 2400 2500 2600 2700 2800 2900 3000 3100 3200 3300 3400 3500 3600 3700 3800 3900 4000 4100 4200 4300 4400 4500 4600 4700 4800 4900 5000 5100 5200 5300 5400 5500 5600 5700 5800 5900 6000 6100 6200 6300 6400 6500 6600 6700 6800 6900 7000 7100 7200 7300 7400 7500 7600 7700 7800 7900 8000 8100 8200 8300 8400 8500 8600 8700 8800 8900 9000 9100 9200 9300 9400 9500 9600 9700 9800 9900 10000 10100 10200 10300 10400 10500 10600 10700 10800 10900 11000 11100 11200 11300 11400 11500 11600 11700 11800 11900 12000 12100 12200 12300 12400 12500 12600 12700 12800 12900 13000 13100 13200 13300 13400 13500 13600 13700 13800 13900 14000 14100 14200 14300 14400 14500 14600 14700 14800 14900 15000 15100 15200 15300 15400 15500 15600 15700 15800 15900 16000 16100 16200 16300 16400 16500 16600 16700 16800 16900 17000 17100 17200 17300 17400 17500 17600 17700 17800 17900 18000 18100 18200 18300 18400 18500 18600 18700 18800 18900 19000 19100 19200 19300 19400 19500 19600 19700 19800 19900 20000 20100 20200 20300 20400 20500 20600 20700 20800 20900 21000 21100 21200 21300 21400 21500 21600 21700 21800 21900 22000 22100 22200 22300 22400 22500 22600 22700 22800 22900 23000 23100 23200 23300 23400 23500 23600 23700 23800 23900 24000 24100 24200 24300 24400 24500 24600 24700 24800 24900 25000 25100 25200 25300 25400 25500 25600 25700 25800 25900 26000 26100 26200 26300 26400 26500 26600 26700 26800 26900 27000 27100 27200 27300 27400 27500 27600 27700 27800 27900 28000 28100 28200 28300 28400 28500 28600 28700 28800 28900 29000 29100 29200 29300 29400 29500 29600 29700 29800 29900 30000 30100 30200 30300 30400 30500 30600 30700 30800 30900 31000 31100 31200 31300 31400 31500 31600 31700 31800 31900 32000 32100 32200 32300 32400 32500 32600 32700 32800 32900 33000 33100 33200 33300 33400 33500 33600 33700 33800 33900 34000 34100 34200 34300 34400 34500 34600 34700 34800 34900 35000 35100 35200 35300 35400 35500 35600 35700 35800 35900 36000 36100 36200 36300 36400 36500 36600 36700 36800 36900 37000 37100 37200 37300 37400 37500 37600 37700 37800 37900 38000 38100 38200 38300 38400 38500 38600 38700 38800 38900 39000 39100 39200 39300 39400 39500 39600 39700 39800 39900 40000 40100 40200 40300 40400 40500 40600 40700 40800 40900 41000 41100 41200 41300 41400 41500 41600 41700 41800 41900 42000 42100 42200 42300 42400 42500 42600 42700 42800 42900 43000 43100 43200 43300 43400 43500 43600 43700 43800 43900 44000 44100 44200 44300 44400 44500 44600 44700 44800 44900 45000 45100 45200 45300 45400 45500 45600 45700 45800 45900 46000 46100 46200 46300 46400 46500 46600 46700 46800 46900 47000 47100 47200 47300 47400 47500 47600 47700 47800 47900 48000 48100 48200 48300 48400 48500 48600 48700 48800 48900 49000 49100 49200 49300 49400 49500 49600 49700 49800 49900 50000 50100 50200 50300 50400 50500 50600 50700 50800 50900 51000 51100 51200 51300 51400 51500 51600 51700 51800 51900 52000 52100 52200 52300 52400 52500 52600 52700 52800 52900 53000 53100 53200 53300 53400 53500 53600 53700 53800 53900 54000 54100 54200 54300 54400 54500 54600 54700 54800 54900 55000 55100 55200 55300 55400 55500 55600 55700 55800 55900 56000 56100 56200 56300 56400 56500 56600 56700 56800 56900 57000 57100 57200 57300 57400 57500 57600 57700 57800 57900 58000 58100 58200 58300 58400 58500 58600 58700 58800 58900 59000 59100 59200 59300 59400 59500 59600 59700 59800 59900 60000 60100 60200 60300 60400 60500 60600 60700 60800 60900 61000 61100 61200 61300 61400 61500 61600 61700 61800 61900 62000 62100 62200 62300 62400 62500 62600 62700 62800 62900 63000 63100 63200 63300 63400 63500 63600 63700 63800 63900 64000 64100 64200 64300 64400 64500 64600 64700 64800 64900 65000 65100 65200 65300 65400 65500 65600 65700 65800 65900 66000 66100 66200 66300 66400

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