

OVERVIEW

- Since 29 February 2024, criminal gangs in Port-au-Prince have launched coordinated attacks against government institutions, destroying police facilities, paralysing several administrative services, blocking main roads, and forcing health facilities and schools to shut down (OCHA 24/05/2024; UN 24/05/2024; UN 22/05/2024). The violence has led to the temporary closure of Port-au-Prince's main airport, port, and metropolitan area (PAHO 05/03/2024; The Guardian 29/02/2024 and 04/03/2024; AJ 19/03/2024). Jimmy 'Barbecue' Chérizier, a leader of the G9 Family and Allies gang federation, claimed responsibility for the surge in attacks that sought to prevent former Prime Minister Ariel Henri – who was in Kenya negotiating the deployment of a foreign armed force to Haiti to help combat the gangs – from returning to the country (The Guardian 29/02/2024 and 04/03/2024; AJ 19/03/2024). Prior to the rise in violence, Henri had announced the postponement of elections from 2024 to August 2025 (Reuters 01/03/2024).
- Between January–March 2024, around 2,500 people were killed or injured as a result of gang violence, a 53% increase compared to the last quarter of 2023 (BBC 24/05/2024; AP 03/05/2024 and 25/05/2024; OCHA 23/05/2024). By the end of May, criminal gangs controlled up to 80% of the Port-au-Prince Metropolitan Zone (ZMPAP), including several neighbourhoods, police stations, and state institutions, limiting people's ability to move freely and access food, protection, and health services (BBC 24/05/2024; AP 03/05/2024 and 25/05/2024; OCHA 23/05/2024).
- Between February and early April, 94,000 people left the ZMPAP, heading to the departments of Grande-Anse, Nippes, Sud, and Sud-Est as a result of criminal gang violence (IOM 12/04/2024; PAHO 8/05/2024). 63% of these displaced people had also been previously displaced, multiple times for some. The majority of the newly displaced sought refuge in areas where they could be accommodated by relatives, putting more pressure on already scarce resources. Displacement resulting from gang violence has increased the protection risks civilians face in their daily lives (IOM 13/02/2024 and 12/04/2024; Protection Cluster 31/05/2024).
- Up until 14 May, at least 21 small and medium-sized commercial establishments had been damaged or burnt in violent events (IFRC 14/05/2024). The port remained closed, but the city's main international airport – closed for nearly three months – reopened, although operating only a few flights (UN 22/05/2024; AP 21/05/2024). Roadblocks continued to isolate the capital from the rest of the country, and civilians were unable to move freely out of fear of attack (OCHA 19/04/2024). This violence has also been felt in the Artibonite department and various areas of the Ouest department, where the capital is located (UNFPA 03/04/2024).
- Criminal gangs caused food shortages by disrupting supply chains and forcing farmers to move away from their fields (OCHA 19/04/2024; FEWS NET 29/05/2024; Food Security Cluster 17/05/2024). As a result, since the beginning of 2024, food prices have increased sharply, raising the cost of the food basket (Food Security Cluster 17/05/2024). By 19 April, the price of the food basket in the ZMPAP had risen by 27% since January, and essential food-basket items for low and medium-income families, such as rice, dry beans, and maize, were more expensive than in the first months of 2023 all across the capital, exposing more people to food insecurity and malnutrition (OCHA 19/04/2024, FEWS NET 29/05/2024).
- By 23 May, access to healthcare services had reached a critical low in Port-au-Prince, with only 20% of health facilities functioning as usual. Persistent insecurity and a lack of staff and medical supplies continue to force medical facilities to operate at reduced capacity, a result of the closure of the port and airport, as well as the blockade of the capital's main roads (OCHA 23/05/2024; UNFPA 03/04/2024; UN 22/05/2024).
- On 25 April 2024, following the installation of a Transitional Council composed of seven political, civil, and economic figures with voting rights, Ariel Henri finally announced his resignation (BBC 25/04/2024; Perspective Monde accessed 11/03/2024; AP 29/05/2024). At the end of May, the Transitional Council named Garry Conille as the new Prime Minister (AP 29/05/2024).
- In October 2023, the United Nations Security Council authorised the deployment of an international security force in response to months of unrest and steadily deteriorating conditions for civilians, with over 200,000 people displaced and 3,000 killed (UN 02/10/2023). This mission's main objective is to secure the capital's critical infrastructure and retake gang-controlled areas across the ZMPAP. The mission, led by Kenya, is expected to include approximately 2,500 police officers from Kenya and several other countries, including Benin, Chad, Jamaica, Barbados, the Bahamas, and Bangladesh (UN 09/05/2024; TNH 21/05/2024; UN 20/05/2024). It is still unclear, however, what form this force will take and how it will affect security. By the end of May, operations in the capital had not yet begun (TNH 21/05/2024; UN 20/05/2024; HRW 28/05/2024).

About this report

Aim: this report provides an update on the surge in violence in the ZMPAP in the first half of 2024, highlighting the aggravation of needs and challenges accessing basic services. The report also provides an outlook section, giving insight into how the situation could evolve in the coming weeks.

Methodology and limitations: this report is based on a secondary data review of publicly available sources. Given the severe access constraints in Haiti, particularly in gang-controlled areas of the ZMPAP, there is a lack of comprehensive information on the type and extent of protection risks and affected groups. The risk of gang reprisals contributes to the consistent underreporting of some protection threats, including sexual violence and abduction.

KEY FINDINGS/FIGURES

- Since February 2024, gang-enforced road closures have significantly restricted humanitarian access, delaying humanitarian operations. The disruption to Port-au-Prince's port, the main entry point for cargo, has blocked humanitarian supplies from entering the country, further limiting the provision of humanitarian assistance (OCHA 27/03/2024).
- By 21 May, six of the country's ten hospitals were barely functional. As a result of escalating violence in Port-au-Prince, healthcare facilities across the country experienced medicine and equipment shortages (UNICEF 21/05/2024; UNFPA 03/04/2024; AP 23/04/2024).
- For the first time, more than half of the population analysed was expected to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or higher levels of food insecurity in the context of persistent violence in Port-au-Prince for the March–June 2024 period (IPC 22/03/2024; Food Security Cluster 17/05/2024).
- Between January and 22 May 2024, the cost of the food basket increased by 27%, mainly driven by insecurity (WFP 27/05/2024).
- Insecurity is the main cause for the temporary closure of around 900 schools in Port-au-Prince and Artibonite, affecting nearly 200,000 children (WFP 27/05/2024; UN 24/05/2024).
- By April 2024, there were 82,885 suspected cholera cases across the country's ten departments, including 1,270 deaths. While the number of suspected cases has declined, the rainy season and overcrowding in IDP camps pose a risk of new outbreaks (PAHO 28/04/2024 and 08/05/2024).

INFORMATION GAPS AND NEEDS

As criminal gangs control much of the territory, preventing the authorities, media, and international organisations from entry and free movement, the current impact of violence in Port-au-Prince and its surrounding areas is not fully known. Although WASH is a priority need in Haiti, there is very little information on needs following the escalation of violence in February 2024.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Since January 2024, there have been recurrent attacks on humanitarian goods and infrastructure, including the looting of hospitals, health centres, and humanitarian containers. Such attacks have led to the suspension or delay of humanitarian operations, limiting people's access to healthcare services (OCHA 27/03/2024; AP 17/03/2024; MSF 21/05/2024). In one of the most illustrative incidents, a UNICEF container of neonatal, maternal, and child health items was looted in March (UNICEF 16/03/2024).

Gang patrols, cars blocking main roads, the government curfew, and the risk of being caught amid an armed attack have restricted the movement of humanitarian responders and supplies, hampering humanitarian operations and people's access to basic services and aid in the ZMPAP (NBC 27/03/2024; CNN 22/03/2024; Crisis24 02/05/2024).

Limited services at Port-au-Prince International Airport continue to impede the entry of humanitarian aid and supplies, delaying operations. By 23 May, several dozen containers loaded with humanitarian supplies had been blocked at the Port-au-Prince port, as gangs had closed it (OCHA 23/05/2024 and 27/03/2024). Criminal gangs' control over entire areas of Port-au-Prince, and across the country, is one of the main constraints to humanitarian assistance.

KEY NEEDS

Healthcare services

Alongside the increasing number of people injured and hospitals reaching capacity, insecurity in Port-au-Prince has also led to the closure of several hospitals, including, by 6 May, the capital's main public hospital, the State University Hospital (ICRC 29/04/2024; PAHO 08/05/2024; MSF 22/05/2024).

The city's clinics are running low on medical supplies as a result of limited service at Port-au-Prince International Airport, the inaccessibility of supplies at the city's port, and roadblocks, making transport to healthcare centres difficult (TRT World 08/04/2024; VOA 23/04/2024; The Guardian 17/03/2024; PAHO 08/05/2024).

By 21 May, as a result of escalating violence in Port-au-Prince, six of the country's ten hospitals were barely functional (UNICEF 22/05/2024). Hospitals report a serious shortage of medical supplies, including medications, essential equipment, hospital beds, and blood products (ICRC 21/04/2024).

Food insecurity and livelihoods

Gang violence in Port-au-Prince and its surrounding areas has worsened Haitians already precarious access to food (WFP 22/03/2024).

According to September 2023 IPC projections, 4.43 million people were expected to experience high levels of food insecurity (IPC 3 or higher) between March–June 2024. The latest IPC update shows a significant worsening of the situation, with around 4.97 million people now facing high levels of acute food insecurity for the period March–June 2024. This includes around 1.64 million people classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) (IPC 20/09/2023; FAO 15/04/2024; IPC 22/03/2024).

Port-au-Prince is particularly affected by food insecurity, as 573,000 people – 60% of the city's population – are projected to experience IPC 3 or worse over the March–June 2024 period (IPC 22/03/2024). Criminal gangs limiting the movement of goods and people, and increasing the cost of goods, constitute one of the main drivers of this deterioration (Food Security Cluster 17/05/2024).

Insecurity has also led to job losses and business difficulties, as the national economy is shrinking and restrictions on economic activity mount (UN 27/05/2024). By 20 May, more than 40% of households in the ZMPAP had experienced job losses and business closures as a result of insecurity, contributing to reduced household food access (WFP 27/05/2024).

By 20 May, two-thirds of households in the ZMPAP lacked sufficient food. Carrefour, Cité Soleil, and Croix-des-Bouquets were the communes most affected (UN 27/05/2024). By 23 May, four of five households had adopted food-related coping strategies, such as borrowing food and reducing the number or size of meals per day (WFP 27/05/2024; Food Security Cluster 17/05/2024).

Insecurity has also forced farmers to abandon about 3,000 hectares of rice crops in Artibonite department, where 90% of the country's rice is grown, decreasing the availability of rice and, thereby, increasing the cost of one of the country's most consumed cereals (FAO 15/04/2024; Food Security Cluster 17/05/2024).

Since the surge in violence in February 2024, rising prices have rendered food access particularly challenging for low-income households. This is mainly a result of the high cost of production inputs, low local agricultural production, movement restrictions, and increasing fuel costs (FEWS NET 29/04/2024; BBC 21/05/2024; Food Security Cluster 17/05/2024).

Shelter

Between February and early April 2024, over 94,800 people fled Port-au-Prince and its metropolitan area, heading to the departments of Grande'Anse, Nippes, Sud, and Sud-Est as a result of the increase in criminal gang violence (IOM 12/04/2024; PAHO 8/05/2024). By December 2023, these departments were already hosting over 116,000 displaced people, reducing departmental ability to provide infrastructure and resources for new IDPs (USAID 06/05/2024; IOM 23/04/2024; IOM 24/01/2024).

By early April, 89,000 IDPs were living in 87 active sites across the ZMPAP (IOM 05/04/2024). The combination of the rainy season and overcrowded living conditions in IDP camps increases the risk of disease outbreaks (PAHO 08/05/2024).

Education

By May 2024, persistent insecurity in Port-au-Prince and Artibonite had led to the temporary closure of nearly 900 schools, affecting nearly 200,000 students and 4,000 teachers (UN 24/05/2024; ECW 05/2024).

More than 180,000 children were displaced in Haiti by May 2024, and 30,000 of the 90,000 displaced in the ZMPAP are children (UNICEF 27/03/2024; IOM 23/04/2024). Accessing education is especially difficult for these children, as education needs overlap with protection needs. By 5 April 2024, 34 of the 87 active IDP sites were schools (IOM 23/04/2024).

Protection

Armed violence and conflict in the capital has put ZMPAP residents at risk of death or injury, forced displacement, confinement to their homes or neighbourhoods, extortion, and forced recruitment (ACAPS 07/03/2024; Save the Children 08/05/2024; GIATO 12/02/2024).

Up until May 2024, civilians were being killed by stray bullets in their neighbourhoods. In Ouest department, over 237 violent deaths were reported between the end of February and the end of May. This number is likely an underreporting, as accessing and identifying victims is constrained (ACLEDA accessed 24/05/2024; AP 19/05/2024).

The risk of displacement is also constant. In the commune of Delmas, near Port-au-Prince, more than 5,000 people were displaced between 25 April and 5 May following attacks by criminal gangs on IDP sites in Port-au-Prince (IOM 07/05/2024). On 2 May alone, violence forced more than 3,700 people from their homes (IOM 03/05/2024). Most of those displaced sought refuge with host families and at other IDP sites (IOM 07/05/2024 and 03/05/2024).

ZMPAP residents are subject to extortion by criminal gangs, especially in the city's economic centres. Extortion has become a major source of revenue for these gangs, who earn thousands of dollars per day through transport and business extortion (GIATO 25/03/2024 and 12/02/2024; NYT 03/05/2024). In 2023, over 1,500 were kidnapped for ransom (Haitian Times 20/02/2024; UN 02/10/2023).

Around one million children and adolescents living in areas under the control of criminal gangs are exposed to forced recruitment (Save the Children 08/05/2024, 24/04/2024, and 14/03/2024). In Haiti, it is estimated that 30–50% of criminal gang members are children, making their recruitment a widespread practice. Recruitment makes children even more vulnerable to coercion, abuse, and exploitation (UNICEF 31/05/2024).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Economic hardship

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas and one of the poorest in the world, hindering the Government's ability to adequately respond to the current security crisis in the capital and its surroundings (WB accessed 08/05/2024; IOM 15/03/2024; GOCI accessed 09/05/2024). The country's economy has continuously contracted over the past five years, and is likely to experience another year of negative growth in 2024 (WB accessed 08/05/2024).

As a result, communities affected by food inflation and loss of purchasing power are the most vulnerable to food insecurity, particularly the 80% living below the poverty line (less than USD two per day) (CESVI accessed 09/05/2024).

Cholera outbreak

By April 2024, there were 82,885 suspected cholera cases across the country's ten departments, including 1,270 deaths (PAHO 28/04/2024). The Ouest department, where Port-au-Prince is located, continues to have the highest concentration of suspected cases (PAHO 28/04/2024). The increase in suspected cases occurred while epidemiological authorities lacked the resources, equipment, and freedom to track cholera transmission hotspots, suggesting the number could be higher (PAHO 28/04/2024).

As a result of its high mortality and infection rate, cholera puts greater pressure on the healthcare system, which already faces disruptions caused by a shortage of medical supplies and restrictions on healthcare workers' free movement (MSF 03/05/2024; ICRC 29/04/2024; PAHO 08/05/2024).

The deteriorating security situation and concentration of displaced people in confined areas have only aggravated Haiti's already critical WASH situation, creating fertile ground for the further spread of cholera (OCHA 19/01/2024).

Vulnerability to natural hazards

Haiti's geographic location in the Caribbean makes it prone to tropical storms and hurricanes, which typically form in the Atlantic Ocean and reach Haitian shores with destructive force. Coastal regions, especially low-lying, densely populated areas, are particularly vulnerable to the flooding and landslides caused by such weather phenomena (OCHA 19/01/2024).

The hurricane season, which typically starts in June and is expected to be extraordinarily active in 2024, poses a particular risk. Hurricanes can destroy crops, disrupt food and medicine supply routes, hinder people's movement, and cause landslides and flooding, further affecting those already displaced in IDP sites (WVI 21/05/2024; Direct Relief 30/05/2024). The hurricane season typically spans from June–December (FEWS NET accessed 03/06/2024).

OUTLOOK

Criminal gangs' continued control in Port-au-Prince

By May 2024, criminal gangs controlled around 80% of the ZMPAP, allowing them to launch attacks against public institutions, security agents, and humanitarian responders without risk of state repression (BBC 24/05/2024; AP 03/05/2024 and 25/05/2024). As the Haitian security forces lack the necessary resources, training, and capacity to respond to attacks, they were overpowered by the gangs. In March, the army only had 2,000 members available to fight at least 13 gangs, while it is estimated that, by February 2024, between 1,500–2,500 criminal gang members were active in the country (AP 17/03/2024; InSight Crime 11/12/2023; Franceinfo 20/02/2024). The police have also been accused of having links to gangs at the highest levels (AP 11/05/2024).

If the situation persists, the gangs will likely continue to control the city and strengthen their alliances (AJ 13/03/2024; GIATO 25/03/2024). Difficulties for those living in areas under gang control will gradually increase, as the State, humanitarian organisations, and the local economy face challenges providing for basic needs (GIATO 12/02/2024; AP 10/03/2024; OCHA 27/03/2024).

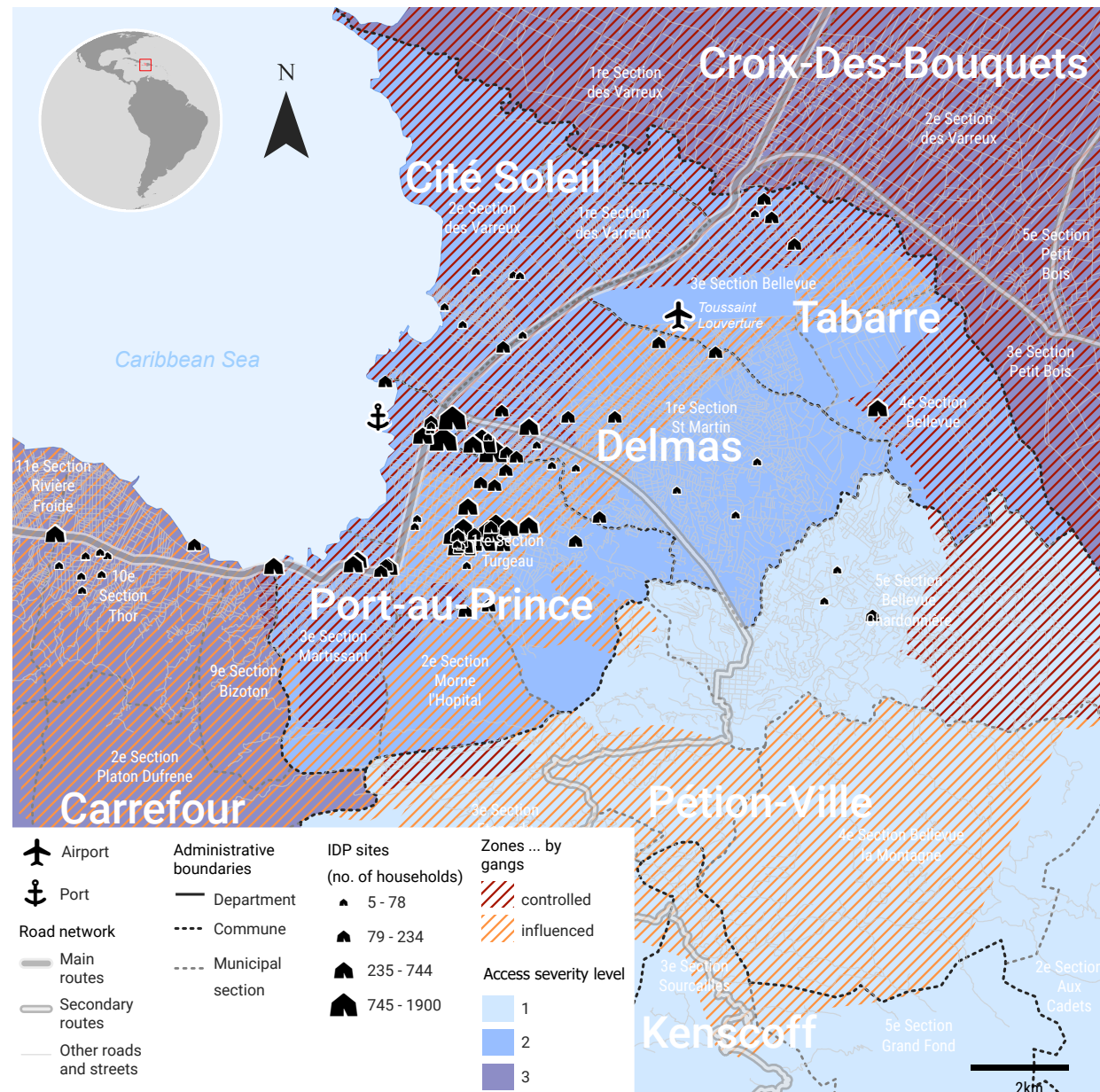
Increased clashes following the deployment of an international force

By the end of May, the UN's approved international operation had not yet arrived in Haiti because of legal restrictions in Kenya, even though envoys had already been deployed to receive them (CNN 24/05/2024 and 22/05/2024; Reuters 09/05/2024; GIATO 24/05/2024).

Following the UN's approval of an international force, the leader of the largest gang coalition, Jimmy 'Barbecue' Chérizier, said that he will treat any international force as 'invaders' and respond with violence (Kenyans 14/05/2024; Citizen Digital 29/03/2024).

As such, an international operation may result in increased insecurity in Port-au-Prince, worsening humanitarian conditions and affecting civilian livelihoods across the country, especially in the capital and its metropolitan area (AJ 13/03/2024; GIATO 25/03/2024). The start date of this mission has yet to be determined, but it is expected to be in the first half of 2024 (Le Monde 01/03/2024).

Map 1. Humanitarian access severity by 25 March 2024



Source: OCHA (02/04/2024)