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## Haiti is Not Safe: Country Conditions 2026

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*Reader's advisory: Some of the language and subject matter in this article may be difficult or distressing for some readers.*

*“There is no life at night.”*

This is the perspective of Pierre Espérance, a leading Haitian human rights defender and the Executive Director of [Réseau National de Défense de Droits Humains \(RNDDH\)](#), who lives in Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital. I am interviewing him about country conditions in Haiti. Haiti is one of the Western Hemisphere’s foremost humanitarian crises. [More](#) than a million people are internally displaced; at least [16,000 people](#) have been killed since 2022. But the scale of devastation in Haiti cannot be captured with numbers alone, so I ask him to describe daily life.

“Daily life? Well, let me tell you my life. I can go to my office. And then also, where I live, it’s okay because I live in a [safer neighborhood]. But there is no life at night.”

Although Haiti’s gangs launch attacks at any hour, nighttime is favored. Civilians [wake up](#) to the roar of their neighborhoods in flames. In a March 2026 attack on Jean-Denis, part of the Petite Rivière de l’Artibonite neighborhood, members of the Gran Grif gang held off attacking during the daytime, when police were present, waiting until nighttime to [begin](#) a massacre that killed at least 70 people.

The country is also hit by rolling blackouts, making nighttime even more unsafe: the power cuts, and life plunges into the darkness. Last year, gang seizures of Port-au-Prince’s main power plant left the city [without power](#) for three days. The functions of daily life come to a halt: schools are shut down, food spoils without refrigeration, the internet won’t connect. Blackouts are also deadly. Without power or alternative fuel, the hospital equipment needed to keep patients [alive](#) cannot run. The cover of darkness enables criminals: power shortages in humanitarian emergencies have been linked to [increases](#) in rape and other atrocities.

“I don’t go out, I don’t do the night thing. I don’t drive at night...Because it’s just the way it is, for the women especially. You are forced to do what you have to do during the daytime. You cannot afford to be outside at a certain time, just to make sure that you will not be a victim,” shared a representative of a women’s organization living in Port-au-Prince, who wished to remain anonymous.

Anthropologist Dr. Greg Beckett’s work [explores](#) how Haitians used the term *blakawout*, or blackout, as a metaphor to encapsulate a state of political and economic deprivation. For Haitians, *blakawout* describes not just the loss of electrical power, but personal power and autonomy. That grief lives in the body, manifesting in physical ailments. Beckett [writes](#): “Living in a blackout wasn’t just living with the lights off—it was living with the constant possibility of your own death.” Beckett’s field research focused on the aftermath of the 2004 coup and 2010 earthquake. Widespread gang control of the country today means that conditions in Haiti have only further deteriorated.

Gangs have [captured](#) an estimated 80-90 percent of the capital. They have expanded their presence to five of Haiti’s ten departments, with even the southeast, a ‘safer’ region of the country, now seeing more [frequent](#) gang-related attacks. Few humanitarian organizations have a presence on the ground in Port-au-Prince anymore. Even the famously intrepid Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has routinely [suspended](#) lifesaving medical services in Port-au-Prince after staff were assaulted by gangs while treating patients. The country has one of the world’s [highest](#) homicide rates, the violence and insecurity so intense that at least [one in ten people](#) in Haiti have been forcibly displaced.

Despite these conditions, the United States is proceeding with [terminating](#) Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for over 330,000 Haitians, putting them at risk of deportation. Haiti is not a safe place to deport people to. Upon arrival in Haiti, returnees would face a country where massacre is normalized. Gangs operate in collusion with corrupt government officials; impunity is rampant, the state unable to take even basic action to protect the lives of their citizens. Even the dead suffer: bodies are mutilated in the morgues, massacre victims piling up with no proper burial. The sections that follow document these conditions in detail, drawing on reporting from humanitarian organizations, human rights monitors, and Haitian civil society.

This report begins with discussion of the political background and gang violence that shapes the nation’s current humanitarian crisis. The report then covers humanitarian needs, including a lack of medical infrastructure and supplies, before discussing gender and sexual violence. We conclude with a brief discussion of persecution that people deported back to Haiti are likely to face.

## Methodology

The following is a continuation of our 2024 [report](#) on humanitarian conditions in Haiti. All information is current as of July 2026.

To deepen our reporting on country conditions in Haiti, USCRI staff spoke to five experts on Haiti’s political crisis, three of whom are currently based in Haiti. To protect their privacy, two interviewees are referred to anonymously:

- Pierre Espérance, Executive Director at Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains
- Dr. Greg Beckett, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario;  
Author of *There Is No More Haiti*
- Representative in Port-au-Prince of a Haitian women’s organization
- Chief Medical Director and Physician, Medical Provider in the Western Department
- Amber Lynn Munger, Senior Program Officer, American Jewish World Service

## Political Situation and Background

*Haiti's deteriorating infrastructure and public order reflect years of political instability, institutional erosion, and insecurity. The assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 deepened the country's political crisis, while armed gangs were able to expand their control under intensified violence, particularly in and around the capital.*

Once the wealthiest colony in the Western Hemisphere, the ongoing legacy of colonial extraction has made Haiti the [poorest](#) country in the region. When the Haitian government announced the [end](#) of fuel subsidies in 2018, increasing the price of fuel by up to 51 percent, it burdened families already unable to afford food, sparking a wave of demonstrations against then-President Jovenel Moïse. Protesters demanded the President's resignation. He [refused](#). In October 2019, an electoral council decided to indefinitely postpone the elections, with Moïse ruling by decree until his assassination in 2021. Haiti has not elected a president since.

During his time in office, Moïse fomented a climate of impunity and corruption. High-ranking government officials often colluded with armed gangs to suppress political opposition. A 2021 [report](#) done by Harvard Law School in conjunction with RNDDH concluded that gang violence in Haiti is not random, but "constitute[s] both widespread and systematic attacks targeted at civilians... evidence suggests that the attacks were pre-planned and furthered both an organizational policy of the gangs and an implicit state policy to repress political opposition."

In a 2018 attack against the La Saline neighborhood, government officials appointed by Moïse not only paid gang leaders to [perpetuate](#) atrocities against civilians but also assisted in planning the attack, bringing weapons, vehicles, and resources to bear. At least 71 people were murdered. To date, the attack's perpetrators, including the government officials involved, remain [free](#).

"To this day, not a single leader of the gangs has been captured, killed, or held to account," shared Amber Lynn Munger, a Senior Program Officer covering Haiti for American Jewish World Service. "There are no consequences for wrongdoing. In fact, it's rewarded. Even when police arrest gang members, corruption often undermines accountability and enables their release. Impunity is rewarded at all levels. And in a society where violence and human rights abuses face no consequences, violence will continue to flourish."

In July 2021, Moïse was assassinated in his home, opening a power vacuum that the gangs—empowered by years of government corruption—stepped in to fill. With the Parliament disbanded and Prime Minister Ariel Henry ruling by an unpopular decree, the state lacked legitimacy. That same year, Haiti was hit by a 7.2-magnitude earthquake, killing more than 2,000 people and plunging an additional 700,000 people into [acute](#) food insecurity. The combined effects of corruption, impunity, environmental disaster, and Moïse's assassination compounded to create Haiti's current humanitarian crisis, giving armed gangs the leverage they needed to take [over](#) between 80 and 90 percent of Port-au-Prince.

Today, the influence of gang violence in Haitian daily life is omnipresent and overwhelming. Last year, criminal groups [carried](#) out 24 massacres and armed attacks in the Artibonite region of central Haiti alone. Gang violence in Haiti is designed to inflict as much pain as possible. In 2024, a gang massacred 207 people, targeting elderly [Vodou](#) practitioners in Port-au-Prince's Cité Soleil neighborhood. The gang's leader wrongly blamed them for the death of his son, and extracted retribution with impunity. In another incident, a gang member ripped a baby from their mother's arms, throwing the child—alive—into a fire. The mother wandered around in shock for two days, eventually dying from the trauma at a police station.

These stories are not exceptional, but representative of the collapse of law and order in Haiti, of the violence that haunts daily life. A representative of a Haitian women's organization living in Port-au-Prince told USCRI that her days are marked by constant worry over safety: "For everyone, including men, women, and especially girls, the first thing that will come to mind [in the morning] is how am I going to keep myself safe from not being kidnapped, from not being assaulted, and for not being the victims or the survivors of gang violence." Dr. Beckett mirrored her sentiment. He shared that even obtaining a bag of rice was so dangerous and so expensive that Haitian friends of his in Canada asked someone flying down from Miami to pack rice into their bags to give out to their family in Haiti.

There is no easy solution, no quick fix, to this epidemic. There is no state protection in Haiti. Armed gangs are [equipped](#) with better weaponry than the police. They [control](#) all the main access routes into Port-au-Prince, including the port, allowing them the power to decide what—if any—humanitarian aid gets in. Government officials are still embroiled with the gangs, choosing to enrich themselves instead of providing basic safety to their citizenry.

Espérance, uses the phrase *banalisation de la vie*, or the “trivialization of life” to describe the lack of state care towards its citizens, how normalized deadly violence has become in Haiti. “When we remember that this [humanitarian crisis] is fueled by state authorities—who prefer to provide gangs with arms and ammunition in order to satisfy their thirst for power, rather than to strengthen the police institution—the situation becomes revolting, denoting the level of trivialization of life by the state authorities.”

## Humanitarian Needs

Since January of 2022, 1.5 million Haitians have been displaced by the concurrent forces of gang violence and state collapse. At least [16,000 people](#) have been killed. 6.4 million people [need](#) urgent humanitarian assistance.

More than half of the country is hungry. The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), tracking food insecurity in Haiti from March 2026 to June 2026, [shows](#) that more than half of the country, or 5.83 million people, are experiencing acute food insecurity. Some 1.2 million are [children](#) under the age of five. The most recent IPC report on malnutrition, covering 2023-2024, warned that 125,000 children were [severely](#) malnourished. Children who are severely malnourished for extended periods of time will suffer for the rest of their lives. Their bones do not grow properly, their brains do not fully develop. Severely malnourished children are also 11 times [more](#) likely to die of key preventable diseases than well-nourished children.

In Haiti, emergency medical care is scarce. [Only](#) 10 percent of the nation’s in-patient medical facilities are operational. Hospitals are often the target of gang violence. In one incident, gangs shot up the neonatal unit at a hospital, [firing](#) at the incubators and injuring newborn babies.

As of last year, 70 percent of Port-au-Prince’s healthcare facilities were [closed](#). Hôpital Universitaire La Paix is the city’s last remaining public hospital. Beds, staff, crucial equipment, and medicine are all in short supply. “Every day, the operating theatres are at full capacity. We have to prioritize certain critical cases and postpone others, sometimes at the cost of human lives,” Dr Jean-Philippe Lerbourg, the hospital’s Medical Director [told](#) the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The medical director of a clinic in Haiti’s Western Department told USCRI that while demand for medical services has surged, access to life-saving medication is limited and unaffordable. Many people are not vaccinated against diseases like diphtheria, a serious bacterial infection that damages the heart and lungs. Once uncommon in Haiti, diphtheria has emerged as a public health concern. As of June 2026, Haiti had 159 reported cases of diphtheria; Brazil and Peru were the only other countries in the Americas reporting cases, with two each.

The medical director of the clinic in Haiti’s Western Department further reported an outbreak of a scabies-like infectious skin disease known as sarcoptosis.

Camps that house internally displaced people (IDPs) are particularly vulnerable to the spread of infectious diseases like sarcoptosis and cholera. People live in small, cramped quarters, six people to a room. Displaced people are [housed](#) in schools or improvised camps on bare plots of land. Residents [do not have access](#) to clean water, or waste and sanitation facilities. Living conditions are difficult and dangerous, with a high risk of waterborne diseases.

Women and girls in IDP camps lack access to menstrual hygiene support, [increasing](#) their risk of urinary and reproductive tract infections. Even outside of IDP camps, period products are prohibitively expensive. A representative from a Haitian women’s organization told USCRI that people sometimes “make a choice between eating today and getting a pack of [menstrual] pads for [their] needs.”

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The year 2025 saw an alarming increase in sexual violence in Haiti. The United Nations reported a 163 percent increase in verified cases of sexual violence in 2025. As most cases are never reported, the magnitude of sexual violence in Haiti is likely [ten or twenty times](#) that.

A representative of a national women’s organization interviewed by USCRI credited the weakness of the Haitian state as a driving cause of the uptick in rates of sexual and gender-based violence. “We have women-led organizations that are doing their best to work with survivors of sexual violence. We have a Ministry of Women’s Affairs. But because we are not organized, because the state is weak, you don’t feel their presence.”

Gangs in Haiti use sexual violence as a weapon to terrorize the population, specifically targeting women and girls. At an MSF clinic in Port-au-Prince, nearly 17,000 victim-survivors of sexual violence were treated between 2015 and 2025. 57 percent of victim-survivors were attacked by members of armed groups. At least 100 survivors were assaulted by 10 or more perpetrators at the same time.

Children are particularly targeted: according to UNICEF, since 2023, there has been an [1,000 percent increase](#) in sexual violence against minors. Amnesty International [interviewed](#) 18 children victimized by sexual violence in Haiti for a 2025 report. Children, they report, are often abducted and then sexually assaulted, qualifying them as trafficking victims under international law. Many young girls become pregnant after being raped; despite efforts to change it, abortion is not legal in Haiti, leaving children to raise children. Some then become the victims of commercial sexual exploitation, one minor telling Amnesty that, after becoming pregnant by a gang-related attack, she could not feed herself or her child. She thus had no choice but to engage in commercial sex work with gang members—a severe human rights violation under International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions.

## Returning to Haiti is Not Safe

Haiti is not a safe place to return people to.

The challenges facing deportees are numerous. Even the logistics of landing a plane in Haiti are complicated. After [several](#) incidents of commercial planes being shot at by the gangs, the Federal Aviation Administration [extended](#) its ban on U.S. commercial flights landing in Port-au-Prince.

Many people were initially displaced because of gang occupation in their neighborhood. Upon return, they have no home to go back to. Even if they did, navigating the gang checkpoints to get from where the plane lands to their home could prove deadly. Human rights advocates [report](#) that people who cannot justify their presence in a particular area are increasingly often assaulted, and even killed, while attempting to cross a gang checkpoint.

Deportees themselves likely face political persecution upon return. “Anybody coming back from the diaspora or returning from TPS status is going to be seen as a threat,” shared Dr. Beckett. “They’ll be seen as somebody who would vote against the gangs or would go against the gangs.” He went on to add that people who have worked for the government or civil society organizations, or who have any kind of connections to a rival authority or power, would also be particularly at risk of gang-related violence upon return.

Espérance reflected similarly on threats deportees are likely to face in Haiti. “Where will they stay? Where?” he asks. “They will have to live with the gangs. And when the gang member sees that you came back [to occupied territory], they will kidnap you. They will kidnap you, they will target you, because they think you left because of them.”

Despite these challenges, and the known humanitarian crisis in Haiti, deportations continue: Groupe d’Appui aux Rapatriés et Réfugiés, Haiti’s leading organization supporting returnees, [reported](#) that more than 68,000 Haitians were deported back to the country in just the first three months of 2026, surpassing the 55,000 recorded during the same time period in 2025. Although most of these deportations came from the Dominican Republic, deportations from the U.S. are expected to rise.

Haiti’s crisis is not over. Nor does any of the evidence gathered here suggest it will ease in the near term. Returning people to a country where they face a well-founded fear of persecution contravenes the principle of non-refoulement, a binding obligation the United States has accepted. But the legal violation is not the whole of it. Much reporting on Haiti treats its suffering as a fixed condition. That framing has made it easier for policymakers to look at the evidence and deny the humanity of people seeking protection. The conditions documented here are not the natural state of a country. They are massacres with names and dates, hospitals with closure orders, children whose assaults were counted. Taking them seriously is the minimum owed to the 330,000 people whose protection the United States is now withdrawing.

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