

1. Introduction

Since June 2021, violent clashes between armed gangs have dominated socio-economic life in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, spreading fear and terror among the population. The security situation has deteriorated significantly and reached new levels since the end of April 2022, seriously affecting the operational environment for humanitarian actors and hindering their ability to carry out life-saving assistance.

The purpose of this document is to raise awareness and provide an overview of the current state of humanitarian access across Haiti and its impact on the population, as well as on humanitarian services provided. Key demands and recommendations are presented at the end of the document.

2. Background

Non-formal armed structures have occupied parts of Haiti for more than 20 years. Consequently, these territories, on the fringes of society and the state, have developed into sociologically and culturally autonomous spaces with their own dynamics. Fuelled by political, economic and security interests, gangs have extended their control, especially in the capital. Haiti's access working group estimates that up to 200 gangs have emerged in Haiti with over 3,000 "soldiers". Around a hundred of them are located in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince. Some 40 gangs are of high caliber, the remaining are mostly small bases spread across the capital and the country.

Between 2018 and 2019, the political crisis, rising cost of living and allegations of poor governance led to major social movements that culminated in the crisis of 'Peyi Lòk' ("closed country" in Haitian Creole), between September and November 2019. Insecurity and road blockages limited access to essential goods and services, including fuel, electricity, water, food, but also oxygen and medical supplies for health facilities, putting people's lives at risk. After 15 years of peacekeeping, the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) completed its mandate on 15 October 2019. MINUJUSTH, which began its operations in October 2017, was preceded by a larger and more robust mission, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), deployed in June 2004. Following the end of the MINUJUSTH, a special political mission, established by the Security Council in its resolution 2476 of 25 June 2019, was deployed on 16 October 2019 under the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH).

2020, mainly marked by reduced economic activities caused by COVID-19, saw the resurgence of gang activities that aggravated the situation of the most vulnerable. In June 2020, a federation of armed groups called "G9 family and allies" established itself in the metropolitan area and became a key player, dominating developments in downtown Port-au-Prince. Gangs proved to be increasingly strategic in their action, skillfully applying sophisticated tactics. In August, a new coalition of armed gangs was formed, the "G-pèp-la", led by Gabriel Jean Pierre, an alleged gang leader from the Commune of Cité Soleil, who opposed the G9 of Jimmy Chérisier, alias Barbecue. The country's capital was set to become the scene of major clashes between the gangs of the two coalitions.

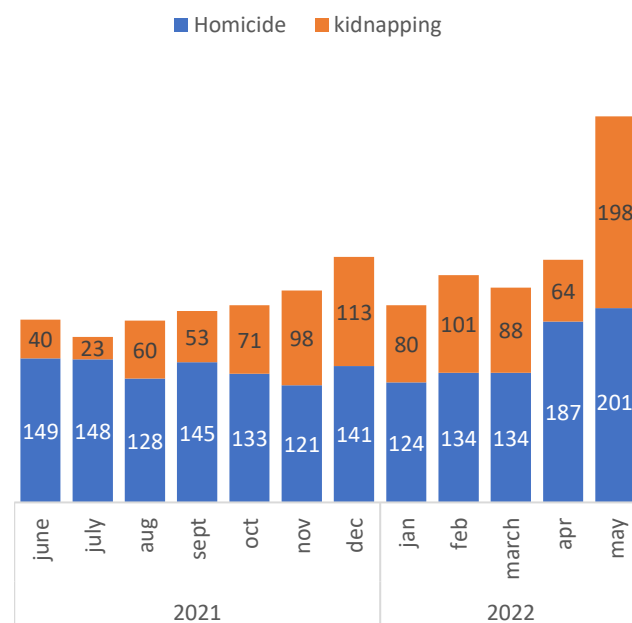
In June 2021, clashes between gangs broke out in the Martissant neighbourhood, at the southern end of the capital. The violence forced at least 19,000 people to flee their homes and affected about 800,000 people living in the disputed areas. About 7,000 people found refuge in organised and spontaneous shelters. On 7 July, the country woke up to the shocking news of the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in his home. Amid this highly volatile political situation and insecurity, Haiti's southern peninsula was hit, on August 14, by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that left 650,000 people in need and killed 2,200. A major disruption in fuel distribution by armed gangs affiliated to G9 hampered all activities in the country in October and November 2021.

On 24 April 2022, clashes resurged between rival gangs in the communes of Croix-des Bouquets, Tabarre and Cité Soleil in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. Over the course of several days, the fighting gradually spread across other communes of the capital, involving more and more allies of the different gangs. Over 200 people were killed, and hundreds wounded, but the real figures are likely to be significantly higher. According to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), some 17,000 people have been forced to leave their homes and seek shelter in spontaneous sites or with host families in the capital or in the provinces.

In May 2022 alone, 200 cases of kidnappings were recorded, double the average number of cases in previous months.

Kidnappings now also target, directly or indirectly, foreigners and UN personnel. Between 23 May and 6 June, assailants abducted an international BINUH staff member, a driver from UN Women and the husband of a UN staff member were abducted, while an IOM national staff member died in the crossfire of a gunfight. Street demonstrations are increasing in response to poor governance, insecurity, fuel shortages and price increases. OCHA estimates that more than a third of the capital is under the control of gangs.

Evolution of Violence in PAP



Source: UNDSS

3. Access challenges

Port-au-Prince: The high level of insecurity has considerably compromised humanitarian actors' access to affected people, for example for food or cash distributions. Local population's access is also hampered. At least 1 to 1.5 million people trapped in gang-controlled areas struggle to access basic services such as health and education. Neighbourhoods in conflict zones are often the most vulnerable, which poses a dilemma when providing life-saving assistance to these hard-to-reach areas, especially when security incidents during humanitarian activities are on the rise. For example, in early April, an international NGO team was held at gunpoint while delivering school kits and equipment in downtown Port-au-Prince, an area where they have been operating for over 15 years. Implementing partners and contractors of UN agencies have also seen their deliveries of humanitarian goods hijacked. In addition to the difficulties in accessing these areas, the situation is restricting access to and from other parts of the country, as these are the main entry points to the capital: the neighbourhoods of La Saline and Cité Soleil surround the port of Varreux (major port of Port-au-Prince); National Road 2 leading to the southern departments passes through the neighbourhood of Martissant; National Roads 1 and 3 providing access to the north of the country pass through the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets.

South: Clashes between gangs in the Martissant neighbourhood have paralysed traffic on National Road 2 for the past year, completely cutting off the four southern departments that were affected by the 7.2 magnitude earthquake on 14 August 2021, thus delaying humanitarian and reconstruction efforts. The situation, therefore, hampers access to essential services for 3.5 million people living in the 4 departments of the Southern peninsula. Transporters are increasingly turning down contracts to move supplies through gang-controlled areas, especially the neighbourhood of Martissant, as several transportation buses have become subject to deadly attacks and kidnappings. Transporters must pay an access fee to gangs in order to cross "safely".

North: Recent clashes in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets are now also complicating road access to the north, where two trucks carrying WFP humanitarian goods were hijacked in May 2022. Irregular street blockages, exchange of gunfire, and multiple kidnappings are complicating access to the five departments north of the capital.

Ports and airports: Gangs also control the area around the port of Varreux, which the humanitarian community relies heavily on, not only to import essential supplies and equipment, but also to transport heavy material by boat to overcome land access constraints to the South and North. Ports are under gang scrutiny as they represent the main source of

income for the government. Gangs are sometimes charging high taxes for access. Moreover, they directly target National Port authority personnel. In recent weeks, gangs kidnapped five customs agents and raided their office resulting in the death of one employee and two injured. As such, the port's activities are disturbed and supplies and equipment have been stuck at the seaport for months. Port-au-Prince's international and national airports are on the outskirts of insecure areas and safe access routes are becoming increasingly limited. In April, stray bullets from a clash even hit humanitarian assets on the tarmac of the national airport terminal.

Offices, warehouses, factories and suppliers: Humanitarian organisations located in gang clashes prone areas are struggling to reach their offices safely (e.g. IOM's office in Tabarre). Some NGOs indicate they have received visits from armed gang members trying to intimidate them (e.g. Carrefour, Croix-des-Bouquet). UN partners note that it has become increasingly difficult to access their warehouses located in less secure areas (e.g. UNICEF's main warehouse in Port-au-Prince). Moreover, some suppliers and industrial parks (e.g. in Carrefour and Noailles) are currently inaccessible.

Fuel shortages: Periods of fuel shortages/disruption in the distribution have prevented some UN agencies from refueling their vehicles, generators or storage tanks. For example, WFP has had to provide fuel for the WHO "PROMESS" warehouse, where vaccines, essential medicines and other health supplies are stored and which should never be less than 50 per cent full, as their usual supplier has exhausted its reserves.

4. Humanitarian impact

Displacements and lack of access to basic services: Since June 2021, at least 36,000 people were displaced due to violence in the capital (19,000 in 2021, and 17,000 over the first half of 2022). OCHA estimates that at least 1 to 1.5 million people are directly affected by the violence in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, due to the lack of access to health and education services and the deterioration of hygiene, sanitation, and access to drinking water.

Protection crisis: The significant deterioration of the security situation has led to a serious protection crisis in gang-controlled neighbourhoods in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. The increase in protection cases and exposure to protection risks is worrying, especially cases of gender-based violence (rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, including of children), as highlighted in a report published by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Sexual violence is used to terrorise the population in gang-controlled areas, children are recruited as soldiers by the gangs. The cruelty displayed horrific (beheadings, cutting up, burning of bodies, feeding corpses to pigs, etc.).

School closures: Some 500,000 children have lost access to education due to gang-related violence, according to the latest data from the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP) and UNICEF. Nearly 1,700 schools are currently closed in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area due to the ongoing insecurity. While exact figures are still evaluated, it can be confirmed that some schools have been attacked and several have been occupied by armed gangs.

Malnutrition and food insecurity: The latest nutritional survey conducted in Cité Soleil, a commune affected by gang violence for several years, shows that one in five children under age 5 suffers from acute malnutrition, numbers clearly above the WHO emergency threshold. Between March and June 2022, some 4.5 million Haitians, or 45 per cent of the population, are severely food-insecure (1.32 million in emergency phase IPC 4 and 3.18 million in crisis phase IPC 3).

Impact on the daily lives of the population in Southern departments: The complete blockage of National Road 2 leading to the Southern peninsula for over a year now has cut off at least 3.5 million people living in the south departments from Port-au-Prince, thus depriving them from a market for the sale of their local production. The offer of local goods thus being much higher than the demand pushes down prices and with that leads to the loss of income. Products that are normally ordered/bought in the capital are not available or their prices have increased drastically as it has become more difficult and costly to transport goods to the South. The supply of food items and the distribution of fuel is significantly diminishing, which has increased the prices of basic goods; inflation in Haiti will approach 30 per cent in 2022. The population of the Grand South, already affected by the August 2021 earthquake and tropical storm Grace two days later, is witnessing a deterioration of their living conditions. They can no longer go to hospitals in the capital, they are receiving less humanitarian aid and materials needed for reconstruction are either blocked or confiscated along the way.

Increase in people in need: The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Haiti, has almost doubled in the last 4 years, from 2.6 million people in 2019 to 4.9 million in 2022.

5. Impact on humanitarian assistance

The latest episodes of violence have limited humanitarian partners' access to affected individuals and communities. UN agencies have reported the following constraints and challenges:

- **Reduced implementation and monitoring of humanitarian activities, including CERF projects:** It has become increasingly difficult to access insecure neighbourhoods, that are also often the most vulnerable, to implement humanitarian activities. Often, monitoring and evaluation activities are either reduced, not carried out (e.g. support to schools or emergency activities), or implemented by partners who may bias information collection.
- **Disruption of critical assistance, e.g. food and health:** Humanitarian items are often blocked at the port or in warehouses, or cannot be transported in time, resulting in significant disruptions and delays in the dispatch of essential supplies, such as food to school canteens in the South and West departments, Plump'Nut to help combat child malnutrition and the distribution of essential health or education supplies. In addition, several technical cooperation activities (e.g. canine anti-rabies vaccination to eliminate rabies in dogs and humans, follow-up of TB/HIV patients in their communities) have also been cancelled.
- **Reduction in Cash Assistance:** The blockage of access to the South has affected the private sector, in particular the financial/banking sector. Financial partners' cash availability is increasingly compromised, which reduces the possibility of implementing cash transfers in the southern departments.
- **Delay of reconstruction efforts in the South:** The blockage of road access to the south and the temporary constraints on access to the port is compromising humanitarian response and reconstruction efforts in the earthquake-affected areas in the south.
- **Cost increase:** For humanitarian partners, the general increase in prices of goods and services is leading to budgets no longer reflecting the costs of planned goods and services. In addition, given the access constraints, humanitarian and development actors are sometimes forced to purchase tickets for commercial flights and rent cars to visit and monitor projects which increases the costs of activities. UN Women, for example, reports a need for 15-25 per cent additional funding compared to initial budgets.
- **Duty of care:** UN agencies and partners continue to express grave concerns, as numerous national staff live in and/or have to travel through unsafe areas to get to their office. The offer for flexible working arrangements, such as working from home, is creating an irregular office presence that is, in turn, causing delays in the management of activities. The fear of being kidnapped on the way to or from the office, as well as the fear of family members being kidnapped (e.g. children left behind) must not be neglected. Many national staff have experienced relatives being kidnapped. This constant fear leads to mental distress and affects the well-being of all staff members.

Response: Despite the difficult operational environment, UN agencies and partners continue to provide essential assistance and deliver relief items where possible. Authorities and humanitarian partners have distributed hot meals as well as non-food items, such as hygiene and kitchen kits, and provided psychosocial support to people displaced by gang violence. In response to the alarming numbers of malnourished children in Cité Soleil, community health workers are distributing ready-to-use therapeutic food, provided by UNICEF, to more than 2,000 children. Alternative routes by air and sea are operated by UNHAS and WFP in order to bypass the Martissant area. The UN and international actors are working closely with grassroots organizations and NGOs to provide services in difficult-to-reach areas of the capital.

Humanitarian Access Working Group: Together with UNICEF, OCHA co-chairs the humanitarian access working group which is composed of UN agencies, and NGO partners. The purpose of the group is to 1) develop a strategic, inclusive and coordinated approach to strengthening humanitarian access, 2) strengthen joint analysis of access constraints and identify solutions, 3) provide a platform for inter-agency exchange that facilitates the monitoring of trends, the generation of information for decision-making and identifies advocacy actions for safe, timely and unhindered access, and 4) strengthen the capacity of humanitarian partners in risk mitigation, response and prevention to address access issues. A larger group of some 50+ humanitarian partners is consulted and informed on a regular basis. However, there is no structural engagement of the working group with armed gangs.

6. Outlook and projections

The situation is expected to remain tense and volatile in the coming months. Given the political vacuum and disagreements, as well as the pending elections, no sufficient stabilisation of the political landscape is expected in the near future. The gangs' armed territorial disputes will continue, as they are closely linked to gaining influence on the

political front, but also due to internal disputes between gangs and their allies. High inflation rates are predicted and there is a high probability that the war in Ukraine will continue to have a negative impact on fuel and food prices.

The coming weeks are likely to be marked by street protests and roadblocks, especially in the run-up to 7 July 2022, the one-year anniversary of the assassination of former President Moïse. But even beyond that date, social unrest and demonstrations calling for security, better governance and increased purchasing power, are expected. Although the authorities managed to delay the general strike of the Southern peninsula business owners to protest the current situation in Martissant, protests are regularly organised in different cities of the Grand South and the threat of a general strike is still looming.

The national polices' limited capacities do not allow for a disruption of gang activities, as the attack on the Port-au-Prince courthouse and its occupation since 11 June showed. Gang violence could lead to further population displacement in Port-au-Prince and poses a continuing risk to the protection of the local population. Negative coping mechanisms are most likely to lead to a deterioration of food security and an increase of malnutrition among children, not only in the capital but also in the provinces. Especially in the Southern departments, people have to rely on their own harvest, restricting their diet, which can be expected to cause more cases of malnutrition in the coming months and year. With the current situation of insecurity in Canaan, the Central and Northern departments might face similar issues in the near future. The investments and progress made in building the resilience of local populations could be reversed, and people might become more vulnerable to future crises, even minor ones. The number of Haitians leaving the country in search for a better life is most probably going to climb further.

In addition to the further deterioration of the political, socio-economic and security situation, Haiti remains under the constant threat of natural hazards and subsequent disasters. The 2022 Atlantic hurricane season began on 1 June, with forecasters calling for an above-average season with at least 19 named storms, 9 of which could turn into category 3 or 4 hurricanes. This is quite concerning as some regions of Haiti are still struggling to recover from the 2021 earthquake and hurricane Grace that hit the country last August.

If the current security situation does not improve, not only humanitarian interventions in the event of a natural disaster, but also longer-term development programmes will no longer be properly implemented. International partners will try to elaborate innovative and adaptable solutions and strengthen their partnerships with national and local NGOs as much as possible, but their room for manoeuvre might be reduced.