



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 (*ACLEDD* 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 RESPONSE

Humanitarian constraints

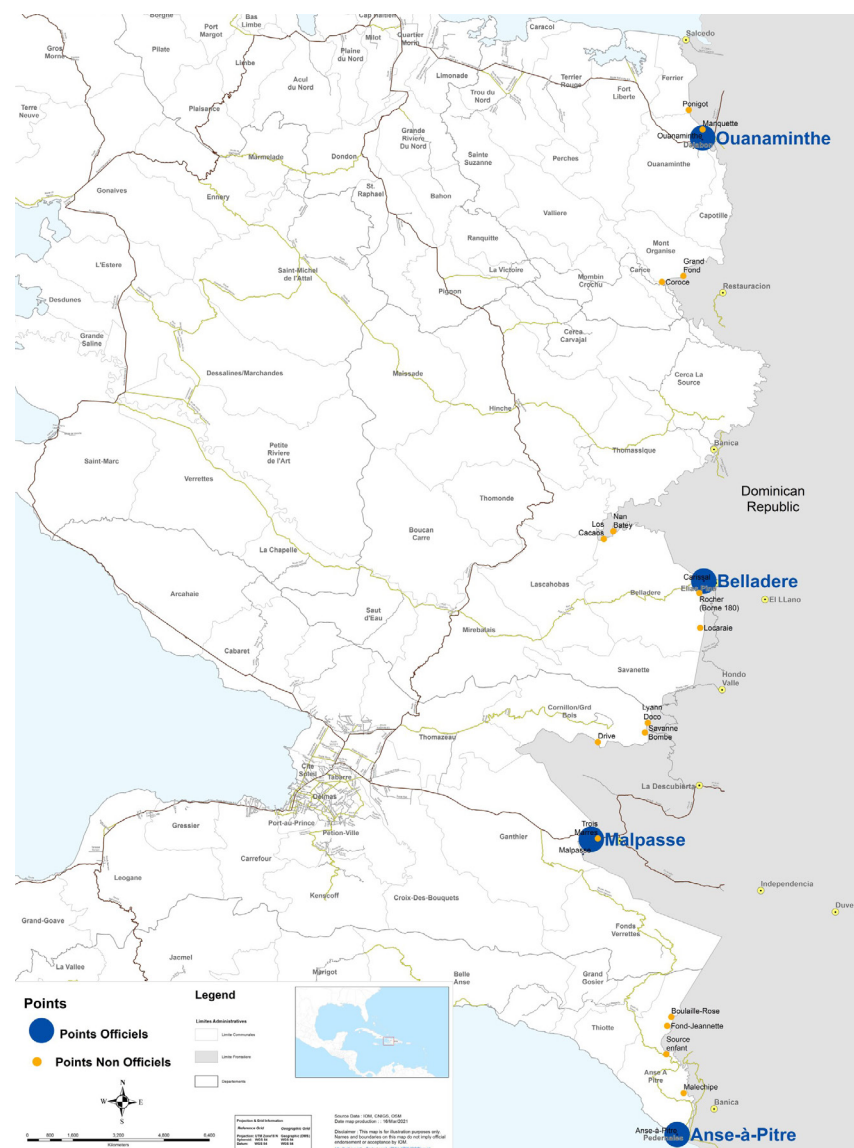
In August 2023, there were 109 access incidents resulting from armed violence, 73 of which occurred in Ouest department (OCHA 21/09/2023). Gangs control several main roads out of Port-au-Prince. In recent weeks, gangs have taken control of Route 3, a previously safe road between Port-au-Prince, border crossings, and the northern town of Cap Haïtien (Humanitarian Outcomes 02/08/2023; El País16/10/2023). Insecurity at the borders, especially at the border crossing of Malpasse, is preventing humanitarian access to Haitian migrants forcibly returned to Haiti (OCHA 21/09/2023).

A lack of fuel and bad roads also pose access challenges. The current rainy season in Haiti can cause mudslides along roads (Logistics Cluster accessed 30/10/2023; Humanitarian Outcomes 02/08/2023).

During the second quarter of 2023, two of the three Haitian departments reporting the most access constraints shared a border with the Dominican Republic (Ouest and Sud). Areas with the most severe constraints in this quarter also hosted 45% of IDPs in the country (UNSC 16/10/2023; OCHA 14/08/2023).

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).

Official and unofficial border Crossing points between Haiti and the Dominican Republic as at April 2021



Source: IOM (21/05/2021)