Migration Profile

HAITI

A. Executive Summary

Haiti is a Caribbean country that along with the Dominican Republic shares the Hispaniola island. Regarding its economy, two-fifths of the Haitian population depends on agriculture, mainly small-scale subsistence farming often disrupted by climate change issues. In fact, according to the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index, Haiti ranked third behind the island of Puerto Rico and Myanmar as a country vulnerable to natural disasters.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with almost 60% of the population living below the national poverty line. It is also heavily affected by corruption and low levels of education of a large section of the population, thus preventing the country’s economic growth.

All these drawbacks have pushed Haitians to move internally and abroad. Internal displacements are mainly rural to urban, caused by gang violence and natural disasters. As for Haitian migration, in 2019 the main destination countries were the United States, the Dominican Republic, and Canada. In addition, Haitian migratory movements especially to South America have been experiencing a significant increase, because of the economic opportunities offered by Brazil and the migratory regularisation process in place in Chile. In this context, remittances are an important source of foreign exchange for Haiti, representing 21.4% of GDP.

Migrants in the Caribbean region are also highly exposed to smugglers and human traffickers.

Haiti is one of the countries in the world with the lowest rate of international migrants, arriving mostly from Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and the United States.

Haiti’s GDP in 2020 decreased by 3.3% compared to the one from the previous year and stood at 14.5 billion US dollars. In 2020, even foreign direct investment (FDI) decelerated by 0.2% of GDP. Regarding the inflation rate, in 2021 it was 16.8%.
B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Haiti is located in the Hispaniola island within the Greater Antilles archipelago of the Caribbean Sea, bordering the Dominican Republic to the east. It has a total surface area of 27,750 sq. km and a population of 11,334,637 inhabitants. The country is divided into 10 departments. It lies in the middle of the hurricane belt, being affected by storms, flooding and earthquakes, as well as periodic droughts.

The official language is French, but this is only spoken by 5% of the population. The Haitian Creole, a blend of French, Taino and West African languages, is the most popular (95% of Haitians speak it fluently). Moreover, regarding the ethnic distribution, most of the Haitian population is from African descent.

As far as religion, about 80% of the population is Roman Catholic. However, this religion in Haiti is heavily mingled with traditional voodoo, originating from West Africa and native beliefs. Protestants are approximately 16%, while the remaining group includes Muslims and people practising other beliefs.

II. International and Internal Migrants

According to the UN, in 2019 Haiti had 18,756 registered immigrants (0.17% of the total population). Male immigration is higher (55.58%) than the female one (44.41%), and its places of origin are mainly Venezuela (13.13%), the Dominican Republic (12.59%), the United States (8.40%), Puerto Rico (8.09%), and Spain (6.78%).

Regarding internal migration movements, they are mostly caused by natural disasters (220,000 in 2021) and gang violence (20,000 in 2021). Nevertheless, there are also Haitians often moving from rural to urban areas looking for better economic opportunities and access to basic services. This exodus of rural population into cities and lack of agricultural capitalization have also reduced the production of food crops in the country.

In addition to many domestic problems like violence, weak infrastructures and lack of basic needs, migrants in the Caribbean region are often exposed to smugglers and human traffickers.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Emigration from Haiti has been driven by several factors, including political instability and natural disasters, like the 2010 earthquake and the 2016 Hurricane Matthew. Moreover, the high level of insecurity caused by gang violence and the structural poverty push emigrants to look for better living conditions abroad. In 2019, Haiti had 1,585,681 emigrants (14.08% of its total population), with a higher male percentage (53.98%).
Most Haitian migrants have a low level of education and a very limited knowledge of English\textsuperscript{xxxviii}. Their main destination countries in 2019 were the United States (46.48%), the Dominican Republic (30.97%), and Canada (6.28%)\textsuperscript{xxxix}.

Emigration from Haiti to the Dominican Republic has a long and complex history. This phenomenon, which was initially part of a regional economic dynamism, became more problematic over the decades because of the relations between the two countries and other global processes\textsuperscript{xl}. The Dominican Republic has also been a recipient of forced migration caused by violence and natural disasters\textsuperscript{xli}. In 2021, Haitian emigration to the Dominican Republic was mainly driven by economic factors and involved mostly the centre of the country\textsuperscript{xlii}.

It is also worth mentioning that the porosity of the border between the two countries, lack of regular migration status for Haitians, changes in the system of state regulation of labour migration, lack of opportunities to migrate through official channels has had an impact on the patterns of irregularity and has also led to the increase of transnational networks of migrant trafficking, located on both sides of the border\textsuperscript{xliii}. Since 2021, Haitian migratory flows have again increased, following political instability and natural disasters, as well as other structural problems\textsuperscript{xlv}.

In addition, another important aspect of Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic is its temporary factor\textsuperscript{xlv}. Therefore, Haitians migrate to the neighbouring country just for a period of time, and then later on they return to their homeland. This phenomenon has been more relevant since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was a significant increase in the number of voluntary returns to Haiti, due to the impact of the pandemic on sectors such as tourism, construction and commerce, where Haitians are mostly employed\textsuperscript{xlvi}. Since March 2021, IOM has recorded more than 320,000 of such voluntary returns\textsuperscript{xlvii}.

Many Haitians have also moved across the Caribbean to South America, especially to Brazil and Chile\textsuperscript{xlviii} (the latter did not require Haitians to have a visa to enter the country until 2018)\textsuperscript{xlix}. For this reason, since 2019 many Haitians have left the country, in an attempt to later reach the United States\textsuperscript{li}. Much of this journey of theirs is done on foot, facing challenges like food and social assistance shortages\textsuperscript{lii}. Emigrants usually stay in informal camps\textsuperscript{liii}. On their way, the Darien Gap is especially dangerous, being mainly a jungle area where criminal groups extort and assault people\textsuperscript{liv}. Furthermore, emigrants suffer racial discrimination abroad, making it difficult for them to access health services or the labour market, or to protect their rights when reporting crimes\textsuperscript{lv}. Likewise, Haitians lack translators and interpreters because they do not speak Spanish or Portuguese\textsuperscript{lvi}.

Mexico has also played an important role as far as the Haitian migration trajectory. As a consequence of the economic downturn and the tightening of migration policies in South American countries, many Haitians began to migrate to Mexico\textsuperscript{lvii}. According to information provided by the National Institute of Migration in Mexico, the number of Haitians arriving in the country has increased since 2017\textsuperscript{lviii}. One of its reasons is to use Mexico as a transit country to the
USA; however, because of migration policies restrictions in that country, many Haitians stay in Mexico and seek refuge there\textsuperscript{x}. Their main destination places are Tijuana and Baja California\textsuperscript{xx}.

Regarding skilled migration, around 80\% of Haiti’s skilled human resources are residing mostly in the Dominican Republic, the United States, and Canada as diaspora communities, working in the health or electronic industries\textsuperscript{xxi,xxii}.

**IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)**

Violence, insecurity, natural disasters, poverty, malnutrition, and political instability in Haiti have forced thousands of people to migrate to other countries\textsuperscript{xxiii}. Thus, in 2021 there were 25,649 Haitian refugees abroad under the UNHCR’s mandate and 96,300 asylum-seekers\textsuperscript{xxiv}, while in 2017, according to the UNHCR, there were only 10 foreign refugees and asylum seekers in Haiti, from 7 different countries\textsuperscript{xxv}.

Most Haitian refugees and asylum seekers are in Mexico. In 2021 there were 18,883 Haitian asylum seekers in this state, being the second nationality with more applications filed after Honduras\textsuperscript{xxvi}. However, only 2,613 applications were reviewed and just 813 of them (30\%) were accepted\textsuperscript{xxvii}. Many do not have access to medical services, are unable to work and suffer from discrimination\textsuperscript{xxviii}.

With regards to internal displacements, they are mainly affected by gang violence, acute food insecurity and natural disasters\textsuperscript{xxix}. Fights and violence among armed gangs in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, including open gunfire, burning down homes and pillaging, have fuelled displacement of the civilian population\textsuperscript{xxx}. On June 24, 2021, there were 17,105 internally displaced persons (IDPs) identified in 10 sites (host communities, spontaneous sites or organised sites)\textsuperscript{xxxi}. In these centres, 56\% of them were female and 44\% male\textsuperscript{xxxii}. Women and children seek refuge mainly in areas of the capital city, such as Carrefour and Bas Delmas\textsuperscript{xxxiii}.

Likewise, natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods increase the risk of further displacements. Haiti ranks third in the 2021 Climate Risk Index, among the countries most affected by severe weather events\textsuperscript{xxxiv}. In 2020, the IDMC recorded 13,000 new displacements due to disasters in the country, mostly linked to hurricanes Isaias and Laura\textsuperscript{xxxv}. In total, the number of IDPs in 2021 caused by natural disasters was 220,000\textsuperscript{xxxvi}.

The disruption of community-level social functioning, family separation, increased financial burdens on host families, forced school closures, loss of livelihoods and the generalised fear hinder the capacity of IDPs to reintegrate and live properly\textsuperscript{xxxvii}. IDPs who could not seek refuge with friends or family fled to informal displacement sites such as Parc Celtique\textsuperscript{xxxviii}. Unsanitary conditions and overcrowding in these areas pose significant risks to people’s physical and mental health and increase existing vulnerabilities. Some women and girls have reported sexual violence, harassment and physical violence in the sites, where they lack privacy and safe places\textsuperscript{xxxix}. 
IDPs in the state and Haitian forced migrants in other countries are exposed to serious issues of irregular migration, smuggling and human trafficking. What is more, Haitian refugees abroad are vulnerable to human rights abuses due to the lack of individualised evaluation. Title 42 of the U.S. Code enables collective expulsion, creating a situation of systematic mass deportations. Moreover, there are problems of refugee status recognition for Haitians in other countries such as Brazil. The reason for the CONARE’s (the Brazilian National Committee for Refugees) denial was that they could not clearly demonstrate the existence of a threat to their lives, security or freedom.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Haiti is ranked tier 2 in the 2021 US Trafficking in Person Report, since it does not meet the TVPA’s minimum standards for eliminating trafficking activities, but is making significant efforts to do so. In 2020, the government initiated one prosecution for sex trafficking, and conducted nine trafficking investigations involving 19 suspects. However, in 2020 it did not report any convictions, compared to the six convictions being carried out in 2019.

Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in the country, as well as Haitian victims abroad. Most of the cases involve children in forced labour in domestic service, who are physically abused. The school enrolment rates keep decreasing, and there are 286,000 estimated children younger than 15 working as domestic servants statewide. These minors, together with children in orphanages, in residential care centres, working on the streets, IDPs, migrants and Haitians living at the border, are especially vulnerable to human trafficking.

Despite some weaknesses shown in combating human trafficking - such as insufficient training of officials to identify, protect and refer trafficking victims, as well as lack of effective laws to regulate foreign labour recruiters and prevent fraudulent recruiting -, the country has made important efforts in combating and preventing human trafficking.

Regarding victim protection, in 2020 the border police turned over 24 potential victims of trafficking to the Haitian Social Welfare Agency (IBESR), offering medical and counselling services, family tracing and limited support returning them to their families. The IBESR and the Ministry of Public Health controlled the number of children in orphanages and residential childcare centres to avoid an increase in child trafficking during the pandemic. Haiti also increased its efforts in providing foster homes as an alternative to abusive orphanages and prohibited unlicensed orphanages from opening.

As for human trafficking prevention, in 2020 the National Committee for the Fight Against Human Trafficking (CNLTP) partnered with an international donor a $5.6 million project to develop an anti-trafficking task force of law enforcement, judicial actors and IBESR representatives for the identification of victims, to support investigations and prosecutions and establish subcommittees in all 10 regions of the country.
The Haitian Magistrate’s School (EMA) held seminars on the law for 128 prosecutors, judges, and police officers, and others on human trafficking for 170 representatives of the national police, judges, and civil society organizations. CNLTP worked on the training of 19 immigration officials in the profile of traffickers and potential victims. The National Migration Office (BPM) also worked to establish a new migration information database at a border crossing point to identify suspected traffickers. Moreover, awareness campaigns concerning forced child labour were conducted by MAST, together with IBESR and the BPM.

VI. National Legal Framework

The legal framework on migration in Haiti includes the September 19, 1953 national migration Law, modified in some articles by the November 25, 1959 Law; the December 26, 1978 Law organising migratory services; and the November 17, 1980 Decree punishing acts of illegal emigration. Moreover, the 1987 Haitian Constitution in its title IV “Aliens” develops the rights and duties of foreign population within the territory. The law on migrant workers of August 1, 2002 outlines the terms of access to the territory, work permits and housing.

In 2015, the Haitian government supported by IOM and ILO developed its first National Migration Policy, providing recommendations in migration, environment and development, labour and social protection, irregular migration and border management. What is more, the 2014 Anti-Trafficking (TIP) Law criminalizes sex and labour trafficking.

At the regional level, in 1994 Haiti became a member of the Convention that established the Association of the Caribbean States. It maintains bilateral agreements with the Dominican Republic, such as the 2000 Declaration regarding the hiring conditions on their nationals and the Agreement on the hiring of seasonal workers.


VII. Main Actors

The State

In Haiti the Ministry of Interior is responsible for applying laws on immigration and emigration. The art. 1 of the May 17, 1990 Decree establishes its mission to design and execute the policy of the executive power with respect to the supervision of the territorial communities, immigration, emigration and civil protection.
The Directorate of Immigration and Emigration (DIE), a technical administrative unit of the Ministry of the Interior, controls the migratory flows throughout the national territory\textsuperscript{cxii}. Regarding refugees, the state lacks a specific institution for its regulation or management, and the UNHCR is the international actor being responsible for it\textsuperscript{cxii}.

The National Committee for the Fight Against Human Trafficking (CNLTP) is the body that monitors trafficking cases in the court system, oversees the prosecution of trafficking-related cases and advocates for the victims\textsuperscript{cxiii}.

\textit{International Organisations}

IOM is the main international actor on migration in Haiti. Since 1994, it has been committed to enhance the abilities of Haitian institutions to manage its borders and control regional migration dynamics, reduce forced migration and protect vulnerable groups, and develop policies and legislation in the country\textsuperscript{cxiv}. It has helped with camp management operations, data collection, health support, temporary shelter, disaster risk reduction, counter-trafficking, and voluntary return and reintegration assistance. IOM has 241 national and 23 international staff members operating in Port-au-Prince, Les Cayes and Ouanaminthe\textsuperscript{cxv}.

As far as refugees, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination under its mandate. It assists refugees and asylum seekers providing for their basic needs such as housing, food and medical care, and deals with refugee resettlement programs\textsuperscript{cxvi}. It also works for the prevention and reduction of statelessness by the identification, verification interviews and biometric registration of stateless persons and/or at risk of statelessness deported or returned from the Dominican Republic to ensure their protection and access to nationality solutions\textsuperscript{cxvii}.

In addition, UNHCR has worked in Haiti providing documentation to earthquake’s survivors\textsuperscript{cxviii}. Together with IOM, it has developed a project to relocate and integrate Haitians in the United States and assist their humanitarian needs\textsuperscript{cxix}. Moreover, IACHR has monitored human rights’ crisis in Haiti and proposed guidelines to adopt an “integral, immediate, effective and lasting response to ensure the rights of Haitian persons in international human mobility”\textsuperscript{cxix}.

Being part of the Association of Caribbean States, this organisation aims to strengthen the regional cooperation and integration process\textsuperscript{cxvi}. It especially focuses on natural disasters in Haiti\textsuperscript{cxii}. As for the Organisation of American States (OAS), it gathers information on Haitian migrants and prepares reports on migrants and refugees in the region\textsuperscript{cxiii}. Furthermore, Haiti is also part of other organisations such as the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL in Spanish)\textsuperscript{cxiv}, or the Organisation for Caribbean Tourism (CTO)\textsuperscript{cxv}.

\textit{NGOs and Other organisations}

Save the Children, the main NGO in Haiti, has been present in the state since 1978 providing nutrition, early learning and water and sanitation programmes. However, in recent years its work has focused on covering the basic needs of children and families who have been affected by
natural disasters. It provides supplies such as jerry cans, buckets, sanitary towels, mosquito nets, tarpaulins, masks and hand sanitisers.

OXFAM is another organisation present in Haiti whose work focuses on reconstruction and growth in urban, suburban and rural areas, addressing humanitarian needs for long-term sustainability. In 2016 after Hurricane Matthew, it distributed clean water, fixed tanks and provided emergency shelter and food.

The NGO Manos Unidas in Haiti provides food security, nutrition, agricultural production, access to water and sanitation, health and education. After the 2010 earthquake, this organisation has incorporated cross-cutting approaches to its projects such as adaptation to climate change, promotion of women and the defence of human rights. In recent years, it has supported emergency actions to address humanitarian catastrophes, for instance Hurricane Matthew in 2016, the returnee crisis in 2017, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, forced displacement due to violence in Port-au-Prince in 2021, and the earthquake in 2021. To carry out its work, Manos Unidas relies on local partners such as Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, América Solidaria, Caritas, Justicia y Paz and ITECA, as well as various religious congregations and grassroots organisations.

Another organisation working in Haiti since 2007 is Cesal. Its work embodies food security interventions at the state’s border with the Dominican Republic. Cesal has helped border communities focusing on improvements in access to education, economic development of small farmers and empowerment of rural women.

The Catholic Church

Among the Catholic organisations active in Haiti, the Jesuit Congregation stands out, working with the migrant population to defend the rights and dignity of migrants, displaced persons, returnees, victims of aggression, abuse and violence, as well as their families. Their work is mainly focused on providing migrants with clothing, accommodation, advice on documentation, health, spiritual, socio-cultural integration, entrepreneurship and psychological assistance. The Jesuit Migrant Service in Mexico, in Ciudad Juarez, has also provided humanitarian services to Haitian emigrants at the border with the United States.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been working in Haiti for more than 60 years. After the 2010 earthquake, CRS provided temporary shelter (to 10,500 families), meals (to more than 1 million people affected), and restoration of 2,397 sanitation facilities, among many other services.

Furthermore, the Congregation Hermanas de San Juan Evangelista (Juanistas) works to ensure protection of human rights, especially of women and children at the border with the Dominican Republic. It assists families living in extreme poverty, homelessness and chronic illnesses, and
provides follow-up and monitoring services for voluntary returnees, as well as education access to their children\textsuperscript{xxxvi}.  

After the 2010 Haitian earthquake, the Brazilian Conference of Bishops (CNBB) and the Conference of Religious of Brazil (CBRB) started an “Inter-congregational Solidarity Project” to be a supportive, welcoming and evangelising presence in Haiti, by getting involved in the reconstruction effort and promotion of more dignified living conditions for the poor\textsuperscript{cxxxvii}. Since 2010, 17 congregations have been working in Haiti promoting literacy and psychological support for women, art, music, theatre, tailoring workshops, education for adolescents and young people, as well as feeding malnourished children\textsuperscript{cxxxviii}.  

Moreover, Caritas Haiti has been deeply involved in empowering communities to play an active role in their own development. Currently, its main areas of operation include risk and disaster management, agriculture and the environment, institutional capacity building, water and sanitation, solidarity economy, gender equality, infrastructure and housing, health and nutrition\textsuperscript{cxxxix}.  

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D. Endnotes

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