

# **Migration Profile**

# DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

#### **A. Executive Summary**

The Dominican Republic (DR) is a Caribbean country that shares with Haiti the island of Hispaniola.

In terms of migration patterns, two main trends can be identified.<sup>i</sup> Firstly, emigration flows are mainly directed to the United States, Puerto Rico, Spain, Italy, and Panama.<sup>ii</sup> Secondly, immigration arrives primarily from Haiti, Venezuela, the United States, Spain, and Puerto Rico.<sup>iii</sup> In recent years, the country has also developed strict policies to curb immigration.<sup>iv</sup>

For a long time the DR has been a destination country for refugees coming from Haiti, and since 2014 many Venezuelans have also begun seeking refuge in the country.<sup>v vi</sup> Currently, the DR has 135,000 stateless Dominicans of Haitian descent, many of whom are vulnerable to human trafficking.<sup>vii</sup>

Environmental changes that are an endemic problem in the Caribbean region have also triggered human displacements in the DR.<sup>viii</sup> In 2022 alone, Hurricane Fiona caused the displacement of 12,500 people.<sup>ix</sup>

In the last decade, the Dominican economy has undergone significant changes and is largely driven by the service industry, which accounts for 61% of GDP, while agriculture and livestock account for 5.5% of GDP, construction (11%), hotels and restaurants (7.6%), and tourism-related activities (15%) have become the key pillars of the local economy.<sup>×</sup>

In 2021 the DR's GDP amounted to US\$ 94,243,453.94,<sup>xi</sup> with an annual growth rate of 12.3%,<sup>xii</sup> thanks to its fiscal and monetary policies that have sustained the Dominican economy, as well as an effective vaccination campaign.<sup>xiii</sup> In 2020 Foreign investment (FDI) net inflows represented 3.1% of the country's GDP.<sup>xiv</sup>

In 2022 the inflation rate was 9.4%.<sup>xv</sup> This has caused an expansion of the fiscal deficit due to unexpected subsidies, which have been necessary to counteract rising prices.<sup>xvi</sup> Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has posed significant immediate risks, increasing costs of goods and services (the DR is a net importer of oil, natural gas, soybeans, sorghum, wheat, and corn) and reducing tourist arrivals.<sup>xvii</sup>

#### **B.** Country Profile

### I. Basic Information

The DR is located on the island of Hispaniola,<sup>xviii</sup> bordered to the east, north and south by the Caribbean Sea, and to the west by Haiti.<sup>xix</sup> It covers a total surface of 48,000 sq. km.<sup>xx</sup> It is divided into 31 provinces<sup>xxi</sup> and has a population of 10,953,714 inhabitants. Its population is mostly (70%) of mixed African and European (Spanish) descent,<sup>xxii</sup> and is divided into 18 ethnic groups, with the most significant affiliation to the Fang, Okak, Bube, Fernandian, Yoruba, and Igbo tribes.

The official language is Spanish, but English and French are also widely spoken in the region, especially because of immigration reasons and at the border with Haiti.xxiii

The main religion is Christianity, and the Catholic Church accounts for 80% of the whole population.<sup>xxiv</sup> In recent years, Evangelicals have increased, both in terms of their number as well as their social and political influence.<sup>xxv</sup>

## II. International and Internal Migration

In 2020, 603,794 immigrants were registered in the DR.<sup>xxvi</sup> Their main countries of origin were Haiti (82.17%), Venezuela (5.64%), the United States (2.42%), Spain (1.22%), and Puerto Rico (0.80%).<sup>xxvii</sup> Immigration is mostly male (63.36%),<sup>xxviii</sup> and the main age group is between 25 and 39 years old.<sup>xxix</sup>

Migration from Haiti has had a long and complex history, and the border between these two countries is considered one of the main migration corridors in the region.<sup>xxx</sup> <sup>xxxi</sup> Initially driven by regional economic factors, this phenomenon has become more problematic over time due to the political relations between the two countries and other global processes. <sup>xxxii</sup> xxiii</sup> In 2021 Haitian emigration to the DR was mainly economic and contributed to the country's growth by providing young workers to the industries of agriculture, construction, tourism, and other services.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that the porosity of the border between the two countries, the lack of a regular migration status for Haitians, changes in the system of state legislation of labour migration, and lack of opportunities to migrate through official channels have had an impact on irregular immigration flows.<sup>xxxv</sup> It has also led to the growth of transnational migrant smuggling networks on both sides of the border.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Since 2021, Haitian immigration has increased again because of political instability, natural disasters, and other structural problems.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In addition, another important aspect of Haitian migration to the DR is its temporality.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Thus, Haitians migrate to the neighbouring country only for a period of time and then return to their homeland.<sup>xxxix</sup> This has been more relevant since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic due to its impact on the tourism, construction, and commerce sectors, where Haitians are heavily employed.<sup>xl</sup> Since March 2021, IOM has registered more than 320,000 voluntary returns of Haitians.<sup>xli</sup>

The immigration growth has raised concerns in Dominican society, with fears that it would reduce employment opportunities for national workers, contributing to stagnating wage levels and poverty reduction.<sup>xlii</sup> In the last few months of 2021, COVID-19-related restrictions

encouraged anti-immigrant policies and practices in the DR.<sup>xliii</sup> In February 2022, the Dominican President announced the plan to build a wall along the border with Haiti to stop illegal immigration and drug trafficking.<sup>xliv</sup>

Regarding internal migration, the main cause is the unequal socio-economic development among provinces<sup>xlv</sup>. Provinces with more significant economic stability are the National District, Santo Domingo, Santiago, La Altagracia, and La Romana, and receive many immigrants arriving from the lesser developed provinces like Elías Piña, Dajabon, Pedernales, and Azúa.<sup>xlvi</sup>

# III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2020 it was estimated that 1.6 million Dominicans lived abroad,<sup>xlvii</sup> approximately 10% of the country's population.<sup>xlviii</sup> Globally, seven countries account for more than 90% of Dominican emigration, above all the United States, where 75% of them reside,<sup>xlix</sup> followed by Puerto Rico (over 400,000), Spain (over 325,000), Italy (over 36,000), and Panama (over 32,000).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the DR is key to the continental and extra-continental transit of migratory flows (especially the irregular ones) to, mainly, the USA and other Caribbean countries.<sup>li</sup>

The most common reasons for emigration are the inability of the Dominican economy and society to provide a sufficient quality of life for its population<sup>lii</sup> and family reunification.<sup>liii</sup> The coronavirus pandemic has also affected mobility patterns in the region, and the subsequent closure of borders has also affected the development of the Caribbean, which is highly dependent on tourism.<sup>liv</sup>

Compared with other foreign migrants to the USA, Dominicans have a more limited fluency in the English language (63% of them are lower than "very good") and lower access to higher education.<sup>Iv</sup> Dominicans also have significantly lower average incomes than native and general foreign populations. In 2019, 19% of them lived in poverty (compared to 14% of immigrants and 12% of those born in the USA).<sup>Ivi</sup> In 2018, Dominican nationals were 2% among the 11 million unauthorised immigrants living in the United States. In 2020, even though 12,000 young undocumented Dominicans were eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme, only 1,900 were able to obtain this status.<sup>Ivii</sup>

# IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced People)

In the DR, persons officially recognised as refugees are eligible to obtain residence permits valid for one year, which can afterwards be renewed.<sup>1</sup>viii They are also entitled to family reunification, access to the labour market, social security, freedom of movement, as well as interpreters to help them while communicating with the Dominican authorities.<sup>lix</sup>

In 2021, the DR registered 162 Haitian people with refugee status<sup>1x</sup> (58.79% were women)<sup>1xi</sup>. Out of the 642 asylum seekers, 285 were from Haiti, 278 from Venezuela, 51 from Cuba, 8 from Afghanistan, and 5 from Colombia.<sup>1xii</sup> In 2021, 116,000 Venezuelan people were also registered; however, they neither sought refugee status nor were asylum seekers.<sup>1xiii</sup> In 2022, 190 refugees and 1,017 asylum seekers were reported, together with 115,283 displaced persons coming from Venezuela.<sup>1xiv</sup> Currently, the Dominican government has discontinued any refugee resettlements in the country.<sup>1xv</sup>

Issues related to violence, insecurity, natural disasters, poverty, malnutrition, and political instability in Haiti have contributed to significant displacement occurrences in their country, as well as in the DR.<sup>Ixvi</sup> Because of the current situation, organised crime has become a significant factor in the exploitation of Haitian border crossers, often promising to Haitian help in expediting the process of their legal documents in exchange for large sums of money.<sup>Ixvii</sup>

Migration from Haiti has triggered significant social and political tensions in the DR, as well as overt racial discrimination.<sup>lxviii</sup> In 2013 the Constitutional Court stripped Dominican nationality from the descendants of Haitians born in the DR whose parents were not legal residents at their birth after 1929, and these people became stateless.<sup>lxix</sup> This decision limited access to fundamental rights and essential services such as education and health care,<sup>lxx</sup> and enabled significant forms of exploitation, especially labour exploitation in the sugar fields, where most workers are Haitians or Haitian descendants living in extremely precarious conditions. However, in 2020, the DR allowed the naturalisation of about 750 people who had previously been stripped of their nationality - only a small proportion of those who apparently qualified for naturalisation, showing major discrepancies in the application of the law.<sup>lxxi</sup>

Since 2014, many Venezuelans have arrived in the DR because of the humanitarian crisis experienced in their country.<sup>lxxii</sup> In 2020, millions of people did not have access to primary health care or adequate nutrition. In addition, limited access to safe water in homes and health centres contributed to the spread of the coronavirus.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Currently, the DR hosts the biggest number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Caribbean sub-region.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Many Venezuelans in the DR do not have regular immigration status and face difficulties while accessing essential services, financial institutions, higher education, and the formal labour market.<sup>lxxv</sup> In addition, the closure of borders due to Covid-19 has made the entry into the territory more difficult for Venezuelans, limiting their economic opportunities, making them even more vulnerable and in greater need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Venezuelans with a regular immigration status are entitled to first-level health care, free emergency care, and Covid-19 testing.<sup>lxxvii</sup> However, they experience difficulties in obtaining secondary and other professional care services.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

In 2021 there were 10,388 internally displaced persons in the DR as a result of four hurricanes that took place in that year.<sup>lxxix</sup> In 2022, Hurricane Fiona caused the displacement of 12,500 people due to power outages, flooding, river overflows, etc.<sup>lxxx</sup>

# V. Victims of Human Trafficking

In 2022, the DR was listed as a Tier 2 country, a designation it firstly achieved in 2020. The government manifests a general intention to increase efforts to satisfy the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

Indeed, efforts have significantly increased compared to previous years, when the number of victims of concern was significant (and growing sharply), and improvement commitments required taking additional steps. The DR has increased the number of convicted traffickers, opened specific shelters for their victims, and improved victim screening and data collection, as well as the registry of Venezuelan migrants vulnerable to human trafficking.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Moreover, the Attorney General's Office and the Police Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU) reported having

initiated 53 trafficking investigations involving 76 people (47 sex trafficking cases and 6 labour trafficking cases).<sup>lxxxiii</sup> They also reported initiating 107 investigations in 2020 and following up on another 15 cases (6 for sex trafficking, 3 for labour trafficking, and 6 for unspecified exploitation that included pandering and procuring) that were ongoing from other reporting periods.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> In addition, 46 new alleged traffickers were being prosecuted, and another 52 suspects were in the process of being charged.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Nonetheless, the state has not eliminated yet the legal requirement to prove force, fraud, or coercion for victims under 18 and continues to fail to adequately fund its anti-trafficking system, including providing sufficient training, resources, and technology for officers, especially outside the capital.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Nor did the DR complete a National Action Plan (NAP). Services available to victims (especially men) remain inadequate.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

The DR must ensure that potential child victims involved in gangs and drug trafficking are not penalised for activities they have been forced to do.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Likewise, the DR must implement the Electronic Investigations Module as a tool for investigations and communications between the National Police and the Public Ministry.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Although the government reported six joint meetings with the National Steering Committee to Combat Child Labour and the Commission against Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation, the DR remains an important destination for sex tourism, especially from North America and Europe.<sup>xc</sup> Children between 15 and 17 are sexually exploited in the streets, parks and beaches of the country, and Haitian women have reported that smugglers often become traffickers and sexual exploiters along the border, with total impunity and even in collusion with corrupt officials.<sup>xci</sup> Draft legislation on human trafficking was postponed in December 2021, ostensibly to incorporate the assessments of surviving victims.<sup>xcii</sup>

#### VI. National Legal Framework

The DR migration policy guidelines for 2030 are deployed in the National Development Strategy (Law 1-12).xciii

The DR handles its migratory system based on the General Migration Law and grants high priority to migration problems in recognition of its Constitution and the international agreements it has ratified. In addition, it considers the need for migration to be in harmony with internal development requirements.<sup>xciv</sup> Specific legislation includes the National Plan for the Regularisation of Foreigners (PNRE), the Decree of Affiliation of the PNRE population to the Social Security System and the Organic Law for the Restructuring of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>xcv</sup> Resolution M-MIP-EXT-00119-2021, approved in January 2021, adopted measures for the regularisation and social and economic integration of Venezuelan migrants.<sup>xcvi</sup>

Decisions on asylum applications and international refugee protection are the responsibility of the National Refugee Commission (CONARE), and applications are sent to the National Office for Refugees (ONR), an auxiliary body of the General Directorate for Migration.<sup>xcvii</sup> CONARE adjudicates asylum applications within 30 days, after consulting a Technical Sub-Committee on the applicant's credibility and compliance with the requirements of the 1951 Refugee Convention, as well as on the situation in the country of origin.<sup>xcviii</sup> Applicants are

given residence permits valid for 60 days during the initial process and for one (renewable) year if recognised as a refugee (spouses and children may concurrently obtain access).<sup>xcix</sup>

Finally, the 2003 Law on Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons (Law 137-03), the Specialised General Attorney's Office against Illicit Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons (PETT) and the Police Unit against Trafficking in Persons (UAT) also specify important provisions of immigration law in the DR.<sup>c</sup>

### VII. Main Actors

## The State

The National Council for Population and Family (CONAPOFA), an agency of the Ministry of Public Health, is the country's highest demographic authority.<sup>ci</sup>

For its part, the National Migration Institute, in connection with the Ministry of Interior and Police, in support of the National Migration Council, contributes to migration management through research, training actions and the proposal of public policies in line with sustainable development and migration governance. Its mission also includes sensitising Dominican society and the state, and disseminating information regarding the scope of migratory phenomena.<sup>cii</sup> Likewise, within the same ministry there is the General Directorate of Migration, with a more administrative profile, with oversight functions over migratory flows and the presence of foreigners in the national territory, as well as a focus on security and sovereignty.<sup>ciii</sup>

The National Border Council of the Dominican Republic, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, coordinates, plans, directs, executes, promotes, and manages projects and works for the development of local peoples and border communities, and is headed by an official of ministerial rank.<sup>civ</sup>

Finally, the Institute of Dominicans Abroad (INDEX) develops programs, projects, and actions to protect the rights of Dominican nationals abroad, improve their quality of life, and strengthen their ties with their country and communities of origin.<sup>cv</sup>

#### International organisations

In the DR, UNHCR oversees the international action to protect people forced to flee their places of origin.<sup>cvi</sup> In 2022 UNHCR improved the system of available data on persons at risk of statelessness, bringing the total number of cases registered with UNHCR to over 104,000. These updated records enhanced the availability of quantitative data and contributed to the analysis of the situations of affected persons, including challenges to accessing education, employment, and other protection concerns.

UNICEF also took part, together with other Dominican institutions, in the Strategic Meetings to Combat Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Girls, Boys and Adolescents, Women, and Migrant Trafficking, aiming to address the situation of exploited migrant youth in the country.<sup>cvii</sup>

The DR has been an IOM member since 1968. It currently has offices in four border towns: Dajabón, Jimaní, Elías Piña, and Pedernales. In the DR, IOM provides technical cooperation to strengthen Dominican government entities to face the new challenges and opportunities of

migration; supports integrated border management, promoting inter-institutional coordination, training of officials and protection of migrants; influences institutions to reduce the costs of sending remittances; strengthens ties with Dominicans abroad by providing technical assistance to institutions to improve consular services and procedures; trains and provides cooperation in labour migration management; and supports the government to promote efforts against human trafficking and smuggling, including direct assistance to victims.<sup>cviii</sup>

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (an Organisation of American States institution) has adopted specific resolutions to protect asylum seekers, refugees and denationalised persons. It has taken steps to address the problem of forced migration in the region.<sup>cix</sup> Moreover, the Regional Conference on Migration (which includes the DR)<sup>cx</sup> works to protect the human rights of migrants, promote the orderly cross-border movement of people, and address migration in a multilateral manner.<sup>cxi</sup>

#### NGOs and Other organisations

*Manos Unidas* supports agricultural projects, the provision of essential services, and access to health care through mobile clinics on the border between the DR and Haiti.<sup>cxii</sup> It aims to improve living conditions on the border and to promote joint development and solidarity between Dominicans and Haitians. Also, in Jimaní, *Manos Unidas* supports a project of the Jesuit Refugee Service to make Haitian immigrants aware of their rights and defend them collectively.<sup>cxiii</sup>

Funcoverd is responsible for accompanying the Venezuelan immigrant population in the DR and developing social and integration plans between the two nations.<sup>cxiv</sup>

Cesal is an organisation present in the cities of Valverde, Montecristi, and Dajabón.<sup>cxv</sup> It focuses on accompanying refugees and migrants. It provides them with accommodation, job training, language learning, social skills development, counselling, and psychological support.<sup>cxvi</sup>

*Movimiento socio-cultural para los trabajadores haitianos* (MOSCTHA) aims to improve the environmental conditions, as well as technical, cultural, and social training of Haitian workers, their descendants, and other vulnerable populations in the DR.<sup>cxvii</sup>

#### The Catholic Church

The Episcopal Conference of the Dominican Republic (CED) has issued several advocacy statements regarding the humane treatment of migrants.<sup>cxviii</sup> The National Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants is present in several Dominican cities providing migrants and refugees with spiritual and legal assistance and educational integration.<sup>cxix</sup> It operates in collaboration with other organisations such as CONDOR, San Pedro de Macoris diocese, and Pastoral Social Caritas.<sup>cxx</sup>

Catholic Relief Services works in the DR with the local Church to assist Haitian migrants.<sup>cxxi</sup> It also cooperates with the Jesuit Refugee Service to carry out the "All of us work" project.<sup>cxxii</sup> In addition, it collaborates with the NINA Consortium providing quality care, protection, and support to street children and youth.<sup>cxxiii</sup>

The *Religiosas Adoratrices* work with migrants and victims of human trafficking and provide them with accommodation, food, health care, clothing, legal, psychological, and spiritual assistance, socio-cultural integration, language learning, and job placement.<sup>cxxiv</sup>

The *Fundación la Merced* carries out intense work in the reception of migrants organised into three areas: education, health and livelihoods.<sup>cxxv</sup>

The Society of Jesus (SJ), through the Centre for Reflection and Social Action "Padre Juan Montalvo", is active in Dajabón (the former *Solidaridad Fronteriza*) and Jimaní (the former *Servicio Jesuita de Migrantes*) with migrants and refugees, and provides them with mobilisation support, legal assistance, and documentation advice.<sup>cxxvi</sup> The SJ also manages *Hogar de Cristo* in Dajabón, where migrants are provided with shelter, food, health care, clothing, language training, spiritual and psychological assistance, socio-cultural integration, and educational integration.<sup>cxxvii</sup>

*Asociación Scalabriniana* works with vulnerable migrants.<sup>cxxviii</sup> It provides legal and spiritual assistance, documentation advice, as well as sociocultural and educational integration.<sup>cxxix</sup>

Finally, Caritas Dominican Republic promotes, coordinates, and implements processes of assistance, human promotion, and integral development to build a more just and supportive society.<sup>cxxx</sup> It works closely with the National Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants on different projects.<sup>cxxxi</sup>

November 2022

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