



PROTECTION ANALYSIS UPDATE (February 2022)

Gang-controlled areas of Port-au-Prince



Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), July 2021

Map legend:

 Gang-controlled areas

 Location of Internally Displaced People's (IDPs) sites

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PRESENTATION

The policy on the centrality of protection adopted by the Inter-Agency Steering Committee in 2016 places protection at the center of humanitarian action¹. In addition, the recent Call to Action on Human Rights of the Secretary General (2020) reiterates the importance of addressing human rights as a common goal for the United Nations². Strong of these prerogatives, and in light of the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, the co-lead of the Protection sector in Haiti, with the support of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), carried out a preliminary protection assessment in November-December 2021.

The overall objective of this assessment was to establish the impact of growing armed violence on the protection situation of people living in gang-controlled areas and beyond. More than 50 interlocutors were interviewed including victims, representatives of the government, international organisations, international non-governmental organisations, national service providers and civil society.

RISK DRIVERS

Fragile political stability

The assassination of the President Jovenel Moïse on 7 July 2021 has left Haiti with very few functioning democratic institutions standing while aggravating the governance vacuum. The legislative assembly has been inoperative since January 2020, when the terms of all delegates of the lower chamber and of most senators expired, as no

¹https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_policy_on_protection_in_humanitarian_action.pdf

²<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The%20Highest%20Aspiration%20->

elections were scheduled to replace them. Since his appointment in July, the new Prime Minister, Ariel Henry, has attempted to establish a government of transition to lay the ground for holding legislative, local and presidential elections in 2022. In early September, he brokered a political agreement to that end, and in late November, he reshuffled his cabinet. However, a civil society-led coalition, known as the “Commission for the search for a Haitian solution to the crisis” or the “Montana Group”, proposed a parallel roadmap.

Gang-related violence as a continuation of politics through other means

Against this backdrop of political instability, analysts see gang-related armed violence as a continuation of politics through alternative means. Gangs have been a longstanding feature of violence in Haiti, particularly after the faltering of President Aristide’s regime in 2004. Gang violence rose again during the “Peyi lòk” popular protests between 2018 and 2020, during which gangs intimidated and targeted rival neighbourhoods, street protestors and civil society actors. A case in point were the massacres perpetrated in the areas of La Saline or Bel Air in November 2018 and November 2019, respectively.

From that point on, as part of a strategy to control the territory, gangs started to target and ransom their own communities whenever the latter were perceived to sympathize with rival gangs, causing large numbers of citizens to abandon these areas. In 2021, the metropolitan area of Port-of-Prince in particular experienced a rapid expansion of unprecedented gang-related violence.

[%20A%20Call%20to%20Action%20for%20Human%20Rights%202020.pdf](#)

In addition, the involvement of gangs in the severe disruption of fuel distribution and terminal blockade (between October and November 2021) has illustrated once more that their activities were also driven by the political agenda of economic and political spoilers.

Ahead of a critical electoral period, the influence of gangs in marginalised overpopulated areas may help collect votes in favour of the highest bidder or prevent political opponents from campaigning. According to local analysts, gangs control territories which account for more than 3.5 million potential electors.

Weakness of law enforcement response and judicial accountability

Since the departure of the UN peacekeeping missions (MINUSTAH in 2017, and MINUJUSTH in 2019), the Haitian police has showed signs of fragility as well as their inability to curtail the territorial expansion of gang activities across the capital and other cities. Generally under-resourced and unremunerated, police officers and magistrates have also been widely accused of corruption.

Additionally, the participation of former/rogue officers in criminal activities seems to be more apparent. Jimmy Cherizier (aka “Barbecue”), a former police officer and leader of an alliance of gangs (known as “G9 and allies”), as well as the creation of criminal group such as *Baz Pilat*, reportedly composed of former police officers have exemplified this situation.

However, it also must be highlighted that the morale is extremely low among police officers mainly because of their vulnerability to gang retaliations and poor working conditions. In 2021, 46 police officers were killed, compared to 30 in 2020. More than half of these killings (28) occurred while officers were off duty.

Circulation and importation of weapons

The proliferation and easy access to small arms and ammunition strengthens the capacity of gangs to carry out attacks, kidnappings, killings and acts of sexual violence. Gangs have access to military style weapons, including M16 rifles, which frequently overpower police officers.

Since Haiti does not produce firearms, all weapons are imported and/or smuggled into the country. Over the past two years, national media has periodically reported on shipments of unlicensed weapons and firearms as well as ammunitions incidentally seized in Haitian ports. These seizures rarely led to police investigations and prosecution.

Social injustice

Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. According to the World Bank, Haiti GDP per capita was US\$ 2.9 in 2020, raking the last in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, and representing a fifth of LAC’s US\$ 15 average. On the UN’s Human Development Index, the country also ranked 170 out of 189 countries in 2020³. Any marginal gain in poverty reduction has been undone by a succession of crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, the assassination of President Moïse, and the August 2021 earthquake.

Since the Duvalier’s period, income inequalities serve as a powerful incentive for violent conflict and unrest. Haiti’s income distribution is the most unequal in the region with the richest 20 percent of the population holding more than 64 percent of the total income of the country, compared to less than 2 percent held by the poorest 20 percent.

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview#1>



Despite hundreds of millions of dollars invested in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, recovery, governance and justice sectors, international community representatives tend to agree that this financial assistance has failed to help Haiti achieve political stability, and address the development needs of Haitians. A paradigm shift is therefore required to discard the culture of short-termism in favour of long-term development objectives that rely on strong local capacities and tackle corruption.

PROTECTION IMPACT ON PEOPLE LIVING IN GANG-CONTROLLED AREAS AND BEYOND

Relations between people living in marginalized and impoverished areas, and gang members are complex and symbiotic. The role of gangs, whose members often originate from the neighbourhood, wavers between predators and protectors. In the absence of the state, gangs reportedly mobilized to defend and provide services to local communities which in return granted them legitimacy. In this regard, some gang leaders have portrayed themselves as “revolutionaries” or bearers of the social and economic aspirations of marginalized communities. However, the protection assessment shows that these communities are both direct victims (physical harm) and indirect victims (disruption or destruction of basic services) of gang activities.

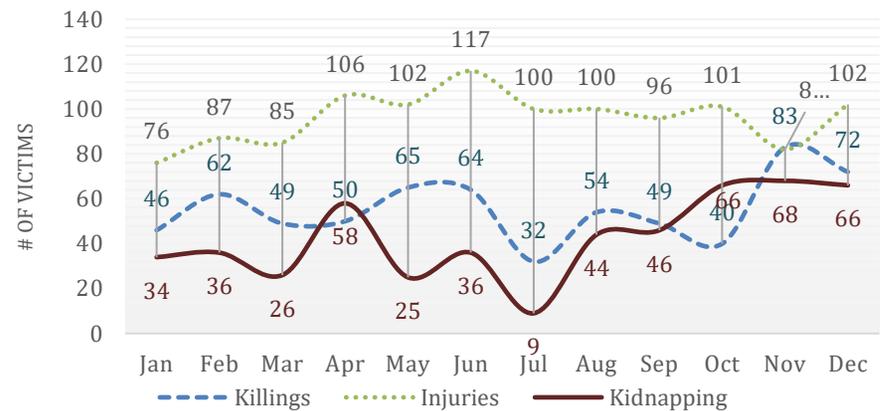
Casualties and kidnapping

Tracking casualties and kidnapping provides a tool to assess trends of violence affecting local populations.

According to the Haitian National Police (HNP), between January and December 2021, at least 2,344 people were killed, injured or

kidnapped as a result of armed violence⁴. Men comprise the majority of victims (86 per cent or 2,016 individuals), followed by women (10 per cent or 234 individuals) and children as young as 5 years old (4 per cent or 94 individuals). No socio-economic category of the population has been spared from kidnapping.

Killings, injuries and kidnapping in 2021

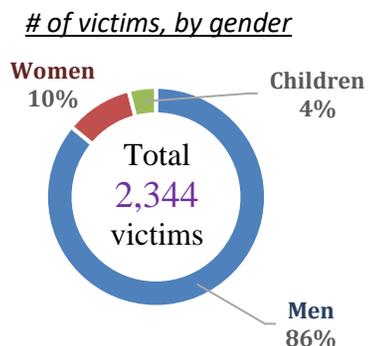


⁴ At the national level, during the same period, at least 2,781 people were killed, injured or kidnapped.

The number of people killed and injured in 2021 exceeded by far those documented in 2019 and 2020⁵. This can be partly explained by a rise in the number of incidents involving gangs as well as an augmentation of incidents in which people were directly shot at by gang elements, as opposed to previous periods when victims were rather caught in crossfire. For example, between July and August in Martissant, there were three targeted attacks against buses transporting passengers and private vehicles, resulting in 23 people killed and 26 wounded. Another example is the use of snipers shooting indiscriminately at people from watchtowers or roof buildings, in particular during fights to control territory between rival gangs. According to local analysts, this change in the modus operandi of gangs intends to instil terror amongst local populations and to force their allegiance.

As for the kidnappings reported to the Haitian National Police, which remain under-reported, there was a steep increase. While 78 and 235 cases were reported in 2019 and 2020 respectively, the number of kidnappings reached 655 in 2021, confirming that this practice has become one of the main sources of income for gangs such as 400 Mawozos, which operates from Croix des Bouquets.

Partial data collected by the assessment team shows that men account for the majority of the victims while women abducted are most likely raped during their captivity. The kidnapping of children is



also of particular concern. UNICEF indicated that between January and October 2021, 30 children were abducted while on their way to school, at home or even at church. Amidst widespread poverty and criminality, gangs are using children to extort money from their families. These violent acts always cause long-lasting emotional trauma on children.

According to local and social medias, most people are released against exorbitant ransoms although some kidnapped people remain unaccounted for⁶.

Sexual violence

Like in similar situations of armed violence, sexual and gender-based violence is largely underreported in Haiti. Most actors, for instance through the Spotlight Initiative, can only act when cases are reported when the survivors seek help. These reported cases are mostly perpetrated within the family or domestic sphere, which is often considered as a private matter, deeply rooted in harmful social norms.

On the other hand, although there is very limited data gathered on sexual violence involving gangs, information collected during the mission indicates that since June, on average 75 victims per month, including children as young as 2 years-old, have been subjected to rape and sexual violence mainly in the areas of Delmas and Croix des Bouquets. Women and girls account for the high majority of the victims. Boys were also reported among the victims, particularly in contexts of initiation rituals to become a gang member. This figure is

⁵ In 2020, at least 1,511 people were killed, injured or kidnapped in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince.

⁶ In the case of the kidnapping of 17 American and Canadian missionaries, it was reported that the gang leader demanded \$1 million for each one of

them. [Haiti Kidnappers Demanding \\$17 Million Ransom to Free U.S. Missionary Group \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

however a snapshot which does not reflect the gruesome extent of sexual violence across the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince.

A high level of brutality and ruthlessness was described by survivors and their family members, in particular when rape was perpetrated by more than one armed element. Accounts of survivors also informed that, in some circumstances, tools were used to rape them, including anal penetration. Others were forced to eat faeces after being raped.

The assessment established that rape was used as a weapon against women and children to humiliate, terrorize and reinforce the control of gang members over local populations. In some areas, the feeling of impunity is so pervasive that rapes have been perpetrated in broad daylight, as in Martissant on 17 October⁷.

In the coercive environment of gang-controlled areas, girls as young as 13 and young females are taken as “wives” or “sex slaves” by gang leaders or gang elements. For instance, gangs have threatened to kill the family of the victim if they could not abuse the latter for several days. Other gang members have traded mobile phones or food for sex with young victims.

Although it was reported that one specific gang leader took some measures, such as summary executions, against a couple of elements involved in sexual violence, in general the patterns of conduct of gangs demonstrate that rape is used to show power over their victims, to impose extreme humiliation and to destroy their dignity.

The assessment team has established at least five categories of rape perpetrated by gang elements according to the situation in which it occurs.

Categories of rape perpetrated by gang elements

Category	Location
Rape as a retaliation act against women and girls living in an area under the control of a rival gang	Areas which witness clashes between gangs for territorial control
Rape as an opportunistic act – women kidnapped or taken away while travelling in public transport	Across all areas of Port-au-Prince
Sexual slavery and forced prostitution of young girls taken as “wives” by gang elements	Areas under the grip of gang leaders (Cité Soleil, Martissant, Croix des Bouquets, Village de Dieu)
Sexual exploitation to have access to shelter or food	IDPs sites of KOMIKED, Centre Olympique and the Armée du Salut
Rape of young recruits in gangs, as a ritual act	Area of Croix des Bouquets under the control of a gang known as “400 Mawozo”

Against this backdrop, judicial and police responses to address sexual violence involving gangs are extremely weak. According to a senior police officer in charge of the *Coordination Nationale des Affaires Féminines*, attached to the Chief of Staff of Police Director, the main reasons explaining this lack of response is the fact that survivors don’t report their cases because they fear retaliation upon their return to gang-controlled areas and because the police itself cannot access the most affected areas due to insecurity and lack of means. In addition, it is important to outline that police are not considered as entry point for SGBV survivors. Between June and December, officially zero cases of sexual violence were officially documented by this coordination body.

⁷ [Haïti-Insécurité : Une femme de 39 ans violée par 6 individus armés en pleine rue à Martissant - Le Facteur Haïti \(lefacteurhaiti.com\)](http://lefacteurhaiti.com)

Violence-induced displacement and population movements

Since March 2020, armed violence has forced at least 19,000 people to leave their homes and flee their neighbourhoods. In some areas, such as Martissant, the team also documented a deliberate strategy of destruction of properties to displace residents for territorial gain. In June, at least 23 homes were burnt down, and 40 other homesteads were pillaged by the gangs of Grand Ravine and Village de Dieu. The team was also informed that some properties, illegally occupied, are being bought by gang leaders from owners who were forced to leave their neighbourhood.

Most IDPs sought refuge in makeshift sites, public buildings and at the home of family members across the capital. According to IOM, there are approximately 16 sites across the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, hosting over 1,337 households. However, due to insecurity, humanitarian actors have access only to nine of these sites. The displaced population, mostly women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities, faces dire humanitarian challenges due to their vulnerability.

In areas such as Cité Soleil, where gangs have a grip on the population, local sources recounted that mobile checkpoints have been manned by armed elements to control and restrict the movements of their inhabitants in and out the neighbourhoods. While going through these checkpoints, people are typically searched and compelled to show the content of their mobile phones. This practice reportedly enables gangs to control information coming out of their areas and to contain the potential dissemination of evidence exposing their abuses against the local population.

Also, some heads of households living in areas such as Bas Delmas, Bas Canaan and Tabarre-Issa, shared with local partners their fear of

stepping out of their homes or neighbourhoods, and leaving family members behind for a few hours. This self-restriction of movements limits access to cash livelihoods and resources.

Access to basic services

Health care

Medical facilities and health workers have not been spared by armed violence. Although no tracking system has been established to systematically record attacks against medical actors and/or the number of facilities forced to close or reduce their services and capacities due to insecurity, the team was informed that several incidents of this nature have occurred since 2018.

In June 2021, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) suspended its activities in Martissant after its compound was attacked by gang elements. Afterwards, MSF took the decision to relocate its medical care services from Martissant to Turgeau, in the town center of Port-au-Prince. Other hospitals and health facilities have also faced similar challenges.

Facilities forced to close or reduce their services due to insecurity

Name	Location	Date: closed or reduced
Health center “Michèle Bennett”	La Saline	Closed since 2018
Centre de santé Fosref (CJPF)	La Saline	Closed since 2020
Centre de santé de Marché Tête Bœuf	La Saline	Closed since 2020
Centre de santé Aurore du Bel-Air	Bel-Air	Closed since Sept. 2020
Hopital St Martin	Delmas 2	Closed since August 2020
Maternity Chancerelles	Pont rouge	Closed between May and July 2021 – since July

		operates at 30% of its capacity
Hôpital Universitaire d'Etat d'Haiti	Centre-Ville	Operational
Centre de santé Bethesda	Delmas 2	Closed since August 2020
Centre de santé Armée du salut	Delmas 2	Partially operational since 2020

The severe disruption of fuel supplies to Port-au-Prince between October and November 2021, partly due to armed violence and speculation, put the lives of hundreds of child-bearing women and new-born babies at risk as hospitals ran low on electricity.

In addition to its impact on services, armed violence has affected directly or indirectly medical personnel. Physical risk taken to reach out some areas has put an additional psychological stress on them. For example, between January and December 2021, at least five medical staff were killed and 8 were kidnapped while numerous ambulance vehicles have been fired upon since January. As a result, many personnel have resigned from their positions because they did no longer feel safe enough in the neighbourhood or because of what they witnessed.

Under these circumstances, violence has become a public health problem, negatively impacting access to medical care for several dozens of thousands of people living in gang-controlled or gang-influenced areas. For instance, when as of May 2021, the maternity of “Chancerelle”, in the area of Pont Rouge, limited its services due to insecurity, pregnant women were compelled to search for medical care further away, making it sometimes impossible due to the cost of transportation or gang activities. In this regard the team was informed that during this period, two pregnant women lost their life

while giving birth, in September and November respectively, as they were unable to reach another hospital.

Moreover, children’s health status is deteriorating. UNICEF informed the team that 58% of children did not receive their full vaccination, of which 42% live in marginalized areas including Port-au-Prince, Cité Soleil and Carrefour. This weak immunization coverage exposes children further to illnesses and epidemics.

In light of the withdrawal of medical service providers, some gang leaders have capitalized on their ability to control territory to establish makeshift care centers in hotspots areas which do not have adequate equipment and personnel to treat patients and ultimately lead to complications and morbidity.

Education

As for access to medical care, access to education has been severely affected by armed violence. However, only incomplete data is available about the number of schools which have been forced to close or to be relocated outside gang-controlled areas. According to a local human rights organisation, in October, several weeks after the start of the academic year, at least 5,000 children living in Martissant were not able to resume school because of turf war between gangs. Some school directors have managed to continue to operate in gang-controlled areas, such as in Croix des Bouquets, often in exchange of paying “taxes” to gang leaders for security. On the other hand, some reports indicate that gangs were opening their own makeshift schools.

By impacting the normal functioning of schools, armed violence has led thousands of children to drop out of school. Among the latter, some have become potential recruits for gangs which offer them a sense of purpose, an opportunity for a short-lived more enjoyable life. According to a local analyst, the decision to join gangs is driven



by the consumption of alcohol and drugs, and the enjoyment of girls and power, with no real economic and social prospects.

In October 2021, it was reported, for instance, that gangs in the areas of *La Saline* and Cité Soleil offered to pay every child between 50 and 80 Haitian dollars every day according to their function, and to provide them with a gun if they joined their respective gangs. In Croix-des-Bouquets, the group of 400 Mawozos reportedly give every child at least 800 Haitian dollars every Saturday for being part of the gang. Children who refused to join the gang were intimidated and ill-treated.

Although gangs have been a prominent feature of the violence landscape over the past 30 years, the current situation is very different from that of the 2000s. Today, gang leaders turning 20 have grown in a trivialized culture of urban violence.

Infiltration of the local economy

In addition to physical violence, extortion and rackets, the stealing of trucks transporting goods or fuel and the steady infiltration within the local economy have become the means par excellence for several gangs to reinforce their social and territorial control. As a result, local communities have been both co-opted and intimidated.

For example, the syndicate of drivers informed the team that it has registered a 25% decrease of activity since June 2021 due to the insecurity, especially on the *Route nationale 2*. Between June and October, at least 30 trucks were stolen, and 8 drivers were killed, injured or kidnapped by gang elements. In this complex environment, it was reported that some truck drivers were complicit in the stealing of trucks out of fear or for quick financial gain.

Additionally, merchants continued to be illegally levied by gangs in order to have access to local marketplaces and sell their goods. The market of Croix des Bossale, located in La Saline area, is a case in

point. Not only extortion and levies affect authority revenues and prevent business from building up, but they also fuel inflation, affect the purchasing power of households living in these areas and contribute to food insecurity. According to FAO, some areas of the metropole controlled by the gangs, such as Cité Soleil, present IPC Phase 4 pockets.

Further, gang elements have reportedly infiltrated the local economy by compelling local businesses, such as petrol stations, to place their elements on their payroll. These elements then play the role of informants to identify potential targets.

In the current economic conjuncture and in an environment controlled by gangs, integrating the criminal economy can be seen as a copying mechanism and as a means of survival.

Access to utility services

Utility providers have also explained to the team how criminal activities have severely impacted their activities, revenues and profits. The *Electricité d'Haiti* (EDH) reported that in March 2021, their workers were attacked in their office located in Village de Dieu for refusing to pay money to the gangs and were compelled to be relocated to Pétion-Ville. Lack of access due to insecurity has also been a major problem to maintain and repair an ageing grid. EDH staff are allowed by gang members to access some areas only when quick fixes are required.

However, as the main gangs are established around vital electricity points of the city such as the Palais National, Varreux, Carrefour and the public hospital, they keep benefiting from a more constant electrical supply as compared to other areas in the city. During the fuel crisis, EDH managed to maintain the distribution of electricity to a minimum thanks to the hydraulic dam located in the Plateau Central. However, if the fuel crisis were to escalate again during the

dry season (December-January), EDF would have much more difficulty in supplying electricity as the dam cannot be used during this period.

The *Direction Nationale de l'Eau potable et de l'assainissement* (DINEPA) informed the team that, in gang-controlled areas, water-fountains are now managed by armed elements at the expense of local water committees. In these areas, their technicians have also been threatened and targeted when they attempted to rehabilitate or repair sanitary services.

In addition, water supply was severely affected in marginalised areas following the disruption of fuel as of September. At some stage, DINEPA was not able to operate the full functioning of its installations and decided to start rationing water in some areas.

DINEPA has also suffered a big revenue loss. For instance, in October, the company reportedly lost approximately US\$ 600,000, as compared to September.

PROTECTION RESPONSES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Over the past few years, local populations have borne the brunt of armed violence in the density populated metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince. Not only armed gangs have expanded their geographical control and influence, but they have also penetrated all the sectors of the daily life of people living in marginalised areas, undermining the enjoyment and the realisation of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all.

In light of the acute and multifaceted protection crisis, responses from national authorities and international actors should revolve around three set of initiatives:

- Enhancing protection and situational analysis to drive intervention and improve impact
- Boosting support to rule of law institutions
- Developing a comprehensive protection response program which bridges humanitarian and development initiatives

Several important initiatives, projects and programs - involving different set of actors from the community, humanitarian and development sectors working directly or indirectly on protection issues - are being implemented. However, very few are conducted according to a people-centered approach. And irrespective of their relevance, a certain number is being implemented in silo, and according to a short-term and a tunnel vision perspective.

Enhancing protection and situational analysis to drive intervention and improve impact

Access to gang-controlled areas is one of the major challenges faced by national and international actors to respond to the humanitarian and protection needs of the most vulnerable groups. While it is illusory to believe that national and international actors can access and intervene in gang-controlled areas without seeking the consent of gang members, accessing these areas should not be done at the expense of the do no-harm principle - in this case the reinforcement of the gangs' structures and/or their control over the local populations.

There is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Different approaches are being developed by national and international actors, according to their background, field of expertise, historical presence and network in the affected areas, or to whether they intent to engage in transactional relations with gang representatives.

However, the evolving security dynamics between and among gangs, their territorial gains and losses, as well as the short-lived gangs' leaderships require humanitarian actors to constantly adapt their engagement with gangs, sometimes on a weekly basis. The lack of a clear organisational structure for some gangs represents an additional challenge for humanitarian actors, and leads some of them to reach out to one or more leaders at the appropriate level of command before carrying out any activity.

In addition to the challenge of accessing certain areas, there is a conspicuous data deficit on the humanitarian and protection situation of vulnerable groups in marginalised areas of Port-au-Prince. Most respondents acknowledge the urgent need to improve the quantity and quality of the data collection process on protection incidents and protection impact of armed violence in order to drive the analysis, make informed decisions and allow a more efficient delivery of assistance and services to those who need them most.

Recommendations

- Creation of an information cell and data collection platform whereby the UN system commits to pool knowledge and resources to gather and cross-check information and protection incidents together. The main objectives of this cell and platform would be to reach a joint situational awareness to help humanitarian actors gain a micro-level understanding of the gangs and the security dynamics. The products delivered should include regular mappings of incidents and gang activities, as well as the profiling of gang leaders and their territorial control. This cell would complement and work in coordination with the humanitarian access group recently established by OCHA.

- Creation of a protection monitoring mechanism, under the coordination of the Protection sector, to reinforce the capacities of the community and local stakeholders still active and present in gang-controlled areas in order to collect protection information against pivotal indicators to plan and carry out delivery of assistance and services to vulnerable groups.
- Carry out regular protection analysis using the "Protection Analysis Framework"
- Conduct assessment of the risks involved in providing or not providing assistance and services in gang-controlled areas in particular the risk of reinforcing the gang structures and their capacity to commit abuses on local populations.
- Address the plight of people living in gang-controlled areas at a strategic level by the UNCT and HCT with government partners and the international community. In addition, it should be ensured that protection is included as an agenda item in HCT meetings on a monthly basis.
- Ensure, in support of the HC, that humanitarian and development funds are prioritized towards protection.

For child abuse and exploitation

- Coordinate and support enhanced monitoring, data collection and analysis mechanisms on child protection risks.

Boosting support to rule of law institutions

Rule of law institutions, in particular the Haitian National Police and the judiciary, play a critical role to curtail armed violence induced by

gang elements. However, over the past few years, these institutions have shown their inability to do so.

Several multilateral and bilateral initiatives have been carried out to support and reinforce the capacities of the Haitian police to address and tackle gang violence, primarily through an advice, training and logistic perspective. International advisors are also collocated in several police departments at the headquarters level. In light of the steady expansion of gangs and their impact of the security and the daily lives of the local populations, this seems to be largely insufficient.

Furthermore, the administration of justice is plagued by a wide range of recurring issues including the lack of independence and corruption of magistrates, overdue delays in investigations, prosecutions and criminal proceedings, and shortage of resources to name a few.

According to the Prime Minister, “the Haitian justice system is ill, corrupt and slow”⁸. Overall, the Haitian justice system has failed to protect victims of armed violence and has consequently contributed to undermine public confidence in state authorities. At the time of the assessment, no meaningful initiatives have been conducted to tackle this problem and to fully and effectively uphold the freedoms and rights of individuals through the investigation, prosecution and punishment of armed violence as well as the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.

In addition, as armed violence is also used as a way to do politics through other means, any technical and logistic support must be accompanied by a strong political commitment from the rule of law institutions’ leadership to tackle this violence, and to improve the salary of police officers, as well as by an effective strategy to curtail

the benefits of political and economic spoilers who gain from violence.

Recommendations

- Increase advisory, technical and operational support to HNP to carry out effective police operations in gang-controlled areas to protect citizens while respecting human rights standards; in this regard, the Inspection Générale of the PHN should be adequately equipped to fully implement its mandate and guarantee police accountability.
- Provide regular briefs to the Police leadership and the *Conseil Supérieur de la Police Nationale* on the impact of armed violence on local populations.
- Interlink the work on protection done by national and international actors in gang-controlled areas with the third pillar of the United Nations strategy on Community Violence Reduction which focuses on protection and law enforcement entities in charge of tackling organised crime.
- On the basis of the International Commission against Impunity model, such as in Guatemala, support Haitian justice institutions to investigate and prosecute emblematic massacres, in particular those involving gangs in Grand Ravine (2017), La Saline (2018) and Bel-Air (2019).

⁸ From the remarks delivered by the Prime Minister at the opening of new judicial year, Port-au-Prince, 5 october 2021.

- Continue to support local dialogue initiative and communal conflict resolution mechanisms, in synergy with rule of law institutions.
- With the assistance of regional countries, support law enforcement authorities to tackle the smuggling and trafficking of weapons into the country, as one of the main enablers of violence, including sexual violence.

Developing a comprehensive protection response program which bridges humanitarian and development initiatives

Protection responses to the impact and consequences of armed violence carried out by gangs must go beyond humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian action is only one part of a much broader holistic response which involves state authorities, the private sector and development partners.

As illustrated by the plight of survivors of rape, temporary assistance is not enough. As for other victims of armed violence, their vulnerability requires a more coordinated and integrated approach based on a protection perspective.

A similar approach should also be adopted to prevent young people from joining gangs. However, proposing an alternative to gang culture and the use of gangs as a continuation of politics or economic profits through other means would require a strong investment and commitment of state authorities as well as the private sector.

Additionally, programs per se will not be able to achieve a significant result in the short term. To change dynamics even just a little, there must be a commitment over several years or even decades. Some categories of people, such as young people living in deprived areas, are even more vulnerable and may need very long-term support.

Recommendations

- Use analysis provided by the protection monitoring mechanism to guide humanitarian and development interventions in gang-controlled areas.
- Reinforce the coordination and integration of protection programs carried out by national and international actors at the planning and implementation stages according to collective outcomes.
- Ensure that the government is on board with the collective outcomes identified and will politically support the planning of actions.
- Ensure that adequate funding will be placed against the identified priorities.
- Monitor the progress made against the collective outcomes.

For sexual violence

- Compile a referral pathway for the survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence in the area of responsibility (SGBV AOR).
- Develop and deliver a sensitization session with monitors of government and civil society on the identification of sexual- and gender-based violence.
- Reinforce the coordination and integration of humanitarian interventions in particular for survivors of sexual violence involving gang elements, through the Spotlight Initiative, while emphasizing the need for a seamless and inter-disciplinary intervention chain.



For child abuse and exploitation

- Reinforce the coordination of child protection programs in humanitarian and development interventions.
- Strengthen the availability and accessibility to social services for children and the youth in dysfunctional sub-urban areas. Particular emphasis should be given to the improvement of access to education, health and nutrition services.

CONCLUSIONS

The assessment found that communities living in areas controlled by the gangs are suffering from under-reported protection risks and increasing needs. Most people live in an atmosphere of fear.

Community members are suffering direct physical and mental harm and are not able to meet their basic needs. They have no choice but to accept this violent environment and live under the yoke of the gangs.

The deficit of data and lack of access to gang-controlled areas have rendered the plight of these people invisible to state authorities and international actors. However, protection concerns are astounding and cannot be limited to the confines of the neighbourhoods occupied by the gangs.

Armed violence is spreading across the metropolitan area and beyond. If the situation is not met with a strong political, security and service response, it will lead to an amplification of protection risks for the whole society.