

AVSI Foundation

Haiti: act now to overcome the crisis. Concrete proposals from the field

Position Paper

1. Introduction

The situation in Haiti is increasingly tragic: it is deteriorating day by day and the space for humanitarian access to the population held hostage by armed gangs is in danger of closing. People are dying every day from violence and starvation, all avoidable losses of life.

Drawing on **its experience in the field**, its direct and extensive knowledge of the local reality, and its proximity to the most vulnerable, **AVSI is presenting a position paper to raise attention to this country and recommend immediate concrete actions.**

AVSI has been working in Haiti since 1999 implementing development and humanitarian aid projects. Due to the major humanitarian crisis over the last 5 years, AVSI's activities have increasingly focused on **emergency interventions in response to the massive needs of the population, without however losing sight of building lasting development.**

After a brief overview of the context exposing major critical issues, but also highlighting positive assets, **AVSI points to specific areas where donors and implementers can act immediately to help accompany Haiti out of the crisis.**

2. The current context

The crisis affects all aspects of life in the country, most directly in the capital but also across the entire country:

- a) **Security:** crime rates have risen dramatically and law enforcement is struggling to guarantee the security of the population; armed gangs now control more than half of the capital. The **level of violence** is unsustainable: the number of victims is constantly increasing, massacres go unpunished, **human rights violations** are systematic: the population is effectively being held hostage by the armed gangs and subjected to daily acts of violence¹. Some recent statistics give a picture of the situation: in August and September 2023, 20,719 people left their homes in Carrefour Feuille (a neighborhood in Martissant) and Solino (a neighborhood in Bel Air)² to take refuge in more than 26

¹ Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, A/HRC/54/79, 25 September 2023.

² HAITI EMERGENCY TRACKING TOOL (ETT), Dashboard #23, IOM.



spontaneous sites throughout the capital with no access to basic services³. Due to the dramatic level of violence, the international community is reducing its presence in the country and thus also its services to the population, despite the fact that the needs are growing as well as the opportunities to take action.

- b) **Politics:** from the 2018 anti-corruption protest up to now, the state of ungovernability in Haiti has progressively worsened and a power vacuum has taken hold, as the terms of office of deputies and senators have expired and new elections could not be held since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021.
- c) **Economy:** extreme poverty and food insecurity affect nearly 5 million people today, almost 50% of the total population. The lack of economic revitalization policies and investment has increasingly weakened all productive sectors, especially agriculture, and has caused an exponential increase in unemployment in urban areas.
- d) **Society:** it has become more and more difficult for civil society organizations to interact with the ruling class, and there are fewer and fewer spaces for real democracy.
- e) **Education:** for the fourth year in a row, significant numbers of Haitian children are *de facto* unable to go back to school, with peaks of 80% in vulnerable neighborhoods of the capital.
- f) **Health:** access to **basic health services** is increasingly uncertain.
- g) **Climate change:** Haiti is particularly exposed to the effects of climate change and **catastrophic natural events** that generate large-scale emergencies. Given the country's fragility and socio-political crisis situation, it is particularly difficult to promptly respond to such emergencies.

The international response to the crisis has been led by the United States, United Nations agencies, European Commission, Canada, the Inter-American Development Bank, and a few other bilateral donors. The Scale Up of Humanitarian Action adopted by U.N. Agencies in April 2023 has not yet resulted in an actual increase in the funded response to meet the skyrocketing needs of the Haitian people. The Humanitarian Response Plan 2023, elaborated by OCHA and partners (UN agencies, international and local NGOs) calls for \$719.9 M to cover the urgent humanitarian needs of 3.2 M people. Currently, the Plan's funding level amounts to \$190.2 M, only 26% of the total funds requested⁴. This is inadequate to cover the current needs, especially considering that the security situation is constantly deteriorating, causing the cost of logistical and non-logistical operations to increase.

3. Where we should act now

- a) **Internal stability:** it is advisable that the **forthcoming multinational security support mission** be conducted with caution, drawing from past experience and with absolute respect for human rights. The hope is that it will succeed in helping the country out of this *impasse* by allowing those who are working in the service of the population to operate safely.
- b) **Access to education and vocational training:** the multinational security support mission to neutralize the current situation of violence is likely to be ineffective in the medium and long term if concrete and lasting pathways of **education, training, and access to work** are not built, offering the younger generation **prompt and viable**

³ Haïti : Etat des lieux de la réponse humanitaire Rapport de Situation – Août 2023, OCHA.

⁴ HAÏTI Tableau de bord humanitaire (janvier - août 2023) au 14 septembre 2023, OCHA.



alternatives to armed gangs. More funds are needed for such programs that are focused on medium and long-term integrated and multisectoral programs.

- c) **Food security and nutrition in both urban and rural areas:** in rural areas we have to push for a progressive **revitalization of agricultural production**. Food and cash distribution should be combined with distribution of agricultural items for production and other investments in agricultural productivity that can provide a local and sustainable response to availability and distribution issues in isolated areas. Cash-for-work actions should be implemented in urban areas too.
- d) **Promotion of human rights protection:** all victims of violence and gender-based violence should be protected, and community responses should be facilitated by promoting and strengthening community-based intake services.

4. Haiti's positive assets

Haiti has two key resources on which we should continue to invest:

- a) **the Haitian civil society and community social fabric:** human resources are the asset of the country, they deserve to be supported, strengthened, and helped to work together so that their activities can be increasingly effective;
- b) **the windows of opportunity for intervention:** there continue to be spaces for action, for impactful interventions that are capable of delivering positive results. Donors and implementers need to analyze and take into consideration successful practices and scale them up.

5. Essential factors for interventions

- a) The **community** can offer real responses, based at the local level, in some cases even bypassing the critical node of the capital; the promotion of the community is a privileged way of thinking of reconstruction of mutual trust and of the social fabric: it has cut threads that need to be rejoin.
- b) The value added of the **adaptive approach**, that is, identifying windows of opportunity for intervention, and exploiting them, with agile interventions that can adapt to the context and fluidity of the situation;
- c) The **humanitarian-development nexus**. While the humanitarian approach cannot be completely abandoned, it is necessary to start investing again in productivity, to propose a model that begins with proactive engagement of beneficiaries with a long-term perspective (e.g., the activities that AVSI implements in the north western part of the country involving some of the most vulnerable families thanks to the joint support of the European Commission General Directorates ECHO and INTPA);
- d) **Institutional donor funding for underfunded sectors such as education, human rights protection, and food security** should be **increased**, not only redirected;
- e) **Consultative pathways between donors and all actors involved** in the initiatives should always be fostered, primarily for local CSOs and communities. Accordingly, constant monitoring activities should be encouraged, in compliance with the principles of **transparency** and effectiveness for all initiatives (e.g., new strategies such as the European Union's Global Gateway).