

A deep dive into the food security crisis

OVERVIEW

Multiple political, social, and economic crises, coupled with natural hazards (such as earthquakes, droughts, and torrential rains), have progressively increased the number of people needing food assistance since 2020 (OCHA 17/03/2023). The number of people likely to experience severe acute food insecurity – i.e. IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or worse – rose from 4.1 million between March–June 2020 to 4.9 million between March–June 2023 (IPC 31/10/2019 and 23/03/2023 a; WFP 31/03/2023 a).

Because of the country's low response capacity, increased gang violence, and the effects of natural hazards, part of the Haitian population depends on humanitarian aid, but humanitarian access remains highly constrained (IPC 23/03/2023 a; ACAPS 05/07/2023).

Urban and rural households are highly exposed to food insecurity (OCHA 17/03/2023). Insecurity and price increases tend to affect urban households more, while natural hazards and the high costs of input for planting affect rural households. Violence in urban areas also affects the trade flow of food and market access in rural areas (FEWS NET 04/2023).

Farmers can no longer afford seeds and tools, limiting agricultural activities. Rising inflation and low income have reduced purchasing power (PI 11/01/2023; MARNDR 06/12/2022). Poor environmental practices, such as logging, have led to progressive soil erosion (UNEP/OCHA 31/01/2016; Mompremier et al. 28/10/2021). Low food production capacity means Haiti relies primarily on imports to meet food needs (WFP accessed 11/05/2023).

KEY MESSAGES

- Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, gang violence, territorial control, and social and political instability have increased. This change has directly affected food security, mainly for at-risk populations, such as children, pregnant women, and people with disabilities.
- Increasing insecurity in urban and rural areas and climate hazards have limited national production capacity, reinforcing the dependence on humanitarian assistance.
- The impact of the humanitarian situation on sectors, such as protection, nutrition, WASH, education, and health, has had direct or indirect implications on food security.
- Food insecurity has become a compounding factor in the increase of migratory flows of the Haitian population, especially in the Americas and the Caribbean.
- An analysis of the situation in Haiti in recent years suggests that the number of food-insecure people will increase in the coming months, given the State's limited capacity to respond and the deterioration of other crises in the country.

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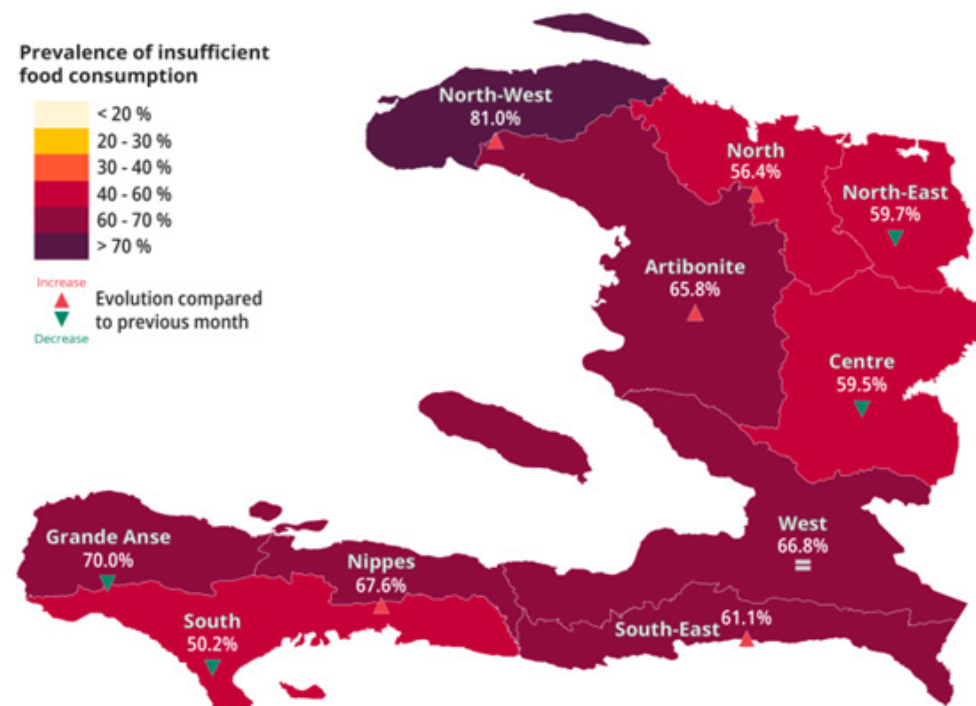
About this report

Aim: this thematic report provides an overview of the severity of the food crisis in Haiti. It presents the main drivers that have converged and increased the number of food-insecure people and the related humanitarian impacts. The report also looks forward to the coming months and analyses how food insecurity may evolve.

Method: this report is based on the review of secondary data from international institutions, including humanitarian organisations, networks, think tanks, and international media.

Limitations: although food insecurity is well documented in Haiti, some figures and variables necessary to understand the magnitude of the crisis remain broad and lack precision. The complexity of the humanitarian crisis in the country, where several needs overlap, sometimes makes it challenging to isolate the impact of food insecurity from other needs.

Percentage of households with insufficient food consumption in Haiti (February 2023)



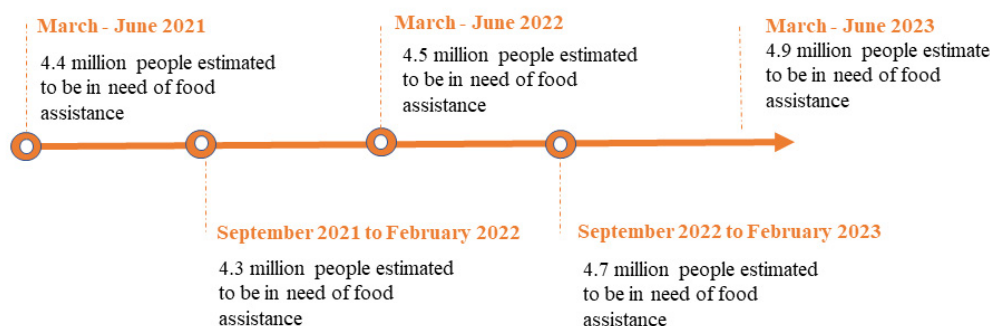
Source: WFP (29/03/2023 a)



SECTION 1: SEVERITY OF FOOD INSECURITY

The projected number of people needing food assistance in Haiti increased to about 4.9 million in March–June 2023, compared to 4.7 million people between September 2022 and March 2023 (WFP/FAO 29/05/2023; IPC 16/03/2022 and 23/03/2023 a). At least three million people faced IPC 3 food insecurity, while 1.8 million experienced Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels between March–June 2023 (IPC 23/03/2023 a).

Number of people requiring food assistance since 2021 (IPC 3 or worse)



Source: ACAPS using data from IPC (03/09/2020, 24/09/2021, 16/03/2022, 14/10/2022, and 23/03/2023 b)

The most affected areas, as at March 2023, were the departments of Nord-Ouest (where at least 81% of households consumed a limited quantity or lesser quality of food), Grand'Anse (70%), Nippes (68%), Ouest (67%), Artibonite (66%), and Sud-Est (61%). In the metropolitan area (Ouest department), the municipalities of Cité-Soleil (82%) and Port-au-Prince (72%) were the most affected (WFP 29/03/2023 a).

SECTION 2: FOOD SECURITY SITUATION BY PILLAR

Stability

The Haitian Government has limited ability to ensure that the population has access to food, especially in times of crisis. Insecurity and climate hazards constantly challenge food stock stability.

Violent protests and territorial control by armed gangs

Gangs have existed in Haiti for decades, but related violence has been increasing since 2021 (AP 26/04/2023). In December 2022, the UN estimated that nearly 60% of Port-au-Prince, the country's capital, was under gang territorial control (AP 09/12/2022). By April 2023, this figure had increased to about 80% (UN 14/04/2023 a; NYT 22/03/2023). Gangs have also established their presence in other areas, including Cap Haïtien (Nord), Gonaïves (Artibonite), Jacmel (Sud-Est), Jérémie (Grand'Anse), and Les Cayes (Sud). The territorial expansion of these gangs has weakened the Government's ability to assist people in need and ensure food supply security (ICG 27/07/2022).

Violent protests, such as those that followed the Government's decision to raise fuel prices in September 2022, heighten food instability and reinforce dependence on humanitarian aid (France 24 17/09/2022). Protesters have targeted and looted humanitarian warehouses, depriving many people of food assistance (WFP 29/09/2022; UN 22/09/2022).

Given the depths of the humanitarian crisis, humanitarian aid in Haiti remains insufficient. Haiti's economic, political, social, and natural structural problems generate the crisis. National and international mechanisms to ensure food stability cannot withstand the impact of food shortages in times of crisis (CIFP 15/01/2023; WFP 31/03/2023 b).

Natural hazards

Haiti is one of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change worldwide, presenting a high level of vulnerability and low coping capacity (ND-GAIN accessed 05/07/2023). The country's geographical location and small land mass make it vulnerable to natural hazards. The State's lack of preparedness to cope with natural hazards further aggravate this vulnerability (CIFP 15/01/2023). More than 96% of the population is exposed to hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes (WB accessed 30/05/2023).

Since 2010, Haiti has faced four hurricanes: Hurricane Tomas (2010), Hurricane Sandy (2012), Hurricane Matthew (2016), and Hurricane Laura (2020). In the same period, Haiti has faced



two major earthquakes (2010 and 2021), which continue to affect infrastructure, livelihoods, road connectivity, and other areas (Cross Catholic 24/06/2022). These climate hazards affect food stability, as limited levels of preparedness prevent the country from having food reserves for times of crisis (The Borgen Project 23/12/2022; CIFP 15/01/2023).

Limited state capacity

The lack of state presence in some areas and local authority corruption and abuse of power affect food stability in Haiti, especially concerning food stocks and humanitarian food aid (GTS 05/04/2022; OAS 08/08/2022).

Limited economic, social, and political capacity of the state limits humanitarian assistance for people in need and the protection of their livelihoods. As a result, national plans and policies fail to ensure food stability. In response, local groups partner with international organisations to carry out many of the programmes that aim to reduce food insecurity in Haiti, even in times of crisis (WFP 31/03/2023 b).

Availability

The progressive deterioration of insecurity and political and social instability since June 2021 have reduced food availability in Haiti. A lack of fuel has slowed food transport, and access restrictions and roadblocks between Port-au-Prince and other areas create difficulties for food producers in transporting and selling their food (FAO 22/05/2023).

Blockade and fuel shortages

Gang violence has also manifested through blockades and the control of fuel supplies and gas stations (UNFPA 13/10/2022). Fuel shortages reduce the availability of domestically produced food and humanitarian aid by disrupting the production chain and preventing food transport. Blockades on petrol and gas stations are mainly in Port-au-Prince but decrease the fuel supply throughout the country, affecting food transport to and from the capital. Fuel shortages also increase the costs of fuel and food, affecting end consumers (FEWS NET 04/2023).

Unrest and social protests

Social and political instability has repeatedly led to strong and long-running protests, which block entry and exit in major cities (UN News 16/09/2022). Demands have included the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry and a better response to fuel shortages and increased gang violence. On some occasions, the Haitian police have joined the protests to demand better conditions to combat armed gangs (OCHA 23/09/2022; CNN 26/01/2023).

The protest blockades not only paralyse economic activity but also prevent the passage of food produced in rural Haiti and food aid. This situation affects food availability within the main cities, where protests generally occur, and in remote areas where humanitarian aid is restricted (OCHA 23/09/2022; WFP 31/03/2023 b).

Floods and droughts

Deforestation worsens the periodic droughts and floods that affect Haiti. These natural phenomena threaten stability, with severe droughts and floods primarily endangering food availability by directly affecting food production and restricting access to adequate food supplies (WFP 22/06/2023 and 29/03/2023 b).

During Haiti's rainy season (typically from April to November or December), the country is prone to flooding, landslides, and mudslides (FEWS NET accessed 26/07/2023). On 3 June 2023, heavy rains across the country caused flooding, rockslides, and landslides, mainly affecting the departments of Centre, Nippes, Nord-Ouest, Ouest, and Sud-Est. In Centre department, flooding has damaged crops, reducing food availability (FloodList 05/06/2023; OCHA 05/06/2023; ECHO 06/06/2023).

Since September 2022, Haiti has experienced severe droughts, resulting in crop failures and reduced food availability (WFP 29/03/2023 b). This situation has particularly affected the south of the country, including Artibonite department, which produces up to 80% of Haiti's rice. Because of the prolonged drought, Haiti's electricity company has also found it difficult to provide the 40m³/s of water needed to irrigate around 30,000 hectares of rice crops (CCC accessed 26/07/2023; The World News 22/02/2023).

Accessibility

The complex crisis in Haiti has reduced the purchasing power of the population. Violence frequently causes confinement and forced displacement, affecting people's livelihoods and their ability to buy food. In a survey of 2,053 household representatives across Haiti's ten departments, at least 56% reported a decrease in their main sources of income (FAO 07/04/2023).

Poverty and inflation

Haiti is the poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean (WB accessed 28/06/2023). Nearly 59% of the population lives below the poverty line, a figure that reaches 90% in rural areas (UNICEF 05/01/2023; ELD 26/01/2023). The lack of livelihoods and low income directly affect people's ability to afford food, reducing dietary and nutritional variety (OCHA 17/03/2023).



Inflation of the Haitian gourde reached approximately 34% at the end of 2022. The depreciation of the local currency against the US dollar during 2022 affected the population's purchasing power and increased the prices of imported products, including food, seeds, and planting products. The increase in the prices of seeds and planting products reduced food production capacity and increased food prices, affecting both farmers and consumers (IPC 23/03/2023 b; WB accessed 05/06/2023).

Fuel crisis

Gang actions include blockades, checkpoints, looting, and confinements that disrupt fuel transport across the country (Al Jazeera 14/10/2022; Axios 07/10/2022). These restricts food accessibility and force the poorest households to resort to negative coping mechanisms (ECHO 22/03/2023; IPC 23/03/2023 b).

In Haiti, most energy products are imported, and the country has no fuel production or refinement facilities (IMF 20/04/2020). Haiti's credit constraints undermine the Government's ability to pay for frequent fuel shipments. As a result, although the country sometimes manages to import several gallons of fuel, the supply is still not enough to meet the demand resulting from the shortage. The lack of fuel affects the transport of locally produced, regional, and humanitarian food supplies. It also affects the livelihoods and reduces the income of transporters (The Haitian Times 08/06/2022).

Displacement following armed gang violence.

As at 15 March 2023, gang violence had displaced at least 160,000 people since 2021. IDPs live in host communities or informal collective sites with limited access to food, humanitarian aid, and services (OHCHR 21/03/2023). IDPs experience livelihood loss and a lack of income to buy food, heightening their dependence on humanitarian aid. Women are one of the most vulnerable groups in IDP camps, as they are exposed to protection risks, such as prostitution and sex trafficking, to gain access to food (ESTT 11/05/2022).

In Artibonite, people have abandoned large areas of land because of violence, particularly in the communes of Dessalines and Petite Rivière-de-l'Artibonite. Estimates suggest that as at April 2023, around 2,400 hectares of arable land were lost compared to the same period in 2022 and 5,800 hectares compared to the same period in 2018 (WFP 27/04/2023). Artibonite is Haiti's main agricultural region, producing up to 80% of domestic rice products. The decrease in agricultural land reduces food supply and increases prices, directly affecting access (InSight Crime 27/02/2023; CCC accessed 26/07/2023).

Nutrient use

Between 2022–2023, limited food availability, stability, and accessibility have affected nutritional use, as people in need are forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms (OCHA 17/03/2023 and 08/05/2023).

Lack of drinking water and poor sanitation infrastructure

The shortage of drinking water particularly affects rural areas. In 2020, only 43% of the rural population had access to safe drinking water. This figure is significantly lower than the average in Latin America and the Caribbean, where about 90% of rural populations had access to safe drinking water. In 2022, only 51% of the over 13,000 improved water source facilities registered in the Integrated Drinking Water and Sanitation Information System database were operational (WB 22/03/2023). The lack of safe water sources exposes the population to waterborne diseases, such as acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, cholera, and malaria (UN 03/09/2021). People with disabilities often face greater challenges in using public toilets and drinking water points, which may not be accessible or lack the modifications that these people need (WB 22/03/2023).

Poor sanitation infrastructure and some cultural practices, including the lack of recycling or waste disposal, have affected rivers and other freshwater sources for drinking water. As at 2020, an estimated 31% of the rural population still practised open defecation, contaminating water sources and putting them at risk of disease. The lack of drinking water sources and sanitation infrastructure also exposes the population, particularly children, to the risk of disease and malnutrition (WB 22/03/2023). Poor waste management increases the risk of a resurgence of cholera and other diarrhoeal diseases, particularly in makeshift shelters where some of these diseases are already present (OCHA 23/04/2023 and 11/05/2023).

Diminished quality and reduced food intake

In March 2023, 49% of surveyed households had resorted to emergency coping mechanisms related to reducing food groups, number of meals, or portions, affecting necessary caloric intake. In the departments of Grand'Anse and Nord-Ouest, the results were more significant in relation to decreasing food quality and quantity (FAO 07/04/2023).

Consumption of early harvests and seeds

As at March 2023, at least 69% of surveyed households who engaged in planting were consuming seeds instead of food or food without completing the maturation process. These coping strategies may affect health conditions (FAO 07/04/2023; OCHA 17/03/2023).



SECTION 3: FOOD INSECURITY IMPACT ON OTHER HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Nutrition

In Haiti, 22% of children are chronically malnourished, 10% are underweight, and 66% of under-fives are anaemic (WFP accessed 21/07/2023). As at May 2023, spreading food insecurity had resulted in a 30% increase in children experiencing severe acute malnutrition compared to 2022 (UNICEF 11/05/2023). People often use negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing food quality or quantity, increasing the risk of malnutrition-related diseases (UNICEF 26/06/2023; OCHA 08/05/2023). Malnutrition, especially in children, impedes mental and physical development and increases the risk of contracting deadly diseases (USAID 15/06/2023; WB 30/06/2022).

Protection

In Port-au-Prince, children and youth are more exposed to protection risks related to forced recruitment into criminal gangs. With the lack of livelihoods affecting food access, the risk of resorting to child labour as a negative coping mechanism also increases (US DOS accessed 15/05/2023).

Women and girls who seek work opportunities also present high protection risks, especially related to sexual gender-based violence and trafficking, as many of them are exploited in commercial sex within Haiti and in the Dominican Republic. Gangs often use hunger to control and force women and girls to participate in sexual favours and forced labour (Niño 08/02/2023; US DOS accessed 15/05/2023).

Education

The lack of resources and livelihoods has led families to reduce spending on education to prioritise food. This method is only one of the coping mechanisms families use in the face of hunger. High food insecurity rates have also led to increased child labour as an income-generating practice for families, increasing school dropout rates (OCHA 17/03/2023).

Gang violence has led to the closure of schools. School meals were often the only form of daily nourishment for some children, so these closures affect food access for children and adolescents (PI 20/03/2023; WFP accessed 17/07/2023).

Health

Food shortages mainly affect pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, infants, children, and older people (PI 20/03/2023). Malnutrition and undernutrition are risk factors for anaemia diseases, learning disorders, loss of muscle mass, cardiovascular diseases, and death (UNICEF 05/08/2022 and 11/05/2023).

Since October 2022, a new cholera outbreak has been detected in Haiti. Food insecurity indirectly increases the risk of cholera, as it causes behaviours such as drinking unsafe water or eating unsafe food. The increase in cholera cases has caused overcrowding in medical centres and a shortage of medical supplies, further challenging the response to malnutrition cases (UNICEF 11/05/2023; Elnaïem et al. 06/02/2023).

Migration

The progressive increase in food insecurity, coupled with other factors such as political, social, and economic instability and natural hazards and poverty, has led to an increase in Haitian migration (US DOS 01/01/2023). Most Haitians who migrate use dangerous routes with human trafficking groups, both by land and sea (IOM 24/01/2023; US DOS 01/01/2023; Finnegan 07/01/2023). The main destination is the US, although Haitian migration has begun to expand throughout Latin America (Finnegan 07/01/2023; IOM 23/05/2023).

Haitian migrants in an irregular situation often arrive in South American countries and use the route through the Darién Jungle between Panama and Colombia to continue their journey to the US. In the first months of 2023, around 100,000 people crossed the Darién, of whom over 23,000 were Haitian migrants. Migrants often face protection risks associated with violence from armed groups, human trafficking, and natural hazards (UN 14/04/2023 b; EE 09/02/2023).



SECTION 4: OUTLOOK

In the next six months, several economic, political, security, social, and environmental factors could influence the evolution of food security. Although it is difficult to say what the level of food insecurity will be in Haiti in the coming months, the current trend provides some idea as to which indicators should be closely monitored.

Expansion of territorial control by armed gangs

Territorial control by armed gangs and violence will likely expand in the coming months.

Although the exact number of armed gang members is unknown, at least 150 gangs were operating in Haiti as at 2022 (Mercy Corps 12/08/2022). Since 2022, gangs have expanded outside Port-au-Prince, suggesting the gradual increase of gang territorial control (Global Initiative 17/10/2022). The persistence of armed gang expansion will further limit food accessibility and availability. This spread will lead to recurrent confinements, food transportation restrictions because of a lack of fuel and the presence of checkpoints, increased forced displacement, and the loss of livelihoods for the population.

The territorial expansion of gangs will also continue to limit humanitarian access, affecting food aid delivery. The trend of increasing violence has led to increased attacks on medical facilities and medical staff (AP 13/02/2023; MSF 24/02/2023). There has also been an increase in attacks on the population, represented by a 35% rise in homicides to total at least 2,180 by December 2022, compared to the same period in 2021. Other events such as rape, kidnappings, and human trafficking have increased, further constraining the population's mobility (Insecurity Insight accessed 01/08/2023; OHCHR 21/03/2023; Le Journal de Montréal 31/01/2023). Armed gangs increasingly demand payment from users travelling by car or motorbike, likely affecting humanitarian aid delivery.

Impact of the El Niño phenomenon

Based on past trends, the El Niño phenomenon could generate droughts in some parts of the country and affect crops in Haiti. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced the start of El Niño on 8 June 2023 (NOAA 13/07/2023). In the Caribbean, the El Niño phenomenon is usually associated mainly with strong droughts, as in the case of the 2009–2010 and 2014–2016 droughts, which coincided with the presence of El Niño (Our Today 21/05/2023). In 2015–2016, an El Niño-induced drought led to the loss of 50% of Haiti's crops (WFP 19/09/2016). However, recent seasonal forecasts still anticipate normal to above-normal precipitations for the July–September season in the country (IRI accessed 01/08/2023; EC accessed 01/08/2023).

During the hurricane season, Haiti will likely face tropical cyclones or hurricanes, despite the presence of the El Niño phenomenon. Typically, El Niño suppresses hurricane activity in the Atlantic Basin, reducing the frequency and intensity of hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea (NOAA 30/05/2014; NOAA accessed 01/08/2023). In 2023, the hurricane season is likely to be normal, as the El Niño phenomenon is not expected to affect the decline of hurricanes (NOAA 25/05/2023). During the hurricane season, it is likely that Haiti could face some of these phenomena, affecting people's livelihoods, hospital infrastructure, schools, crop irrigation, drinking water plants, and sanitation systems. This could have a major impact on food security.

Currency depreciation

The economic downturn will likely reduce the population's purchasing power and access to food. In 2018, the exchange rate was USD 1 to HTG 65. As at 1 July 2023, USD 1 was equivalent to HTG 139 (MPI 05/07/2023). As Haiti depends on imported products, the dollar's upward trend affects access to food and the inputs needed to grow crops (WFP accessed 11/05/2023; MPI 05/07/2023). Violence and insecurity have caused various economic sectors, such as agriculture, hotels, restaurants, and tourism, to gradually decline. The progressive deterioration of the local economy affects livelihoods, deepens poverty, and increases the population's dependence on remittances from relatives in other countries (MPI 05/07/2023; SunSentinel 19/07/2023).