

UNICEF **CHILD ALERT** | October 2025

The polycrisis for children in Haiti

The ripple effect of violence, malnutrition, lost learning and failing essential services

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Executive summary

In 2025, more than 3.3 million children in Haiti need humanitarian assistance, up from 3 million in 2024.

The unprecedented level of insecurity has pushed more than 680,000 children into displacement, often multiple times.

Haiti's current crisis is not rooted in one single event, but in decades of compounding shocks and chronic instability. Political fragility, economic inequality, natural disasters and weakening institutions have converged to create one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies in the world.



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For Haiti's children, these compounding crises mean a daily struggle for survival – shuttered schools, hospitals overwhelmed, and childhoods cut short by violence, neglect, exploitation, and hunger. Without decisive action, the future of an entire generation is at stake.

UNICEF calls on the international community to prioritize Haiti's children and to act with the urgency and scale that the crisis demands. There is still time to protect its children and reverse the country's downward spiral:

- Restore and protect humanitarian access.
- Urgently increase the scale and scope of humanitarian funding.
- Restore and safeguard basic services.
- Protect and support displaced children.
- Invest in long-term stabilization and child-focused recovery.

Introduction



Haiti is facing a devastating and fast-evolving humanitarian crisis. As violence spirals, access to and the quality of basic services deteriorate and internal displacement soars, children are paying the highest price. Armed groups now control much of the capital Port-au-Prince and key roads, leaving millions cut off from food, healthcare, education and protection. Schools are shut, hospitals are overwhelmed or shuttered, and aid access is dangerously constrained.

In 2025, more than 3.3 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance, up from 3 million in 2024 . The number of children displaced by violence has almost doubled over the past year to approximately 680,000, while cases of acute malnutrition, child recruitment, gender-based violence, and other grave rights violations of children's rights have also increased.

This Child Alert draws on the latest data, field reports and sectoral analyses to sound the alarm on the scale of the crisis facing children in Haiti. It provides a snapshot of the unprecedented threats they face and outlines the urgent action required to ensure their protection and access to nutrition, healthcare, water and sanitation, education, hope and other essential services.

In 2025, more than **3.3 million children** are in need of humanitarian assistance, up from 3 million in 2024.



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I. Today's crisis in historical context

Haiti's current crisis is not rooted in one single event, but in decades of compounding shocks and chronic instability. Political fragility, economic inequality, natural disasters, and weakening institutions have converged to create one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies in the world.

For many families, the tipping point came with the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, which triggered a power vacuum and a sharp escalation in armed violence. Since then, armed groups have expanded their control over neighbourhoods, ports, and national roads – paralyzing services, disrupting trade and terrorizing communities.

At the same time, Haitians have endured recurring environmental disasters. In the past 15 years alone, the country has been struck by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake in 2010, Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in 2021. These disasters destroyed infrastructure, eroded coping mechanisms and strained an already fragile state.

The collapse of the Haitian *Gourdes*, rising inflation and global price shocks have pushed even more families into poverty. Nearly 4 in 10 Haitians live on less than US\$2.15/day. Essential services, including water, education, and health, have progressively deteriorated. Cholera re-emerged in 2022, and malnutrition surged amid widespread food insecurity and displacement.



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II. Situation analysis: A country on the brink



An estimated 6 million Haitians, more than half of the population and including 3.3 million children, are in urgent need of assistance. Haiti is facing a polycrisis, in which the collapse of one sector exacerbates the next: malnutrition worsens as health services falter, cholera spreads in displacement sites without safe water, and the disruption of education leaves children more vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation. The combined impact has devastating consequences for children. Violence is expanding into regions previously considered stable including Artibonite, Nord and Centre departments.

The unprecedented level of insecurity has pushed more than 1.3 million people into displacement, of which 680,000 are children, often multiple times. As a result, the number of internally displaced persons (IDP) sites has doubled to 246 nationwide in the first six months of 2025. In many areas, aid workers cannot safely reach communities, and families cannot travel to clinics, food distribution points or schools. Armed groups are increasingly targeting roads, ports and warehouses, forcing humanitarian actors to rely on mobile teams and local networks to deliver life-saving assistance. These access constraints not only block aid but also accelerate the collapse of essential services, with health, nutrition and protection systems all unravelling together.

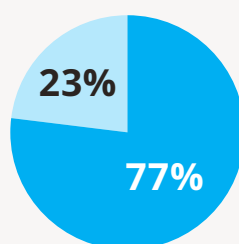
Haiti is facing a polycrisis, in which the collapse of one sector exacerbates the next: malnutrition worsens as health services falter, cholera spreads in displacement sites without safe water, and the disruption of education leaves children more vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation.

Health services are collapsing under pressure. Only 41 per cent of health facilities in the Metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince remain fully functional. Insecurity has forced dozens of facilities to close, resulting in shortages of staff, fuel, medicine and medical supplies. In many parts of Port-au-Prince, women give birth without trained personnel, and children with malnutrition cannot access treatment.

Cholera remains a threat. Since the re-emergence of the disease in October 2022, over 90,000 suspected cases have been reported. Water and sanitation systems are in ruins, and 3.8 million people lack access to safe drinking water. In overcrowded displacement sites, families often rely on contaminated water, fuelling disease outbreaks and increasing the risk of dehydration in children suffering from diarrhoea and wasting.

2.7 million

of the total population of 11.77 million people are estimated to be living in areas controlled by armed groups



Approximately
1 in 4 people

The crisis is further exacerbated by food insecurity, with 5.7 million people, including more than 1 million children, facing critical levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above). Overall, UNICEF estimates that 2.85 million children, about one quarter of Haiti's child population, are experiencing consistently high levels of food insecurity across the country. Families continue to grapple with significant lack of food and high levels of acute malnutrition. With food insecurity on the rise, the country also faces a growing public health emergency and famine-like conditions affecting an estimated 8,400 people living in displacement sites.

The education system is under siege. More than 1,600 schools were directly affected by violence, and more than 1,080 were completely closed in 2025. At least one in four Haitian children is out of school. In many displacement sites, schools serve as temporary shelters, leaving children without access to learning and putting teachers and students at heightened risk. Education is not entirely free, creating an additional barrier for children alongside violence and widespread school closures.



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Only 15–20 per cent of schools are public, and even these require families to pay for textbooks and uniforms, while private schools charge tuition. For families impoverished by multiple crises, these costs make education increasingly inaccessible.

Children in Haiti face increasingly overlapping and compounding threats, including forced recruitment, abduction, sexual violence and the loss of caregivers. Displacement, trauma, and poverty make them more vulnerable than ever, with limited access to safe spaces and social support.

III. A protection crisis for children and women

In Haiti today, children are not only caught in the crossfire, but they are also being directly targeted. The scale and severity of violence against children and women have reached alarming levels, with grave violations of children's rights becoming a daily reality in areas under the control of armed groups.

In 2024, the United Nations verified 2,269 grave violations against children, nearly five times more than the year before, and this likely represents only a fraction of the true scale, as most cases go unreported in areas under the control of armed groups. Verified violations include killing and maiming, abduction, sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals. Out of these, the United Nations verified more than 300 cases of child recruitment and use by armed groups, nearly double the figure from 2023. Children as young as 10 are being forced to carry weapons, serve as lookouts or for other dangerous tasks. Girls, in particular, face brutal risks of sexual violence, coercion and exploitation by armed group members.

The violence has also disrupted critical protection services. Safe spaces for children and women have been destroyed, staff displaced and survivors left without support. Among IDPs on site in the capital, 33 per cent are accommodated in uncovered areas and are exposed to protection and security risks.



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As a result, survivors of rape, trafficking, and abuse often go without medical care, legal assistance or psychosocial support.

In areas under the control of armed groups, children and their families live under the constant threat of armed attacks, kidnappings and sexual violence. Many have witnessed killings or been forced to flee in the middle of the night, while fear of retaliation prevents survivors and witnesses from speaking out. For countless children, trauma is a daily reality, and unless protection services are urgently restored, an entire generation risks growing up not only in fear but also under relentless exposure to violence and exploitation.

IV. The impact on children's health and nutrition

More than 1 million children face critical levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above). These numbers represent a significant increase from previous years and highlight a national emergency affecting both urban and rural communities.

The SMART 2023 survey revealed that 7 out of Haiti's 10 departments had Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates above the WHO emergency threshold of 5 per cent. Areas such as Nord-Est, Artibonite and parts of Grand'Anse are now considered critical zones for nutritional deterioration.

Conditions are most dire in urban displacement hotspots like Croix-des-Bouquets, where the IPC analysis classifies acute malnutrition as Critical (Phase 4).



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In many of these areas, insecurity and armed group activity have cut families off from food markets and humanitarian assistance. Rising prices for staple goods have further reduced household purchasing power, forcing families to skip meals or rely on nutrient-poor diets.

Water and sanitation infrastructure has collapsed in many displacement sites and areas under the control of armed groups. More than 3.8 million people, including over 1 million children, lack regular access to safe water. This not only increases the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea, but also exacerbates the loss of body mass and related complications among children suffering from wasting.

The health system is overstretched and under-resourced. Insecurity has forced the closure of multiple health centres, particularly in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. Where services remain, staff shortages, looted facilities, and fuel scarcity prevent the delivery of even the most basic care, leaving many malnourished children without access to treatment.

Coverage of services to prevent, detect and treat malnutrition remains dangerously low – well below the threshold required to prevent a broader crisis. Without a sustained scale-up in access, funding, and coverage, tens of thousands more children could fall into life-threatening malnutrition within months.

V. Displacement and return

As of mid-2025, Haitians continue to endure some of the most severe human rights violations and life-threatening situations in the country's recent history.

Severe needs, including protection from violence, are felt predominantly in the capital and the departments of Artibonite and Centre where armed violence persists.

More than 2.7 million people are estimated to be living in areas under the control of armed groups, 1.6 million of which are women and children, hindering their freedom of movement and access to basic services.

Displacement has primarily been driven by escalating armed violence, targeted attacks on civilians, and territorial control battles across Port-au-Prince and neighbouring communes. Entire neighbourhoods have been emptied as families flee armed incursions, arson, kidnappings and extortion. Many children are displaced multiple times as violence follows them into temporary shelters.

Most of the displaced people remain in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, living in overcrowded public buildings, makeshift shelters or informal displacement sites. These sites often lack access to safe water, sanitation, protection and health services. Children, particularly those unaccompanied, disabled or orphaned, face heightened risks of violence, exploitation and abuse.



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The lack of secure and dignified shelter has forced thousands of families to seek refuge in schools, churches and abandoned buildings, often without privacy or adequate safety measures. In many areas, schools serve as shelters at night and revert to classrooms during the day, further disrupting children's learning.

The crisis is further compounded by cross-border returns and deportations from the Dominican Republic. Many Haitians, including children, return to the country without documentation or belongings. Once returned, they face immediate risks of homelessness, hunger and statelessness.

Whether displaced within Haiti or returned across its borders, children face the same reality: uprooted, unprotected and without access to basic services. Children who are forcibly returned are also at heightened risk of recruitment by armed groups.

Efforts to facilitate returns for internally displaced families remain limited. Most are unable or unwilling to go home due to ongoing violence, destroyed property or trauma. Insecurity in return areas makes local reintegration efforts extremely challenging.

The risk of repeated displacement remains high in many areas where armed groups are present nearby.

Reception and reintegration services for cross-border returnees, including birth registration and referrals, are still in place but urgently need scaling.

With violence showing no signs of abating and many families displaced for over a year, Haiti is facing a protracted displacement crisis with long-term implications for children's development and well-being.



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VI. An education emergency



Haiti's education system is in freefall – with the future of an entire generation of children hanging in the balance. Violence, displacement, poverty and insecurity have converged to make learning nearly impossible for hundreds of thousands of children.

During the school year 2024–2025, many schools had been directly impacted by violence. More than 1,600 schools were closed and 25 occupied by armed groups, affecting 243,410 students and 7,548 teachers. In Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas, classrooms have become targets and shelters. Eighty-four schools were used as collective centres for internally displaced persons in 2025, this means not only lost learning, but also lost safety, structure, and hope for the future.

Displacement has disrupted education for nearly 500,000 school-aged children. In overcrowded shelters and displacement sites, children lack access to textbooks, learning materials and qualified teachers.

In Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas, classrooms have become targets and shelters.

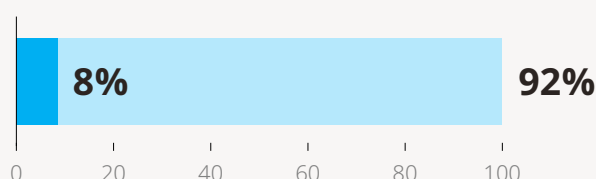
Many adolescent girls drop out entirely due to safety concerns, caregiving responsibilities or the absence of menstrual hygiene materials.

According to the Ministry of National Education and Professional Training, more than one in four Haitian children are currently out of school. The national literacy gap is widening, especially for younger children missing foundational learning milestones.

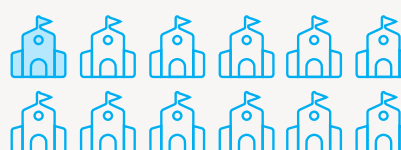
Unless safe access to education is urgently restored, Haiti risks losing not just its schools, but also an entire generation of children whose futures will be irreparably harmed.

1,606 schools

out of 18,983 are closed



Equivalent to
1 in 12 schools nationwide





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VII. Building hope for the way forward



Haiti is at a breaking point. Basic systems and services are collapsing and many of the 1.6 million women and children living in areas under the control of armed groups remain largely cut off from aid.

Humanitarian funding is critically low: as of June 2025, UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children appeal for Haiti was only 13 per cent funded, well below the level required to respond to rising malnutrition, displacement and protection needs.

Without urgent resources, critical programmes including child protection, health, nutrition, water and sanitation and education will remain severely constrained.

The future of Haiti's children depends on choices made today and delay or inaction will cost lives. With urgent international support, coordinated action and restored access, there is still time to protect its children and reverse the country's downward spiral.

UNICEF continues to urge the international community and relevant actors in Haiti to take the following urgent actions to protect the rights, safety and well-being of children in Haiti and to address the escalating humanitarian crisis:

Restore and protect humanitarian access.

Armed actors must comply with international law, ensure the protection of children and the infrastructure they rely on and

With urgent international support, coordinated action and restored access, there is still time to protect its children and reverse the country's downward spiral.

facilitate the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance. Negotiated humanitarian corridors and security guarantees are essential to reach the most vulnerable populations.

Urgently increase the scale and scope of humanitarian funding. Donor governments and international partners must mobilize immediate and sufficient resources to fully support critical programmes in Haiti, including child protection, health, nutrition, water and sanitation and education, ensuring that all children have access to lifesaving services.

Restore and safeguard basic services.

The Government of Haiti, local authorities, and humanitarian donors must prioritize the rehabilitation of health, education and water and sanitation infrastructure, support local service providers and ensure frontline workers can safely reach communities. Investment in mobile and community-based service delivery is essential in areas inaccessible by traditional means.



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Protect and support displaced children.

The Haitian government, humanitarian actors, and donors must include safe shelter, case management, family tracing and reunification and psychosocial support in their response for children uprooted by violence. Returns should only take place when they are safe, voluntary and dignified, with adequate support for reintegration, in line with international standards and norms. Survivors of gender-based violence must also be protected and supported to regain some form of normalcy.

Invest in long-term stabilization and child-focused recovery.

Haiti's crisis requires not only humanitarian relief but also sustained political engagement and targeted development support. Without a pathway toward inclusive governance, equitable development and accountability for perpetrators of violence, the cycle of conflict and vulnerability will persist.

UNICEF calls on the international community to prioritize Haiti's children and to act with the urgency and scale that the crisis demands. The tools and resources exist to help Haiti emerge from this crisis. It is time to put them to use – for every child.

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