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**HTI105995.FE**

Haiti: The situation of women who live alone, including those who are not in precarious situations; whether they can access employment and housing; support services available to them (2015-September 2017)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

**1. Women Who Live Alone**

Sources report that it is not uncommon for women to live alone in Haiti (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). According to sources, women often live alone with their children (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; France 2017, 53). A 2014 report on the impact of the 2010 earthquake and on household living conditions in Haiti [1] indicates [translation] “[that] in 2012, a little over four out of ten households (44%) were headed by women” (Herrera et al.)
June 2014, 46). Similarly, the Common Country Assessment prepared by the United Nations Country Team in Haiti reports that in rural areas, households are, to a large extent, headed by women (UN June 2017, 103).

In a March 2016 report on Haiti, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) indicates the following:

[translation]

[A] common practice of fathers denying the paternity of their biological children, leading to the general failure of men to meet their parental obligations and resulting in the poverty of the numerous female-headed households and the children concerned (UN 9 Mar. 2016, para. 49).

Similarly, during a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor in social work at the University of Quebec in Outaouais (UQO), who also serves as the scientific director of the Observatory on Regional Development and Gender-Based Analysis (Observatoire sur le développement régional et l'analyse différenciée selon les sexes, ORÉGAND) [2] and who has been working with women's group representatives in Haiti for over 30 years, stated [translation] “[that] it is unusual for [Haitian] women to be childless [and that] it is very common for men not to live with the women with whom they have had children” (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a project officer at the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) in Haiti [3], who has over 20 years of fieldwork experience, noted that Haitian women often have children of different fathers and that [translation] “a single woman and her children make up the family unit in most cases” (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017).

1.1 Access to Employment

In a 2014 report entitled *Politique d'égalité femmes homme 2014-2034*, the Ministry of the Condition of Women and Women's Rights (ministère à la Condition féminine et aux Droits des femmes, MCFDF) indicates that, according to a diagnostic report on gender inequality published in 2013, women work mainly in the service sector, are self-employed (83 p. 100) and work in trade (Haiti Dec. 2014, 12).

According to the same source, a 2009 MCFDF report entitled *Rapport d'application de la CEDEF [CEDAW]* reports the following:

[translation]

[Women] who are engaged in an economic activity can be broken down proportionately as follows: 43.9% are merchants, 37.5% work in the agricultural sector, and 10.7% and 6% work in service sectors and other sectors, respectively (Haiti Dec. 2014, 13).

According to the Common Country Assessment on Haiti, [translation] “[i]n rural areas, 67.7% of women work in the informal sector, whereas in urban areas, they account for a little more than 50%” (UN June 2017, 102). During a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a former advisor to five Haitian prime ministers between 1993 and 2017, stated that “life is easier for single women in urban areas, where [they] can hope to find a job, than in rural areas, where the only livelihood is farming” (Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). CEDAW reports that [translation] “rural women are exposed to high levels of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, have little access to basic services, and participate only marginally in decision-making relating to issues that are of concern to them” (UN 9 Mar. 2016, para. 37).

According to the professor, in order to find a job, it is essential to [translation] “know people” and that there is no work [translation] “without contacts” (full professor 3 Oct. 2017). She noted that it is also necessary to speak Creole (full professor 3 Oct. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Without providing further details, the former advisor stated that [translation] “men are generally given preference over women when it comes to jobs” (former advisor 2 Oct. 2017). In addition, a 2015 report on Haiti published by the World Bank Group [4] reports that “[w]omen are significantly disadvantaged in the labour market” and that they are 20 percentage points more likely than men to be unemployed (Singh and Barton-Dock 2015, 35). According to the 2014 report on the impact of the
2010 earthquake and on household living conditions in Haiti, the unemployment rate was 38.3 p. 100 among women and 19.8 p. 100 among men (Herrera et al. June 2014, 120), based on data collected as part of the Post-Earthquake Living Conditions Survey (Enquête sur les conditions de vie après séisme, ECVMAS) conducted in 2012 by the Haitian Institute of Statistics and Informatics (Institut haïtien de statistique et d'informatique, IHSI). In addition, CEDAW notes that women "face high unemployment rates, persistent horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market as well as a gender wage gap, particularly in the private sector" (UN 9 Mar. 2016, para. 31).

In a briefing note issued in Port-au-Prince to mark International Women's Day on 8 March 2016, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) states the following:

[translation]

Women receive lower wages than men. Between 2007 and 2012, the rate of work activity in Haiti has risen 20 points for young men, but only 8.9 points for women. (UN 8 Mar. 2016).

According to the 2014 report on the impact of the 2010 earthquake and on household living conditions in Haiti, the unemployment rate in Haiti decreased by 12.5 p. 100 for men and by 10.4 p. 100 for women (Herrera et al. June 2014, 120), based on the data collected as part of the ECVMAS in 2012 and as part of the 2007 Survey on Employment and the Informal Economy (Enquête sur l'emploi et l'économie informelle) conducted by the IHSI, between 2007 and 2012.

Sources report that women hold positions in the public sector (UN June 2017, 101; US 3 Mar. 2017, 23), but that they mostly work in low-level positions (US 3 Mar 2017, 23) or that they are paid less than men (UN June 2017, 101).

According to the professor, it is possible for Haitian women to start businesses (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). The Common Country Assessment on Haiti indicates that [translation] "[w]ith respect to entrepreneurship, women engage more in individual micro initiatives to survive and are not very visible in businesses (SMEs)" (UN June 2017, 102). Sources report that women face limited access to resources (UN June 2017, 102; US 3 Mar. 2017, 14), which makes [translation] "it difficult for women to take entrepreneurial initiatives" (UN June 2017, 102). Sources report that women have access to credit (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Project Officer
5 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017), but that the rates offered by banks are high and that micro-credit projects are widespread (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017).

A July 2017 report by the Secretary General on MINUSTAH states that “[t]he fragile socioeconomic situation continues to contribute to the increased vulnerability of Haitian households, particularly affecting girls and women” (UN 12 July 2017, para. 6). The Common Country Assessment indicates poverty as being among the more significant causes of gender inequality in Haiti (UN June 2017, 103).

1.2 Access to Housing

According to sources, single women can own or rent (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017). According to sources, housing is extremely expensive in Port-au-Prince (Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a UNDP recovery specialist, who studied in Haiti and who has been working there for at least seven years, explained that most single women live in [translation] “low-cost and poor quality” housing (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017). The former advisor added that single women with [translation] “little means” have to live with their parents (Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017).

1.3 Societal Treatment

According to the professor, marriage [translation] “is not very common” in Haiti (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). According to a mission report prepared by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (Office français pour la protection des réfugiés et apatrides, OFPRA) following a visit to Haiti from 26 March to 7 April 2017, [translation] “approximately 22% of women are married today, most of whom live in ‘plaçage,’ a non-marital practice of couples that is not recognized by the Civil Code” (France 2017, 53).

According to the professor, [translation] “[t]he attitude toward single women varies depending on social class and religion” (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). She stated that [translation] “among the working class, having a man in one’s life is ‘well-regarded,’ it ‘moves up’ one’s social standing” (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). She also indicated that [translation] “among Evangelicals and Catholics, for example, there is
a more negative perception of single women with children, but there are nevertheless many of them (Professor 3 Oct.2017). The project officer stated that the [translation] ‘official,’ ‘advocated’ model is that of the Western couple, but reality is quite the opposite (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017).

For further information on the situation of women in Haiti and on violence against women, including sexual violence, see Response to Information Request HTI105161 of December 2016.

2. Women Living Alone Who Are Not in Precarious Situations

2.1 Access to Employment

Without providing further details, the project officer explained that [translation] “economic independence is the most determining factor when it comes to a woman’s situation in Haiti, and where she lives, her age and level of education are not” (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017). The former advisor noted that [translation] “women with means who want to start businesses have access to funding and credit” (Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017).

According to the former advisor, access to education depends on financial means (Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). Sources report that private schools provide the best education in Haiti (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). According to the professor, women [translation] “with financial means or who are educated can find employment” (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). In addition, the former advisor explained that it [translation] “is easier” for women with financial means to live alone, because they have access to employment and educated women have a [translation] “greater chance of being hired for a job” (Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). The professor also added that women with work experience [translation] “will naturally have a greater chance” of finding a job (Professor 3 Oct. 2017).

However, the recovery specialist pointed out that [translation] “entering the labour market is difficult, even with a diploma” (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017). According to the same source, [translation] “[women] are victims of violence and harassment, or even inappropriate proposals to [get] a job” (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017). According to a 2017 report prepared by the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED), a think tank based in Port-au-Prince, whose
mission is to “contribute to the development of high-level research and scientific training in Haiti” (INURED n.d.), for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a commonly known Haitian expression suggests “that a female applicant for a post must engage in sexual relations with her superior in order to secure or maintain the position” (INURED August 2017, 42). That source adds that “[d]ue to high levels of unemployment and the inefficiency of the judicial system, such cases go unreported” (INURED August 2017, 42). The recovery specialist added that most her friends who went to university and entered the labour market do not earn enough money to support themselves (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017).

### 2.2 Access to Housing

According to sources, access to housing and property are determined by financial means (Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). Sources noted that women who live alone and who are not in a precarious situation may be able to find housing (Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017).

Some sources referred to wealthy neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince, including the following:

- Pétionville (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017);
- Turgeau (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017);
- Bourdon (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017);
- Kenscoff (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017);
- Pacot (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017);
- Vivi Mitchel (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017);
- Juvénat and Montagne Noire (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017);
- Fermathe, Bois Moquette and Musseau (Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017);

The professor summarized by explaining that [translation] “lower [Port-au-Prince], the part near the port (on the western side, geographically), is poorer, and the eastern part, on the side of the mountain, is wealthier” (Professor 3 Oct. 2017).
Sources noted, in reference to these neighbourhoods, that some poor people may live there (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017). The professor elaborated: [translation] “It is not uncommon to find poor dwellings even within neighbourhoods considered more posh. A shack might stand next to a villa. ... So, having an address in that kind of neighbourhood is not necessarily an indication of social status” (Professor 3 Oct. 2017).

2.3 Treatment by Society

According to sources, women living alone who are not in a precarious situation may be victims of violence like any other Haitian women (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017; Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017) and discrimination (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017). The project officer, distinguishing between physical violence and economic violence (sexual abuse for a job), stated that situation of women who live alone and who do not live in precarious conditions [translation] “is similar in terms of spousal violence, whether they are legally married or not. Their situation is different in terms of economic violence because they are more financially independent” (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017). The former advisor indicated that a very independent woman [financially speaking] may irk some people because she may be seen as a threat (Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Support Services

For information on state protection and support services for women victims of violence, see Response to Information Request HTI105161 from December 2016.

The OFPRA report indicates that, according to one woman activist, the objectives of the MCFDF are as follows: [translation] “the prevention and sanction of violence against women, the development of women’s political participation, the fight for nonsexist education, their independence, and their integration into decision-making positions in public and private bodies” (France 2017, 55). The same source also notes the following, based primarily on the comments of a former minister and member of Solidarity for Haitian Women (Solidarité des femmes haïtiennes, SOFA): [translation]
Although this department is threatened with being shut down every time there is a change of government, and although it has extremely limited room for manoeuvre, given that it receives less than 1% of the total government budget, it has contributed to certain improvements in terms of legal recognition of violence against women. (France 2017, 55)

According to sources, social services in Haiti are non-existent (full professor 3 Oct. 2017) or [translation] “ineffective” (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017) or corrupt (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017). In a report published in July 2016 by the UN Economic and Social Council, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti reports that [UN English version] “the availability of social safety net services has declined” in Haiti (UN 25 July 2016, para. 6).

Sources noted that there is no food assistance from the state (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017). According to the project officer, to obtain assistance to feed her children, a woman living alone must rely on her family to convince the father to pay a monthly amount (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017). Sources indicate that there is now a law on paternity, maternity and filiation in Haiti (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; UN 25 Aug. 2016, para. 90). According to the 2016 CEDAW report, this law [UN English version] “guarantee[s] equal treatment to children born out of wedlock” (UN 9 Mar. 2016, para. 4). According to the project officer, it ends certain [translation] “privileges” for “legal” spouses and children, for instance, with respect to inheritance (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017). According to the recovery specialist, efforts were made to draft a law on [translation] “responsible paternity,” but it has not been implemented, meaning that mothers may find themselves “in delicate situations” with respect to proceedings against fathers (Recovery Specialist 9 Oct. 2017).

According to sources, there is no social housing in Haiti (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017; Professor 3 Oct. 2017; Former Advisor 2 Oct. 2017).

The OFPRA report notes that, according to Nicole Phillips, the author of an article on the role of grassroots movements in the fight against sexual violence in Haiti, [translation] “women meet their needs with help from their community—family, rural or neighbourhood” (France 2017, 53). The professor similarly explained that [translation] “assistance [for women] primarily comes from the family, the community, the diaspora. Solidarity and mutual support are part of the values system. … In this context, family and social networks are very important (Professor 3 Oct. 2017).
Sources report that there are numerous women’s organizations in Haiti (Professor 3 Oct. 2017; France 2017, 56), in both rural and urban areas (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). According to the project officer, women’s organizations are “the most wellstructured in civil” (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017). According to the professor, their effectiveness varies (Professor 3 Oct. 2017). Sources named the following women’s associations in Haiti:

- Sun Women’s Association of Haiti (Asosyasyon Fanm Soley Dayiti, AFASDA) [an association with branches across the country and comprising 3,000 members; among other things, it is active in the fight against gender-based violence, offers [AWID English version] “legal support” to victims and provides “temporary housing,” and organizes awareness and outreach activities for the general public (AWID 6 June 2017)];
- Fanm Deside [an organisation with 4,000 members [translation] “that fights to improve the status of women in Haiti” by creating “projects of an economic character to improve the women’s lives: microcredit services, credit unions, plant nurseries, workshops to manufacture, process and sell goods” and “income generating activities to economically empower women” (Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie n.d.)];
- Kay Fanm [[translation] “a housing, support and advocacy centre based in PortauPrince that promotes and advocates for women’s rights” whose areas of activity include “support and rehabilitation for victims of violence” and “the development of income-generating tools by and for women” (FSM [2016])];

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The report on the impact of the 2010 earthquake and on household living conditions in Haiti is presented by the IHSI in collaboration with the Development, Institutions and Globalization Laboratory (Laboratoire de recherche développement, institutions, mondialisation, DIAL) of the Research Institute for Development (Institut
de recherche pour le développement, IRD) (Herrera et al. June 2014, 5). “This project received financial support from the National Research Agency (Agence nationale de la recherche, ANR) as well as funding from the European Union” (Herrera et al. June 2014, 4). The authors of the report are as follows: Javier Herrera (IRD-DIAL), Nathalie Lamaute-Brisson (consultant IHSI), Daniel Milbin (IHSI), François Rouvaud (IRD-DIAL), Camille Saint-Macary (IRD-DIAL), Constance Torelli (INSEE) and Claire Zanuso (Université Paris-Dauphine-DIAL) (Herrera et al. June 2014, 3).

[2] The Observatory for Regional Development and Gender-Based Analysis (Observatoire sur le développement régional et l'analyse différenciée selon les sexes, ORÉGAND) is located in the Outaouais region and has been working since 2003 to “develop research and regional expertise in gender-based analysis, to enhance cooperation and collaboration between universities and local and regional organizations in the area of gender-based analysis, to encourage participation of academia in regional development, [and] to analyze and ensure the recognition of women’s participation in development their regions and communities” (ORÉGAND n.d.)

[3] CECI is a Quebec organization whose mission is to combat poverty and exclusion in the world (CECI n.d.a). It has been operating in Haiti since 1971 (CECI n.d.b). The information provided by the CECI project officer reflects the project officer’s personal point of view (Project Officer 5 Oct. 2017).

[4] The World Bank Group report was written by Raju Jan Singh and Mary Barton-Dock; “this work is a product of the staff of The World Bank with external contributions” (Singh and Barton-Dock 2015, ii).

References


Former Advisor, Haiti. 2 October 2017. Telephone Interview with the Research Directorate.


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Project Officer, Centre d’étude et de coopération internationale (CECI). 5 October 2017. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Recovery Specialist, United Nations Development Program (UNDP). 9 October 2017. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Singh, Raju Jan and Mary Barton-Dock. 2015. __ Haiti: Toward a New Narrative.


Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Haitian journalist; Professeor of sociology.

**Internet sites, including:** ecoi.net; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; United Nations – UN Women, United Nations Development Programme.
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