

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#)

> [Research Program](#)

> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

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11 June 2014

HTI104872.FE

Haiti: Information on the security situation, including crime and kidnappings; measures taken by the government and other bodies to fight crime (June 2012-May 2014)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. General Security Situation

Sources indicate that the general security situation in Haiti is unpredictable (UK 8 May 2014; Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013) or "very unpredictable" (Canada 9 June 2014). It is also described as "hazardous" (ibid.), [translation] "unstable" (Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013) and "volatile" (UK 8 May 2014).

In its June 2014 advice to travellers to Haiti, the Belgian Department of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Cooperation and Development (Ministère des Affaires étrangères, du Commerce extérieur et de la Coopération au développement) notes the following:

[translation]

[t]he general security situation in the capital, Port-au-Prince, remains poor and unpredictable despite the presence of international troops. The situation may improve or deteriorate very suddenly. (Belgium 6 June 2014)

Some sources indicate that demonstrations can sometimes turn violent (UK 8 May 2014; Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013). In its advice to travellers to Haiti, the Government of Canada describes the situation as follows:

Demonstrations are frequent, and protest marches and strikes may occur at any time in the capital, throughout the country and on main highways. Local transportation services may be disrupted. ... Rioting and related violence can occur on little or no notice (Canada 9 June 2014).

In a report on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) covering the period from August 2013 to March 2014, presented to the United Nations Security Council, the Secretary-General of the organization states as follows: "By far the area most affected by civil unrest was the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, followed by the urban areas of the North, North-East and Artibonite Departments" (UN 7 Mar. 2014, para. 12). In its advice to travellers to Haiti, the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office indicated that "[d]emonstrations and protest marches occasionally take place in Port-au-Prince and other cities, especially Cap-Haïtien [in the north] and Les Cayes [in the south]" (UK 8 May 2014). Other sources also state that that Port-au-Prince is the most common location for protests (France 22 May 2014; US 28 May 2014, 5). More specifically, in its May 2014 report on crime and safety in Haiti, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security of the United States' Department of State reports that "[v]iolent political protests occur regularly in downtown Port-au-Prince around the National Palace, the Champ de Mars, and the State University campuses," and that "[t]hese protests have been frequent, averaging multiple incidents per week since mid-2009" (ibid.). According to the UN Secretary General's report,

The first half of the reporting period...saw a 57 per cent increase in demonstrations. The majority of those, however, were triggered by socioeconomic grievances concerning inadequacies in basic services such as education, infrastructure, electricity and water supply. (UN 7 Mar. 2014, para. 12)

The report goes on to say that "[m]ost were peaceful even though they were characterized by frequent use of road barricades" (ibid.).

2. Crime

2.1 Crime in General

In their advice to citizens travelling to Haiti, the governments of the United Kingdom, France and Switzerland all caution that "[c]rime levels are high" (UK 8 May 2014), that [translation] "[c]riminal violence remains very high" (France 22 May 2014) and that [translation] "the number of violent crimes is high" (Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013).

According to the UN Secretary General's report,

Crime statistics collected by the national police and MINUSTAH showed a marginal downward trend in major crimes compared with the reporting period of the previous year. The total number of homicides in 2013 (817 reported cases) was 21 per cent lower than in 2012, reversing a five-year trend. (UN 7 Mar. 2014, para. 11)

The US Bureau of Diplomatic Security reports that, although numbers from the Haitian National Police (Police nationale haïtienne, PNH) indicate a modest drop in crime in 2012, other sources indicate that crime has increased steadily since 2010; it adds that reliable statistics on crime in Haiti are difficult to obtain and that analyses show that crimes are inaccurately or under-reported (US 28 May 2014, 1). According to the Bureau, most statistics show that, in 2013, violent crimes such as murders stayed at roughly the same level as in 2012 (ibid., 2).

The advice to Canadian travellers indicates that criminal activity is especially evident in large centres such as Port-au-Prince (Canada 9 June 2014). France specifically mentions Cap-Haïtien, in addition to Port-au-Prince, and warns that guns are prevalent in both of these cities (France 22 May 2014).

2.2 Criminal Gangs

The Belgian government warns travellers that there is a [translation] "strong presence of armed gangs" in Haiti (Belgium 6 June 2014). According to the advice provided to Canadian travellers, these gangs are especially evident in downtown Port-au-Prince (Canada 9 June 2014). Some sources note that the following Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods are particularly dangerous: Carrefour, Cité Soleil and Martissant (US 28 May 2014, 9; UK 8 May 2014; Canada 9 June 2014). Canada and the United Kingdom include Bel Air in the list (ibid.; UK 8 May 2014), while the US Bureau of Diplomatic Security includes Croix-des-Bouquets (US 28 May 2014, 9). Employees of the US embassy are only authorized to travel to areas the Bureau has identified as dangerous if they do so in armoured vehicles and under armed escort (ibid.). Canada provides the following information on the neighbourhoods that it advises travellers to avoid:

These areas continue to be dangerous due to criminal activity and the local authorities' lack of capacity to ensure order. Personal safety and a police presence are not guaranteed. The police are unable to respond in a timely manner to calls for assistance in these areas... . (Canada 9 June 2014)

The US Bureau of Diplomatic Security cautions that the situation in the Cité Soleil neighbourhood continues to be "of concern," despite the efforts of the PNH and UN security forces to put an end to the criminal gangs' control of this area (US 28 May 2014, 5). Without providing details, the Bureau adds that "gang violence in the area rose dramatically" at the end of 2013 (ibid.).

2.3 Reported Crimes

Travellers from Switzerland are advised that [translation] "[a]rmed attacks (including attacks resulting in fatalities), thefts of cars and other items, as well as burglaries, happen regularly" (Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013). According to the US Bureau of Diplomatic Security, "[r]obbery-related shootings continued during 2013, and there are frequent reports of random gunfire throughout Port-au-Prince" (US 28 May 2014, 1).

Some sources report that robberies are committed on the roads (ibid., 4; UK 8 May 2014). Others indicate that the road between the Port-au-Prince international airport and the city is particularly targeted (US 28 May 2014, 4; France 22 May 2014; Canada 9 June 2014).

According to the UN Secretary-General's report, from August 2013 to March 2014, "violence and gang activity continued to be concentrated in major urban centres, with approximately 77 per cent of homicides in 2013 taking place in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince" (UN 7 Mar. 2014, para. 11). Corroborating

information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.4 Kidnappings

Some sources report that kidnappings for ransom occur (Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013; Belgium 6 June 2014). The UK informs travellers to Haiti of the threat of kidnappings in Port-au-Prince, particularly in Petionville (UK 8 May 2014).

Belgium advises its travellers that kidnappings are [translation] "not uncommon" and [translation] "are the primary security risk for individuals" (Belgium 6 June 2014). The US Bureau of Diplomatic Security, however, reports that "2013 saw a sharp decrease in kidnappings... due to the success of several law enforcement operations targeting gangs" (US 28 May 2014, 7). According to the UN Secretary-General's report, "the total number of kidnappings in 2013 decreased by 53 per cent compared with 2012" (UN 7 Mar. 2014, para. 11). The US State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, however, reports 82 kidnappings from January to November 2013, compared to 126 for the same period in 2012—a drop of less than 50 per cent (US 27 Feb. 2014, 4).

According to the US Bureau of Diplomatic Security, kidnapping victims are not targeted because of their nationality, race, gender or age, and the breakdown in kidnapping victims in the last few years is "spread fairly evenly" among men, women and children (US 28 May 2014, 5). The Bureau reports that "[a]ll persons who are perceived to have wealth or some family connections with assets, either in Haiti or abroad, are vulnerable" (ibid.). According to the UK's advice to travellers, however, both Haitians and foreigners can be victims of kidnapping, because "[k]idnappers target wealth" (UK 8 May 2014). The information provided to Canadian travellers indicates that "[t]he general Haitian population, regardless of social class, can be considered at risk of being kidnapped" (Canada 9 June 2014).

Swiss travellers are warned that kidnappings [translation] "often involve violence" (Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013). According to the US Bureau of Diplomatic Security, "many kidnappings include physical or sexual assaults" (US 28 May 2014, 7). Some sources note that kidnappings sometimes result in the victim's death (ibid.; Canada 9 June 2014) or disappearance (ibid.). The US Bureau of Diplomatic Security noted that cases of home invasions for the dual purpose of kidnapping and robbery do occur, particularly in the more affluent areas of Port-au-Prince (US 28 May 2014, 2). Home-invasion kidnappings seem most common in the following neighbourhoods: Vivy Mitchell, Pelerin, Laboule, Thomassin and Kenscoff (ibid.).

2.5 Violence Against Women and Children

The US Bureau of Diplomatic Security reports that gender-based crimes remain a "serious problem" (US 28 May 2014, 1). According to Human Rights Watch, "[g]ender-based violence is a widespread problem" (Jan. 2014, 3). Freedom House adds that violence against women and children, which was already "widespread," "worsened considerably" after the 2010 earthquake (2013). Amnesty International (AI) reports that, "[a]ccording to reports from women's rights organizations, women living in camps for internally displaced people remained at particular risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation" (2013). Also, according to Freedom House, "rapes were reportedly pervasive in the displacement camps, where insufficient police protection and inadequate housing exacerbate[e] the vulnerability of women and children" (2013).

According to Human Rights Watch, "[w]omen seeking accountability for sexual violence crimes encounter multiple obstacles, including reproach by members of the public or threats" (Jan. 2014, 3). Similarly, AI reports that "[w]omen reporting gender-based violence receiv[e] little redress," even though "Haiti's police and justice system [have] made some progress in responding to gender-based violence" (2013). According to *Country Reports 2013*, in June 2013, the PNH reported that they had received "301 complaints of rape and rape-related crimes since the January 2010 earthquake;" however, one women's rights NGO stated that "approximately 600 rape cases had been reported to the [national police] and forwarded to the judiciary for prosecution during that same period" (US 27 Feb. 2014, 31). Of those cases, only five had resulted in sentencing (ibid.). According to the UN Secretary-General's report, the average monthly number of reported rapes increased to 33.8, compared with 30.5 during the previous reporting period (UN 7 Mar. 2014, paragr. 11).

For more information about gender-based violence and protection offered by the state, see Responses to Information Request HTI104396 and HTI104085.

3. Measures Taken by the Authorities to Fight Crime

According to Human Rights Watch, "[t]he weak capacity of the Haitian National Police (HNP) contributes to overall insecurity in the country" (Jan. 2014, 2). Swiss travellers are advised that [translation] "[t]he legal and security authorities are often overwhelmed with cases" (Switzerland 21 Nov. 2013).

According to the US Bureau of Diplomatic Security, "Haitians still lack basic policing services, so many residents do not report assaults, rape, and other crime because of lingering-and too-often justified-perceptions of police apathy, incompetence, and corruption" (US 28 May 2014, 1). The Bureau adds that the PNH has "a very limited response capability. ... [and] minimal deterrent effect on criminals" (ibid., 7). It explains that, for those reasons, more Port-au-Prince residents are turning to security systems or guards, and buying firearms for personal protection (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

For more information on the PNH and the challenges it faces, consult Response to Information Request HTI104397.

The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has been deployed in the country since 2004 (UK 8 May 2014; Freedom House 2013). According to the report of the UN Secretary-General, "when the capacity of the national police was put to severe test, both by local criminal activity and heightened civil unrest, operational support by MINUSTAH forces was required" (UN 7 Mar. 2014, para. 13). Some sources, however, report popular discontent toward MINUSTAH, stemming from its role in the cholera outbreak and from reports of sexual abuse by soldiers (Freedom House 2013; AI 2013). Human Rights Watch reports that, "[a]ccording to United Nations figures, at least 81 allegations of sexual abuse or exploitation have been made against MINUSTAH personnel in the last six years, including 16 in 2013, as of mid-November" (Jan. 2014, 6).

According to the US Bureau of Diplomatic Security, a "perennially weak judiciary" exacerbates Haiti's security problems (US 28 May 2014, 1). Freedom House also flags the weaknesses of the judicial system, describing it as "underfunded, inefficient, and corrupt, and...burdened by a large backlog of cases, outdated legal codes, and poor facilities" (2013).

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.

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[Top of Page](#)

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