OHCHR BINUH

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CHILDREN TRAFFICKED BY GANGS IN HAITI:

RETHINKING THE RESPONSES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Haiti, at least 26 gangs[1] operate in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, as well as in several communes in the Artibonite and Centre departments. The majority of them are involved in child trafficking[2].

Based on quantitative and qualitative data, this report — published jointly by the Human Rights Service (HRS) of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) — shows that both structural and contextual factors contribute to creating an environment in which children are increasingly exposed to the risk of trafficking by gangs. This risk is particularly acute for children from extremely poor and marginalized families, as well as for those living on the streets or in displacement sites.

The report also documents the various tactics used by gangs to recruit children, particularly in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, including the use of violence and threats against those who resist or attempt to leave. Gangs also lure children by offering in-kind benefits, regular pay, or drugs. They specifically target children at risk, seeking a sense of belonging, support, social recognition, and protection.

In addition, the report describes in detail the different forms of exploitation faced by children. For example, boys are often used to carry out various tasks, including running errands, delivering messages, monitoring security forces and people's movements, and collecting extortion payments. Over time, after being subjected to violent "initiation rites," they may be forced to take part in more serious crimes, including targeted killings, kidnappings, sexual violence, and the destruction of property. Some are also involved in clashes with law enforcement. Girls, for their part, are frequently victims of rape, including collective rape, sexual exploitation and sexual slavery; they are forced to perform domestic work and, in some cases, are also compelled to engage in criminal activities.

Child trafficking by gangs seriously undermines the full range of children's rights, exposing them to violence and exploitation and depriving them of essential opportunities such as access to education and decent living conditions. The long-term consequences are devastating, threatening not only the well-being of today's children, but also the prospects of future generations.

While some initiatives by State authorities, as well as international and national organizations, seek to address the harm suffered by children involved with gangs, insufficient attention is paid upstream to the prevention of child trafficking. In the absence of urgent measures to protect children from such abuses, Haiti's very future is at risk.

In this context, the HRS of BINUH and OHCHR recommend rethinking the response by the various actors to child trafficking by gangs, by adopting a human rights-based approach that considers these children first and foremost as victims, in accordance with international law and standards[3].

The report proposes a comprehensive and integrated response by State authorities, supported by Haitian civil society organizations and the international community, structured around seven pillars. These pillars address the root causes — economic, social and educational — that expose children and their families to the risk of trafficking, while ensuring accountability for the perpetrators of this crime as a means of preventing future violations.

[1] See page 14 for a list of these gangs.

[2] Child trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of any person under 18 years of age, irrespective of the means used, for the purpose of exploitation including forced criminality and sexual exploitation. For more information, see the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (also known as the "Palermo Protocol").

[3] For more details on the international legal framework, see Annex II.

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Pillar I - Strengthening social protection programmes and access to financial services for families from marginalized neighbourhoods

Families constitute the first line of protection against the recruitment of children by gangs. The report calls for strengthening and adapting social protection programmes to urban dynamics in order to improve families' social and economic conditions and to address the main risk factors for trafficking, such as limited access to education or families' lack of financial resources — obstacles that reduce children's employment prospects when they reach working age.

Existing social protection programmes remain underfunded and heavily dependent on donor assistance. Their geographical coverage is limited, notably excluding large urban areas under gang control. They also face operational challenges, such as errors in beneficiary targeting and constraints that hinder the conversion of digital cash transfers into usable cash. In addition, institutional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, as well as accountability mechanisms to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, are lacking.

This is compounded by serious difficulties in accessing financial services supported by public banks or community initiatives, which are nevertheless essential to achieve medium- and long-term impact, in complement to social programmes.

Ultimately, this situation leaves families — particularly female-headed households — with insufficient support to prevent the recruitment of children or to help them disengage from gang activities.

Pillar II - Supporting schools as protective spaces

Schools play a crucial deterrent role by offering both learning opportunities and protection from gang influence. However, corruption, chronic underfunding, reliance on private education, and gang violence seriously undermine the enjoyment of the right to education[4]. In areas under gang control, schools are only allowed to operate if they pay "taxes" to gang leaders. In some cases, school fees are covered by these same gangs in exchange for children's involvement in their activities. Despite these challenges, public authorities and international partners, including United Nations agencies, continue to support children's school attendance through the establishment of school canteens, the rehabilitation of schools, the creation of temporary learning spaces, cash transfers to families, and the distribution of school supplies.

Schools can also foster a protective environment for children through civic education initiatives, such as those carried out by the Community Education Police (EDUPOL) and Peace and Integrity Clubs, which are designed to strengthen resilience to gang influence, promote social cohesion and cultivate a culture of peace. Strengthening the capacity and status of teachers is equally essential, so that they are equipped with the skills needed to identify and address potential cases of human trafficking within the school and the wider community.

Although these interventions are not immune to gang interference, they are extremely complex to implement and entail security risks for both public and private actors. Nevertheless, the State, with the support of the international community and civil society organizations, must continue and strengthen these efforts in order to guarantee access to education and maintain schools as safe spaces, with a view to reducing gang influence over children.

[4] In 2025, 1,606 schools were closed across Haiti, affecting 243,000 students, according to UNICEF (July 31, 2025). "Haiti Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6," available at https://reliefweb.int/attachments/d64cc276-e61d-4e51-98c5-b9911c608a05/UNICEF%20Haiti%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%206%20-%20Mid-Year%202025.pdf

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Pillar III - Developing child-friendly spaces outside of school

As schools struggle to operate in areas under gang control, child-friendly spaces outside the formal education system have become essential to reducing child trafficking by gangs. Although these structures — limited in number and often run by community-based and faith-based organizations — provide services such as food distributions, medical care, psychosocial support, recreational and sports activities, and support to parents, they are severely hindered by insecurity. They also face difficulties in securing donor funding, in particular because of fears of negative publicity or a perception of complicity. Specialized mental health services provided by these organizations are also scarce and costly, leaving the majority of children without access to specialized care.

As part of government efforts, an ad hoc Presidential Commission was established in June 2025 to launch a national network of reception centres and rehabilitation homes, providing safe spaces and psychosocial support to children who are victims of trafficking by gangs. During the same period, a programme known as PREJEUNES was set up by the public authorities, with the support of UNICEF, to provide community-based assistance through “Youth Centres” established in the capital.

Pillar IV - Strengthening vocational training initiatives and young people’s future employment opportunities to combat poverty and marginalization

Poverty in Haiti pushes many people, including children, to seek sources of income from a very young age, often through illegal activities carried out by gangs, in order to meet their own needs or those of their families.

In this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local service providers have implemented small-scale vocational training initiatives, offering short-term income and skills development. However, the impact of these initiatives remains limited, due to the scale of the employment crisis and the reluctance of many businesses to hire people from marginalized areas, who are stigmatized as posing risks to companies’ operations or reputation.

It is therefore essential to design and implement vocational training programmes that are closely tailored to the specific needs and realities of local economies, in order to expand young people’s prospects for decent employment when they enter the labor market and thereby reduce their vulnerability to exclusion and exploitation.

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Pillar V - Reducing gangs' capacity through strengthened law enforcement measures

As of 31 January 2026, operations conducted by the security forces have slowed the territorial expansion of gangs in the capital but have not succeeded in regaining control of areas under their control or dismantling their criminal governance. Support for these operations therefore remains a priority, while ensuring compliance with international human rights law and standards, in particular with regard to the treatment of children who are victims of trafficking by gangs. In this respect, operations must be conducted in accordance with the "Protocol on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered during Security Operations on National Territory", signed in 2023 between the Government and the United Nations[5].

In some circumstances, children accused of association with gangs have been victims of extreme violence, including summary executions carried out by law enforcement and killings perpetrated by so-called self-defence groups. Respect for human rights by law enforcement is both a legal obligation of the State and a key factor in strengthening community trust. The deployment of the recently established Gang Suppression Force (GSF), tasked with conducting anti-gang operations, must also ensure that the rights of the child are fully respected and protected in the planning and conduct of its operations, in accordance with international human rights law and United Nations Security Council resolution 2793 (2025).

To the extent that access to and possession of firearms and ammunition strengthen the control exercised by gangs over the population, including children[6], the authorities' efforts to combat illicit arms flows must continue, notably through strengthening the capacities of customs services and specialized police units, and by pursuing accountability for high-level individuals involved in trafficking networks. In addition, the national authorities should advance the National Strategy on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Community Violence Reduction (DDR-CVR), adopted in 2021, in particular its provisions on voluntary disarmament. At the same time, the international community should ensure the strict implementation of the United Nations arms embargo on Haiti.

[5] For more details, see the Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Haiti (under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour) on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered during Security Operations on National Territory.
[6] See United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (March 28, 2025), "Human Rights Situation in Haiti," A/HRC/58/76, available at https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/55/76

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Pillar VI - Prioritizing rehabilitation and reintegration measures for children over punitive measures

The "Protocol on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered during Security Operations on National Territory", in line with international human rights law standards, considers children associated with gangs first and foremost as victims. It prioritizes family- or community-based solutions, accompanied by rehabilitation and reintegration measures, rather than detention. Despite this, the Haitian judicial authorities appear to place greater emphasis on the principle of the criminal responsibility of minors than on the principle of non-punishment applicable to victims of trafficking.

In addition, cases involving children associated with gangs are often handled by a dysfunctional juvenile justice system[7]. In Port-au-Prince, these children are detained alongside other children in conflict with the law and adults at the Centre for the Reintegration of Children in Conflict with the Law (CERMICOL), the only operational detention facility in the capital[8]. Many children remain there in prolonged pretrial detention under inhuman conditions and have little or no access to educational or rehabilitation services[9].

In the face of these challenges, the HRS supports the judicial authorities in ensuring fair and effective judicial proceedings for children formerly associated with gangs, while advocating for human rights-based responses. This includes promoting rehabilitation and reintegration measures in place of criminal prosecution, as well as calling for the release of children who are arbitrarily and unlawfully detained.

Pillar VII - Strengthening the fight against impunity for the crime of child trafficking and access to effective remedies

Despite the existence of a legal and institutional framework to combat child trafficking, in line with applicable international norms and standards, accountability in practice remains extremely weak due to limited investigative and prosecutorial capacities.

In light, among others, of these structural shortcomings, as well as other deficiencies that seriously affect the functioning of the justice system, the Haitian Government approved by decree, in April 2025, the creation of two specialized judicial units, developed with the support of the HRS and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). One of these units is responsible for investigating serious human rights violations - including child trafficking - and prosecuting those responsible, while the other focuses on complex financial crimes. Alongside the development of specialized capacities within the police and the strengthening of cooperation with foreign jurisdictions, including through the use of extraterritorial jurisdiction, these units will play a decisive role in ensuring criminal accountability for the crime of child trafficking.

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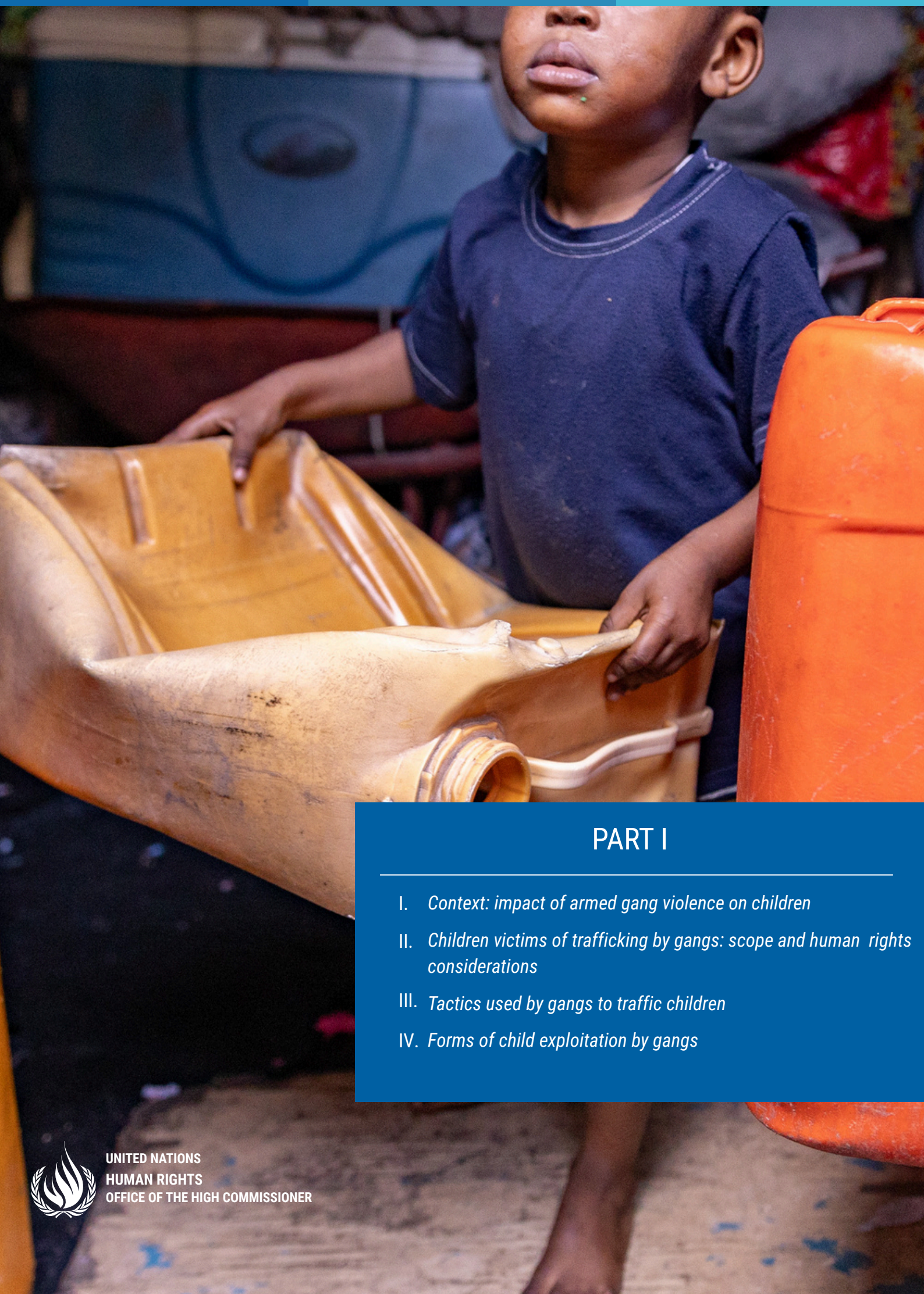
[7] See United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (28 March 2024). "Situation of human rights in Haiti", A/HRC/55/76, available at https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/55/76.
[8] Ibidem
[9] Ibidem



PART I

UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

I. CONTEXT: IMPACT OF ARMED GANG VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

In recent years, Haiti has experienced an escalation in gang-related violence, both in terms of intensity and territorial reach. Since the beginning of 2023, violence that was previously concentrated in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince has gradually spread to the rural areas surrounding the capital, as well as to the Artibonite and Centre departments[10].

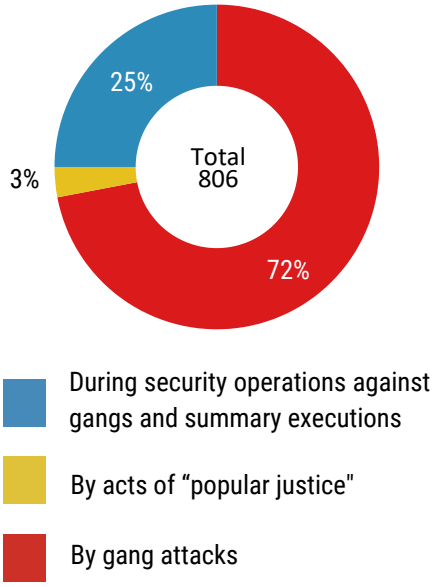
Children have not been spared by this violence. According to the HRS, between January 2022 and December 2025, of the 26,188 people killed or injured, at least 806 were children (536 boys and 270 girls)[11].

These victims (killed and injured) result from three dynamics: attacks carried out by gangs (72 per cent of child victims), security operations against gangs, including summary executions (25 per cent), and acts of "popular justice" perpetrated by so-called self-defence groups, as well as by members of the population (three per cent).

These data are, however, far from exhaustive[12]. For example, according to local sources, children associated with gangs who are killed during clashes between rival groups or in the course of police operations often remain unidentified[13].

During this period, at least 220 children were also kidnapped for ransom by gangs[14]. The victims were abducted from their homes, on their way to or from school, while walking, or while going about other daily activities.

Breakdown of child victims (killings and injuries) by perpetrator and/or context 2022–2025



In addition, numerous girls and, to a lesser extent, boys have been victims of rape, often committed by multiple perpetrators, during gang attacks in neighbourhoods controlled by rival groups or in other areas targeted for expansion. Sexual violence has also been perpetrated against girls while travelling on public transport, during captivity following kidnappings, and in makeshift sites hosting displaced persons.

Gang violence has also severely undermined children's ability to enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights. Violations include, in particular, restricted access to education and health care following the closure of facilities, as well as deteriorating access to drinking water, sanitation, nutrition, and food security, notably as a result of forced displacement and loss of livelihoods. In 2025, 1,606 schools were closed across Haiti, affecting 243,000 students[15], while only 5 per cent of the 93 health facilities assessed in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince were fully operational[16].

[10] OHCHR and BINUH (July 2025), "Intensification of criminal violence in Lower Artibonite, the Centre Department and areas east of the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince", available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025-july-artibonite-and-mirebalais-EN.pdf

[11] According to the HRS, 18,187 people were killed (15,511 men, 2,163 women, 345 boys and 168 girls), and 8,001 were injured (6,151 men, 1,557 women, 191 boys and 102 girls).

[12] For other violations, see United Nations Security Council (17 June 2025), "Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General", available at https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4084012?ln=fr&v=pdf

[13] Their bodies are often mutilated or disfigured by the power of the firearms used, or burned either by the police or by gangs in order to prevent their identification, or for so-called "mystical" purposes linked to alleged religious practices.

[14] Of the 5,454 documented kidnappings, 3,472 victims were men, 1,762 were women, 116 were boys and 104 were girls.

[15] Sixty per cent of these schools are located in the West department. For further details, see UNICEF (31 July 2025), "Haiti Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6", available at https://www.unicef.org/media/172991/file/Haiti%20Humanitarian-SitRep-Mid-Year-2025.pdf

[16] United Nations Security Council (27 June 2025), "S/2025/418", available at https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/418

II. CHILDREN AS VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING BY GANGS: SCOPE AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

Among the various violations committed against children in Haiti in recent years, recruitment by gangs has been frequently reported by national and international organizations and the media[17]. Nevertheless, this phenomenon has not been sufficiently addressed through the lens of trafficking, which requires the implementation of specific prevention and protection measures.

2.1. Definition of trafficking in persons

Under its international commitments, Haiti has legal obligations to protect children from violence[18] – including abuse and exploitation by criminal gangs – and to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration. These obligations apply regardless of whether a child has been formally identified as a victim of trafficking[19].

The main international instrument establishing both the definition of trafficking and the obligations of States is the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

In accordance with this Protocol, children cannot legally consent to their own exploitation; any involvement is therefore presumed to be coercive, regardless of any apparent consent. It should further be noted that the victim's consent in no way affects the criminal liability of the perpetrator of the offence[20].

However, analysing the facts surrounding trafficking can provide valuable insights into its root causes and help inform the design of targeted interventions.

The crime of trafficking comprises three essential and interrelated elements:

1. **The act:** recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or receiving the person.
2. **The means:** using threat, force, other forms of coercion, a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to facilitate the act. Unlike in the case of adults, there is no legal requirement to show "means" in the case of children.
3. **The purpose of exploitation:** forced criminality, the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Source: UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (also known as the "Palermo Protocol")

[17] See, for example, Le Nouvelliste (5 September 2023), "Street children, fertile ground for recruitment by armed gangs", available at https://lenouvelliste.com/article/244288/les-enfants-des-rues-un-terrain-fertile-de-recrutement-pour-les-gangs-armes; Ayibopost (18 June 2024), "My life as a child member of 5 Segonn in Village de Dieu", available at https://ayibopost.com/my-life-as-a-child-member-of-5-segonn-in-village-de-dieu/; and Amnesty International (12 February 2025), "Gangs' assault on childhood in Haiti", available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/haiti-children-suffering-gang-recruitment-attacks-sexual-violence/

[18] See United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1 September 2025), "The rights of the child and human rights violations against children in armed conflicts", A/HRC/60/51, para. 60: "In areas where organized criminal gangs or paramilitary groups operate, children are exposed to extreme violence, including killings, mutilations, exploitation and abuse. States have an obligation to adopt comprehensive strategies based on the rights of the child in order to prevent and respond to such violations" (arts. 19 and 34–38), available at https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/60/51

[19] Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 19 and 34 to 39

[20] OHCHR (2014). "Fact Sheet No. 36: Human Rights and Human Trafficking", available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-no-36-human-rights-and-human-trafficking, page 35

2.2. Scale of child trafficking by gangs

In 2024, more than 500,000 children were living in areas under gang control[21]. By December 2025, gang violence had forced over 1,400,000 people to seek refuge in overcrowded makeshift sites or with host families[22]. More than 53 percent of these people were children[23].

All of these circumstances expose children to an increased risk of human rights violations, including trafficking[24].

Nevertheless, there are currently no comprehensive data on the number of children who are victims of trafficking by gangs. The limited information available relates only to the number of children recruited by gangs, which represents only a fraction of the children who are actually victims of trafficking. By way of example, according to the annual report of the United Nations Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, at least 302 children (256 boys and 46 girls) were recruited and exploited by gangs[25].

Despite this lack of quantitative data, qualitative information collected from victims' families, State authorities, local service providers, United Nations agencies and other international organizations confirms an alarming increase in the number of children who are victims of trafficking by gangs[26].

2.3. Perpetrators of child trafficking

On the basis of testimonies, videos of gang attacks and propaganda content disseminated by gang members on social media, the HRS established that the 26 gangs[27] operating in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, as well as in significant areas of the Artibonite and Centre departments, are involved, to varying degrees, in child trafficking, in particular for the purposes of recruitment and exploitation in criminal activities.

Seven gang leaders are subject to sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council under resolution 2653 (2022)[28], for acts constituting a threat to the peace and security of the country, including their involvement in criminal activities and human rights abuses[29]. Three of these individuals — Luckson Élan, Wilson Joseph and Innocent Vitelhomme, the respective leaders of the Gran Grif, 400 Mawozo and Kraze Baryè gangs — are listed for the recruitment of children[30]. The Viv Ansanm coalition is also listed for the recruitment and use of children in the 2024 annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for the year 2024[31].

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[21] OHCHR (June 2024), "Haiti: A growing number of displaced persons are in desperate need of protection and priority assistance, UN experts urge," available at https://www.ohchr.org/fr/press-releases/2024/06/haiti-soaring-number-displaced-desperately-need-protection-and-aid-priority

[22] International Organization for Migration (IOM) (September 2025), "Haiti – Report on the displacement situation in Haiti – Round 11", available at https://dtm.iom.int/fr/node/57236

[23] Ibidem

[24] United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (25 September 2023), "Situation of human rights in Haiti", available at https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/54/79

[25] Report of the Secretary-General (17 June 2025), "Children and armed conflict", A/79/878–S/2025/247, available at https://docs.un.org/en/s/2025/247

[26] These findings are supported by several elements, including reports from local service providers interviewed by the HRS, who indicated that in recent months there has been an increase in the number of families seeking assistance to help their children disengage from gangs. In addition, during recent human rights awareness sessions organized by the HRS, police officers involved in anti-gang operations reported an alarming increase in the presence of children manning illegal checkpoints in the streets of the capital.

[27] The HRS collected and corroborated information, including digital evidence, that established a link between these gangs and child trafficking.

[28] This resolution was subsequently renewed by resolutions 2700 (2023), 2752 (2024) and 2794 (2025).

[29] These seven individuals are Jimmy Chérizier, leader of the Delmas 6 gang; Jonhson André, leader of the Village de Dieu gang; Renel Destina, leader of the Grand Ravine gang; Wilson Joseph, leader of the 400 Mawozo gang; Vitelhomme Innocent, leader of the Kraze Baryè gang; Luckson Élan, leader of the Gran Grif gang; and Kempes Sanon, leader of the Bel Air gang.

[30] United Nations sanctions targeting Luckson Élan, Wilson Joseph and Innocent Vitelhomme: https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/luckson-elan; https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/wilson-joseph; and https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/vitelhomme-innocent

[31] United Nations Security Council (June 2025), "Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General", A/79/878–S/2025/247, available at https://docs.un.org/en/s/2025/247

Prophane Victor, a former Haitian parliamentarian, and Dimitri Hérard, former head of the General Security Unit of the National Palace (GSUNP) under the presidency of Jovenel Moïse, are also on the United Nations sanctions list. Prophane Victor is suspected of involvement in arms trafficking and of having resorted to violence, including through the creation and support of the Gran Grif gang. Dimitri Hérard is suspected of having played a central role in supporting criminal networks and gangs in Haiti, in particular by helping the Ti Bwa gang strengthen its operational capacities. The gangs 400 Mawozo, Belekou, Brooklyn, Gran Grif, Grand Ravine and its 103 Zombies cell, Ti Bwa, and Village de Dieu are highly involved in child trafficking[32].

Beyond the United Nations framework, unilateral sanctions have also been imposed by Canada, the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom and the United States against these individuals, as well as against 37 other actors involved in activities undermining peace and security in Haiti, including gang violence, corruption and other serious crimes. Some of these sanctions regimes explicitly cite the recruitment of children among the grounds for listing five gang leaders[33].

Name of gangs	Areas controlled by gangs
103 Zombies	Gressier (West dept.)
400 Mawozo	Croix-des-Bouquets and Ganthier (West dept.) and Mirebalais (Centre dept.)
Base Pilate	Port-au-Prince (West dept.)
Belekou	Cité Soleil (West dept.)
Boston	Cité Soleil (West dept.)
Brooklyn	Cité Soleil (West dept.)
Canaan	Croix-des-Bouquets (West dept.) and Saut d'Eau (Centre dept.)
Chen Mechan	Croix-des-Bouquets (West dept.)
Delmas	Delmas (West dept.)
Délugé	Montrouis (Artibonite dept.)
Descahos	Gonaïves (Artibonite dept.)
Gran Grif	Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite (Artibonite dept.)
Grand Ravine	Port-au-Princee (West dept.)
Kokorat Sans Ras	L'Estère (Artibonite dept.)
Les Argentins	Port-au-Prince (West dept.)
La Saline	Port-au-Prince (West dept.)
Pierre VI	Cité Soleil (West dept.)
Raboteau	Gonaïves (Artibonite dept.)
Simon Pelé	Cité Soleil (West dept.)
Terre Noire	Cité Soleil (West dept.)
Ti Bwa	Port-au-Prince (West dept.) and Carrefour (West dept.)
Tokyo	Delmas (West dept.)
Village de Dieu	Port-au-Prince (West dept.)
Wharf Jérémie	Port-au-Prince (West dept.)
Krache Difè	Port-au-Prince (West dept.)
Kraze Baryè	Pétion Ville (West dept.) and Tabarre (West dept.)

[32] United Nations Security Council concerning Luckson Élan: https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/luckson-elan, and United Nations Security Council (30 September 2024), "Letter dated 30 September 2024 from the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2653 (2022) addressed to the President of the Security Council", S/2024/704, para. 128, available at https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4064700?ln=en&v=pdf

[33] These individuals are Christ-Roi Chéry, Luckson Élan, Wilson Joseph, Jeff Larosse and Innocent Vitelhomme.

III. TACTICS USED BY GANGS TO TRAFFIC CHILDREN

In marginalized areas under gang control, where State authorities and public services have either withdrawn because of insecurity or were never effectively present, large segments of the population, including children, are threatened or coerced into accepting gangs as "social regulators". These gangs establish and enforce illegal rules governing behaviour, movement and economic activities, and often control access to services, using violence to ensure compliance with those rules.

The has HRS documented various tactics used by gangs in child trafficking:

(i) the use of violence and threats against children and their families;

(ii) the provision of in-kind benefits or cash payments, as well as drugs; and

(iii) the creation of a sense of belonging and the granting of "social status".

3.1. Use of threats and violence against children and their families

The recruitment of children by gangs has evolved in line with their operational needs. According to information collected by the HRS, recruitment appears to increase immediately following periods marked by clashes between rival gangs or between gangs and security forces. These violent confrontations result in significant losses among gang members[34]. In response, gangs resort to violence, threats and coercion in order to rapidly replenish their ranks and maintain their operational capacities. For example, in some neighbourhoods, gangs have destroyed the homes of families who refused to allow their children to be recruited.

Gangs also resort to violence against children and their families who attempt to disengage from them. Some children have been severely beaten or shot in the hands or feet, while others have been killed in public places. The fear of such retaliation often keeps children trapped within the gang.

Service providers have also observed that, when children manage to leave a gang, their families are often subjected to increased surveillance and, in some cases, direct threats aimed at forcing the children to rejoin the gang. Out of fear of reprisals and in the absence of relocation options outside areas under gang control, families rarely report such incidents to the police or to service providers.

***Interview of a former gang element, Joseph, 16 years old**

"I grew up in a poor neighbourhood where gangs controlled everything. I saw armed men in the streets all the time. Some were well-dressed, had nice cars, and were surrounded by women. They were the ones who made the rules in our neighbourhood. For us children, it was normal. We didn't have many opportunities to play sports or have fun, and there really wasn't any hope for the future.

One day, towards the end of August 2024, I was hanging out with a friend and he told me that he was part of a gang. He talked to me about all the positive things the gang gave him, like money and the feeling of being important. He told me I should join them too. I hesitated because I knew it was dangerous, but I decided to give it a try.

Shortly after I joined, a gang member gave me a radio and asked me to monitor the police and inform the gang of their movements. Then the gang leader gave me a firearm. There were rumours of a major police operation, and I was told that I would have to fight the police. I was afraid, because I did not want to be killed. I told the gang leader that I wanted to go home. He became very angry and struck me with the weapon. He hit me repeatedly until he broke my hand. He told me that if I tried to leave, he would kill me.

Even though I was very afraid of the gang, I managed to escape shortly afterwards. Someone in my community told me about an organization that could help me get medical care and support. I contacted them in September 2024 and, since then, they have been helping me through psychosocial counselling and support to cope with everything I went through".

Source: Service provider

[34] Limited access on the ground and to relevant services, owing to security constraints, has in many cases hindered the HRS's ability to determine the age of gang members killed during clashes with the police. This constraint makes it particularly difficult to distinguish between older adolescents and young adults, thereby affecting the accuracy of the related figures.

The use of threats against girls is primarily aimed at forcing them into sexual relationships with gang members, rather than recruiting them to participate in criminal activities, as is more commonly the case for boys. As documented by the HRS, during these forced relationships — which in some cases can last for several months — girls are subjected to sexual violence. Refusal of these relationships often results in violent reprisals, including rape, homicide, and arson targeting the homes of the girls and their families.

In order to protect their daughters from such practices, some families try to move them to safer areas of the capital or to other regions of the country. However, this requires economic resources, which many families do not have. It should be noted that, among families with no viable alternatives, some have encouraged their daughters to maintain "romantic relationships" with specific gang members, as a perceived protective strategy[35].

3.2. Transactional relationships: from in-kind benefits to financial incentives

In marginalized areas, the absence of State services and viable or stable income opportunities leads some members of the population, including children, to join gangs in order to provide for their families[36]. In these neighbourhoods, gangs often dominate the local economy and present themselves as the only available source of income, even though it is based on illegal activities.

However, the mere presence of gangs in a marginalized neighbourhood does not automatically lead children to show interest in joining them; this interest largely depends on the gang's ability to provide material support and "protection." While many gangs in Port-au-Prince have the resources to do so, others are significantly less wealthy and influential. In these latter contexts, despite the hardships families may face, parents often oppose their children joining them.

3.2.1. Meeting basic needs

As part of their tactic to exploit children and strengthen their capacities, some gangs, such as Grand Ravine, Ti Bois and Village de Dieu, have established well-organized systems that claim to "take care of" street children or those whose families are unable to meet their needs. According to information collected by the HRS, these gangs provide meals through canteens, operating alongside official school canteens[37]. These distributions take place in community spaces and specifically target children, women, and the elderly. Some of the food distributed, as well as other goods such as household items, come from trucks hijacked while passing through or near neighbourhoods under gang control.

Children, particularly those living on the streets or without family networks, may also be housed by gangs, often in shared dwellings, usually abandoned by owners who fled their neighbourhoods to escape violence. In some cases, a child may be assigned individual accommodation. They also receive clothing and are encouraged to maintain a "neat and clean appearance." Local sources interviewed indicated that for many children meeting their basic needs contributes to a sense of protection that goes beyond mere physical safety[38].

3.2.2 Distribution of money, coveted goods, and drugs

Beyond meeting immediate and basic needs, gangs with significant material resources are perceived by residents as genuine "social investors." Local interlocutors explained to the HRS that these gangs are sometimes the only ones providing cash assistance and paid "jobs" in a context marked by the absence of social protection systems and limited economic opportunities. For example, the Grand Ravine and Village de Dieu gangs — considered two of the most powerful and well-resourced gangs in Haiti, according to local media[39] and videos they themselves have posted on social media to display their material wealth — periodically distribute coveted goods that are out of reach for the majority of families living in

[35] For more information, see Section IV – Forms of child exploitation by gangs – 4.3 Girls exploited by gangs: from recruitment to sexual exploitation and sexual slavery, page 21.
[36] According to the World Bank, in 2024, 36 percent of Haitians were living in extreme poverty (with less than USD 2.15 per day), a situation which, combined with other economic indicators, makes Haiti the poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean. World Bank (28 April 2025), "The World Bank in Haiti: Overview", available at https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/haiti
[37] For more information, see Part II of this report.
[38] See Section III – Tactics used by gangs in child trafficking – 3.3. Perceived social status and protection, page 17.
[39] Ayibopost (15 April 2024), "Ongoing construction in Village de Dieu: Viv Ansanm destroys the lower part of the city", available at https://ayibopost.com/chantier-en-cours-au-village-de-dieu-viv-ansanm-detruit-le-bas-de-la-ville/

poverty. Among these goods are motorcycles, phones, electronic devices, and branded shoes. As with food supplies, many of these items come from hijacked cargo trucks. These distributions often serve as the first point of contact between many children and the gangs.

Children are also drawn to these gangs by the promise of regular payment. Depending on the nature of the tasks assigned, payments range approximately from USD 100 to 300 for activities such as guarding kidnapped persons, gathering information, ransacking homes, or monitoring police movements. According to local sources, these payments are generally made twice a month. Higher payments, reaching up to USD 700, are reportedly granted for participation in "major missions," such as carrying out kidnappings, hijacking vehicles, or engaging in armed clashes with rival gangs.

Interview with Pierre, a child formerly associated with a gang, recruited at the age of 10 while living on the streets.

"I was 10 and I was living with my aunt. She did not have money to send me to school. I chose to stay on the street to beg. Members of the neighbourhood gang, including the 'leader', would come to see me. They gave me cigarettes and leftover cocaine. I became heavily addicted. After using cocaine, I no longer behaved like a normal person. I felt like I was in another world and felt ready to kill anyone.

The gang was made up only of young men and a few women. They always had weapons and were constantly using cocaine as well. I grew closer to the gang. I became a 'toutè' for the gang. I watched the police and informed the gang of their movements. I had a radio that helped me do my job."

Source: HRS

Conversely, gangs with more limited resources and a restricted capacity to offer attractive benefits, such as those operating in Brooklyn (Cité Soleil), tend to attract fewer children. In these specific contexts, some families have even gone so far as to plead with gang leaders to refrain from recruiting their children, only to be told that the child "has made their own choice" and that the parents "no longer have control over them".

The distribution of drugs is another tactic used by gangs to recruit children. Although the scale of this practice could not be assessed by the HRS, some service providers and former gang members interviewed confirmed that it is common for gangs to recruit vulnerable children by providing them with small amounts of marijuana or cocaine, deliberately trapping them in a cycle of addiction.

In this regard, some children associated with gangs have openly admitted to local sources that they use drugs to "increase their strength" and to lessen their fear during armed clashes and other criminal activities[40].

3.3. Perceived social status and protection through affiliation with gangs

According to Haitian psychosocial counsellors experienced in supporting children, those affected by violence are particularly likely to experience a deep sense of abandonment and lack of belonging. As a result, they are drawn to harmful coping mechanisms, such as associating with gangs, which "offer" them a sense of order, protection, and social status otherwise absent from their lives, in contrast to the chaos and fear prevailing in many disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince. At first glance, gangs may "offer" a sense of family and camaraderie, where members look out for one another. One counsellor interviewed by the HRS also indicated that some children believe that carrying firearms would protect them from the pervasive violence around them. Alarmingly, some of the children who expressed such perceptions were only six years old.

[40] The HRS has identified the gangs to which these children are affiliated but has refrained from disclosing their names in this report in order to protect them against potential reprisals.

These perceptions are further reinforced by social media. Photos and videos shared on online platforms such as TikTok and YouTube portray gang life as glamorous and appealing, featuring large parties, expensive clothing and jewelery, bundles of cash and, frequently, the presence of women. These images act as powerful incentives for children to join gangs in pursuit of similar status, material benefits and a sense of belonging.

Among many young people in Haiti, the rap videos of the Village de Dieu gang leader, Johnson André, also known as "IZO", enjoy notable popularity. In April 2023, he received a YouTube "Creator Award" for surpassing 100,000 subscribers on his channel. Although his official YouTube account was subsequently removed following repeated reports of his involvement in human rights violations, a new channel entitled "UV" (an acronym for "Unité Village de Die", the gang unit known for its clashes with the police) was created and continues to broadcast videos portraying the lifestyle of gang members and glorifying their criminal activities[41]. By December 2025, videos posted on this account had accumulated more than 1.7 million views. As of the same date, videos produced by the Village de Dieu gang promoting its abuses remained accessible on TikTok.

Music video posted by the Village de Dieu gang on YouTube, showing easy access to sought-after goods by its members.

Gang leaders — including Jimmy Chérizier of the Delmas 6 gang, Joseph Wilson of the 400 Mawozo gang and Luckson Élan of the Gran Grif gang — frequently use WhatsApp to disseminate videos in which they portray themselves as providers of "social services" to marginalized populations, while at the same time issuing threats against State actors, the international community, journalists and anyone who publicly denounces their criminal activities.

[41] YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@uvdmedia

IV. FORMS OF CHILD EXPLOITATION BY GANGS

The HRS has documented multiple forms of child trafficking by gangs in Haiti for exploitation purposes, which vary according to the child's age and gender, as well as the gangs' internal needs and structure. These forms include performing support tasks for the gangs, such as running errands or collecting extortion payments; ransacking and destroying property; and being forced to participate in criminal acts, including violent clashes with other gangs or the police, and killings.

Regarding girls and young women, they are generally subjected to sexual exploitation and sexual slavery and are most often forced to perform domestic tasks. In some cases, they are also compelled to participate in criminal activities such as gathering information, monitoring areas, or using firearms during gang operations.

4.1. Recruitment for the purpose of exploitation in "minor" tasks or services

The exploitation of some children by gangs is limited to performing so-called minor tasks or services, such as running errands or delivering messages or goods on behalf of gang members. Others may be involved in activities on the fringes of criminality, generally without the use of violence, including acting as lookouts or monitoring police movements — a role known in Creole as *toutè*.

Many children engage in these tasks on an occasional basis to generate additional income, either for their own needs or to support their family[42]. In some cases, the exploitation of children by gangs may stop at this stage, without leading to increased involvement in criminal activities or deeper integration into the gang's structure.

4.2. Recruitment for the purpose of exploitation in criminal activities

However, over time, some children become increasingly involved and are drawn into progressively violent and criminal activities, which firmly embed them within the gangs and make leaving much more difficult. These children — particularly those who express a desire to become "full" members of a gang while simultaneously showing hesitation or reluctance to commit violent acts — are often subjected to "initiation rites".

4.2.1. *"Initiation rites"*

The HRS has documented that several gangs — including the 400 Mawozo, Belekou, Canaan, Grand Ravine, Kraze Baryè, La Saline, and Village de Dieu — have established "initiation rites" to mark the admission of new members into their ranks. Service providers have confirmed that, during this initiation phase, children who show reluctance to fully commit are forced to carry out acts of violence, such as killings — sometimes even of a family member — to demonstrate their loyalty and secure their position within the gang. Such acts isolate the children from their families and communities, effectively compelling them to remain in the gang. In other cases, the initiation phase involves forcing children to take part in violent clashes with rival gangs, during which they are ordered to kill "enemies." Local sources have reported that the intense desire of some children to be accepted by the gang drives them to kill without remorse or to engage in armed confrontations.

Rape, often collective, is also used as a tactic by some gangs[43] against newly recruited boys and girls. In some cases, these rapes are motivated by gang members' purportedly mystical beliefs, claiming that such practices transfer their power to the children. In other cases, rape is used to prevent new recruits from returning to their families and communities, further trapping them under the gang's control. In a social context where survivors of sexual violence, both men and women, are often stigmatized, once a child has been sexually assaulted by gang members, they are frequently perceived as "tainted" and presumed to have become a gang member.

Once considered fully integrated into the gang, recruits are sometimes subjected to a second "initiation ceremony," intended not only to "immunize" them against attacks by enemies but also to instill unwavering loyalty. As described

[42] These activities constitute a form of child trafficking whenever a child is recruited, used, or controlled by a gang for exploitation purposes, including performing illicit or dangerous tasks, with the child's consent, the existence of payment, or any informal arrangement being legally irrelevant in this context. For more information on the definition and legal framework of child trafficking, see Section 2.1 ("Definition of Trafficking in Persons"), page 12.

[43] The HRS has identified some of these gangs but has refrained from disclosing their names in order to prevent any risk of reprisals.

by children in contact with service providers, these practices — known as *rit pwoteksyon yo* and said to confer invulnerability — draw on elements of Vodou that have been appropriated and distorted by the gangs, as documented in several historical and anthropological research studies[44].

These manipulations of religious beliefs often involve the use of so-called protective potions, prayers, or tattoos — practices that gang members believe can protect them from gunfire during armed clashes. Other initiation ceremonies involve stripping the "warriors" of their clothes and bathing them in an infusion of various herbs reputed to have mystical powers. Recruits also receive protective talismans, such as bracelets or pieces of clothing, intended to shield them from bullets and meant to be worn during confrontations.

4.2.2. *Types of exploitation in criminal acts*

After their integration into gangs, children are gradually assigned to different roles based on their age, gender, perceived loyalty and commitment, as well as the gang's needs at a given time. Some eventually occupy "central" roles, becoming deeply integrated into the gang's structure and entrusted with increasingly dangerous criminal activities.

They may be tasked with patrolling certain neighbourhoods, collecting payments from extorted businesses, identifying potential victims of theft or kidnapping, or being stationed at illegal checkpoints set up by gangs along major roadways.

At more advanced levels of involvement, children are often tasked with transporting ammunition and retrieving the bodies or firearms of other gang members killed during armed clashes with rival gangs or law enforcement.

They sometimes actively participate in armed violence, carrying firearms and fighting on the "front lines." Witnesses have also observed children taking part in clashes with the police, including attacks on police stations and the ransacking of buildings[45]. According to local sources, the children often carry firearms "as big as themselves." Boys who return "safe and sound" from these confrontations are, depending on circumstances and the gang's needs , "promoted" within the gang hierarchy and entrusted with leadership roles at the head of sub-units.

Service providers working with children who are gang members or are in contact with gangs have reported that some of these children display a "ruthless and remorseless" attitude toward killing. This behavior is driven by an intense desire for acceptance and the need to secure a place within the gang, although some accounts also indicate that many of these children appear to act under the influence of psychoactive substances.

The story of André, killed at the age of 12.

Considered by older gang members as one of the boldest newly recruited children, André was quickly sent to participate in clashes with the police. During one of these confrontations, he managed to slip inside a police armoured vehicle and throw a Molotov cocktail, an act that caused him serious injuries and nearly cost him his life. Back in the gang's stronghold, André demanded from his leaders a more powerful firearm in exchange for the 9mm pistol he was already carrying. His request was granted, but shortly afterward, he accidentally shot himself in the foot. The gang leader, judging him unfit to handle a heavier weapon, then confiscated it.

Frustrated and humiliated, André left the gang to join a rival group, where he was used for various criminal purposes. His new leader allowed him to settle in one of the abandoned houses located in the gang-controlled area, where he stood guard for the group. During a confrontation between the police and the gang at the end of May 2025, André was on the roof of this house when a bullet struck him in the neck, violently throwing him to the ground.

The next day, another gang member discovered his lifeless body. Before reporting the incident to the gang, he set the body on fire, erasing what remained of André's short and violent life.

Source: Service provider

[44] See, among others, Horelick, L. A. (2010), "The Occurrence and Detection of Gunpowder in Haitian Vodou Charms: The Pakèt Kongo", doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles; and Chelsey L. Kivland (2020), "Street Sovereigns: Young Men and the Makeshift State in Urban Haiti", Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press.
[45] Interviews conducted by the HRS with local sources in June 2023 and February 2025.

4.3. Girls exploited by gangs: from recruitment to sexual exploitation and sexual slavery

Girls recruited or housed by gangs are generally assigned roles reflecting traditional gender stereotypes. However, according to local sources, girls are increasingly exploited by gangs in criminal activities typically assigned to boys, such as ransacking homes and other buildings.

Recruitment for multiple tasks

Testimonies collected by service providers from current or former child gang members have revealed that girls recruited by gangs are often assigned domestic tasks, such as cooking and cleaning.

However, with the evolution of gang violence over the years, as well as the need for belonging or self-protection among some children, some girls — and more broadly women in their early twenties — have begun to take on more "active" roles within gangs. This includes participating in clashes alongside men, as documented by the HRS regarding the 400 Mawozo and Team Asansè gangs. These girls and women carry firearms and have been trained in their use.

Sexual exploitation

Investigative work by the HRS has documented cases in which girls as young as 12 were housed by gangs for the purposes of sexual exploitation and sexual slavery. In areas controlled by these gangs, the girls were often forced or subjected to social pressure to become "konkibins" or "Ti menaj" — sexual "partners" — of gang members. Many families believe it is preferable for a girl to be "attached" to a gang member, who will "protect" her from rape by multiple gang members and provide her with in-kind benefits (food, drinking water, and other material goods).

These practices, which are often not recognized by the victims and their families as a form of sexual violence[46], reflect deeply rooted power imbalances and gender inequalities. They expose women and girls to a significantly higher risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence.

Julia, a survivor of sexual violence

My name is Julia. In 2024, when I was 15 years old, I was forcibly subjected to sexual exploitation by members of two allied gangs; they forced me to have sexual relationships with several of them on at least six occasions. These gangs control the area where I lived and created an atmosphere of fear, frequently committing abuses and threatening violence if their demands were not met. I became pregnant.

I was also exploited by the gangs to gather information that they used for their criminal activities. In late 2024, I was intercepted by a self-defence group. At first, I was afraid, as I had heard stories of residents, including children, being shot or killed with machetes by self-defence groups or angry mobs simply for suspected collaboration with gangs. However, on this occasion, they responded differently. They contacted a community organization, which took care of me and helped me access medical care and other support.

Source: Service provider

The HRS has also documented cases of girls who were exploited by gangs for months or even years and were ultimately killed by their "partners" following acts of jealousy or for allegedly showing disrespect to their "authority." The families of these young girls were also exposed to the risk of reprisals.

Sexual exploitation by gang members also results in stigmatization from family and community, a particularly heavy burden for girls who become pregnant and are subsequently abandoned and without resources.

[46] For more information on the use of sexual violence by gangs, see BINUH and OHCHR (October 2022), "Sexual violence in Port-au-Prince: A weapon used by gangs to spread fear", available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/20221014-Report-on-Sexual-Violence-haiti-en.pdf

PART II

INTEGRATED RESPONSES TO CHILD TRAFFICKING BY GANGS

V. Social and economic responses

VI. Law enforcement operations and justice measures

UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

INTEGRATED RESPONSES TO CHILD TRAFFICKING BY GANGS

Under international law, States have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent human trafficking, investigate incidents, and prosecute perpetrators, as well as to ensure assistance and protection for trafficking victims[47]. These obligations apply regardless of whether the alleged perpetrators are state or non-state actors.

In Haiti, structural factors — such as poverty, weak institutions, and social exclusion — and contextual circumstances — particularly armed violence — have contributed to creating an environment that increasingly exposes children to the risk of being trafficked by gangs. While most initiatives focus primarily on responding to harm already experienced by children associated with gangs, preventing child trafficking before it occurs must be a priority.

To this end, a comprehensive and integrated approach is essential, combining prevention initiatives aimed at addressing the deep-rooted economic, social, and educational causes of trafficking, with law enforcement actions and human rights-based judicial measures designed to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure effective remedies for victims.

V. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESPONSES

Improving the socio-economic conditions of families — through strengthened social protection, access to quality education, and the promotion of decent employment, alongside vocational training and job placement programs — plays a crucial role in addressing the root causes and mitigating the socio-economic factors of trafficking. It also provides children and adolescents with a safer environment, thereby reducing their vulnerability to trafficking.

5.1. Social protection programs for families

Families play a key role in protecting children from exploitation by gangs. While some families may encourage their children to join gangs[48], many others serve as the first line of protection, often at considerable personal risk. In some cases, mothers have even confronted gang leaders in an effort to reclaim their children. However, such actions can result in violent reprisals from the gangs.

These dynamics highlight the urgent need to implement effective social protection programs that provide adequate support to families, particularly female-headed households, in order to reduce the economic precariousness that places their children in situations where they become easy targets for gangs.

Although social protection programs exist in Haiti, some studies indicate that they cover only about six percent of the population and rely heavily on donor-funded initiatives[49]. In addition, according to the HRS, the majority of these programs do not address the specific needs of marginalized families whose children are at risk of trafficking by gangs, leaving them largely unprotected.

For example, the 2020 National Policy for Social Protection and Promotion (NPSPP) and its action plan[50], overseen by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL), do not appear to have anticipated the rapid deterioration of the social and security situation linked to gang violence in the capital. As a result, one of the main state-run social assistance programs, *Klere Chimen*[51], is implemented only in the Grand'Anse and South departments[52]. According to experts from national institutions working on these programs, scaling them up, strengthening institutional capacity, adapting them to urban contexts, and expanding their geographical coverage could significantly reduce children's exposure to trafficking by gangs.

[47] See the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking" (E/2002/68/Add.1), Principle 2.

[48] For more details, see Section III – Tactics used by gangs in child trafficking – 3.1 – Use of threats and violence against children and their families, pages 15 and 16.

[49] Chazaly, C. and Aucoin Delloue, C. (2025), "How social protection can better meet the needs of the most vulnerable in Haiti: the case of internally displaced persons", Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) Facility, DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom

[50] Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL) (April 2020), "National Policy for Social Protection and Promotion", page 49.

[51] Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL) (October 2023), "Action Plan of the National Policy for Social Protection and Promotion (APNPSPP), 2023–2025/2026".

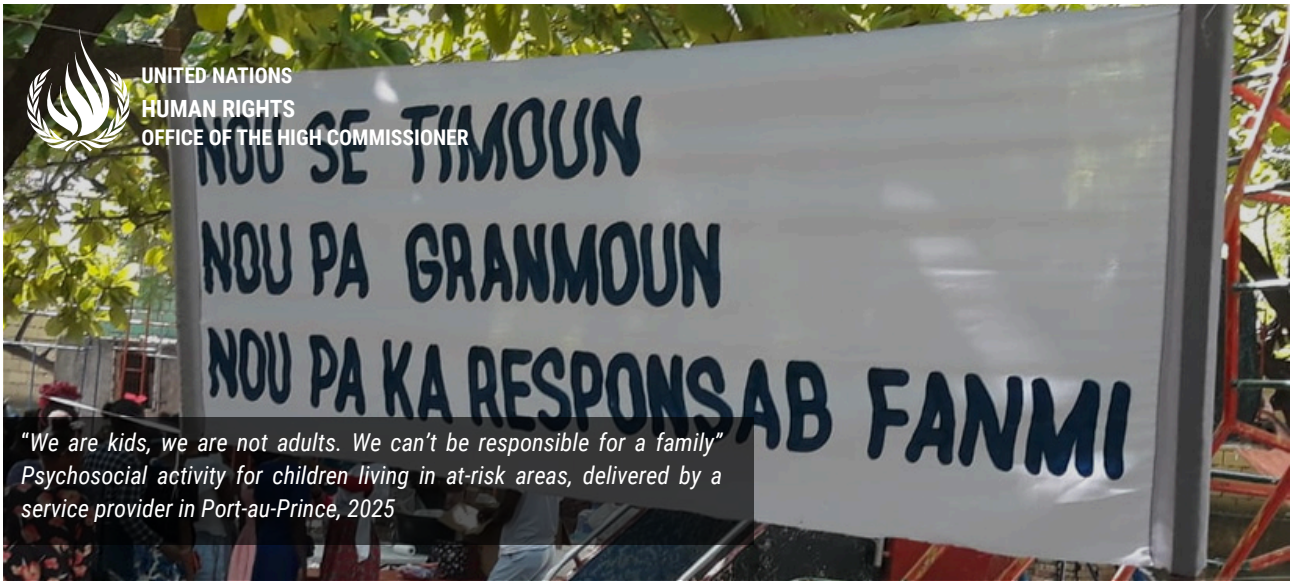
[52] With the support of the World Food Programme (WFP) and funding from the World Bank (WB), the program assists more than 22,000 vulnerable households, prioritizing families with young children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as persons with disabilities.

Similarly, other national social assistance programs, such as the one implemented by the Economic and Social Assistance Fund (ESAF)[53], with external funding provided by international partners like the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), provide in-kind aid and cash transfers via mobile phone applications to particularly vulnerable groups — including female-headed single-parent households, families with malnourished children, persons with disabilities, and displaced households, including those in gang-controlled areas.

According to ministry sources, one of the main obstacles to implementing such social protection programs in marginalized neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince lies in the dysfunction of Haiti's social registry — the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor Information System (MSALIS). Established in 2018, this tool was designed to identify and register the most disadvantaged segments of the population, analyze socio-economic trends, and administer social benefits. However, it lacks the flexibility and adaptability needed to collect data on vulnerability in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince. In particular, the strategies used so far to gather data to identify individuals and families in need rely primarily on door-to-door surveys, which are impractical in gang-controlled areas. Alternative solutions have been identified, including cross-referencing data with ESAF and community service providers who have access to these areas, as well as setting up registration kiosks in safe spaces such as town halls or religious centers. These solutions, however, have not yet been tested.

Another major challenge lies in the absence of financial service providers in gang-controlled areas, while a significant portion of social assistance is delivered through mobile phone money transfers. Recipients face serious difficulties in using the funds they receive, as goods and services in these areas are generally paid for in cash. Without banks to facilitate withdrawals and with only a few small local shops offering cash-out services at high transaction fees, converting digital transfers into usable cash becomes both costly and complex. Furthermore, according to a state service provider interviewed by the HRS, gangs in these neighbourhoods control almost all aspects of residents' lives and are often aware of the identity of aid recipients, including when assistance is provided electronically. As a result, recipients are frequently forced to hand over a portion of the aid they receive to the gangs.

Social protection programs are essential both to meet the immediate needs of these families and to strengthen their medium-term resilience. They therefore play a crucial role in reducing the risk of child trafficking. Urgent measures are needed, however, to remove obstacles that hinder their implementation, particularly targeting errors and difficulties related to cash transfer withdrawal services, in order to adequately support families in preventing their children from becoming victims of gang trafficking, while also providing families whose children are already involved in gangs with alternative means of accessing resources and viable pathways to disengage from gang-related activities.



"We are kids, we are not adults. We can't be responsible for a family"
Psychosocial activity for children living in at-risk areas, delivered by a service provider in Port-au-Prince, 2025

[53] The Economic and Social Assistance Fund (ESAF) is under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy and Finance.

5.2. Access to financial services

Social protection programs are primarily designed to provide immediate assistance and meet essential needs, and are generally consumption-focused. However, improving access to financial services — whether through private or community initiatives, or with government support — is essential for achieving medium- and long-term effects, particularly when accompanied by training and mentoring programs.

In this regard, state intervention remains very limited. For example, public banks, such as the National Credit Bank (NCB), have only engaged in small-scale, occasional microcredit activities and tend to target primarily high-income clients. They do not implement comprehensive microfinance programs with the same level of specialization and adaptation to beneficiary needs as those developed by private microfinance institutions, which are generally managed by local or international non-governmental organizations[54].

North department, Haiti
Source: HRS

These non-governmental organizations, operating in marginalized or rural areas, do not limit themselves to providing microcredit: they also support beneficiary families to ensure the effective use of these loans for launching small businesses, notably through training in financial management and entrepreneurship. This approach has proven effective in strengthening household economic empowerment, especially when accompanied by regular follow-up. For example, several microfinance programs[55] or community financial services, such as the "Village Savings and Loans Associations" implemented by the non-governmental organization Fokoze[56], operate with some success in rural areas of Haiti.

While these initiatives could help reduce the incentives for children to join gangs to meet their families' financial needs, they reach only a limited number of beneficiaries, most of whom live in rural areas, and remain heavily dependent on unstable donor funding.

It would therefore be appropriate to adapt these programs to the urban context, with a view to strengthening the empowerment of disadvantaged families in these areas and enhancing their financial autonomy. In other contexts, beneficiaries have not only been able to create income-generating activities to cover their families' essential needs, but also to send their children to school[57], particularly in female-headed households. Available data also show that the impact is greater when women are prioritized to receive and manage these loans[58].

[54] World Bank (WB) (2019), "Financial Capability and Inclusion in Haiti – Results of a Demand-side Survey", available at https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/607661578039258981/pdf/Financial-Capability-and-Inclusion-in-Haiti-Result-of-a-Demand-Side-Survey.pdf

[55] For example, "Haiti's Microfinance Education and MPM Loan Program", focused on women, entrepreneurship, and education in the South department, and "Hope for Haitians – Women's Microloan Program", which operates primarily in rural villages in the North and North-East departments of Haiti, providing training in business management, financial literacy, and mentorship support.

[56] Fonkoze (2023). « Rapport annuel », available at https://fonkoze.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Fonkoze-Family-Annual-Report_2023.pdf. See also: Opportunity International Canada (2024), "Haiti: Pathways to a Better Life Program – Progress Report, Spring 2024", available at https://opportunityinternational.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Haiti-Pathways-to-a-Better-Life-Program-Progress-Report-Spring-2024.pdf

[57] See, for example, Khandker, S. R. and Samad, H. A. (2014), "Microcredit impact on children's education and women empowerment: A review of the Grameen Bank microfinance schemes in Bangladesh", available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286943885_Microcredit_Impact_on_Children's_Education_and_Women_Empowerment_A_Review_Experience_of_Grameen_Bank_Microfinance_Schemes_in_Bangladesh ; and Norwood, C. (2014), "Women's empowerment and microcredit: A case study from rural Ghana", Journal of International Studies & Development, 4(1), 1–2, available at https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4513662/

[58] « Haiti's Microfinance Education and MPM Loan Program, focused on women, entrepreneurship, and education in the South department, and Hope for Haitians – Women's Microloan Program, which operates primarily in rural villages in the North and North-East departments of Haiti, providing training in business management, financial literacy, and mentorship support.

5.3. Schools as protective spaces

Schools are not only places of learning but also spaces of protection, providing children with a safeguard against trafficking and exploitation by gangs. Several service providers have indicated that many children attribute their involvement in gangs to their family's poverty, as well as the difficulties they face "in getting to or staying in school" —rather than to an individual choice.

Although Haiti has an obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to education by ensuring its availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability for all children without discrimination[59], the Haitian public school system has suffered for many years from chronic underfunding and a lack of resources. It is characterized by inadequate and limited infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a lack of appropriate teaching materials. In this context, private schools account for approximately 80 percent of primary schools, forcing families to spend an average of USD 140 per child per year[60]. For many Haitian households living in poverty[61], this expense is simply out of reach.

In addition to these structural difficulties, there is the impact of gang violence: according to the latest available assessment, as of April 2025, this violence has led to the closure of 1,606 schools, mainly located in the West department[62].

The HRS investigation shows that in areas where they seek to expand their control, gangs directly target school infrastructure. In contrast, in areas they already control, such as Cité Soleil, Croix-des-Bouquets, and Martissant, they have adopted a different approach. In these zones, they exert control over the operation of schools by allowing them to open only in exchange for the payment of "taxes," in the same way they do with other service providers and businesses under their influence. According to local sources, schools often cover these payments by diverting part of the assistance provided by humanitarian organizations. In some cases, gangs even determine which schools are allowed to receive this assistance.

In these schools, some children have their school fees covered by gang members in exchange for their involvement in criminal activities. For example, these children — especially boys — attend school in the morning and spend their afternoons or evenings performing tasks for the gangs, such as managing illegal checkpoints. In many cases, this involvement leads to school dropout, particularly to accommodate "gang-related responsibilities".

5.3.1. *Initiatives to keep children at school*

Despite the unstable environment prevailing in areas controlled by gangs, public authorities, with the support of local and international organizations, have sought to maintain programs aimed at encouraging children to attend school and stay off the streets. These initiatives include food distribution, organizing awareness sessions in schools on the risks of gang involvement, providing mental health and psychosocial support, setting up temporary learning spaces, and enrolling displaced children in new schools.

During the 2024–2025 school year, the school feeding program implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) provided meals to more than 20,000 children[63] in certain areas controlled by gangs, where humanitarian interventions are more complex and less reliable in terms of logistics and security. These interventions were carried out using nutritious food products specifically designed to withstand the transport and storage challenges typical of contexts affected by armed violence. Between February and June 2025, the WFP also distributed daily hot meals in at least 20 makeshift schools, set up on sites for internally displaced persons in downtown Port-au-Prince, where children are also exposed to the risk of trafficking.

Nonetheless, these interventions are not immune to gang interference. For example, in Martissant, where no activity can operate or be implemented without the approval of gangs, the HRS was informed that the gang leader personally decided which schools were allowed to run a feeding program, in exchange for a portion of the delivered food. As a result, the WFP temporarily suspended its program in this area between February and July 2025.

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[59] E/C.12/1999/10, 8 December 1999. See further information on the international legal framework in Annex II.

[60] World Bank (November 2023), "School attendance and interest in learning are priorities for many young Haitians," available at https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/news/feature/2023/11/15/school-attendance-and-a-keen-interest-in-learning-are-priorities-for-many-young-haitians

[61] The average income of low-income or poor households in Haiti is less than 2.15 U.S. dollars per day, a threshold corresponding to extreme poverty according to the World Bank. World Bank Group (April 2023). "Poverty and Equity Brief. Latin America and the Caribbean – Haiti," available at https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global_POVEQ_HTI.pdf

[62] UNICEF (31 July 2025), "Haiti Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6," available at https://www.unicef.org/documents/haiti-humanitarian-situation-report-no-6-mid-year-2025

[63] In certain areas of Carrefour, Kenscoff, and Port-au-Prince where the security situation allowed service providers to operate under relatively normal conditions, the World Food Programme (WFP) also supported school feeding programs, benefiting more than 7,000 students.

International partners also play a key role in rehabilitating schools that have been ransacked or damaged by violence, most of which are located in areas under gang control. For example, UNICEF, through a local implementing partner, has supported the reconstruction or rehabilitation of ten schools in the communes of Delmas, Pétion-Ville, Port-au-Prince, and Tabarre. Three of these schools are located in Port-au-Prince neighborhoods controlled by gangs. In addition, UNICEF distributes school kits and supports cash transfer programs to facilitate the return to school of children affected by gang-related violence[64].

As long as the socio-economic conditions of families remain unchanged, these programs must be maintained to prevent children from turning to gangs as a means of livelihood and survival.

5.3.2. Civic education initiatives

In addition to formal education, schools can also help create a protective environment by implementing civic education initiatives aimed at reducing the risks of gang recruitment. Initiatives put in place by state and private actors include raising awareness about the dangers of gang recruitment, strengthening the capacities of children, families, and communities through education on human rights and peaceful conflict resolution, and providing psychosocial support to help them cope with the stress of living in violence-affected environments.

The Community Education Police (EDUPOL)*

Created in 2015, the Community Educational Police (EDUPOL) is a specialized police unit primarily responsible for preventing and combating juvenile delinquency in and around schools. In this capacity, it plays a complementary role in preventing gang recruitment and supporting the disengagement of children associated with gangs.

As of December 2025, 50 EDUPOL* officers were deployed in approximately 100 schools in the capital, notably in the communes of Delmas, Pétion-Ville, and Tabarre, reaching around 58,000 students. This level of deployment remains largely insufficient to provide adequate coverage of all schools in the metropolitan area, especially since schools located in gang-controlled areas remain inaccessible to EDUPOL.

Despite funding cuts, United Nations agencies have nevertheless continued to provide financial support to the EDUPOL program.

EDUPOL

**In April 2025, EDUPOL launched a pilot project hosting up to 50 at-risk children daily in a state-owned building located in the commune of Tabarre. These children, many of whom live in poverty or in the streets, are considered particularly vulnerable to gang recruitment. The project aims to occupy their time positively and keep them away from gang influence.*

Through partnerships with civil society organizations, the children participate daily in craft workshops and music classes. The project also includes educational outings aimed at exposing participants to successful community role models, offering positive alternatives to gang culture.

Although notable behavioral improvements have been observed among participants, the initiative now faces several major financial and logistical challenges.

Peace and Integrity Clubs

Schools also serve as spaces to promote positive change by strengthening social cohesion, encouraging critical thinking, and fostering a culture of peace. In this regard, during the 2024–2025 school year, the HRS supported an initiative that produced positive results among participating students by reinforcing human rights education and empowering youth as agents of change within their communities. Implemented by local partners, this initiative led to the creation of 18 Peace and Integrity Clubs in schools nationwide, including two in disadvantaged neighborhoods of the capital. These clubs engaged more than 500 young people around key themes such as civic values, human rights, peaceful conflict resolution, protection, and environmental education.

OHCHR's Peace and Integrity Club, Pétion Ville, 2025

[64] More than 5,000 vulnerable families each received 10,000 gourdes (approximately 75 U.S. dollars) to support the return of their children to school for the 2025 school year.

5.4. Child-friendly spaces outside the school setting

Given the challenges related to gang violence, which disrupt the functioning of schools and prevent many families from sending their children, child-friendly spaces outside the formal school setting become a priority to help reduce gang recruitment. However, these initiatives, often led by community and faith-based organizations, remain extremely limited in number and insufficiently resourced[65].

5.4.1. Programs implemented by civil society and faith-based organizations

Although these spaces do not replace school, they provide services that meet children's needs, including emergency assistance with food, medical care, and other material support, as well as safe places where children can spend the day and receive social support. Activities offered include psychosocial support, sports, mobile libraries, educational play programs, and skills development workshops*.

These programs create safe environments in which children, and sometimes their parents, receive emotional support and participate in activities based on responsibility and social engagement, thereby helping to reduce their exposure to the risks they face in gang-controlled neighborhoods. They also help identify situations of heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation, particularly among girls.

*** Mobile libraries**

With the support of the HRS, the organization Combite pour la paix et le développement (CPD), specialized in human rights advocacy and education, manages a network of mobile libraries serving six schools located in gang-controlled areas, or hosting children from those areas, as well as six informal sites for internally displaced persons in Delmas and Pétion-Ville. This initiative allows children deprived of schooling due to gang violence to have continuous access to culture and learning opportunities, wherever they are and whenever they need it.

Nevertheless, the organizations managing these spaces face significant challenges, particularly given the backgrounds of the children involved. After sometimes prolonged involvement with criminal groups, or due to difficulties previously experienced at school or within their communities, some children may struggle to adapt to this type of approach. These organizations must also avoid any direct confrontation with gangs and ensure they are not perceived as a threat, requiring considerable effort and posing significant risks to their staff — especially in neighborhoods where gangs operate through so-called "foundations," often linked to political actors, which are used as means of controlling community life[66].

Overall, these programs remain fragile and at risk of disappearing. While international partners generally provide direct funding for such projects, their cooperation policies and action plans — most often defined for fixed periods — offer limited flexibility to adapt to the rapidly changing context as well as to the evolving threats and impacts of gang violence.

5.4.2. Programs implemented by the State

As part of the government's efforts to create spaces for marginalized children, an ad hoc presidential commission, called the "Commission to Support the Establishment of the National Network of Reception and Reeducation Centers," was created by decree in February 2025 (it was established at the end of June 2025). With a six-month mandate, this commission was tasked, among other things, with developing and proposing a national policy and action plan to establish, administer, and manage a national network of centers for the care and protection of vulnerable children and adolescents, including those at risk of gang recruitment or in conflict with the law. As of the completion of this report (January 2026), the HRS had not been informed of the publication of the commission's report.

Furthermore, also in February 2025, the government, with the support of UNICEF, launched the PREJEUNES program, one of whose main objectives is to establish "Youth Centers" throughout the capital to help children and young people resist gang influence, as well as to facilitate the reintegration of those who have been associated with gangs[67]. The program also includes the establishment of "community peace zones" and "community child protection committees" tasked with monitoring and reporting risks. At this stage, one of these "Youth Centers" has already been established and is managed by a national organization in the commune of Pétion-Ville, but it is still too early to assess its impact.

In 2025, the ESAF also developed a project financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), aimed at young people aged 15 to 35 and entitled "Safe Space for Youth." This project, which had not yet been implemented as of January 2026, involves reclaiming community spaces in downtown Port-au-Prince currently occupied by gangs. Once these areas are retaken by the police, safe socio-recreational environments will be created

[65] Some of these initiatives include "Child-Friendly Spaces" and the safe spaces "Espas Mwen," implemented by UNICEF in partnership with local service providers. In 2025, of the 25 spaces resulting from these two initiatives, ten were located in gang-controlled areas.

[66] For more details on these so-called "foundations", see BINUH and OHCHR (10 February 2023), "The Population of Cité Soleil Under the Grip of Gang Violence", available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/population-cite-soleil-grip-gang-violence-investigative-report-human

[67] A second objective concerns the reintegration of minors in conflict with the law (see Section VI – 6.2 Children in Conflict with the Law: Implementation of Child Rights–Respectful Justice, pages 40 to 46).

for young people, thereby helping to reduce both the physical presence of gangs and their influence in these neighborhoods. The initiative is currently awaiting official government approval.

5.5. Mental health care services

Alongside community or public programs aimed at providing children and youth with protective, preventive, and reintegration spaces in response to gang influence, addressing the psychological consequences of violence constitutes another essential pillar of the support provided to these children.

However, these counselling and psychological support services are extremely scarce in Haiti, with most mental health care provided by private-sector professionals, while public services are largely absent. Consequently, these services are largely economically inaccessible to many families, particularly those living in gang-controlled and economically marginalized areas.

Only a very limited number of local actors provide free mental health services to children involved with gangs. While some operate directly in gang-controlled neighborhoods of the capital, at the risk of their personal safety, others have expressed to the HRS their concerns about traveling to and providing in-person services in these areas.

These service providers also face significant challenges due to limited resources and have expressed a clear need for additional specialized training in order to respond effectively to the complex trauma experienced by these children. Indeed, interviews conducted by the HRS with psychologists show that children who are victims of trafficking and gang exploitation suffer deep and lasting psychological and emotional harm. Many of them experience post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders resulting from these experiences.

Children not directly associated with gangs are also traumatized. According to psychologists working with them, many live in such fear of being kidnapped that they dread the journey to school each morning. Others are forced to witness dead bodies, sometimes burning, along their route. Children compelled to leave their homes and live in displacement due to gang violence experience particular trauma. They not only lose their housing but also face frequent family separations, school dropout, and precarious living conditions in improvised displacement sites, which lack basic services and are often overcrowded.

5.6. Strengthening vocational training and employment opportunities to combat social discrimination

Due to persistent economic difficulties that limit parents' ability to provide for their families, many young people — including children under 18 — are forced to start earning income at an early age. In this context, it is essential to implement vocational training programs that combine theoretical learning with practical experience and address the specific needs and realities of local economies. Such programs will enable children, once they reach the legal working age (16 and older in Haiti)[68], to access decent work and income-generating opportunities, thereby helping to reduce the risks of recruitment and exploitation by gangs[69].

Among the priorities of the 2023–2026 Action Plan of the National Policy for Social Protection and Promotion are the promotion of access to skills development and vocational training, as well as the establishment of social promotion mechanisms aimed at combating poverty and underemployment, particularly among youth. However, the Action Plan specifies that its implementation has been postponed to the period 2025–2030 and will focus more specifically on the South-East department.

In fact, existing initiatives led by the government and its international partners to strengthen socio-economic opportunities for children and youth tend to focus on rural areas, such as those implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the Grand'Anse and Artibonite departments. In contrast, comparable programs specifically targeting children and youth living in marginalized urban communities affected by gang violence appear to be non-existent.

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[68] For children under 16, all efforts must ensure respect for their right to education and comply with guidelines such as those of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) of the International Labour Organization (ILO), available at https://www.ilo.org/fr/programme-international-pour-labolition-du-travail-des-enfants-ipec

[69] To be fully effective, these programs should combine practical work experience with evening training. This dual approach addresses both immediate and long-term needs: daytime work allows young people to earn income and acquire skills that reduce short-term vulnerabilities, while evening education broadens their development prospects and future opportunities. See International Labour Organization (2010), "Children Leaving Armed Forces and Groups: Practical Guide for Economic Reintegration," available at https://www.ilo.org/publications/children-formerly-associated-armed-forces-and-groups-%E2%80%9Chow-%E2%80%9D-guide-economic

This gap persists despite numerous recommendations from international human rights protection mechanisms, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), calling for the establishment of protection programs specifically for children and youth, adequately resourced, to prevent gang recruitment and ensure sustainable income-generating opportunities[70].

According to several sources with expertise in this field consulted by the HRS, previous apprenticeship and employment programs targeting gang-controlled areas have often failed to produce positive results. This situation is partially explained by the fact that a significant number of private-sector actors regularly refused to hire people from these neighborhoods due to social stigma, perceiving them as potential "threats" to their business.

In this context, and given the mixed results observed, only small-scale initiatives have been implemented by local service providers and non-governmental organizations, with the support of United Nations agencies and other international actors. These initiatives — carried out as rapid-impact projects — have primarily focused on areas where children and youth face a severe lack of socio-economic opportunities and are at high risk of gang recruitment. Typical projects involve the rehabilitation of urban infrastructure, such as sidewalks, street lighting, or small bridges. These projects have also provided income, practical training, and certificates that enhance participants' employability. However, their overall impact in terms of transforming underlying dynamics has remained very limited, given the magnitude of the economic and employment crisis in Haiti.

VI. LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS AND JUSTICE MEASURES

Alongside economic and social responses, law enforcement operations and judicial measures are essential to weaken the growing influence of armed gangs and their capacity to recruit and exploit children. The security-focused response, which in recent years has concentrated the efforts of Haitian authorities and the international community, has relied on a combination of operations conducted by specialized units of the Haitian National Police (HNP) — sometimes marred by human rights violations, including against children — and efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition.

The judicial response, on the other hand, has faced major institutional challenges, resulting in the inability to apply the principle of non-punishment to children exploited in criminal activities due to trafficking.

6.1. Law enforcement operations aimed at weakening gang capabilities

As of 31 December 2025, law enforcement operations, supported by the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission, later renamed the Gang Suppression Force (GSF), have succeeded in slowing the territorial expansion of gangs but have failed to regain control of areas under their influence or dismantle their criminal governance. This limited impact is explained in particular by insufficient operational capacity to maintain a sustained presence in these areas, as well as the more general absence of effective state presence and basic public services. As a result, gangs have retained their ability to engage in child trafficking, particularly through recruitment.

Beyond the limited impact of security operations on the sustainable reduction of gang violence, other challenges severely hinder efforts to protect and rehabilitate children who are victims of gang-related trafficking. In particular, specialized police units, on the front lines of the fight against gangs, often lack awareness of national and international legal frameworks that recognize children associated with gangs as victims entitled to protection, and instead treat them as perpetrators of offenses.

[70] See, among others, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (25 March 2024), "Human Rights Situation in Haiti," A/HRC/55/76, paras. 50 and 51, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5576-situation-human-rights-haiti-report-united-nations-high , and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (26 September 2024), "Interim Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights," A/HRC/57/41, para. 45, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5741-situation-human-rights-haiti-interim-report-united-nations-high

6.1.1. Law enforcement's conduct toward children trafficked by gangs during security operations

Despite the existence of a Protocol between the Government and the United Nations[71], which stipulates that all children arrested during police operations on suspicion of gang association must be handed over to the Juvenile Protection Brigade (JPB) and the Institute of Social Welfare and Research (ISWR), some officers in specialized police units do not always appear to consider these children as victims.

During human rights awareness sessions conducted with the Haitian National Police (HNP), the HRS observed that a number of officers deployed in these units perceive themselves as engaged in an "armed conflict" and consider children involved in gangs as "combatants" who can be targeted at any time and in any place[72]. Although some have already received training in child protection, they indicated feeling compelled to use lethal force in order to avoid being killed themselves[73].

This perception that children associated with gangs are considered offenders rather than victims is also widespread within certain segments of the Haitian society, particularly among those supporting "self-defense groups"[74]. In this regard, according to the HRS, between January 2022 and December 2025, at least 36 children (25 boys and 11 girls), some as young as 10, were executed by members of specialized police units or killed by self-defense groups and mobs after being accused of gang association or gathering information for gangs. In some cases, these suspicions were based solely on their refusal to cooperate during police searches.

In this context, the hierarchy of the Police should ensure the implementation and strict adherence to the Protocol by all police units. It is also essential to strengthen the operational capacity of the General Inspectorate of the Haitian National Police (GIHNP) to ensure that any alleged human rights violations committed by police personnel are effectively investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice.

Violence perpetrated by self-defence groups against children

On the morning of 27 September 2024, Jean, aged 10, was crossing a square in the Santo neighborhood of Gressier. He was carrying only a backpack with a few clothes. Members of the Caravane self-defense group intercepted and interrogated him. They accused him of acting as a lookout for a local cell of the Grand Ravine gang, known as the "103 Zombies." After being tortured, Jean was shot in the same square, in front of passersby. His body was then burned on a vacant lot opposite the MARCO commercial complex, along National Road No. 2, in the La Colline neighborhood.

Source: HRS

At the same time, the deployment of the Gang Suppression Force (GSF), established in September 2025 to replace the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission for conducting anti-gang operations, should also ensure that children's rights are fully protected under all circumstances. This involves safeguarding children's rights both during the planning and conduct of operations, in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2793, including identifying children who are victims of trafficking and ensuring their referral to child protection services.

6.1.2. Measures to combat the illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition

According to the HRS, gangs' access to and possession of firearms and ammunition reinforce their power within communities and contribute to a false sense of "social status and protection" among marginalized and socially excluded children and youth who join them[75].

[71] For more details on the "Protocol on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered during Security Operations on National Territory," see Section 6.2.1 of this report, pages 32 to 34.

[72] Since the situation in Haiti does not constitute an armed conflict, security operations are governed by international human rights law. Any use of force by law enforcement, as well as by private military and security companies, must comply with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, non-discrimination, precaution, and accountability, strictly limiting the use of lethal force to situations where it is absolutely necessary to protect life.

[73] Under international human rights law, the applicable legal framework in Haiti, the intentional use of lethal force is only permitted as a last resort, and solely against a person who poses an imminent threat to life.

[74] In 2025, the Human Rights Service supported the Haitian human rights organization *Centre d'Analyse et de Recherche en Droits Humains* (CARDH) in organizing four roundtables bringing together security forces and civil society. These discussions focused on human rights issues raised during anti-gang operations, shared concerns of both parties, and ways to strengthen cooperation and mutual trust. For more information, see CARDH (September 2025), "Proceedings of the Meetings and Conferences of the Sectoral Security Table (TSS)," available at https://cardh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/CARDH_Actes-des-Conferences_Reunions_de-la-Table-Sectorielle-sur-la-Securite-TSS_02-Sept.-2025.-Up-23_page-0001-2.pdf

[75] See Section III of this report – 3.3. Perceived social status and protection through affiliation with gangs, page 17, as well as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (26 September 2024), (A/HRC/57/41), "Interim Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights," available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5741-situation-human-rights-haiti-interim-report-united-nations-high

However, despite the efforts of national authorities, supported by the international community, to reduce the illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition in Haiti[76], traffickers have continued to exploit ineffective and inadequate border control systems as well as a dysfunctional judicial apparatus to facilitate this trade. The General Administration of Customs and police units deployed at the borders continue to face underfunding, limited technological equipment, poor inter-agency coordination, and corruption. Likewise, judicial procedures related to arms trafficking progress very slowly, allowing key figures involved in these trafficking networks to enjoy impunity[77].

Haiti's efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition should continue, particularly through the strengthening of technical capacities and the fight against corruption within the relevant institutions. The international community should also intensify its actions to ensure the effective enforcement of the arms embargo imposed on Haiti by the United Nations[78].

At the same time, national authorities should commit to implementing the 2021 National Strategy for Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Reduction of Community Violence. These efforts should be firmly grounded in international human rights law to ensure their sustainability and exclude any amnesty for perpetrators of serious human rights violations. They should also be accompanied by comprehensive socio-economic interventions aimed at sustainably reducing domestic demand for firearms[79].

6.2. Children in conflict with the law: Implementation of child rights–respectful justice

International legal instruments and Haitian legislation emphasize that children who are victims of trafficking must be primarily regarded as victims and not as perpetrators of offenses.

These instruments advocate for non-detention and non-punishment measures, accompanied by psychosocial support and other protective measures, to prevent further harm and ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration into society[80]. Furthermore, these children must not be penalized for unlawful acts committed as a direct consequence of their trafficking experience, and their detention should only be used exceptionally, as a last resort, for the shortest possible period, and in their best interests[81].

Nevertheless, the investigation conducted by the HRS indicates that detention continues to be widely applied, due to limited knowledge of the applicable legal instruments by the competent authorities and restricted capacity to implement the principle of non-punishment. It also highlights the absence of effective mechanisms to identify trafficking victims and refer them to the appropriate entities.

6.2.1. Protocol on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered during Security Operations on National Territory

To support the Haitian state in fulfilling its human rights obligations, the United Nations system in Haiti assisted the government in drafting a "Protocol on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered during Security Operations on National Territory" (hereinafter referred to as the "Protocol").

Signed on 27 October 2023 by the Government of Haiti and the United Nations, the Protocol recognizes that children associated with gangs must be considered as victims and not as perpetrators of offenses.

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[76] Two specialized units of the Haitian National Police actively contribute to combating arms trafficking within their respective mandates: the Bureau for Combating Drug Trafficking (BCDT) and the Border Police (POLIFRONT), responsible for securing the borders. In addition, the Haitian Transnational Criminal Investigation Unit (TCIU), dedicated to investigating transnational crimes, was established in February 2024, although it is still in an early stage of development.

[77] Two major cases related to arms and ammunition trafficking illustrate this situation: the "Miss Lily" case in Port-de-Paix, which involves prominent local political figures, and the arms trafficking case involving the Episcopal Church of Haiti. Both cases, dating back to 2022, are still under investigation. Judicial proceedings are ongoing, and neither case has been closed to date.

[78] Under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the UN Security Council has imposed various sanctions measures, including a travel ban, asset freezes, and an arms embargo, through Resolution 2653 (2022), which came into effect in 2022 and was renewed by Resolutions 2700 (2023), 2752 (2024), and 2794 (2025).

[79] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (5 May 2023), "Impacts of the Acquisition, Possession, and Use of Firearms by Civilians," A/HRC/53/49, available at https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/49

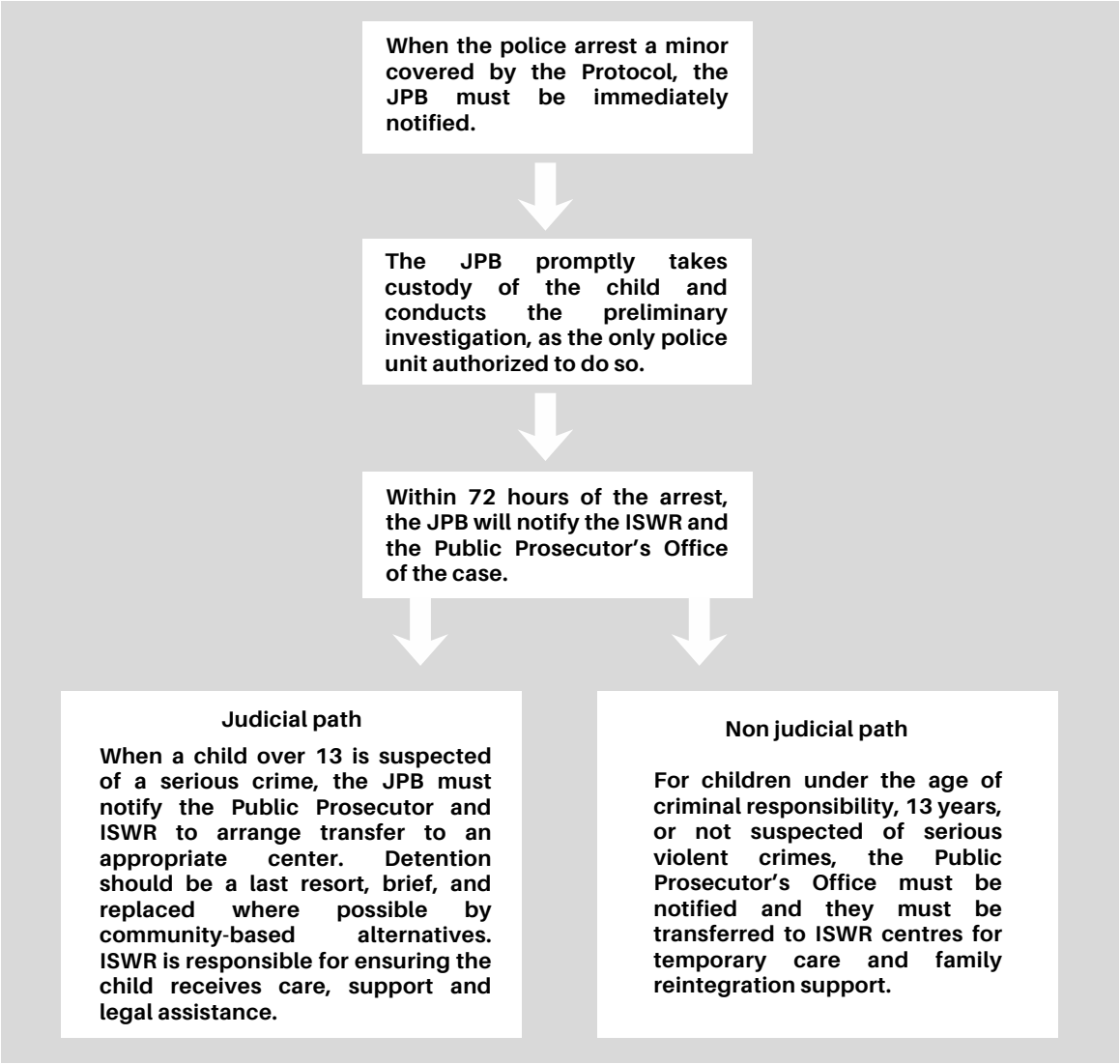
[80] See the legal framework in Annex II

[81] Article 37(b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

It establishes clear procedures to address the specific needs of children under 18 in conflict with the law, applicable to cases of gang association, emphasizing a victim-centered approach that prioritizes protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration[82]. The Protocol applies primarily to children apprehended or rescued during security operations conducted by the Haitian National Police (HNP), as well as to any other children coming into contact with these forces. It also specifies the roles of key state institutions, including the Juvenile Protection Brigade (JPB), the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Institute of Social Welfare and Research (ISWR)[83], to ensure the protection, care, and appropriate treatment of children associated with gangs.

Referral pathway according to the Protocol

According to the Protocol, children associated with gangs, apprehended or otherwise coming into contact with the police, must be referred through a specific pathway that takes into account their age and the offenses they are accused of.



[82] In its Article 2, the Protocol, recognizing Haitian national law as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, defines children as any person under the age of 18. In accordance with its scope, the term "children associated with armed gangs" encompasses all minors recruited or used by gangs, regardless of their role. This definition covers not only those who have directly participated in acts of armed violence and carried firearms, but also those performing support functions, such as messengers, lookouts, or spies, as well as girls exploited for sexual purposes.

[83] The ISWR is a public agency responsible for social and child protection, notably by supporting vulnerable families. The JPB is a specialized unit of the Haitian National Police tasked with preventing violations of children's rights by combating juvenile delinquency, conducting police investigations in cases involving children, and investigating offenses committed against minors, such as sexual assault, abuse, and exploitation.

Challenges in the implementation of the Protocol

- ***Institutional gaps***

One of the main factors undermining the effectiveness of this instrument is the absence of the Task Force responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Protocol by the competent authorities[84].

Sources within the JPB informed the HRS that another obstacle lies in the limited knowledge of the provisions of the Protocol among police officers responsible for the initial arrest of children. According to these sources, police stations do not systematically notify the JPB when they detain children, as required by the Protocol. They often conduct their own investigations and forward cases directly to the Public Prosecutor's Office, thereby bypassing the JPB and limiting its ability to monitor cases and ensure the protection of children's rights throughout the procedure.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the JPB is also limited due to internal shortcomings. The HRS was informed that, as of December 2025, the JPB had only 16 officers in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, which is insufficient to carry out all investigations and follow-up measures in a timely manner.

The lack of adequate logistical resources, including a database, also prevents the JPB from knowing the exact number of gang-related child cases reported to it, as these cases are handled on an ad hoc basis as they arise.

Despite its institutional and logistical weaknesses, the JBP generally notifies and timely transfers children to the ISWR, which also faces similar challenges, including underfunding, a lack of personnel, and insufficient facilities to provide protection and temporary care services.

Another major obstacle to the implementation of the Protocol lies in the fact that the Public Prosecutor's Office in Port-au-Prince frequently sends children involved in gang-related criminal activities — from minor offenses such as theft to more serious crimes — to the Rehabilitation Center for Children in Conflict with the Law (CERMICOL), contrary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Protocol's emphasis on prioritizing non-detention measures.

This situation is partly explained by instability within the Public Prosecutor's Office, leading to inconsistencies in the application of the Protocol, as well as by the absence of viable alternatives to detention.

- ***Transitional foster families versus residential care centres***

The Protocol prioritizes the care of these children in temporary foster families rather than in residential centers, which should be limited to short stays or reserved for particularly complex cases.

However, there is currently no foster care program for children who are victims of trafficking for forced criminal activity or gang association. For now, UNICEF mainly supports the ISWR in implementing a foster care program for vulnerable children. Moreover, this program is active only in the South department, where approximately 90 vulnerable children — not necessarily associated with gangs — are currently placed in certified foster families. Although 74 families are certified in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, the program has been suspended due to insecurity and gang-related violence.

Due to the social stigma associated with children linked to gangs and the fear of retaliation from active gang members, very few families are willing to participate in a foster care program. Consequently, the ISWR has opted to create dedicated child protection centers in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince and in other regions of the country. As of December 2025, two centers existed. One of them, supported by UNICEF and the HRS, is located in Port-au-Prince and is fully operational. It can accommodate up to 40 children, mainly for short stays of up to 90 days, during which they have access to comprehensive and individualized psychosocial support, as well as long-term rehabilitation and reintegration services. The second center, located in Les Cayes (South department), consists of a large rural estate with several buildings, including residential facilities for children, as well as medical, educational, and other support structures, and has the capacity to host several dozen children. The center is intended to receive children from across the country, including Port-au-Prince; however, it is not yet operational, mainly due to financial and logistical constraints.

In complex cases requiring special attention, such as children who have committed serious crimes as a direct consequence of their trafficking situation, the Task Force provided for in the

[84] As provided in paragraph 38 of the Protocol, this Task Force is mandated to facilitate and promote the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol. It is composed of the ISWR, the JPB, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the juvenile judge, the Border Police (POLIFRONT), the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, and the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training. If necessary, this Task Force may also be expanded to include other stakeholders.

Protocol should identify a solution that prioritizes the best interests of the child. Placement in a transit and orientation center may be considered; however, in all cases, family, local, and community-based solutions should be preferred over deprivation of liberty. As noted above, this Task Force had not yet been established as of January 2026.

6.2.2. *Specialized children's court: from dysfunction to limited implementation of the non-punishment principle*

The current Haitian Penal Code, dating from 1988, as well as the new Penal Code[85] provide that children under 13 years old involved in criminal acts are not criminally responsible and may only be subject to measures of protection, assistance, supervision, and education[86]. In the case of children aged 13 to 17, they may be prosecuted for criminal acts and sentenced to detention, provided that, in the court's opinion, the application of other types of measures would not contribute to their rehabilitation[87].

However, in accordance with the principle of non-punishment, the 2014 Haitian law on combating human trafficking provides that "any person who is a victim of trafficking is not criminally responsible for […] unlawful acts committed as a result of their status as a victim"[88]. This law also stipulates that all measures taken regarding children who are victims of trafficking must be based on the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that their specific needs, including housing, education, and psychological support, must be appropriately addressed[89].

In this context, and despite the explicit provision in national legislation, Haitian judicial authorities often appear to prioritize the principle of criminal responsibility of children over the principle of non-punishment for trafficking victims. They apparently make no distinction between children in conflict with the law and those involved in criminal activities as a result of trafficking. They frequently initiate judicial proceedings that should be reviewed by a specialized children's court[90]. However, this court has not been functional since 2022, following an attack on its premises and the destruction of its records by gang members.

As a result, cases involving children in conflict with the law are handled on an ad hoc basis by the Port-au-Prince court.

Since January 2025, the HRS and the BINUH criminal section have been supporting and mobilizing judicial actors and lawyers in Port-au-Prince to reconstruct destroyed files and adjudicate pending cases. In October 2025, 53 files (13 concerning girls and 40 concerning boys) were in the process of being reconstructed. Two months later, 16 of these children had been released following special juvenile hearings and were subsequently placed in foster families.

6.2.3. *Overcrowding at the Rehabilitation Center for Children in Conflict with the Law*

In Port-au-Prince, children in conflict with the law are detained at the Rehabilitation Center for Children in Conflict with the Law (CERMICOL), which was originally created to rehabilitate and reintegrate juvenile delinquents into society. However, over the years, the center has transformed into a detention facility for boys.

Furthermore, following attacks by gangs on the women's prison in Cabaret (located in Croix-des-Bouquets) in 2023 and on the men's prisons in the capital, located in Port-au-Prince and Croix-des-Bouquets, in 2024, CERMICOL began to accommodate all adult detainees from the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince.

In December 2025, CERMICOL housed 111 children (95 boys and 16 girls) and 581 adults (445 men and 136 women), while its maximum capacity was 93 detainees. Men and boys are placed in separate cells; however, women and girls are held together in the same cells[91].

Overall, despite the involvement of the ISWR and EDUPOL personnel, children detained at CERMICOL are deprived of access to quality education, vocational training, rehabilitation services, and opportunities for reintegration into society. The only services available appear to come from donations or contributions by religious organizations, including books, clothing, and prayer sessions. Some classrooms have been converted into cells to address overcrowding caused by the arrival of adult detainees. Children interviewed by the HRS reported limited access to health care and poor living conditions at CERMICOL, including lack of potable water and nutritious food, and deteriorating educational services.

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[85] The new Penal Code was initially scheduled to enter into force in December 2025. However, in January 2026, the Government announced its postponement, without specifying a new date, citing the need to avoid legal gaps and to ensure adequate familiarization with its provisions by judicial actors.

[86] Articles 7 and 111 of the new Penal Code

[87] Article 112 of the new Penal Code

[88] Article 8 of the 2014 Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons

[89] Article 8 of the 2014 Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons

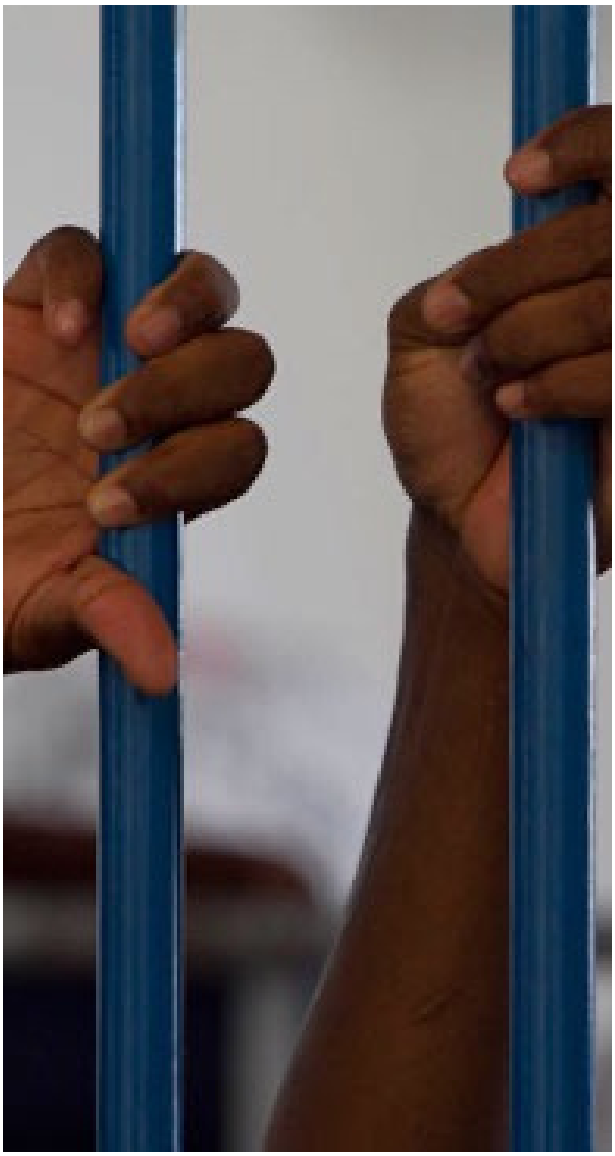
[90] The law of 7 September 1961, which is part of the legal framework governing children in conflict with the law, established a Special Juvenile Court in Port-au-Prince tasked with adjudicating children who have committed serious crimes. The court was designed to include three specialized judicial positions: two investigating judges and one presiding judge. As of October 2025, only two of these positions were filled.

[91] For details on the Human Rights Committee's observations regarding deplorable detention conditions in Haitian prisons, including at CERMICOL, see CCPR/C/HTI/CO/2, paragraph 28, available at https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/HTI/CO/2

The investigation conducted by the HRS revealed that most children at CERMICOL spend a large part of their adolescence in detention without being brought before a judge or having access to a lawyer.

Since the Haitian Penal Code does not provide for a specific category for gang-related crimes — recognizing only the general offense of "criminal association"[92] — it is not possible to determine with precision how many children are detained for their participation in gang activities.

The lack of detailed data on these children's backgrounds, compounded by overcrowding and the cohabitation of children and adults of both sexes, further complicates efforts to design and implement targeted programs for children in conflict with the law, with the aim of supporting their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.



Louis, recruited at 17 by a gang, has spent five years at CERMICOL, where he was still in 2025 as an adult.

"I joined a gang to avenge my father's death. He was killed by a rival gang while going to work. I quickly gained the trust of the older gang members. They became like my family. They entrusted me with important 'missions.' I managed the weapons and other logistical tasks, and I had many men under my 'command.' Then I became a 'senior' member of the gang with all the major privileges. My salary was several thousand gourdes (over 1,000 U.S. dollars) every Saturday. That money allowed me to live in a way none of us children had ever dreamed of.

In 2022, I was arrested and sent to CERMICOL. I feel okay. I thank God for being locked up; I don't want to die in clashes with other gangs or with the police. I felt trapped and scared, always targeted by other gangs. When I was in the gang, I constantly had strange visions. I saw my body in the mouth of pigs and dogs tearing my body apart. But I would like to get out and have the chance to live a normal life, to have a job. Even though I feel safer here than in the gang, life at CERMICOL is not a good life. One can be attacked at any moment by another inmate with anything. No access to healthcare, no access to good food. Life is very hard. In the juvenile cells, they fight among themselves".

Source: Interview conducted by the HRS

6.2.4. *Limited reintegration and rehabilitation programs*

Reintegration and rehabilitation programs for children who are victims of trafficking are essential to break cycles of violence and help them build a future outside gang-related criminal networks. However, according to information collected by the HRS, only a few of these programs exist, and their impact on the rehabilitation and reintegration of children released from CERMICOL remains very limited.

One of these programs is managed by an international non-governmental organization, which provides rehabilitation and reintegration support during and after the detention of children and youth at CERMICOL. In addition to legal assistance, this program offers individualized psychosocial services tailored to the specific needs of each child. However, one of the main challenges in designing and implementing support adapted to the particular needs of children associated with gangs lies in the difficulty of identifying them, even though this identification is a state obligation[93].

[92] According to the 1982 Haitian Penal Code, in force in December 2025, articles 224 to 227 define the crime of criminal association. Article 225 specifies that the offense exists solely by the organization of gangs, correspondence between their leaders, or agreements aimed at distributing the proceeds of unlawful acts, even without the commission of other crimes.
[93] Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19

So far, these children can only be identified if they voluntarily reveal their gang affiliation, which very few do, due to the risk of stigma and fear of retaliation from gangs. Upon their release, often when they are already young adults, this organization continues to support them and their families by providing vocational training, entrepreneurship guidance, and material assistance to help them start income-generating activities, according to their needs. However, due to social stigma and the lack of identification documents, their reintegration is extremely difficult, leaving them vulnerable to returning to gangs or engaging in other forms of criminal activity.

6.3. Accountability for the crime of child trafficking

6.3.1. Limited impact of the national legal framework and judicial jurisdiction

Under article 368 of the new Penal Code, which was initially scheduled to enter into force in December 2025 but has been postponed to an unspecified later date, penalties range from 15 to 20 years of imprisonment when the trafficking victim is a minor, and from 20 to 30 years of imprisonment when the offense is committed by an organized criminal group. This increase in penalties is based on the 2014 Law on Combating Human Trafficking, which provides for sentences of seven to 15 years (Article 11) and constitutes the applicable framework for trafficking until the new Penal Code comes into force.

Jurisdiction to handle these crimes lies with the Court of First Instance, where cases are heard by the criminal chamber sitting without a jury. The Child Protection Unit (JPB) is responsible for investigations involving children, while the National Committee for the Fight against Human Trafficking (NCFHT) is responsible for coordination and policy development but has no judicial authority.

The Haitian judicial system faces significant structural and operational challenges. Chronic underfunding, political interference, and the widespread impact of gang violence on personnel and judicial infrastructure have severely weakened its capacity to deliver justice. In this context, magistrates struggle to investigate and prosecute complex cases, such as those related to child trafficking, with the speed and efficiency required to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice and, if convicted, receive sentences proportionate to the severity of the offense. These cases require specialized expertise and strong institutional coordination, which remain largely insufficient. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the training and specialization of judicial personnel, law enforcement, and other institutions involved in combating child trafficking and labor, as well as to improve coordination and cooperation among them[94].

6.3.2. Improving the domestic approach

The absence of centralized coordination for cases of trafficking involving children remains a major challenge. Although the NCFHT is officially designated as the national coordinating body on human trafficking, its current institutional structure, attached to the MSAL, limits its ability to act independently and effectively. Despite its mandate to oversee national strategies, coordinate inter-institutional efforts, and monitor their implementation, the Committee has neither legal authority, nor a dedicated budget line, nor sufficient staff. These constraints have hindered its ability to provide a coherent and sustained response to child trafficking by gangs.

Strengthening the institutional powers and autonomy of the NCFHT is essential to ensure that it can fully fulfill its coordination role, oversee policy implementation, and serve as a central hub for data collection, victim referral, and inter-institutional accountability. This would also help ensure that children who are victims of gang-related trafficking are treated as victims rather than offenders and that they receive the necessary protection and rehabilitation services.

As part of initiatives to strengthen national capacities to combat human trafficking, the Haitian Government adopted a decree in April 2025 creating two specialized judicial units, developed with the support of the HRS and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

One of these units is tasked with investigating and prosecuting serious human rights violations and abuses, while the other will focus on complex financial crimes. These units represent a promising step toward strengthening accountability and combating impunity in cases of child trafficking. They are expected to become operational in 2026. Sustained political will, adequate resources — including a specialized police unit for combating trafficking — as well as protection for judicial actors will be essential to ensure the effectiveness and independence of these new structures, as well as to guarantee the protection of victims and witnesses and their safe access to justice.

[94] CCPR/C/HTI/CO/2, paras. 31(a) and (d)

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Child trafficking by gangs has devastating consequences for the human rights of children, their families, and Haitian society as a whole, while fueling a cycle of violence that further undermines security and stabilization efforts. Throughout the capital, children are recruited for exploitation to participate in gang criminal activities. Others fall victim to sexual exploitation and sexual slavery.

Throughout the trafficking process, children are coerced by gangs to perform minor tasks, such as running errands or gathering information, as well as more serious crimes, including killings, sexual violence, and property destruction. Girls experience gender-specific abuse in the form of sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, and coerced relationships in exchange for alleged "protection." Violent "initiation rites" — including forced killings, collective rapes, and ritualized ceremonies — further deepen children's dependence, isolate them from their families, and consolidate their subjugation within gang structures. Living in a context of pervasive violence and facing limited or non-existent social and economic opportunities, some children and their parents are drawn to gangs out of fear, to gain financial or in-kind benefits, or in the belief that it might provide them with social status or a form of "protection".

To address this major challenge, national authorities, local organizations, the United Nations, and international partners have implemented a series of initiatives and programs that have shown promising results. However, these efforts remain too limited in scale, fragmented, and heavily affected by insecurity, as well as vulnerable to chronic underfunding. Moreover, the available funding does not always reach initiatives in marginalized areas where trafficking is most prevalent, nor the families most vulnerable to traffickers.

In this context, it is essential to rethink national and international approaches. Only an integrated response — which simultaneously addresses the harms suffered by children who are victims and survivors of abuse and exploitation by gangs, tackles the root causes of trafficking, and ensures accountability for traffickers as well as effective remedies for victims — can meaningfully address this complex problem.

To this end, the HRS recommends, in accordance with the international legal framework, the following priority actions:

1. Expand social protection programs and financial services for vulnerable families:

To the Haitian authorities, with the support of the international community:

- Deploy social protection and promotion programs in marginalized areas of Port-au-Prince to specifically target families, particularly female-headed households, whose children are at risk of trafficking by gangs.
- Adapt the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor Information System (MSALIS) to collect data on vulnerability in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, with the aim of identifying the needs of marginalized families, including those whose children are at risk of trafficking. Based on this, develop effective measures to support them, including social protection programs, vocational training, employment services, and access to decent job opportunities.
- Establish an independent and specialized observatory for monitoring and evaluating social protection and promotion programs, as well as accountability mechanisms, with the support of the Office of Citizen Protection (OCP) and civil society, in order to strengthen the credibility, effectiveness, and efficiency of the National Policy for Social Protection and Promotion (NPSPP).
- Undertake sustained efforts to mobilize national resources, including through progressive fiscal policies, to fund the social protection and promotion system.
- Promote access to microfinance programs or community-based financial services adapted to the urban context, with the aim of strengthening the autonomy of vulnerable families and fostering their financial independence.

2. Strengthen the role of schools as protective spaces

To the Haitian authorities, with the support of the international community:

- Strengthen programs aimed at encouraging children to attend school and stay off the streets, including through school feeding programs, the reconstruction of schools ransacked or destroyed by gangs, and the provision of cash transfers to facilitate the return to school of children affected by gang-related violence.
- Support the development of civic education initiatives in schools, including through Peace and Integrity Clubs and the deployment of additional EDUPOL officers.

3. Develop more child-friendly spaces outside of schools

To the Haitian authorities:

- Ensure that mental health care is provided to children who have experienced various forms of psychological trauma related to gang violence.

To the Haitian authorities, with the support of the international community:

- Support community and faith-based organizations that create safe environments where children receive mental health care and participate in constructive activities to reduce their vulnerability to gang-related trafficking.
- Support the PREJEUNES program in establishing youth centers in the capital to reduce the risk and influence of gangs, as well as the prevalence of community violence.

4. Strengthen vocational training programs and employment opportunities for youth to prevent social discrimination

To the Haitian authorities, with the support of the international community:

- Develop and enhance educational and vocational training programs for youth, particularly those living in marginalized areas, in order to improve their prospects of accessing decent employment at working age, in line with local labor market needs.

5. Strengthen responses by law enforcement and the judicial system

To the Haitian authorities:

- Intensify efforts to investigate, prosecute, and sanction serious human rights violations, particularly those affecting children, committed by members of the Haitian National Police during anti-gang operations.
- Implement the 2021 National Strategy for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration – Reduction of Community Violence (SNDDR-RVC), particularly its provisions concerning voluntary returns or weapons buyback programs, to reduce the availability of firearms among gang members.
- Accelerate the establishment of the two specialized judicial units to combat serious crimes, including sexual violence and child trafficking, as well as corruption and financial crimes.

To the international community:

- Accelerate the deployment of the Gang Suppression Force (GSF), as authorized by the United Nations Security Council in its Resolution 2793 (2025), to combat gang criminal activities, in strict compliance with international law, including international human rights law.
- Ensure that the human rights of children are fully protected at all times, including during the planning and conduct of operations by the Gang Suppression Force (GSF). This should include implementing a human rights compliance framework, referring children associated with gangs to appropriate actors, and deploying child protection advisors within the GSF, in accordance with the Security Council mandate.

- Fully comply with the arms embargo established by United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2653 (2022), 2699 (2023), 2752 (2024), and 2794 (2025), including by strengthening inspections of shipments destined for Haiti at its ports and airports, in order to reduce the capacity of gangs to commit human rights violations.

6. Establish a child rights–respectful justice program

To the Haitian authorities:

- Strengthen investigations and prosecutions of child trafficking in accordance with the "do no harm" principle.
- Adopt all appropriate legislative, policy, administrative, and other measures to ensure the effective implementation of the non-punishment principle for trafficking victims by all competent national authorities, including the police.
- Fully implement the 2023 "Protocol on the Transfer, Reception, and Care of Children Associated with Armed Gangs Encountered during Security Operations on National Territory," by establishing the envisaged inter-institutional Task Force and strengthening the institutions responsible for its execution.
- Ensure the early and individualized identification of children who are victims of trafficking and children at risk, through effective screening and referral mechanisms to appropriate protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration services, and guarantee them access to unconditional assistance and remedies, while strengthening gender-sensitive and inclusive rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

7. Strengthen accountability for the crime of child trafficking

To the Haitian authorities:

- Establish prosecution mechanisms, including through the specialized judicial unit for mass crimes, to ensure the systematic investigation and prosecution of child trafficking cases.
- Create specialized anti-trafficking units within the Haitian National Police (HNP) to improve the identification and handling of cases involving children who are victims of gang-related trafficking.
- Strengthen inter-institutional cooperation between the Haitian National Police (HNP), the Child Protection Brigade (JPB), the National Committee for the Fight against Human Trafficking (NCFHT), the Institute of Social Welfare and Research (ISWR), public prosecutors, and other child protection actors to ensure that trafficking cases are not misclassified and that victims receive appropriate support.

ANNEX 1- METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the methodology of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for monitoring human rights, the HRS collected information from primary, secondary, and tertiary sources considered credible and reliable. The report is primarily based on interviews with victims, witnesses, civil society representatives, state institutions, and other individuals with direct or indirect knowledge of the documented incidents. Each source was assessed based on its reliability, its capacity to gather information in the given context, and the credibility of the data provided. All information was then analysed according to OHCHR principles — credibility, reliability, accuracy, and corroboration — to ensure rigorous, impartial, and methodical documentation of the alleged violations.

Due to the security context, some interviews were conducted remotely, primarily by telephone, with measures in place to ensure the confidentiality of the exchanges. The "do no harm" principle guided all interactions with sources to avoid any risk of negative impact on the individuals or organizations concerned. Particular attention was given to establishing appropriate protection measures for collecting testimonies from children and child victims of sexual violence, including through collaboration with organizations specializing in child protection and responses to sexual violence. The names of victims and other incident details included in this report have been altered to protect their privacy, prevent potential retaliation by perpetrators, and reduce the risk of social stigma. In some cases, the names of specific gangs are deliberately omitted to prevent indiscriminate retaliation against children who may be associated with them.

The HRS also utilized open sources, as well as official documents, court decisions, publications from non-governmental organizations, and other relevant materials. All information was rigorously verified and cross-checked with credible and reliable sources, including through direct consultations with individuals responsible for the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public and private social protection and prevention policies and programs.

The main challenges in collecting and verifying data on the recruitment and use of children by gangs stem from the fact that those directly involved, whether perpetrators or victims, rarely speak about the issue outside their immediate circle. Nevertheless, testimonies collected by the HRS from former child gang members provide first-hand accounts of their experiences, shedding light on the roles they were forced to assume and the violence they endured. In addition, some adult gang members have openly admitted, in interviews published online, that children are actively involved in gangs and therefore participate in criminal activities, with one stating that "there is no age to fight or carry firearms"[95]. Furthermore, videos captured by residents during clashes between gangs and police or during the ransacking of buildings, and later shared on social media, have shown individuals appearing to be children, some as young as 10 or 12 years old, actively participating in these acts of violence. Many of them were armed with large rifles.

[95] Charles Villa, "I met the gangs of Port-au-Prince, capital of Haiti", 11 October 2024, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06WQL1L_9b4

ANNEX 2- INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1. International legal framework

The international legal framework prohibiting all forms of slavery is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948).

Haiti is also a party to the main international treaties relating to the trafficking of children and related forms of exploitation, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, ratified in 1991), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, ratified in 2013), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, ratified in 1995), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, ratified in 1981), International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ratified in 2007), as well as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol, ratified in 2011), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Other relevant instruments include the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC, ratified in 2014)[96], the 1926 Slavery Convention[97], the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery (ratified in 1958), ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour (ratified in 1958) and its 2014 Protocol, as well as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (ratified in 2009).

At the regional level, Haiti is bound by the American Convention on Human Rights (ratified in 1977), the Inter-American Convention of Belém do Pará (ratified in 1997), and the Inter-American Convention on the International Traffic in Minors. Haiti has also expressed its support for non-binding standards such as the Paris Principles, while the Vancouver Principles remain relevant but have not been formally endorsed.

2. Definitions

2.1. Children

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 1), a child is defined as any person under the age of 18[98]. Under the Haitian Constitution, the age of majority is also set at 18[99].

Under the Haitian Criminal Code, children aged 13 to 17 may be held criminally responsible[100]. Notwithstanding this criminal responsibility, children under the age of 18 who are in conflict with the law retain their status as children and are entitled to special protection, in particular the protections guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child[101].

2.2. Trafficking in children

The Palermo Protocol[102] defines trafficking in persons as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons for the purpose of exploitation. In the case of children, it is not necessary to prove the use of means such as coercion, deception or abuse of a position of vulnerability, as a child's consent to the exploitation is legally irrelevant[103].

Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, and the removal of organs[104].

[96] International humanitarian law, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), does not apply in Haiti, since the current situation cannot be classified as an armed conflict.
[97] This Convention has neither been signed nor ratified by Haiti.
[98] Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 1
[99] Constitution of the Republic of Haiti, article 16.2
[100] New Haitian Criminal Code, articles 7, 11 and 112
[101] Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 40
[102] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, article 3
[103] A/80/166, para. 18; and Child trafficking and armed conflict, p. 10, available at https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Child-trafficking-and-armed-conflict-2.pdf
[104] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, article 3(a) and (b)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child also protects children against a wide range of exploitative practices, including economic exploitation, sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking in children, and the use of children for illicit activities[105].

3. Obligations of the State towards children in situations of vulnerability and children in conflict with the law

3.1. Children in situations of vulnerability

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has placed particular emphasis on the vulnerability of separated and unaccompanied children to trafficking or involvement in criminal activities that may result in harm, or even death. Consequently, article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires States parties to exercise heightened vigilance in this regard, particularly where organized crime is involved. The Committee has also noted that there is frequently a link between human trafficking and the situation of separated and unaccompanied children[106].

The recruitment of children by organized criminal groups constitutes a human rights violation that affects children differently depending on their gender[107]. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has emphasized that children associated with armed groups are frequently victims of sexual violence, and that girls are recruited at an earlier age and subjected to sexual harassment as a means of recruitment[108]. This issue requires the adoption of a gender-sensitive approach in the design of prevention and protection mechanisms[109]. Structural discrimination based on gender, as well as other forms of discrimination, increases the risk of trafficking as a result of States' failures to ensure effective protection of children and respect for their rights[110]. It can also lead to boys not being identified as victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation[111].

3.2. Children in conflict with the law

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recognized that victims of trafficking must not be penalized but should instead receive assistance as victims of a serious human rights violation[112]. Children who are exposed to the risk of being trafficked again should not be returned to their country of origin, unless this is in their best interests and appropriate protection measures have been put in place[113].

The principle of non-punishment of victims of trafficking is essential to ensure the recovery of victims and to guarantee a human rights-based response to child trafficking. Children may be at risk of being arrested and detained because of their association with armed groups, without being recognized or assisted as child victims of trafficking, in violation of the principle of non-punishment and of the State's obligations towards victims of trafficking under international law[114].

The Committee stated that children in conflict with the law have the right to be treated in a manner that promotes their reintegration, and that the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child must be used only as a measure of last resort[115]. It is therefore necessary, as part of a comprehensive juvenile justice policy, to develop and implement a wide range of measures to ensure that children are treated in a manner appropriate to their well-being and proportionate both to their personal circumstances and to the seriousness of the offence committed[116].

Finally, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated[117] that the principle of non-punishment applies broadly to all forms of trafficking, whether for the purposes of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation or forced criminality, and that it covers both cross-border and internal trafficking. Under this principle, victims of trafficking must not be penalized for unlawful acts committed as a direct consequence of their situation

[105] Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 32 to 36
[106] CRC/GC/2005/6, paras. 23 and 52
[107] Ref.: AL COL 4/2024, p. 8
[108] Ref.: AL COL 4/2024, p. 8
[109] Ref.: AL COL 4/2024, p. 8
[110] A/80/166, para. 5. See A/71/303
[111] A/80/166, para. 5. See A/HRC/53/28/Add.2
[112] CRC/GC/2005/6, para. 53
[113] CRC/GC/2005/6, para. 53
[114] A/80/166, para. 32; A/HRC/56/60, p. 12. See A/HRC/47/34
[115] CRC/C/GC/10, para. 1
[116] CRC/C/GC/10
[117] A/HRC/47/34, para. 57

of trafficking, regardless of the seriousness of the offence. Its scope encompasses criminal, civil, administrative and migration-related offences, as well as any other form of sanction. It further prohibits any form of deprivation of liberty in such contexts, including immigration detention and detention in the context of removal, transfer or return procedures.

4. State obligations in combating trafficking in children

The following international instruments establishing States' obligations to combat trafficking in children are not exhaustive, but they constitute some of the most important and most widely applicable frameworks.

4.1. International human rights standard

Under the ICCPR, Haiti is required to prohibit slavery and forced labour, and, under the ICESCR, it must protect children from economic and social exploitation[118]. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) strengthens States' obligations relevant to combating the trafficking and exploitation of women and girls[119]. The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires States to ensure that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, and to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation[120].

Furthermore, articles 32 to 36 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child expressly impose on States the obligation to prevent and combat the exploitation of children, including trafficking, sexual exploitation and the sale of children[121]. Moreover, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography requires States to criminalize the sale of children and related exploitative practices, and strengthens their obligations with regard to prevention, protection and international cooperation.

The Palermo Protocol requires States to criminalize trafficking in persons, to prevent and combat that crime, to protect and assist victims, and to promote international cooperation[122]. It emphasizes the identification of victims, respect for their privacy and protection, access to legal assistance, and the establishment of measures for physical, psychological and social recovery, taking into account the age and specific needs of child victims[123].

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, ratified by Haiti in 2007, legally binds the national authorities to the elimination of child trafficking.

In its Fact Sheet No. 36 on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, OHCHR stated that the principle of non-punishment applies generally to all forms of trafficking and prohibits any deprivation of liberty in such contexts, including criminal, administrative or immigration detention[124].

4.2. Regional standards relating to human rights

Article 6 of the American Convention on Human Rights[125], ratified by Haiti in 1977, establishes the prohibition of slavery, including the trafficking of women and forced or compulsory labour.

As early as 2006, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognized the existence of a trend in international law aimed at prohibiting the recruitment of persons under 18 years of age into the armed forces and ensuring that minors do not take a direct part in hostilities. Subsequently, in its 2016 judgment in Workers of the Hacienda Brasil Verde v. Brazil, the Court interpreted the prohibition set out in article 6 as referring broadly to "trafficking in persons". It also found that States are required to adopt positive measures to put an end to such practices and to prevent violations, stating as follows: "States have the obligation to ensure the creation of the necessary conditions to guarantee that violations of this

[118] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, articles 8 and 24
[119] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, article 6
[120] Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 32–36; CRC/GC/2005/6, para. 52
[121] Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 32–36
[122] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, article 6; AL COD 1/2025, p. 11; A/HRC/56/60, para. 1
[123] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, articles 6(1), 6(3), 9(2) and 9(5); AL COD 1/2025, p. 11
[124] OHCHR Fact Sheet No. 36 on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, pages 17–22
[125] American Convention on Human Rights, article 6

inalienable right do not occur and, in particular, the duty to prevent both their agents and private individuals from violating it". Accordingly, States must adopt comprehensive measures in order to act with due diligence, establish an appropriate legal framework and ensure its effective implementation.

4.3. Soft law

Non-binding international guidelines, while rooted in binding international human rights law, further clarify States' obligations and provide guidance for the implementation of a human rights-based approach to combating trafficking in human beings. In particular, the Principles and Guidelines Recommended by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Human Rights and Human Trafficking[126] stress that the protection of the human rights of victims of trafficking must be at the centre of all anti-trafficking actions. They emphasize the importance of victim identification, the non-criminalization and non-detention of victims for offences linked to their situation of trafficking, as well as the provision of appropriate assistance and protection measures. The Guidelines also highlight the need for special safeguards for children, including measures tailored to their age, gender and specific vulnerabilities, as well as approaches that give priority to recovery, rehabilitation and durable solutions.

For its part, Guideline 8[127] makes explicit reference to special protection and support measures for child victims of trafficking. In particular, it urges States to ensure that definitions of child trafficking take account of children's need for special protection and, in accordance with the Palermo Protocol, that deception, force or coercion are not included as elements of that definition. It also stresses the importance of ensuring that child victims of trafficking are not subjected to criminal proceedings for offences related to their situation as victims of trafficking, inter alia.

Moreover, Fact Sheet No. 36 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights constitutes another important and authoritative soft-law resource, which interprets binding human rights obligations relating to trafficking in human beings[128].

[126] Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking
[127] Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, Guideline 8, p. 11
[128] OHCHR Fact Sheet No. 36 on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, pages 17–22