

Over 700,000 internally displaced in Haiti as humanitarian crisis deepens

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People wait for food distribution in a displaced persons camp at the Lycee Marie Jeanne in Port-au-Prince, Haiti [File: Clarens Siffroy/AFP]

Port-au-Prince, October 2 (RHC)-- More than 700,000 people are now internally displaced from their homes in Haiti, with over half of them being children, according to a new report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The United Nations agency said on Wednesday that the figure represented a 22 percent rise compared to June. More than 110,000 people have fled their homes in the last seven months due to gang violence, particularly in Gressier, west of the capital, Port-au-Prince, it added.

Haiti has faced years of unrest and instability as powerful armed groups – often with ties to the country’s political and business leaders – have vied for influence and control.

The situation worsened dramatically at the end of February, when gangs launched attacks on prisons and other state institutions across Port-au-Prince.

The surge of violence this year prompted the resignation of Haiti’s Prime Minister Ariel Henry, the creation of the country’s Transitional Presidential Council, and the deployment of a United Nations-backed, Kenya-led multinational force called the Multinational Security Support Mission.

Last week, the UN human rights office said more than 3,600 people had been killed this year in “senseless” gang violence in the country. And on Monday, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) said in a report that almost 48 percent of people in Haiti are experiencing acute food shortages.

Gregoire Goodstein, the IOM’s chief in Haiti, urged on Wednesday “the international community to step up its support for Haiti’s displaced populations and the host communities that continue to show remarkable resilience in the face of these challenges.”

The IOM report said about 75 percent of those displaced were now sheltering in the country’s provinces, with the Grand Sud region alone hosting 45 percent of all displaced individuals.

The remainder are in Port-au-Prince “where the situation remains precarious and unpredictable,” said the IOM, with people often living in overcrowded sites, with little to no access to basic services.

The agency said 83 percent of displaced people were being hosted by families. “It is crucial that efforts to restore stability and security across the country continue, alongside humanitarian aid to alleviate the immediate suffering of those affected,” it said.

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