Haiti's political and humanitarian crisis

Haiti is currently experiencing one of the most difficult periods in its recent history. Just one month after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 7 July 2021, a devastating 7.2-magnitude earthquake hit the south-west of the country, affecting over 800 000 people and killing over 2 200. As a result, the national and regional elections (scheduled for 26 September 2021) were postponed indefinitely. At the same time, kidnappings and gang violence have increased insecurity; and the repatriation of thousands of Haitian citizens who had migrated to neighbouring countries has complicated the already critical situation. The EU is committed to helping the country through its humanitarian aid and development cooperation.

Hard times for Haiti

Mounting political instability. On the morning of 7 July 2021, Haiti’s controversial president, Jovenel Moïse, was killed by a group of gunmen who assaulted his home. He had been elected in November 2016, following the annulment of the first round of elections held in October 2015, which he claimed to have won. Moïse's presidency was marked by a deepening economic crisis and allegations of corruption and brutality – triggering mass demonstrations against his government. As the legislative elections due in 2019 were never held, Moïse had ruled by decree since January 2020, with Haiti's parliament closed. Moïse formed a new intelligence agency under his control, and even attempted to modify Haiti’s constitution (allegedly to secure immunity from prosecution) and to reinstate the army (disbanded in 1994 for human rights abuses). Although his term in office technically ended on 7 February 2021, five years after his predecessor Michel Martelly left the presidency, he clung to power arguing that he had been sworn in one year later owing to the electoral dispute. This sparked new popular unrest. Although new presidential elections were scheduled for 26 September 2021 following Moïse’s assassination, they were postponed indefinitely after prime minister Ariel Henri dismissed the electoral council (CEP), considering it too partisan. Henri has promised to appoint a more consensual CEP, ‘accepted by all of society' and to set a fresh date for elections in the first months of 2022.

A dire humanitarian situation. Haiti's political crisis has been compounded by another of an economic and humanitarian nature. The country has not yet recovered from the 2010 earthquake, which killed some 220 000 people and devastated its infrastructure. Hurricane Matthew also caused great destruction in 2016, and Haiti’s fragile health system has been strained, first by cholera outbreaks and then by the Covid-19 pandemic (Haiti has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the region, with just 0.8 % as of 10 December 2021). On 14 August 2021, another earthquake (magnitude 7.2, similar to that of 2010) struck the south-west of the country, affecting mainly rural areas. It caused hospitals, schools and homes to collapse, killing over 2 200 people and leaving around 12 700 injured. Tropical storm Grace complicated the situation by causing floods two days later and hampering rescue operations. In its Haiti situation report of 7 October 2021, UNICEF points out that the earthquake has affected at least 800 000 people, including 340 000 children and nearly 39 000 people displaced. Over 900 schools have been damaged or destroyed, and 230 000 children risk dropping out of school if classrooms remain closed. Even before the earthquake struck, the UN estimated that over 40 % of Haiti’s population would require humanitarian assistance in 2021. Haiti's lack of capacity to cope with natural disasters is among the worst in the world.

Violence and insecurity on the rise. Another problem adding to Haiti’s crisis is the rising level of crime and violence. Criminal gangs control large areas of the country, kidnapping and murdering with almost total impunity. In 2020, the US government imposed sanctions on three Haitian citizens, including two members of Moïse’s government, for human rights abuses relating to gang violence. One of them, Jimmy ‘Barbecue' Cherizier, forced Haiti’s prime minister to flee the 18 October 2021 ceremony commemorating Haiti’s founding father, by appearing at the ceremony with heavily armed gang members and presiding over it himself. Kidnappings surged in Haiti in 2021, with a rise of nearly 300 % in the last six months of the year. On 17 October 2021, 17 American and Canadian missionaries were kidnapped by an...
armed gang. The issue of gang violence and crime (forcing 19,000 Haitians from their homes in summer 2021) has become so serious that Haiti’s Foreign Minister, Claude Joseph, has formally asked the UN Security Council for help.

Repatriation of migrants by third countries. Around 11,000 Haitian migrants (8,000 from the US alone) were returned to Haiti between September and November 2021, further overstretching the country’s capacity to tackle the humanitarian crisis. This forced repatriation has been condemned by UN human rights experts. Most of these migrants had left Haiti for other Latin American and Caribbean countries after the 2010 earthquake. Furthermore, the unstable political situation, the humanitarian crisis and the persistent violence could further encourage Haitians to emigrate, as long as Haiti remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the Western Hemisphere.

European Union response
On 8 July 2021, the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), Josep Borrell, condemned the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and offered the people of Haiti the EU’s full support. The EU Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, visited Haiti on 17 September 2021, his visit coinciding with the deployment of a third humanitarian air bridge flight, and reaffirmed the EU’s humanitarian commitment to alleviating the emergency situation in the country. The EU has provided humanitarian aid for victims of major crises and disasters in Haiti, such as hurricanes, cholera outbreaks, the pandemic and the 2010 and 2021 earthquakes. In Haiti’s case, the EU’s strategies for humanitarian aid and development cooperation are closely linked, so as to ensure a smooth transition between short- and long-term assistance. EU-Haiti relations are framed by the Cotonou Agreement, the Caribbean-EU Partnership Strategy (2012, which includes Haiti’s reconstruction among its priorities), and the EU-Cariforum Economic Partnership Agreement (signed by Haiti in 2009). Haiti benefits from the EU’s regional programmes and thematic instruments (e.g. the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)).

European Parliament and Haiti

On 20 October 2021, European Commissioner Ylva Johansson made a statement in the European Parliament plenary on the humanitarian situation in Haiti following the recent earthquake, and on the same day Parliament adopted a resolution on the effectiveness of Member States’ use of EU Solidarity Fund money in cases of natural disasters. The HR/VP made a statement on the situation in Haiti on 20 May 2021 calling for the 'development of a wider scale of EU public diplomacy in the field of human rights in Haiti'. Also on 20 May 2021, Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation in Haiti, urging the Haitian authorities to organise free, fair and credible elections; reiterating its concern about the deteriorating humanitarian, political and security situation; and stressing the importance of international efforts. In November 2019, Parliament adopted another resolution on Haiti, condemning the repression of peaceful protests, and urging all parties to abstain from violence and engage in a peaceful dialogue. On 24 November 2021, Parliament adopted amending budget No 6/2021, on the basis of which the EU will supply additional vaccine doses to low- and middle-income countries and reinforce the Union civil protection mechanism, including the EU response in Haiti.

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