UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

CIVIL DOCUMENTATION AS A PATH TO PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS IN HAITI

Haiti faces a humanitarian crisis marked by escalating gang-related violence, widespread displacement, and the collapse of essential services. Over 1.4 million people have been forced to flee their homes, while many are unable to leave areas under the control or influence of armed gangs, and others continue to be deported back to Haiti.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

Civil documentation is a crucial protection tool in Haiti's current crisis. It allows individuals to exercise their rights and access essential services such as education and healthcare, bridging urgent needs with sustainable solutions.

Having a valid civil document is essential in Haiti to enroll in school, open a bank account, register for a SIM card, apply for a passport, vote, facilitate movement under a state of emergency, and receive humanitarian aid. Without it, investments in social protection and public services risk leaving behind the most vulnerable.

Beyond its immediate impact and protective function, civil documentation contributes to humanitarian response and long-term development goals. It strengthens governance and the rule of law by supporting national institutions and legal frameworks. It also aligns with global priorities, including the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus.

DOCUMENTATION NEEDS AND BARRIERS

In 2020, approximately three million Haitians had not registered their births. The situation has worsened due to insecurity, the forced displacement of 1.4 million people, and the deportation of over 200,000 individuals as of 2025, all of which involve sudden loss of possessions. Data from the National Migration Office and IOM indicate that over 40 per cent of deportees lack any form of identity document. Primary barriers to documentation include high administrative costs, limited state capacity, and centralization of services. Despite these obstacles, authorities are committed to expanding access to documentation without discrimination.

UNHCR works with national authorities and civil society, including Haitian-led organizations, to expand these services.

The Agency supports people at risk, including internally displaced people and deportees, helping them rebuild their lives.

KEY STATE ACTORS IN CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
IN CHARGE OF BIRTH CERTIFICATES

MINISTRY FOR CULTURE
NATIONAL ARCHIVES EXTRACT

NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION OFFICE
NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD

HOW CAN ACCESS TO CIVIL DOCUMENTATION BE STRENGTHENED?

POLICY GUIDANCE FOR AUTHORITIES

Support Haitian authorities in reviewing and strengthening the national legal framework, ensuring birth registration is universal, free, and accessible.

ENHANCING CAPACITY RESPONSE

Provide financial and technical support to key state actors by deploying additional personnel, mobile teams in rural areas and locations hosting internally displaced persons, equipment, and standardized registration forms.

PROVISION OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Support local organizations that offer legal assistance to raise awareness about the importance of civil documentation.

Comprehensive services should include legal advice, case management, representation before relevant authorities, and direct assistance to cover administrative fees.

UNHCR ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024

- UNHCR supported the extension of the validity of a **presidential decree** enabling free late birth registration for adults and **trained over 120 civil registry and NGO staff** on this new system.
- UNHCR strengthened the National Archives by **recruiting 22 data** entry staff and providing them with **equipment,** including standardized forms, office furniture, and birth registers. This benefited eight civil registry offices across Haiti.
- UNHCR partnered with local organizations Initiative Citoyenne pour les Droits de l'Homme (ICDH) and Organisation des Citoyens pour une Nouvelle Haïti (OCNH) to deliver **legal assistance** to displaced and host communities in Port-au-Prince and border areas. **This collaboration led to the issuance of 10,000 new civil documents.**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE CIVIL DOCUMENTATION IN 2026

- **Identify and support additional local organizations providing legal assistance beyond Port-au-Prince, including border areas.**

  A community-based approach will be prioritized, using existing community mechanisms to raise awareness, provide counseling, and facilitate referrals to documentation services.
- **Integrate legal assistance and referrals into humanitarian and development projects to ensure protection and access to services.**
- **Support authorities in deploying mobile registration units in hard-to-reach areas, including border zones, to facilitate the reintegration of returnees.**

For more information:
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