

Dominican Republic: The problem of undocumented Haitian migrants continues.

*Fernando Ariel Manzano*¹

1. Summary

Undocumented Haitian immigration in the Dominican Republic is a complex phenomenon resulting from the economic, political and social crisis in Haiti, as well as the demand for labour in key Dominican sectors. However, the lack of regularisation policies has led to increasing precariousness and social exclusion of this population.

The Dominican government's response has focused on massive deportations and migratory restrictions, measures that have generated international concern without addressing the structural causes of the problem. Faced with this reality, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that combines the regularisation of Haitian workers, the strengthening of bilateral and regional cooperation, and the promotion of policies that reduce discrimination and favour social integration. Only through sustainable and balanced strategies will it be possible to guarantee stability and development in the region.

2. Introduction

Haitian immigration to the Dominican Republic is a complex phenomenon with deep historical, economic and socio-political roots. Over the last decades, the migratory flow from Haiti has intensified due to the persistent economic crisis, political instability, recurrent natural disasters and the institutional weakness of its government. In contrast, the Dominican Republic has experienced significant economic growth, especially in sectors such as construction, agriculture and services, which rely heavily on Haitian labour.

This migratory flow, however, is not homogeneous. Substantial differences are observed according to the length of stay, gender and working conditions of migrants. In particular, the recent feminisation of Haitian migration and the position of migrants in the life cycle have transformed the social and economic dynamics in the Dominican Republic. In this

¹ Associate Researcher at UNICEN-CONICET (University Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires y Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas). Degree in Economics (University of Buenos Aires). Degree in Sociology (University of Buenos Aires). PhD in Demography (University Nacional de Córdoba).

context, the so-called Dominican-Haitians constitute a group with specific characteristics derived from the interaction of these migratory and demographic factors.

One of the main challenges facing the Dominican Republic is the regularisation of the legal status of Haitian immigrants and their descendants. The lack of documentation and the absence of inclusive migration policies have created a legal limbo for thousands of people, restricting their access to fundamental rights such as education, health and decent employment. Moreover, the presence of undocumented migrants has intensified debates on migration management and its effects on the economic and social structure of the receiving country.

Historically, the relationship between the two countries has been marked by tensions and negative perceptions, exacerbated by political and media discourses that have promoted social exclusion and discrimination. In this sense, a narrative has been constructed in which Haitian workers are perceived as unfair competitors in the labour market, which has reinforced racial stereotypes and hindered the formulation of binational cooperation strategies.

The background to this problem lies in Haiti's deep structural crisis, characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment and a fragile governance system.

Consequently, migration to the Dominican Republic is a survival strategy in the face of precariousness in the country of origin. This situation is aggravated by the permeability of the Dominican-Haitian border, whose management has been limited by the topography and economic disparities between the two nations.

Given this situation, it is essential to design and implement coordinated migration management mechanisms that allow for the effective regularisation of immigrants and the guarantee of their fundamental rights. Likewise, it is crucial to foster bilateral dialogue with the objective of developing public policies that promote the social and labour inclusion of the Haitian population in the Dominican Republic.

Far from being conceived as a threat, Haitian immigration should be understood as a phenomenon that requires rational management based on respect for human rights. In a world characterised by increasing human mobility, overcoming historical prejudices and moving towards a model of coexistence based on cooperation and mutual respect is an urgent necessity. Only through inclusive policies and a real commitment to social equity can stability and sustainable development in the region be guaranteed.

This technical report analyses the persistence of the problem of undocumented Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic, addressing its causes, its implications for the

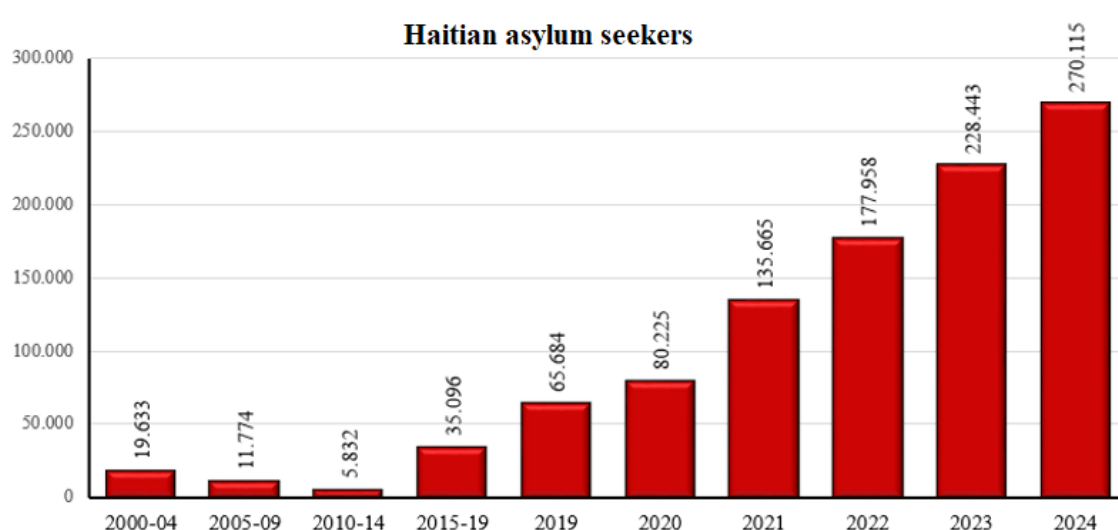
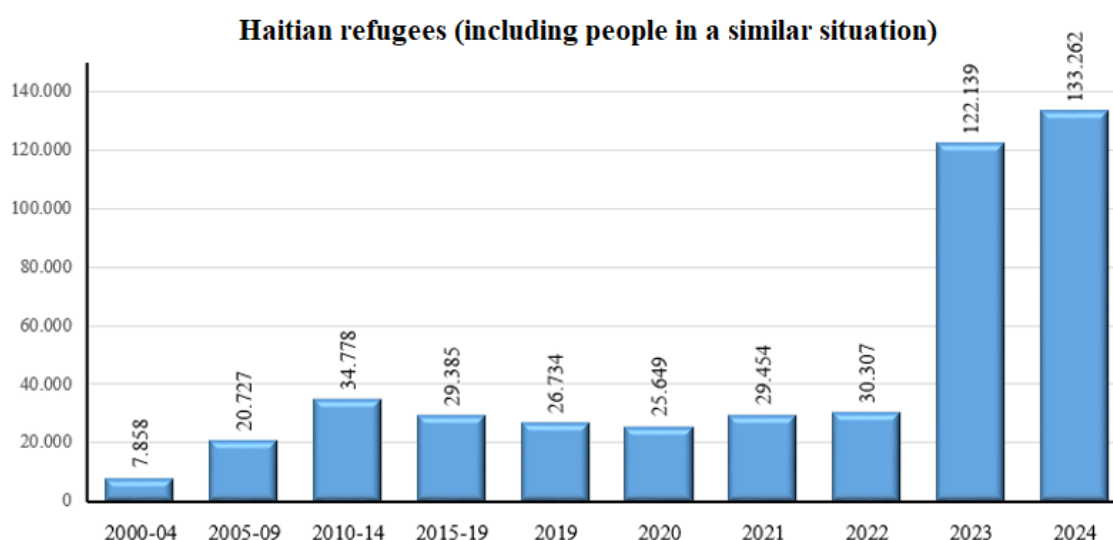
Dominican economy and society, and the policy responses that have been implemented to date. It also examines the role of the media and political discourse in the construction of public perception of this problem.

3. Data on forced migration from Haiti

The crisis in Haiti, marked by the collapse of the state, the rise of gang violence and arms trafficking, has generated a massive exodus of its population in search of safer and more stable living conditions. As Figure 1 shows, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between 2000 and 2022, the number of Haitians recognised as refugees abroad did not exceed 30,000 people. However, in 2023 and 2024, the number of Haitians with international protection increased significantly, reaching 122,139 and 133,262 individuals, respectively.

This exponential growth is further accentuated when considering the number of Haitians in the process of being assessed for refugee status. In 2023, the figure rose to 228,443 people, while in 2024 it rose to 270,115. Unlike those who have already been granted refugee status, these migrants are in a more vulnerable situation, facing the risk of being returned to their country of origin unless they are granted another form of international protection. These data reflect the growing pressure on asylum systems and the urgent need for a coordinated response by the international community to address the Haitian migration crisis.

Figure 1. Haitian refugees* (including persons in a similar situation) and asylum seekers**. Period 2000-2024.



Notes: (*) Refugees are persons who have already been recognised as refugees. They enjoy international protection and cannot be returned to their country of origin. Persons in a refugee-like situation" are those who, although not formally recognised as refugees, face similar risks and receive equivalent protection. (**) Asylum seekers have fled their country and have applied for international protection in another state, but whose application is still in the process of being assessed. If their application is accepted, they become refugees; if it is rejected, they may be returned to their country of origin unless other forms of protection are available.

Source: Own elaboration based on United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR-UN).

Currently, the foreign population in the Dominican Republic exceeds 570,933 people, 87.2 per cent of whom are of Haitian origin. Many migrants arrive in conditions of extreme vulnerability, without access to documentation or basic rights, making regularisation difficult and increasing the risk of discrimination and exploitation. To address this situation, President Luis Abinader has requested technical and financial support to strengthen the national response and improve institutional capacity in migration management.

Proposed strategies include the collection of data on the demand for foreign labour in key sectors such as agriculture, construction and tourism, as well as the monitoring of bi-national markets on the border with Haiti. These initiatives seek to facilitate legal pathways to employment and reduce pressure on informal markets, promoting orderly and sustainable integration. Inaction in the face of this crisis could have serious consequences for the social and economic stability of the country, which is why the Dominican Republic seeks to consolidate a multi-sectoral response that benefits both migrants and receiving communities.

4. Development

The situation of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic cannot be understood without considering the structural factors that drive this migration. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita substantially lower than that of the Dominican Republic and with alarming levels of unemployment and underemployment. In addition, recurrent natural disasters, such as the 2010 earthquake and hurricanes that have affected the region, have further deteriorated the Haitian economy and forced many citizens to seek better opportunities in the neighbouring country.

In the Dominican Republic, the economy relies heavily on Haitian labour, especially in sectors such as agriculture, construction and domestic services. However, the undocumented status of many Haitian workers leaves them extremely vulnerable. Many employers take advantage of this status to pay wages below the legal minimum, deny employment benefits and expose workers to exploitative conditions. This situation not only perpetuates social inequality, but also contributes to the perception that Haitian migrants ‘compete’ for jobs with Dominican workers, fuelling feelings of xenophobia and discrimination.

The migration problem also has an impact on public services, such as health and education. In many localities, especially in border and urban areas, hospitals have reported a high demand for services from Haitian migrants, which has generated debates on the use of state resources. Similarly, in education, the enrolment of Haitian children in public schools has been a source of controversy, as many of them do not have identity documents, making it difficult for them to access formal education.

Politically and legally, the Dominican Republic has implemented various measures to regulate Haitian migration. However, these policies have been criticised both domestically and internationally. In 2013, the Dominican Constitutional Court issued ruling 168-13, which redefined the criteria for obtaining nationality, especially affecting descendants of Haitians born in Dominican territory. This decision generated a humanitarian crisis, as thousands of people were left stateless and without access to basic rights. Subsequently, the government implemented the National Plan for the Regularisation of Foreigners, with the objective of providing legal status to irregular migrants, but results have been limited due to bureaucratic complexity and lack of resources.

Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic responds to a combination of economic, political and social factors. Haiti, considered the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere, faces recurrent crises that include political instability, violence, economic collapse and natural disasters. These conditions have forced thousands of Haitians to seek opportunities in the neighbouring country, where they can access jobs in sectors such as construction, agriculture and informal trade. In 2019, Haiti was the largest source of migrants to the Dominican Republic with 1.73 million people, a figure that, according to some studies, may be underestimated due to the presence of undocumented migrants.

The Dominican government has implemented drastic measures to reduce irregular immigration. In 2023, it reportedly deported approximately 250,000 Haitians, and in October 2024 it announced a plan to expel 10,000 migrants every week. These policies have generated international criticism due to the conditions under which deportations are carried out. Reports have documented cases of Haitian migrants being transported in cages and subjected to degrading treatment. In addition, Decree 668-22, signed by President Abinader in 2022, reinforces the search for undocumented migrants and allows for the expulsion of Dominicans of Haitian origin if they do not have proper documentation.

Dominican migration policy has also been influenced by international factors. The Eleventh Summit of the Americas and the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection have been promoted as key initiatives for migration management in the region, but have excluded the Haitian issue in the Dominican Republic. This omission is evidence of the lack of a comprehensive approach to regional migration policies. In this context, mass deportations and restrictive measures continue without a structural solution to the migration crisis.

On the other hand, the migration phenomenon also has a significant economic impact. The Haitian population in the Dominican Republic plays a key role in essential economic sectors, albeit in precarious conditions and with low wages. Despite their contribution to the Dominican economy, these migrants face discrimination, social exclusion and limited access to basic services. In addition, remittances sent from the Dominican Republic represent a vital source of livelihood for Haiti. In 2023, Haiti received approximately USD 3.8 billion in remittances, representing 16.3% of its GDP. However, the impact of these remittances on improving living conditions in Haiti remains limited due to the country's economic fragility.

Finally, the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has been marked by a history of tensions and structural discrimination. The massacre of Haitians in 1937 under the Trujillo dictatorship consolidated a nationalist narrative that has influenced the Dominican population's perception of Haitian immigrants. This historical legacy has been reinforced by migration policies that prioritise control and exclusion over integration and respect for human rights.

5. Conclusion

The phenomenon of undocumented Haitian immigration in the Dominican Republic is a multidimensional problem with deep structural roots. As discussed in the Introduction, Haitian migration responds to a combination of socio-economic, political and demographic factors, reflecting not only Haiti's internal crisis, but also the labour and social dynamics in the receiving country. In this context, Haitian migrants face barriers to the regularisation of their status, which generates vulnerability and social exclusion.

Data on forced migration from Haiti show that the crisis in Haiti has fuelled an unprecedented exodus, with an exponential increase in refugee applications in recent years. Political instability, the rise of gang violence and the collapse of the state have turned migration into a survival mechanism for thousands of Haitians. However, the absence of effective regularisation policies in the Dominican Republic and border control measures have exacerbated the precariousness of this population.

The development of the analysis has shown how Haitian migrants play a crucial role in key economic sectors in the Dominican Republic, such as construction and agriculture, albeit in conditions of informality and exploitation. It has also highlighted the impact that this migration has on public services, particularly in health and education, and how the lack of documentation limits access to basic rights. The state response has largely been

based on policies of mass deportation and migration restrictions, which have been criticised both nationally and internationally for their humanitarian and legal implications. To address this issue effectively, it is essential to adopt solutions that not only regulate migratory flows, but also guarantee the protection of human rights. First, it is essential that the Dominican Republic implement a more inclusive migration framework that allows for the regularisation of Haitian workers in strategic sectors of the economy. This would contribute to reducing labour informality and guaranteeing better living conditions for this population.

Second, bilateral cooperation between the Dominican Republic and Haiti is essential to manage migration in a coordinated manner. Border control mechanisms need to be strengthened without resulting in violations of rights. The international community must also play a more active role in the stabilisation of Haiti, promoting economic development and humanitarian assistance initiatives that reduce migratory pressure.

Finally, combating discrimination and historical prejudices that have perpetuated the exclusion of the Haitian population in the Dominican Republic is a priority. The promotion of awareness-raising campaigns and the promotion of a more balanced narrative in the media can contribute to more effective social integration.

In conclusion, the problem of undocumented Haitian immigration in the Dominican Republic cannot be addressed exclusively from a securitisation perspective. Comprehensive strategies that combine efficient migration policies, international cooperation and respect for human rights are required. Only through a balanced and sustainable approach will it be possible to transform this phenomenon into an opportunity for the development and stability of both nations.

6. Bibliographic References

Bourgeois, C. (2024). Haití en las Américas. Puntos de quiebre en las políticas migratorias y movilidades haitianas en el continente (2010-2023). *Cuadernos Intercambio sobre Centroamérica y el Caribe*, 21(1), 1. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=9482293>

Ferrán, F. I. (2024). La cuadratura del círculo dominicano. Publicación del Centro de Estudios Económicos y Sociales P. José Luis Alemán, PUCMM, Santo Domingo, República Dominicana.

Gordonava, A. H. (2023). Entre la migración circular y la migración en tránsito: nuevas movilidades en la frontera Pisiga (Bolivia)–Colchane (Chile). *Maloca: Revista de Estudios Indígenas*, 6, e023013-e023013. Disponible en <https://doi.org/10.20396/maloca.v6i00.18378>

- Jenko, N. (2023). La masacre del perejil. Editores, 139. Universidad de Pécs Centro Iberoamericano Pécs. p. 139-155. Disponible en: https://real.mtak.hu/185723/1/ThomazyG_IBEROAMERICA_20_2023.pdf
- Madriaga-Parra, Lissette y Nicolás Gissi-Barbieri. 2025. "Migración haitiana de tránsito: la ruta migratoria por Santiago de Chile y la aspiración de llegar hacia el norte global". Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología 58: 155-178. <https://doi.org/10.7440/antipoda58.2025.07>
- Maresca, A. (2024). La exclusión política y social de los migrantes haitianos en República Dominicana: acercamiento al racismo multidimensional. Universitas-XXI, Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas, (40), 93-113. Disponible en: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/4761/476176952009/html/>
- Muñoz-Pogossian, B., & González-Bengoa, C. (2024). Políticas públicas para migrantes y refugiados en ciudades de las Américas. Revista Economía, Gestión Y Territorio, 1(1), 11–33. <https://doi.org/10.4206/rev.egt.2024.v1n1-02>
- Núñez-Medina, G., & Uribe-Salas, F. J. (2024). Análisis estadístico de la migración de haitianos a Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, usando regresión logística. Huellas de la Migración, 8(15), 11-36. Disponible en: <https://huellasdelamigracion.uaemex.mx/article/view/17332>
- Núñez-Medina, Gerardo; Uribe-Salas, Felipe Javier. (2024). Análisis estadístico de la migración de haitianos a Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, usando regresión logística. Huellas de la Migración, [S.l.], v. 8, n. 15, p. 11-36, feb. 2024. ISSN 2594-2832. Disponible en: <https://huellasdelamigracion.uaemex.mx/article/view/17332>
- Rodríguez Núñez, J. B. (2024). Informalidad laboral y economía no observada: una revisión de la literatura aplicada en la República Dominicana. Ciencia, Economía y Negocios, 8(1), 155-181. <https://doi.org/10.22206/ceyn.2024.v8i1.3262>
- Santana, J. D. R. (2024). Las remesas familiares entre República Dominicana y Haití: un análisis comparado: 2010-2023. Observatorio de las Ciencias Sociales en Iberoamérica, 5(4), 83-96. Disponible en: https://ojs.eumed.net/rev/index.php/ocsi/article/view/5_remesas
- Tello, O. A. S., & García, T. D. J. P. (2024). Políticas migratorias en América: migración y desplazamiento forzado, derechos humanos, seguridad humana y violencia. Revista Relaciones Internacionales, 6(2), 55-99. Disponible en <https://revistas.ues.edu.sv/index.php/reinter/article/view/2928>
- Urra, M. V., & Sandoval, S. R. (2024). Migración emergente en tiempos de pandemia en Chile. análisis crítico de la cobertura mediática. Clacso. Disponible en <https://www.doctoradoencomunicacion.cl/repositorio/files/original/ef369c22acc85930397e5b7b71e4696ff04b1ecb.pdf>

