

Features

Can Haiti apparel sector survive Hurricane Melissa, HOPE/HELP loss?

Hurricane Melissa has devastated parts of Haiti, displacing thousands and damaging infrastructure with apparel leaders warning the storm could put a further strain on its apparel industry given the recent expiry of its US HOPE/HELP trade benefits.

Isatou Ndure | October 31, 2025

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Hurricane Melissa has left parts of Haiti's apparel sector struggling to assess the full extent of disruption. Credit: YAMIL LAGE/Gettyimages.co.uk.

At least 30 people have died in Haiti after Hurricane Melissa tore through the Caribbean earlier this week, according to the [BBC](#), with torrential rain,

flooding and power outages causing widespread destruction across southern and western regions.

Officials believe many of the victims died when a river overflowed in Petit-Goave, and around 15,000 people have been displaced and are sheltering in more than 120 temporary centres.

The Category 5 storm, which brought winds of up to 295 km/h, made landfall in Jamaica before striking Haiti and moving across the region. Roads remain blocked, and humanitarian agencies are struggling to reach communities cut off by floodwaters.

Hurricane impact in Haiti's key garment manufacturing zones

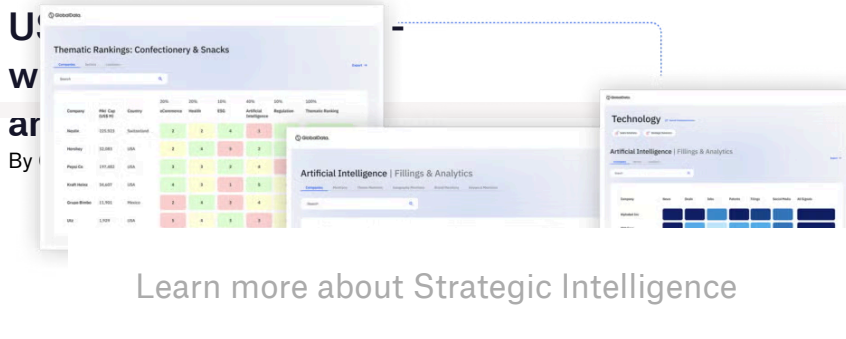
The Association of Industries of Haiti (ADIH) had not responded to Just Style's request for comment at the time of going to press, but it is believed that Haiti's major apparel manufacturing zones in the north may have escaped the worst of the storm.

Ed Gribbin, CEO of Gribbin Strategic LLC and immediate past chairman of Sewn Products Equipment & Suppliers of the Americas (SPESA) tells Just Style exclusively: "I reached out but don't have any feedback from my team there, before adding: "I do know that the Northeast part of the country, where we employ thousands of people in the Codevi Industrial Park, was reported to have not been impacted as severely as the southern and western parts of Haiti, so I remain hopeful."

But, Gribbin is quick to assert that flooding, destruction of homes and power cuts have devastated an already

fragile community.

GlobalData Strategic Intelligence



He says: “There has been a significant loss of life, most from drowning, and the massive floods have displaced thousands of people... in the one country in the world that can afford it least.”

The BBC reports that the World Food Programme and the US State Department are coordinating logistics and emergency relief, while the UK government has pledged an additional £5m (\$6m) on top of the £2.5m of funding already announced for humanitarian supplies and power restoration.

University of Delaware professor of fashion and apparel studies, Dr Sheng Lu adds that many of Haiti’s garment factories were located in areas significantly affected by the hurricane, such as Port-au-Prince.

He explains: “The damaged roads and other critical infrastructure could make it even more costly and time-consuming for US fashion companies to source from the country, especially now that the expiration of the HOPE/HELP program has further complicated Haiti’s outlook as an apparel sourcing base.”

Julie Hughes, president of the US Fashion Industry Association (**USFIA**) tells Just Style she is very concerned

about the impact of Hurricane Melissa on her colleagues in Haiti: “We know that there is major flooding and damage in key areas, but we do not yet have much information or a full assessment of the situation. We expect it could be several days before we know more.”

Hurricane adds to Haiti apparel sector’s ongoing trade uncertainty

The devastation adds a new strain to Haiti’s apparel sector as it was already grappling with the [loss of key US trade benefits under the HOPE \(Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act\) and HELP \(Haiti Economic Lift Program Act\) schemes, which expired in September 2025.](#)

The programmes had underpinned Haiti’s export-driven garment industry by granting duty-free access to the US market, so without them manufacturers face higher costs.

Robert P. Antoshak, VP of strategic global sourcing and development at Grey Matter Concepts says: “There are times when it seems Haiti can’t catch a break, and Hurricane Melissa is a case in point. The loss of lives is a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities that countries in the region face during hurricane season.

Antoshak believes Hurricane Melissa further underscores the importance of renewing the benefits of the HOPE/HELP programme “now more than ever”.

While GlobalData’s retail analyst Neil Saunders describes the hurricane as a “blow upon a bruise for apparel in Haiti,” he warns that without renewed trade incentives, post-hurricane rebuilding may stall.

He shares that although the extent of the damage is still being assessed, the devastation hit Haiti hard and “it will no doubt be disruptive to the apparel sector.”

Saunders continues: “The problem is that now that preferential trade with America has expired, it will raise a question of whether manufacturers invest to rebuild or repair damaged infrastructure.”

Sadly, he says: “Some may not feel there is a reason to do so.”

Background: What did end of HOPE and HELP mean for Haiti’s apparel sector?

Haiti’s apparel industry has long depended on preferential access to the US market through the HOPE (Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act) and HELP (Haiti Economic Lift Program Act) trade programmes.

Introduced in 2006 and 2010, respectively, the schemes granted duty-free treatment for apparel made in Haiti using US or regional fabrics, provided factories met specific labour, environmental, and sourcing standards.

The programmes were credited with revitalising Haiti’s manufacturing sector following decades of political disorder and the 2010 earthquake.

[A report published by the United States International Trade Commission](#) states that the apparel sector provided over 60,000 jobs in Haiti in 2021, though this number declined to nearly 22,000 by 2024 due to political instability and security concerns.

[Back in July 2024, several members of Haiti’s apparel sector said the future of Haiti’s apparel sector would depend on the renewal of the HOPE/HELP trade programme.](#)

At the time US congresswoman and Haiti caucus co-chair Ayanna Pressley commented: “The Haitian people have suffered deeply and to allow HOPE/HELP to expire would be a drastic disservice to their livelihood.”

Hope is running out given both HOPE and HELP expired on 25 September 2025, and efforts in the US Congress to renew or replace the benefits have stalled as wider debates on reciprocal tariffs on trade have taken priority.

The American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) shared its “deep disappointment” earlier this month on the US administration allowing the Haiti trade preference programmes to expire and urged the US government to extend them to provide US businesses with smart, practical strategies to diversify sourcing outside of China.

Without renewal, many factories already struggling with inflation, political unrest, and logistics disruptions could face closure – a risk now heightened by the physical damage caused by Hurricane Melissa.

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