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Rethinking the management of the migration crisis in the border coun- tries of the central Sahel

The situation of the Coastal West African coun-
tries bordering Burkina Faso

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ACRONYMS

AES	Alliance of Sahel States
ANPC	National Civil Protection Agency
ECOWAS	Community of West African States
DAARA	Department of Aid and Assistance to Refugees and Stateless Persons
EXCOM	Executive Committee
GRB	Ghana Refugee Board
HCR	High Commissioner for Refugees
ISS	Islamic State in the Sahel
JNIM	Support Group for Islam and Muslims
PSGOUV	Government Social Program
PURS	Emergency Program for the Savannah Region
VDP	Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland
UA	African Union

Executive summary

The coastal countries of West Africa bordering Burkina Faso are experiencing a wave of refugee arrivals fleeing both jihadist violence and that committed by defense and security forces and Volunteers for the Homeland Defence (VDP). On the whole, the reception conditions offered by both governments and local communities ensure that refugee populations are welcomed with dignity, that their humanitarian needs are met, and that this does not lead to conflict or violence with host communities.

However, coastal states are also tempted to restrict reception conditions and, in the case of Ghana, even to expel some refugee populations. Not only can such policies not be applied due to a lack of capacity to seal borders, but they also plunge populations into situations of extreme precariousness, which risk driving them into the arms of armed groups and exposing coastal countries to a heightened security threat in the medium term.

States must maintain open reception policies that are strict on the identification and monitoring of refugees to avoid possible terrorist infiltration, and flexible in the application of reception conditions, particularly when this reduces pressure on available resources: these policies must also be accompanied by the establishment of inclusive forums for dialogue with all local players to prevent and rapidly defuse any disputes or tensions.

Introduction

The Sahel is sinking into a security crisis that has been steadily worsening since 2012. Burkina Faso is becoming the epicenter of this insecurity. In 2024, the country became the most exposed to terrorist attacks in the world, according to the Global Terrorism Index¹. Civilians are paying the heaviest price for Burkina Faso's exposure, caught between ever-increasing jihadist violence against the population on the one hand, and violence perpetrated by the defense and security forces and the VDP on the other. Since the beginning of 2023, the number of civilians killed by these armed actors has reached record levels, and this trend has even intensified since the beginning of 2024.

The immediate consequence of this violence is a surge of internally displaced people, as well as refugees in neighboring countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Ghana). However, these countries of refuge are also exposed to the contagion of jihadist violence, which exposes them to the difficult challenge of continuing to be open to welcoming populations fleeing such violence, while ensuring that these same populations do not become an additional source of fragility for the local social fabric.

The policy brief analyzes the construction of this fragile balance. After characterizing the flows of forced displacement to coastal countries (1), as well as reception policies (2), it is important to analyze the risks these flows pose for local contexts (3) and the consequences this has for the policies of coastal countries (4).

1 - CHARACTERIZATION OF FORCED MIGRATION FLOWS TO COASTAL COUNTRIES AND THEIR CAUSES

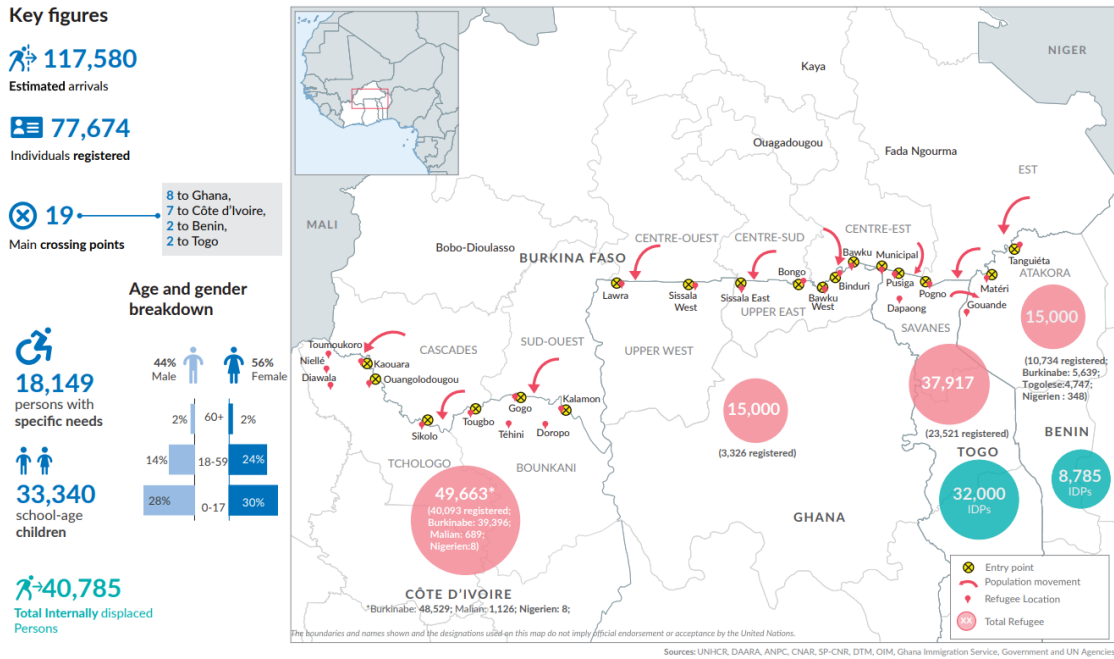
1.1 - Analysis of forced displacement flows

The continuing deterioration in the security situation in Burkina Faso since 2016 has led to the forced displacement of over 2.1 million people in the country (UNHCR data, March 2024) and 117,580 departures to southern border countries, where the security situation as much as the context of social cohesion is more favorable. Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are all concerned by these displacement flows, even though the northern part of these states is exposed to growing insecurity, which is a source of internal displacement in Togo and Benin.

The figure of 117,580 forcibly displaced people is probably lower than the actual figure, given that it refers to people who have been registered, and that a number of people escape the identified flows. This is particularly the case for pastoral populations, who, via transhumance in particular, escape official channels and registration processes. This difference may partly explain why the majority of individuals registered are women and children, while male refugees prefer informal cross-border mobility channels.

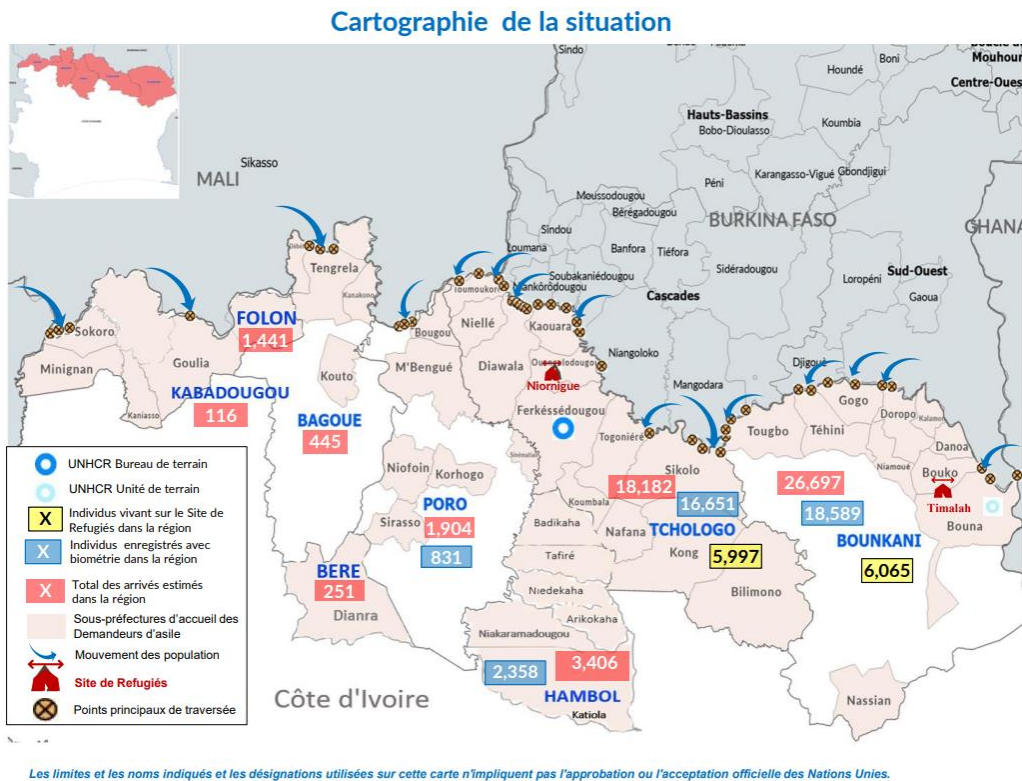
¹ <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/global-terrorism-index/>

MAP 1 - REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF REFUGEES FROM BURKINA FASO IN COASTAL COUNTRIES



Source: UNHCR (March 2024)

MAP 2 - LOCATION OF REFUGEE AREAS IN NORTHERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE



Source: UNHCR, March 2024

In Côte d'Ivoire, as of March 12, 2024, UNHCR estimated the number of forcibly displaced people from Burkina Faso at almost 50,000 (41,598 officially registered by UNHCR), of whom 45% were men and 55% women. 51% of the displaced came from the Cascades region, 15% from the Hauts-Bassins, 12% from the South-West and 8% from the Boucle du Mouhoun.

In Togo, the number of refugees has long been underestimated due to the lack of an official census. In December 2023, such a census was carried out by the authorities as part of the Emergency Program for the Savannah Region (PURS), which led to an estimated 37,917 refugees, a large number directly linked to the prevailing security pressure in East and Center-East regions of Burkina Faso. The country, plagued by growing insecurity since 2022, is also home to 32,000 internally displaced persons.

In Benin, the Atacora department was home to almost 9,000 refugees at the end of 2023, particularly in Tanguiéta and Matéri (15,000 including Alibori). These flows come directly from the East region of Burkina Faso, but also from Togo, in response to the deteriorating situation in the Kpendjal prefecture. Among them, more than 1,500 refugees arrived in February 2023 (mainly in Gouandé), following attacks in northern Togo. Benin's National Civil Protection Agency (ANPC) has also reported the internal displacement of 8,785 people in the Atacora and Alibori departments, due to the deteriorating situation. UNHCR projections suggest that the number of refugees could double to 30,000 by the end of 2024².

In Ghana, 15,000 refugees are estimated to have reached the Upper East and Upper West regions in 2023, as a result of the deteriorating security situation in the Center-East in Burkina Faso. According to UNHCR projections, this figure could rise to 28,000 by the end of 2024³.

1.2 - Causes of forced displacement

The coastal countries bordering Burkina Faso are directly affected by the growing insecurity affecting almost the entire territory of Burkina Faso. Forced displacements from Burkina Faso are essentially due to insecurity or its consequences in terms of loss of access to land, which is the primary livelihood for 80% of the population that depend on agriculture.

Insecurity obviously stems from attacks perpetrated by jihadist groups, mainly the JNIM and to a lesser extent the EIS, which are growing steadily in Burkina Faso's East, Centre-East, South-West, Cascades and Hauts-Bassins regions. The establishment of the VDP in January 2022, far from restoring security to the territory, has overexposed civilian populations to jihadist violence. With the arrival of President Traoré in October 2022, the generalization of VDPs throughout the country increased this risk. Since then, any village that sets up a VDP is now attacked by the JNIM, and its inhabitants evicted or killed. This has played a major role in the explosion of violence against civilians since the beginning of 2023⁴. By extension, the populations who live essentially from cultivating their fields are today denied access to land by the embargoes put in place by the JNIM in some forty urban and rural communes in the country. Deprived of their means of existence, these populations are forced to move, most often within the country, but also to coastal countries where economic opportunities are more plentiful.

However, a large number of displaced people are also fleeing violence perpetrated by the defense and security forces, and/or by the VDP. Since 2019, counter-insurgency operations have led to widespread violence against the population, a trend that has continued to increase since then⁵. This is particularly the case in Côte d'Ivoire, where a very large number of

² Gulf of Guinea Joint Response Plan for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and host communities - Benin response Plan, UN, March 2024

³ Gulf of Guinea Joint Response Plan for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and host communities - Ghana response Plan, UN, March 2024

⁴ See "Burkina Faso: arming civilians at the cost of social cohesion", International Crisis Group, December 2023.

⁵ See "Burkina Faso: emerging from the spiral of violence", International Crisis Group, February 24, 2020.

the displaced people are from pastoralist communities - the majority of them Peulh - who have paid a heavy price for the anti-terrorist fight waged in Burkina Faso. In Benin, Togo and Ghana, the majority of refugees appear to be fleeing jihadist violence, and to a lesser extent violence perpetrated by Burkina Faso's armed forces.

The violence emanating from all the armed actors in Burkina Faso has resulted in the forced displacement of over 2 million people in the country, who generally flee rural areas to take refuge in urban communes on their outskirts. Current counter-terrorism operations are aimed at freeing up areas to relocate people who have fled insecurity. However, despite the effective relocation of some localities, large-scale violence against civilians has increased in recent months, generating new waves of forced displacement. These are likely to continue in the future.

2 - RECEPTION POLICIES THAT GENERALLY RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED PERSONS

For several decades, refugee policy in West Africa was based on setting up refugee camps. This approach is increasingly being questioned, both because of the cost of such policies, and because it is ill-suited to the specific needs of refugee populations in West Africa, some of whom live on mobility, and who project themselves into long-term patterns of forced displacement, averaging 20 years according to a UNHCR source.

2.1 - Camp policies and their limits

Côte d'Ivoire is the only country to have set up "refugee reception centers" to accommodate displaced persons forced from Burkina Faso in 2023. While the first Burkinabe refugees arrived in the Ouangolodougou department at the end of 2021, the influx became significant from December 2022⁶.

In 2023, the authorities decided to set up two "refugee reception centers", where forcibly displaced people will be welcomed on a voluntary basis: one in the locality of Niornigué, near the border town of Ouangolodougou, in the Tchologo region; and the other on the Notadouo site, in the Bounkani region. These two sites cover the entire area concerned by the reception of forcibly displaced people from Burkina Faso.

This reception policy is part of a Ivorian tradition of hospitality and openness to refugee populations, manifested by a refusal to expel them⁷. It involves a substantial budgetary effort on the part of the Ivorian state, which provides 90% of the funding for the two centers, "a first in Africa" according to the UNHCR⁸. The two pillars of Ivorian public action in refugee management are security and humanitarian.

The security aspect is directly managed by the National Security Council and the Ministry of the Interior, in order to monitor the refugee population. Assisted by the DAARA (Direction d'Aide et d'Assistance aux Réfugiés), the Ivorian authorities have first carried out a biometric registration of refugees in order to identify the population in question. The authorities monitor the security of the reception centers, first and foremost to protect the displaced population, who may be the target of reprisals. Access to the camps is highly restricted, and the publication of

⁶ Interviews with administrative sources, Ouangolodougou, March 2024.

⁷ In the 1990s, Côte d'Ivoire welcomed refugees from the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts on its western border. The situation was reversed during the country's long civil war, when Ivorians fled mainly to Liberia, but also to Ghana.

⁸ "Côte d'Ivoire to inaugurate two reception centers for Burkinabe refugees", RFI, July 21, 2023.

refugees' identities or photos is forbidden, despite certain shortcomings⁹. The authorities also keep a close watch on interactions between the camps and their surroundings, particularly in view of fears of collusion with armed actors operating in Burkina Faso. Community and even family relations between certain refugees and jihadist groups accentuate this risk for the Ivorian authorities. In addition to the centers themselves, the Ivorian authorities have invested considerable resources in reinforcing the security network along the border with Burkina Faso, whether through the densification of defense and security forces (police, gendarmerie, border police, Dozo), the mobilization of electronic surveillance resources or the strengthening of intelligence networks in this area.

On the humanitarian front, DAARA, with the support of PSGOUV and HCR, is providing assistance to displaced populations. The reception centers benefit from houses built from solid, durable materials (cement with tin roofs): 1,500 houses on the Notadouo site and 1,080 on 10ha on the Niornigué site. The sites benefit from free electricity and drinking water supplied by hydraulic pumps, despite the fact that the Ouangolodougou department has a general drinking water supply problem¹⁰. The public authorities also supply the refugees with food (rice, corn, salt, oil, tomatoes) and energy (domestic gas¹¹). Refugees have special access to the civil registry service in town halls for birth declarations.

However, these official solutions are not enough. Not only is the construction and management of the centers very costly for the Ivorian state, but it also slows down the process of empowering refugee populations who will undoubtedly be present on Ivorian territory in the long term. It is particularly ill-suited to the nature of the economic activities of the majority of displaced people in northern Côte d'Ivoire, who are pastoralists for whom mobility is essential to their daily subsistence as well as to safeguarding their capital, their animals. Today, only 12,000 of the IDPs from Burkina Faso are in camps, with the remaining 38,000 opting for community-based solutions.

2.2 - Community-based initiatives

The reception of displaced persons is often largely beyond the control of states and the policies they implement, because borders are porous and the weak territorial network of defense and security forces in the northern parts of these states prevents hermetic control of flows. As a result, displaced populations often evade the census, preferring to develop local, community-based relations rather than the solutions proposed by governments.

In Côte d'Ivoire, as soon as the first refugees arrived, their reception and management was initially initiated by indigenous or allochthonous communities living close to the border, particularly in the departments of Ouangolodougou, Doropo and Tehini. Refugees initially sought refuge in neighboring communities on the other side of the border, valuing shared community relations, kinship or religious affiliation. Even today, the majority of refugees prefer to avoid reception centers in favor of community-based solutions, negotiating with village chiefs the conditions of their reception in a locality, or directly with relatives or landlords with whom they have sometimes interacted for a long time. In the case of sedentary populations, kinship relationships are sufficient to enable them to be welcomed. For pastoral populations, this is traditionally done in exchange for an annual gift of oxen or the loan of a plough oxen, for example.

⁹ This measure needs to be put into perspective, as an influencer specializing in tourist trips to Côte d'Ivoire gained access to the camp. He was able to film the asylum seekers and show the facilities at the Niornigué site in a short video report.

¹⁰ This additional effort was made by the Ivorian government via its dedicated structure, the Office Nationale de l'Eau Potable (ONEP). ONEP is placed under the technical supervision of the Ministry of Hydraulics, Sanitation and Health, and the financial supervision of the Ministry of the Budget and State Portfolio. ONEP has a Board of Directors made up of eight (8) members from the ministries that make up the stakeholders in the drinking water sector. Source : <https://onepci.net/> consulted on March 13, 2024.

¹¹ Interview with a local entrepreneur in Ouangolodougou, March 2024

These community-based approaches necessarily lead - at least temporarily - to a loss of control by the authorities over the reception conditions for displaced populations, who prefer the safest and most economically convenient solutions. This poses challenges for the authorities, particularly when these approaches favor illegal solutions, starting with the occupation of classified forests or artisanal gold-panning sites, as observed in northern Côte d'Ivoire. This situation is de facto imposed on the authorities and could be an opportunity as the displaced people have a economic activity, while reducing the risk of significant pressure exerted by refugees on available resources. For the time being, the authorities have no choice but to accommodate such a situation, while adapting through innovative approaches. One of these was the recent declassification of a classified forest near Ferkessedougou, allowing displaced populations and guests living in a village in this forest to be legalized in their situation. These adaptation measures must be provisional, and should not be expected to be generalized at the risk of attracting even more refugees for economic motivations in the long term, but at the very least they have helped to maintain social cohesion. To date, there have been no clashes between refugee and host populations.

2.3 - Hybrid solutions: a Community approach framed by the Member States

At this stage, Togo, Ghana and Benin are adopting hybrid reception policies, combining community-based approaches with sustained state support. While giving priority to the reception of refugees through local communities, the authorities are identifying open sites and supporting displaced populations with partners such as the UNHCR. This support is primarily humanitarian in nature, but the authorities are increasingly considering solutions that will enable the population to become economically resilient.

Ghana and Benin are developing community-based solutions, mainly by offering humanitarian assistance. In Ghana, in February 2023, the Ghana Refugee Board (GRB) and the HCR jointly organized a high-level consultative dialogue to develop a response strategy for the Upper East and Upper West regions, leading among other things to the need for the government to secure land that has enabled the creation of two sites for the reception and settlement of refugees and asylum seekers: Tarikom (Upper East region) and Zini (Upper West). The Ghanaian authorities are developing schools there, enabling displaced populations to attend school.

In Benin, the authorities have been providing emergency support to refugee populations arriving in the Atacora since 2021, before requesting the support of the HCR to take over and support these populations in sustaining their livelihoods so that they remain socio-economically resilient¹². The authorities have not set up any specific reception sites, with the bulk of reception taking place among local families on the basis of pre-existing business or community relations.

Togo, on the occasion of the 74^{ème} EXCOM session of the HCR in October 2023, reiterated its readiness to welcome refugee populations, going so far as to grant nationality to 1,000 of them, on the basis of the "right of birthplace" which prevails in Togo. The country has set up a simplified registration procedure, and adopted protection and assistance measures in conjunction with the HCR and other humanitarian partners: food support for displaced populations, refugees and hosts; reinforcement of listening centers and justice centers to deal with cases of gender-based violence; improvement of basic infrastructures to cope with the influx of needs; setting up of refugee management committees, etc. The authorities have also taken steps to ensure that the refugees' rights are respected¹³. The authorities have also made commitments to support the long-term care of refugee women (by 2027): integration of 15,000 refugees and IDPs into social protection projects and programs; integration of 5,000 refugees and IDPs into

¹² "Assistance humanitaire aux réfugiés et déplacés dans l'Atacora: Le Système des Nations unies au Bénin soutient le gouvernement", September 25, 2023, La Nation.bj

¹³ Declaration available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/23-togo.pdf>

gender-based economic empowerment projects and programs; providing 8,000 refugee and IDP children with access to education¹⁴.

Togo is currently considering a particularly innovative solution adapted to the logic of long-term displacement, which can only be sustainable if it offers displaced populations the conditions to pursue their socio-economic activities. To this end, they are considering the creation of zones dedicated to agricultural activities and pastoral livestock farming in the Oti reserve. To this end, they are supported by the World Bank through programs designed to strengthen the socio-economic resilience of refugee populations.

3 - THE RISK OF EXACERBATING LOCAL TENSIONS

Today, these reception policies are facing the challenge of their sustainability, in the face of an increasingly complicated security, political and social climate that is tempting authorities to question the commitments they have made to refugee populations: increased pressure on resources, the fear that these refugees will bring insecurity with them, and the frustrations that can arise among host communities in reaction to these assistance measures.

3.1 - Increased pressure on local resources

The entire northern strip of the coastal countries is exposed to a context of latent tension over access to resources (land, water), regularly giving rise to conflicts between farmers and between farmers and herders. In fact, forced displacement from Burkina Faso, coupled with internal displacement, accentuates the already existing pressure on available resources. The host populations of these areas, mostly from sedentary communities, living from agriculture and often also from livestock farming, take a dim view of the arrival of these displaced people, particularly when they come from pastoral communities, and more specifically when they are - as in the majority of cases - Peulh. The fear of occupation of the available space by these pastoral communities and of an increased risk of animals roaming in their fields are the main reasons for this reserved reception.

Côte d'Ivoire is the country most exposed to such a risk, given both the record number of refugees it hosts from coastal countries, and the fact that a large proportion of them are pastoralists. In view of the rapid increase in flows from the end of 2022, the National Security Council decided on May 25, 2023 to ban the entry of refugees' livestock into Ivorian territory, "in order to preserve social cohesion (...) and guard against health risks"¹⁵. Preventing the influx of livestock is intended to limit the risk of animals straying into farmers' fields, one of the causes of conflict between herders and farmers. In fact, the inability of the authorities to control the border tightly has led to the development of bypass strategies to let animals in, notably via secondary tracks or classified forests. Some Bounkani villages have refused to accept refugees.

The creation of reception centres is in itself an attempt to "fix" pastoral populations without their animals on sites, in order to reduce pressure on resources. In fact, while the vast majority of women and children are present in these centres, the male pastoralists prefer to stay outside the centres, whether by negotiating with the indigenous populations the conditions of their residence with or without their animals, or by entering the classified forests rich in fodder for their animals. Indeed, the ban on bringing in animals is not respected by a large number of

¹⁴ Official speech at <https://actionsociale.gouv.tg/le-togo-a-pris-part-au-2eme-forum-mondial-sur-les-refugies-a-geneve-en-suisse/>

¹⁵ "La Côte d'Ivoire aux marges de la menace jihadiste", *Le Monde*, June 16, 2023.

pastoralists. And with good reason: animals are the only capital of these populations, who cannot leave them in Burkina Faso at the risk of exposing themselves to theft, whether by jihadists, VDPs or even the defense and security forces.

However, pastoralists are not the only ones increasing pressure on resources. Non-pastoral refugee populations live mainly from agriculture, and often even from agro-livestock farming. They express the need for available land as a means of subsistence, and entrust their animals to herdsmen whom they allow into the classified forests. Finally, these refugee populations swell the ranks of artisanal gold miners both in northern Ghana (Upper West especially, but also in the Upper East) and in northern Côte d'Ivoire. In this respect, the Burkinabè have considerable expertise in artisanal gold mining, and the Burkinabè diaspora already holds preferential economic positions there. This diaspora helps to integrate certain refugees into the artisanal gold-panning sites, even though they are clandestine and officially prohibited.

3.2 - Fear of imported insecurity

The reasons are not just socio-economic. Pastoral communities - particularly foreign transhumant herders - have long been associated in the collective imagination of the Sahel and coastal West African countries with banditry, and therefore violence. This has made it all the easier to associate the arrival of these herders with the possible spread of terrorism, given that the Peulh community is particularly targeted by jihadist recruitment groups. Although this is less and less true as recruitment has diversified to include all Sahelian communities, it continues to permeate some minds in the Sahel and West Africa. The words of the Ivorian Minister of Defense in December 2021, describing the attacks in Côte d'Ivoire as the work of "Peulh populations from Burkina Faso", bear witness to this reality, just as notable in neighboring countries such as Togo, Benin and Ghana¹⁶. In recent years, officials (local elected representatives, ministers, etc.) in these three countries have suggested that attacks perpetrated on their territory are indiscriminately the work of jihadist groups or Fulani pastoralists. These comments, it should be stressed, were often made during these countries' first years of exposure to jihadist attacks, suggesting a lack of understanding of a problem that was new to them. While it is to be hoped that this perception has now been mitigated, the ban on transhumance and the expulsion of pastoralists in northern Ghana show that it is still with us. The increasing trend in displacement flows in 2024 and probably in the following years, is likely to give rise to further questioning of the reception of refugees for security reasons.

3.3 - The risk of frustration among host populations

In most refugee-hosting areas, cohabitation between refugee and host communities is often put to the test in the face of accusations of excessive aid to refugee populations, to the detriment of host populations. This prevailing feeling was confirmed in most of Burkina Faso's border areas. Particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, while local people's perception of refugees is generally positive, they need to be careful not to create frustrations among host communities. Locally, part of public opinion regrets that government intervention may favor refugees to the detriment of local residents. Some of them used to say that refugees, for example, have solid homes while their hosts sometimes lack the means to buy them. From this point of view, refugee access to classified forests or gold-mining sites could exacerbate tensions with host communities.

This feeling, which could weaken social and community cohesion, has been amplified by the recent context of evictions from precarious neighborhoods and high-risk areas in Abidjan. There have been comments on social networks comparing with the situation in the North and underlining that the authorities have favored refugees over nationals. This kind of sentiment is attested to by a statement from the main opposition party, the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire

¹⁶ "What is happening in the North is men who come mainly from Burkina", points out the Minister of Defense, Téné Birahima Ouattara", *LaFaso.net*, December 8, 2021

(PDCI-RDA), which, in a statement produced on February 27, 2024, indicated that "if the State of Côte d'Ivoire was able to build around 2,000 housing units in Ouangolodougou and Bouna, with all amenities (free water, electricity and food) for the benefit of Burkinabe refugees fleeing the horrors of the jihadist war, at the expense of the Ivorian taxpayer, why doesn't it then take the same surge of solidarity towards its own citizens?"¹⁷.

4 - INCREASINGLY FIRM PUBLIC MEASURES

4.1 - Reducing interaction between Sahel and coastal countries, banning cross-border transhumance

In recent years, Sahelian and coastal countries have considerably reduced their interactions, whether political, with the formation of the AES and the exit from ECOWAS, or socioeconomic, with the temptation of coastal countries to reduce or even prohibit transhumance flows. This context of reduced cross-border mobility is reflected in episodes - still isolated for the time being - of arrests of commuters. In early 2024, for example, a group of Nigeriens arriving in Côte d'Ivoire from Ghana were arrested and deported in defiance of ECOWAS texts governing the free movement of people.

In response to fears of a massive influx of pastoralists, and that they may have ties with jihadists, some coastal countries have reflexively blocked - partially or totally - cross-border transhumance from the Sahel southwards. Benin and Togo took fairly firm restrictive measures back in 2021, which have since been renewed. In both countries, transhumance is officially prohibited, with only internal mobility authorized. In practice, distinguishing between animals belonging to foreign herders and those belonging to national herders is particularly difficult, leading to problematic situations where animals belonging to national herders are seized or killed. Furthermore, the security forces do not have the means to prevent the illegal entry of animals via border entry points located in the bush. This places pastoralists in an illegal situation, further contributing to their marginalization.

This ban on transhumance is a major constraint for pastoral populations, for whom transhumance is less a lifestyle choice than a production method designed to adapt to rainfall and climatic variations, providing animals with access to water and pasture that they cannot find in Sahelian countries during the dry season. The risk is that these measures will encourage a growing number of livestock breeders to leave the sector, accentuating their migration to coastal countries in search of other economic opportunities.

4.2 - The temptation of refusal and expulsion

All coastal states hosting refugees from Burkina Faso fear that jihadists will take advantage of these flows to infiltrate the northern part of their countries. Fortunately, to date, despite these fears, refoulements have been the exception rather than the rule. Benin, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire have not turned back any refugees to date.

However, since 2023, the increase in the flow of migrants has led to firmer reactions. In July 2023, Ghana decided to "repatriate" several thousand "Burkinabe migrants", a process which continued until the end of the year throughout the northern strip, but mainly in the Upper East. In fact, these migrants were almost exclusively Peulhs, some of whom were livestock farmers, while others had largely settled in Ghana for several years. There are no official figures for the number of people expelled, but the actual figure is between 5,000 and 10,000. On their return,

¹⁷ Statement by PDCI parliamentarians on the eviction, Abidjan, February 27, 2024

the Burkinabè authorities occasionally took charge of these people, before leaving them to fend for themselves in the absence of any durable support. Some chose to return to Ghana, exposing themselves to further arrests. Both the reason for this decision and the Ghanaian authority behind it remain officially unknown, although several corroborating sources suggest that it was a hasty army decision based on rumors suggesting that some Fulani refugees might be linked to jihadists.

This situation reflects a worrying reality, namely the existence of a double standard in the reception of refugees, a phenomenon that exists on different scales in most of the host countries bordering Burkina Faso. This double standard distinguishes pastoral populations from sedentary communities, who generally enjoy community or administrative facilities enabling them to be better received in the host country. In the case of Ghana, while the authorities were expelling several thousand Peulh, Mossi and Bisa communities from Centre-East region of Burkina Faso continued to be welcomed and even benefited from the benevolence of local customary authorities. According to some sources in the Upper East, the wave of expulsions may have been triggered by slanderous denunciations by certain non-Fulani refugees accusing pastoralists of colluding with the jihadists: community tensions existing in the Centre-East have thus been exported to northern Ghana, and the slanderous denunciations that accompany them with them. In northern Côte d'Ivoire, certain villages (notably in the Bounkani region) have refused to accept Fulani refugees, further proof of the existence of this double standard.

5 - SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY-BASED REFUGEE RECEPTION POLICY

National authorities and their partners who support refugee reception policies should pursue their policy of openness, while strengthening flow control and monitoring of refugee populations, demonstrating flexibility in the application of refugee reception conditions, systematizing the establishment of spaces for dialogue involving all local players, and reflecting on sustainable reception solutions that value the role of local communities and benefit them too.

The authorities should pursue their policies of welcoming refugee populations, speeding up procedures for acquiring refugee status to enable asylum seekers to enjoy the protection conferred by the AU and Geneva Conventions.

They should also consider that some of these forced displacements are likely to be long-lasting, calling for more structural responses to ensure that refugee communities have access to basic services without the risk of saturation in host villages. This requires investment in the construction of schools, health centers and water points, to ensure that saturation of access to these services does not lead to excessive resentment of refugees. Refugee populations must also have access to income-generating activities, including agrosilvopastoral activities, through the distribution of production kits and access to land negotiated with traditional authorities.

Host populations which have initially invested in hosting refugees must not feel frustrated, when they themselves are experiencing situations of socio-economic precariousness or lack of access to certain basic social services. National authorities must therefore mobilize financial instruments (PSGOUV 2 in Côte d'Ivoire, for example) to guarantee humanitarian support (food supplies) and improved access to basic infrastructure (housing, drinking water supply, electricity, etc.). These investments will help to avoid the prevailing feeling that refugees are better off than host populations, and prevent the rise of frustrations that can undermine community social cohesion.

This support for both refugee and host communities calls for community-based approaches, which are de facto preferred by the communities themselves, who all have local contacts

based on shared community allegiances or socio-economic interactions. The authorities should therefore systematize the search for intermediaries with traditional and religious authorities, as well as with peasant and pastoral organizations.

These community-based approaches require the creation of forums for dialogue in host areas, enabling host and refugee communities and the authorities to maintain a constant dialogue on the conditions under which refugees are being received, and to raise emerging tensions and problems relating to the consequences of settlement (concentration of animals, straying, etc.). These forums should enable the authorities to refine the census of refugee populations, in order to avoid stigmatization phenomena that could lead to mass expulsions, as in Ghana in July 2023. Lastly, these forums for dialogue can help refine the rules, which, as we have seen, are far more flexible, derogatory and changeable (depending on the constantly evolving context) than national reception policies. If refugee populations feel involved in the decisions taken, they will be all the more eager to turn to the authorities.

The authorities should be both rigorous in their monitoring of refugees and flexible in their application of reception conditions. The authorities should systematize the registration of refugees, whether they are on dedicated sites or staying in communities, in order to have an accurate database of the number of refugees in the territories concerned. No public policy can be implemented without *at least* an accurate knowledge of the beneficiary populations. Moreover, the community-based approach is an asset for the authorities, enabling them to make hosts guarantors of the probity of the refugees they take in.

At the same time, the authorities should show flexibility in the conditions of reception, even if certain practices run counter to other national policies, in particular the ban on entering the territory with their animals, the protection of classified forests, or the ban on artisanal gold panning. Far from benefiting only the refugees, these informal practices reduce the pressure on existing resources and also benefit the host populations. Tolerance of these practices must prevail until lasting solutions can be found through dialogue with all local stakeholders. Following the example of Côte d'Ivoire, the declassification of certain forests in refugee hosting areas could be a solution to legalize *de facto* existing situations.

Conclusion

The coastal countries of West Africa are still hesitant about the best way to deal with the flow of refugees from Burkina Faso. In part, these flows are still perceived as a potential threat both to the security of their territory and to the social cohesion of the host areas. Despite some firm measures, countries have so far resisted the temptation to close their borders completely, even if the temptation exists in most countries. In fact, none of these countries has the effective means to keep its borders hermetically sealed. Not only would such a stance be impractical in the long term, it could also send out a negative signal to host populations, and at the same time give rise to situations of rejection and violence against these refugee populations. So far, the absence of community-based violence between refugee and host populations shows that public reception policies are accepted and respected by communities. It is in the interest of governments to continue in this direction, not only out of respect for international commitments, but also because such policies limit the recruitment dynamics of jihadist groups. The latter exploit degraded contexts as much as situations of rejection and marginalization caused by unjust state policies.

PASAS

PLATEFORME D'ANALYSE,
DE SUIVI ET D'APPRENTISSAGE
AU SAHEL



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