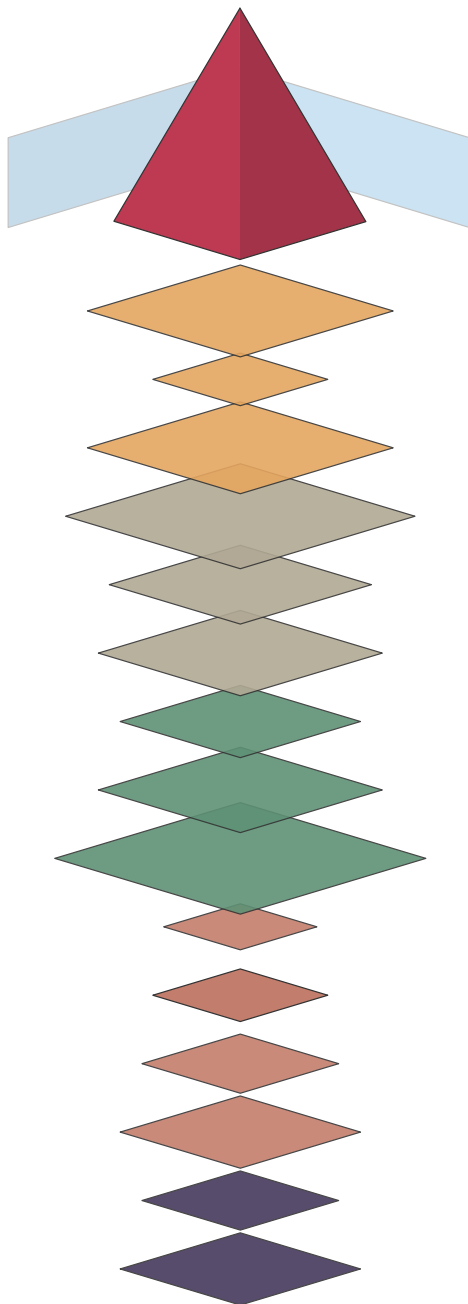


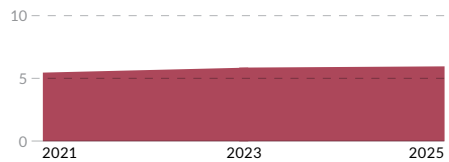


# BURKINA FASO



## 6.03 $\nearrow 0.11$ CRIMINALITY SCORE

50<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  $\nearrow 3$   
14<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  $\nearrow 2$   
3<sup>rd</sup> of 15 West African countries  $\nearrow 1$



## CRIMINAL MARKETS **5.77** $\searrow 0.06$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	<b>7.00</b>	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	<b>4.00</b>	$\searrow 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	<b>7.00</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	<b>8.00</b>	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	<b>6.00</b>	0.00
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	<b>6.50</b>	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	<b>5.50</b>	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	<b>6.50</b>	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	<b>8.50</b>	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	<b>3.50</b>	$\searrow 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	<b>4.00</b>	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	<b>4.50</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	<b>5.50</b>	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	<b>4.50</b>	$\searrow 1.00$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	<b>5.50</b>	0.00



## CRIMINAL ACTORS **6.30** $\nearrow 0.30$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	<b>5.00</b>	$\nearrow 1.00$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	<b>7.00</b>	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	<b>7.00</b>	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	<b>6.50</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	<b>6.00</b>	0.00



This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.

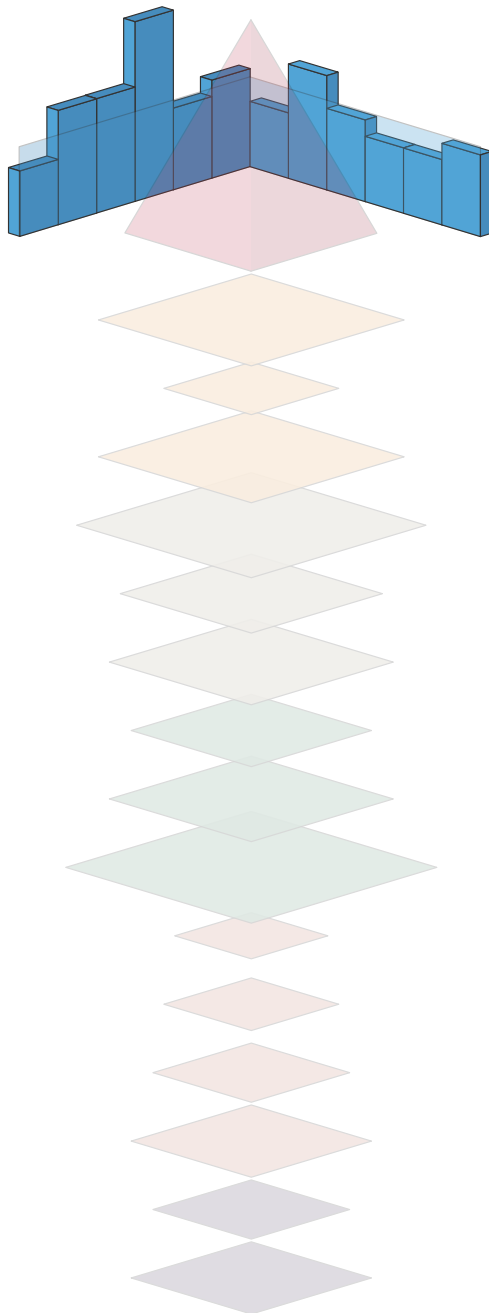


Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.



# BURKINA FASO



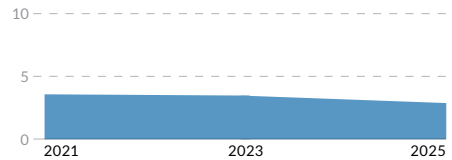
2.88  $\downarrow$ 0.58

## RESILIENCE SCORE

170<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  $\downarrow$ 23

41<sup>st</sup> of 54 African countries  $\downarrow$ 11

13<sup>th</sup> of 15 West African countries  $\downarrow$ 3



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	2.00	$\downarrow$ 0.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3.50	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	3.50	$\downarrow$ 1.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.50	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	2.50	$\downarrow$ 1.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3.00	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	2.00	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.50	$\downarrow$ 0.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	2.50	$\downarrow$ 0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00	$\downarrow$ 0.50
PREVENTION	2.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	2.50	$\downarrow$ 2.00



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

The human trafficking market is deeply entrenched in Burkina Faso, with the country serving simultaneously as a source, transit zone and destination for trafficking. The scale and complexity of the problem is exacerbated by widespread insecurity, displacement and poverty – particularly for the estimated 2 million internally displaced persons, who are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Loose criminal networks dominate the trafficking landscape, luring victims (often children) with false promises of employment before subjecting them to sex trafficking, forced labour, organized begging and domestic servitude. Violent extremist groups and Quranic schools are some of the main perpetrators of forced child begging. Women are also routinely targeted for sex trafficking, particularly at artisanal gold mining sites. The human trafficking market has a strong transnational dimension. Children are taken to neighbouring countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Niger, for forced labour and sex trafficking. Similarly, Burkinabe women are trafficked to western Asia for domestic servitude. Conversely, the country is also a destination, with foreign victims – mainly from West African countries – exploited in forced labour and sex trafficking.

People smuggling in Burkina Faso is a major market. The landlocked country is primarily a departure point, and to a lesser extent a transit hub due to its location, with routes extending to coastal nations and North Africa. Although the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) facilitates visa-free travel, individuals often employ smugglers to bypass the bribes and harassment at border posts. The worsening security environment and the capture of various territories by armed groups has sharply decreased the movement of migrants through the country, and many have been transiting through Benin or southern Mali instead. The smuggling routes are predominantly used by West African migrants who travel through the Sahel to Algeria or Libya with the intention of reaching Europe. Smuggling groups are composed mainly of former migrants and local residents with strong regional knowledge and ties to public officials. The complicity of authorities is a major factor in enabling the trade, with smugglers regularly interacting with officials from neighbouring states.

Extortion and protection racketeering are pervasive, primarily perpetrated by violent extremist groups and, to a lesser extent, local self-defence groups. Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), which holds the greatest territory in the country, and Islamic State Sahel province (more commonly known as IS Sahel) impose a religious tax, or zakat, on communities under their influence. In return, they offer protection against

rival groups or security forces and grant access to the natural resources in their territory, including grazing land in national parks and artisanal gold mining sites. Extortion is especially common along major transportation routes and around market towns, where violent extremist groups conduct 'security checks' to seize cash or goods from civilians. Kidnappings for ransom also take place in with JNIM, IS Sahel and other criminal networks targeting wealthy people, traders and gold mine operators, but this remains less common.

### TRADE

Arms trafficking in Burkina Faso is a highly developed and multifaceted market. Sustained insecurity in the country has fuelled demand for weapons both among armed groups and civilians seeking self-protection. Illicit arms enter the country through various channels, including looting from military depots; cross-border smuggling from conflict-affected neighbours like Mali and Libya; purchases from corrupt military personnel; artisanal production; and residual stockpiles from past conflicts. Elements of both JNIM and IS Sahel are reportedly active in regional arms trafficking networks. The trade has strong transnational links, with flows moving across Sahelian borders and extending to coastal states. Weapons sourced from Burkina Faso have reportedly reached conflict zones in northern Ghana, particularly in Bawku.

The counterfeit goods market, particularly pharmaceutical products, is highly consolidated in Burkina Faso. Illicit medicines reportedly make up the majority of medical products sold in Burkina Faso, driven by a lack of affordable and accessible regulated drugs. Most counterfeit drugs originate from India and China and enter the region through major West African ports. Other sources include European countries, such as France and Belgium, as well as producers in Nigeria and Ghana. Burkina Faso's central location and porous borders make it a key hub for regional distribution. Loose criminal networks dominate the trade, but state-embedded actors, such as public officials and health workers, also play enabling roles. Armed groups participate indirectly by taxing shipments or controlling smuggling routes. The public often fail to distinguish between traffickers and legitimate providers given the critical shortages. Counterfeit goods trafficking extends beyond medicines, with recent seizures highlighting the popularity of illicit textile products and alcoholic beverages.

The smuggling of excise goods is similarly entrenched, especially for cigarettes and foodstuffs. The illicit tobacco trade is fuelled by a combination of overproduction from foreign suppliers and significant price differences between neighbouring countries, which incentivizes cross-border smuggling. Cigarettes flow through various trans-Sahelian and coastal corridors, including routes to Libya, Algeria,

Mali and Niger. Legal and illegal markets frequently overlap, with some licensed vendors engaging in trafficking. Armed groups also benefit from this trade by taxing convoys or controlling transit points in their areas of influence. Tobacco is often smuggled alongside other products, including pharmaceuticals, as revealed by recent seizures. However, since the precise quantities of different items are not broken down in the seizure reports, it is hard to accurately assess the size of the market.

## ENVIRONMENT

Flora crime in Burkina Faso mostly takes the form of illegal rosewood logging, a protected species with high market value. Despite prohibitions, illegal logging continues in the Cascades and Sud-Ouest regions, particularly near Kampti, due to a combination of population pressure and weak enforcement. Smugglers transport logs to the major trade hub at Bobo-Dioulasso using fake permits or bribing forestry officials to get around checks. The involvement of officials suggests significant corruption within regulatory agencies. International demand for the wood, particularly from China, drives the transnational market, which is fed by logs moving from Burkina Faso to ports in Ghana and Togo.

Fauna crimes are on the rise, particularly in areas of increased insecurity. JNIM and IS Sahel collaborate with poachers in some areas – such as at the southern borders with Benin and Niger – with the extremist groups providing protection or demanding goods in return for forest access. The trafficking of sea turtles – for which Burkina Faso serves as a transit country – is just one example of the country's involvement in regional wildlife trafficking networks. Trophy hunting (particularly of lions) is another key form of wildlife crime, although quotas have reduced in recent years due to dwindling populations, while the poaching of elephants and hippos continues in certain areas. These activities not only threaten local biodiversity but also contribute to conflict dynamics, particularly where hunters provide intelligence or goods to groups like JNIM in exchange for access and protection.

Non-renewable resource crimes in Burkina Faso are dominated by the illicit gold trade, particularly from artisanal and small-scale gold mining. The capital, Ouagadougou, functions as the primary trading hub, where gold is smelted into bars before being trafficked through neighbouring countries such as Mali or sent directly to countries like Switzerland, Türkiye and the UAE. The trade in mercury and cyanide, essential for gold processing, is central to this criminal economy across the region, with Burkina Faso serving as a nexus for these hazardous substances. Despite not being a key livelihood for many communities, informal mining contributes significantly to national instability, with gold revenues funding JNIM and IS Sahel and incentivizing corruption. Gold extraction not only funds armed groups but is also a means for them to assert territorial control and win community support. Gold mining is closely linked to human trafficking, particularly for labour and sexual exploitation. Fuel smuggling is another

well-organized market in Burkina Faso and is interconnected with the trafficking of processing chemicals. Criminal networks utilize similar logistical strategies for transporting fuel and cyanide, for instance, across the eastern and south-eastern borders with Benin and Togo. Fuel also transits through the tri-border region shared with Mali and Niger.

## DRUGS

Burkina Faso functions mainly as a transit country for the heroin trade, albeit on a relatively small scale. Modest quantities of heroin, destined for Europe, pass overland through the country after coming ashore at West African ports like Lomé, Cotonou and Lagos. Drugs are concealed using false-bottomed containers and transported by utility vehicles and motorcycles. Local consumption exists but is limited to wealthier individuals, including expatriates and entertainment figures.

The cocaine trade is more significant across West Africa than the heroin trade, and Burkina Faso plays a role as a transit point. Cocaine produced in Latin America is shipped to West Africa, using both container ships (which aim for major ports in Ghana, Nigeria and Togo) and smaller vessels such as fishing boats, cargo ships and pleasure craft. While most cocaine is then rerouted to Europe by sea, a small proportion is trafficked across the Sahel, including through Burkina Faso, toward Europe. Although domestic demand is lower than for other drugs, usage is increasing among affluent individuals and segments of the youth.

Cannabis is widely used in Burkina Faso and represents a sizeable proportion of the national drug market. Large seizures and dismantled networks underscore its popularity. Since 2020, a growing volume of cannabis resin has been trafficked by sea from Morocco to the Gulf of Guinea using a variety of non-containerized vessels, including go-fast boats, and dropped along the West African coastline. From there, the resin is transported northwards overland, passing through Benin and Togo, with a portion potentially transiting through Burkina Faso.

Synthetic drugs, particularly methamphetamines and misused medications like Tramadol, have found a rapidly expanding market. These substances arrive to coastal ports and are routed inland through Burkina Faso toward other Sahelian states. Consumption is widespread and has surged across the subregion, particularly among young people, sex workers and manual labourers in agriculture, construction and gold mining. Although armed groups are significant consumers of illicit substances, such as Tramadol and Rivotril, there is little evidence that they are directly involved in their trafficking.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes are present in Burkina Faso, corresponding with its growing digitalization. Criminal activities include gaining unauthorized access to data, hacking and ransomware attacks. The expanding use of cryptocurrency platforms has enabled new forms of fraud, including gaining access to digital wallets and exchanges. Cyber criminals elsewhere in the region, particularly in Cameroon, are reported to collaborate with local perpetrators. Although cases are under-reported, the growing frequency and sophistication of cybercrimes suggest a moderately pervasive criminal market.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Burkina Faso continue to be a notable issue, driven in part by political instability and the increasing prevalence of cyber-enabled fraud. Embezzlement of public funds is still widespread across the education, agriculture and infrastructure sectors. While the current administration has pursued legal action against some former officials for embezzlement and corruption offences, there are concerns about politically motivated prosecutions and impunity for abuses within the military. A particularly common form of financial crime are cyber-enabled scams, including identity theft, fraudulent medical prescriptions, fictitious job offers and investment fraud on social media platforms. Mobile phone scams are also widespread, often involving fabricated civil service competitions with requests for payment to join eligibility lists. Fraud schemes primarily rely on social media and benefit from gaps in the public's digital literacy and regulatory enforcement.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in Burkina Faso are largely formed from self-defence militias, which play a complex dual role as both contributors to conflict and, at times, sources of resilience. While some reports indicate that militias have helped reduce crime and violence, a lack of state oversight has allowed them to become involved in numerous criminal activities, including extortion, protection racketeering, cattle rustling and communal violence.

Criminal networks in Burkina Faso are characterized by their fluid, opportunistic nature, adapting to shifts in the profitability of various illicit markets. Most are loosely organized, with actors engaging in multiple criminal activities and collaborating with the armed groups in control of large territories and key trade routes. These networks are central in drug trafficking and gold smuggling operations, often relying on corrupt political and security actors to operate with impunity. Such networks are embedded within formal and informal systems and frequently leverage patronage, corruption and institutional gaps to shield their activities. Their influence also extends beyond national borders, linking them with criminal actors in neighbouring states.

In Burkina Faso, state-embedded actors are significant contributors to the country's criminal landscape. While the state lacks control over criminal markets in general, certain state officials and law enforcement agents actively facilitate criminal operations – often accepting bribes or directly participating in illicit economies. Corruption is especially concentrated in areas with high criminal activity, which encourages smuggling, trafficking and resource exploitation. Official complicity extends to transnational crimes such as human smuggling, gold trafficking, drug distribution and illegal logging. Moreover, state-backed self-defence groups such as the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP) have reportedly engaged in kidnappings, narcotics trafficking and cattle rustling, and their deployment has coincided with a spike in violence and abductions. Public sector embezzlement is another persistent issue, with funds being diverted from education, agriculture, sports and other domains.

As far as foreign actors concerned, violent extremist organizations affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, specifically JNIM and IS Sahel, are present in Burkina Faso. JNIM operates in almost all of its regions, and controls territory in northern and eastern Burkina Faso. IS Sahel concentrates its activities in the far north around the tri-border area with Mali and Niger. These groups engage directly in a range of criminal activities including cattle rustling, kidnappings and the illicit trade of arms and gold. Indirectly, they finance their operations by taxing criminal markets such as drug trafficking and counterfeit goods, regulating transit routes and blockading cities. Their growing territorial control and financial self-sufficiency has contributed to escalating violence against civilians, significant human rights violations and mass displacements. The country also hosts foreign actors – particularly from neighbouring Sahelian and coastal states such as Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria – who are prominent in the human trafficking and gold smuggling trades and often work with local counterparts. Cattle rustling also involves regionally coordinated networks for transportation and sale, with Burkinabe perpetrators cooperating with Ghanaian or Ivorian intermediaries to sell stolen cattle. Foreign corporations, especially within the tobacco industry, are also believed to contribute to criminal markets by oversupplying cigarettes to the region, facilitating illicit trade.

Private-sector actors are often engaged in both legal and illegal economies. Some legitimate businesses shift into illicit activities when market conditions are favourable. This is particularly evident in sectors such as pharmaceuticals and synthetic drugs, where licit and illicit supply chains are deeply interwoven. Private actors engaged in drug and gold trafficking tend to launder the proceeds through real estate, livestock and artisanal gold mining ventures. The gold sector, in particular, provides a convenient channel for money laundering as the commodity is legal, mobile and high-value. Small vendors also play a role in facilitating smuggling, especially of processing chemicals like cyanide which has been increasingly trafficked with the expansion of artisanal mining.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Burkina Faso's resilience to organized crime has been significantly weakened by ongoing political instability and conflict. Since 2022, the country has been governed by a military junta that seized power through two successive coups, reversing the political reforms previously enacted. In May 2024, the junta announced the extension of military rule for five years due to continued insecurity, with over half of the country's territory outside government control. Governance indicators show a sustained deterioration across key areas, including the rule of law and government effectiveness and accountability. Armed groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State add further to the instability by financing their operations through extortion, cattle rustling and taxing illicit economies such as gold smuggling. Severe human rights abuses attributed to violent extremist organizations, militias and security forces, including mass killings, torture and repression, have been reported under the current administration. Reports also indicate widespread impunity for security services, including auxiliary forces.

Government transparency and accountability is supported by specialized institutions, including the Autorité Supérieure de Contrôle d'Etat et de Lutte contre la Corruption, which has launched national initiatives to prevent and fight corruption. These institutions facilitate training and awareness activities for public and private stakeholders and collaborate with civil society groups. However, civil society actors have been increasingly threatened since the junta's rise to power and currently operate under immense pressure, with criticism of the government often triggering intimidation, abductions or harassment. Furthermore, access to information remains partial, and key public documents and data are not readily available. There is a legal framework for information disclosure, but excessive secrecy provisions and limited enforcement mechanisms hinder its effectiveness.

International cooperation has been strained under the current regime. Although Burkina Faso is a signatory to major international treaties and has previously worked with INTERPOL and the European Union, its partnerships have deteriorated since 2022. The leadership has shifted alliances away from traditional partners, such as France and ECOWAS, and towards Russia, Türkiye, China and Iran. The junta formally ended French military operations in February 2023 and has distanced itself from former European partners. In January 2024, Burkina Faso, alongside Mali and Niger, announced its departure from ECOWAS, further undermining regional cooperation frameworks. Existing bilateral and multilateral agreements on human trafficking and child smuggling – particularly with Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo – have not yielded sustained cooperation. Diplomatic tensions, border clashes and accusations of destabilization have further hampered cross-border efforts.

As for national policies and laws, Burkina Faso has legislation targeting an array of criminal markets, including human trafficking, falsified medical products, money laundering and environmental crime. Despite this, enforcement remains weak due to insecurity, corruption and limited institutional capacity. The ministry of justice's national legal database has not been updated since 2017, and although it has national strategies for the digital economy and cybersecurity, the country lacks a robust regulatory framework for emerging challenges such as cryptocurrency.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Burkina Faso's judicial system includes specialized units tasked with prosecuting financial crimes, narcotics trafficking and organized crime. However, the judicial system is heavily affected by the fight against terrorism, limiting its ability to address other forms of organized crime. Executive interference, corruption and insecurity have led to court closures and hindered access to justice in conflict-affected regions. Detention conditions are particularly severe. Mass counterterrorism operations have resulted in overcrowded prisons, with insufficient access to food, water, sanitation and medical care, especially in rural areas. Pre-trial detention is common and often extends beyond the maximum sentence for the alleged offense. These conditions contribute to radicalization and undermine confidence in the justice system. Law enforcement efforts against organized crime are held back by resource limitations and widespread insecurity. Although there are specialized agencies dealing with organized crime, they are relatively ineffective and even law enforcement officials have been implicated in criminal activities like human and fuel smuggling. Despite continued efforts, law enforcement remains under-resourced, and armed groups continue to operate with impunity across swathes of the country.

Territorial integrity is a major concern, with a significant portion of the country remaining outside government control. JNIM operates in all regions of Burkina Faso and has put in place blockades over more than 50 villages and towns, including large regional capitals such as Djibo. The southern region remains a key transit area for illicit goods, including weapons and medical products, between Sahelian and coastal states. Burkina Faso's geography – bordering six West African countries – exposes it to flows of licit and illicit goods. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities also persist.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Burkina Faso's anti-money laundering (AML) framework has experienced setbacks in recent years. The country previously demonstrated significant political will to strengthen its AML regime, engaging with international

partners such as the Financial Action Task Force and the Intergovernmental Action Group on Money Laundering. However, since 2022, political instability and withdrawal from regional organizations such as ECOWAS have halted regional collaboration and undermined ongoing projects. Burkina Faso remains on the Financial Action Task Force's list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring, also known as the 'grey list'. While the legal architecture for AML is in place, enforcement is limited due to the weak capacity of the financial intelligence unit and the strength of the informal economy. Sectors such as mining and insurance are particularly vulnerable to money laundering and the government has not responded to asset recovery requests.

The economic regulatory environment also faces structural and institutional challenges. Despite legal frameworks designed to encourage foreign investment and fair competition, the country's economy is hamstrung by persistent insecurity, corruption and infrastructure deficits. Political instability and armed conflict have disrupted trade and business operations across much of the territory, pushing them into the illicit market. The artisanal gold mining sector, a major contributor to export revenues, operates largely outside state oversight and is dominated by criminal networks and armed groups. This sector is associated with labour rights violations, tax evasion and financing groups like JNIM and IS Sahel. The state's limited territorial control has allowed illicit economic activity to flourish with minimal oversight (although extreme instability also makes many areas unattractive to criminal groups). Sanctions imposed by other countries following the 2022 coups, combined with Burkina Faso's withdrawal from regional bodies, such as the G5 Sahel, have reduced its access to regional funding mechanisms. The government has tried to introduce reforms to improve business registration, but corruption continues to limit job creation, particularly among youths who, as a result, overwhelmingly seek employment in the informal economy.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Support services for victims and witnesses are limited in Burkina Faso. While progress has been made in victim identification and the operation of two 24-hour shelters in Ouagadougou for adults and children, these efforts remain insufficient. Political instability following the military coups has disrupted anti-trafficking initiatives, having rendered

the national anti-trafficking committee inactive, with no reported investigations into trafficking cases. Efforts to assist drug users have included capacity-building initiatives by local organizations, but the state remains heavily reliant on non-governmental and international partners. Victim assistance and referral services are underdeveloped outside the capital, and no formal witness protection programme exists. Victims often lack awareness of their rights and legal protections, which discourages participation in judicial proceedings. Consequently, most victims are left without adequate legal or social safeguards.

Prevention strategies targeting organized crime have focused on trafficking and drug-related issues. Despite the existence of a national action plan, which aims to develop a system based on prevention and awareness campaigns, several gaps remain: no training has been provided to diplomatic personnel; there are no public awareness efforts targeting child begging; and Quranic schools remain unregulated. Nevertheless, broader outreach efforts exist such as drug prevention campaigns through media and direct engagement.

Civil society organizations play a central role in delivering essential services, assisting victims of crime and responding to humanitarian needs in areas neglected by the state. However, their operational space has contracted considerably since the military coup. Many towns and displacement camps remain cut off due to insecurity, particularly in the north and east. Humanitarian access is severely limited in these regions, hampering the work of local and international organizations. Foreign financing of civil society groups is viewed with suspicion by the state, and any criticism of the government or reporting on the conflict landscape is heavily repressed. Journalists are subject to threats, arrests and forced conscription into state-aligned militias. Burkina Faso's press freedom has declined markedly, reflecting broader constraints on civil liberties and the increasing risks faced by non-state actors engaged in improving accountability.

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