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# 2023 West Africa Organised Crime Resilience Framework

Assessing threats and resilience -  
Foundational report

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## Summary

While West Africa is a vibrant and diverse region, it faces a range of organised crime and other security-related threats. This OCRF foundational report sets out the organized crime and security landscape across the region, identifying the key risks and vulnerabilities in West African states, as well as providing a nuanced analysis of states' resilience. Three deep dives focus on informing and assessing existing responses and gearing these towards prevention.

## Recommendations

Emerging themes for responses:

- Responses to the crime and security challenges in West Africa must incorporate multi-stakeholder and holistic toolkits that go far beyond traditional criminal justice and military approaches.
- Disjuncts in conceptions of legitimacy between states and communities shape illicit economies and conflict, and pose an enormous obstacle to effective responses.
- Rethinking the approach to criminalization and, where appropriate, shrinking 'criminal' spaces and markets is one means of addressing this source of conflict.
- Analysis of legitimacy should be central in crafting responses to illicit economies and wider human security challenges.
- Civil society is a proven catalyst for positive change, as a bridge between communities and policymakers; as a mechanism for oversight and accountability; and as a key source of resilience. Fostering an environment for civil society to operate freely and effectively is, therefore, crucial.



**OCWAR-T**

Organised Crime: West African Response to Trafficking

## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project
ASGM	Artisanal and small-scale gold mining
CRVA	Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
CSO	Civil society organization
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ENACT	Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organized crime
GI-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
NACOC	Narcotics Control Commission
OCRF	Organized Crime Resilience Framework
OCWAR-T	Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking
PWUD	People who use drugs
VDP	Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland)

## Glossary

*Note: (I) definitions deriving from the Organized Crime Index; (C) definitions deriving from the Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments (CRVAs).*

**Anti-money laundering (I):** a state's ability to implement legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering and other related threats to the integrity of its financial system. Profits that criminals make from organized crime are often concealed by being funnelled through legitimate businesses. Through the development of anti-money laundering mechanisms, states become more resilient to the threat of money laundering, which potentially underlies all forms of organized crime.

**Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) (C):** ECOWAS assessments of the structural vulnerabilities, event-driven risks, and social and institutional resilience factors in a country according to five human security pillars.

**Economic regulatory capacity (I):** the ability to control and manage the economy and to regulate financial and economic transactions (both nationally and internationally) so that trade is able to flourish within the confines of the rule of law.

**Event-driven risk (C):** any event-driven factor that has the potential to be a conflict trigger, including specific controversies or events such as natural disasters or elections.

**Government transparency and accountability (I):** the degree to which states have put oversight mechanisms in place to insure against state collusion in illicit activities

**Human security (C):** a holistic understanding of security which looks at the impact of demographic, economic, political and security issues on individuals and communities as well as the role played by a wide variety of social and institutional factors in preventing conflict.

**International cooperation (I):** the structures and processes of interaction, policymaking and concrete implementation, beyond the national level, through which countries respond to organized crime.

**Judicial system and detention (I):** a state judiciary's power to enforce judgments effectively in cases of organized crime. The ability of a country's judicial system to do so depends on whether it is adequately resourced and operates independently and effectively at all points along the juridical chain.

**Law enforcement (I):** the state's ability to investigate, gather intelligence, protect and enforce its rules and procedures against organized crime.

**National policies and laws (I):** state legislation and structures put in place to respond to organized crime. National organized crime strategies and legislation are adapted to the needs of the state, its legal tradition and social, economic, cultural and geographic conditions. The presence of these reflects higher state-resilience to organized crime.

**Civil society<sup>1</sup>(I):** the range of non-state actors that can supplement government responses to organized crime and provide 'checks and balances' on government action. This includes the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) across the spectrum, from victim support to crime prevention. Since CSOs are engaged in local communities they encourage a sense of local ownership of measures, which is more sustainable. The media is also critical in holding governments to account and mobilizing civil society against the threat of organized crime among local populations. Thus, the more civil society capacity a state has, the more resilient it is to organized crime.

**Organized crime (I):** illegal activities conducted by groups or networks who engage in violence, corruption or related activities in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or material benefit. Such activities may be carried out both within a country and transnationally.

**Organized Crime Index (I):** composite indicators of the level of organized crime ('criminality') – comprising an assessment of the pervasiveness of 10 criminal markets and four criminal actor types – and the level of resilience to organized crime ('resilience'). The two headline scores, criminality and resilience, as well as each subcomponent and underlying indicator, are measured on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is good and 10 is bad for criminality, and vice versa for resilience).

**Political leadership and governance (I):** the role played by a government in responding to organized crime and its effectiveness in doing so. Strong political leadership and governance are linked with a higher resilience to organized crime.

**Prevention (I):** the strategies, measures, resources, programmes and processes that aim to counter organized crime.

**Resilience (to organized crime) (I):** the ability to withstand and disrupt organized criminal activities as a whole, rather than individual markets, through political, economic, legal and social measures. Resilience refers to measures taken by both state and non-state actors.

**Social and institutional resilience factors (C):** any social or institutional factor that has the potential to mitigate or manage risks and vulnerabilities from a conflict and human security perspective. This includes political, cultural and community leaders with the ability to influence conflict dynamics in a constructive way, including public sector, private sector, religious institutions, civil society, opinion leaders, development workers, etc. Resilience factors can include institutions that play a stabilizing role in the short, medium, or long term.

**Structural vulnerability (C):** any structural factor that has the potential to be a conflict driver. These can include youth unemployment, poverty, inequality, climate, patronage, demographic factors, etc.

**Territorial integrity (I):** the degree to which states are able to protect their territory and infrastructure from organized criminal activities, including border-control capacity.

**Victim and witness support (I):** assistance provided to victims of various forms of organized crime such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, extortion or fraud.

## Introduction

West Africa is one of the world's most vibrant and diverse regions; home to over 400 million people, around 1 200 languages and many different religious and ethnic identities. The region's economic growth since the turn of the century has been impressive, resulting in a significant reduction in absolute levels of poverty.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, with rampant insecurity at the hands of violent extremists, armed groups and criminal bandits, political instability, limited economic opportunities for the region's burgeoning youth population and the worsening impact of climate change, West Africa faces many complex challenges.

With over 20 000 conflict fatalities across the region in 2022 alone,<sup>3</sup> violence in West Africa, especially in the Sahel region, is at unprecedented levels. According to the ACLED Conflict Severity Index, three countries in West Africa – Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria – have extreme or high levels of conflict.<sup>4</sup> Illicit economies play an important role in sustaining instability across the region.<sup>5</sup>

The security and well-being of citizens across the ECOWAS region is affected not only by violent conflict, but by myriad, interwoven factors from economic prosperity to political representation, justice and security, social cohesion, freedom and much more. In this context the concept of human security, as opposed to the narrower concept of state security, has increasingly become the focus of policymakers across West Africa.

As set out in the ECOWAS Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments (CRVAs), 'the human security framework provides a holistic approach to understanding different threats that affect individuals' lives, whether this is through conflict, health, food, environment, or other social, political or economic factors'.<sup>6</sup>

A key component of this human-centric approach to security, focused on reducing harm to the people of West Africa, is prevention. This requires comprehensive, accurate and timely data on existing and future threats and is therefore one of the main rationales behind the work of the ECOWAS Commission, through both the Early Warning Directorate and the ENACT Organized Crime Index.<sup>7</sup> While the objectives of the index are manifold, its principal aim is to build an evidence base to underpin responses to organized crime.<sup>8</sup>

The 2021 ENACT Organized Crime Index identified the West Africa region as having the second-highest level of criminality on the African continent, with human trafficking, drugs and the illicit trade in non-renewable resources forming the most prevalent criminal markets. The region placed in second once again in the latest iteration of the index, the 2023 Global Organized Crime Index.

In 2023, West Africa overtook Southern Africa as the region with the highest resilience score on the continent, pointing to comparatively high levels of resilience even in areas affected by significant criminal markets. The index highlighted legislative frameworks, civil society actors and the region's international collaboration in the fight against organized crime as relative regional strengths. Overall levels of resilience, however, both objectively and within the global context, are weak.

The index's findings provides a statistical underpinning for the relationship between illicit markets, security and stability, demonstrating a strong negative correlation between criminality and peacefulness.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the less peaceful a country, the more likely it is to be afflicted by high levels of organized crime.<sup>10</sup> ECOWAS Vision 2050 identifies security and stability as the main pillars of a peaceful and prosperous region.<sup>11</sup> Responding to illicit economies which pose a threat to these goals must be a central element of programming. In line with this, the Organized Crime Resilience Framework (OCRF) examines the major organized-crime threats facing the West African region, as identified by the index and the CRVAs published by the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate.

While the index is devoted to organized crime, the CRVAs focus on conflict and human security more broadly. Drawing on both these datasets engenders a conflict-sensitive and human-security-focused assessment of organized crime in West Africa, encompassing threats and vulnerabilities, as well as potential sources of resilience.

This report first sets out the organized crime and security landscape across the region, identifying the key risks and vulnerabilities in West African states. This is complemented by a nuanced analysis of states' resilience, so that existing structures, measures and initiatives can be best harnessed. From community policing and other forms of civil society activity to comprehensive and progressive legislative frameworks and key state institutions, there are countless sources of resilience across West Africa.

This is followed by three 'deep dives', exploring several factors identified in the initial stage of analysis. Given that a key rationale for both the CRVAs and the index is to contribute to the countering of organized crime and other security threats, the deep dives (and the OCRF more broadly) focus on informing and assessing existing responses and gearing these towards prevention.

First, we examine the recent drug policy reform in Ghana to understand the impact of alternatives to incarceration on people who use drugs (PWUD) and illicit drug markets in the country. The second explores the proliferation of self-defence and vigilante groups in West Africa, identified as both a threat and a source of resilience by different actors, drawing from the experience in Mexico – a country with a long history of armed groups forming in response to crime and insecurity. Finally, we study one of the most crucial challenges of our time: climate change. The third deep dive provides an overview of the complex relationship between climate change and criminal activity, in particular how scarcity shapes illicit markets, before assessing the ways in which community-driven solutions can start to mitigate the impacts of climate change on organized crime and other security threats.

This is the first of four papers which form the OCRF. This report centres on the preliminary data analysis to identify the risks, vulnerabilities and sources of resilience. It highlights some of the key findings from each deep dives, as well as pulling out the common themes and lessons that can be drawn from the three case studies. Each deep dive is then presented in full as a standalone report.

The ultimate objective of the OCRF's findings is to feed into ECOWAS' ongoing support to member states, enabling targeted programming and support packages. Through the OCRF deep dives, important lessons have been drawn out which offer ways for all West African states to build effective responses to organized crime in the region.

Drawing on both these datasets engenders a conflict-sensitive and human-security-focused assessment of organized crime in West Africa

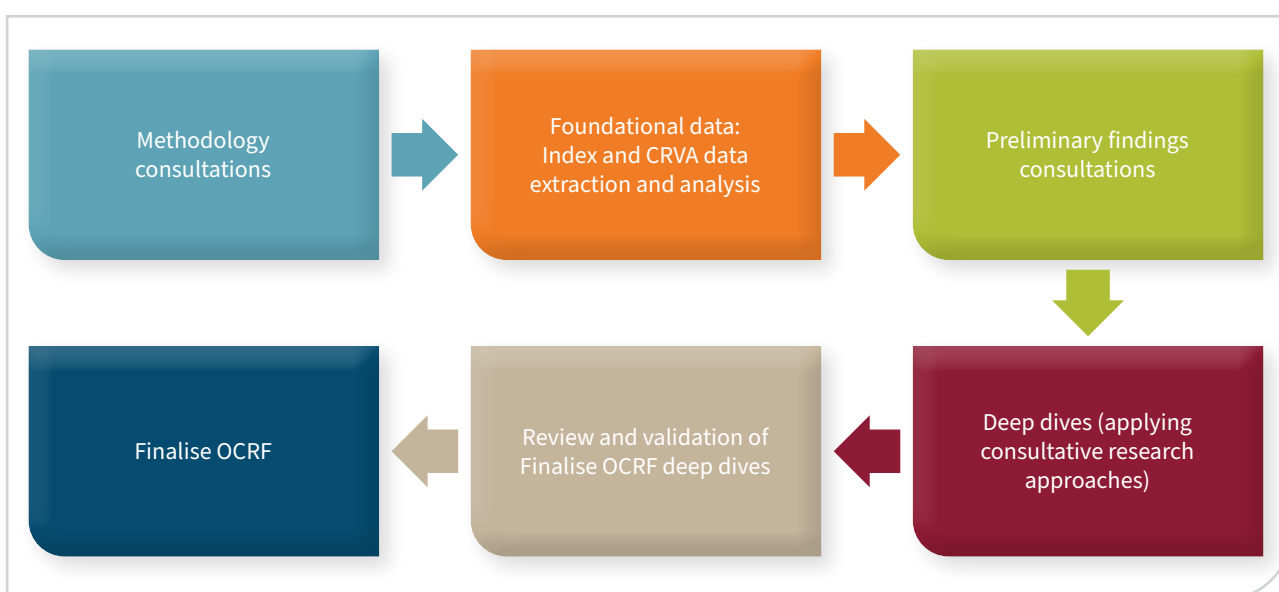


## Methodology

As set out above, the overriding principle behind the development of the OCFR is the desire to provide a nuanced and human-security-focused assessment of the organized crime threats facing the West African region and responses to these threats.

The methodology implemented in the development of the OCFR is a multi-stage process, building on comprehensive existing datasets and supplemented by further in-depth qualitative assessments. The value of the OCFR derives from the expert input from regional stakeholders. As such, the OCFR has involved multiple rounds of consultation over an extended period with a wide range of stakeholders, including from the ECOWAS Commission as well as subject matter experts from academia, research institutions (including the GI-TOC and ISS) and other civil society organizations (including members of the West Africa Research Network on Organized Crime, WARNOC).<sup>12</sup>

Chart 1: OCFR development process



Source: Authors



*Bissau, Republic of Guinea-Bissau - February 8, 2018: Group of women at a community meeting in the city of Bissau, in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa*

## Foundational data and preliminary findings

The OCRF builds upon two existing datasets: the ENACT Organized Crime Index 2021 ('the index') and the Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments (CRVAs), published by the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate. The following section outlines the methodology used for extracting data from the two foundational datasets to determine the primary illicit economies, security threats and sources of vulnerability among the focus countries, in addition to the key sources of resilience.<sup>13</sup>

### ENACT Organized Crime Index 2021

#### What is the Organized Crime Index?

The Organized Crime Index captures levels of organized crime and levels of resilience to organized crime in 54 countries across Africa.

The index draws on the assessments of over 100 technical, thematic and regional experts to create two headline scores: 'criminality' and 'resilience', each measured on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is good and 10 is bad for criminality, and vice versa for resilience).

The criminality score is based on two components: criminal markets and criminal actors. The 10 criminal markets assessed are human trafficking, human smuggling, arms trafficking, flora crimes, fauna crimes, crimes related to non-renewable resources, the cocaine trade, the heroin trade, the cannabis trade and the synthetic drugs trade. Four types of criminal actor are also captured in the index: mafia-style groups, criminal networks, state-embedded actors and foreign actors.

The resilience component comprises 12 'building blocks' of resilience: political leadership and governance, government transparency and accountability, international cooperation, national policies and laws, judicial system and detention, law enforcement, territorial integrity, anti-money laundering, economic regulatory capacity, victim and witness support, prevention, and non-state actors.

The criminal market scores were used to identify the illicit economies which present the greatest challenges to West Africa. Five emerged: the criminal markets with the highest regional average scores (human trafficking, the cocaine trade and the cannabis trade), as well as the two criminal markets with the greatest increase in pervasiveness between 2019 and 2021 (arms trafficking and the synthetic drug trade).<sup>14</sup> The index was also used to assess resilience to organized crime in the region through the lens of the 12 indicators which are considered the building blocks to an effective response to organized crime.

The next step was to dig deeper into the dynamics of the criminal markets and resilience mechanisms. To do this, the index narratives for each of the 17 indicators (five criminal markets and 12 resilience indicators) were extracted from the comprehensive individual country profiles – reviewed by a minimum of three experts for each country – and consolidated into a single repository.

Content analysis was then carried out on the narratives for each indicator, for each country, to identify the key themes. Each narrative was given one or more qualitative 'tags' that speak to the nature of the threat posed by the respective criminal market or the resilience measures. Examples include 'terrorism', 'mining' and 'corruption', among others.

The end product was a set of thematic tags for each criminal market and resilience indicator to be analyzed in the next step.



## Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments

In addition to the index, information was also extracted from the CRVAs. The CRVAs outline a set of structural vulnerabilities, event-driven risks and social and institutional resilience factors for each country. The vulnerability, risk and resilience factors which fall under the ‘security’ pillar of the CRVAs (one of five pillars) for each of the 15 focus countries were collated into a single document.<sup>15</sup> This allowed for a quantitative analysis of the prevalence of the various factors identified. This was complemented by a qualitative analysis of the vulnerabilities, risks and resilience factors which are relevant to organized crime highlighted under the other four pillars.

### What are the Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments (CRVAs)?

The CRVA assesses structural vulnerabilities, event-driven risks, and social and institutional resilience factors according to five human security pillars identified by ECOWAS in a 2016 scoping paper: 1) economics and resources; 2) politics and governance; 3) population and demographics; 4) rule of law; and 5) security.

Research for the CRVAs was conducted in three main phases: a desktop study using data from dozens of sources including ECOWARN Situation Reports and quantitative data; fieldwork, which involved validation workshops, interviews and focus group discussions; and a final stage of analysis and validation.

CRVA findings describe how risks flow from vulnerabilities both within and across the five pillars. In recognition of the fact that violent conflict has underlying social, economic, political and security drivers but expresses itself differently depending on the context, a holistic human security framework is used for the CRVAs in all ECOWAS member states. Furthermore, the analysis also breaks out gender considerations and external factors as cross-cutting issues that need to be understood for effective early warning, planning and response.

## Initial consultations

The methodology and approach were developed following three iterative consultation sessions with the ECOWAS Commission. Following the development of the methodology and preliminary findings, an initial consultation with key stakeholders across West Africa was held in Lagos in December 2022. Participants included experts on a wide range of illicit economies including sexual exploitation and other forms of human trafficking, arms trafficking and the counterfeit medicine trade, as well as stakeholders from the ECOWAS commission. The purpose of the consultation was two-fold. Firstly, to receive feedback on the methodology used to develop the OCRF and on the preliminary findings. Secondly, to discuss and outline the priorities for deeper analysis based on the preliminary findings.

Participants were also asked to identify any priority threats, vulnerabilities and resilience factors that did not emerge from the initial findings. An important point raised was the dual nature of several phenomena, which can be thought of as both threats or vulnerabilities and sources of resilience, depending on the context (for example, vigilante groups or informal economies). Other contributions emphasized the need to place human security at the core of the OCRF analysis and the importance of good governance.

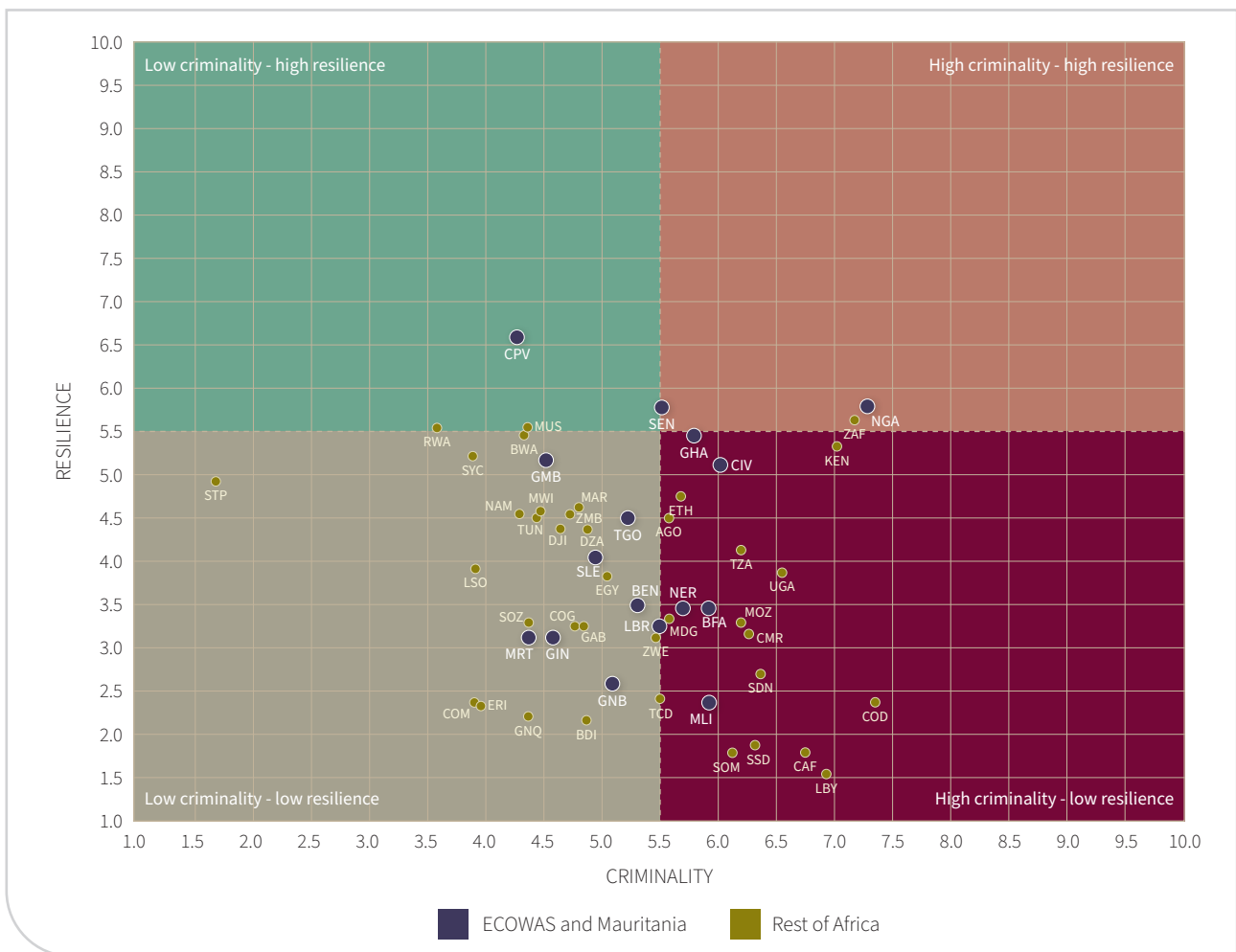
Breakout group discussions were held to deepen participant contributions to determining the priority areas for further research. The approach was amended following the consultation.

## Deep dives

Based on the preliminary findings and initial consultations, a set of proposals for further research were developed, focused on the intersection of illicit economies, human security and policy responses. The three deep dives selected (following a second round of consultation with ECOWAS Commission stakeholders) are rooted in the three components that were elaborated during the initial stage of the research, namely the region’s risks, vulnerabilities and resilience strengths and weaknesses.

While all three case studies were underpinned by the same overriding principle of seeking to engage with experts on the ground to ensure that the analysis was nuanced and context-specific, the methodology for each deep dive was tailored in each case. Across the deep dives, methodologies included gender-disaggregated focus group discussions with people who use drugs in Ghana and communities in the periphery of Niokolo-Koba National Park, Senegal; virtual and in-person roundtables with, and white papers produced by, experts on vigilantism in West Africa; and interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including government representatives, law enforcement, community leaders, drug dealers and civil society representatives. All primary data collection was complemented by an extensive review of relevant literature. Detailed methodologies are included in each separate case study.

Chart 2: Vulnerability classifications



Note: While 46 of the 54 African countries are assessed as having low resilience, of the six countries with high resilience, half are in West Africa. Interestingly, two of the three states located in the high criminality–high resilience quadrant are West African states (Senegal and Nigeria), with South Africa being the only country in this quadrant outside of the region. Countries in this quadrant, into which Senegal has moved since the 2021 iteration of the index (when the country was classified as low criminality–high resilience), tend to be more economically developed states with robust foundations for resilience measures, but a wide range of pervasive criminal markets.

Source: Global Organized Crime Index 2023

## Organised crime and insecurity in West Africa

This section presents the initial findings from the baseline assessment of the index and CRVAs identifying the threats and vulnerabilities in the West Africa region, as well as regional strengths and weaknesses with regard to resilience to criminality and conflict.<sup>16</sup>

### Identifying the threat

#### Illicit economies

The index provides an assessment of ten criminal markets, including people-based markets, trade-based markets, environmental markets and drug markets.<sup>17</sup> All illicit economies in the index (as well as those not included) pose a threat in varying degrees, to the security and well-being of people across West Africa.

Environmental crimes, for example, are widespread throughout the region. The illicit gold trade is prevalent in many countries in the Sahel region and coastal West Africa, which according to the index, ‘not only breeds further instability and corruption, but is detrimental to the environment and to the health of local populations’.<sup>18</sup> The illicit oil trade is similarly pervasive, whether in the form of illegal bunkering or smuggling of fuel across borders.<sup>19</sup>

Many countries are also faced with the challenge of the illicit wildlife trade, as the region is home to many endangered animal species that are poached and illegally sold both in Africa itself and primarily in Asian markets.<sup>20</sup> Illegal logging, often enabled by high levels of corruption, is another significant organized crime threat in West Africa.<sup>21</sup>

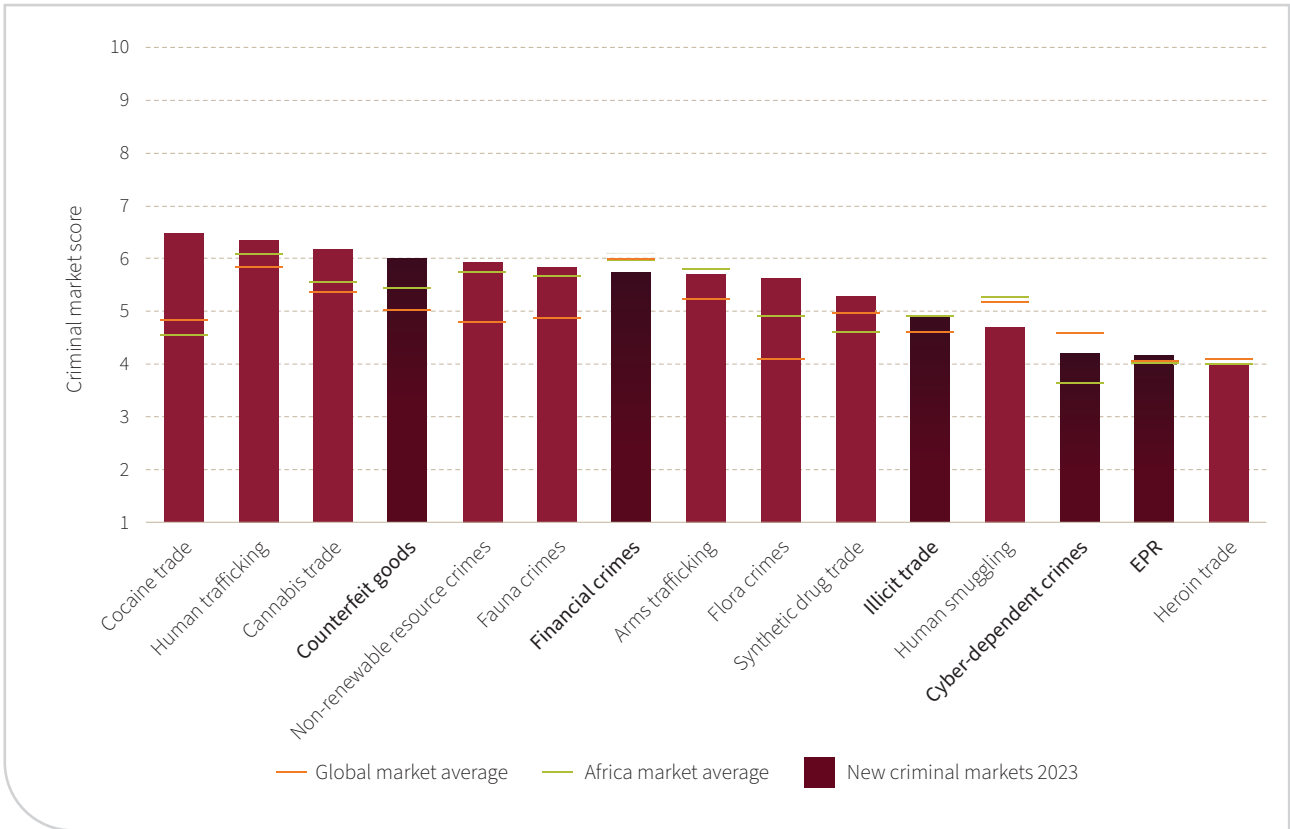
Since 2019, the level of irregular migration from north and west Africa to the Canary Islands, in particular, has surged, with human smuggling networks operating as key players in the economy.<sup>22</sup> Among the deadliest irregular migration routes in the world, it carries significant risks for those on the move.

In addition to the four criminal markets described briefly above, the 2023 Global Organized Crime Index assesses the prevalence of a further five criminal markets: extortion and protection racketeering; trade in counterfeit goods; illicit trade in excise consumer goods; cyber-dependent crimes; and financial crimes. While the region on average scores relatively low (compared to other markets) on extortion and protection racketeering and cyber-dependent crimes, counterfeit goods are the fourth most pervasive criminal market in West Africa.



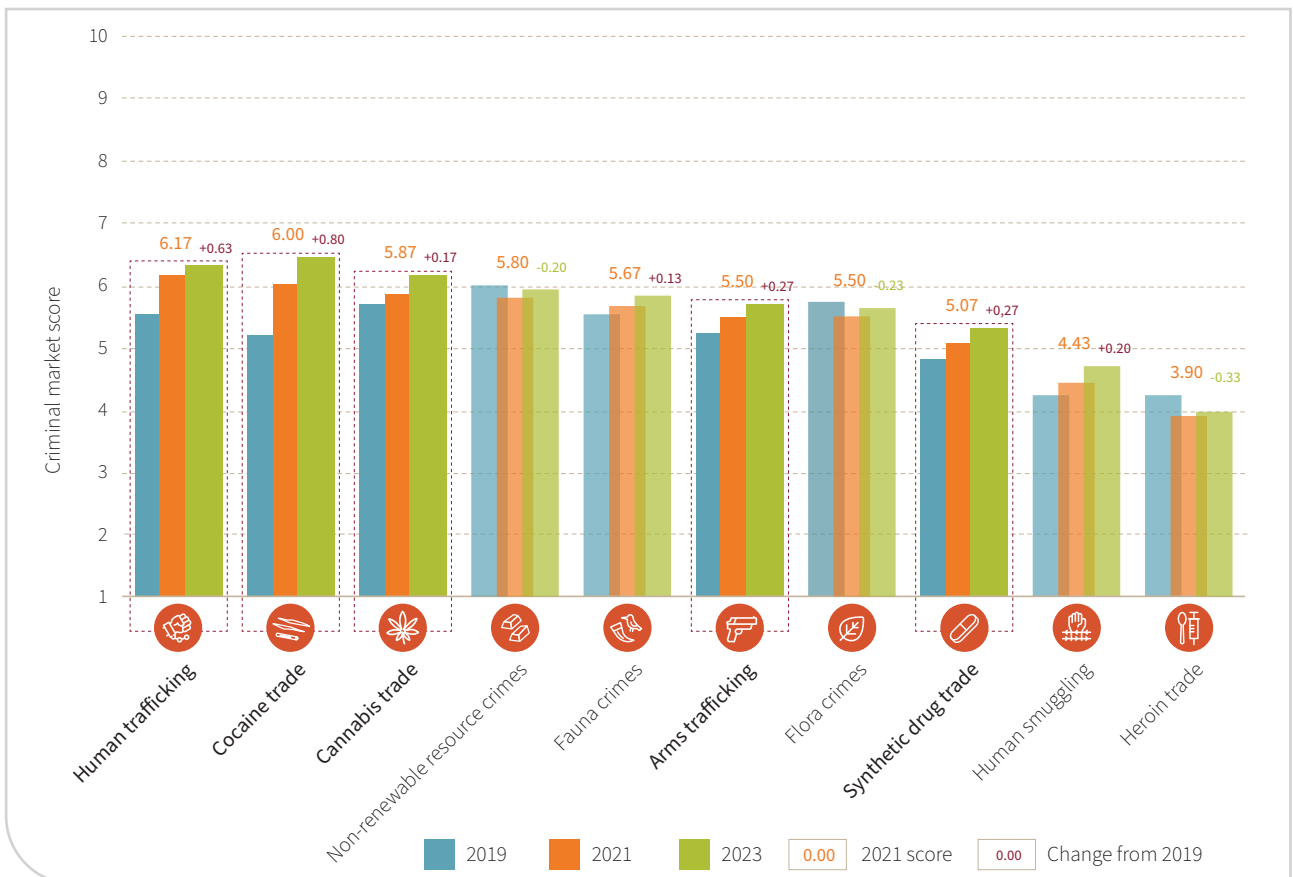
*Popular departure site for migrants wanting to reach Europe; ‘coast of Senegal whilst trying to make the crossing to the Canary Islands*

Chart 3: Criminal markets in West Africa, 2023



Source: 2023 Global Organized Crime Index

Chart 4: Criminal market prevalence in West Africa, 2019–2023



Source: ENACT Organized Crime Index Africa 2021; 2023 Global Organized Crime Index

While myriad criminal markets thrive across West Africa, this report focuses on six; five based on their relative prevalence in West Africa and pace at which their reach is expanding across the region according to the index, and one which falls outside tracked index markets, based on the recommendations of regional stakeholders who highlighted its magnitude and the gravity of its associated harms. These markets are: human trafficking, the cocaine trade, the cannabis trade, arms trafficking, the synthetic drug trade and, following consultations, the illicit pharmaceuticals trade.

Analysis of the criminal market ‘tags’ across the region as a whole provides a more nuanced assessment of illicit economy dynamics.

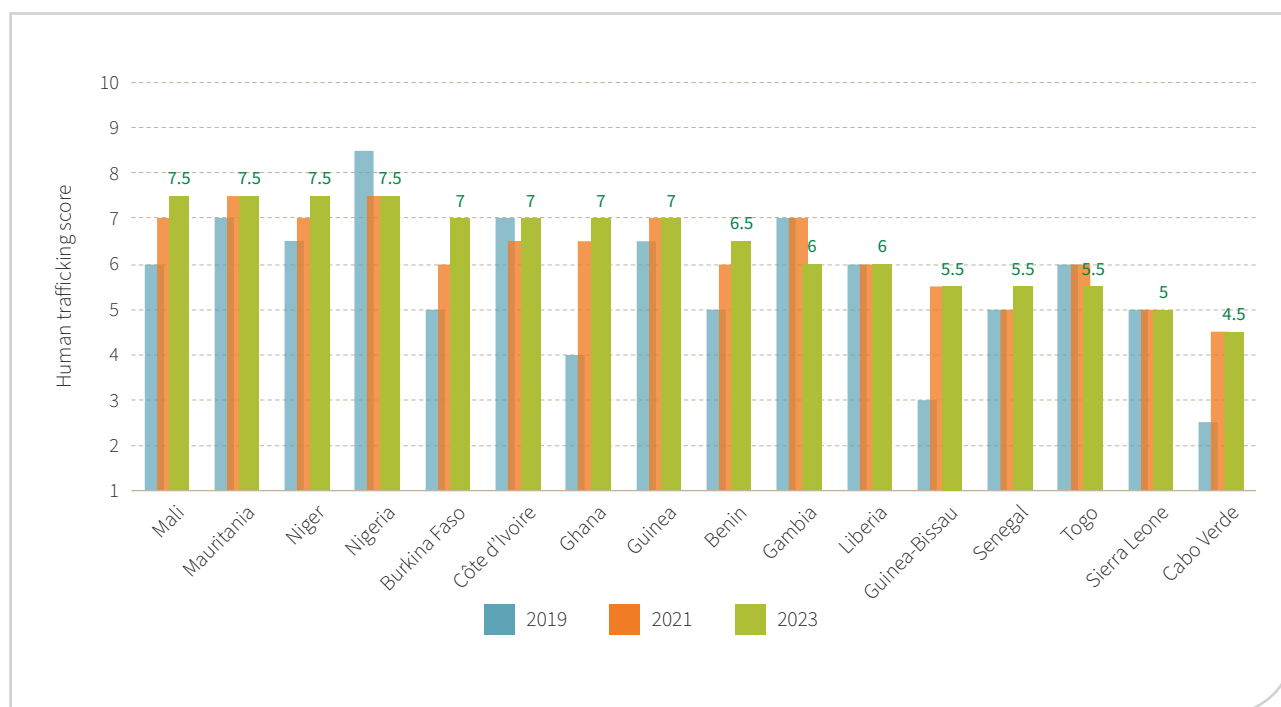
### Human trafficking

The exploitation of *talibés* (children receiving a Quranic education) as beggars was highlighted in the index narratives of six ECOWAS countries. This does not refer to the phenomenon of child begging per se but specifically to forced begging linked to exploitative contexts, which meet the definitions of trafficking pursuant to the United Nations protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in human beings. The forced begging of *talibés*, most prominent in Senegal, but also in other neighbouring countries, is in a phase of rapid expansion.<sup>23</sup>

Several countries’ narratives mention links to the Middle East, reflecting the most prominent trafficking routes from West Africa. West African nationals, mainly women, are trafficked to the Gulf states for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour, primarily as domestic workers. These countries are heavily dependent on low-paid migrant workers and individuals from West Africa often end up in exploitative environments.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the mining sector was identified as playing a role in human trafficking dynamics in a number of countries in the region. Gold mines are often sites of exploitation in the form of forced labour and debt bondage.<sup>25</sup> Human trafficking risks linked to goldmining have been identified in many West African states, in particular Sahelian countries, including Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal.<sup>26</sup>

Chart 5: Human trafficking



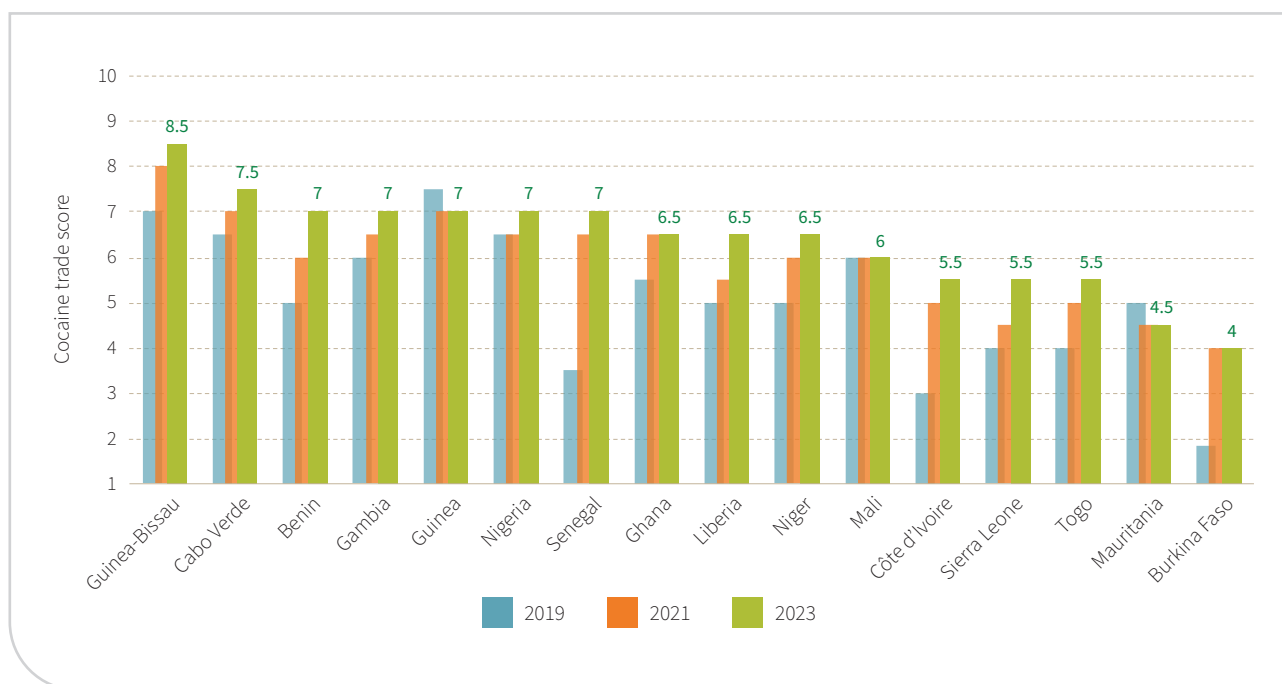
Source: 2023 Global Organized Crime Index

## Cocaine trade

According to the 2021 Organized Crime Index, not only is the cocaine trade among the most prominent criminal markets in West Africa, but it is the criminal market that registered the greatest increase in pervasiveness across West Africa between 2019 and 2021.<sup>27</sup> This trend has not abated in 2023, as the market continued to grow, increasing considerably to become the most pervasive criminal market across the region.<sup>28</sup> Since the turn of the century, West Africa has increasingly been used as a transit point in cocaine smuggling from Latin America to destination markets in Europe.<sup>29</sup> Unparalleled production in source countries, record seizures in several West African states and a booming consumer market in Europe and within the region all point towards cocaine flows through the region being higher than ever.<sup>30</sup>

Corruption is a theme that emerges particularly strongly in the context of the cocaine trade in the majority of West African countries (and in fact more so than in any other criminal market analyzed). The prominence of corruption in the expert analyses is down to the nature of the cocaine market – a transit trade of a high value commodity – which favours the creation of structured protection economies reaching to high levels in the state.<sup>31</sup> Due to this, the cocaine trade has a pernicious impact on political instability, not least through its role in electoral financing.<sup>32</sup> The prominence of corruption in index cocaine narratives also reflects the crucial role played by officials at trade and transport infrastructure, primarily seaports, as well as other law enforcement and political actors in protecting and enabling the cocaine trade in the region.<sup>33</sup>

Chart 6: Cocaine trade



Source: 2023 Global Organized Crime Index

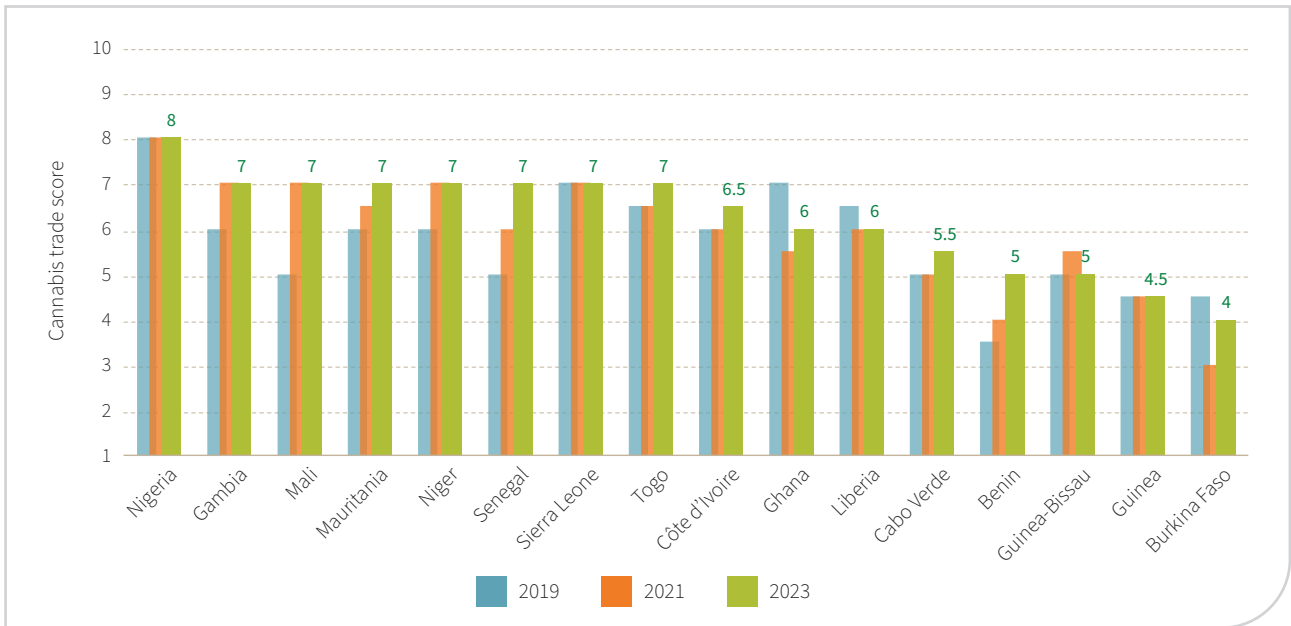
## Cannabis trade

The consumption of cannabis is ubiquitous across West African countries. The Sahelian countries function as transit points for the regional hashish market, and as part of the larger trafficking network linking the region to European markets.<sup>34</sup>

However, while the cannabis trade is one of the most pervasive criminal markets across West Africa, the index narratives emphasized its widespread availability and high consumption rates, rather than harm.

In terms of levels of violence associated with the criminal market and its impact on governance and human security, among other important considerations, experts involved in the index development did not assess

**Chart 7: Cannabis trade**

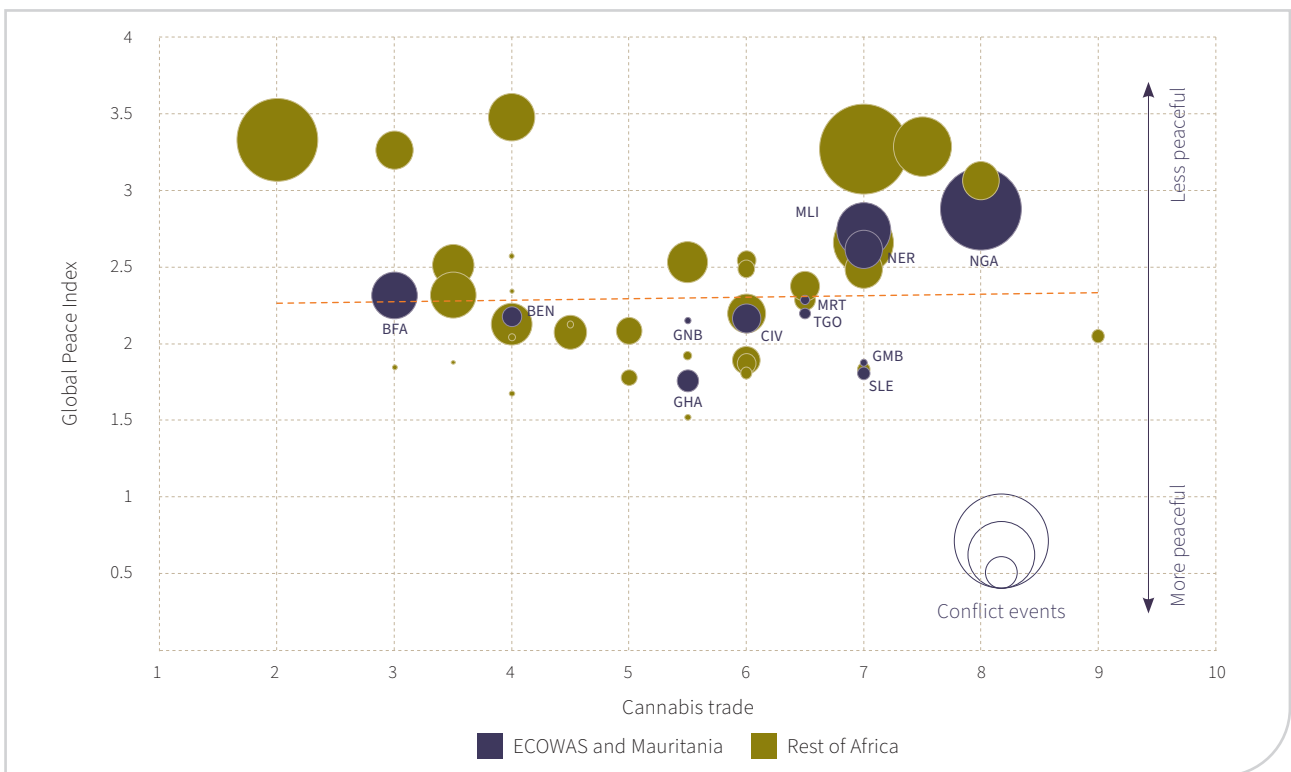


Source: 2023 Global Organized Crime Index

the cannabis trade to be as harmful as other criminal markets. Analysis of the correlation between the index scores for the cannabis trade and external metrics measuring conflict shows a weak relationship between the prevalence of the illicit drug market and levels of violence across West Africa and the wider continent (see Chart 8). This is not to say there are not exceptions to this overarching trend: in Senegal, for example, cannabis cultivation is an important source of funding for separatist rebels in the Casamance region.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, however, pursuant to a harm-centric approach, the more limited indication of harm associated with the cannabis trade suggests it should be lower on the priority lists of regional policymakers.

**Chart 8: Relationship between the cannabis trade, peacefulness and conflict**



Source: ENACT Organized Crime Index Africa 2021; Vision of Humanity (Institute for Economics and Peace); ACLED

## Arms trafficking

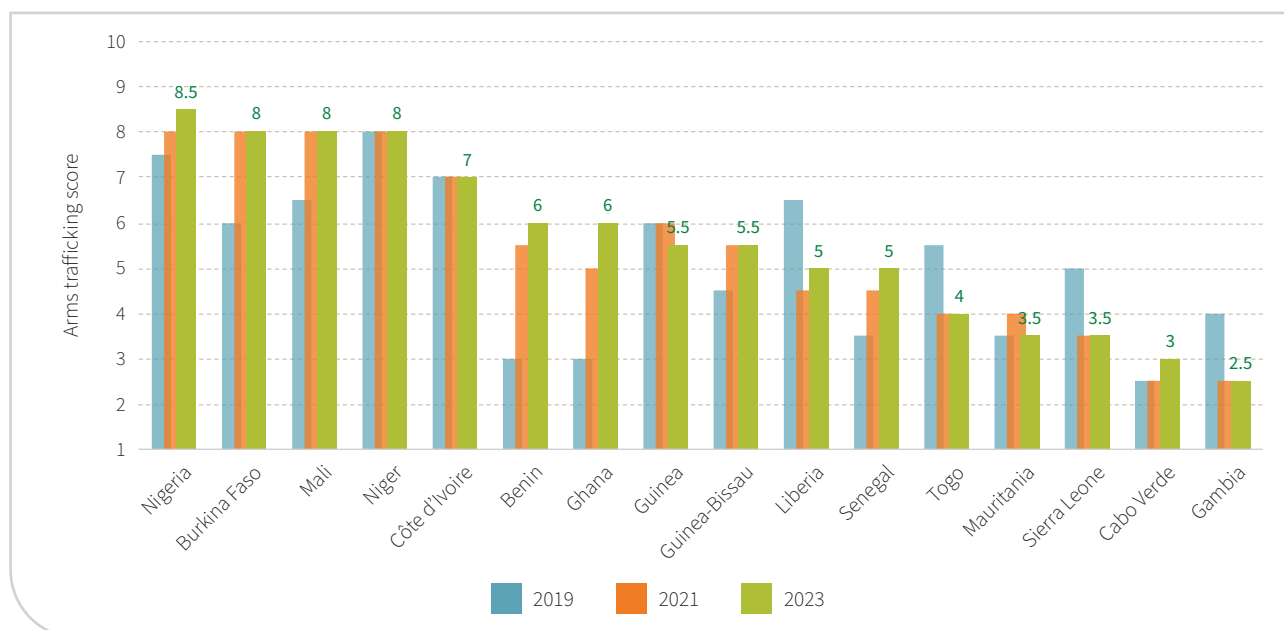
Prominent arms trafficking tags reflect key features of the regional market, with ‘conflict zone’, ‘terrorism/terrorist group’ and ‘stolen arms’, in addition to ‘local manufacturing’, being most prevalent.

The arms trafficking market has devastating implications for conflict and instability across the West African region. Conflict is a central contributor to arms trafficking, as demand for weapons from both conflict actors and communities for self-protection grows. In turn, higher levels of weapons in circulation can also exacerbate levels of violence, by weaponizing existing tensions and conflicts, creating a vicious cycle.<sup>36</sup> This is underlined by the fact that the top three countries for the arms trafficking market in 2023 are also the three largest conflict hotspots in West Africa: Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso.<sup>37</sup>

Violent extremist groups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, are heavily involved in regional arms flows. Recent research suggests that the primary source of weapons in the Sahel is the diversion of firearms from national armed forces and that, although there is a degree of transcontinental weapons importation, the majority of arms in circulation in the region are produced in Africa.<sup>38</sup>

According to the index, ‘there has been a proliferation in increasingly sophisticated small arms and light weapons in the region, often extracted illegally from government stockpiles, that are used by armed groups involved in inter-ethnic and inter-community conflict across the region’.<sup>39</sup> However, artisanal arms production is also significant and is increasing in both prevalence and sophistication in many countries.<sup>40</sup> Concerningly, the index points to an overall increase in the arms trade between 2019 and 2021, and again from 2021 to 2023.<sup>41</sup>

Chart 9: Arms trafficking



Source: 2023 Global Organized Crime Index

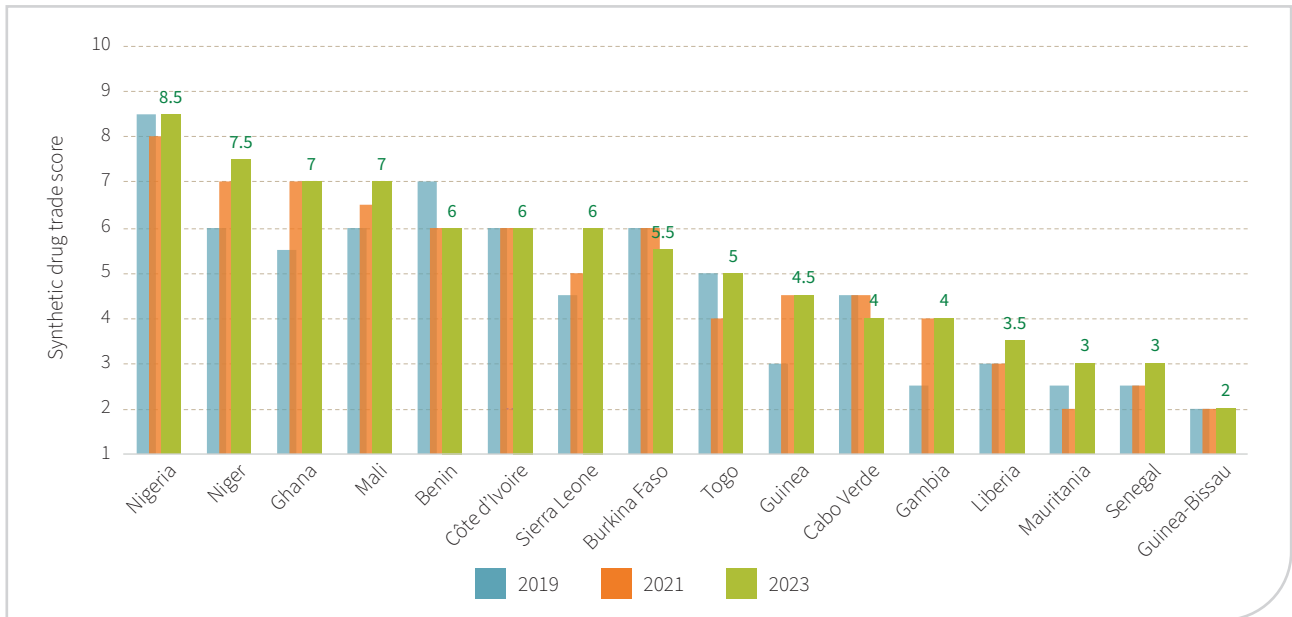
## Synthetic drugs

Finally, synthetic drugs are spreading rapidly throughout West Africa and are increasingly being recognized as a major threat to human security in much of the region. Tramadol and methamphetamines are seen as the primary synthetic drug threats, although synthetic cannabinoids appear to be in a phase of sharp expansion.

Tramadol consumption has repeatedly been highlighted as a major threat to human security in the ECOWAS region,<sup>42</sup> identified in several countries' CRVAs as a pervasive risk factor.<sup>43</sup> A synthetic opioid painkiller with both analgesic and psychotropic properties, tramadol is widely used in West Africa by individuals engaged in strenuous manual labour, such as artisanal gold mining; those working or travelling long hours, such as taxi



Chart 10: Synthetic drug trade



Source: 2023 Global Organized Crime Index

drivers or irregular migrants; and otherwise physically and emotionally draining work such as sex work.<sup>44</sup> As with many illicit economies, the most vulnerable and marginalized elements of society are the most affected by the tramadol trade.

West Africa is a key production point in the global methamphetamine trade. Since 2011, when the first meth lab was seized in the country, Nigerian networks have moved up the supply chain to dominate the continental trade and are now prolific in the global trafficking of methamphetamines.

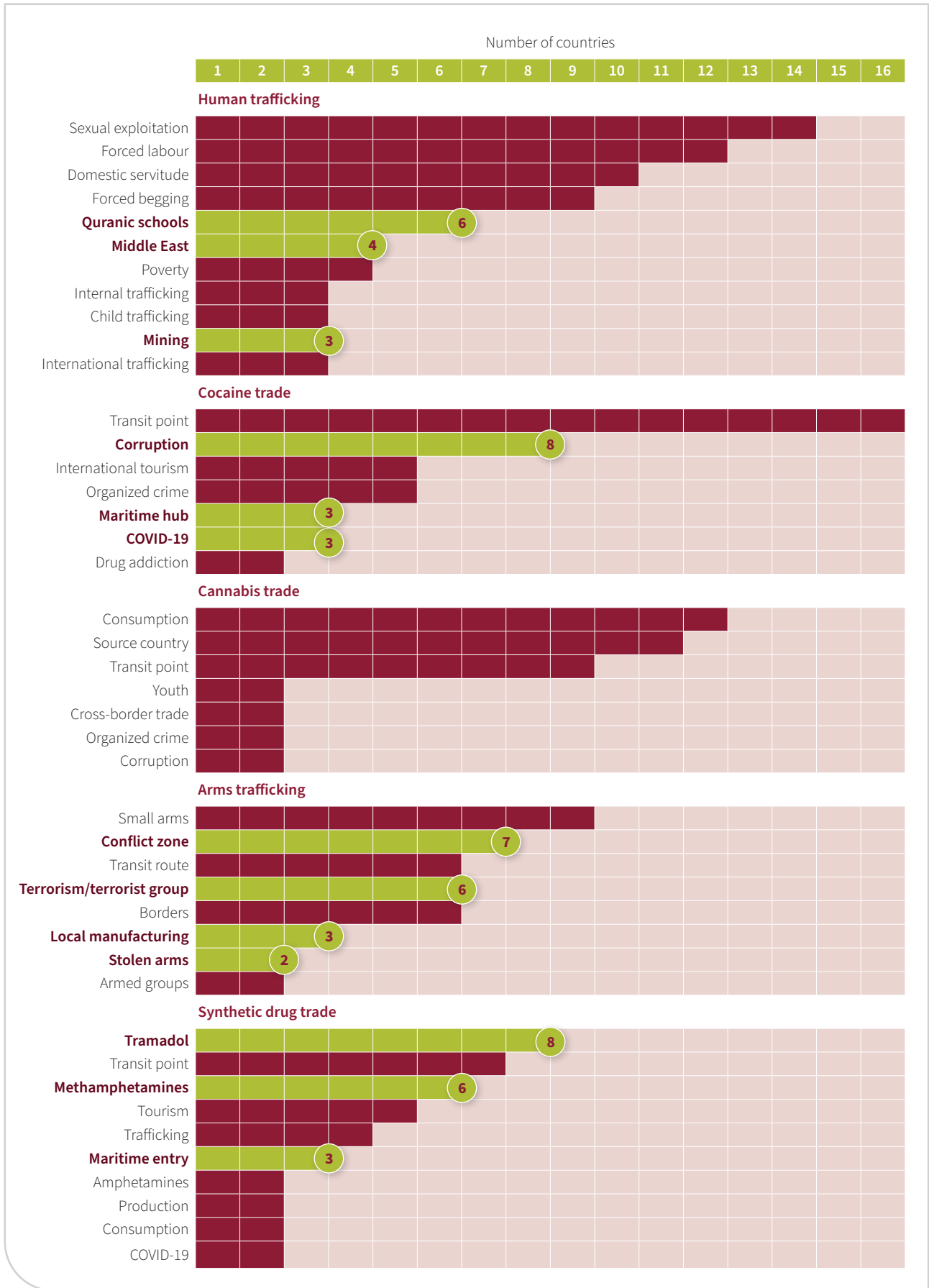
The nature of synthetic drugs markets means that when they enter new areas they expand quickly and rapidly gain a foothold, with devastating consequences. In contrast to the more traditional plant-based drug markets, synthetic drug markets do not need established transnational relationships, complex and expensive logistics, or significant start-up capital. The GI-TOC has shown how synthetic drugs – ranging from methamphetamines to synthetic cannabinoids – have transformed drugs markets across Africa within a short period of entering a new territory.<sup>45</sup>

As is the case for the cocaine trade, maritime trade infrastructure is highlighted as an important feature in the illicit trade in synthetic drugs, echoing GI-TOC research which has identified seaports as key hubs for cocaine and synthetic drug trafficking.<sup>46</sup>



*Ivorian police officers from the National Police Directorate responsible for narcotics and drugs (DPSD) carry out searches at a market during an anti-drug operation in Adjame, a popular commune in Abidjan on September 22, 2023*

Chart 11: Criminal market tags



Source: GI-TOC analysis of ENACT Organized Crime Index 2021

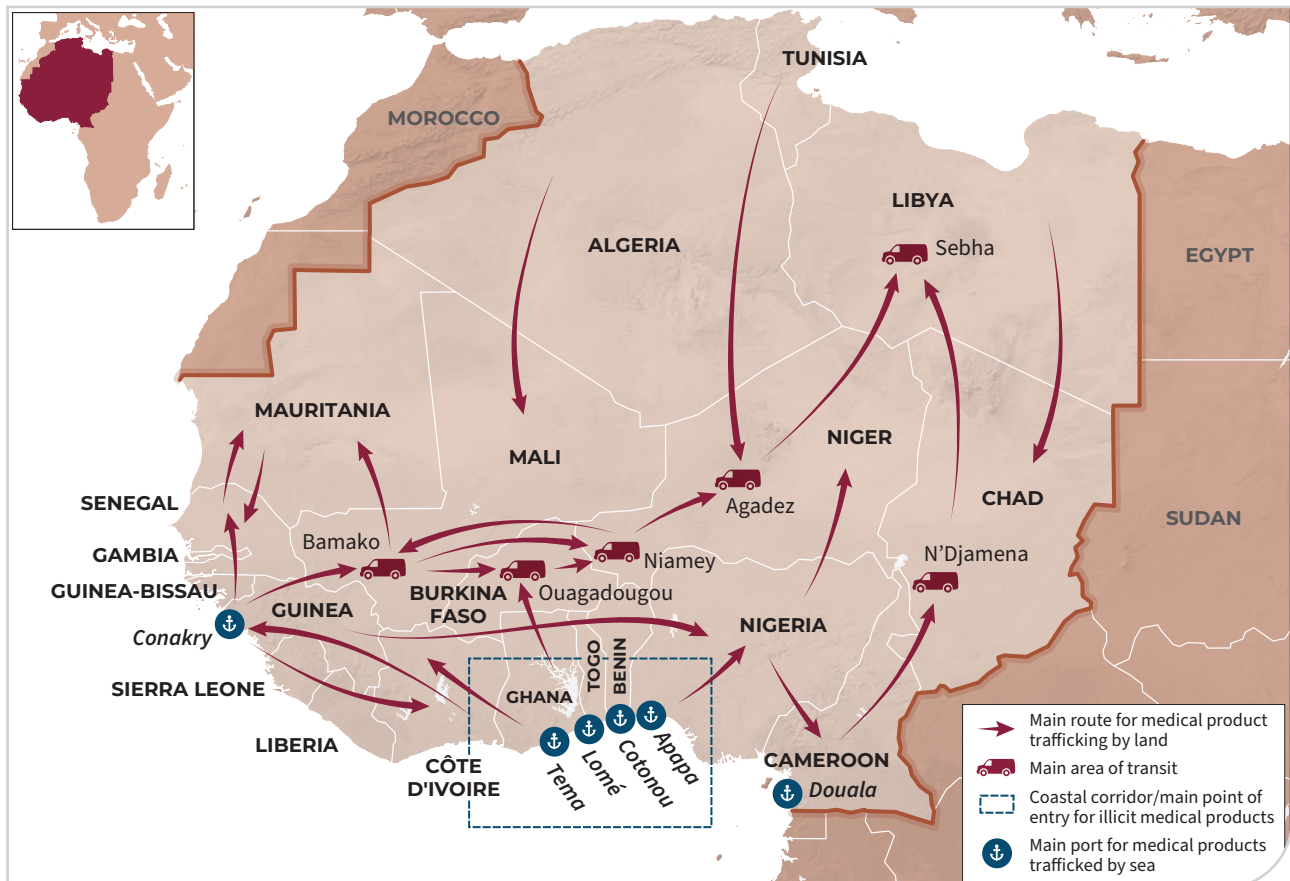
## Illicit pharmaceuticals

In addition to the five criminal markets analyzed above, expert stakeholders (including members of the WARNOC) consulted during the initial stage of the research stressed the significant harm caused by the market in illicit pharmaceuticals. Illicit pharmaceuticals was not a market covered by the Organized Crime Index 2019–2021, and as such was not presented as a primary criminal market threat in the preliminary findings. In recognition of the importance of this market, it has been captured in the 2023 iteration of the index, which highlights a number of countries in West Africa facing the threat of counterfeit and illicitly traded pharmaceuticals.<sup>47</sup> In such countries, illicit pharmaceuticals are predominantly sold on the street in rural areas and markets, targeting individuals who cannot afford the more expensive legitimate drugs available in pharmacies.<sup>48</sup>

West Africa is particularly impacted by counterfeit medicines – across the Sahel, it is estimated that between 19 and 50 per cent of available medicines are substandard and falsified, respectively.<sup>49</sup> While the region has been enhancing its response,<sup>50</sup> the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the problem, with criminal networks profiting from the global health crisis to feed black markets with substandard versions of medicines touted as potentially effective treatments.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to substandard and counterfeit medicine, the illicit trade in legitimate medicine is also widespread, with the non-medical use of tramadol particularly pervasive.<sup>52</sup> Given the region’s reliance on pharmaceutical imports, seaports – and coastal areas of West Africa more broadly – are the primary entry points and hotspots for the illicit pharmaceuticals market.<sup>53</sup> However, there is also a large consumer market across Sahelian countries. Despite the harm that can be caused by trafficking pharmaceutical products, it enjoys high levels of legitimacy among local populations, as sellers are seen as benevolent service providers, as opposed to criminal actors.<sup>54</sup>

Chart 12: Routes used for trafficking medical products to the Sahel



Source: UNODC, Trafficking in medical products in the Sahel, TOCTA Sahel, 2023.

## Organized-crime-related, event-driven risks

'Risk' is defined here, drawing on the CRVA definitions, as any event-driven factor that has the potential to be a conflict trigger and can include specific controversies or events such as disasters or elections that may occur. These risks, therefore, reflect threats to the safety and security of populations across West Africa that are not themselves organized criminal markets, but are often intertwined with them and involve criminal actors. The analysis of event-driven risks as part of the OCRF ensures that the assessment of organized-crime threats incorporates a conflict-sensitive and human-security centred approach.

Various forms of criminality, from drug trafficking and illegal mining operations to gang violence, child trafficking and cattle rustling, are highlighted as risks in West Africa by the CRVAs. In addition to the six criminal markets explored above, several other event-driven risks assessed by the CRVAs to be prominent in the region are analyzed here. In order to focus on the risks most relevant to organized crime, we first analyzed those under the security pillar of the CRVAs.

Across the 16 focus countries, over 50 unique risk factors pertinent to organized crime and security were identified in the CRVAs; four of these represented a recurring theme throughout the region:<sup>55</sup>

- Land- and resource-based conflicts (including farmer-herder conflict)
- Vigilante and self-defence groups
- Political violence
- Gender-based violence

### Land- and resource-based conflicts (including farmer-herder conflict)

In West Africa, a region heavily dependent on the agricultural sector, land- and resource-based conflicts are a central driver of conflicts. Customary land tenure is most common across the region, but 'deep and rapid ecological, demographic, economic, social and cultural changes are making land rights less secure, undermined by more intense resource competition, overlapping claims and rising conflicts'.<sup>56</sup>

In certain countries, land-based conflict is often tied to chieftaincy issues. Where land is largely held under customary tenure, which gives control of land and its resources to the local chief, this raises the stakes for potential disputes over succession.<sup>57</sup> Communal violence over land can also be a result of unclear border demarcation and boundary disputes.<sup>58</sup> Mining, both legal and illegal, often plays a key role in the degradation of land, which can intensify competition over land access.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, competition

*A Fulani herder leads his cattle to graze in the fields between Severe and Mopti in central Mali on March 18, 2021*





*Chemical waste stain the soil on November 22, 2018 in Obinugwu village in southeast Nigeria, at a clandestine methamphetamine lab that was busted by the NDLEA in November. - With access to lucrative markets to the south and east, and aided by porous borders and corrupt law enforcement, experts warn Nigeria is fast becoming a major player in the global methamphetamine market*

between industrial mining operations and ASGM for access to land and minerals has also increased regional tensions.<sup>60</sup>

One particularly prominent form of land- and resource-based conflict in the region is farmer-herder conflict, which peaks during the transhumance season and often plays into existing inter-ethnic tensions.<sup>61</sup> Tensions between herders and farming communities is an important risk factor associated with the rise of cattle rustling, a particularly destabilizing form of illicit economy pervasive in many countries in West Africa, particularly Mali and Nigeria (the most prominent cattle-producing countries in the region).<sup>62</sup>

### **Vigilante and self-defence groups**

Self-defence groups have proliferated in the region, in particular in the Sahel since the beginning of the security crisis in 2012. These initiatives are typically borne from a failure on the part of the state to provide security. Self-defence groups are therefore often viewed positively by local communities as they fill the security vacuum and are often considered to be more effective than local police and other security forces.<sup>63</sup>

In recent years, several states in the region have moved towards state-sponsored self-defence groups, including in Burkina Faso in the form of the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP), and in Nigeria, in the form of the *Amotekun* corps among others.

There is often a lack of training and oversight of self-defence groups, which leads to the use of harsh tactics, including physical abuse.<sup>64</sup> Groups of this nature have been accused of carrying out criminal activities ranging from kidnapping to the sale and trafficking of narcotics.<sup>65</sup> In some countries, self-defence militias are important actors in the gold sector – a sector that is key to the livelihoods of millions of people across the region but is vulnerable to criminal activity. Militias are often established along ethnic lines, magnifying ethnic tensions and amplifying communal conflicts.

Moreover, the line can be blurred between semi-formal groups and opportunistic vigilantes seeking to exact mob justice, which can result in mass violence and even lynching.<sup>66</sup> Some develop into mafia-style ‘violent entrepreneurs’, and become involved in various forms of criminal behaviour such as extortion (see deep dive section for more on vigilante groups in West Africa).<sup>67</sup>

Tensions between herders and farming communities is an important risk factor associated with the rise of cattle rustling

## Political violence

West Africa is a politically volatile region, as evidenced by the six successful coups d'état that have taken place since 2020, one unconstitutional transition of power and several unsuccessful coup attempts.<sup>68</sup> Political violence, including election-related violence but also violence with a political objective more broadly, is seen as a significant security threat across the region.

Clashes between supporters of opposing parties and candidates have been regular occurrences during elections over the past decade.<sup>69</sup> Nigeria's February 2023 elections saw multiple attacks against candidates, party supporters, electoral staff and voters; criminal gangs were key perpetrators of the violence in various states.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, violent crackdowns against political protests, which often intensify around elections, are also common in several states in West Africa.<sup>71</sup>

The link between elections and organized crime has long been recognized in different contexts all over the world, with violence at the hands of criminal actors frequently influencing the outcome of democratic processes.<sup>72</sup> Among the most pernicious threats to free elections is the mobilization of gangs, militias and youths by political actors to engage in intimidation, violence and other criminal activities during election periods.<sup>73</sup> Crucially, in many places, those carrying out acts of violence on behalf of politicians during election periods are also key players in a number of criminal markets. Using the proceeds of the latter and the protection gained from those in power, organized criminals are able to further bolster their influence and shield their criminal activities from prosecution.<sup>74</sup>

## Gender-based violence

Approximately 40 per cent of women in West Africa have been victims of gender-based violence, making it among the most affected regions in the world.<sup>75</sup> In addition to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, as mentioned in the previous section, women and girls suffer other forms of violence such as assault, rape and even murder, sometimes for ritual purposes.<sup>76</sup> Female genital mutilation, which is a deeply rooted cultural practice often carried out clandestinely, is also a common practice in several countries in the region.<sup>77</sup>

Although often overlooked, the intersection of gender and organized crime, illicit economies, gangs and armed groups must be a central element of analysis as different elements of society experience the impacts of illicit economies in distinct ways. Women and girls are frequently the targets of kidnapping by bandits and other armed groups, for example.<sup>78</sup> Political violence targeting women in West Africa has increased dramatically in recent years, posing a threat to female participation in political life and the public sphere more widely.<sup>79</sup> Further, emerging research indicates that women form central elements of community resilience responses to organized crime.<sup>80</sup>

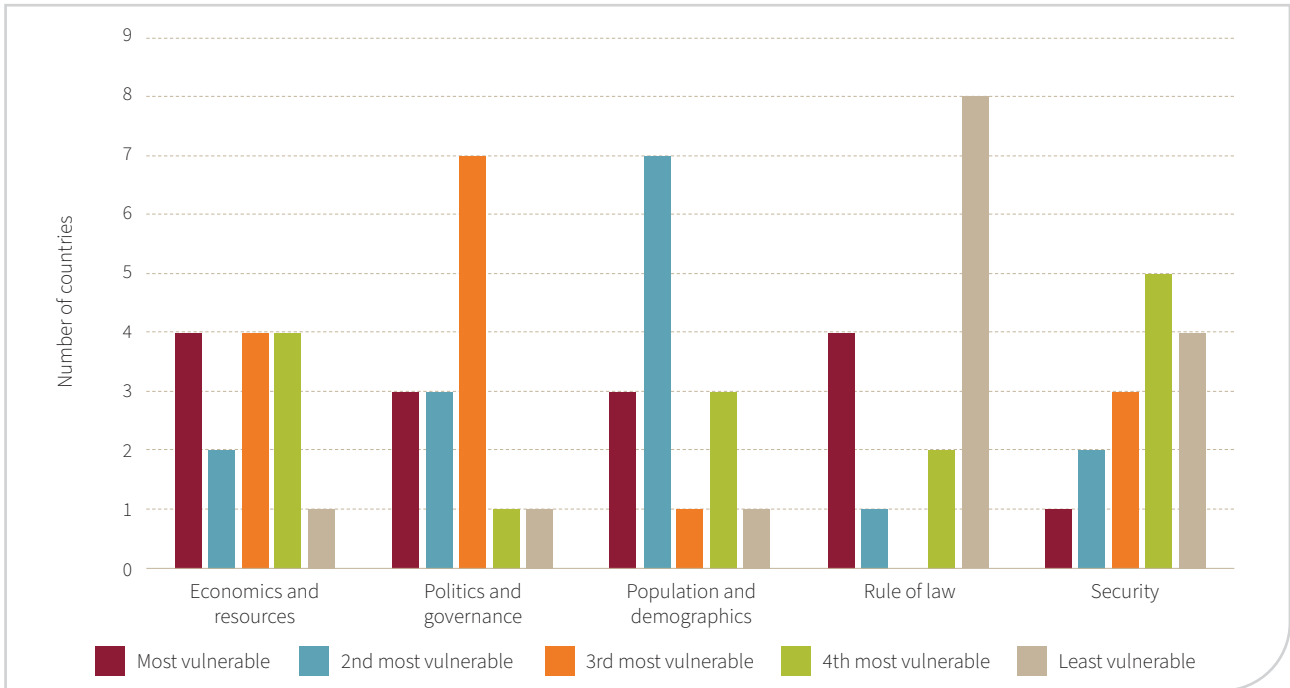
## Additional event-driven risks

Event-driven risks under the CRVA security pillar were coded in the first step of the OCRF because this is the pillar most focused on organized crime. However, to ensure a holistic assessment, this was complemented by a qualitative review of event-driven risks across the distinct pillars – as set out in Chart 13 – as a number of these also intersect with organized crime dynamics.<sup>81</sup>

From this qualitative review, two event-driven risks were particularly recurrent, and central to the analysis of organized crime threats.

Firstly, corruption, both of political representatives but also police and other security forces, which can often act as a conflict trigger or multiplier. The issue of 'ghost soldiers', for example, a corrupt practice whereby armed forces members exist only on paper to enable officials to siphon off salaries, has been highlighted in a number of countries in West Africa.<sup>82</sup> Addressing corruption is widely recognized by regional policymakers as a key element of addressing conflict and political instability.<sup>83</sup>

Chart 13: CRVA human security pillars by vulnerability rank



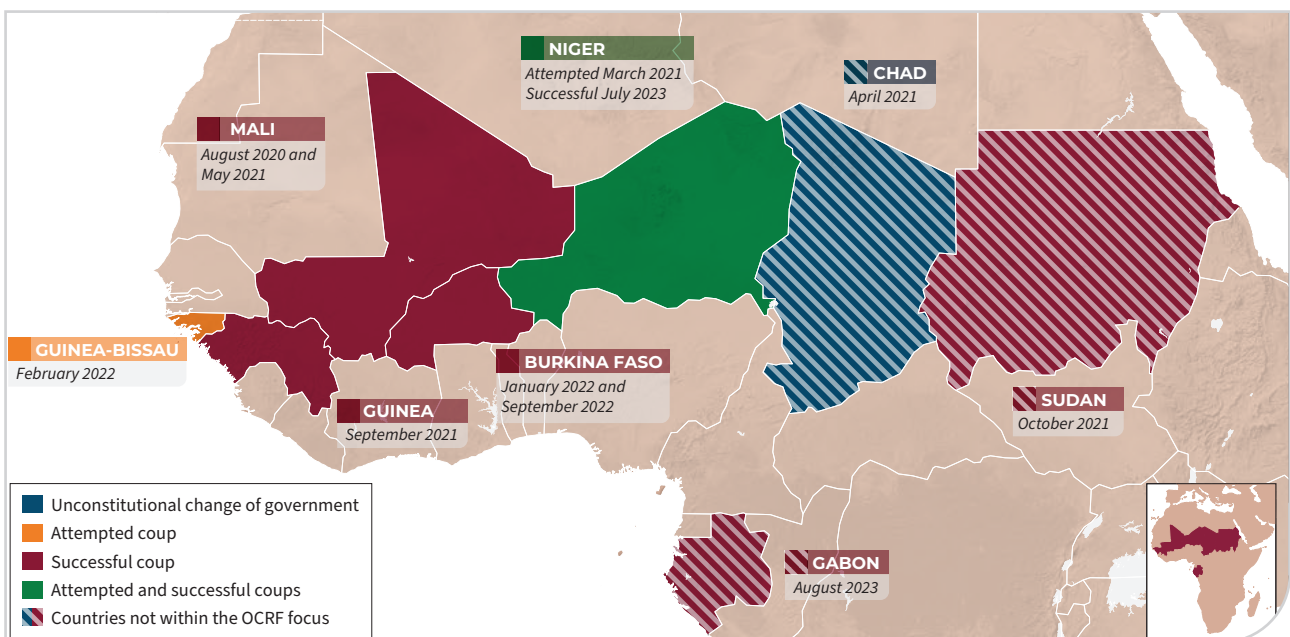
Source: Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments, ECOWAS

The findings of the Organized Crime Index show that, as an enabler of organized criminal activity, state-embedded actors are the most prominent type of criminal actor in the region:

From high-level corruption and embezzlement to the direct involvement of state officials in illicit economies, such as illegal logging, gold mining and drug trafficking, state-embedded actors are clearly the primary vectors through which organized crime operates in the region.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, elements of the judicial system are often considered corrupt, with bribery and impunity widespread.<sup>85</sup> The strength and influence of state-embedded actors, far from being tempered in recent years, have only increased in West Africa since 2021.<sup>86</sup>

Chart 14: Successful coups in Africa since 2020



Source: International IDEA

Chart 15: Security pillar event-driven risks

Criminality	Gender-based violence (GBV)	Vigilante and/or self-defence	Communal conflicts		Boko Haram insurgency activities			Child trafficking/ labour		
			Chieftaincy disputes	Drug abuse	Electoral processes	Galamsey operations (illegal mining operations)	Gang violence (microbes, "gnambro")		Impunity of former combatants	Inadequate Security Sector Reform (SSR) Initiatives
		Human rights violations	Conflicts between ethnic groups	Inconclusive DDR	Low level of implementation of the DDR process	Maritime insecurity	Money laundering	Multiplication of militia groups	Mutiny within divided security forces	
			Inadequate reintegration of ex-combatants	Ineffective implementation of the security provisions of the Peace Agreement	Political protests	Rape and gender-based violence	Recurrence or escalation of conflict in the north	Resurgence of conflict in Senegal's Casamance region	Security crackdown during protests/ demonstration	
				Coup attempt						
	Herder-farmer conflicts	Terrorism	Cross-border and maritime tensions between fishing communities	Inefficient coordination among multiple security actors	Presence of foreign security forces	Social uprising/ insecurity by loyalists of the previous administration especially in the Western region	Tensions surrounding the deployment of Operation Vanguard	Terrorist activity; spillover of conflict from neighboring countries	Violent extremism and terrorism	
			Cross-border disputes	Inflammatory speech on radio and broadcast media	Proliferation of armed/terrorist groups	Tensions arising from transhumance	Violent political protests	Withdrawal of ECOMIB	Withdrawal of ECOMIG forces	
	Land- and/or resource-based conflicts	Political violence	Cattle rustling	Diminished public trust in the police institutions	Legacy of the Memories of the Civil war	Radicalization	Tensions or clashes between pro-Jammeh and ECOMIG forces	Weak presence of security and defense forces	Withdrawal of military and police component of UNMIL before the 2017 elections	Withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission (UNOCI)

Source: Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments, ECOWAS

Secondly, coups d'état have disproportionately affected West Africa, with a spate of coups since 2020 fuelling fears of 'coup contagion' across the region. Importantly, coups and their consequences can be closely linked to illicit economies and corruption. In Guinea-Bissau, for example, the cocaine trade was linked to a reported coup attempt in February 2023.<sup>87</sup>

The perception of corruption among state authorities by the population can be a significant contributor to a loss of government legitimacy, which can be used as a pretext for orchestrating a coup. In coups across West Africa – including in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso – coup leaders have emphasized the corruption of those they have overthrown as a justification for seizing power.<sup>88</sup>

While in some cases illicit economies have expanded in the wake of coups,<sup>89</sup> in others, criminal networks are so entrenched throughout formal and informal structures, that a change in government has had a limited impact on illicit economies.<sup>90</sup> In some cases – as appears to be the case in Guinea's cocaine market following the 2021 coup – the disruption of existing power structures enables new players to enter the market, driving an overall expansion.<sup>91</sup>

### Structural vulnerabilities: mainstreaming conflict sensitivity

Identifying the most prevalent threats facing the region is a useful first step, but it is also important to consider what the underlying reasons for countries' susceptibility to these threats are. Incorporating analysis of those CRVA structural vulnerabilities (which focus on conflict) assessed to be relevant to organized crime, ensures the OCRF mainstreams conflict sensitivity.<sup>92</sup> Criminality itself, in addition to representing an overarching threat to much of the region, was identified in the CRVAs as a significant factor in a country's vulnerability to broader security threats, illicit activities, conflict and violence – underscoring the vicious cycle of crime and conflict.

Reflecting the tendency of instability and conflict to spread, and risk intensifying over time, a key structural vulnerability highlighted was the presence of conflicts or insurgencies in one region of



a country, or a neighbouring state. Instability enables illicit economies by leaving communities dependent on informal livelihoods as the economic damage caused by conflict grows and is entrenched.<sup>93</sup> Across West Africa, nearly all the most violence-affected regions are also areas in which illicit economies thrive.<sup>94</sup>

The wide range of structural vulnerabilities identified under the CRVA security pillar which fall outside of the criminality and conflict groupings outlined above, can be broadly categorized as follows:

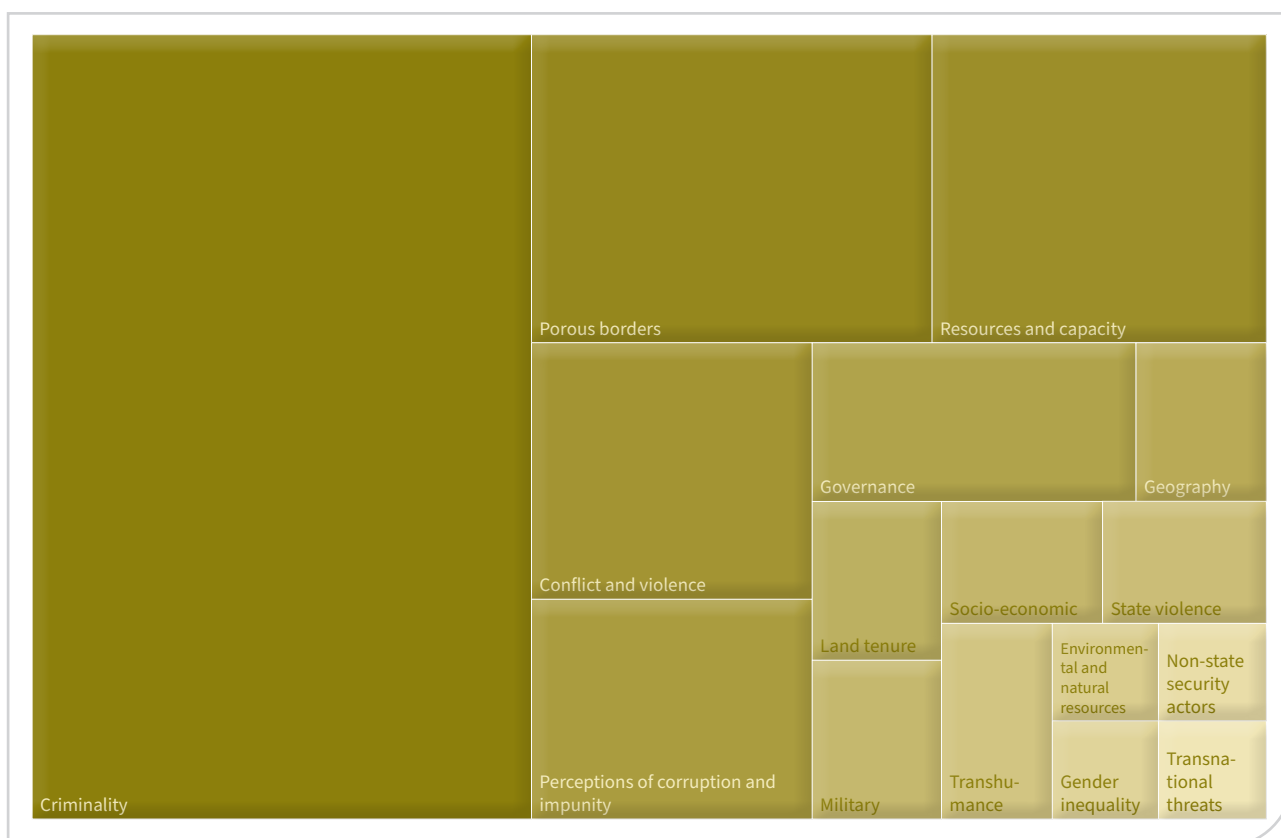
### Border porosity

The porous nature of most borders in West Africa is a major facilitator of informal and illicit cross-border trade, underpinning the livelihoods of millions across the region.<sup>95</sup> Hubs of illicit economies tend to cluster around borders that have been compromised due to weak governance.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, violence clusters in border areas across West Africa, particularly in the Sahel,<sup>97</sup> and conflicts are increasingly spilling over borders.<sup>98</sup> Freedom of movement for citizens of ECOWAS member states and pervasive corruption among border officials, contribute to the permeability of regional borders.<sup>99</sup>

### Lack of resources and capacity

Many of the structural vulnerabilities identified in West African countries boil down to deficiencies in capacity and a lack resources among state institutions, predominantly police and other security forces. These challenges are tied to corruption alongside wider economic stresses. This has a detrimental impact on the state’s ability not only to secure its land borders but also its maritime domain.<sup>100</sup> CRVAs highlighted weaknesses in police and judicial capacity as significant structural vulnerabilities. Both are an underlying cause of the low levels of confidence in criminal justice processes and state forces in many countries.<sup>101</sup>

Chart 16: Security pillar structural vulnerabilities



Source: Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments, ECOWAS

## Perceptions of corruption and impunity

While closely related, there is a crucial difference between corruption (an event-driven risk) and perceptions of corruption (a structural vulnerability) in fuelling instability. While corrupt practices often enable illicit economies and can trigger or multiply conflict and violence, CRVAs also underscored how citizens' *perception* of corruption among security forces, border officials and political actors is a crucial structural vulnerability, which leaves states susceptible not only to illicit economies and other security threats but to diminishing trust in government and state institutions.<sup>102</sup>

Rural areas tend to attract illicit economies that are more strongly linked to instability



In turn, this leads many communities to implement their own initiatives, including establishing self-defence groups (as explored below), and creates spaces for alternative governance providers, like certain non-state armed groups.<sup>103</sup> Latest public opinion data suggests that the share of the population who believe levels of corruption to be increasing are extremely high in a number of countries in West Africa.<sup>104</sup>

## Additional structural vulnerabilities

As was the case with event-driven risks, reviewing the security pillar alone fails to capture a holistic assessment of the structural vulnerabilities present in parts of West Africa. As such, the security-pillar analysis was complemented with a qualitative review of the other pillars of the CRVAs (population and demographics; economics and resources; politics and governance; and rule of law), in addition to the stakeholder consultations. This allowed for an element of differentiation between the central pillar of focus – security – and others, while simultaneously ensuring as comprehensive an assessment as possible. A number of different vulnerabilities were highlighted, including socio-economic vulnerabilities, demographic vulnerabilities and climate change.

**Youth unemployment:** By far the most recurring socio-economic vulnerability cited in both the CRVAs and by the stakeholders consulted was the issue of unemployment, in particular youth unemployment. High rates of unemployment were identified as a structural vulnerability in all 15 ECOWAS member states' CRVAs, often alongside related issues of poverty and inequality. High unemployment rates are both an indicator and driver of a high prevalence of informal economies.<sup>105</sup> West Africa has an extremely young population, with almost two thirds of the region's population under the age of 25, which while being an asset, can also pose a risk in terms of economic and social challenges and wider instability.<sup>106</sup> Youth unemployment is considered by many across West Africa to be a primary driver of criminality, extremism and drug use.<sup>107</sup> This echoes recent research that found that the need for employment is the primary reason behind joining a violent extremist group in the countries in the region most affected by them.<sup>108</sup>

**Rural–urban disparities:** These manifest both in terms of infrastructure and access to services, and development more broadly.<sup>109</sup> For a variety of reasons, rural areas tend to attract illicit economies that are more strongly linked to instability,<sup>110</sup> while rapid urbanization can drive spikes in criminality, and cause conflicts over land or other scarce resources.<sup>111</sup>

**Climate change:** The CRVAs identified climate change as a key structural vulnerability multiplying conflict risks. Greater reliance on illicit economies is one of the coping mechanisms adopted by communities facing the challenges of climate change. In turn, the environmental impacts of many illicit economies are themselves contributing to the harms of climate change on communities and ecosystems. Organized crime and associated corruption should thus be understood as both a cause and consequence of climate change.<sup>112</sup> Environmental phenomena are shaping community tensions, driving scarcity of resources, and operating as a key factor in human movement, including through forced displacement. As these impacts enhance pressure on local ecosystems, magnifying resource scarcity, this enhances instability and contributes to the creation of new illicit markets, as criminal actors assume responsibility for the provision of basic needs, such as water.<sup>113</sup>

## Assessing resilience to organised crime and human-security challenges

Having outlined the dimensions of the organized crime threat to West Africa above, we turn to considering countries' ability to withstand and disrupt organized criminal activities, and assessing countermeasures taken by both state and non-state actors.

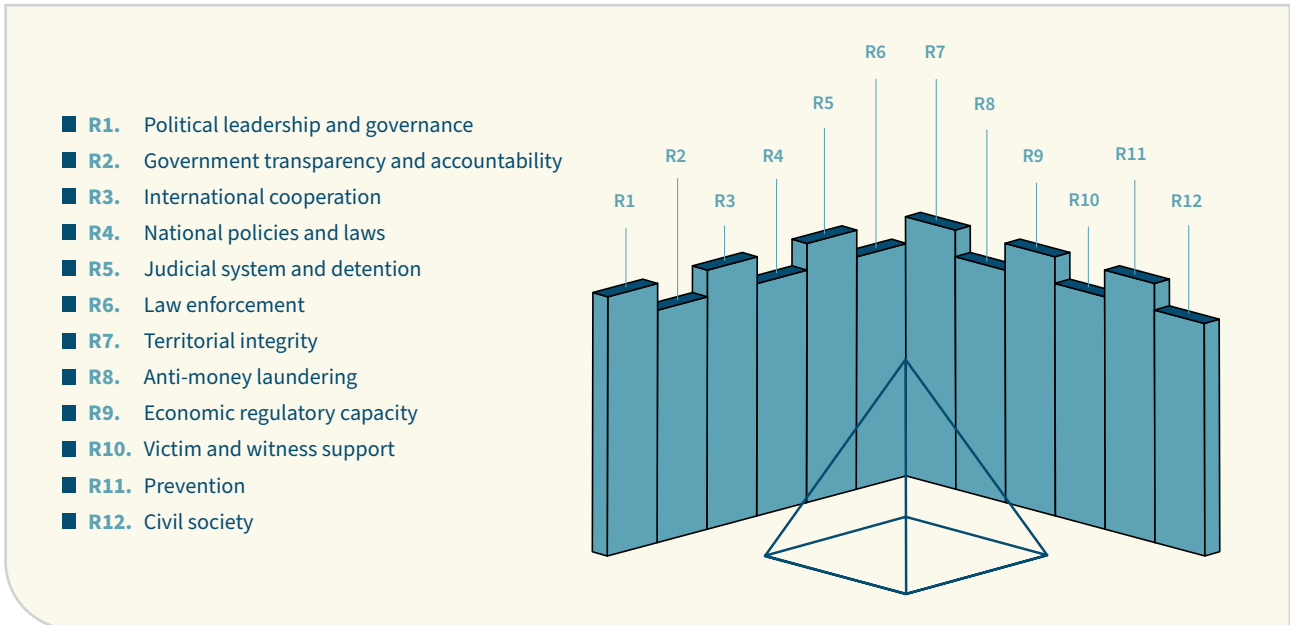
Although initially focusing only on the weakest pillars of resilience according to the index, namely victim and witness support, anti-money laundering and prevention,<sup>114</sup> upon consultation, a revision to the methodology was undertaken, such that the resilience section provides an analysis of all 12 resilience indicators. This reflects our conceptual understanding of resilience as a holistic approach to the threat of organized crime, encapsulating not just law enforcement and other criminal justice measures, but also governance, socio-economic factors and civil society. Chart 17 shows the principal themes to emerge from the analysis of the 12 resilience indicator narratives.

Chart 17: Resilience indicator narrative tags



Source: GI-TOC analysis of ENACT Organized Crime Index 2021

**Chart 18: Resilience building blocks**



Source: ENACT Organized Crime Index Africa 2021

The CRVAs identify social and institutional resilience factors in line with the five human security pillars, namely those relating to: politics and governance; population and demographics; security; economics and resources; and the rule of law.

Many of the region’s greatest challenges are rooted in complex local or national contexts. As such, activities or initiatives which have the potential to result in greater resilience are often highly country specific. The CRVAs identified hundreds of different initiatives which were identified as potential sources of resilience to mitigate security risks.<sup>115</sup> Analysis of these enabled several broad themes to emerge, which can also be analyzed through the lens of the 12 index building blocks of resilience (see Chart 18).

Below is an analysis of the 12 resilience indicators, for both organized crime and other security threats, assessing both relative strengths and weaknesses, as identified by the index and the CRVAs.<sup>116</sup>

### Political leadership and governance

The establishment of an array of commissions and committees at the highest levels of the state can often reflect a high degree of political will to address a particular threat. National commissions on human rights and high commissioners tasked with reconciliation and national unity, for example, have been identified as sources of resilience.<sup>117</sup> Community cohesion – including peaceful coexistence between different ethnic or religious groups<sup>118</sup> – was highlighted to be of paramount importance in the resilience of countries across the region. This can be promoted through a number of initiatives, such as peace and transhumance committees and other dialogue programmes.

Correspondingly, analysis of the index’s resilience indicator narratives points to a high degree of state fragility as key factor in undermining governance and weakening resilience across the region. This is often exacerbated by the infiltration of criminal elements in the state apparatus; ‘chronic insecurity across much of the region has simultaneously allowed criminal actors to gain a foothold in societies across West Africa and led governments to often prioritize conflict and terrorism over organized crime’.<sup>119</sup>

### Government transparency and accountability

Visible efforts to sanction corrupt officials helps to dent the perception of impunity, fostering confidence in authorities and, by extension, resilience.<sup>120</sup> The digitalization of government systems was identified as an

important factor in making government more transparent and accountable. Meanwhile, a lack of political will to tackle organized crime and corruption was identified as a challenge across the region, with many countries slow to implement or introduce anti-corruption measures.<sup>121</sup>

### International cooperation

Many potential resilience factors identified involve some form of international cooperation. The CRVAs identified peacekeeping operations as crucial sources of resilience in a number of countries, such as Mali.<sup>122</sup> In addition to peacekeeping operations, other international initiatives include bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries on border control, as well as established institutions such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin.<sup>123</sup>

International cooperation is one of the higher-scoring resilience indicators from the index, in part reflecting the status of most countries in the region as signatories to most if not all relevant organized crime treaties and conventions. International action on the issue of drug trafficking is among the most common forms of international cooperation on criminal markets in West Africa.

International cooperation has declined in some parts of the region, particularly the Sahel.

### National policies and laws

The index highlights national policies and laws relating to organized crime as among the stronger resilience indicators across the region. However, while legal frameworks exist, effective implementation to target organized crime has lagged. CRVAs, focusing more on conflict, identified several government initiatives to address local conflicts, early warning mechanisms and the implementation of national counter-extremism plans as central resilience factors.

### Judicial system and detention

CRVAs underscored the importance of alternative dispute mechanisms across the region. Traditional chiefs, religious leaders and other community leaders often play a primary role in dispute resolution at the local level, with many people preferring to resolve conflicts through these alternative mechanisms rather than going to the formal justice system.<sup>124</sup> A driver of this is the ineffectiveness of judicial systems across many countries in the region, as identified by the index. Factors behind this include a lack of resources and capacity, but also a strong sense that corruption and impunity are pervasive and political bias or influence is commonplace.



*Logo of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in N'Djamena, Republic of Chad, on the fourth day of a four day working visit of the Belgian Foreign Minister to Chad and Mali, Thursday 31 August 2017*

## Law enforcement

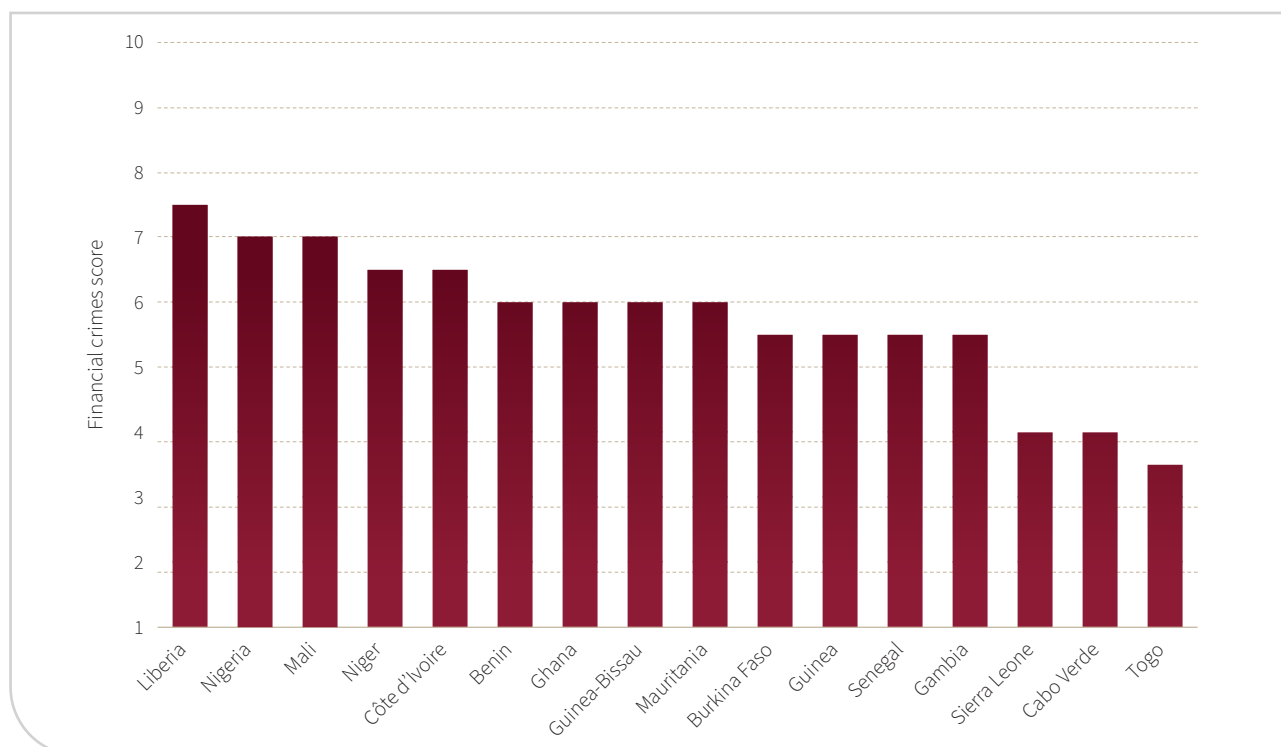
The vast majority of relevant potential resilience factors identified by the CRVAs fall under the umbrella of the security sector. This primarily includes measures such as security-sector reform, community policing (the importance of which was also raised at the regional stakeholder consultation stage) and the training of law enforcement. Security-sector reform undertaken by authorities in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, was a significant contributing factor to the demobilization and integration of former armed combatants into the national armed forces and wider society.<sup>125</sup> Index assessments highlight international support for law enforcement agencies in the region as particularly beneficial for the success of police operations, while noting corruption and a lack of resources as major handicaps.

## Territorial integrity

A significant obstacle to resilience to organized crime and other security threats is the geographic vulnerability faced by many countries. Extensive land borders, complex terrain or the prevalence of coastal islands can all exacerbate border porosity and shape trafficking routes. The expanding operations of non-state armed groups (originally concentrated in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin but increasingly moving into to northern areas of coastal states) pose major challenges to the territorial integrity of countries across the region.

Border officials are highlighted as pivotal in preserving the integrity of territorial boundaries,<sup>126</sup> as are agencies involved in securing the maritime domain, particularly in island states or countries which face the threat of illicit flows via predominantly maritime routes.<sup>127</sup> International aid is often focused on maritime and border security and, while this contributes to security in some cases, it is fraught with challenges and often rendered ineffective.

Chart 19: Financial crimes in West Africa



Note: 'Financial crime', as per the index definition, is a broad term describing non-violent crime that results in financial loss to the state, an entity or individuals. However, to avoid double-counting, this criminal market does not include money laundering, which is characterized as a secondary crime, linked to illicit proceeds of a prior offence. One exception is when money laundering occurs as a result of fraud or another offence that is classified as financial crime under this index.

Source: Global Organized Crime Index 2023

## Anti-money laundering

According to the index, anti-money laundering capacity is particularly weak in West Africa.<sup>128</sup> The prevalence of cash transactions and widespread informal economies are key areas of vulnerability to money laundering. A lack of enforcement of existing anti-money laundering measures, as well as corrupt practices, are among the main obstacles to an effective response. An estimated 60–70 per cent of total economic activity across the region is accounted for by the informal economy.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, the vast majority of transactions within the informal sector are paid either in cash or through informal financing mechanisms, instead of the formal banking system, which limits the traceability of financial flows.<sup>130</sup> Illicit financial flows underpin illicit economies, erode government revenue and sustain conflict actors. Tackling these must therefore be a central priority, but current responses are lagging far behind the threat.

## Economic regulatory capacity

Another resilience theme identified through a qualitative review of the non-security pillars of the CRVA is economic resilience. As alluded to in the previous section, economic hardship and marginalization is often a key driver of conflict and radicalization. But across West Africa, a number of structural factors and both governmental and non-governmental initiatives related to the economy are identified as important sources of resilience. Particularly important in many states is access to microcredit, in particular for women.<sup>131</sup> Efforts to reform and modernize the land tenure system, including digitizing records of land sales, are also important, in particular in countries in which land- or resource-based conflicts (including farmer–herder tensions) are a risk.<sup>132</sup>

As highlighted above, communities living near borders are heavily reliant on cross-border trade – whether formal or informal – as a major source of livelihood, and thus, resilience.<sup>133</sup> Limited access to financial services, particularly formal banking systems, have allowed informal systems to develop and become entrenched, providing a fertile ground for illicit financial flows.

## Victim and witness support

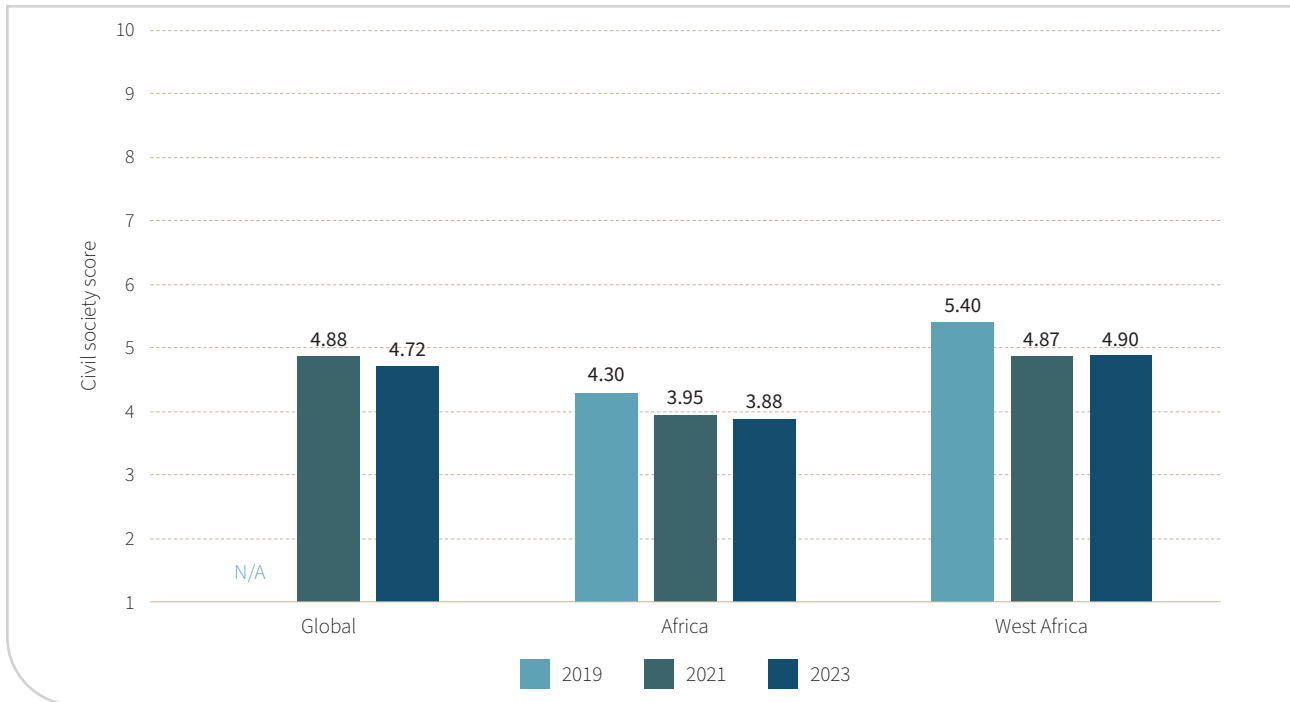
Among the resilience building blocks identified to be the weakest in West Africa is support to victims and witnesses of organized crime. In the vast majority of countries, support offered to victims of organized crime is lacking, and where support is available, it is largely thanks to non-governmental organizations. One of the most commonly highlighted problems from the coding exercise is that even when frameworks do exist in the region, implementation is poor. Support for witnesses is sorely lacking across West Africa, despite the fact that it is a ‘fundamental weapon in the armoury against impunity’.<sup>134</sup> This was highlighted as a core issue in many contexts, from political actors to law enforcement, military and the judicial system.

## Prevention

Overall, the approach to organized crime globally, as well as in West Africa specifically, have centred around law enforcement and wider criminal justice responses, ‘falling short in addressing the social and structural vulnerabilities which organized crime takes advantage of to flourish in the first place’.<sup>135</sup> While effective security responses are a crucial aspect of any holistic response to security threats, including organized crime, it is clear that a wider toolkit is required.

A major issue hampering responses to organized crime across the world, including in West Africa, is the failure to understand and invest effectively in successful preventative approaches. Within West Africa, the main category of responses falling within the ‘prevention’ bucket, and those most commonly raised in consultations with civil society stakeholders, are awareness-raising and sensitization campaigns. However, the efficacy of these has been cast into doubt in the context of many illicit economies – such as human smuggling – where they have repeatedly failed to deter the practice. Campaigns focused on avoidance of specific harms have yielded better results for those affected, albeit not reducing movement overall.

Chart 20: Erosion of civic space, 2019–2023

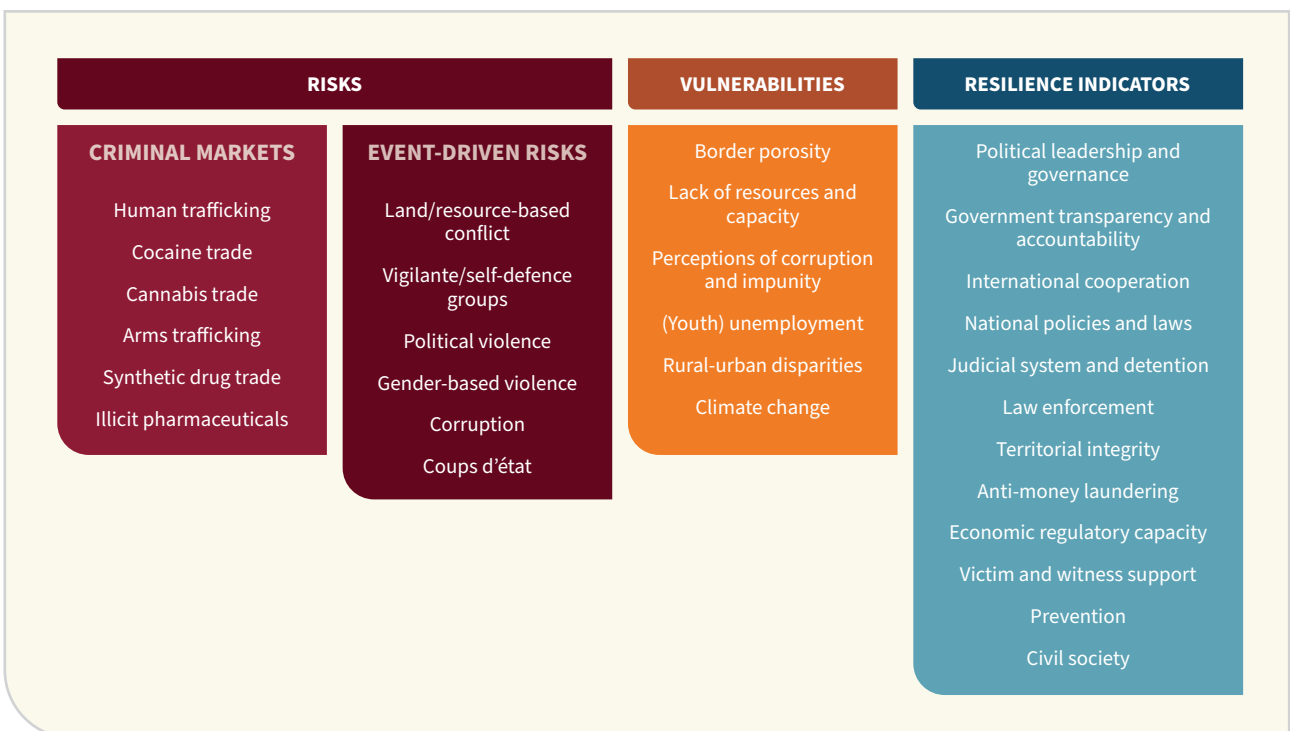


Source: Non-state actors indicator, Global Organized Crime Index 2023

### Civil society

Non-state actors were also seen to play a major role in communities’ resilience in the face of adversity. Media and other non-governmental organizations, including women-based organizations, are an important source of resilience. So too, however, are individual citizens who are the fabric of local communities and whose capacity to mobilize and take collective action is a key source of resilience against organized crime and other forms of insecurity.<sup>136</sup>

Chart 21: Risks, vulnerabilities and resilience indicators



Source: Authors



Governments in West Africa are becoming increasingly hostile to non-state actors



In areas of instability such as the Casamance in southern Senegal, the intervention of women’s platforms in dispute resolution is lauded as an important resilience factor.<sup>137</sup> Although there are many risks associated with them, self-defence, vigilante and other community-based militia groups have also been highlighted as important strengths in many countries for filling security gaps in local communities and reducing criminality.<sup>138</sup>

The prominence of civil society organizations across the region is in large part due to the lack of funding provided by central governments, which pushes the burden onto civilians themselves.<sup>139</sup> However, the index shows that governments in West Africa are becoming increasingly hostile to non-state actors, in particular the media, with growing curbs on press freedom being highlighted.<sup>140</sup> The region’s performance on the index’s non-state actors resilience indicator worsened significantly between 2019 and 2021, and the 2023 iteration of the index illustrates that the civic space has not rebounded in the past two years.<sup>141</sup>

Chart 21 provides an overview of the threats and vulnerabilities identified, and resilience indicators explored, building on the findings of the ENACT Organized Crime Index and the ECOWAS Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessments (CRVAs).

### Deep Dives: Key takeaways

While wide-ranging research into the dynamics of illicit economies is paramount to building an evidence-based response, this research focuses on analyzing specific responses. To do so, it dives deeper into approaches taken by policymakers and communities across West Africa to evaluate what works when it comes to responding to the challenges of organized crime and related security threats, with a particular focus on prevention.

In this section, we outline the key findings of the three deep dives conducted as part of the OCRF (the full deep dives are presented as standalone reports). The themes chosen for the deep dives are rooted in the preliminary findings outlined in the previous section.

From the initial research, a set of risks, vulnerabilities and resilience strengths and weaknesses were identified, as shown in Chart 21. The deep dives are rooted in these three components, with each stemming from the selection of one or more elements from the different components to develop a research proposal. A central consideration when developing proposals was the degree to which policy implications and lessons can be formulated based on the research question and eventual findings. The overarching questions when designing the deep dive topics were firstly, ‘what is most relevant from a human security perspective currently?’ and secondly, ‘in which areas have there been interesting regional responses, the success or failure of which can be assessed?’.

Given that the OCRF is centred on insights from regional experts and designed to reflect the priorities of the people on the ground, the three deep dives presented below are based on extensive stakeholder consultations. The methodologies used for each deep dive are summarized in the methodology section of this report, and presented in full in each individual case study.

#### Deep Dive 1: New approaches to regulating drugs in West Africa: Exploring the impact of Ghana’s drug policy reform

One of the most prominent threats to West Africa that emerged from the preliminary findings, and underscored through the consultations, was the illicit trade in various types of drugs.

Consensus around drug policy within Africa – historically seen as a bastion of prohibitionist drug policy – has been fracturing in recent years, particularly in the wake of the 2016 UNGASS meeting.<sup>142</sup> However, while

*East Legon, where a nearby rehabilitation centre has seen a rise in demand in recent years*



calls for adopting a ‘public health approach’ have gained traction – in West Africa and more broadly – there remains significant variation in what this implies, and in implementation.<sup>143</sup>

In 2020, Ghana’s parliament passed the Narcotics Control Commission Bill (‘Act 1019’), which replaced custodial sentences for drug possession for personal use with fines (more of which below). Among a small number of regional reformers, Ghana presents an important opportunity to explore rhetoric, practice and impacts of drug policy reform in West Africa. For the full deep dive, see: ‘New approaches to regulating drugs in West Africa: Exploring the impact of Ghana’s drug policy reform’.<sup>144</sup>

### **One step away from prohibitionist approaches: Ghana’s legislative reform**

#### **Narcotics Control Commission Bill, 2020**

The Act stipulates the Narcotics Control Commission’s (NACOC) objectives to include ‘ensur[ing] public health and safety’, and ‘collaborat[ing] with the relevant bodies to develop measures for the treatment and rehabilitation of persons suffering from substance use disorders’. Furthermore, it also makes reference to ‘adopt[ing] measures to reduce the demand for and harm caused by the use of narcotic drugs and plants through education, treatment and rehabilitation of persons with substance use disorders’ and to ‘ensure that substance use disorders are treated as a public health issue’. However, the Act is vague on the means by which the NACOC will achieve its functions; moreover, the Act does not define what is meant by a ‘public health approach’.

Section 37 of the Act provides that a ‘person who, without lawful authority, proof of which lies on that person, has possession or control of a narcotic drug for use [...] is liable on summary conviction to a fine [...] and an additional term of imprisonment [...] if the fine is not paid’.<sup>145</sup> The penalty for ‘possession for use’ is a fine of between 2 400 and 6 000 Ghanaian cedis (195 to 485 euros). If this fine is not paid, a prison sentence of not more than 15 months will be handed down in default.

Furthermore, for individuals convicted of purchasing a narcotic drug or plant for personal use, the Act also allows a court to ‘direct the person to seek treatment and rehabilitation at a facility approved by the Commission’.

These legislative provisions, while welcome in removing incarceration as the primary penalty for possession of drugs for use, deviate from best practice in a number of ways:

- Firstly, the **provision of a fine as a penalty for possession for use, with default incurring imprisonment**, places disproportionate harms on the most vulnerable, with fines incurred largely beyond the reach of many of the most marginalised people who use drugs (PWUD).

- Secondly, there is **lack of clarity on distinguishing possession for use and possession for supply**, which leaves law enforcement officers conducting the initial arrests without substantive guidance when determining the nature of the offence. Furthermore, police reportedly regularly lean towards charging the offenders with possession for supply (sometimes as a punishment in cases in which the individuals arrested refuse to pay bribes solicited by police officers).<sup>146</sup>
- Thirdly, global precedent indicates that the introduction of **court orders for treatment is a development of significant concern**. This is stipulated in the Act despite evidence from around the world demonstrating that mandatory treatment has poor outcomes.<sup>147</sup> Further, mandatory treatment is arguably in breach of ethical standards for medical professionals.<sup>148</sup> A disproportionate focus on rehabilitation also risks ignoring a number of potentially beneficial, non-medical, interventions (so-called psychosocial interventions) that could reduce the harms to PWUD.

### Analysing the impacts of Act 1019

Among the stated goals of Act 1019 was to decrease incarceration of PWUD, and their friction with the criminal justice system more broadly. Members of the judiciary consulted reported that Act 1019 had an immediate impact on the total numbers of PWUD facing jail terms, with prosecutors reportedly withdrawing a large proportion of cases of drug use pending under the previous legislation. However, a lack of official, centralised and disaggregated data from the court system and law enforcement means that interpreting the anecdotal evidence is not straightforward.

A central harm associated with the criminalisation of PWUD is the nature of their interactions with law enforcement. Overall, it was not possible to determine a consistent trend in interactions between PWUD and law enforcement. While police ‘swoops’ reportedly continue, some PWUD consulted reported that they have decreased recently. Furthermore, a number of women who use drugs reported an overall softening of police attitudes and fewer cases of abuse. However, this experience was certainly not uniform. For example, one man who uses drugs reported that, compared to two to three years ago, police harassment had intensified: ‘The police now are more interested in extortion than prosecuting. There is more extortion now than three years ago.’<sup>149</sup> While there was disagreement over whether these were accelerating or decelerating, ongoing extortive practices were widely reported.

Among the common objectives of a public health approach to drugs is to decrease the stigma suffered by PWUD. Practitioners in Ghana, from rehabilitation counsellors to law enforcement and criminal justice professionals, were largely of the view that in recent years the level of stigma associated with drug use and PWUD has declined. Crucially, however, discussions with PWUD themselves indicated that little has changed in terms of people’s attitudes towards them. According to one woman who uses drugs: ‘In [the community’s] eyes, once a junkie, always a junkie.’<sup>150</sup>

Rehabilitation centres in Accra qualitatively reported an increase in the number of individuals seeking treatment since 2020, supported by official data on admissions. However, using statistics on admissions for drug-related cases as an indicator of reduced stigma, or of enhanced availability of facilities to PWUD seeking treatment, is contentious. Firstly, treatment is inappropriate for many PWUD, who may not be problematic drug users. Secondly, many admissions to treatment may be coerced, which is broadly recognised as ineffective and a breach of the rights of PWUD. Thirdly, there are severe accessibility issues to treatment in Ghana, both in terms of the availability of services and their associated costs. And, finally, the quality of treatment in both state-run rehabilitation centres and privately run facilities is flawed.

While Act 1019 only obliquely refers to harm reduction, it has been interpreted to open the door to such approaches. Supporting this interpretation, Ghana’s National Drug Control Master Plan (2022–2030)

sets out a number of priority action areas, including implementing a drug substitution programme and a needle and syringe programme. However, a clearer legislative footing, explicitly rendering legal such approaches, would mitigate risks of varying interpretations, or backsliding against harm reduction implementation, in the future. Once these measures get underway, Ghana would be following the footsteps of several other countries in West Africa, such as Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, for example, which have already begun implementing a range of harm reduction measures.

### Key takeaways and recommendations

Act 1019 represents a welcome step away from blanket criminalisation of drug use in Ghana, an approach widely recognised to perpetuate harms, magnify pressures on the criminal justice system, while having no material impacts on the scale of drug markets. As such, the reform presents a welcome shift in the legislative terrain on criminalising drug use prevalent across the ECOWAS region.

Beyond some of the flaws in design outlined above, scarce resourcing and the short period of implementation have presented obstacles to material change to date. In order to move towards a future drug policy that is more evidence-based and centred on protecting the human rights of PWUD, amendments are required to the legislative framework. Further, for reform to fully move beyond the cosmetic – the level at which many drug law reforms remain for lengthy periods – implementation is critical.

A number of key recommendations around the design and implementation of drug policies aiming to move away from imprisoning PWUD, and towards a public health approach, designed both to support Ghana and other ECOWAS member states, are outlined in the full report. However, an overview is outlined below.

#### Alternatives to custodial sentences for personal drug use

- **Fully decriminalise the possession, purchase and transportation of controlled drugs for personal use**, in line with the West Africa Commission on Drugs' model law.
- **Clarify the distinction between possession for personal use and possession for supply, with reference to thresholds of quantity.**
- **Move away from mandated, court-referred rehabilitation orders.**
- **Education and sensitisation of the provisions of the new law must be scaled up.**

#### Adopting a public health approach

- **Amendments are required to Act 1019 to ensure that its touted 'public health approach' is effective** in providing 'scientifically sound treatment and humane social support to those who need them'.
- **NACOC should prioritise implementation of provisions in Act 1019 requiring the establishment of Standard Operating Procedures for treatment and rehabilitation services**, which should align with international best practice.
- **The government must substantially increase funding for treatment services for PWUD.**
- **Ghana's Human Rights Strategic Plan should be reformed** to create the architecture for advocacy towards regulations driving towards enhanced access to treatment and harm reduction services for PWUD.

#### Harm reduction

- **Providing a clear architecture for the implementation of harm reduction approaches** – in line with WHO guidelines – would enable such programming to be introduced without facing risk of future legal challenge.
- **Appropriate resources are a pre-requisite for sustainable implementation of harm-reduction measures.**

## Broader recommendations

- Rethink current prohibitionist approaches that centre primarily around a criminal justice response to drug use and move towards a public health-based approach to drug policy.
- Position individuals most impacted by drug policy – namely PWUD – at the centre of drug reform processes.
- Remove mandatory minimum sentences for trafficking offences, while maintaining maximum ceilings.
- Implement alternatives to punishment for many low-level actors in the drug trade, including those who engage in social supply, drug couriers and cultivators of illicit crops.
- Contributions from CSOs and other non-state actors should be welcomed, and civil society should continue to advocate for a public-health approach.
- ECOWAS member states should invest in capacity building for health providers or service providers, including training of more addiction specialists and law enforcement.
- Member states should work towards improving social support and public health, for which significant investment is crucial.

## Deep Dive 2 – Self-defence groups as a response to crime and conflict in West Africa: Learning from international experience

Self-defence and vigilante groups have been commonplace across West Africa for many years, but have become particularly prominent in the past decade since the beginning of the security crises in Mali and Burkina Faso and surge in violence in Nigeria. These groups often emerge from a security vacuum and state failure to protect to local populations.<sup>151</sup> Recently, there has been a growth in both state-sponsored and non-state vigilante and collective security outfits, underscoring the complex relationship between the state and these groups. The *Amotekun* in Nigeria and the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP) in Burkina Faso are just two examples of this kind of auxiliary force.

Analysis of the index and CRVAs highlighted that self-defence groups were identified by regional stakeholders both as key ‘event-driven risks’, likely to drive conflict, and sources of resilience in the face of security threats.<sup>152</sup> This contrasting analysis merits further exploration.



*November 16, 2022 shows a man writing his application letter to enrol as a Volontaire pour la Défense de la Patrie - VDP (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland), at the Governorate of Ouagadougou*

This deep dive explores potential frameworks for engaging with self-defence groups and vigilantes in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. The aim is to bring together case studies from West Africa and Latin America – a region with a long history of self-defence groups – to examine the lessons that policymakers can draw from international comparisons. The full deep dive is presented in the report, ‘Self-defence groups as a response to crime and conflict in West Africa: Learning from international experience.’<sup>153</sup>

The goal of this research is not to advocate for vigilantism but rather to recognize the reality that self-defence groups are now a mainstay of the security landscape in West Africa and offer recommendations for managing the risks associated with their proliferation and harness any potential benefits they might offer.

### Vigilantism in Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mexico

In Nigeria, various types of groups can be classified as vigilante or self-defence groups, all of which can be broadly described as local community-based attempts to plug security gaps in the context of rising crime and communal conflicts. Many tend to be highly localized and largely unconnected to the state, working under the oversight of residents’ associations and community leaders, but community-based groups have increasingly been integrated into the state’s security framework. There has also been a recent surge in the number of state-created vigilante groups.<sup>154</sup>

In Burkina Faso, self-defence groups in various guises have always been part of communities’ response to crime and insecurity. Self-defence groups in largely rural areas such as the *koglwéogo* defined themselves as ‘watchers’ or ‘protectors’, with self-legitimization narratives based on their contribution to solving crime and protecting communities against thefts of motorbikes, livestock, and other commercial goods.<sup>155</sup> Since the deterioration in the security situation across the country from 2018 onwards, self-defence groups shifted their attention to responding to violent extremism and insecurity, rather than crime. Nowadays, the VDP, a group of armed civilian auxiliaries created by the Burkinabé government in 2020 which absorbed existing self-defence groups, is by far the most prominent militia organization in the country.

In Mexico, a movement known as the *Autodefensas de Michoacán* (self-defence groups of Michoacán) appeared in 2013 to combat the Knights Templar Cartel, a criminal organization that dominated the state of Michoacán. After two years of mobilization, which brought in more than 15 000 armed men, the groups managed to successfully dismantle the cartel.

As the *Autodefensas* took on the cartel in numerous violent clashes, the federal government launched an unprecedented process of negotiation with them. Less than 20 months after their establishment, the *Autodefensas* became partly ‘legalized’ and state-affiliated through their absorption into the newly created regional police force, the *Fuerza Rural* (Rural Force).<sup>156</sup> This led to a gradual demobilization of armed civilians and a progressive return of federal police and armed force presence to areas in which they had extremely limited reach before 2013.

However, state support was not accompanied by a long-term institutional strategy, and quickly disappeared. The groups’ leaders, increasingly acting as autonomous strongmen and political bosses, accumulated power by engaging in licit and illicit activities, including the drug trade and extortion, effectively stepping into the vacuum left by the dismantled Knights Templar Cartel.<sup>157</sup> More than ten years after the *Autodefensas* emerged, Michoacán remains one of the most violent states in Mexico.


### Vigilantism: a risky path

The proliferation and strengthening of vigilante groups carries various risks (analyzed in full in the standalone report, ‘Self-defence groups as a response to crime and conflict in West Africa: Learning from international experience’).<sup>158</sup>

In Burkina Faso, self-defence groups in various guises have always been part of communities’ response to crime and insecurity

- The sustained empowerment of vigilante groups can further undermine the legitimacy of the state as the guarantor of security.
- Vigilante groups often start to engage in the illicit activities they were set up to tackle and prevent, including the illicit trade in firearms, the proliferation of which is encouraged by the emergence of self-defence groups. Other illicit activities include looting, racketeering and other forms of extortion, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, drug trafficking and illicit involvement in the gold sector.
- The majority of self-defence groups operating both in Mexico and the West African context do so with very little supervision, and by extension, accountability. As groups grow stronger, they often develop into criminal enterprises and community oversight mechanisms such as citizens' committees – one of the few forms of accountability exhibited across the various geographic contexts – tend to fall away. Limited accountability and training leave the door open for the proliferation of human rights abuses, including violent attacks and extra-judicial killings.
- The formation of self-defence groups along ethnic lines can fuel communal tension thus magnifying local conflicts and providing fertile ground for violent groups to exploit.

The formation of self-defence groups along ethnic lines can fuel communal tension thus magnifying local conflicts and providing fertile ground for violent groups to exploit



The number of serious risks associated with self-defence groups is at the root of why they should not be considered an advisable policy response to crime and insecurity. Nevertheless, as the past three years in particular has demonstrated, vigilante groups are deeply embedded across several West African states. Since it is unrealistic to expect this to change in the near future, there are several ways in which these risks can be mitigated, and the potential benefits of self-defence groups be harnessed.

### Formulating a response

Building on evidence from the Mexican experience over the past decade or more, in addition to lessons from the recent proliferation of vigilantism in West Africa, this deep dive unpicks three prominent approaches that sought to harness the benefits of self-defence groups. However, as set out below, there are several issues with these approaches too.

#### 1. Enhancing accountability to communities and civil society: A thorny tangle

Many self-defence groups' legitimacy is rooted in their localism, which can be further enhanced by the establishment of citizens' committees or pre-existing community oversight structures. Traditional authorities have often played an important role in supervising vigilante groups. However, the establishment of sustainable civilian oversight committees is fraught with risks, including resentment from vigilante leaders at perceived excessive oversight, potentially leading to them turning against the committees. Moreover, the members of the committees themselves may face violence at the hands of various actors.

#### 2. State absorption of self-defence groups

In order to mitigate the risks of multiplying vigilante groups, and co-opt some of their local legitimacy, governments are often tempted to 'legalize' such groups by absorbing them into existing, or newly established, state forces. There have been mixed results with a combination of partial and rushed processes, an absence of long-term strategies or exit plans, and poor accountability all generating a range of problems. The findings of this research suggest that long-term public-policy commitments and resource allocation must underpin such absorption. Furthermore, where self-defence groups perpetrate human rights abuses, state authorities must ensure that they are brought to account. Finally, federal, state and local authorities must coordinate any 'legalization' efforts, in order to ensure a cohesive approach and avoid any damage to state legitimacy.

### 3. Recruitment: mitigating the risks of ethnically motivated violence

Finally, adopting appropriate recruitment processes is pivotal in reducing some of the risks associated with self-defence groups, in particular the risk of feeding into ethnic conflicts. Avoiding ethnically homogeneous groups is crucial, for example, and so recruitment strategies must be designed to avoid this. The nature of the recruitment process has a significant impact on local trust in non-state security providers, which can in turn affect the level of violence against civilians among other things.

#### Recommendations: mitigating risks and harnessing benefits

It must be noted that this paper does not advocate using self-defence groups as a response to either conflict or crime. Instead, it is critical for governments to ensure public security by improving state structures in order to offer credible alternatives to vigilante groups, strongmen and violent intermediaries.

However, in contexts where self-defence groups are already proliferating, we outline a number of recommendations that would allow governments to harness any potential benefits and mitigate the risks.

- **Vigilantism ‘charter of principles’** – Acknowledging that the best strategy concerning vigilante groups is highly dependent on local and national contexts, and recognizing the sovereignty of national governments to determine their own security policies, ECOWAS should draft a charter of principles that member states should adhere to once self-defence groups have already entrenched themselves into the security landscape in the country. These high-level principles can be based on the findings of this research and should include a directive to refrain from supporting ethnically segregated self-defence groups and a requirement for unequivocal condemnation of violence against civilians and other human rights abuses perpetrated by armed actors.
- **Rebuild trust between state, communities and self-defence groups through diagnosis and dialogue** – Where self-defence groups have emerged, states should invest in mapping the needs of the population, beyond public safety issues, to build better relations. This should be accompanied by opening communication channels between local authorities and citizens, with the aim of responding to local needs and rebuilding trust, while also recognizing the pivotal role of traditional authorities and customary leaders.
- **If adopting a strategy for the state absorption of self-defence groups, this must be done carefully** – Recruitment processes for state-affiliated self-defence groups should be designed to ensure local populations have a voice in the process, paying particular attention to ensuring ethnic diversity among both the leadership and the membership. A thorough vetting process as well as comprehensive training for group members on human rights and violence prevention must be at the core of any recruitment and training processes. Furthermore, state support is crucial for the effective management of vigilante forces, either by guaranteeing the long-term sustainability of the forces or, conversely, offering a viable exit strategy for local vigilantes. Other vital elements in any legalization strategy should be guarantees that impunity will be challenged by the state; that clear mandates are established in advance; and that there is sufficient coordination of approaches by different state institutions.
- **Bolster community and civil society oversight** – Existing community mechanisms for accountability and citizen representation, particularly for resolving local conflicts, should be supported to strengthen the oversight of self-defence groups, with customary leaders and traditional authorities having a crucial role. National policymakers should be open to independent oversight from civil society organizations, and international agencies, of any public policy to integrate or outlaw vigilante groups, in order to minimize the risks of fuelling the (further) development of armed groups.

A thorough vetting process as well as comprehensive training for group members on human rights and violence prevention must be at the core of any recruitment and training processes



Finally, civilian oversight bodies should seek to draw from different channels of authority – for example, splitting governance functions between customary leaders (to vet potential recruits), local police (for operational oversight) and local government (providing financial support).

- **Demobilization and exit plans** – Establishing self-defence groups clearly contributes to the proliferation of armed groups operating in any particular territory, and should be avoided. However, where these have been established, or absorbed, it is key to have a long-term vision as to how such groups can be demobilized when no longer required, to avoid a sudden lack of employment for large numbers of armed young men trained in violence. Clear exit routes must be crafted to allow former group members to opt for an alternative to ongoing engagement in security forces. Despite the failure of most DDR programmes for non-state rebel groups in disparate contexts, many of which have engendered key lessons that should be drawn. Ensuring self-defence groups are dispersed as they are absorbed into security forces to prevent them from effectively becoming private armies under their former leaders, is one such takeaway.

### Deep Dive 3 – Climate change, illicit economies and community resilience: Niokolo-Koba National Park, Senegal

West Africa is severely affected by the myriad effects of climate change. The impact on agriculture – the economic mainstay for much of West Africa – is driving communities into a reliance on illicit economies, most prominently artisanal gold mining. The protection of highly biodiverse areas has been a bulwark of global responses to environmental degradation and climate change. However, pressure on traditional livelihoods is encouraging more resource extraction in protected areas. The areas surrounding national parks are crucial spaces in which to examine the interrelated challenges of climate change and illicit economies.

The enforcement of regulations against resource extraction in protected areas, which rendered many traditional practices illegal, has engendered community grievances across West Africa (and indeed globally). Such grievances have repeatedly been exploited by alternative governance providers, in the shape of non-state armed groups operating across swathes of West Africa.<sup>159</sup>

This third and final deep dive, scrutinizes the nexus between climate change and illicit economies, and the available response frameworks, with an emphasis on community-based solutions. The research focuses specifically on Kédougou, in south-east Senegal; a region experiencing significant environmental effects in one of the four countries in the world most vulnerable to climate change.<sup>160</sup> While the key points are outlined below, the in-depth case study analysis is presented in the fourth paper in this OCRF series.<sup>161</sup>



*Communities living on the outskirts of Niokolo-Koba National Park, in Senegal's Kédougou region, are feeling the impacts of climate change, increasing their reliance on illicit economies*

## Negative coping mechanisms: illicit economies

Coupled with the rising cost of living and huge population growth, the impact of climactic shifts on traditional agricultural livelihoods has driven the communities living in the corridors skirting the Niokolo-Koba National Park (hereafter referred to as ‘peripheral communities’) further into the park itself, and increased their reliance on illicit activities.

While some of the illicit markets relied on by peripheral communities are inherently illicit, many are rendered so because they breach regulations designed to safeguard the national park, thus pitting community interests against those of environmental protection. The key illicit markets cited by communities as increasingly important sources income all fall within the ambit of environmental crimes. Adopting the framework used by the Organized Crime Index, these can be categorized as: non-renewable resource crimes (artisanal gold mining and, to a far lesser extent, sand dredging); fauna crimes (poaching in the national park); and flora crimes (predominantly illegal logging). In addition, human smuggling was cited as a resilience mechanism since it allows community members to find employment overseas in the face of dwindling livelihoods.

- **Fauna crimes** – Widespread poaching, for both high-value species and bushmeat, in Niokolo-Koba National Park constitutes a central threat to the biodiversity of the park. Previous research has underscored that forested areas that are less biodiverse are less resilient to climate change, while absorbing less carbon dioxide which contributes to global warming.<sup>162</sup> As agricultural livelihoods and livestock availability decrease, an increasing reliance on bushmeat and funds from poaching activities is likely to continue driving this vicious cycle.
- **Non-renewable resource crimes** – Peripheral communities reported an expansion in artisanal gold mining (ASGM) within the park since 2022 due to a combination of factors, including discovery of a particularly rich vein, an increase in gold prices and diminishing agricultural yields. Over time, ASGM has transformed from a supplementary economic activity to an economic necessity. ASGM has spawned a range of secondary illicit markets in and around sites, including the trafficking of women (almost exclusively Nigerian) for sexual exploitation, exploitative working conditions, child labour, and smuggling mercury and drugs.<sup>163</sup> The links between ASGM and climate change in Kédougou region mirror those across West Africa, with ASGM driving environmental damage which further damages agricultural livelihoods and feeding processes which fuel further climate change (such as deforestation).
- **Flora crimes** – Illicit logging, one of the most profitable natural resource crimes globally, constitutes a serious threat to the environment and undermines the stability of climate systems.<sup>164</sup> Kédougou’s steep population growth over the past two decades has driven higher demand for charcoal by households and higher quality timber for construction, sourced from the park and peripheral areas, in some cases with the complicity of bribed park agents.<sup>165</sup>
- **Human smuggling** – Community members reported that diminishing livelihoods have driven growing levels of emigration,<sup>166</sup> particularly since 2019, predominantly to other regions of Senegal, but also overseas.<sup>167</sup> Where the destination is beyond the ECOWAS region, the services of human smugglers are often engaged. Human smuggling has long been a resilience mechanism in West Africa, facilitating the movement of people fleeing extreme weather events or shifting livelihood availability. The lack of legal migration routes will continue to force a significant proportion of ‘climate migrants’ (who currently enjoy no protections under international law)<sup>168</sup> into irregularity, facing significant personal risks, and fuels demand for the services of human smugglers.

While some of the illicit markets relied on by peripheral communities are inherently illicit, many are rendered so because they breach regulations designed to safeguard the national park



## Current responses and challenges

Responses to illicit economies, and the broader impacts of climate change, in Niokolo-Koba Park can broadly be placed in two categories: the enforcement of regulations protecting the park, and programming seeking to support the resilience of peripheral communities and thereby decrease incursions into the park.

1. Legislation pertaining to environmental crimes in Senegal is fairly strict and the government has consistently increased investment in protecting the park's resources. The growing securitization of the park from the mid-2010s is in line with global conservation trends, and has heightened tensions between local communities and enforcement agents in many places.<sup>169</sup>
2. The Senegalese government has increasingly invested in, and invited support for, a wide range of programmes seeking to support communities in the Kédougou region faced with shrinking livelihoods due to climate change.<sup>170</sup> These include programmes for capacity building on sustainable ecosystem management, environmental protection and awareness-raising, and enhancing income-generating activities in a more environmentally friendly framework.
3. While many community resilience initiatives are supported through external funding, communities also reported developing autonomous resilience responses to climate change and the environmental impacts of illicit economies. These include initiatives to promote the use of organic fertilizers to mitigate soil contamination from ASGM and the use of *tontines*, a form of mutual investment fund whereby members contribute a fixed amount, and at the end of each month the total pot is paid to one member of the group (allowing them to invest in alternative income-generating activities, and lessening reliance on illicit economies).<sup>171</sup>

Two major challenges pose obstacles to responses:

1. Across West Africa the disconnect between what states consider to be legitimate (i.e. 'legal'), and what local communities and actors in transnational networks consider to be legitimate ('licit'), is a source of tension between governments and civilians, and poses a challenge to responding to 'illegal' economies.<sup>172</sup> Increasing securitization of park conservation – particularly since 2019 – has further heightened tensions between communities and authorities, with grievances multiplying in instances where park agents are thought to have used excessive force.<sup>173</sup> The gap between community concepts of legitimacy and the position in law has made some park agents function as mediators across this divide, and created space for corruption and extortion.
2. Although the park's regulations prohibit exploitation of its resources in all its forms (beyond the buffer area, where some activities are permitted), there is a widespread belief among peripheral communities that external actors are given permits by corrupt elements of park management. This perception of inequitable access to park resources has repeatedly led to unrest and fed grievances.

## Lessons learnt for the wider region

The Kédougou case study underscores a number of common challenges pertaining to the linked threats of climate change and environmental crime in the context of protected areas. The lessons drawn, and outlined below, are shaped to provide a basis for responses across the ECOWAS region, rather than merely for the Niokolo-Koba Park.<sup>174</sup> In line with the focus of the OCRF on exploring preventative response strategies, we focus on approaches beyond law enforcement.

### A. Strengthen the social compact between communities and local authorities.

- Facilitate dialogue and build relationships to align communities and conservation enforcement actors.
- Create an 'innovation grant' system for local communities in biodiverse areas.
- Enhance the role of local communities in managing protected areas.
- Channel a greater proportion of finances generated by the park to peripheral communities.

- Mitigate the negative impacts of securitizing the protection of national parks.
- Review legislation governing crimes relating to protected areas, to remove long custodial sentences for low-level offenders.
- Enhance focus on human rights in training programmes for park agents.

#### **B. Address corruption in the management of national parks and protected space.**

Analysis of past responses indicates that the most successful responses to environmental crimes over the long term have had the support of locally embedded and trusted civil society groups in partnership with mandated government enforcement units.<sup>175</sup> Programming areas feeding into these goals include:

- Partnering specialized enforcement units (including park agents or rangers) with specialized non-governmental organizations.
- Enhancing accountability through local monitoring.
- Tackling corruption in licence allocation, ensuring grants are transparent and sensitive to local community perceptions.

#### **C. Continue supporting community resilience to climate change**

- Support adaptation projects and/or climate resilient livelihoods in line with Goal 7 of the African Union's Agenda 2063, to build 'Environmentally sustainable and climate resilient economies and communities.'<sup>176</sup>

#### **D. Explore pathways to facilitating formalization of artisanal gold mining**

- Establish mining corridors, and approaches which seek to support and regulate ASGM, including by testing regulation of amalgamation (rather than de facto prohibition), which are promising elements of the existing response.<sup>177</sup>

### **Emerging themes for responses**

A number of overarching themes regarding effective responses to challenges related to organized crime and human security emerge from the preliminary findings and subsequent deep dives. They underscore that the nature of conflict and violence today is radically different to 50 years ago. Wars between nation-states are far less common, yet internal political violence has increased, and many conflicts involve non-state actors such as political militias, violent extremist groups and criminal organizations.<sup>178</sup>

In West Africa, like across much of the world, conflict is often interlinked with illicit economies, which in turn exacerbate insecurity and instability.<sup>179</sup> However, illicit economies can be key sources of resilience for marginalized communities– complicating the response.

Resource scarcity and climate change are pivotal in shaping both informal and illicit economies, and conflict dynamics, and multiplying the threat. As the challenges facing the region appear to increase in number and complexity, responses must keep pace, adopting multi-stakeholder and holistic toolkits which go far beyond traditional criminal justice and military approaches to crime and conflict.

### **Concepts of legitimacy**

Disjuncts in conceptions of legitimacy between states and communities shape illicit economies and conflict, and pose an enormous obstacle to effective responses.

Where power structures and rules are seen as illegitimate, or their legitimacy in the eyes of the local population is diminished, this opens the door to grassroots challenges to state authority. In West Africa, this has created space for the emergence of a plethora of non-state armed groups, including insurgent, separatist and violent extremist groups.

Where the actions of state security forces are perceived to be illegitimate (due to corruption or abuse) or ineffective, vigilante groups emerge to guarantee the safety of their communities and deal independently with crime. This fractures the state's monopoly on violence, further damaging state legitimacy. Once established, self-defence groups have repeatedly become part of the cycle of violence they were established to quash, and pose significant challenges to conflict resolution.

Similarly, where regulations are at odds with local ideas of legitimate practices, as is often the case with the many livelihood and resilience practices, their enforcement creates tension and resentment among local communities. The criminalization of resource extraction in protected areas is one such problem. Again, such grievances can be leveraged by alternative governance providers, such as the myriad non-state armed groups across West Africa, including Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in southern Burkina Faso.

Differing views on the part of the state and local communities over what are legitimate economic activities mean state crackdowns can repeatedly engender violence, eroding the social contract between governments and their citizens. This discrepancy is particularly apparent in the context of 'grey markets',<sup>180</sup> namely the illegal trade of legal commodities, as well in the exploitation of natural resources, as shown by this research. It is also a crucial feature of the drug debate in many countries, where communities often do not perceive certain substances that are legally controlled to be 'illegal'. This is particularly the case in the countries of origin of controlled substances, such as cannabis-cultivating states, where cannabis is not only a major source of livelihood, but often ingrained in local culture.<sup>181</sup>

So how does this analysis feed into recommendations for policymakers?

Firstly, rethinking the approach to criminalization and, where appropriate, shrinking 'criminal' spaces and markets is one means of addressing this source of conflict. This can be done by exploring approaches to formalizing and regulating economic practices that are currently illegal, many of which constitute major sources of livelihoods across the region. In doing so, resources can be shifted from criminal justice, which has repeatedly proved to be counterproductive, to initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of citizens.

For example, people who use drugs should not be considered 'criminal', and scarce criminal justice (including prison) resources should be diverted away from incarcerating them. This has started to be recognized in Ghana. Ghana is again spearheading shifts to the approach by starting to regulate elements of cannabis cultivation, avenues which could also be explored and expanded upon by other states.

Another context in which this principle could be applied is the gold sector, where further support for formalizing artisanal gold mining is urgently required (as explored in a separate OCFAR-T paper exploring promising regional practices).<sup>182</sup>

Secondly, analysis of legitimacy should be central in crafting responses to illicit economies, and wider human security challenges. Where state responses are likely to stand at odds with conceptions of legitimacy, they will often engender community pushback – responses should take this into account, and seek to minimize the disjunct. Development responses, rather than those centred on a criminal justice approach, may be more appropriate. In line with this, where illicit economies are largely non-violent, law enforcement approaches may prove counterproductive. While there are many other risks linked to their deployment, the mandates of vigilantes must be limited to defending against violence. Where this is expanded to non-violent crimes, the risk of spiralling violence is magnified.<sup>183</sup>

Where regulations are at odds with local ideas of legitimate practices, their enforcement creates tension and resentment among local communities

## Putting civil society at the centre

Members of civil society have proven to be catalysts for positive change across the region. In Ghana, CSOs and community members played a key role in advocating for drug policy reform, while in the Kédougou region of Senegal, they have been the central drivers of community resilience initiatives.

Civil society actors operate as a bridge between communities and policymakers, channelling grassroots concerns into policy spaces, and giving a voice to those most affected by crime, conflict and the responses to these interlinked phenomena.

Civil society can also be a crucial mechanism for oversight and accountability. This can be in the form of official oversight committees (like some set up to oversee self-defence groups in certain areas) or more informally as checks on corrupt practices and perceived injustices carried out by law enforcement agents and other state security officials.

Finally, both the index and the CRVAs highlighted civil society and communities as major sources of resilience. This notion is unequivocally reinforced by the findings of the OCRF. Whether it is providing support to people with substance use disorders, conducting education and sensitization campaigns or developing initiatives to promote alternative livelihoods, civil society is at the heart of many of the positive and effective responses being taken across West Africa. Fostering an environment for civil society to operate freely and effectively is, therefore, critical. ECOWAS member states have crucial roles to play in reversing the growing restrictions on civil society operations.

## Annex 1: Stakeholder engagement

Date	Location	Type/purpose of consultation	Stakeholders involved
<b>GENERAL</b>			
October 2021	Virtual	Working session for initial proposal	ECOWAS Commission
November 2021	Virtual	Introductory meeting	ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate
January 2022	Virtual	Methodological consultation and data exchange exploration	ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate
December 2022	Lagos, Nigeria	Discuss preliminary findings; consult on priority areas of deep dives	ECOWAS Commission representatives; GI-TOC/ISS experts; subject matter experts (civil society and academia)
April 2023	Virtual	Final approval on methodology and deep dives	ECOWAS Commission; Member States' National Centre for Coordination of Early Warning and Response Mechanism representatives
<b>DEEP DIVE 1 – New approaches to regulating drugs in West Africa: Exploring the impact of Ghana’s drug policy reform</b>			
May 2023	Accra, Ghana	Focus group discussions (x2)	People who use drugs (PWUD)
	Ashaiman, Ghana	Focus group discussions (x2)	People who use drugs (PWUD)
	Accra, Ghana	Focus group discussion	Judges; other legal practitioners
	Accra, Ghana	Multistakeholder focus group discussion	State institutions (Office of the Attorney General; Narcotic Control Commission; Ghana Prison Service; Ghana National Police; Ministry of Health); civil society organizations; rehabilitation centres; medical professionals; legal practitioners
	Accra, Ghana	Bilateral interviews	Ministry of the Interior; law enforcement; border control; rehabilitation centre; civil society organization; legal practitioner
<b>DEEP DIVE 2 – Self-defence groups as a response to crime and conflict in West Africa: Learning from international experience</b>			
May 2023	Virtual	Focus group discussion	Experts from academia and research institutions on Mexico, Nigeria and Burkina Faso
May 2023	Written submissions	White papers (x5)	Experts from academia and research institutions on Nigeria and Burkina Faso
<b>DEEP DIVE 3 – Climate change, illicit economies and community resilience: Niokolo-Koba National Park, Senegal</b>			
April–May 2023	Kédougou, Senegal	Focus group discussion (x2)	Community members
April–May 2023	Kédougou and Dakar, Senegal	Bilateral interviews	Law enforcement; environmental activists; researchers; journalists
July 2023	Kédougou, Senegal	Focus group discussion (x4)	Community members
July 2023	Kédougou and Dakar, Senegal; virtual	Bilateral interviews	Direction for National Parks; Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development; Ministry of Mines and Geology; Directorate of Water, Forestry, Hunting and Soil Conservation; key environment-related sector workers; journalists

## Notes

- 1 The Organized Crime Index uses the term ‘non-state actors’, in order to include the media and private sector. However, following consultations, the term civil society is preferred as it better captures the central component of non-state actors responding to organized crime in West Africa.
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- 14 Except for the cocaine trade and human trafficking, which already feature in the top three criminal markets in West Africa.
- 15 As a non-ECOWAS member state, there is no available CRVA for Mauritania.
- 16 As outlined in the methodology section of this report, the preliminary findings of the OCRF are based on the 2021 Organized Crime Index. However, the latest iteration of the index was published in September 2023. To ensure the analysis is as current as possible, findings from the 2023 iteration are mentioned throughout this report. See Global Organized Crime Index 2023, GI-TOC, September 2023.
- 17 It is important to recognize that criminal markets that fall under broader categories, such as environmental crimes or drug markets, are not monolithic, but have different dynamics, pervasiveness, monetary values, actors involved and so on. For this reason, in addition to the central role they play in local, regional and global criminal landscapes, the developers of the index took the decision to break drug markets down into four different drug types to ensure the nuances of the illicit drug trade within states are accounted for.
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