

Summary

As insecurity in the Sahel keeps deteriorating, Coastal West Africa increasingly faces the impact of increasing numbers of refugees from Burkina Faso and Mali. Between March and July 2023, Cote d'Ivoire saw an increase of refugees, with numbers reaching 32,000. The majority fleeing from violence in the form of abductions, killings, looting and cattle theft from Burkina Faso and Mali. Due to the length and porosity of the Malian and Burkinabe border, fears of jihadist militants slipping through crowds of refugees have remained high.

Recent events and developments

According to a recent report by the international Crisis Group, between March and July 2023, the influx of refugees coming from Burkina Faso and Mali had quadrupled in the northern border regions of Cote d'Ivoire. Numbers amassed to 32,000, increasing tensions between ethnic groups, specifically towards the Peul who are reputed for being close to the al-Qa'ida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) as stated by a report by the International Crisis Group. Burkina Faso and Mali's seeming inability to contain the violence within their own borders has given rise to fears of violence spreading towards Cote d'Ivoire as well. Bands of militants have moved into forests along Burkina Faso's southern border with Benin, Ghana, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire. The destabilization of Cote d'Ivoire by Jihadists offers significant propaganda value due to its rapidly growing economy, ties to western countries through French military presence and fertile soil for movements due to neighbouring countries having severed ties with their western partners. Furthermore, October 6 saw former Prime Minister Patrick Achi, of Cote d'Ivoire removed without reason along with the dissolution of parliament.

Impact assessment

Risk of jihadist attacks from JNIM spilling over into Cote d'Ivoire poses a significant threat to the safety and security of Ivorian citizens and internationals alike. It is not a matter of if, but rather when terrorists choose to strike by entering Cote d'Ivoire posing as refugees from the north as stated by a UNHCR report. As the fastest growing Francophone economy in West Africa, Cote d'Ivoire's relative wealth, combined with the close ties between the southern port city Abidjan and its former colonial power, France, makes it an attractive target for external actors such as jihadists and Wagner seeking to incite anti-government and anti-western sentiments as well as the removal of French military presence. Cote d'Ivoire is also preparing two high profile events in the near future: the Africa Cup of Nations football tournament scheduled for January-February 2024, and a presidential election in October 2025. Both could present themselves as long-term targets for an attack and as methods of destabilization.

Advice from Forth Global

- Monitor local news and liaise with local contacts to be informed of relevant developments. Inform staff not to discuss plans and routes publicly
- Ensure emergency plans and security procedures are set up, and that on-site employees are familiar with protocols and emergency contacts.
- Refrain from unnecessary travel to northern border regions with Burkina Faso and Mali.
- Travellers should remain vigilant of their surroundings and avoid crowds and demonstrations.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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