

## Spike of violence in Centre-Nord region since January 2024

### CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

Violence has been rapidly increasing in Centre-Nord region of Burkina Faso since early 2024. During the first four months of the year, attacks by the al-Qaeda-affiliated group Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) killed nearly 200 people in Namentenga and Sanmatenga provinces surrounding Kaya city in the region. Between May and the end of August, JNIM killed at least 420 people, a significant increase compared to the first four months of the year (ISW 29/08/2024). In April, JNIM fighters on motorcycles killed 17 civilians in the village of Dofinega in Centre-Nord region (ADF 02/04/2024).

JNIM has claimed responsibility for a 24 August attack that killed at least 200 people and injured 140 in Burkinabe town of Barsalogo, Centre-Nord region, where civilian volunteers were digging a trench for the military (AJ 26/08/2024; OHCHR 30/08/2024; RFI 02/09/2024). Although official sources have not confirmed the official death toll, there are reports that the fatalities totalled 300–400 by 30 August (La Croix 30/08/2024; Bellingcat 04/09/2024; Reuters 31/08/2024). By 4 September, the Government had not yet confirmed the precise number of casualties and injuries (Bellingcat 04/09/2024). This is the largest attack on civilians in Burkina Faso since the crisis started in 2015, when a failed coup attempt and the election of a new president in December resulted in a sequence of attacks across the country (La Croix 30/08/2024; CooperSalud 2023).

Between 1 January and 9 September 2024, armed attacks killed nearly 2,000 civilians across the country, with JNIM being responsible for roughly 80%. This is an increase compared to the same period in 2023, which saw close to 1,700 civilian fatalities (ACLED accessed 09/09/2024; ACLED 05/07/2024). The deadliest month was February, with over 570 deaths countrywide. In a single incident on 25 February, the military killed 223 civilians, including 56 children, in Nondin and Soro villages in Nord region. Mass killings of this nature are likely to be a part of a military operation targeting civilians accused of collaborating with JNIM (ACLED accessed 06/09/2024; HRW 25/04/2024).

By 30 June, nearly 1.1 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Centre-Nord region, out of 6.3 million people across the country (UNICEF 17/07/2024; OCHA accessed 16/09/2024).

### ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- Security measures, including movement restrictions, car inspections, curfews, and prohibitions on public gatherings, are expected to intensify because of the recent JNIM attack in Barsalogo (Crisis24 26/08/2024).
- Centre-Nord's main military base is located in government-controlled Kaya city, whose strategic importance makes it a target for JNIM. Gaining control in Kaya city would allow JNIM to move towards the country's capital, Ouagadougou. Because of this, further attacks and fighting are likely, potentially increasing violence on both sides (ISW 29/08/2024; Crisis24 26/08/2024).
- During the lean season (July–September), food insecurity is expected to increase, particularly in communities with a high number of displaced people and areas that have some access constraints. Typically, during this time, stocks become depleted, and food prices skyrocket, reaching their annual peaks (REACH 30/06/2024; WB 08/09/2022).

### HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- Two coups d'état in 2022 and an attempted coup d'état in September 2023 – plus the resulting political instability – have created a challenging operating environment for humanitarian responders (USAID 07/06/2024).
- Improvised explosive devices, armed traps, and irregular checkpoints continue to be the main barriers to humanitarian access, including in Centre-Nord (UNICEF 09/09/2024). These barriers cause delays in humanitarian supply delivery and hinder humanitarian programme implementation in the region (UNICEF 31/05/2024).
- The insufficient accessibility of certain bypass roads has led to increased delays for supply convoys and consequent food supply shortages in specific markets, namely in the country's northern and eastern regions (FEWS NET 30/08/2024).
- From May–June, JNIM heightened the intensity of its attacks along the Route Nationale 3 east of Kaya city in Centre-Nord region, hindering access to this area (ISW 29/08/2024). Recurring attacks may continue to hamper access.

## CRISIS IMPACTS

### Protection

Centre-Nord region has seen an increase in various types of security incidents. Armed groups in the region have abducted civilians, killed community leaders, kidnapped and physically harmed women, threatened evictions, and displaced residents (UNICEF 17/07/2024). Between 1 January and 9 September, direct targeting killed more than 2,000 civilians across Burkina Faso (ACLED accessed 09/09/2024). JNIM is responsible for around 80% of these fatalities (ACLED 05/07/2024). This shows an upward trend compared to the same period in 2023, which saw nearly 1,700 fatalities (ACLED accessed 09/09/2024; ACLED 05/07/2024).

There are regular reports of abductions, kidnappings, and the targeting of women, girls, and children. Because of humanitarian access constraints, the provision of protection services for civilians is declining, leading to a rise in protection risks, particularly for gender-based violence (UNHCR 15/03/2023). This decline in protection services comes as humanitarian workers struggle to access affected communities because of insecurity, the presence of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), and physical access constraints. In July, there were 241 protection incidents in Centre-Nord region, but because of these challenges, the number of protection incidents in affected areas is likely higher than is reported (Protection Cluster 11/09/2024; UNHCR 15/03/2023; MSF 11/06/2021).

On 30 September 2022, a military junta comprising a group of military officers led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré seized power and overthrew Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, whom the junta had previously helped gain power in January of the same year. Traoré claimed that Damiba was removed from power because of his lack of ability to deal with NSAGs (France 24 28/09/2023; Reuters 01/10/2022). Under a 'general mobilisation' declared in April 2023, the military junta authorised conscription orders (HRW 27/02/2024; France 24 14/04/2023). The junta has recently used this emergency law to conscript workers from the judicial system as well as journalists, human rights activists, and political opponents, particularly targeting those perceived to be disloyal to the current regime (HRW 21/08/2024; DW 10/11/2023).

### Displacements

Clashes between the Forces de Défense et de Sécurité (supported by the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland) and other armed groups in several parts of the country, including Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Nord, Est, Nord, and Sahel, have led to an increase in the number of armed confrontations in rural communities. These confrontations have had a severe impact on community members, resulting in civilian casualties and loss of assets and income

generation, prompting civilian displacement to safer locations. Frequent displacements also cause an increase in separated and unaccompanied children (UNICEF 09/09/2024).

On 27 May, NSAG threats displaced the entire population of Kamsé village in Centre-Nord region – more than 3,100 individuals – to Pissila. By late 2023, Pissila commune had approximately 100,000 IDPs (OCHA 11/06/2024). In May 2024, NSAG violence in Mané, Tagalla, and Tangasgo in Centre-Nord region caused civilian displacement, but the provincial directorate of humanitarian action has not provided an official number of displaced people (UNICEF 31/05/2024).

Violence in Burkina Faso is a primary trigger for displacements within and outside the country. The number of Burkinabe refugees and asylum seekers increased from 60,000 to 150,000 from December 2022 to December 2023 (NRC 03/06/2024). By March 2023, there were nearly 2.1 million IDPs in Burkina Faso (representing approximately 10% of the total population), including nearly one million in Centre-Nord (494,000) and Sahel (502,000) regions alone (UNHCR 31/07/2024; ACSS 04/09/2024; USAID 12/06/2024; IOM 25/11/2023).

### Health and WASH

By 30 June, 89 out of 182 health facilities in Centre-Nord were closed, while 32 were operating at minimum capacity (UNICEF 09/09/2024; IRENA 10/2022).

By 2021, 6 of the 13 regions in Burkina Faso (Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Est, Centre-Nord, Est, Nord, and Sahel) were experiencing challenges in accessing water (MSF 02/06/2021). The conflict – particularly the use of explosive devices to attack water points – has made the existing water crisis in Burkina Faso more severe. This also hinders access to essential water and sanitation services for host communities that are already experiencing a shortage of WASH services (ECHO 08/02/2023). The arrival of newly displaced people from different parts of the affected areas in displacement sites has made the host areas vulnerable to resource scarcity and created an imbalance in the running system of water and food allocation. Many families are struggling to fetch water for their daily basic needs (MSF 11/06/2021; NRC 05/09/2022). Villages tend to be close to waterways, but because of insecurity, people are displaced to areas where they are unable to access water sources. NSAGs are also taking control of water management systems, making access for the civilian population much more difficult (IPS 14/03/2023). Children and older people face particular health-related issues because of extreme heat, water scarcity, and dehydration (UNICEF 21/07/2022).

Because of poor access to WASH facilities and limited access to essential health services in displacement sites across Burkina Faso, cholera and meningitis outbreaks have become regular health concerns across the country (Tarnas et al. 06/02/2023; ECHO 08/02/2023 and 13/01/2023; UNICEF 07/03/2023 and 21/07/2022). The violence and insecurity in Centre-Nord have

the potential to worsen the region's health situation, putting health facilities at risk of closure at WASH facilities at risk of destruction. Access constraints also prevent the arrival of some essential medicine.

### Food insecurity and nutrition

Between 2019–2024, the number of people facing acute food insecurity in Burkina Faso increased from 687,000 to 2.7 million (WFP 28/08/2024). The main drivers of this increase were massive population displacement, sociopolitical instability, climate change, and COVID-19 (PI accessed 06/09/2024; Nikiema and Dedewanou 04/09/2024). Conflict has caused displacement, disrupted livelihood activities, worsened food insecurity, and limited people's access to farming land, livestock, and markets (USAID 12/06/2024).

By 30 June, over 2.7 million people, including about 443,000 children under the age of five, were in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity or worse. Most of these people were concentrated in the regions of Centre-Nord (21%), Nord (18%), Sahel (18%), Est (17%), Centre-Est (7%), and Boucle du Mouhoun (7%) (UNICEF 09/09/2024).

From August 2023 to July 2024, 480,000 children between the ages of six months and four years 11 months, as well as nearly 131,500 pregnant and breastfeeding women, experienced acute malnutrition at elevated rates. This figure includes data from 37 analysed provinces, including all provinces in Centre-Nord region, out of the 45 provinces across the country. The main drivers of acute malnutrition are low food consumption and inadequate nutrition (IPC 02/01/2024).

### Education

By 30 June, 822 of the 1,375 schools in Centre-Nord were functional (UNICEF 09/09/2024).

Across Burkina Faso, more than 5,300 schools had closed by 31 March, primarily because of insecurity. This represents 20% of the schools across the country, affecting over 818,000 children, including more than 394,000 girls (UNICEF 20/05/2024). School closures put many children in danger of exposure to child labour, physical violence, sexual exploitation, or even recruitment to NSAGs. Children associated with armed forces or armed groups face education access issues and heightened vulnerability to exploitation and violence, fuelling cycles of poverty and reducing their chances of returning to school (NRC 09/09/2024).

## DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

### Political instability in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, a 2022 military coup increased disputes among armed groups over control of the country. In September 2022, the commander of the artillery regiment in Kaya, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, seized control with the support of several military captains and proclaimed himself the leader of the nation. Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was removed from power and accused of failing to fulfil his promise to put down the Islamist extremist insurgency that has affected the country since 2015. Traoré's seizure of power worsened the country's fragile security situation, which had long been military-dominated and lacked strong democratic institutions (ACSS 28/10/2022; BBC 03/10/2022; TAR 14/04/2024 and 01/10/2022). In September 2023 and January 2024, Burkina Faso's intelligence and security services stopped attempts to overthrow the ruling military junta (VOA 27/09/2023; ISW 22/08/2024). Security officers led the 2023 coup attempt, and a network of retired and active military officers, civilians, and activists led the 2024 attempt (RFI 28/09/2023; Africanews 19/01/2024). JNIM also orchestrated an unsuccessful coup attempt against the junta in June 2024 (ISW 22/08/2024).

The unstable political situation and constant battles for power by different groups, plus the Government's inability to deal with NSAGs, have worsened the security situation in Burkina Faso, increasing the level of violence across the country.

### Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin

Extremists associated with JNIM and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara have proliferated in Burkina Faso since 2016, increasing violence and directly challenging state authorities (Quidelleur 02/2024). JNIM is a Salafi-Islamist organisation established in Mali that adheres to al-Qaeda's worldwide Islamist ideology and capitalises on regional animosities and grievances to expand its regional backing. It operates in many areas of West Africa, including Burkina Faso and Niger (NCC 10/2022).

The continuous, gradual expansion of JNIM into rural regions is based on the use of force. They also allocate resources, establish order, administer justice, and provide protection to marginalised communities, using these tactics to facilitate participation in NSAGs (Quidelleur 02/2024). The goal of JNIM is to battle government security forces and the military to seize control of a specific area, broaden its extremist ideologies, and establish Islamic governance (ACSS 01/12/2020; GIATOC 03/08/2022). JNIM has been involved in massive civilian killings throughout the country, accounting for 80% of all civilian killings between 1 January and

9 September 2024 (ACLED accessed 09/09/2024; ACLED 05/07/2024). JNIM was responsible for 152 of the 158 violent incidents in Centre-Nord between 1 January and 13 September (ACLED accessed 13/09/2024). The Burkinabe army, however, has also been involved in the mass killings of civilians, especially those suspected of collaborating with JNIM (HRW 25/04/2024; France 24 17/05/2024).

## Competition over valuable resources

Burkina Faso is rich in mineral resources, including gold, zinc, copper, manganese, phosphate, and limestone. The country also has unexploited diamond, bauxite, nickel, and vanadium resources (EITI accessed 19/07/2024). Every year, the Burkina Faso Government generates millions of dollars from its gold mines. Armed groups seek control of these gold mines and the economic trade route (AJ 11/03/2022).

The presence of the Wagner Group, a private military company based in Russia, has also played a key role in destabilising the security situation in West Africa, including in Burkina Faso (BBC 20/02/2024). The Wagner Group arrived in Burkina Faso in February 2023, after the French military forces left following the junta's demand for their withdrawal. Since the Wagner Group arrived in Burkina Faso, violence, extremism, and terrorism have worsened. In nearly every country they do business in, the Wagner Group has been accused of committing human rights violations, including robberies, rapes, torture, and murders of civilians (Krym Realii 01/11/2023; TAR 25/01/2024; France 24 20/02/2023; Africanews 28/03/2024). The Wagner Group's presence has increased insecurity in Burkina Faso and the whole Sahel region (SD 07/10/2023). Through the Wagner Group, Russia has indirectly provided military support for different African governments, including those in the Sahel region, in exchange for access to natural resources (El País 14/08/2023; CNBC 27/02/2024; Zmina 20/10/2023; ADF 20/02/2024).

Government forces and NSAGs fight over the control of trade routes, which encompass areas within Burkina Faso as well as regional economic hubs, seaports, and coastal trade zones. The pursuit of resources and benefits, coupled with the desire for territorial control, aggravates conflict, resulting in significant impacts on civilians who become affected and displaced (AJ 11/03/2023; NRC 05/09/2022; ACLED accessed 05/09/2024).

## COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

### Climate-related hazards

Between the end of March and the beginning of April 2024, severe heat affected a region spanning the Sahel and West Africa, with Burkina Faso reaching maximum temperatures over 45° C and minimum temperatures of 32° C (UNDRR 18/04/2024). Climate change and extreme heat have had an impact on people's lives and livelihoods in Burkina Faso. Climate change in Centre-Nord region has had a substantial effect on local livelihoods, particularly by causing persistent rainfall scarcity, hampering agriculture by delaying the sowing season. In general, the country has a long record of climate change vulnerability, and it is prone to prolonged drought, flood, and epidemics, especially during the dry (November–March) and rainy (May–October) seasons (WB accessed 06/09/2024; IOM 28/12/2022; Trip Report accessed 10/09/2024; UNICEF 09/09/2024). In recent years, heavy flooding, long dry seasons, low rainfall, and extreme weather events have led to increased displacement and damage to available resources. Burkina Faso has an INFORM climate change risk score of 7.3/10 and a score of 8.1/10 for hazards and exposures (EC accessed 06/09/2024).

Extreme heat driven by climate change has also caused water to evaporate from dams, creating water scarcity throughout the country. Specifically, in the three dams in the Nakanbé Basin – Bagré, Loumbila, and Ouaga dams – the evaporation rate is around 50% (UNICEF 21/07/2022; NatGeo accessed 18/07/2024; Alfred et al. 01/2024). Burkina Faso is already dealing with a water crisis, which violence could worsen. Violence from NSAGs, who destroy or take control of water facilities across the country, making access to water for civilians far more difficult or even impossible, is especially an issue (IPS 14/03/2023; ICRC 03/10/2023).

The worsening security situation has made communities in Burkina Faso, who are already dealing with drought and climate change, even more vulnerable, as it will significantly affect livelihoods and trigger additional displacement, exhausting already scarce resources (ICRC 03/10/2023).

### Poverty

Burkina Faso is among the ten poorest countries in the world (USA Today 07/07/2019; ECHO accessed 06/09/2024). Over 40% of the population lives under the poverty line (WB accessed 27/03/2024). Subsistence farming and traditional livestock farming are the main sources of income for the majority of the Burkinabe (WB 29/06/2017 and 06/2016). Some farmers also produce cash crops such as cotton, but revenue from this product is uncertain because of international market conditions and the effects of climate change. As a result, people

face reduced income opportunities and struggle to meet their basic needs (UNICEF 21/07/2022; FA accessed 13/09/2024). The collective impact of poverty, price hikes, conflict, and uncertain market conditions have made people vulnerable to shocks and reduced their coping strategies. At the same time, displaced populations tend to migrate towards comparatively better areas, which strains the needs of host communities and leads to resource competition (IOM 28/12/2022; WFP 09/03/2023).

In conflict-affected areas or areas with many displaced people, the population is already experiencing poverty and difficulty accessing drinking water and food. Many do not have the economic reserves to deal with shocks such as forced displacement because of violence, livelihood losses, or the loss of adult family members who contribute to the household income. This leads to increased humanitarian needs and prevents people from breaking the cycle of poverty (WVI 19/03/2024).

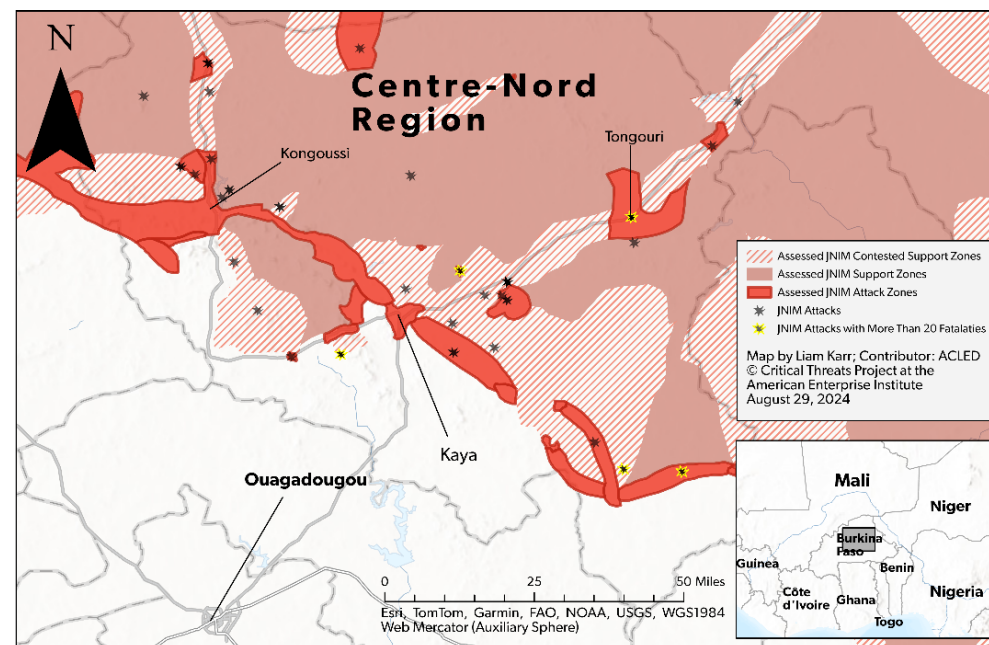
### Spread of diseases

There is an outbreak of hepatitis E in Centre-Nord region (UNICEF 31/05/2024). Most of the reported cases are in the communities of Pissila and Kaya, which are also the areas that conflict and displacement have affected the most. The main cause of hepatitis E is the consumption of water contaminated with faecal coliforms (UNICEF 17/07/2024).

By 24 March 2024, nearly 5,700 suspected measles cases had also been reported, with 21 deaths across the country. Since the start of the year, measles cases have skyrocketed in all regions, with major outbreaks in nine health districts across four regions: Centre (39%), Centre-Nord (18%), Nord (17%), and Boucle du Mouhoun (7%) (UNICEF 12/04/2024). The prevalence of measles may increase, as the disease spreads easily in crowded areas, such as shelters (CDC accessed 13/09/2024).

Insecurity causes access issues that prevent medical product delivery. This, combined with the displacement of large amounts of people and attacks on water points and health facilities, may aggravate the already dire healthcare situation and significantly increase the spread of different diseases.

MAP 1. JNIM Intensifying Pressure Around Kaya (Centre-Nord) since May 2024



Source: ISW (29/08/2024)