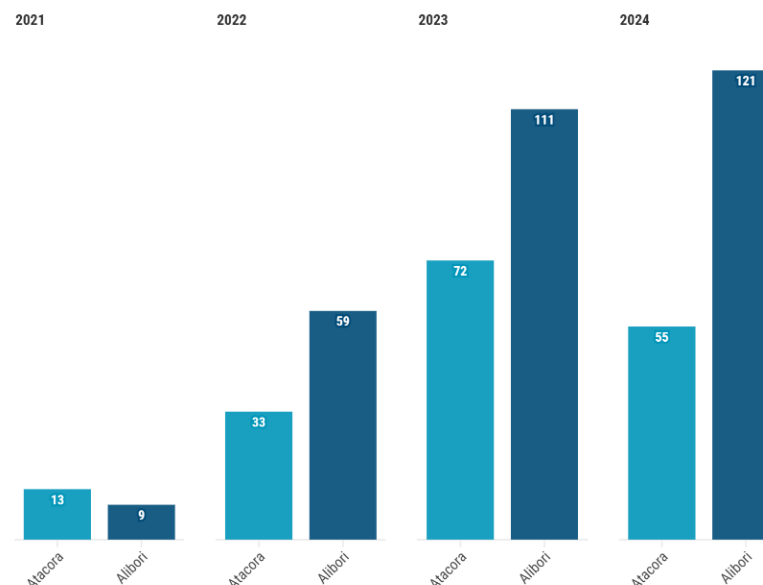


CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

- In January 2025, violence in northern Benin continued to escalate, with recent attacks by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) in the border area between Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger underscoring persistent insecurity. Violence in Alibori and Atacora continues to displace families, with many moving to urban centres, such as Malanville (Alibori), near the border with Niger (France 24 10/01/2025; BBC 10/01/2025; ACLED 14/01/2025). The number of violent incidents has increased dramatically in these departments, rising from 22 in 2021 to 176 in 2024. Attacks targeting civilians, particularly by non-state and unidentified armed groups, have grown significantly during this period, doubling from 52 to 131 between 2022–2024 (ACLED accessed 28/01/2025).
- Since 2021, non-state armed groups (NSAGs) – including JNIM, which is affiliated with Al Qaeda – have expanded their activities into the coastal Gulf of Guinea countries, including northern Benin, targeting both military and civilian populations. Regular armed clashes between NSAGs and the Beninese army have since persisted. Casualties from clashes and targeted attacks against civilians, kidnappings, and displacement triggered by growing insecurity have significantly heightened protection risks in northern Benin (IFRC 04/12/2024; GRANIT 31/07/2024). As they push further southward, NSAGs view the lush forests bordering Burkina Faso as secure areas for conducting their activities. For NSAGs, coastal countries like Benin are also sources of equipment, food, and financing, particularly through the sale of stolen livestock (TV5MONDE 16/08/2022; IFRI 11/02/2022).
- Most violent incidents involving NSAGs in northern Benin are attributed to JNIM, even if some rare incidents are also attributed to Islamic State – Sahel Province and community militias (CESA 26/08/2024). The intensification of JNIM attacks since 2021, with a significant escalation from 2023–2024, also reflects their strategic objectives to expand their control and weaken state authority. According to available analysis, these attacks aim to consolidate territory, deter state intervention, and gain community support or compliance through fear (ACLED 12/12/2024; Clingendael 05/06/2024).
- The conflict has resulted in the displacement of populations. By February 2024, over 12,500 IDPs were recorded in Alibori and Atacora departments, an increase of 24% compared to June 2023. By January 2025, these two departments continued to be affected by the spillover of NSAGs from the Sahel countries. Displacement in these departments is primarily driven by insecurity and community-based conflicts (IOM 27/12/2024 and 29/01/2025).

- The Government of Benin has responded to the crisis through military operations such as Mirador and Araignée, deploying 450 personnel to secure key areas (GRANIT 31/07/2024). That said, these efforts have been unable to prevent NSAG incursions or mitigate protection risks.
- Host communities continue to offer critical support to displaced populations, often sharing already limited resources. With the lack of IDP camps, displaced people are predominantly living with host communities. This puts additional strain on their capacity, increasing the vulnerability of both displaced and host populations (IOM 27/12/2024). Humanitarian needs continue to grow, particularly for food, shelter, health, and WASH (GRANIT 31/07/2024; ISS 28/11/2024).

Figure 1. Violent events in Alibori and Atacora (2021–2024)

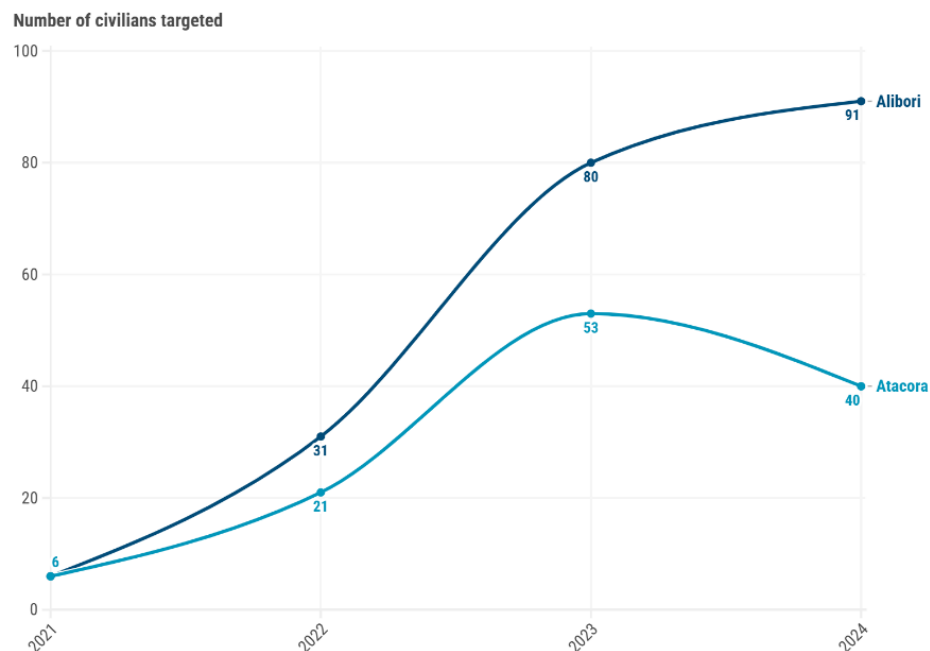


Note: This visual only includes battles and incidents of violence against civilians. It does not include events categorised as remote violence, protests, riots, or strategic developments.

Source: ACAPS using ACLED (accessed 24/01/2024)

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

Figure 2. Violent events targeting civilians in Alibori and Atacora (2021–2024)



Source: ACAPS using ACLED (accessed 24/01/2024)

- The intensification of NSAG activities in northern Benin, across the country's porous borders, suggests that the violence will continue to displace civilians. Population movements are likely to escalate along the borders with Burkina Faso and Niger. So far, attacks have predominantly targeted rural communities, forcing families to seek safety in urban centres such as Malanville (GRANIT 31/07/2024; IOM 27/12/2024). While there is currently no evidence of populations crossing into neighbouring countries, the proximity to international borders increases the likelihood of cross-border movements, as has occurred during past crises in the region (IFRC 29/05/2023).
- NSAGs' growing military capabilities, including the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and increasingly coordinated attacks within their ranks, are likely to aggravate the security situation. These groups' ability to carry out simultaneous attacks across multiple locations has increased their territorial reach and made it more difficult for state security forces to respond effectively (ISS 28/11/2024). Their ability to establish bases

near porous borders, such as the W-Arly-Pendjari nature reserve along the borders with Burkina Faso and Niger, facilitates the movement of fighters and weapons. These bases provide strategic advantages, enabling NSAGs to evade security forces and sustain their operations, which heightens threats for civilian populations (BTI 07/12/2024; GI-TOC 26/02/2024).

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- The use of IEDs and armed clashes are likely to hinder humanitarian operations in affected areas, including essential supply routes (ISS 28/11/2024). The continued use of IEDs will likely make roads and travel routes unsafe, hindering the mobility of humanitarian organisations and forcing them to adopt more expensive alternative routes. That said, although insecurity is growing and the number of violent incidents has been increasing since 2021, there remained no reports of direct attacks on humanitarian workers until January 2025. This may also be explained by a lack of data on violence against humanitarian workers and assets, as there are few analytical entities collecting such information.
- The closure of the border between Benin and Niger, initially imposed after the July 2023 coup in Niger and maintained by the latter, citing security concerns, has significantly disrupted the movement of goods and humanitarian assistance (GRANIT 31/07/2024). Key crossing points, such as the Malanville bridge, remain closed, forcing informal and risky river crossings at higher costs (VOA 23/05/2024; FES 18/12/2024 a). Niger is accusing Benin of hosting foreign forces perceived as a threat, contributing to these restrictions (FES 18/12/2024 a).
- While Benin reopened its borders in February 2024 following the lifting of ECOWAS sanctions, the limited flow of essential goods, such as food and medical supplies, remains a challenge, as Niger maintains border restrictions. The ECOWAS sanctions, initially imposed in July 2023 following the coup in Niger, included border closures, financial transaction suspensions, and asset freezes aimed at pressuring the military junta to restore constitutional rule (FES 18/12/2024 b; African Business 19/11/2024; RFI 23/11/2024). Alternative supply routes through Burkina Faso and Nigeria exist but involve higher risks and costs owing to insecurity and logistical constraints (ICG 05/12/2023; GRANIT 31/07/2024).

CRISIS IMPACTS

Displacement

By February 2024, around 12,500 IDPs were recorded in northern Benin. This number has likely increased, as violent incidents against civilians have continued since then, leading to further displacement. Most IDPs are concentrated in Alibori and Atacora as a result of the violence and insecurity in these departments, which have been the primary locations of NSAG attacks. Banikoara, Karimama, Kérou, Kobli, Matéri, and Tanguiéta are the main communes hosting the IDPs (IOM 29/01/2025).

Benin was also hosting more than 16,000 refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries by September 2024. Most fled NSAG violence in Burkina Faso. Many are residing in the same northern departments where IDPs have relocated in response to the crisis in Benin, increasing pressure on already overstretched host communities and services (IOM 29/01/2025; WFP 04/11/2024; UNHCR et al. 18/04/2024).

Protection

The violence in northern Benin has exposed civilians to heightened security risks, including kidnappings, killings, and injuries from IEDs. Since 2021, at least 45 IED-related incidents have been reported in Alibori and Atacora departments, affecting civilians, including children, and causing injuries and trauma (ISS 28/11/2024). There is no verified data on the number of civilian fatalities from IED attacks, and civilians have also been killed in armed clashes, targeted attacks, and kidnappings, further heightening security risks.

In 2024 alone, 56 civilian kidnappings were recorded in Alibori and Atacora, highlighting the threat posed by NSAGs (ACLEDA accessed 23/01/2025). Reports indicate that gender-based violence has increased amid the conflict, with risks including physical assault and forced marriage, particularly in areas under NSAG influence or where displaced populations face heightened vulnerabilities (UNICEF 26/11/2024; APA 19/09/2024; REcAP network 06/2024).

Food security and livelihoods

Armed conflict and internal displacements in northern Benin have severely disrupted both subsistence and commercial agricultural production, particularly in Alibori and Atacora. Farmers are abandoning their fields because of insecurity, while other livelihoods, such as livestock rearing and trade, as well as tourism in the Pendjari reserve, have collapsed (Pulitzer

Center 12/10/2022). The main crops produced in northern Benin include maize, sorghum, millet, and yam, which are staple foods for domestic consumption. The disruption of agricultural activities has led to reduced household food stocks and higher food prices, worsening food insecurity (FAO 18/10/2024).

By mid-2024, over 108,000 people in Alibori and Atacora were projected to face acute food insecurity during the June–August lean season. Malnutrition remains a concern, with 36.5% of children under five affected by chronic malnutrition, according to the most recent available survey from 2021–2022 (WFP 04/11/2024). Given the current conflict and disruptions to food production and livelihoods, food insecurity and malnutrition levels are likely to rise in affected areas.

Health

The deterioration of health services in Atacora, aggravated by frequent displacement and limited infrastructure, has heightened health vulnerabilities. 6 of the 15 health centres in Atacora and Alibori are functioning at minimal capacity as a result of staff shortages, infrastructure damage, and supply chain disruptions, and they are struggling to address the needs of displaced populations and people with conflict-related injuries (MSF 10/12/2024; UNICEF 05/12/2024).

Healthcare access disruptions have particularly affected pregnant women, who face increased risks because of the limited availability of maternal health services, including safe delivery options. Limited access to healthcare facilities has also affected patients with medical emergencies such as severe malaria cases, further straining the health system. The displacement of medical staff and patients resulting from the violence has further strained the health system. The conflict has also severely affected mental health, with many individuals experiencing fear, psychosis, and trauma as a result of violence and displacement (ISS 28/11/2024).

Education

The insecurity has significantly disrupted education in northern Benin. By mid-2024, four schools in Materi (Atacora) and Karimama (Alibori) had closed in response to threats and attacks on school facilities, affecting 315 students. IDPs face overcrowded classrooms in host communities, increasing the risk of dropouts and exposing them to exploitation and abuse (UNICEF 05/12/2024). The stress of displacement and conflict can have a traumatic impact on children, affecting their ability to learn, as seen in other conflict-affected regions in West and Central Africa (Education Cluster 13/09/2023).

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Conflict spillover

The prolonged conflict in the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) has enabled the expansion of NSAG activities into West African coastal countries, including Benin. The insecurity and governance vacuums created by the Sahel conflict have allowed these groups to establish operational footholds in northern Benin, particularly in remote border regions with limited state presence and difficult terrain. In areas such as the W-Arly-Pendjari reserve, NSAGs exploit the dense forests and cross-border access to sustain their operations while evading security forces. Their involvement in transnational illicit networks – trafficking arms, drugs, gold, and wildlife products – provides financial resources for them to maintain and expand their activities (BTI 07/12/2024; GI-TOC 26/02/2024; Clingendael 02/06/2024).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Intercommunal conflicts

Northern Benin experiences violent intercommunal conflicts stemming from unequal land access between farmers and herders, flawed land ownership systems, and the contested management of forest reserves (PNUD 20/11/2024). Socioeconomic vulnerabilities – characterised by limited infrastructure, pervasive poverty, and weak state presence – worsen these tensions, creating fertile ground for radicalisation and violent extremism. Reports indicate that such conflicts, particularly in nomadic pastoralist regions, could lead to recruitment by NSAGs like JNIM (GI-TOC 26/02/2024; WAMAPS 28/11/2024).

Climate change

Benin is highly vulnerable to climate change, ranking 23rd in climate vulnerability and 133rd in climate readiness among 182 countries (UCB accessed 31/01/2025). Rising temperatures and extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and wildfires have intensified, affecting agricultural production and displacing thousands in recent years (CCKP accessed 31/01/2025).

Climate change intensifies resource competition and aggravates socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Benin's severe dry season has in the past worsened the situation, affecting agriculture and intensifying disputes over land use (Pulitzer Center 11/10/2022). This environmental challenge has further heightened tensions between communities, creating fertile ground for conflict and recruitment by armed groups (DW 06/08/2024).

Resource scarcity

Pre-existing resource shortages, including limited access to clean water, fuel, and grazing land, aggravate the crisis. Northern departments like Atacora face heightened vulnerabilities owing to overstretched resources and insufficient infrastructure, including inadequate healthcare facilities, poor road networks, and restricted market access (FAO 18/10/2024). The decrease in arable land caused by climate change and land degradation further intensifies the competition for resources, fuelling community conflicts and increasing the risk of food insecurity (GRANIT 31/07/2024; BTI 07/12/2024).

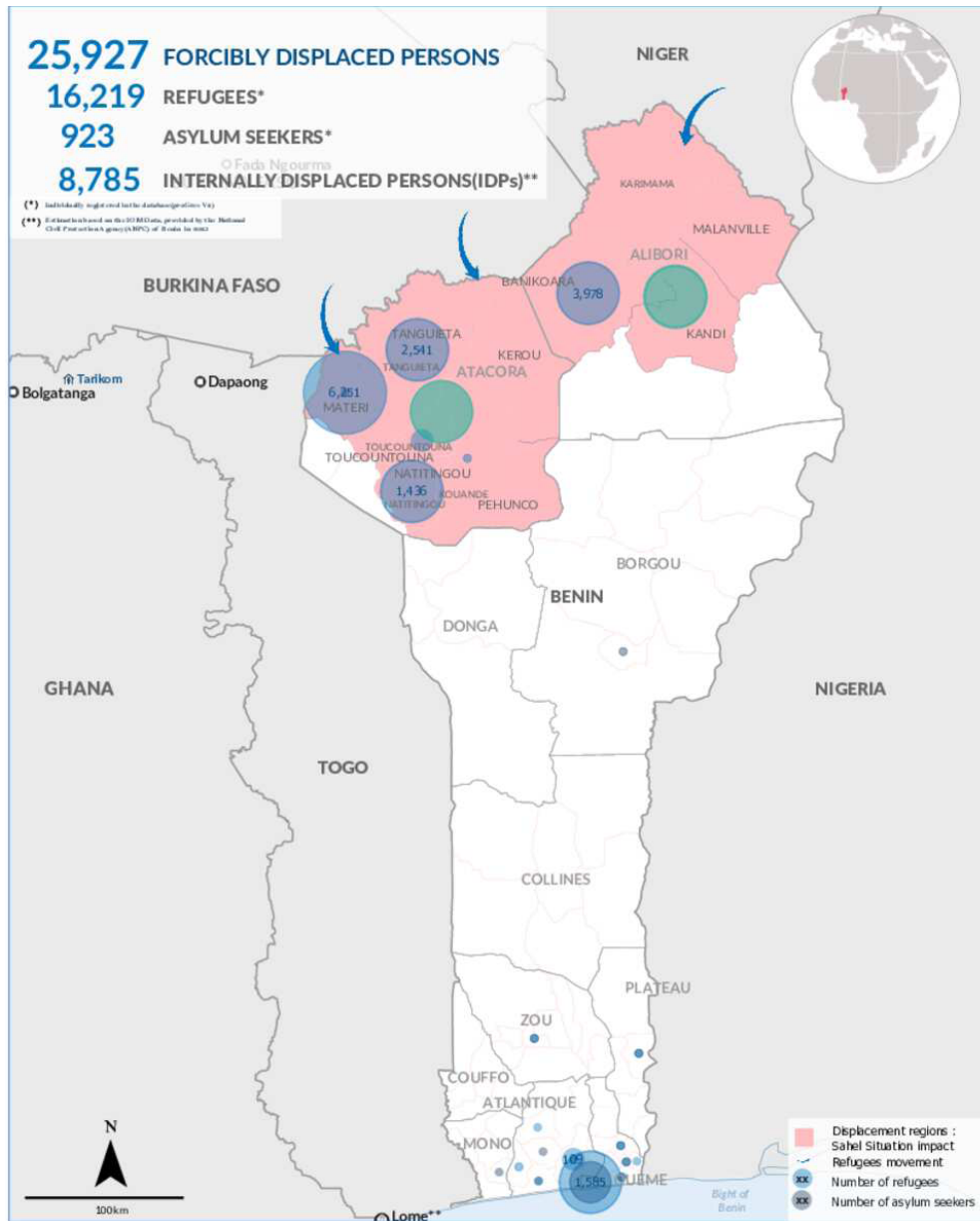
Information gaps

Despite increasing recognition of the northern Benin conflict, as evidenced by the response plans of various humanitarian organisations, the magnitude of the needs remains uncertain given insufficient data and limited humanitarian presence.

Specific needs in the shelter and WASH sectors are relatively underreported, although humanitarian organisations generally acknowledge the existence of significant needs in these areas.

The current state of food insecurity remains uncertain given a lack of recent data since the last evaluation.

Map 1. Forcibly displaced populations in Benin by 31 August 2024



Source: UNHCR (18/09/2024)