

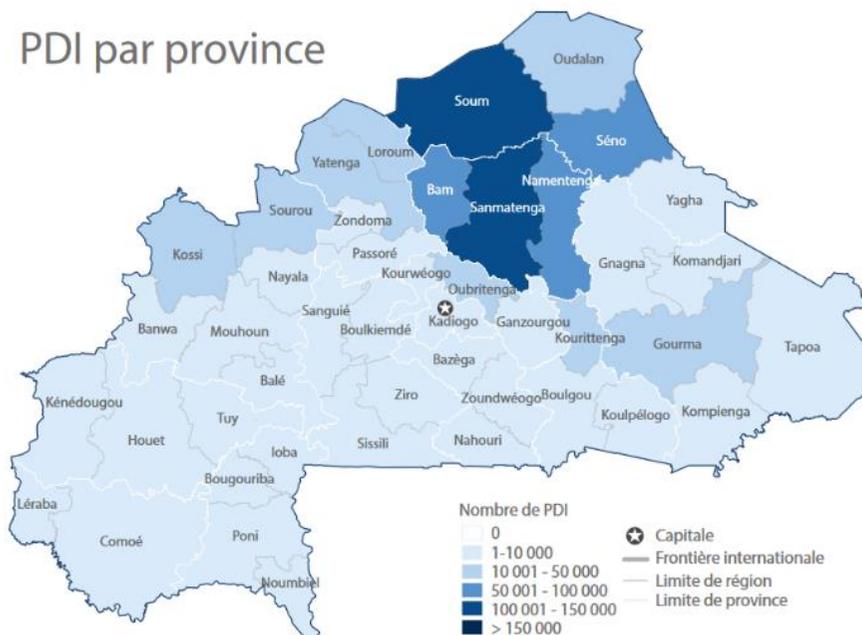
COVID-19: Insecurity and education in Burkina Faso

Situation at the start of the new school year

- On 15 March, the Burkina Faso government announced the closure of all schools and universities in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19. While students in exam years were able to return to class on 1 July, approximately 4.2 million children have been out of school for over six months due to COVID-19 containment measures, until the start of the new school year on 1 October (Education Cluster 18/06/2020, MENA 29/05/2020, Burkina24 27/05/2020).
- 350,000 children were out of school prior to COVID-19 in the context of conflict, displacement, and insecurity (UNHCR 08/08/2020, Education Cluster 30/06/2020).
- Insecurity in Burkina Faso has led to the internal displacement of over 1 million people as of August 2020, including 544,000 children in need of education assistance (UNHCR 08/08/2020, Education Cluster 19/08/2020).
- A deliberate effort by armed groups to stir up ethnic tensions have driven some Fulani to join their ranks, causing further stigmatisation of the wider Fulani community, and sometimes resulting in retaliatory attacks on Fulani villages.

About this report

This report is based on a review of publicly available information along with an interview of a key informant from a humanitarian organization in Burkina Faso. There are significant information gaps concerning the exposure of children to armed group recruitment. Since data on child recruitment in Burkina Faso is not available, the rationale in this analysis is built primarily on narrative reports.



IDPs by province, Source: OCHA 21/08/2020

Key considerations

- 1 The effects of prolonged **school closures on retention rates are not known** and should be monitored from the outset of the new school year.
- 2 The extended period away from the classroom may have made children, particularly marginalized Fulani, **more vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups**.

The school year will be further delayed in some localities due to continued insecurity and seasonal flooding, potentially exacerbating risks faced by out of school children.

Humanitarian access



Humanitarian access in Burkina Faso limited by insecurity and seasonal flooding. IDPs, including vulnerable children identified in this report, are faced with repeated displacement, limiting their access to aid services and educational programs.

Context

Rise in insecurity since 2019

The power vacuum and weak governance that followed the removal of former President Blaise Compaoré in 2014 have allowed for the expansion of armed groups in Northern and Eastern Burkina Faso (Crisis Group 24/02/2020). The situation has rapidly deteriorated since 2018. There were 467 reported violent incidents in the country between 2015 and 2018, 642 in 2019 and 454 between January and August 2020 (ACLED).

While sporadic violence is present across the whole country, the bulk of violent incidents, and resulting displacement, occur the Sahel, Centre-Nord, Est and Boucle du Mouhoun regions. Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) active in these regions also operate in Mali and Niger, fuelling a cross-border crisis in the Liptako-Gourma region (ACLED, IOM 22/06/2020).

Insecurity has caused a dramatic increase in internal displacements, which have driven humanitarian needs across all sectors. The number of IDPs in the country rose from 237,000 in July 2019 to over 1 million in August 2020 (UNHCR 08/08/2020). Most IDPs are located in the Sahel and Centre-Nord regions; many live in flood-prone areas and are at risk of additional displacement during the current rainy season (May-October). The Sahel region also hosts over 19,000 Malian refugees, though several thousand refugees have returned to Mali since the beginning of the year, due to increasing violence in Burkina Faso (UNHCR 23/06/2020, UNHCR 13/03/2020).

COVID-19 in Burkina Faso

The first case of COVID-19 in Burkina Faso was detected on 9 March in Ouagadougou. On 10 March the government officially declared COVID-19 an epidemic (UNICEF 24/06/2020). 2,294 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in Burkina Faso as of 12 October, including 63 deaths (Government of Burkina Faso 12/10/2020). While the virus has spread to all of the country's thirteen regions, 60% of the cases and 80% of the deaths have been reported in Ouagadougou (Health Cluster 13/10/2020). The accuracy of the reported numbers cannot be verified due to a lack of information on testing data; the actual number of COVID-19 cases in the country is likely to be higher than stated.

Containment measures

On 15 March, the government announced the closure of all schools and universities in the country. This was followed by a ban on public gatherings, including demonstrations and religious services, a curfew, border closures, and the closure of Ouagadougou's market. Ouagadougou, Bobo Dioulasso, Dedougou, Hounde, Banfora, Manga and Zorgho were quarantined, with travel to and from those cities forbidden. A phase-out of containment measures began in late April with the opening of Ouagadougou's market.

The travel ban for quarantined cities was lifted on 5 May and religious institutions were allowed to open on 10 May, with a limit of 50 people during marriages and baptisms. The curfew was lifted on 3 June and international travel resumed at Ouagadougou Airport on 1 August (ACAPS 23/07/2020, RFI 29/07/2020).

A decrease in the respect for social distancing guidelines has been observed in the general population since the phase-out of containment measures began (Key Informant Interview 23/07/2020, SIG 21/06/2020). Adherence to COVID-19 containment guidelines is a challenge for IDPs affected by floods and those living amongst host-communities in over-crowded localities (UNHCR 23/06/2020, FEWS NET 12/2013).

School closures in Burkina Faso

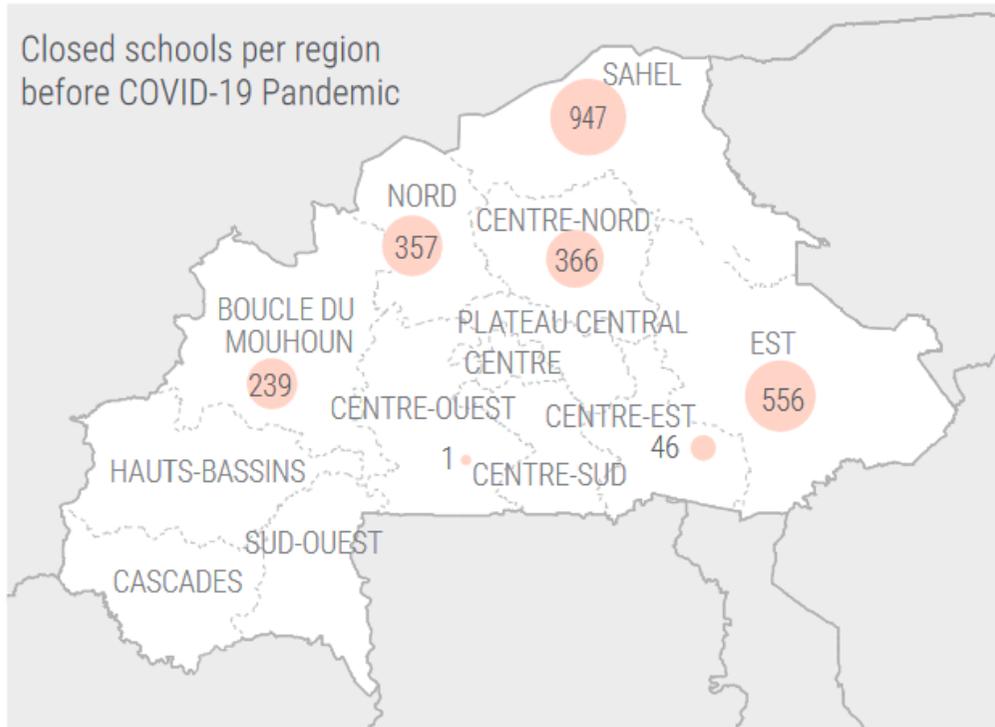
Insecurity in Burkina Faso forces schools to close

Attacks on schools by armed groups severely disrupts education in conflicted areas. Schools are burnt and looted, while teachers are threatened, kidnapped or killed (Human Rights Watch 08/09/2020). Prior to the COVID-19 school closures, 2,500 schools were closed due to insecurity, affecting close to 350,000 children and 11,200 teachers. Schools in host communities are used as emergency shelters, and the influx of new children overwhelms local educational infrastructures. Among the 545,000 children directly affected by insecurity, only 152,400 (28%) had access to formal or informal education (Education Cluster 30/06/2020, The New Humanitarian 07/07/2020, Key Informant Interview 23/07/2020).

Limited humanitarian access to out of school children

Repeated displacements drive people into increasingly remote areas, rendering humanitarian access more difficult. The whereabouts and activities of family members who remain in their villages following displacements are often unknown by the community (Key Informant Interview 23/07/2020). 18,000 children are currently in areas that are inaccessible for humanitarians (OCHA 21/08/2020).

Parents sometimes send their children to safer cities in order to pursue their education in more favourable conditions or to earn money working small jobs. There is no data on the number of children living in this type of arrangement, but reports indicate that the closure of schools and youth centres, along with a decrease in job opportunities could lead to increased protection needs for this population (The New Humanitarian 07/07/2020).



Source: OCHA 20/07/2020

COVID-19 mitigation measures have left 4.2 million children out of school for at least six months

In an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 the government of Burkina Faso ordered the closure of all schools on 16 March. On 1 July approximately 800,000 students in exam years returned to class. The 4.2 million students who are not in an exam year will remain out of school until 1 October at the earliest. While there has been an effort to provide out of school students with opportunities for distance learning through radio broadcasts, television shows and online classes, only around 118,000 (2.36% of affected children) had benefitted from those initiatives by June (Education Cluster 18/06/2020, MENA 29/05/2020, Burkina24 27/05/2020). IDPs and refugees have limited access to distance learning initiatives due to a lack of devices and internet connectivity. Marginalised children that are currently without educational opportunities and thus missing the safety net schools often provide are more likely to not return to school once classes resume due to exposure to higher risks of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation. They are also less likely to be able to access required learning devices, infrastructure or connectivity (UNHCR 30/06/2020).

Impact on marginalised Fulani children

Armed groups capitalize on ethnic tensions and frustration towards the government in order to recruit amongst marginalized Fulani (Crisis Group 24/02/2020). Central and Northern Burkina Faso have seen long-standing disputes between Mossi (farmers) and Fulani (herders) communities over access to natural resources and conflicting land claims. The increase in violence caused by Islamist groups have exacerbated intercommunal tensions, fostering resentment towards Fulani who are perceived as being overrepresented in armed groups (Jeune Afrique 06/07/2020). Self-defence forces and Burkinabe Armed Forces are reported to commit extrajudicial killings on Fulani people in response to attacks by armed groups (Human Rights Watch 07/08/2020, DW 11/03/2020). Land expropriations and stigmatisation further marginalize members of the Fulani community.

Increased potential for child recruitment

The combined effects of a long period without schooling, marginalization, ethnic tensions and limited humanitarian access create an environment that increases the potential for child recruitment, particularly among Fulani children.

- Prolonged periods away from school lead to decreased interest in education in both parents and children, increasing the risk of vulnerable children permanently halting their schooling (Education Cluster 15/08/2020).
- Out of school Fulani youths, some of whom have witnessed extrajudicial killings by Armed Forces or revenge attacks by other armed groups, are a target for recruitment. Armed groups use the traumatic experiences and marginalization to incite further tensions and drive recruitment.
- Humanitarian access to Fulani populations is difficult, and men often do not follow women during displacement. It is not known whether those who stay behind go into hiding, look after their cattle or join armed groups (Key Informant Interview 23/07/2020). The increased risk of recruitment faced by children who stay behind was identified prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF 29/01/2020). The intensification of armed group activity has led to increased protection needs for children in Burkina Faso, including protection against recruitment (OCHA 21/08/2020).
- Local humanitarians have identified the risk of recruitment, and begun small-scale efforts to bring out of school children back to the classroom (RFI 27/08/2020).
- There have been reports of child recruitment in neighbouring Mali where the same armed groups are active. School closures due to insecurity and perceived self-defence needs are drivers of child recruitment in Mali (Al Jazeera 19/04/2020, VOA 13/08/2020).

Limited alternatives to in-school education

Assessments of the humanitarian situation in May 2020 performed by REACH, while not representative, provide an indication of the lack of educational alternatives for out of school children in Est, Nord, Centre-Nord and Sahel regions. Data from the vast majority of localities affected by school closures indicates that school-age children did not take any measures to pursue out of school education during the month of May, such as studying at home or in another non-school setting. In Est and Nord regions, 8% and 9% respectively of surveyed localities responded that children studied at home in May, whereas that number falls to 2% in Centre-Nord and 0% in Sahel (REACH 05/2020, REACH 05/2020, REACH 05/2020, REACH 05/2020).

Information gaps

Intercommunal tensions, distrust towards Burkinabe authorities and low humanitarian access lead to significant information gaps regarding the Fulani population. Their precise location after displacements or attacks is often unknown, as are their needs. There is no data that measures the extent to which recruitment of out of school Fulani children into armed groups is already occurring. Consequently, targeted response capacity could be limited should this risk begin to materialise. More generally, there is a current lack of information on the impact that COVID-19 has had on child protection needs in Burkina Faso (Education Cluster 25/08/2020).

Outlook for the new school year

Floods

Schools are being used as emergency shelters for those affected by floods, putting additional strain on the education system, just before the school year is due to start. The rainy season, which normally ends in mid-October, has caused flooding across Burkina Faso affecting 71,000 people as of 10 September. The hardest hit regions are the Centre-Nord (21,600 affected) and Sahel (23,970 affected), where 733,000 of the country's one million IDPs are located. At least 3,300 houses and 1,790 emergency IDP shelters have been destroyed. Populations in the conflict-affected regions are particularly vulnerable to flooding due to displacement and precarious housing conditions (FEWS NET 12/2013, ICRC 09/09/2020, CONASUR, OCHA 11/09/2020).

Some schools cannot reopen

Attacks on schools have continued during the closures, jeopardising the start of the new school year in certain conflict-affected areas. In Tansarga (Est region), 12 schools were burnt between 27-29 July, and one on 15 September (Gulmu Info 29/07/2020, Gulmu Info 16/09/2020). As of 21 September, 2,206 schools were reported to be closed at the outset of the new school year (MENA 21/09/2020). Rapid needs assessment for Oudalan province (Sahel region) found that only 8% of the 25 surveyed villages had a school, and children had to walk an average of one hour to reach the nearest school. 44% of the schools in the surveyed areas were destroyed, and a further 32% needed repairs before being fit for use (WFP 27/08/2020).