

Burkina Faso

Country Overview

Politics

Burkina Faso is a presidential republic in West Africa. Following independence from France in 1960, Burkina Faso saw repeated military coups during the 1970s and 1980s, and then multiparty elections in the early 1990s. Former President Blaise Compaoré, who led a successful coup in 1987, remained in office from 1987 to 2014, when he resigned due to popular protests which condemned his attempt to amend the Constitution's two-term presidential limit.

¹ An interim government, led by President Michael Kafando and Prime Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida, organized presidential and legislative elections that were carried out in November 2015 after a failed coup attempt by allies of Former President Compaoré in September.² President Roch Mark Christian Kaboré won the 2015 elections and was re-elected to a second five-year term in November 2020, winning 57.74 percent of the popular vote, with his party, the People's Movement for Progress, winning 56 seats in the 127-seat National Assembly.³ National and international election observers described the elections as peaceful and satisfactory, despite both logistical issues and a lack of access to the polls due to insecurity in the country.⁴

Economy

Burkina Faso is classified by the World Bank as a low-income country.⁵ As a landlocked country with few natural resources and a limited industrial base, Burkina Faso faces persistent elevated poverty rates, although its GDP had been increasing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to contain the COVID-19 virus caused the country's GDP to fall by about 5 percent during the first half of 2020.⁶ The World Bank expects Burkina Faso's economy to recover gradually, driven by a rebound in services, high gold production levels, and a stable agricultural sector.⁷

Agriculture dominates employment, with 90 percent of the 8.501-million-person labor force working in the agricultural sector. The remaining ten percent are employed in industry and services.⁸ While there is a vast supply of unskilled labor, skilled labor resources are limited for formal sector jobs most commonly in construction, civil engineering, mining, and manufacturing industries.

9



Social/Human Development

More than 63 percent of Burkina Faso's population is under the age of 25 due to declining mortality and high fertility rates, leading to a population growth of just below three percent per year.¹⁰ While access to education has improved, only about 41 percent of the population over the age of 15 is literate.¹¹ The average literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa is over 65 percent, making Burkina Faso's literacy rate lower than average.¹² Net school enrollment in 2019 was 77.4 percent for primary education but only 30.4 percent for secondary education – the majority of young people are out of school by the age of 18, dulling economic prospects for the vast reserve of working-age youth.¹³ However, the unemployment rate remains low, sitting at just about 5%.^{13,14}

According to the World Bank, the poverty rate in Burkina Faso fell from 46 percent in 2009 to 40.1 percent in 2014.¹⁵ However, the country remains one of the poorest in the world, as Burkina Faso's Human Development Index score for 2019 was 0.452, ranking 182 out of 189 countries.¹⁶

Despite the challenges faced by Burkina Faso, including food shortages and high poverty rates, the country has become a destination for refugees and hosts around 21,601 Malian refugees as of 2021.¹⁷

U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2021)

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2 Watch List

According to the *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report*, the Government of Burkina Faso does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so, mainly through victim assistance measures. However, no traffickers have recently been prosecuted, vulnerable populations are not effectively screened for trafficking indicators, and victim identification and services remain weak.¹⁸

Trafficking risk is found among Burkinabe children in potentially exported supply chains including agriculture and gold, as well for domestic work, sex work, and street vending. Burkinabe women are also at risk for exploitation in forced labor and sex trafficking abroad, mainly in the Middle East.¹⁹ Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/burkina-faso/>

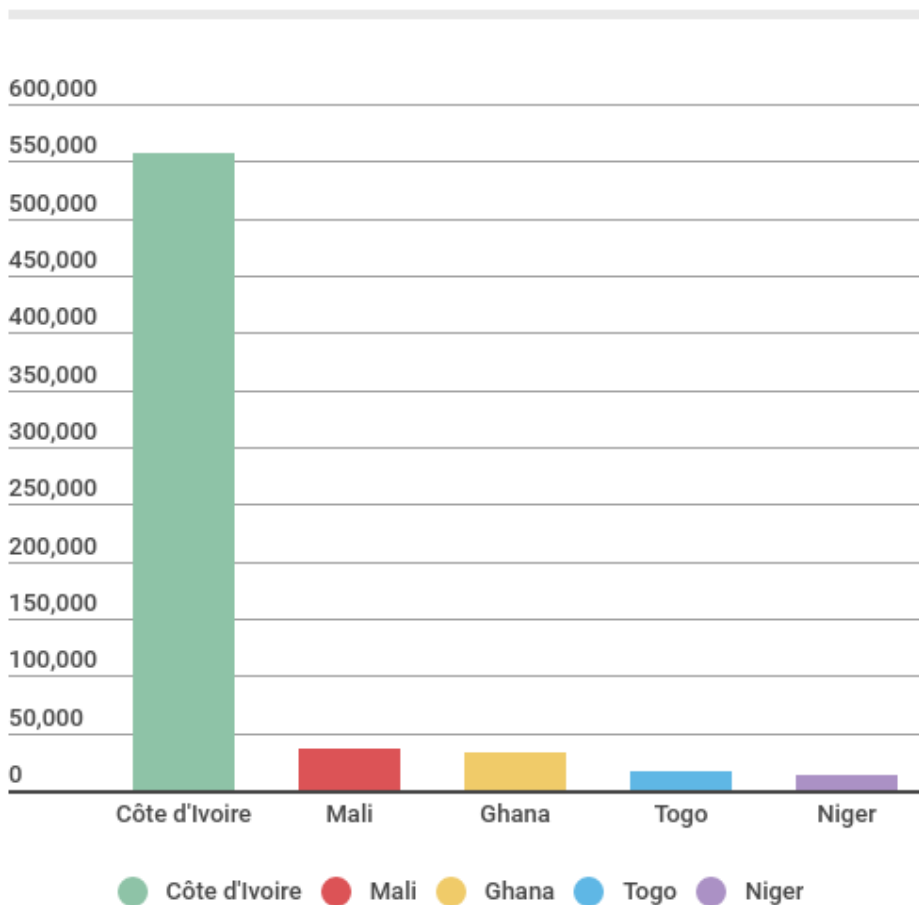


Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Burkina Faso has negative net migration. As of 2019, the most common identifiable migrant sending countries to Burkina Faso were Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Ghana, Togo, and Niger. Additionally, a country of origin for a sizeable number of migrants to Burkina Faso could not be identified and thus these migrants have been classified as arriving from “Other South” followed by “Other North.”²⁰

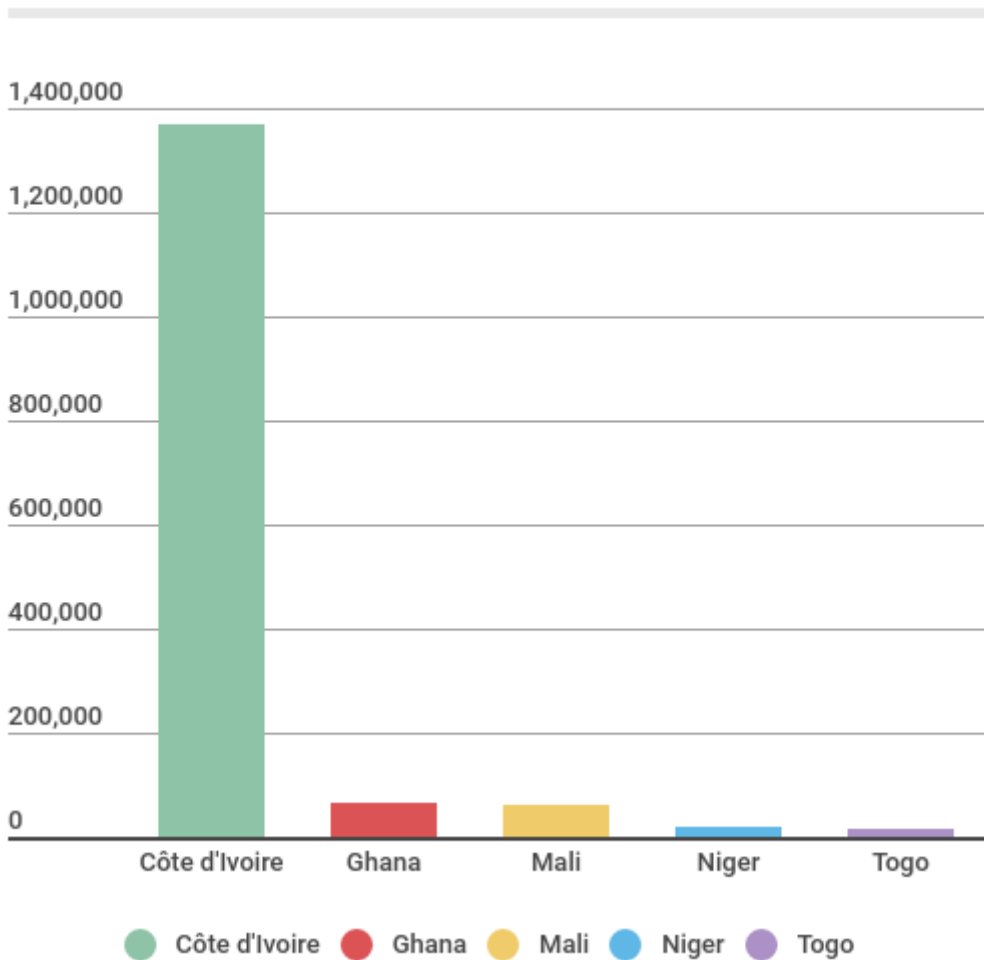
There were an estimated 1,095,275 persons of concern in Burkina Faso at the end of 2020, most of whom were internally displaced persons (IDPs). The number of IDPs within the country has grown rapidly in recent years, rising from an estimated 72,195 in 2018.²¹ Internal migration has been driven by insecurity caused by armed conflict, poverty, climate change leading to food insecurity, and the COVID-19 pandemic.²²

Migrants to Burkina Faso



Migrants from Burkina Faso are primarily destined for Côte d'Ivoire, followed by Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Togo.²⁴ There is an extensive history of Burkinabe migration for work in Côte d'Ivoire.²⁵

Migrants from Burkina Faso



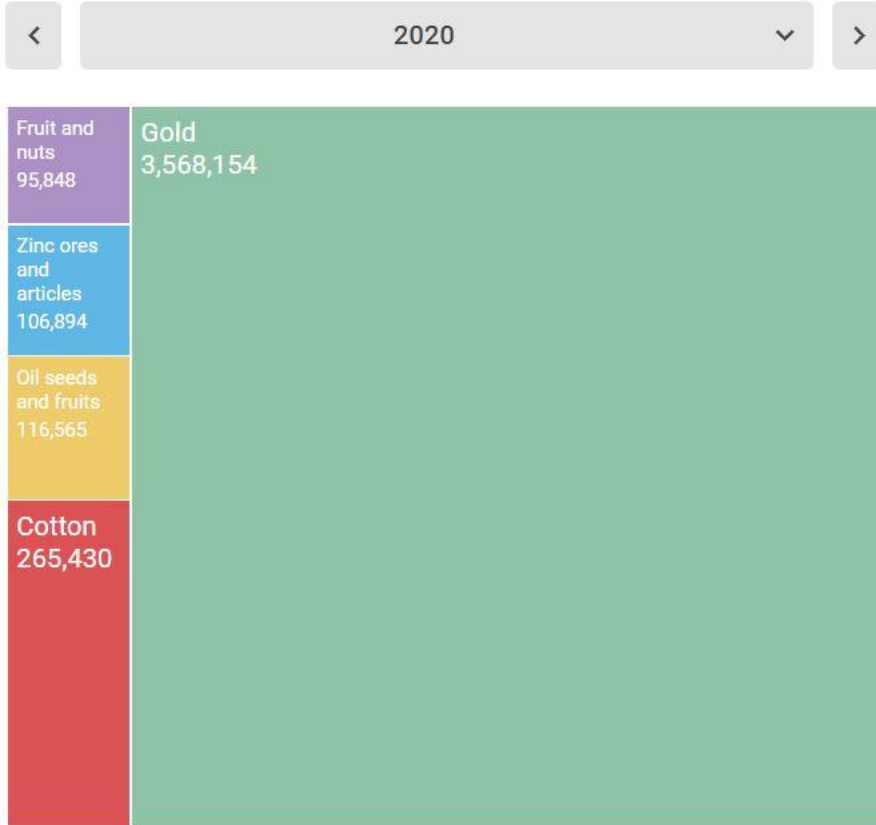
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Exports and Trade

Burkina Faso's top exports in 2020 were gold, cotton, oil seeds and fruits, zinc ores and articles, and fruit and nuts.²⁷



Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

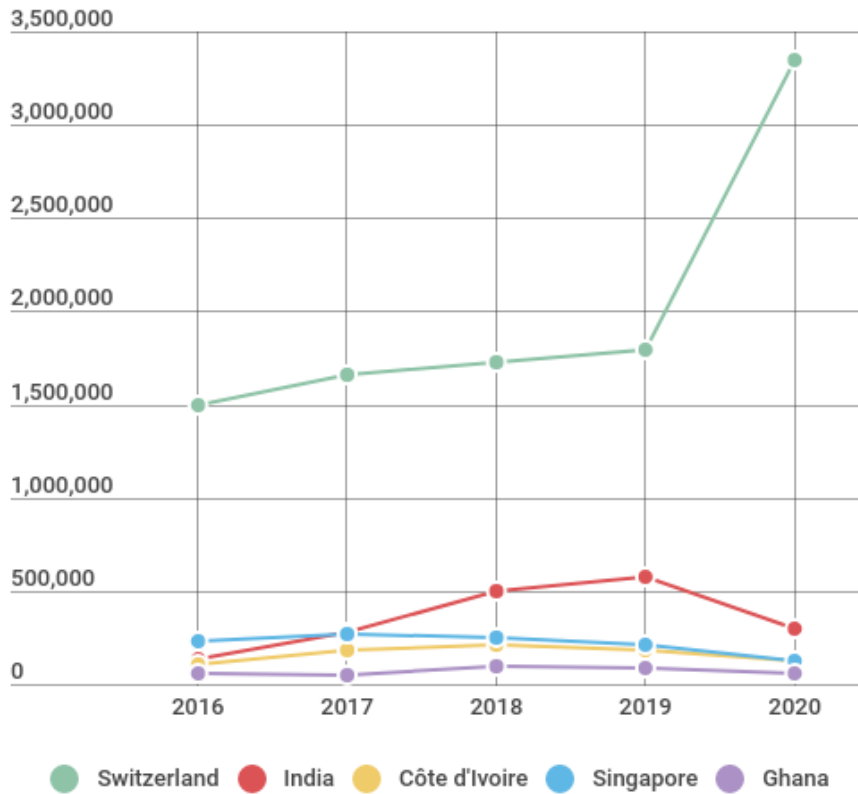


28

The top importers of goods from Burkina Faso in 2020 were Switzerland, India, Côte d'Ivoire, Singapore, and Ghana.²⁹



Burkina Faso Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



30

Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

The law provides workers, apart from public employees and essential workers, the right to form and join trade unions of their choice without prior authorization or excessive requirements. The U.S. Department of State reports that the law allowing for freedom of association and collective bargaining is effectively enforced by the Burkinabe government.³¹



The law also protects the right to strike, but this right is quite limited, and the government interfered with multiple union protests and rallies in 2020, citing COVID-19 restrictions.³² The law prohibits anti-union discrimination and provides the immediate re-instatement of workers fired for union activity. Relevant legal protections cover all workers, including migrant workers and those in the informal sector. International organizations have reported that contract workers and agency workers continue to face antiunion discrimination from employers.³³

According to Freedom House, despite government efforts to suppress union activity, labor unions are a strong force for democracy and the respect of civil liberties in the country.³⁴

Working Conditions

The law mandates a minimum monthly wage of 30,684 CFA francs (USD 62) for formal sector employees under collective agreements.³⁵ The minimum monthly wage does not apply to those who work in subsistence agriculture or other informal sectors. Unfortunately, most of the labor force is employed in subsistence agriculture or other informal occupations and thus the minimum monthly wage only applies to a minority of the work force. Additionally, the legal minimum wage is less than the poverty income level. The law establishes the minimum workweek to be 40 hours for nondomestic workers and 60 hours for household employees.³⁶

The law sets occupational health and safety standards and requires companies with 30 or more employees to have a work safety committee. If an employee chooses to remove themselves from a company with fewer than 30 employees due to a hazardous situation, a court rules on the relevancy of the worker's claim.³⁷

According to the U.S. State Department, minimum wage, working hours, and health and safety standards are not effectively enforced, with no reports of effective enforcement of findings during inspections in 2020. In March 2020, the National Union of Human and Animal Health Workers (SYNTSHA) expressed doubt around the ability of the country to protect front-line health workers put at high risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the organization maintains that the government has failed to improve employment conditions for health workers.³⁸

The U.S. Department of State reported that the Government of Burkina Faso has made efforts to reform labor policy in order to make the labor market more flexible while ensuring workers' rights, including workers' safety and health.³⁹

Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment and occupation, but the government does not effectively enforce these laws and regulations, and discrimination occurs based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, social origin, disability, language,



sexual orientation, gender and gender identity.⁴⁰ The U.S. Department of State reports that women frequently face discrimination in jobs, and although women have the right to equal pay, they generally receive lower pay for equal work. There are also legal restrictions on women's employment in industries such as construction which have been classified as too arduous or morally inappropriate for women, or which could pose a danger to a woman's reproductive capability.⁴¹

Forced Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, yet the U.S. Department of State has reported that the government does not effectively enforce applicable laws.⁴² In 2020, the government demonstrated insufficient efforts towards prevention of trafficking, prosecution of traffickers, and identification and protection of victims, partially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Burkinabe adults and children continue to be exploited in situations of forced labor both domestically and abroad, and traffickers exploit foreigners, particularly women and children, through labor and sex trafficking in Burkina Faso.⁴³ Violent extremist groups have targeted the growing number of internally displaced women and children for exploitation through forced labor and sex trafficking.⁴⁴

Child Labor

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation of children, child pornography, mining, and jobs that harm the health of a child.⁴⁵ The law sets the minimum working age to 16, which is commensurate with the age required for completing educational requirements. While children under the age of 18 are not permitted to work at night, children 13 and older are permitted to perform limited employment activities which are not defined by the law.⁴⁶ The government demonstrated efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor, but inconsistently enforced child labor laws, partially due to insecurity caused by violent extremist groups. Child labor occurs in multiple sectors, including agriculture, mining, trade, construction, and domestic labor.⁴⁷

The official primary school entrance age is six. According to the Education Policy and Data Center, 22.6 percent of children are out of school during primary school years (ages 6-11), and 69.6 percent of children are out of secondary school (ages 12-18).⁴⁸ Children from rural areas and children from lower income families are far more likely to be out of school than their wealthier or urban-dwelling peers.⁴⁹

Civil Society Organizations

Freedom House has reported that while many nongovernmental organizations operate openly and freely, human rights groups sometimes face abuses by security forces justified by vaguely worded legal provisions.⁵⁰ Throughout 2020, the government denied permits for demonstrations and rallies for civil society organizations.⁵¹ Growing insecurity and widespread violence has caused many NGOs to lose access to large parts of the country, and aid workers are often at risk of harm themselves.⁵²



Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants

Conventions	Status
ILO 29 FORCED LABOR	In force
ILO 87 FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE	In force
ILO 98 RIGHT TO ORGANIZE AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING	In force
ILO 100 EQUAL REMUNERATION	In force
ILO 105 ABOLITION OF FORCED LABOR	In force
ILO 111 DISCRIMINATION	In force
ILO 138 MINIMUM AGE	In force
ILO 181 PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES	Not ratified
ILO 182 WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR	In force
ILO 97 MIGRATION FOR EMPLOYMENT	In force ⁵³

Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Burkina Faso scored an 87.1 and ranked 36 out of 178 countries on the 2021 Fragile States Index, placing it in the “High Warning” Category.⁵⁴ The country has experienced a rise in terrorist attacks and violence in recent years, including attacks on government forces in conflict-affected areas.⁵⁵ Islamist groups have attacked civilians, convoys, government troops, villages, and churches,⁵⁶ justifying their attacks by linking victims to the government, the West, or Christianity. There is a growing fear that the Islamist attacks will spread into neighboring countries in the South such as Ghana, Togo, and Benin, which have a Christian majority. Burkina Faso’s trade system relies on these southern countries for their harbors and the spread of Islamic attacks threatens Burkina Faso’s trade security.⁵⁷ In response to the terrorist attacks, Burkinabe security forces launched counterterrorism operations in Burkina Faso and Mali, which resulted in security forces unlawfully killing hundreds of victims, the majority of which were from the Peuhl ethnic group. Authorities have opened investigations into the unlawful killings, however, there has been no progress in the investigations since 2019. Furthermore, no charges have been brought against armed Islamists.⁵⁸

Level of Crime and Violence

Amnesty International reported enduring armed conflict around Burkina Faso, particularly in the north and east of the country. Armed groups regularly fought one another and attacked civilians, often along ethnic lines. Seven of thirteen regions continue to be under a state of emergency, granting the authorities expanded powers to arrest and detain people. Security forces were reported to have carried out extrajudicial killings and torture with impunity.



Gender-based violence and sexual abuse, as well as the inability of victims to seek assistance, was exacerbated by the armed conflict.⁵⁹

State Persecution

In Burkina Faso, citizenship is derived either by birth within the country's territory or through a parent. When a child is born, parents are required to register their children and many, especially in rural areas, are unaware of the requirement to register, with consequent impacts on access to public services like education. UNHCR reports that over 700,000 habitual residents of Burkina Faso were legally or de facto stateless due to a lack of documentation.⁶⁰ State forces and volunteers were reported to perform extrajudicial killings, torture, and human rights violations against the Fulani minority group. The U.S. Department of State noted that President Kaboré and other senior officials appeared committed to ending these abuses but lacked capacity to enforce accountability. Persecution also occurred against the LGBTI community, and police sometimes arrested and humiliated gay men and transgender people. The government did not prevent LGBTI organizations from operating, but also did not respond to anti-LGBTI violence and discrimination.⁶¹

Level of Corruption

The 2020 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index gives Burkina Faso a 40 out of 100, where 0 signals "Highly Corrupt" and 100 signals "Very Clean." Burkina Faso is ranked 86th out of 180 countries.⁶² In 2020, the U.S. Department of State reported that although the law provides for criminal penalties for corruption by officials, the government did not implement the law effectively and officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.⁶³

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

Burkina Faso scored low in the human development category, according to the UN Human Development Index 2020, with a rank of 182 out of 189 countries and a score of 0.452. Burkina Faso's neighboring countries Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, and Ghana have relatively higher HDIs, but Mali and Niger rank lower, with Niger at the bottom of the list.⁶⁴

Level and Extent of Poverty

For Burkina Faso, poverty is pervasive, with 83.8 percent of the population classified as living in "multidimensional poverty" according to the UN, with another 7.4 percent determined to be vulnerable to multidimensional poverty.⁶⁵ When adjusted for inequality, the Human Development Index falls to 0.316, a loss of 30.1 percent due to inequality. Burkina Faso's gross national income (GNI) per capita was USD 2,133 in 2019.⁶⁶



Degree of Gender Inequality

The UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) scored Burkina Faso 0.594 and ranked the country 147 out of 162 countries in the 2019 index.⁶⁷ Social, economic, and political gender discrimination towards women remains prevalent, despite the government's effort and commitment to establish a policy and legal framework to bridge the gaps between legislation and practice.⁶⁸ Child and forced marriages persist in Burkina Faso through loopholes around religious and customary marriages, and customary law allows the husband's family to gain custody of any children after a divorce. Female genital mutilation and sexual harassment are prevalent in Burkina Faso regardless of legislation prohibiting both offences. Furthermore, there is insufficient data and statistical analysis around violence against women in the country.⁶⁹

Despite the existence of laws intended to ensure access to land, women's rights are restricted in practice. Land is usually accessed through inheritance, but widows are expected to return to their families without inheriting their husband's land, and a daughter's right to inheritance is often not respected.⁷⁰ Women have difficulty accessing bank loans because formal institutions classify women as "high-risk" applicants, as they often do not have financial or material security including land possession.⁷¹

Landlessness and Dispossession

Since 2009, the Government of Burkina Faso has been making reforms to land tenure to recognize land titles and ownership rights. The process is focused in 47 communities, with the hope of nationwide expansion. Since 1960, only 5,000 land titles have been distributed.⁷²

Environmental Factors

Due to Burkina Faso's dependence on the agricultural sector, it is highly vulnerable to environmental shocks like rainfall shortages.⁷³ The country faces multiple climate change hazards such as droughts, heatwaves, torrential rainfall, and extreme weather.

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Cotton

Cotton Overview

Cotton provides fifteen to twenty percent of Burkina's active labor force with employment. Cotton is predominantly produced by smallholder farms; there are also a few larger plantations. Since the early 1990s, reforms to the cotton sector have resulted in rapid



economic growth. However, Burkina Faso's dependence upon cotton has resulted in increased economic vulnerability to market shocks.⁷⁴

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Cotton Production

The U.S. Department of Labor has reported that cotton is produced in Burkina Faso using both forced labor and child labor. Children participate in planting, weeding, and harvesting cotton crops, and are involved in the worst forms of child labor, sometimes due to trafficking.⁷⁵ Both domestic and transnational migration among child workers is common to assist in the cotton harvest; this often occurs within the context of extended family. This migration can be involuntary and may sometimes lead to conditions of forced labor.⁷⁶

Gold

Gold Overview

While cotton is Burkina Faso's most important cash crop, the gold export market has increased in recent years.⁷⁷ Burkina Faso has eight large-scale industrial goldmines, and smallholder and artisanal mining is also common.⁷⁸

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Gold Production

The U.S. Department of State has reported that children in Burkina Faso are engaged in forced child labor as gold panners and washers in artisanal mines. An estimated 200,000-300,000 children work in artisanal mining in the country.⁷⁹ The U.S. Department of Labor has reported that gold is produced with both forced labor and child labor, and children working in gold mines are exposed to dangerous chemicals such as cyanide and mercury.⁸⁰ There have been reports of child migrants rescued from gold mines in Burkina Faso, where they were working under conditions of involuntary labor.⁸¹ The recent growth of the gold sector in the country has also led to reports of sex trafficking of women in mining towns.⁸²

¹ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook: Burkina Faso*. July 2021. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/>.

² BBC News. *Burkina Faso profile – Timeline*. March 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13072857>.

³ U.S. Department of State. *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burkina Faso*. 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/burkina-faso/>

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⁵ World Bank. *Burkina Faso: Overview*. April 2021. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/overview>.

⁶ World Bank. *Burkina Faso: Overview*. April 2021. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/overview>

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- ¹³ World Bank. Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (ILO estimate) - Burkina Faso. June 15, 2021. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=BF&most_recent_year_desc=false
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- ¹⁶ United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 2020*. 2020. <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook: Burkina Faso*. 2019. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uv.html>.
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- ²⁰ United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Migrant Stock 2019*. 2019. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>.
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- ²² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Operations: Burkina Faso*. 2021. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/burkinafaso>
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