Along with attacks in north-eastern Côte d’Ivoire since 2020, violent extremist groups have infiltrated the livestock and illegal artisanal gold mining economies to generate funds, mobilise human resources and obtain means of subsistence. Responses to the threat must integrate this dimension and strive to deprive these groups of the resources they need to function.
Key findings

- Côte d’Ivoire has faced violent extremism since at least 2016. The June 2020 attack on the mixed army-gendarmerie post in Kafolo started a new sequence marked by a concentration of insecurity along the country’s northern borders.
- Between 2019 and 2021, violent extremist groups have carried out incursions into Ivorian territory, attacks against defence and security forces, and acts of intimidation against the population.
- Extremist groups have also made efforts to generate financial resources, mobilise human resources and secure livelihoods in Côte d’Ivoire through illegal artisanal gold mining and the livestock economy.
- During this period, Côte d’Ivoire’s north-east served as a centre of operations and as an area of refuge, settlement, funding, recruitment and supply for these groups.
- For the time being, it seems that Côte d’Ivoire has managed to contain the insecurity linked to violent extremist groups. However, the persistence of insecurity among its northern neighbours and the existence of vulnerabilities and risk factors in its northern border areas continue to raise the spectre of threat.

Recommendations

Understanding the threat

- Ivorian authorities need to understand the threat facing the country beyond the scope of these attacks. Efforts by violent extremist groups to mobilise human and financial resources and to secure operational and subsistence resources should also be analysed.

Livestock economy

- Côte d’Ivoire’s authorities, in collaboration with organisations representing the interests of actors in the livestock economy, should strengthen the implementation of and compliance with the regulations governing this sector. This is particularly regarding transhumance, the movement of livestock and grazing areas. They need to communicate these regulations and raise awareness among all stakeholders.
- Ivorian authorities and livestock organisations should strengthen the mechanisms to control the origin and traceability of livestock on local markets and during their transport from the country’s north to other cities, especially Abidjan; or to create new systems.

Illegal gold mining

- Ivorian authorities should continue efforts to regulate the artisanal gold mining sector in order to increase the share of this activity carried out under legal conditions. To do this, the costs (financial and administrative) of obtaining operating permits should be reduced, in particular by creating a dedicated centre. The process of revising the Mining Code to better consider the concerns of local populations regarding their access and the exercise of artisanal gold mining under legal conditions should be accelerated.
Introduction

Since at least 2016, Côte d’Ivoire has faced threats from violent extremist groups operating in the Sahel, and more broadly, West Africa. Four years after the Grand-Bassam attack on 13 March 2016, the country was again targeted on 12 June 2020 with an assault on the mixed army-gendarmerie post in Kafolo, on the border with Burkina Faso.

In 2020 and 2021, extremist groups exerted strong pressure in the north-east of the country. There has been relative calm since the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022. However, it seems premature to say that Côte d’Ivoire has succeeded in definitively stopping the progress of the threat.

The current lull, however, makes it possible to retrospectively analyse the years during which the country and some of its border communities had specific experience of this threat. It also provides an opportunity to learn lessons for the future. Finally, this clarification allows us to examine the role that certain illicit activities have played in the expansion strategy of violent extremist groups. In particular, to serve their efforts to mobilise human, operational and logistical resources and to generate financial resources.

Methodology

The research aims to generate qualitative empirical data on the links between violent extremism and illicit activities in the northern regions of Côte d’Ivoire, bordering Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali. This involves highlighting the attitude of extremist groups regarding certain illicit activities, and analysing where these activities take place in their strategies for setting up and mobilising human, operational, logistical and financial resources.

Violent extremism is addressed through the lens of individuals associating with the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims or Jama’at nusrat al-islâm wal-muslimîn (GSIM or JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel). These two armed groups have been fuelling insecurity in the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) for little over a decade and have committed acts qualified as terrorism. They are distinguished by their rhetoric imbued with references to Islam.

Although disputed, the term ‘jihadist’ was used by most of those we met within the scope of this research in naming the people responsible for the insecurity in the north of Côte d’Ivoire. This term is also what groups have used for themselves during reported interactions with the populations. Its use in this report is therefore explained by the fact that it is the expression most often used by the people we met, and by the groups themselves. The term ‘terrorist’ is also used by the interviewees for this research.

None of the attacks recorded in north-eastern Côte d’Ivoire have been claimed by extremist groups operating in the region. However, they are attributed to a group linked to Katiba Macina, a component of GSIM. This group has gradually established itself along the border between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, in the border towns of the Burkinabé administrative regions of Cascades and Sud-Ouest. It has been called ‘Katiba Alidougou’, from the name of the border locality in Burkina Faso located in the administrative region of Sud-Ouest and considered as its original base. It is also identified by the name of the person who is presented as its leader, Sidibé Abdramani, alias Hamza. In fact, this group is made up of several sub-groups operating along the Ivorian-Burkinabé border based on geographical distribution.
In addition to the armed elements, many individuals have associated themselves, whether consciously, voluntarily or under duress, with the actions of these groups. These associates were, in particular, ‘business partners’, informants, couriers or ‘brokers’ or recruiters. Most people who found themselves associated with the groups were men. The presence of children aged 14 to 18 in camps or among the ranks of extremist groups has also been noted.

Stories collected in Tchologo indicate the presence or association of women with these groups. An interviewee who was involved in medicine trafficking and who collaborated with the jihadists when carrying out his activities in the border area mentioned the presence of women in the groups. A female interviewee who had been approached for recruitment purposes reported attempts by the groups, relying on women collaborating with them, to recruit other women with proposals for funding business activities, particularly in the catering services. The role of cook played by women on behalf of the groups has come up in a few accounts. While this has already been documented elsewhere, it hasn’t been possible to cross-check and substantiate them further in the context of this research.

The jihadist threat, as it has manifested and developed, has also taken on a community dimension. Stories of those who have collaborated with the extremists, met them or been in contact with them reveal the presence of numerous people belonging to the Fulani community, or at least of Fulani appearance, and speaking the Fulani language (fulfuldé). One person who collaborated with these groups in the Tchologo Region, himself belonging to the Fulani community, said, ‘The majority [of the group members] speak the Fulani of Dori,’ a city in northeastern Burkina Faso, in the Sahel region. Dioula and Moore are also cited as languages spoken by the group members.

These elements provide indications of the origin and identity of the group members and of the people who associate with them. This reality has fuelled and reinforced the perception of an external threat of foreign origin. The data collected, however, reveals the association of individuals belonging to other communities, in particular the Lobis and the Mossis, especially for the supply of provisions to the groups. This illustrates the ability of groups to recruit or collaborate with people from other communities.

Regarding illicit activities, the study focused on those which, following the review of the literature and the work on the methodology design carried out by the research team, were considered prevalent and well established in the research area. This choice was also guided by the illicit activities where proven or possible links were revealed through previous research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in the Liptako-Gourma region. These include trafficking in arms and ammunition, drugs, medicines and phytosanitary products, illegal artisanal gold mining and cattle rustling.

Extremist groups have shown their ability to recruit and collaborate with people from different communities.

The research was undertaken to document the organisation of these activities, in particular the actors involved and their roles (including those of women), the relationships they have with each other, their operating methods, the trafficking routes used for each product, the financial flows and links between these activities and violent extremism.

The study was designed and implemented by a team of 10 people, including two women. After an in-depth literature review, data collection in northern Côte d’Ivoire was conducted in two phases: from October to November 2021, and between January and April 2022. Open-ended semi-structured individual interviews – based on modular interview guides – were conducted with 272 males (79%) and females (21%) from the five defined categories (see Chart 2). Nearly half of the people interviewed belong to categories 1 and 2.

The research covered the regions of Bagoué, Bounkani and Tchologo. The choice of these areas and localities visited was guided by certain criteria. These included geographical proximity to countries facing insecurity fuelled by extremists, the recorded or reported existence of incidents or incursions attributed to extremists, their
Chart 1: Steps in implementing the research

- **23 – 25 November 2020**: Regional methodological workshop (Dakar)
- **27 – 28 September 2021**: Methodological workshop with the research team (Ferkessédougou)
- **October – November 2021**: First phase of data collection in the border areas
- **January – April 2022**: Second phase of data collection in the border areas
- **22 – 23 November 2022**: National workshop to validate preliminary results (Abidjan)

Chart 2: Categories of male and female interlocutors

1. Individuals associated with or involved in violent extremism and/or illicit activities
2. Individuals who have been associated with or involved in violent extremism and/or illicit activities
3. Individuals who know someone who is or has been associated with or involved in violent extremism and/or illicit activities
4. Individuals who, through their socio-professional activities, have access to information or have knowledge of the dynamics studied
5. Individuals involved in the development and implementation of responses to prevent and counter violent extremism and/or illicit activities
Chart 3: Profiles of the interlocutors

Chart 4: Areas covered by the research

* Yamoussoukro
suspected or proven presence, and the existence of illicit activities or trafficking routes.

Since the methodological choice was to collect qualitative empirical data, particular attention was paid to the accounts of actors with direct experience of the dynamics studied. Due to the sensitivity of these issues and the context in which the research was conducted, the main challenge was identifying who we could speak to. This task and the collection of onsite data were carried out by members of the research team originating from the regions concerned, living in these regions and having the necessary contacts.

During data collection, the team was confronted by mistrust and reluctance by some interlocutors – in particular those involved in illegal gold mining (Bagoué) or drug and medicine trafficking (Bounkani and Tchologo) – to provide certain details. This included in particular the circuits and routes taken and the origin of certain products. Access to gold mining sites (especially in Bagoué) represented an additional challenge. In order to circumvent this, one of the strategies was to be accompanied and introduced by locals. In some cases, the workers were approached not at the sites, but at their places of residence.

The Kafolo attack in June 2020 opened a new streak of threats, with a concentration in the north-east

All interviews were individual and the stories were collected confidentially and anonymously. In order to preserve these dimensions, the choice was made not to mention where the interlocutors lived. This report only presents and analyses the dynamics that have been cross-checked. Facts not based on cross-checked data, but which seem pertinent to highlight, are mentioned using the appropriate language precautions. Accounts by both male and female interlocutors have been inserted into the report in order to illustrate some of the dynamics documented.

The data collected provides information on the realities at work in the research area between at least 2019 and the beginning of 2022. They provide elements of understanding on the strategies deployed by extremist groups to establish themselves, on their operating methods, and on the vulnerabilities and weaknesses they have taken advantage of. These realities depend to a large extent on the context, particularly the security context. However, this has undergone changes in the research area since the end of the data collection. It is therefore likely that certain dynamics have changed.

It has not always been possible to collect conclusive data on activities that have their origins or their extension outside the research area, particularly in areas not covered, in other regions of Côte d’Ivoire or even in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali.

Northern Côte d’Ivoire: a region facing violent extremism

Long before the Grand-Bassam attack in 2016, the regional context, marked by the security crisis in Mali, already represented a threat and a source of concern for Côte d’Ivoire. The attempted establishment of a group linked to Ansar Dine (Ansar Dine sud, or katiba Khalil Ibn Walid) in the Sikasso Region, specifically in the Misséni and Fakola communes bordering Côte d’Ivoire, saw camps being dismantled in August 2015.

Rumours or reports of attacks or foiled plans for attacks targeting Côte d’Ivoire – particularly the economic capital, Abidjan – have also circulated over the past seven years. This phenomenon shows the persistence, albeit diffuse, of the threat. The attack in June 2020 on the mixed army-gendarmerie post in Kafolo in the border region of Burkina Faso opened a new sequence marked by a threat concentrated along the northern borders, particularly the north-east border with Burkina Faso.

Three main phases characterise this new sequence. The first, dating back to 2019 at the latest, was distinguished by the reported presence, in northern Côte d’Ivoire, of armed individuals suspected of belonging to violent extremist groups, or of people associated with them. They were encountered in the bush, in the forests (especially in the Comoé National Park – PNC), on the banks of the Comoé River or when passing through Ivorian villages located along the border with Burkina Faso. This presence could suggest a phase during which people linked to extremist groups would have made exploratory incursions into Ivorian territory to explore the area.
The second phase, covering 2020–2021, began with the attack on Kafolo in June 2020. It was during this period, specifically between March 2021 and the end of the year, that the activism and threat posed by the extremist groups in the north of the country were most evident, both in Bounkani and Tchologo. This was marked by a series of attacks that mainly targeted the defence and security forces (SDF) positions and convoys (gendarmerie, army and customs posts), including the use of improvised explosive devices. Interviewees also reported frequent incursions into Ivorian territory, from Burkina Faso, and the movement of armed individuals belonging to extremist groups in the border villages of Bounkani and Tchologo as well as in the PNC. This contact with the populations often gave rise to preaching, threats and intimidation by the jihadists. Some of these encounters resulted in abductions followed by detentions.

During this phase, extremist groups maintained a sporadic or ad hoc presence in Ivorian territory. Makeshift camps were established in the PNC or in forests around the villages of Bounkani and Tchologo, or along the border with Burkina Faso. These camps, and the men they were sheltering or who were using them, were supplied – often daily – with food and other consumer goods (especially fuel, cigarettes and medicine) by people from the surrounding villages, recruited and remunerated for this purpose.

The third phase, which runs from the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022 until the third quarter of 2023, is characterised by an apparent calm. No significant attacks were noted until the end of July 2023. The incursions, movements or presence of extremist groups seem to have drastically reduced to the point of appearing non-existent. This lull also became apparent in the perceptions expressed by people we met while conducting this research. The fear that prevailed at the height of the groups’ activism has diminished significantly, although some apprehension remains.

The north of Côte d'Ivoire, however, continues to suffer the repercussions of the insecurity caused by extremist activities.
groups, particularly because of their withdrawal into the border areas of Burkina Faso.

Between the end of 2021 and 8 August 2023, nearly 32 000 ‘refugees’ coming mainly from these areas were recorded in northern Côte d’Ivoire. Nearly 53% of them come from the Mangodara Department (Comoé Province, Cascades Region). They fled because of threats, intimidation and attacks attributed to extremist groups. The presence of these ‘refugees’ raises the concern of the Ivorian authorities about the risk of infiltration of people linked to these groups and conflict situations resulting from the livestock they take with them.

A resurgence of insecurity in the north-east cannot be ruled out. Similarly, the dynamics noted in this part of the country don’t exclude the possible emergence of other outbreaks in other border areas (especially with Mali or Ghana).

**Links between violent extremism and illicit activities**

The research has highlighted the efforts made by violent extremist groups to associate themselves with certain socio-economic activities in northern Côte d’Ivoire, particularly in the border strip between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso and, to a lesser extent, Ghana. These efforts have occupied a central place in the groups’ implantation strategy. They were aimed mainly at generating financial resources, mobilising human resources and securing livelihoods.

The data collected shows that two sectors of activity in particular have caught the attention of violent extremist groups: cattle theft, more broadly the livestock economy, and illegal gold mining.

**Links between violent extremism and the livestock economy**

Cattle breeding, after agriculture and before mining and trade, represents one of the main socio-economic activities practised along the border strip between Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali. The data collected through the research highlights the system that violent extremist groups have set up around the livestock economy (specifically the theft, breeding and commercialisation of cattle). This strategy aims to generate and invest financial resources, secure livelihoods and mobilise human resources through the establishment of a network of ‘business partners’, informants, recruiters and couriers.

Cattle breeding is practised in the north of Côte d’Ivoire by local economic actors who entrust the cattle to herders. In the north of the country, the herds are also fed seasonally – particularly during the dry season – by transhumance from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Due to the scarcity of pastures in their country of origin, Burkinabe herders have been settling in the north of Côte d’Ivoire with their cattle for many years.

Since the end of 2021/start of 2022 there has been an apparent lull in attacks in the north of the country.

Recent settlement by breeders from Burkina Faso have also been mentioned over the past three years.

Cattle breeding in northern Côte d’Ivoire has a number of vulnerabilities. The herders who look after the cattle and are in charge of transporting them to water and pasture points or to points of sale face many dangers living in the bush. They are generally alone. Livestock breeders, owners and traders are also dependent on the security of where their livestock graze. In addition, non-compliance with regulatory provisions that organise the sector make it a vulnerable activity in the current security context. This means for example that cattle – stolen or not – end up in Côte d’Ivoire or Burkina Faso to be introduced into commercial channels.

Cattle breeding sometimes causes conflicts – especially with farmers – around movement or access to pasture and water points. It also leads to one of the most common forms of crime in rural or peri-urban areas, namely cattle theft.

Cattle theft is not a new practice in the research area. The phenomenon has specifically been reported in Bounkani and Tchologo. In Bagoué, and more specifically in the Tengréla Department, it seems to be quite undeveloped outside of the town of Tengréla.

Cattle theft is traditionally based on a chain of complicity between herdsmen, breeders, groups of cattle thieves, butchers, and livestock traders.
Unsupervised herds are particularly targeted. Cattle thieves sometimes also benefit from the complicity of herdsmen who provide them with a few heads from the herds in their care in exchange for money. Depending on the number of heads of cattle and the proximity to the border, thieves can resell the cattle to local butchers or traders, or sell them across the border. Local butchers slaughter the stolen cow, butcher it and sell the meat. The traders sell the stolen cattle at the local markets or load the animals into convoys that transport them to Abidjan, specifically to Port-Bouët, where the main slaughterhouse of the economic capital is located.

Some of the cattle stolen in Bounkani and Tchologo are transported on foot to Burkina Faso or Ghana. Burkina Faso also appears to be a place of transit for these cattle, which are then driven on foot or loaded into trucks in the direction of Ghana. The movement of stolen cattle also takes place horizontally, for example between Tchologo and Worodougou, or between Tchologo and Bounkani.

Côte d’Ivoire is also a destination for livestock stolen from Burkina Faso. These livestock enter through the north of the country, transported on foot by groups of thieves or herdsmen. They are then entrusted or passed over to other groups of thieves, breeders or traders to be sold locally or transported to Abidjan.

The jihadist presence on the northern border area has introduced a new dynamic to the livestock economy.

As early as 2019, indications emerged suggesting the involvement of individuals suspected of being linked to extremist groups operating in the Sahel in the sale of livestock between northern Côte d’Ivoire and the Port-Bouët abattoir in Abidjan.
The presence of jihadists in the border areas of Burkina Faso, with associates and accomplices on Ivorian soil, has initiated a new dynamic in the livestock economy. Originally a simple form of banditry, livestock theft has transformed – in its scale, its modus operandi and its aims – into an illicit cross-border economy.

This activity has intensified in the north of Côte d’Ivoire, more specifically in the regions of Bounkani (Bouna, Doropo, Téhini) and Tchologo. While single cattle were stolen in the past, from 2019 and at the height of the insecurity in 2020 and 2021, thefts became more systematic, more frequent and more substantial.

Violent extremist groups such as ‘arsonist firefighters’, faced with the insecurity they themselves contributed to generating, posed as protectors in the Bounkani and Tchologo areas where they operated or exercised influence. More specifically, along the border with Burkina Faso. Many livestock stakeholders have integrated this reality and have chosen to deal with these individuals in order to continue to exercise their activity. Those who were unwilling to collaborate with the groups had no choice but to leave the areas concerned, or face threats to their lives or livelihoods, being intimidated or kidnapped, or their cattle being stolen.

The prospect of losing their livestock has been the main instrument of pressure and blackmail used by groups to contact herders and cattle owners and coerce them into collaborating with them. Numerous cases of cattle rustling following this strategy have been reported.

Story 1: ‘[The jihadists] have invaded our forests. The area was emptied of safe people. Those who remain are mostly in contact with these armed men, otherwise they cannot live peacefully with their oxen. Today, any breeder who has a lot of animals and wants to live in peace in this part of the country has to deal with them. Some herdsmen go to Dabakala and Tafiré to escape their control.’

Breeder, Tchologo, 28 October 2021

Story 2: ‘I started having problems with groups of ox thieves in 2019. One day in February 2020, I lost some of my oxen. I searched in vain. While looking for them, I came across a group of people at the Burkina border. From our exchanges, I understood that this was an organised group. They told me that the animals often crossed the border with herdsmen and that they could help me to find them in exchange for payment. I showed them the mark on the animals. They gave me an appointment.

‘When I came to the meeting, they simply asked me to collaborate with them to fight against the “Kafri” if I wanted to find my oxen and live peacefully in the area with my animals. They told me that I mustn’t refuse it if I was a real son of Fulani.

‘In addition, my animals were protected in the area, both in Burkina and in Côte d’Ivoire. I also understood that the people I was dealing with were the ones who had stolen my cattle or who protected the thieves. In order not to lose my herd, I went to these jihadists. I agreed to be under their protection. I had to, if I wanted my cattle to be returned to me. It was also for the good of my whole family that I collaborated. In this area, they are masters. Their leader that I saw is Fulani. He commands a group of herdsmen who completely control the area on this side.’

Livestock breeder and trader, Tchologo, 15 April 2022

Herdsmen have been at the heart of the livestock theft, looking after them and transporting them on both sides of the border. They have also played a role in the efforts to bring livestock breeders, owners and traders into the fold of the violent extremist groups. They were responsible for sending them the offer of collaboration with the extremists, by indicating the roles they would be called on to play, particularly in the livestock trade, and the benefits they would derive from it.
Livestock breeders, owners and traders have also played a role in guarding and raising the cattle of the jihadists. In addition to this contribution, these actors have benefitted from capital contributions from the jihadists to trade in cattle.

One interviewee who took part in this type of activity in Tchologo said he received several tens of million FCFA from the groups, for the purchase of oxen, in order to organise convoys to Abidjan.

The stories collected from several of the people who had worked with the jihadists, collaborated with them or been approached by their intermediaries indicated that these groups were never short of financial resources. They seemed constantly on the lookout for “investment” opportunities. They were willing to finance various traders and economic operators and to pay those who were willing to do them a favour.

Livestock breeders, owners and traders have also played a role in guarding and raising the cattle of the jihadists. In addition to this contribution, these actors have benefitted from capital contributions from the jihadists to trade in cattle.

Story 3: ‘I had a herd of more than 80 head of cattle. It was guarded by a Fulani herdsman who spent more than seven years with me. In November 2020, he told me that he had to leave with his children and his wife to stay with her sick mother for a while. A Mossi friend told me he suspected him of collaborating with the jihadists. “I was confused, because I didn’t know how to protect my oxen without frustrating him. While I was looking for a solution to save my animals, the herdsman said to me one morning: “Boss, you have a good breed of cattle that is very sought after. With so many thefts in the area, I advise you to trust the jihadists to prevent them from being stolen. They will give you enough means to expand your business; they will protect and increase the number of your animals.”

“I told him that I would think about it and give him my answer the next day. The next morning was Thursday 26 November 2020. I went to the park at 7:00 a.m. To my great surprise, I found neither the herdsman nor the oxen. I immediately called on a few of the parents to help me find my animals. We informed the gendarmerie.

“After two days of searching, I received a call from the herdsman. He told me that he had been kidnapped with the oxen by the jihadists, and that he did not know where he and the animals were, but that he was outside of Côte d’Ivoire on Burkinabe territory. He added that the jihadists who were holding him were demanding the sum of 10 million FCFA to free him and the animals. My friends advised me to let it go, because he had certainly been collaborating with these criminals for a long time. A few months later, I learnt that he was one of the jihadists and that he had a weapon.’

Planter and cattle owner, Bounkani, 14 January 2022

Story 4: ‘In February 2021, a breeder came to my home with his two herdsmen and two herds of oxen. He told me he was fleeing the drought in Burkina. He wanted a place to settle down. He spent nearly a week with me. To my surprise, the SDF came to my house very early one morning.

“The agents arrested both myself and the breeder I was hosting. We spent three days in prison in Doropo and 21 days together in prison in Bouna. It was then that I knew that I had hosted a terrorist without realising it.

“His man had oxen that the terrorists had stolen in northern Burkina. He wanted to settle down to create a base for himself. In that way, he could bring together the oxen stolen by the terrorists in neighbouring countries. He was going to be a great financial support for them and he was also going to recruit young people. He had enough money and said he was going to open a big shop when he was settled down.’

Breeder, Bounkani, 16 January 2022
This contribution could be likened to a type of zakat, a practice that can generally be seen in areas where the jihadists operate, and which is seen as an element of the ‘governance’ that they put in place. It’s generally introduced in areas considered to be under the control of extremist groups, or at least under their influence. For them it’s another source of money and heads of cattle.

When it comes to the logic that has guided the actors involved in the livestock economy association with the jihadists, in addition to the benefits of protection and financial gain, intermediaries sometimes use community ties to convince fellow community members to associate and collaborate with the jihadists. Many of the intermediaries are part of the Fulani community.

The people we met within the scope of the research who were associated in various capacities with the system set up by violent extremist groups said they had ended their collaboration. Some of the associates have been arrested over the past three years and are probably still being detained. Others were detained and then released.

Some people decided to move away from the border strip, particularly from the villages and isolated areas where the groups were operating, to settle in urban centres. Still others have left, or plan to leave, the north of the country to settle in other regions further south. Many herdsmen have decided to move towards Burkina Faso or Ghana.

It has not been possible to determine whether the groups still have associates or accomplices in Côte d’Ivoire, and if so, whether they continue to play a role, have been put on hold, or have adopted a low profile. None of these scenarios can be ruled out.

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**Story 5:** ‘As I know the sector well, people trust me to sell their cattle. I met a brother who made me an offer from the jihadists. He asked me to do the same for them: sell their cattle. I hesitated. But as we know each other, and in the area where I am, we meet armed men every day who do nothing to us. I finally agreed to work for them, also for my own safety and that of my family. I took their money and continued to buy and sell cattle for them as well.

‘They could give me 50 000 000 FCFA per convoy and I could make two convoys per month. I could sometimes load a truck alone, but I preferred to do it with other people.

‘The person who gave me the money came from Burkina, more specifically from an area on the border. Sometimes it was another Fulani brother living here in Côte d’Ivoire who gave me the money. Once the sale was made, another person would call me to collect the money. The cattle were sold at Port-Bouët.’

*Livestock owner and trader, Tchologo, 8 November 2021*

**Story 6:** ‘At the beginning of September 2021, I met an old friend who wanted to entrust me with 32 cattle that he had stolen in Burkina. He presented me with some money and told me that he was one of the jihadists. He told me that he would like to work with me. That we could make more money, we wouldn’t have any weapons, but I was going to be in charge of recruiting young volunteers and sourcing food for the group.

‘I was really scared, but I couldn’t say no to him. I told him it was a good deal and asked him to give me some time to think it over. I couldn’t sleep anymore, because I didn’t know what to do. If I had to flee with my family and their money. A few days later, I learnt that he had been killed in a clash between Burkinabe soldiers and jihadists.’

*Trader and former cattle rustler, Bounkani, 12 January 2022*

**Story 7:** ‘To receive protection from the jihadists, I had to give two oxen per park and per year. I did this from 2020 to 2022. I also recruited four cattle owners in the area, who agreed to work with them to protect their cattle. Those who do not want to pay in kind (cattle) pay 500 000 FCFA each year. Their cattle will never get lost, and no one will disturb them.’

*Livestock trader, Tchologo, 15 April 2022*
Beyond the legislative and regulatory mechanisms governing livestock breeding, transhumance and trade, cattle theft doesn’t seem to have received any particular attention from the public authorities. The security context that has prevailed since 2020, specifically the indications of jihadist involvement in the theft and commercialisation of cattle, has made it a subject of concern for the Ivorian authorities, particularly in Bounkani.

During this period, this situation led to the introduction of a series of measures. A livestock convoy control system has been put in place and a witness function has been established for the markets in order to ensure the origin of the animals and improve their traceability. Breeder umbrella organisations have been created to better organise the actors involved in livestock farming.

The effectiveness of these measures in the face of cattle theft and its introduction into commercialisation channels – at a local level and beyond – remains to be seen.

Based on the accounts of the people we met, there would be nearly 30 sites around the towns and villages covered by the research in the regions of Bagoué, Bounkani and Tchologo. This is without counting the PNC, which could house numerous sites.

As in other contexts, artisanal gold mining and the activities around the sites attract many people, including nationals from several countries in the region. On the Bagoué sites, the interviewees particularly noted the presence of Burkinabe, Ghanaian, Guinean, Malian and Nigerian nationals. Individuals presented as Chinese nationals were reported in connection with gold prospecting. Even if there is a significant presence of Malian nationals noted, because of the proximity of Mali, artisanal gold mining is practised particularly by the Burkinabe.

In Bounkani and Tchologo, Burkinabe nationals are the highest in number, not only because of the proximity of their country, but also due to their proven and sought-after know-how in artisanal gold mining. The influx of Burkinabe artisanal gold miners has also impacted the number of people involved in illegal gold mining in the region.

In this context, the Ivorian authorities, in collaboration with organisations representing the interests of actors in the livestock industry, should strengthen the implementation of and compliance with the regulations governing this sector in Côte d’Ivoire. This is particularly regarding transhumance, the movement of livestock and grazing areas. They should communicate these regulations and raise awareness among all stakeholders.

They should also strengthen the mechanisms for controlling the origin and traceability of livestock in local markets and when transporting cattle from the north of the country to other national cities, especially Abidjan. The measures taken should be systematised and extended to all regions in the country’s north, as well as to the entire livestock supply and commercialisation chain, in order to ensure better traceability.

Finally, the Ivorian authorities should explore ways to respond to the challenges related to managing cross-border transhumance and the phenomenon of cattle theft in close coordination with neighbouring countries, especially Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali.
citizens could also be explained by traditional economic migration, and the fact that it’s hard to carry out these activities in Burkina Faso because of insecurity fuelled by jihadist groups and local conflicts. \(^7^0\)

Indigenous populations are increasingly involved in the artisanal gold mining chain in the research area, attracted by the prospects of enrichment. Women occupy an important place in this activity. They are mainly responsible for washing gravel and earth in order to extract the ore. They are also often involved in commercial activities on the extraction sites, selling food, drinks, clothing, medicine and drugs, etc.

Box 2: Intensifying control of the Comoé National Park

The Comoé National Park (PNC) is presented as ‘one of the largest protected areas in West Africa.’ \(^7^1\) With an area of 1 149 150 hectares, \(^7^2\) monitoring it is a challenge. During the decade of politico-military crisis that Côte d’Ivoire went through following the 2002 rebellion, the movements that controlled and administered the north of the country more or less actively allowed the settlement of socio-economic groups such as illegal ranchers and gold diggers. The integrity of the PNC was constantly violated during these years.

Despite the end of the politico-military crisis, the years that followed did not allow for total or permanent control to be restored. The consequences of the dynamics initiated during the rebellion have persisted. Thus, the park regularly records livestock entering the park, which is illegal.

It’s also remained vulnerable through the benefits that the illegal gold diggers get from the complicity of agents of the Ivorian Parks and Reserves Office (OIPR), the structure in charge of managing and protecting the PNC. \(^7^3\)

The lack of human and material resources (transport, communication and surveillance) available to OIPR agents remains a challenge for the park’s security and for the conservation of the plants and animals it houses. The integrity of the PNC continues to be undermined, both at the centre and in the surrounding areas, by multiple human intrusions and activities. These include poaching, illegal gold mining, agriculture, cattle breeding and grazing of domestic animals, etc.

The efforts made \(^7^4\) to ensure this integrity have focused in particular on strengthening surveillance.

External support has been provided in this regard, as well as in the fight against illegal gold mining. \(^7^5\)

A PNC biodiversity protection project, funded by Germany’s KfW Development Bank until 2025, aims mainly to rehabilitate or set up the infrastructure necessary for the management programmes in the park, to deploy a radio communication network and to provide air support for the management of the Comoé area. \(^7^6\)

While the PNC remained under fragmented or even non-existent control for several months, particularly in 2021, since 2022 there’s been a gradual takeover by the OIPR, with the help of a military detachment. In addition, a new strategy for managing and securing the park \(^7^7\) was announced in March 2022. It was inspired by the management experience of the Pendjari National Park in Benin, which also faces the threat of jihadist groups.

It’s planned that management of the PNC will be entrusted to African Parks Network. A six-month pilot phase must be implemented before drawing lessons for the future. This implementation has not yet started. Efforts to strengthen the means – human, material and logistical – of the surveillance and control of the PNC should be stepped up in order to preserve its integrity and ensure that it doesn’t become the scene of activities such as gold mining.

Whatever management method is adopted in the park, the Ivorian authorities and their technical partners will have to take care to reconcile the security and conservation requirements with the needs and concerns of the communities living around the PNC. To do this, permanent consultation with these communities will need to be maintained.
Children take part in the operation as well, usually at the sites on weekends, particularly to wash the gravel. Others have dropped out of school to do this full time.

In Bagoué, illegal gold mining is practised on sites that are generally well established and organised, often converted former cashew fields, located near localities and villages. The same type of artisanal mining sites can be found in Bounkani and Tchologo, where gold mining is also practised in the PNC and on the Comoé River. Mining for gold on land – including in the PNC – involves heavy digging and washing of the earth. On the Comoé River, mining is mainly carried out by dredging and sand washing.

The data collected confirms the extremists’ interest in illegal artisanal gold mining in the north of the country. Many actors involved in this activity have reported the presence of jihadists in Bounkani and Tchologo, more specifically, inside the PNC and on the banks of the Comoé River. Rare intrusions on sites located near the border localities of Bounkani have also been reported.

Violent extremist groups have played a role as financiers in artisanal gold mining operations

According to the accounts of interviewees active on these latest sites, it seems that the jihadists who were operating in these areas adopted a discreet and cautious approach. Beyond the traditional warnings against denouncing their presence, they did not attack the miners and sometimes offered to secure the sites to avoid their dismantling by the SDF. This approach could be due to wanting to not attract too much attention, or frightening the artisanal gold miners, or clashing too directly with the internal organisation of these sites. Interviewees expressed suspicion regarding the fact that the jihadists had also infiltrated sites through individuals acting as informants or recruiters.

The climate of fear caused by the presence and actions of extremist groups has reduced visits to the sites, both by gold miners and by traders who used to operate there (restaurant owners, drug sellers, mechanics, etc.), and has led to a slowing of the activity. Many artisanal gold miners who once operated in the PNC have either stopped going there or stay on the outskirts. This was especially the case at the height of the presence of the extremists, from the last half of 2020 until the beginning of 2022.

Data collected shows that the groups were involved in the search for gold during this period, particularly in the PNC. Gold miners reported having encountered jihadists there, with ore-detection devices. People abducted and detained by the jihadists, also inside the PNC, also reported that the latter were in possession of gold detection equipment.

Story 8: ‘Currently, we are afraid to go and look for gold in the park, because the jihadists are there. Three days before the month of the last Ramadan [April 2021], my team and I found them searching for gold in the park. They didn’t say anything to us because they know that we can’t report them since we’re all thieves, but I was very scared. Since that day, some members of my team have decided to go to a gold site. We continue to go into the park, but we don’t go any further. Several people have seen them in the park, but no one dares to inform the authorities.’

Gold panner, Bounkani, 7 November 2021

Many accounts illustrate how the violent extremist groups have interfered in artisanal gold mining. This has been highlighted through a number of roles played by these groups or their associates.

Gold miners and traders, having continued to frequent sites along the banks of the Comoé River, despite the presence of violent extremist groups in the area, spoke of assurances given by their ‘bosses’ that nothing would happen to them. These assurances suggest the existence of agreements between the ‘bosses’ and the jihadists, which would allow the continuation of gold mining.
Information about the embezzlement or confiscation of gold by the jihadists from gold miners inside the PNC, reported by gold miners interviewed in Bounkani, shed another light on their relationship to artisanal gold mining. This modus operandi has not been reported at any other gold mining location covered in the research.

There could be several explanations as to how and why this happens. Confiscating gold could be a means used by the jihadists to obtain the ore. It could also be seen as a type of banditry carried out against isolated miners by individuals linked to the violent extremist groups.

The preferred hypothesis though is that it is an act of intimidation in order to discourage gold mining in the PNC by miners who do not operate ‘under the control’ of the groups or with their authorisation.

These dynamics illustrate the approach, similar to that previously described for the livestock economy, that violent extremist groups have used to interfere in gold mining, whether in the park or on the Comoé River. Their method was based on an offer of protection or, at the very least, permission to continue mining activities. In some cases, the groups have used coercion.

The data collected indicates that the groups have taken on the role of financiers in certain mining operations. Interviewees report offers of monetary support in connection with gold mining activities, made by intermediaries suspected of acting on behalf of jihadist groups. The funding provided by the groups formed the basis of the commercial relations established with certain ‘bosses’ and other actors in the illegal artisanal gold mining sector.

Teams of gold miners were also financed and maintained in the same manner. In return for the funds granted, the extremist groups receive income from the sale of the extracted gold or acquire it, at a reduced price, in order to market it.

Although this has not been explicitly demonstrated in Côte d’Ivoire, the involvement of groups in the commercialisation of gold extracted as a result of these arrangements seems likely. Financial transactions are carried out through intermediaries acting on behalf of the groups.
Recruitment attempts at the sites, again through intermediaries, have been mentioned. However, these were not large-scale or overt actions carried out by the groups.

The miners have shown a certain reluctance to give in to these advances from the jihadists. For many young people, despite the precariousness in which they live, illegal gold mining represents a factor of resilience to violent extremism. As mentioned, the presence of jihadists on and around the sites prevented people from going there, and led to a slowdown in activity. The organised and structured nature of artisanal gold mining at most sites has increased the resilience to jihadists’ attempts to take over or infiltrate. All the actors found on these sites are known; their roles and responsibilities are well defined and accepted by all.

This reality has made these sites less vulnerable to jihadist involvement or intrusion than in the PNC or on the Comoé River. On the other hand, according to actors involved in gold mining, some sites would also have been used by jihadists as places to supply food and other consumer goods.

The involvement of the jihadists in illegal artisanal gold mining in southern Burkina Faso, on the border with Côte d’Ivoire, is similar to how they operate in Côte d’Ivoire. This is according to Burkinabe gold miners who collaborated with these groups, but who ended up settling on the Ivorian side to continue their activity.

In this part of Burkina Faso, commercial partnerships have been established between the jihadists and the illegal gold miners. The groups were acting as financiers. They provided detection devices and operating equipment to young people. The gains from the operations were then shared. The groups were also involved in the commercialisation of the mined gold through gold buyers linked to them. Ultimately, this is a gold mining and commercialisation system that has been set up and maintained by the groups. These groups generally act through intermediaries.

**Conclusion**

Côte d’Ivoire’s north-east has served as a centre of operations and a zone of refuge, establishment, funding, recruitment and supply (mainly of food and other consumer goods) for extremist groups, especially between 2019 and 2022. The security situation in this region is closely linked to that in southern Burkina Faso and Mali, and in northern Ghana. Côte d’Ivoire’s ability to sustainably preserve security and social cohesion among communities living in the northern border areas, and ensure their wellbeing, will depend on four main interconnected factors.

First, the capacity of Burkinabe and Malian authorities to deal effectively with the security challenges in their
border areas, particularly by preventing violent extremist groups from establishing themselves and thriving there, is fundamental. Second, the situation will depend on the effectiveness of the measures adopted by the Ivorian authorities to strengthen security and reduce vulnerabilities and other risk factors (social, economic, cultural, security, political, etc.).

Third, given the cross-border nature of the threat posed by violent extremism and the documented dynamics related to the livestock industry and illegal artisanal gold mining, cooperation between Côte d’Ivoire and its neighbours (Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali) is essential. This cooperation should focus on military and security aspects, and the governance of common border areas.

Box 3: Defining effective and sustainable measures to regulate artisanal gold mining

The Ivorian authorities have been fighting against illegal artisanal gold mining since 2013. Repression of this mining and those involved in it represents one of the major axes of this fight. Between 2015 and 2018, the National Gendarmerie, in collaboration with the Ministry of Mines, was at the forefront.

Subsequently, it was joined by the Brigade for the Repression of Infractions of the Mining Code – a unit created within the Ministry of Mines in October 2018.

A new actor, placed under the supervision of the National Security Council, appeared in June 2021. This is the Special Group for the fight against illegal artisanal gold mining, made up of elements from the National Gendarmerie and Water and Forestry agents, and agents from the Ministry of Mines.

These different units carried out site dismantling operations, which led to the arrest of individuals and the seizure and destruction of mining equipment and extracted ore.

Besides the number of sites dismantled and people arrested, the recolonisation of sites visited by the SDF shows the limits of this approach. These limits are accentuated by the operational capacities (material, logistical and human) of the SDF that were deemed insufficient – despite the means made available to them – to cope with the magnitude of the problem.

Efforts to formalise illegal artisanal gold mining have been undertaken as part of the National Artisanal Gold Mining Rationalisation Programme (2014–2016). In addition to ongoing repression, this programme included a training and supervisory component for the sector. Field schools were set up to train mining artisans.

These efforts have not been able to slow down the progression of the issue. This is probably because the main target of the dismantling is the small guy working at illegal artisanal gold mining sites. Notable local figures and financial and often political interests who provide their support, participate in the system, and derive economic benefits from it, are largely ignored.

Efforts to formalise and supervise illegal artisanal gold mining raise questions about the capacity and possibility of ensuring the socio-professional integration of the thousands of young people who make a living from it. Failing that, they need alternative income sources. In order to offer appropriate alternatives, it’s important to consider the variety of actors (supervisors, diggers, washers, etc.), and all the other commercial activities (both legal and illegal), that gravitate around mining sites.

Artisanal gold mining has, for some, provided a means of resilience to violent extremism, in particular to the risks and attempts of recruitment or control by extremist groups. In this context, the Ivorian authorities should continue efforts aimed at regulating the sector so that this activity is carried out as much as possible under legal conditions.

To do this, it would be necessary to reduce the costs (financial and administrative) of obtaining operating authorisations, in particular by creating a dedicated centre. It would also be necessary to accelerate the process of revising the Mining Code to better consider the concerns of local populations regarding their access to and the exercise of artisanal gold mining under legal conditions.
Finally, the place occupied by the various countries of the sub-region in the strategy of extremist groups should not be overlooked. As long as these groups have the option of withdrawing and mobilising human, financial, operational and logistical resources in neighbouring countries, the threat will persist, in one form or another, and no country will truly be safe.

Evidence from this research suggests that other illicit activities have provided, or are likely to provide, opportunities for extremist groups operating in the border areas to obtain operational and livelihood resources. This is the case with the trafficking of medicines, fuel, crop protection products and drugs, the theft of motorcycles, illegal hunting, and kidnappings for ransom. Attention should be paid to the illicit economies that continue in the border areas and the factors that contribute to sustaining them. Understanding and addressing the mechanisms that groups benefit from, or that influence, these economies could increase the effectiveness of existing security and socio-economic measures.

Notes
1. Côte d’Ivoire has also implemented military-security and socio-economic responses. These actions were the subject of an ISS analysis published in July 2023. See W Assanvo, Has Côte d’Ivoire found the solution to violent extremism?, ISS Today, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/has-cote-divoire-found-the-solution-to-violent-extremism, 25 July 2023.
4. Groups or small groups that are either formally affiliated to them, or simply linked to them, gravitate around these two movements.
5. Interview with an Ivorian security actor, Abidjan, 3 August 2021. To find out more about the avenues relating to the affiliation of these groups, see also V Duhem, Côte d’Ivoire: how the jihadists are trying to establish themselves in the North, Jeune Afrique, www.jeuneafrique.com/1174346/politique/cote-divoire-comment-les-jihadistes-tentent-de-simplanter-dans-le-nord/, 20 May 2021.
7. Interview with a security actor, Abidjan, 3 August 2021.
8. This constraint was not necessarily physical, but was exercised through threats. Often it was also fuelled by the fear of reprisals.
9. Accounts collected from people who had been approached by the ‘recruiters’ of the groups also reported steps taken – in Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso – aimed at enlisting ‘volunteers’ for the fighting. However, most attempts and efforts to mobilise human resources that have been documented in the context of this research were for the functions of logistical support, intelligence gathering, and in line with socio-economic activities (in particular the livestock trade and artisanal gold mining).
10. This term refers to the people who were responsible for supplying the violent extremist groups with consumer goods (rice, beans, oil, salt, tea, sugar and fuel).
11. Some of these associates could combine several functions and be ‘business partners’ as well as informants and recruiters.
12. It has not been possible to cross-check and support this beyond the information shown. Consequently, further work on this aspect may be necessary.
13. No similar indications have been reported in Bounkani or Bagoué. This does not necessarily mean that no women have been associated with extremist groups in these regions.
16. The groups present on the banks of the Comoé River were, it seems, ‘fed by women who were living with them by the river’ (cf. interview with a farmer, Tchologo, 15 April 2022). In the same vein, the specific case of the companion of a fisherman on the Comoé River bank, who would have found herself in charge of cooking and delivering meals for the groups, was recounted by an interlocutor within the context of the research.
18. The Fulani community is far from being homogeneous. It presents such a cultural, sociological and economic diversity, including in the north of Côte d’Ivoire, that we should rather talk about the Fulani communities.
19. Interview with livestock breeder and trader, Tchologo, 15 April 2022.
20. Main language spoken in Burkina Faso, particularly by members of the Mossi community.
21. Other illicit activities exist in the research area, including the theft and trafficking of motorcycles (usually stolen), vehicle smuggling (from Burkina Faso), illegal hunting and fuel smuggling. Cases of kidnappings with ransom demands have also been noted in Bounkani. Following the closure of the land borders by the Ivorian authorities in March 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19, people started being transported illegally from Bagoué in Côte d’Ivoire to Mali by tricycle. Robberies and armed robberies on the roads, carried out by individuals known as ‘coupeurs de route’, are also rife. This list is not exhaustive.
23. Several studies and publications address the issue of violent extremism and terrorism in northern Côte d’Ivoire from the view of its expansion from the countries of the Sahel to the coastal countries by presenting the developments, manifestations and vulnerabilities. A few of these publications also examine the issue of illicit activities and their links to violent extremism. See A new ‘three-border zone’? The extension of

49 Nearly 90% of these individuals (244) were met in towns in the north of the country. Thirty-three people were met on a second occasion in Bounkani in order to gather additional information, which brings to 277 the number of interviews conducted with people in the north of the country. In total, nearly 280 individual interviews were conducted as part of this research.

27 The at the end of the data collection period in the field, the onsite research team continued to follow certain developments, more specifically in Bounkani and Tchologo, regarding the presence of extremist groups and illicit activities, especially cattle theft.


30 Côte d’Ivoire shares nearly 600 km of land border with Mali and 600 km with Burkina Faso. These borders are dotted with many unofficial crossing points, both for people and for goods. According to an analysis of the state of the borders published in 2020 by the National Border Commission of Côte d’Ivoire (CNFCI), alongside the four official crossing points existing along the border with Burkina Faso, 80 unofficial crossing points were identified. Similarly, 49 unofficial crossing points have been listed along the border with Mali, in addition to the five official crossing points. See CNFCI, Annual Report 2020, p. 28, October 2020. These figures are probably underestimated. This situation has benefited violent extremist groups who have been able to carry out incursions and move across the border with Burkina Faso.

31 This is the year the collected data refers to. Other media sources also mention the presence of suspicious individuals in Tchologo during 2019. See V Duhem, Terrorism: from Katolo to Tengrela, how Côte d’ivoire is facing the threat, Jeune Afrique, www.jeuneafrique.com/1105294/ politique/terrorisme-de-katolo-a-tengrela-comment-la-cote-divoire-face-a-la-menace/, 27 January 2021. Before 2019, there was a possible presence of individuals belonging to or linked to extremist groups. Another study cites testimonies mentioning the presence in the Comoré Park of individuals linked to this movement since 2016. See Elva, op. cit., p. 48. This period also coincides with the emergence, from late 2018-early 2019, of the growing presence and activism of extremist groups in the Burkinabe administrative regions of Sud-Ouest and Cascades, bordering Côte d’Ivoire. See H Nsaibia, Insecurity in Southwestern Burkina Faso in the Context of an Expanding Insurgency, ACLED, https://acleddata.com/2019/01/17/insecurity-in-southwestern-burkina-faso-in-the-context-of-an-expanding-insurgency/, 17 January 2019, and Promediation, op. cit., p. 14–16.

32 La Bagoué, at least the area covered by the research, seems for now to be spared from violent extremism. The views expressed by the interlocutors we met indicate a threat perceived as more diffuse, even distant. It was mainly characterised by periodic rumours of attacks or the presence of jihadists.

33 The most notable movements were reported in the towns of Togolokaye, Kologobo, Bélé, and Tindala in April and May 2021.

34 It has not been possible to determine exactly how long this presence lasted during 2020 and 2021. An interviewee who had been detained in Comoré National Park said he had stayed there for 14 days before managing to escape and reach his village.

35 Although during this period the groups seemed to benefit from a relative ease of entry (particularly due to the porosity of the border), of moving about and staying on Ivorian territory, their presence was not sufficiently consolidated to confirm that they had managed to establish one or more sanctuaries on Ivorian soil. Moreover, even if their influence was not negligible in reality, but especially in the minds of the communities living along the border with Burkina Faso, the groups did not strictly speaking exercise any control over significant stretches of the Ivorian territory.

36 Two clashes between the SDF and elements suspected of belonging to violent extremist groups were noted in January and July 2022 in towns in Bounkani, bordering Burkina Faso. See the Resilience for Peace project, Equal Access International, 2023.

37 As they have not yet officially obtained the status, the Ivorian authorities consider them to be ‘asylum seekers’.


42 Settlements dating back to the mid-1990s were identified as part of this research.
At the heart of cattle rustling are groups of people specifically formed to steal animals. One person we met during the research recounted his involvement in cattle rustling activities dating back to 2008. For more information on the main challenges livestock farming in rural areas in Bagoué, Bounkani and Tchologo is facing, see FAO and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Census of farmers and agricultural holdings 2015–2016, 2019, p. 114. www.fao.org/3/CA3109FR/ca3109fr.pdf, 2019.

The animals can also be slaughtered directly by the thieves and the meat sold to a butcher. According to the accounts provided by some interviewees, the stolen livestock is generally sold at a price lower than its market value on the markets, which is between 125 000 and 200 000 FCFA each.

Almost all regions of the country are now affected by this phenomenon. The only official statistics available on the volume of people carrying out illegal artisanal gold mining in Côte d’Ivoire date back to 2014. Their number is estimated at more than 500 000. See Dr G Denis, Artisanal gold mining in Côte d’Ivoire: the persistence of an illegal activity, European Scientific Journal vol. 12, no. 3, p. 20, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/3286025317.pdf. The figure of 23 400 people was put forward in a recent report by the National Council for Human Rights. See Survey report on the mapping of gold mining sites in Côte d’Ivoire, p. 7, www.caadip.ci/uploads/2c8b927bc6f5203375d0c9d19e60016.pdf, March 2022. Given the intensification of gold mining since 2014, this last figure is undoubtedly far lower than the reality.

This widespread perception was expressed by several interlocutors. It has not been possible to obtain quantified data to measure the scale of cattle theft or its evolution over time. Stolen cattle are not systematically reported to the security forces. According to a study, 2 000 head of cattle were stolen in 2019 and 2020 in northern Côte d’Ivoire. See Promeditation and Konrad Adenauer Foundation, op. cit., p. 33.

This practice has only been documented in Tchologo. This does not exclude the fact that it has also been implemented in Bounkani. It has not, however, been possible to determine the scale at which this contribution was instituted in northern Côte d’Ivoire, let alone its basis for calculation.

To find out more about the different functions of zakat, see Y Guichaoua and F Bouhier, Interactions between civilians and jihadists in Mali and Niger, University of Kent, p. 14–16, https://kar.kent.ac.uk/11002631/


The link between illegal artisanal gold mining and organised crime, even terrorism, was one of the topics discussed during the government seminar held in Abidjan in April 2021. The intensification of the fight against this phenomenon was defined as being one of the priorities for 2021. See Final communiqué of the seminar on the government work programme (PTG) 2021, www.gouv.ci/doc/1619210757/SEMINAIRE-RELATIF-AU-PROGRAMME-DE-TRAVAIL-GOUVERNEMENTAL-PTG-2021-COMMUNIQUE-FINAL.pdf, 23 April 2021.

Almost all regions of the country are now affected by this phenomenon.

The development of illegal artisanal gold mining has been favoured by the ‘rebel governance’ that was put in place following the political-military crisis that Côte d’Ivoire went through between 2002 and 2011. The military hierarchy that controlled the central, northern and western areas of the country facilitated the establishment and activities of gold miners, especially foreigners (mainly Burkinabé and Malians). See Socio-economic dynamics around the Comoé National Park, Côte d’Ivoire, GIZ, p. 75–77, February 2016.

Almost all regions of the country are now affected by this phenomenon.

The official statistics available on the volume of people carrying out illegal artisanal gold mining in Côte d’Ivoire date back to 2014. Their number is estimated at more than 500 000. See Dr G Denis, Artisanal gold mining in Côte d’Ivoire: the persistence of an illegal activity, European Scientific Journal vol. 12, no. 3, p. 20, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/3286025317.pdf. The number is estimated at more than 500 000. See Dr G Denis, Artisanal gold mining in Côte d’Ivoire: the persistence of an illegal activity, European Scientific Journal vol. 12, no. 3, p. 20, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/3286025317.pdf. The figure of 23 400 people was put forward in a recent report by the National Council for Human Rights. See Survey report on the mapping of gold mining sites in Côte d’Ivoire, p. 7, www.caadip.ci/uploads/2c8b927bc6f5203375d0c9d19e60016.pdf, March 2022. Given the intensification of gold mining since 2014, this last figure is undoubtedly far lower than the reality.

Decree No. 2014-397 of 25 June 2014 determining the terms of application of Law No. 2014-138 of 24 March 2014 on the Mining Code (http://mines.gouv.ci/wp-content/themes/Newsmag/doc/decree_application.pdf) defines the conditions for exercising artisanal mining in its articles 67 to 71. So, while the text prescribes that any artisanal mining operation requires an authorisation granted by an order of the Minister of Mines for a renewable period of two years, most sites operate without any authorisation other than that granted by the landowners or village chiefs. Outside the prohibited zones and perimeters of the mining titles, exploitation must be practised with excavations of a maximum depth of 15 m (article 67). While the use of chemicals and explosive substances is prohibited (article 69), the use of mercury in washing operations and in explosives was reported particularly in Bounkani and Bagoué.

Two hundred and fifty-two illegal sites have been identified in Côte d’Ivoire, see National Human Rights Council, op. cit., p. 20.

In the department of Tengréla (the only department in the region covered by the research), although the research formally identified three sites, the interviewees mentioned the existence of about 10 locations, including old sites. A study by the National Council for Human Rights identified six of these in this department, see National Council for Human Rights, op. cit., p. 17. According to the study conducted by COGINTA, the department of
Tengréla is home to nearly 40 illegal sites, see G Guipie, A N’Goran and H Sib, op. cit., p. 16.

66 About 10 sites have been documented in Boukani, while the Human Rights Council study has identified six, see National Human Rights Council, op. cit., p. 16.

67 Our interlocutors mentioned the existence of about 10 sites in Tchologo; 13 sites have been identified by the study carried out by the National Council for Human Rights, see National Council for Human Rights, op. cit., p. 19.

68 Patrol missions conducted by the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves (OIPR) in the PNC in 2018 revealed the existence of 162 active excavation areas, which gives an idea of the potential scale of activity in the park. See OIPR, State of conservation in the Comoé National Park, https://whc.unesco.org/document/170723, November 2018. The gold miners we met within the scope of this research describe the yields from gold extraction in the park as relatively better than at other sites. Furthermore, unlike the sites that are characterised by an organisation that integrates constraints that need to be respected (in particular, the obligation to sell the gold extracted onsite to designated intermediaries and at a fixed price, which is generally lower than the price offered outside these sites), each team working in the park has relative freedom in their prospecting and extraction activities, and the gold miners have the freedom to sell the extracted gold to whomever they wish, and at their own price.


70 See J Haro, Burkina Faso: gold, the metal of discord, CENOZO, https://cenozo.org/burkina-faso-lor-le-metal-de-la-discorde/, 9 September 2021.

71 See UNESCO, Comoé National Park, https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/227/. The PNC was created in 1968. It is characterised by the ‘great diversity of its vegetation’ with ‘savannahs, savannah woodlands, gallery forests, riverine forests and coastal grasslands.’ The same diversity can be observed in the animal species it hosts: nearly 135 species of mammal (including 11 for primates, 11 for carnivores and 21 for artiodactyls), 35 species of amphibians and 500 species of birds. There are chimpanzees, leopards, elephants, buffaloes and lions.

72 According to Decree No. 2018-497 of 23 May 2018, redefining the boundaries of Comoé National Park (https://talenx.fao.org/docs/pdf/IVC187403.pdf), its area was increased to 1,148,756 hectares.

73 Accounts collected from interlocutors who carried out illegal artisanal gold mining activities in the park well before the recent insecurity fueled by the jihadist threat indicate that most of them benefited from the complicity of OIPR agents. The latter provided them with information on which areas the surveillance patrols would cover, enabling them to escape and carry out their activities with relative peace of mind. The corruption of some of these agents also enabled arrested gold miners to regain their freedom and escape prosecution.


75 See UNESCO, Support for strengthening surveillance and the fight against illegal gold mining in the Comoé National Park (Côte d’Ivoire), https://whc.unesco.org/fr/assistances/3176.


78 Illegal artisanal gold mining has not been affected in Bagoué, due to the reported absence of extremist groups. It is more the dismantling operations carried out by the SDF that generally affect activity in this region.

79 Military operations led by the Ivorian armed forces, in particular the intervention of attack helicopters, have also played a role in reducing illegal artisanal gold mining in the PNC.

80 The ‘bosses’ are key players in the organisation of illegal artisanal gold mining activities. This is a generic term for those who finance or manage mining operations in the field. At the local level, the ‘bosses’ are responsible for finding a site – generally rented from landowners – or a ‘hole’ on a site, recruiting and maintaining one or more teams of diggers, providing them with work equipment, etc. The ‘bosses’ also intervene to haggle over the release of members of their teams when they are arrested by the SDF. In some cases, the term ‘boss’ is used to identify someone who provides financial resources to a third party for the purchase of gold. When the mining takes place outside of a site, the extracted gold is exclusively sold to the ‘boss’. The ‘bosses’ at the local level sometimes have their own ‘boss’ or rather a ‘godfather’ above them, who often turns out to be the financier. That person can be living in the same area, in Burkina Faso, in Abidjan, and even in another African country. This reality illustrates the opacity of the financing structures of illegal artisanal gold mining.

81 The specific context and the descriptions given leave little doubt about the type of people who were responsible for the reported situations.

82 The illegal miners who operate in the PNC usually go there and work in groups of three or four people, which exposes them and makes them particularly vulnerable.

83 ‘Today, we the bosses are afraid to go to the sites because there are jihadists who frequent these places to get food and other small items that they need. They might kidnap us if they see us there. They don’t threaten anyone because we don’t denounce them.’ Interview with a ‘boss’, Boukani, 2 November 2021.


85 These limitations, challenges and shortcomings have been revealed by the participants in the technical workshop to validate the preliminary results of the research, organised on 22 and 23 November 2022 in Abidjan.

86 The pilot project to support the securing and enhancement of artisanal gold mining as a factor of development and social cohesion in the north of Côte d’Ivoire (SECORCI), implemented in the department of Tengréla (region of Bagoué) by the NGO COGINTA with funding from the European Union, aims in particular to ‘contribute to the structuring of the artisanal gold mining activity to channel the economic benefits and make it a lever for local development.’ In this context, an Artisanal Mining Training Centre (CEFAM) was recently opened in Papara (Tengréla Department, Papara sub-prefecture) in order to offer training to artisans working in small mines and performing all activities related to this sector. See AIF, Opening of an artisanal mining training centre in Papara, Abidjan.net, https://news.abidjan.net/articles/717545/ouverture-dun-centre-de-formation-a-lartisanat-minier-a-papara, 3 February 2023.


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