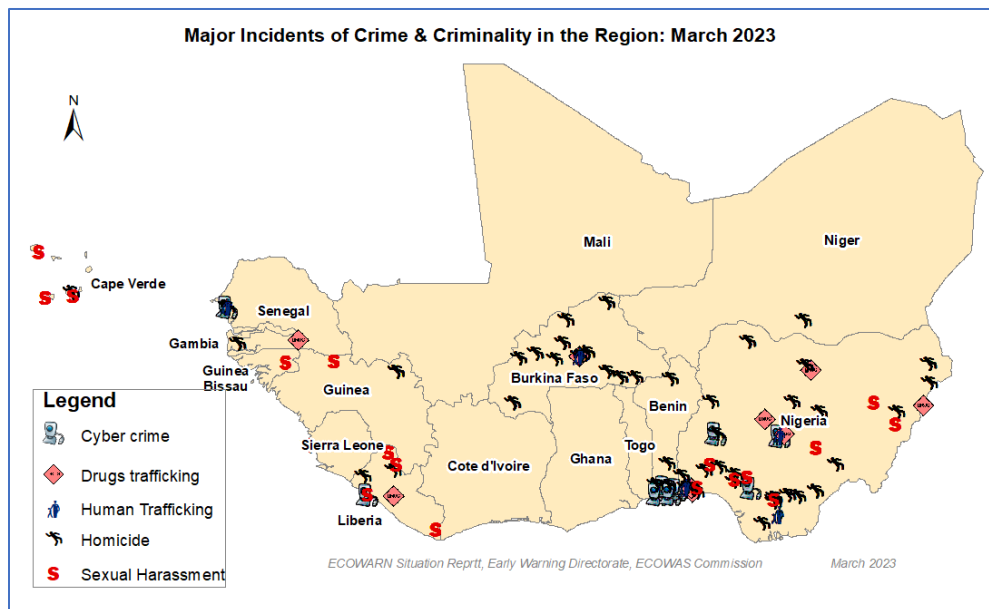




## Crime and Criminality: Human Security Monthly Report – March 2023

### Executive Summary



The ECOWAS region continues to face several Human Security related challenges. Major Crime and Criminality related events recorded in March 2023 included several Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) activities. Illegal trafficking, often but not

exclusively of drugs, can also be an important source of revenue for several organized criminal groups settled in the region with connections abroad as well as for extremist groups like Boko Haram, Islamic state, and other local terrorist groups especially as the region is a major transit area for cocaine from South America and heroin from Afghanistan, both predominately going to Europe.

Challenges in preventing illicit drug trade and associated organized crime as well as mitigating its effects on users in Nigeria in particular, were evidenced by cases reported in numerous States of the Federation despite strong control and repression policies in place. Several individual couriers including women were also arrested during Law enforcement operations. In another development, Benin Republic has embarked on a firm fight to prevent Cybercrime and its effects on people's assets nationwide and the economy of the country. TOC also impacts not only communities, their environment but the entire development process, security, and stability of Member States.

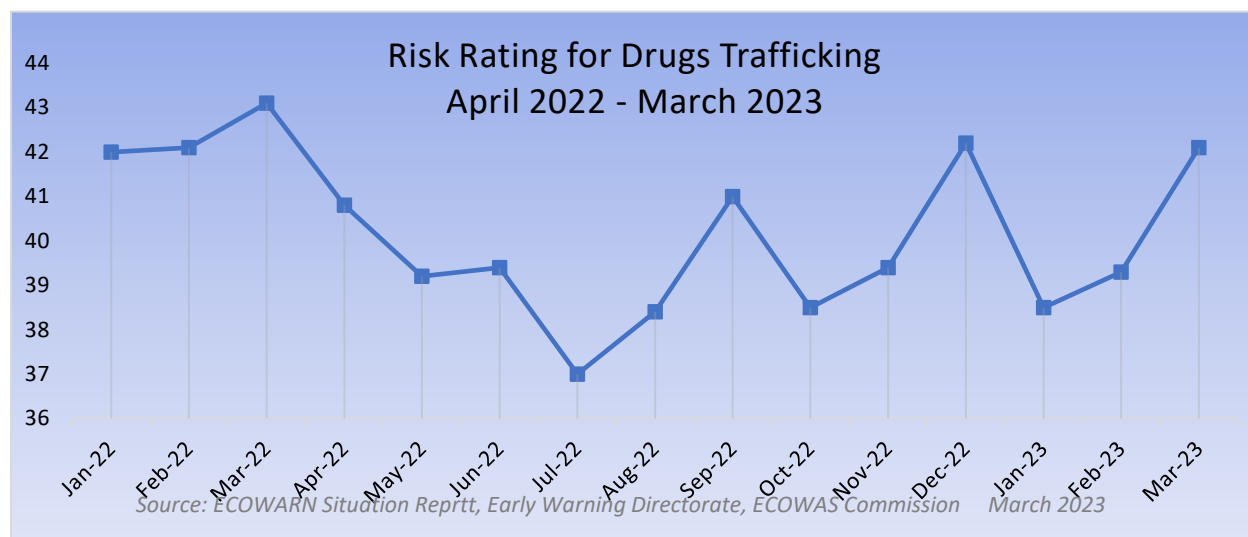
In addition, the map above generated by the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network Reporter (ECOWARN Reporter) highlights major National violent crimes reported during the month under review including Burkina Faso that still struggles to secure its territory reduce the occurrence of homicides and Gender-Based Sexual Violence with Cabo Verde still battling to eradicate the high incidences of rape in the country. Indeed, the prevalence of defilement and rape cases in the country raised once again the urgent need to protect vulnerable groups including women and children both girls and boys through the implementation of strong sanctions against perpetrators and counseling.



## TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISED CRIME

### DRUG TRAFFICKING

Almost 2,000 tons of cocaine was produced in 2020, according to UNODC 2023 Global report on cocaine published during the month under review. The West Africa region sits on major drug trafficking transshipment routes, most notably for cocaine. The area also sees the trafficking, distribution, and increasing consumption of other drugs, including heroin, methamphetamine, cannabis, and opioids. The month of March 2023 saw several major seizures made in various States in Nigeria highlighting growing patterns in the trafficking of opioids, heroin, cannabis sativa and other psychotropic substances. According to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), 37 persons were apprehended over 2.2 tons of illicit drugs seized by operatives at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos and in raids across 12 states within one week. Major events include:



Source: ECOWARN: Evolution of the number of drug Trafficking related incidents recorded in region between April 2022-March 2023

Various strategies were deployed by Nigerian Law Enforcement Agencies through diverse operations in order to manage drug related crimes in the country. On 10th March, agents stormed Kajola forest near the border between Edo and Ondo states, where they destroyed cannabis farms measuring 39.801546 hectares according to the NDLEA. Also, 1, 205, 260 pills of opioids including tramadol, diazepam were seized on 13th March, in two interdiction operations in Kogi and Gombe states. Nine suspects were arrested by the NDLEA in the framework of those operations. Findings reveal that the drug syndicate networks between Nigeria, and Malawi, Mozambique in East Africa, and Europe. The same day, 3 kilograms of heroin were seized in Lagos and two members of the trafficking network allegedly involving networks between Nigeria, and Malawi, Mozambique and Europe were arrested.

The Nigeria Cannabis Survey conducted in six southeastern States of the Federation published in March 22 showed among other outcomes the predominant consumption of cannabis in the domestic market, with evidence of trafficking to other countries and the involvement of organized crime groups in trafficking cannabis from the farms onwards.



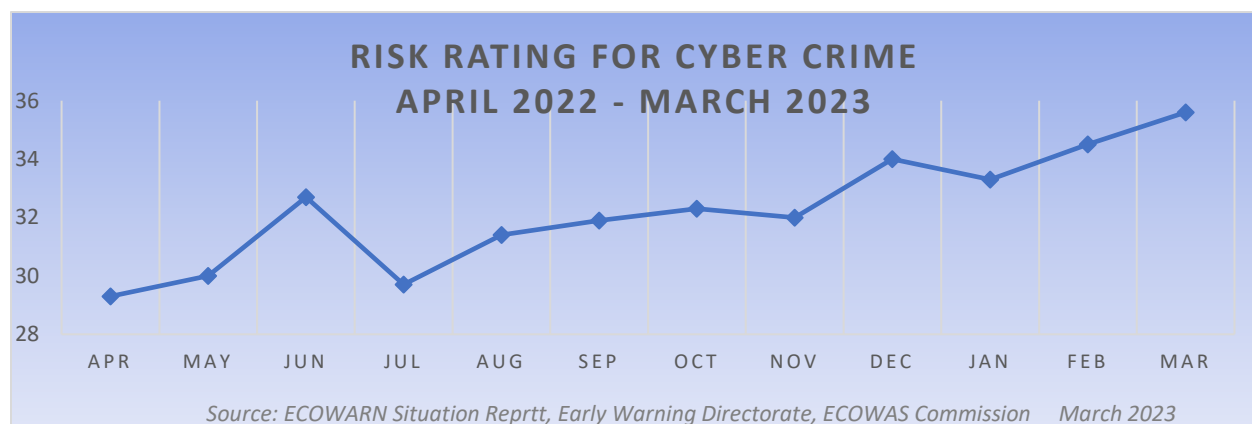
Some Gender considerations highlighted the active involvement of women in the business with the arrest in Warri of a local female distiller of cannabis sativa and dry gin with 19.5 litres of a cocktail locally called “monkey tail” and 22.2kg of cannabis. In Akwa Ibom State, a 42year old women was arrested with 1.1 tons cannabis sativa kept in her house. In a separate drug law enforcement operation, a female drug dealer was caught with Cannabis Sativa, Methamphetamine, Tramadol 225, Skuchies, Molly and Codeine cough syrup in Ogun State while another woman was arrested with 3.245kg of skunk in Gombe State and two other female drug dealers, with 49.5kg of skunk in Moshin, Lagos state. The involvement of women in the trafficking is not specific to any given country but is significantly growing in some countries including Nigeria.

The pattern observed from field reports gathered showed that cannabis sativa was the main substance trafficked within and between Member states. As in several ECOWAS Member states, Nigeria has become a country of traffic and consumption of all types of drugs mainly cocaine and cannabis sativa but also increasingly opioids like tramadol and other imported psychoactive drugs as highlighted in the West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (WENDU) reports.

Generally, consequences include mental illness, loss of individual integrity, low productivity, liver and kidney-related diseases, child and sexual abuse, financial mismanagement, destruction of family hope, and untimely death. Another major consequence is the increased potential for dropping out of school associated with adolescent substance abuse which results to resorting to crime activities. Causes of drug abuse include among others, peer group influence, environmental factors, psychological or physiological factors, and unemployment.

It is necessary to encourage a holistic approach in preventing drug trafficking including abuse mainly opioids and cannabis, cheaper and easily accessible to the youth and the regular high consumption of which has long term devastating consequences. Strong preventive measures are therefore required for a real impact on this long-term fight.

## CYBERCRIME





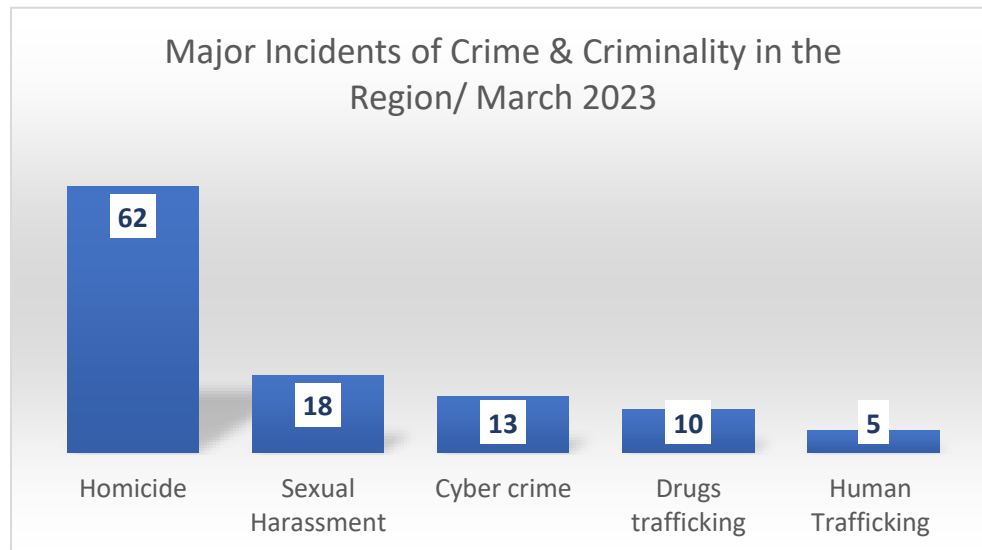
As a growing global phenomenon, cybercrime in Benin Republic particularly is seen in various forms, including online scams, theft of personal data, dissemination of illicit content among others. Several law enforcement activities were reported on ECOWARN during the month under review including:

According to the data on ECOWARN, on 14 March 2023, the Central Office for the Repression of Cybercrime (OCRC) of Benin Republic arrested a dozen suspected cybercriminals popularly known as “Guy-men” or “Léwé” in Akpro-Misséré-té in the department of Ouémé, Cotonou in the Littoral and Abomey-Calavi in the department of Atlantique. On 16 March 2023, agents of the OCRC apprehended four cybercriminals in Grand-Popo, in the department of Mono. Individuals arrested include Nigerian nationals. Other arrests were made in Allada, Atlantique.

It will be recalled that operations carried out in mid-February 2023 resulted to the arrest of 58 people for cybercrime activities. Benin was ranked 148 out of 175 countries globally by the International Telecommunication Union in 2017. Long considered a hub of African cybercrime, it fell to 80th place out of 175 countries in 2018. Cybercrime cost the African continent 10% of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021, or more than US\$4.2 billion, according to a study by Serianu, a Kenyan cyber security company.

## NATIONAL CRIME

### HOMICIDE



For the sixth consecutive month, homicide and targeted assassinations remain the top and major crime perpetrated in ECOWAS Member States. Likewise in previous months, incidents linked to homicide represented the first largest number of incidents

reported on ECOWARN in March 2023 with Nigeria leading the most affected countries followed by Burkina Faso. In this report, the difference is being made between terror related homicide and criminal homicide based on the context and actors involved.

Between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of March two homicides were reported in Somgandé and Dapoya, districts of Ouagadougou respectively including one perpetrated by a female prostitute. On 17 March, a student killed his maid in Dédougou Department in the province of Mouhoun. The same day a 30-year-old man



was murdered upon his refusal to be arrested by shooting in Karpala, sector 51 of Ouagadougou by 6 motorized gunmen believed to be in uniform.

Several Security related homicides perpetrated by unknown armed gunmen with targeted assassinations of individual civilians or groups were recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> March in Sanguié province, in Banwa and Oudalan on the 7<sup>th</sup> and in Mangodara on the 10<sup>th</sup>. In addition, 13 people were killed in Hargo in the province of Loroum (North region) while two other individuals were murdered on the 14<sup>th</sup> and another on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March in the province of Koulpélogo (Centre-east region). On 21 March, another similar killing was recorded between Saouga and Débéré in Oudalan(Sahel region).

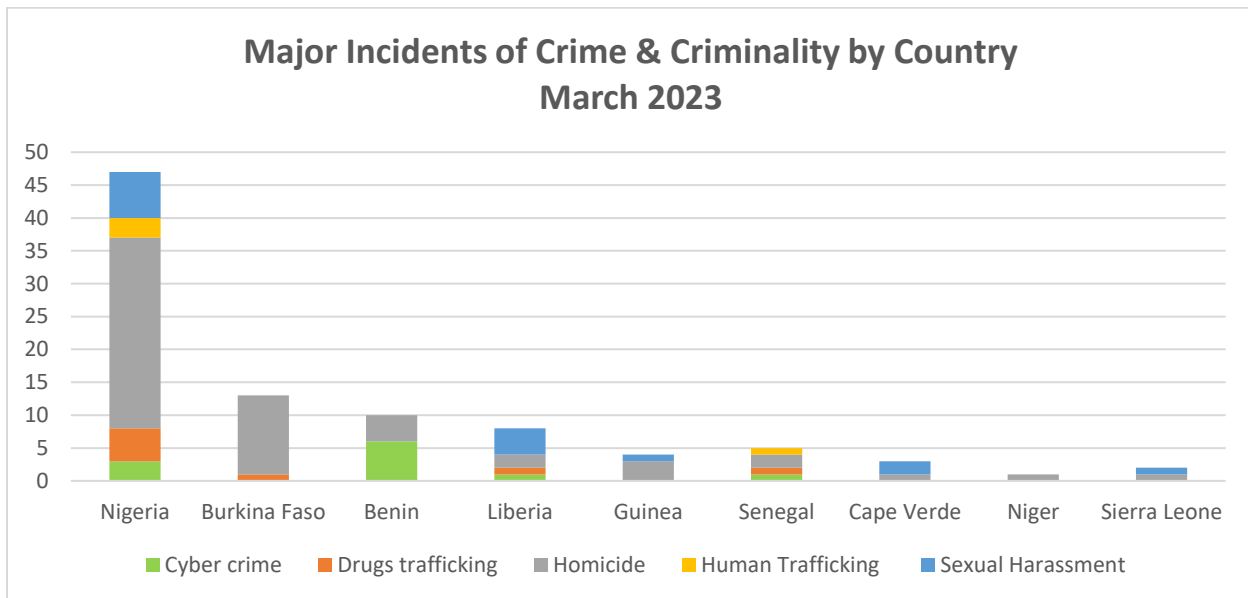
It will be recalled that the volatile situation in many regions of Burkina Faso which has severely affected many communities and prevented thousands of children from going to school, had prompted the decision taken by the government to declare a State of Emergency (SoE) repeated several times since 2019. The latest SoE entered effect in 22 of Burkina Faso's 45 provinces starting on 30<sup>th</sup> March for 30 days, in some provinces of the regions of Boucle du Mouhoun, Cascades Region, Center North, Center-East, East, Hauts-Bassins, North and Sahel.

The consequence of homicide in communities within Burkina Faso goes far beyond the initial loss of human life. Indeed, beyond creating a climate of fear, deadly violence can generate uncertainty and cause instability. To tackle the frequent deadly criminal activities that exacerbate insecurity, proactive measures are required including rigorous monitoring of arms manufacturing, import, circulation, and trade, as well as the prosecution of dealers. These measures will also go a long way to address the underlining structural vulnerabilities and the root causes of the phenomenon including youth bulge, high unemployment rate, addiction to drugs and poverty among others.

## *GENDER BASED VIOLENCE*

According to the data from ECOWARN reporter, various cases of Gender-Based Violence were recorded in many ECOWAS Member countries during the month under review and represent the second highest number of all incidents recorded. Cases reported included sexual harassment, domestic violence, and rape/defilement which continue to prevail in the region. A major hotspot of this type of crime was Cabo Verde.

Major incidents reported during the month under review included the case where 11 individuals were arrested in Praia, Santiago Island under the suspicion of sexual abuse of an underaged person. In Brava Island, a Stepfather was sentenced to 13 years in prison for abusing a 4-year-old child in October 2022. In another development, the judicial police arrested a man accused of raping a 9-year-old girl in São Vicente Island.



During the Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) fieldwork conducted by the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate in 2018, it was also noted that the vulnerability of underage children to sexual and physical abuse in the country was prevalent nationwide. Incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) and child abuse therefore reported among the major Event-Driven Risks in Cabo Verde. This situation has prompted Government to take several steps to address these issues, including the passage of the 2011 Special Law on GBV and the implementation of national action plans on GBV and child abuse. To strengthen the legal system to deal with these crimes, women’s organizations have also called for the creation of a special family court which will address crimes of domestic violence and abuse.

Prevention of this type of crime include urgent actions to protect vulnerable groups. Those actions include continuous awareness campaigns in communities and counselling of victims of gender based sexual violence who live with the trauma caused by such a crime. In this regard, strong commitment is needed to implement the Act in Cabo Verde

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary tools available to ECOWAS are the exercise of its advocacy and convening power. As illustrated by the success of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies through Nigeria that culminated this month, ECOWAS could play a valuable role in facilitating cooperation against the trafficking of drugs and other illicit goods both between its member governments and with governments outside the region. On a similar note, ECOWAS could play a similar – and similarly important – role in helping facilitate cooperation amongst its Member States to counter cybercrime by leveraging on the ongoing the OCWAR-C (Organized Crime in West Africa: Response to Cybercrime) project. Finally, ECOWAS could play an advocacy role in urging governments including Cabo Verde to strengthen their laws against



sexual and gender-based violence including child abuse and to improve the enforcement of those laws already on the books.

To tackle the alarming trend of homicide in Burkina Faso, the collaboration between the populations and services in charge of the criminal repression need to be encouraged. In addition, Law enforcement authorities have the responsibility to reassure communities that criminals and offenders they denounce will be punished accordingly. Most especially through the Ministry of territorial Administration, Decentralisation and Security, there is the need to develop a community policing platform to build trust and collaboration with communities affected by insecurity. There is the need on the part of the government to continue with the initiatives to reduce the circulation of small arms and light weapons with the support of relevant stakeholders including civil society.

Key Directorates and Departments	Key legal frameworks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Political affairs, peace and Security specifically the Directorate of Peacekeeping &amp; Regional Security in charge of the implementation of TOC related instruments and cooperation with law enforcement agencies in Member states;</li> <li>• Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs in charge of the implementation of the WENDU program among other drug related instruments.</li> <li>• ECOWAS Gender Development Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drug Abuse, Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crimes in West Africa</li> <li>• Regional Action Plan to address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse (2008);</li> <li>• Recommendation and Decision on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing of Drug Control activities.</li> <li>• ECOWAS 2015 Supplementary act relating to equality of rights between women and men for sustainable development in the region.</li> </ul>