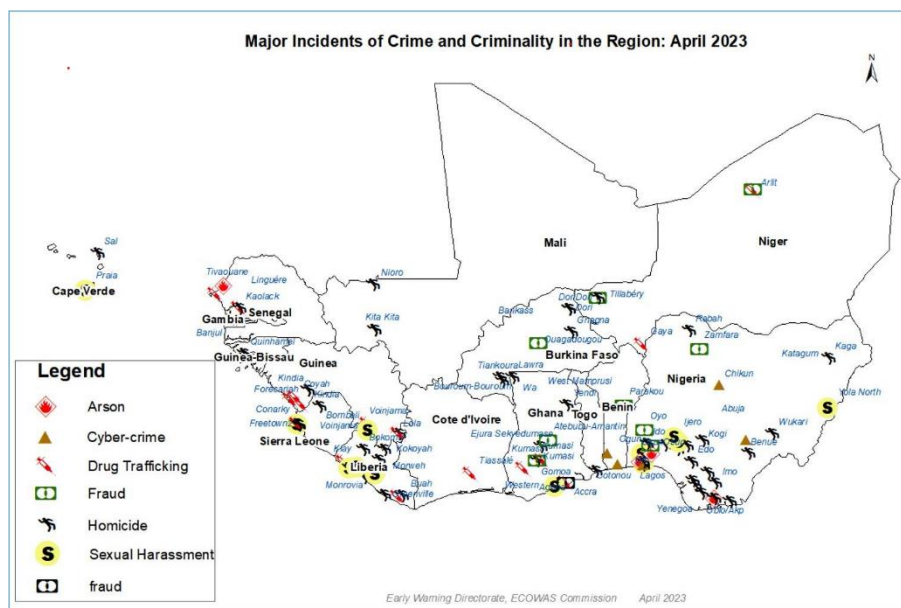




## Crime and Criminality: Human Security Monthly Report – April 2023

### Executive Summary

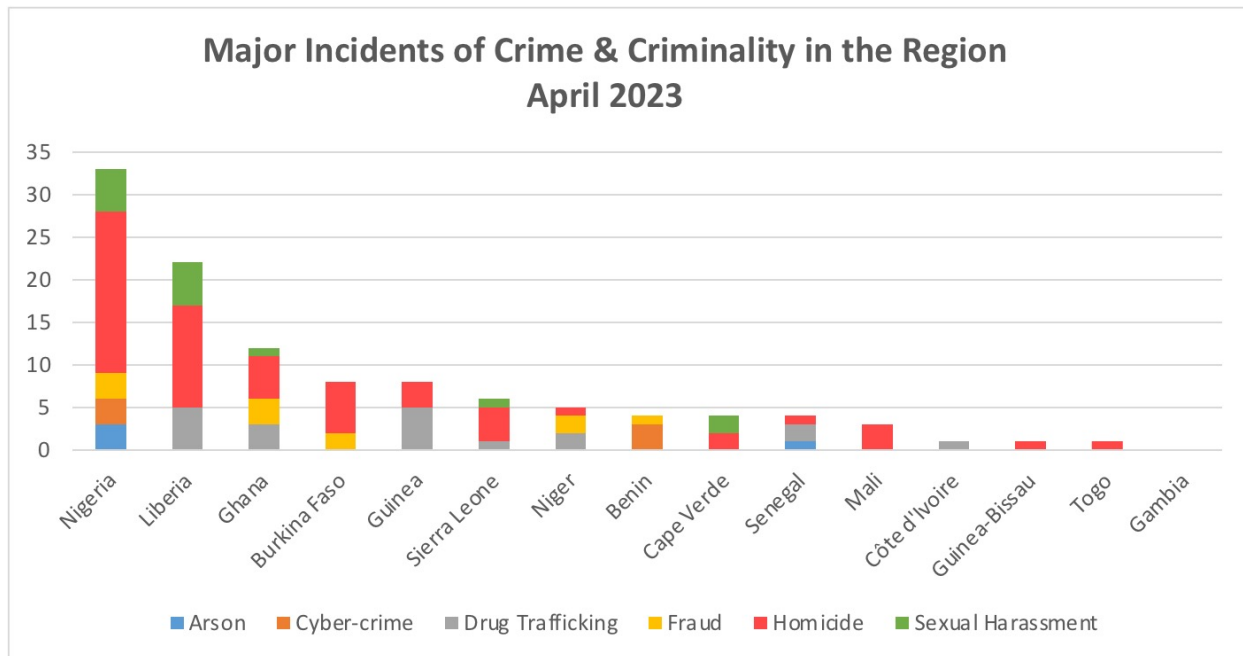
The ECOWAS region continues to face several Human Security related challenges with incessantly, the menace of crime and criminal-related activities still exacerbate the security situation in the region. As seen in the graph generated by ECOWARN, several national crimes and Transnational Organized Crime activities were recorded in all Member States. Several



factors such as weak and porous borders, weak law enforcement structures and the lack of synergy between law enforcement agencies/institutions, socio-economic inequalities and political instability continue to provide viable breeding grounds for the expansion of crime and criminal activities in the region. Whereas ECOWAS has put in place strategic policies, frameworks, and measures to tackle these illicit activities at a regional level, the onus lies on Member states to effectively enforce these response measures/frameworks in addressing the complexities of criminality at the state-level.

In the month under review, this report brings to the fore, with empirical evidence as captured on the ECOWARN Reporter 2.0, TOC activities such as drug trafficking in Guinea which continues to deploy law enforcement operations to counter the scourge of this type of crime and Fraudulent activities in Ghana where the practice of “Sakawa” continues to prevail. In addition, ECOWARN highlights major National violent crimes reported during the month under review including gender-based violence (GBV) with Liberia still battling to eradicate the high incidences of rape/ defilement and sexual harassment in the country. Also, homicide was captured as a major concern in Cabo Verde during the period under review.

In analyzing these crimes, the report examines the state-specific contributing factors and how they impact their perpetration and spread in the countries under report. Furthermore, the report focuses on the response measures including prevention put in place by countries affected in combatting and addressing these crime related challenges.



Source: ECOWARN Reporter 2.0

The graph above depicts the outlook of crimes as well as the nature of crimes perpetrated in each Member State. Nigeria recorded the highest number of crimes ranging from arson being the lowest to the highest being homicide. While this phenomenon is not new, the underlying factors that motivate the perpetration of homicide in countries like Nigeria and Ghana are spousal/relational related and poverty induced as evidenced by reports recorded on ECOWARN. Drug trafficking was recorded as the second highest crime perpetrated in the ECOWAS region in the month of April 2023 followed by sexual harassment and GBV reported as the third highest crime in the same month. Fraud and cyber-related crimes ranked fourth and fifth respectively with arson ranking the least of perpetrated crimes in the month under review. This is suggestive that the types of criminal activities affecting the region are diverse and run across all Member states.

## Analysis of Current Developments

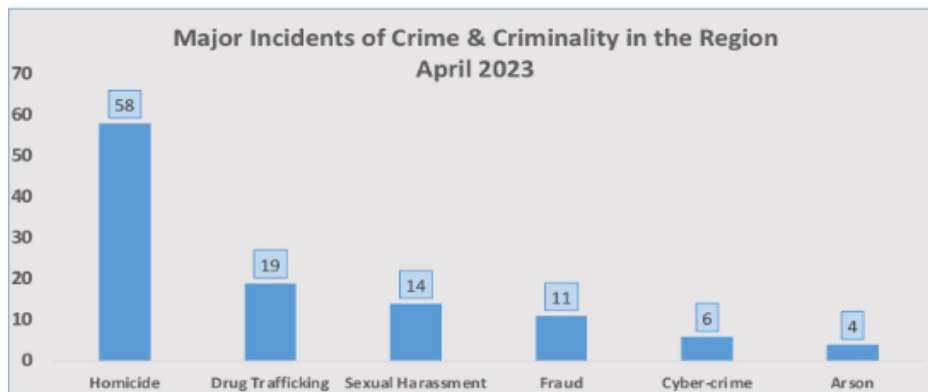
### NATIONAL CRIMES

#### HOMICIDE

For the seventh consecutive month, homicide is at the apex of major crimes perpetrated in ECOWAS Member States. Likewise in previous months, incidents linked to homicide represented the first largest number of incidents reported on ECOWARN in April 2023. Cases of homicide in Cabo Verde were reported on ECOWARN. The nature of these homicides has been mostly familial killings. For example, on 7 April 2023, a man was killed by his wife in Sal Island and on 17 April 2023, a nephew stabbed his uncle to death in São Martinho Grande de Santiago due to a family disagreement. The surge in homicides, especially of this nature, have become a cause of concern for the government and the public. The island of Santiago is notably one of the hotspots for homicides in Cabo Verde. Resultantly,



the increase in the rate of homicides is attributed to factors such as poverty, drug trafficking including abuse and gang-related activities.



The linkage between the three major contributing factors of homicides specifically in the island of Santiago is that poverty amongst the locals drives the youth especially, to indulge in drug peddling to make

earnings meet. These same illicit substances are abused by members of gangs and criminal networks in the same hotspot. Also, there is the issue of availability and circulation of illicit arms and weapons among gangs and criminal groups from monies accrued from drug trade according to reports. This paints a vicious cycle of how poverty may motivate drug trafficking as a source of income and fuel gang activities and in turn bring about the free flow of illicit arms and weapons in some local communities which will be used in perpetrating homicides.

## SEXUAL HARRASSMENT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In the month of April, there were reported incidences of sexual harassment GBV in Liberia especially as violence of all levels perpetrated against men and women has become a growing phenomenon in Liberia. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) establishes that Gender-based violence (GBV) in Liberia although widespread is often seen as a private, family matter.<sup>1</sup> This means that occasionally will perpetrators of GBV be arrested and prosecuted at the public or statutory level. Some Culture and societal norms have been used as a tool in perpetrating and responding GBV in Liberia.

Culture is the fabric of society and an attempt to educate people on the need to abandon certain harmful cultural practices may be met with antagonism. Treating GBV as a private matter robs its response of retributive justice since it has its roots in cultural and societal ways of handling criminal issues. For example, on 4 April 2023, a 13-year-old girl was reportedly defiled by a 37-year-old man in Solo Village, Yeany Statutory District, River Cess County. The suspect who was later arrested, and detained claimed the victim was his traditional wife. Other incidents of GBV recorded include the gang rape of a 17-year-old girl near the Mandingo Graveyard, Old Road Monrovia by 5 young men on 16 April 2023 and the sexual abuse of a 49-year-old mentally ill woman at her River View Community residence, Unification City, lower Margibi County by a 22-year-old young man, on 5 April.

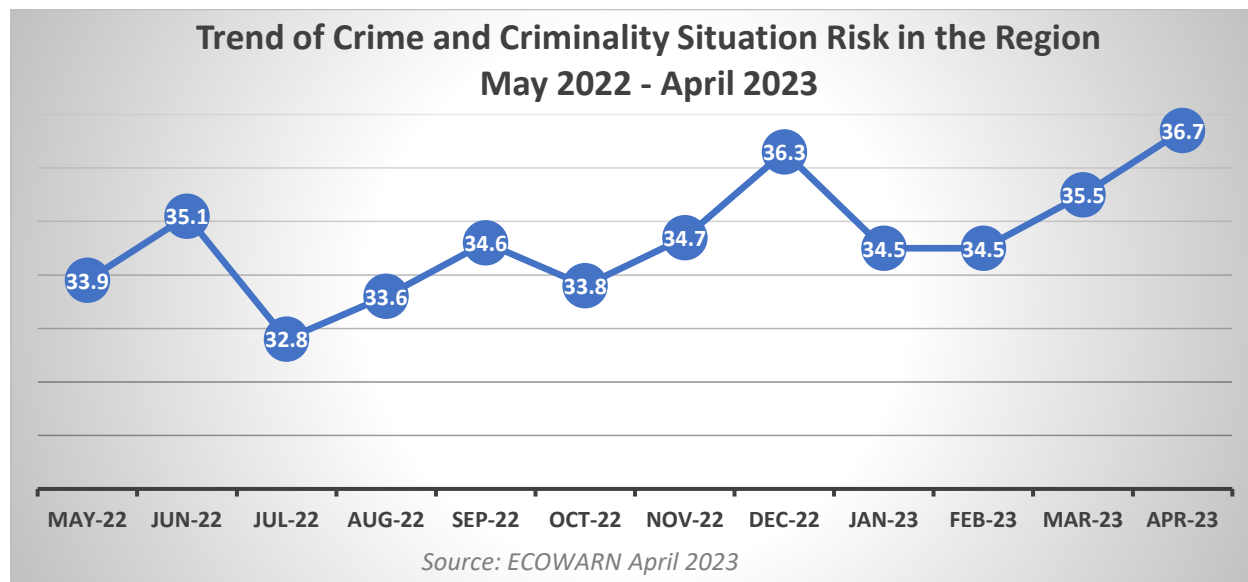
<sup>1</sup> USAID. (2022). Gender and Social Inclusion. Liberia. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/gender-and-social-inclusion> accessed on 4 May 2023.



In Liberia, President George Weah declared in September 2020 rape a national emergency following protests of thousands of Liberians in Monrovia in August 2020 against rising sexual assaults. A number of underlying factors such as the impact of the civil war, cultural gendered roles, customary rituals as well as contributing factors including but not limited to ineffective in/formal systems, family, education, influence the prevalence and outcome of (S)GBV cases in Liberia, which equally impact the formal and informal structures.<sup>2</sup> These factors continue to hamper the coordinated efforts made by international, governmental and civil society actors in responding and mitigating GBV in Liberia. More challenging is the mitigation and response to the prevalence of GBV that are stemmed from cultural/societal factors. Thus, the need for coordinated efforts built on mutual trust, respect for societal structures and cooperation by both local and national actors in identifying, responding to and mitigating GBV in local communities.

In responding to GBV in Liberia, its second National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (2019-2023) has instituted as part of its pillar on prevention, a Rape law (2005), which stipulates 10 years' imprisonment if proven guilty and a life sentence in the case of statutory rape, Domestic Violence Bill (drafted), an executive order 92 on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and a policy on crime prevention which outlines several priorities for combating crime, including incidents of a SGBV nature.

## ORGANISED CRIME



*Source: ECOWARN: graphic depicting an increasing pattern of Crime & Criminality related incidents in the region since Feb. 2023 following the same trend between October and December 2022*

<sup>2</sup> Reddy, D. (2014). *Managing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Liberia: Exploring the syncretisation of Western and traditional approaches* (Master's thesis, The University of Bergen). Retrieved from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30908384.pdf> accessed on 4 May 2023.



## DRUG TRAFFICKING

In April 2023, drug trafficking was recorded as the second highest crime in the ECOWAS region. Taking Guinea into perspective and according to data from the ECOWARN Reporter, the scourge of drug trafficking and abuse are widespread, with several hotspots throughout the country. These hotspots are mainly associated with the production and trafficking of cannabis sativa, methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin. The country's drug activities do not only have a negative impact on the country but on the entire region. This is because many of these illicit substances are smuggled to Member states from neighbouring countries and Mauritania. The Madina market is considered the epicenter of the illicit medicines trade in Guinea and is an important storage and redistribution centre for West Africa.<sup>3</sup> Whereas, there are additional hotspots of drug trafficking and abuse in Guinea. One of these hotspots is the capital city Conakry which has become a transit point for cocaine and heroin trafficking from South America and Asia, respectively.

One of the contributing factors to the incidence of trafficking and abuse in Conakry is due to its high population density and easy access to the airport and seaport, which makes it a hub for drug trafficking activities. Guinea is situated in what is described by UNODC as the Northern Hub of cocaine trafficking in the region. For instance, the ECOWARN Reporter indicates that on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2023, a large quantity of was seized by agents of the brigade of floating units of the National Navy based in the autonomous port of Conakry. According to the press release from the Ministry of National Defense, a ship, bearing the Sierra Leonean flag and transporting several bags of drugs with a total weight of 1,572 kg of cocaine, was intercepted.

Another hotspot of drug trafficking in Guinea is the Nzérékoré Prefecture predominantly known for the production and trafficking of cannabis and cocaine. The region's proximity to Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone makes it contribute to the lucrative aspect of the drug trade. These Member states are either transit or destination zones for cannabis and cocaine popularly used by criminal networks and armed groups. According to the ECOWARN Reporter, customs officers based in the suburb of N'zoo, a locality located on the border between Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, arrested an alleged trafficker in possession of two (02) kg of cocaine. The interception and arrest occurred in Lola an area in the Nzérékoré Prefecture. This draws a parallel between drug trade along border towns due to proximity, porosity of borders, shared cultural identities and similar socio-economic inequalities that make it easy for the drug trade to flourish.

A major concern resulting from this specific type of crime is drug abuse, considered currently as a public health menace. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Kane, M. (March, 2023). Trade and counterfeit goods / Guinea's ruling junta comes down hard on illicit medicine trade. ENACT Observer. Retrieved from: <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/guineas-ruling-junta-comes-down-hard-on-illicit-medicine-trade> accessed on 4 May 2023.



In responding to drug trafficking in Guinea, there have been several indictments and arrests made by the statutory law enforcement agencies accompanied by a tightening of law enforcement operations. A lot more can however be done on the prevention side.

### *FRAUD AND CYBERCRIME (SAKAWA)*

There is a thin line between fraud and cybercrime in Ghana although the motive behind these two crimes is similar, to dupe, impersonate and trick innocent people and get away with their funds and occasionally properties. However, 'sakawa' as a crime in Ghana hinges on the use of rituals and other forms of black magic to trick, dupe and sometimes kill victims for money. It is an illegal practice which combines modern Internet-based fraud with African traditionalist rituals and is widely popular among the youth in economically deprived communities in the country such as Ashaiman, Nima, Kasoa, Agona amongst others. However, in times past, fraud activities have taken a distinctive turn, causing financial loss to the government of Ghana.

Some reports alleged that some public officials through cooperation with clandestine parties commit fraud through the purchase of fake products. Captured on the ECOWARN in the month of April, more than 20,000 electricity meters installed within the Accra East Region of the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) were declared fake. The meters were estimated to cost the power distribution company about GH¢2 million in revenue loss monthly. They were identified in homes in eight operational ECG districts in the region – Makola, Legon, Mampong, Kwabenya, Dodowa, Adenta, Teshie and Roman Ridge. It also emerged that, during the exercise conducted by the Accra East Region of the ECG at Ayi Mensah on April 14, some of the suspects had illegally reconnected power directly from the supply pole. The meters were confiscated in the Ayi-Mensah/Kweiman Electoral Area and its environs during the initial stages of an ongoing nationwide revenue mobilization exercise which is expected to end on April 20, this year.

The underlying factors of fraud and cybercrime in Ghana is largely poverty resulting from socio-economic inequalities and in the last seven months, the economic recession in Ghana has highly increased the cost of goods and services thereby inflating the cost of living for the average citizen. This inadvertently affects the youth who are mostly unemployed and may resort to illicit ways to earn a living. Fraud, cybercrime or Sakawa has become one of such ways through which the youth can make 'quick money' in the country. As established above, these crimes are perpetrated in local communities with low standards of living and economic challenges. While the government of Ghana has an existing policy and law on cybercrime and fraud, the fight to tackle and clamp down the activities of 'Sakawa' groups remain a challenge as these criminal groups operate with black magic and charms according to victims.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above criminal-related activities in the four Member States, the report recommends the following:

- Focusing on the high rise in the number of recorded homicide incidents, Member states should effectively sensitize and create awareness through public education for the citizenry on how to be security conscious in their domestic settings. To mitigate incidences of homicides especially **Cabo Verde**, an improvement in Police resources dedicated to effective management of homicide is key. Government should continue with strategic initiatives aimed at reducing the circulation of small arms and light weapons with the support of relevant stakeholders including civil society actors.
- In **Liberia**, agencies and institutions that oversee SGBV should partner with local actors in communities in the timely reporting of cases of SGVB to the law enforcement agencies. Also, prevention of this type of crime includes 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.
- Dwelling on the 2008 Regional Action Plan to address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse, and ECOWAS Drug Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Related Organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa (2016–2020), Member states are encouraged to build synergies and strengthen the capacities of their respective security and law enforcement agencies/institutions in identifying, mitigating and (or) responding to contemporary and emerging organized crimes in West Africa. In **Guinea** particularly, another step would be to introduce, widen and reinforce a structured school program for sustainable impact on the children and the youth to mitigate the alarming trend of drug abuse, mainly methamphetamine and cannabis among the youth.
- The Government should create public awareness about the significance, nature, economic and social consequences of cybercrime including Sakawa activities in **Ghana**. Education on the phenomenon should be emphasized on the social tricking maneuvers used by the fraudster to defraud people in cyberspace.



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> <li>• Directorate of Digital Economy and Post Technology mandated to fight against cybercrime among others.</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 (2008)</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> <li>• ECOWAS Drug Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Related Organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa (2016–2020)</li> <li>• Directive C/DIR.1/08/11 on Fighting against Cybercrime within ECOWAS</li> <li>• C/DIR.1/01/2021- Relating to the Adoption of the Regional Cybersecurity And Cybercrime Strategy</li> </ul>