COUNTER-TERRORISM AND BORDER MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

FUNDAMENTAL AND CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES

CTED

▶▶▶ TRENDS

ALERT

CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS

Despite the efforts of Member States in Africa to strengthen border security, Member States continue to face challenges due to porous borders.

Gaps in Member States' knowledge of their specific vulnerabilities limit their ability to strengthen border security.

Efforts to manage entry and exit of citizens are often impeded by the lack of civil registration and vital statistics records.

Some border posts lack basic physical infrastructure.

An integrated approach to border security and management must include communities and address root causes of violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

Good border governance involves improving the socioeconomic conditions of people living in communities around borders.

Member States should establish and implement all border management measures in a manner that fulfils their international counter-terrorism commitments and obligations under international law, including human rights and refugee law.

BACKGROUND

This Trends Alert was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) in accordance with Security Council resolution 2617 (2021), in which the Council reaffirms the essential role of CTED within the United Nations to identify and assess issues, trends and developments relating to the implementation of Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014), 2396 (2017) and other relevant resolutions.

CTED Trends Alerts are designed to increase awareness, within the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee and among United Nations agencies and policymakers, of emerging trends identified through CTED's engagement with United Nations Member States on their implementation of the relevant Council resolutions.

METHODOLOGY

Between 2018 and 2023, the Counter-Terrorism Committee conducted assessment visits to 15 Member States on the African continent. The Member States visited were Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, and Uganda.

The resulting reports contained, on average, 40 recommendations to each Member State on steps to improve implementation of Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism. In this Trends Alert, CTED reviews and summarizes those challenges and recommendations related to border management. The political and security situation has changed in some Member States on which the assessment reports are based. This could result in variations between current shortfalls and needs and those previously identified and could impact international engagement to support their needs. The Trends Alert excludes challenges and recommendations specific to weapons in the context of border management as CTED intends to address that issue in a later report.

Member States in Africa assessed by CTED on behalf of the CTC between 2018-2023

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 47 per cent of global terrorism deaths.[1] With terrorism and violent extremism continuing to spread across parts of the continent, including through the movement of foreign terrorist fighters, the Security Council emphasizes border security and management.[2]

For border management policies to be effective, Member States must first have sufficient knowledge of the local, geographical and other trends, threats and vulnerabilities that can be exploited by terrorists. This knowledge should proactively inform all efforts to manage borders and guard against the spread of terrorism while protecting human rights, including the right to freedom of movement.

This Trends Alert is the first of two publications which highlight the most common challenges identified by the Counter-Terrorism Committee that Member States in Africa face in managing their borders in line with resolution 2178 (2014) and other relevant resolutions. It outlines the conditions and framework gaps in assessed African Member States that terrorist groups may seek to exploit to cross national borders and conduct terrorist activities.
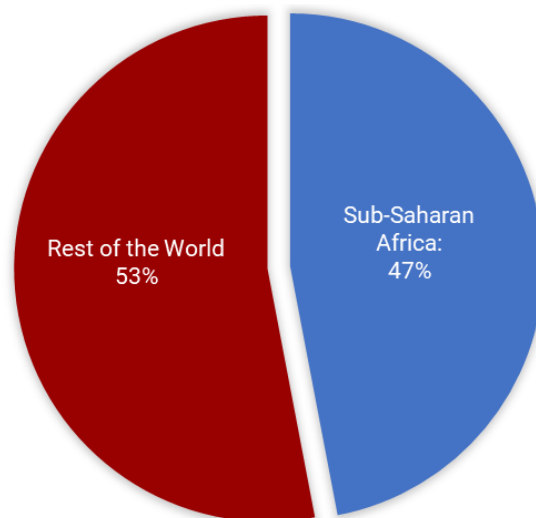
Percentage of Global Terrorism Deaths (2023)
Source: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023 GTI report

The second Trends Alert, "Counter-Terrorism and Border Management in Africa: Technical and capacity-related gaps", will emphasize specific technical and capacity-related issues African Member States face in managing borders in the context of counter-terrorism.

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[1] Vision of Humanity, "Deadliest Terrorist Groups in 2023", Institute for Economics and Peace.
[2] Security Council resolutions 2178 (2014), 2396 (2017).

MAIN CHALLENGES

Border-related insecurity can allow the movement of terrorists, as well as illicit funds and goods used to finance and support terrorism, across land, air, and maritime borders. In addition, shortcomings in addressing the topographical, structural and resource-related limitations specific to border towns creates vulnerabilities, which are exploited by terrorist groups in Africa. According to the African Union in its African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance, "Security threats such as the spread of terrorist networks … have been exacerbated by a lack of targeted border governance".[3]

This section provides an overview of the key challenges and recommendations contained in the Counter-Terrorism Committee's assessment visit reports for African Member States between 2018 and 2023.

1 Knowledge gaps on migration patterns, security threats, trends and vulnerabilities

In its assessments, the Counter-Terrorism Committee found that the level of knowledge about the vulnerabilities that terrorists may exploit to enter a country or transport goods across borders varied, with at least eight African Member States unaware of all of their sector-specific vulnerabilities. Others were aware of their porous borders and that the annual transhumance period could be exploited for terrorist purposes, but not of other possible vulnerabilities.

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[3] 2020. Available at www.peaceau.org/uploads/2020-english-au-border-governance-strategy-final.pdf.

Furthermore, they were not aware of the extent of terrorist exploitation of these trends, nor the vulnerability of tourism destinations to undetected terrorist transiting.[4] In addition, States needed to better understand and have stronger analysis of cross-border terrorism-financing risks given the use of cash couriers to fund terrorist cells in Africa.[5] [6]

The Counter-Terrorism Committee has recommended that several Member States establish a stronger knowledge base of the conditions affecting border security, including geographical, human, infrastructural, legal, human rights-related and gendered considerations. Similarly, various Member States needed disaggregated and reliable statistical data on migration management to improve border management policy processes.

The level of knowledge regarding the vulnerabilities that terrorists may exploit to enter a country or transport goods across borders varied, with at least eight African Member States unaware of all their context-specific susceptibilities

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[4] Similar knowledge gaps also exist in some Member States that are either a source, destination or transit country for human trafficking, which prevents authorities from understanding the actual linkages between human trafficking and terrorism. In these countries, no direct link between human trafficking and terrorism had yet been established, despite some reports of trafficking in children across borders for terrorist training purposes. This lack of knowledge about the links between human trafficking and terrorism can be observed in several of the States that are most affected by terrorism and human trafficking, as cited in CTED's report on the nexus between the two phenomena. However, the vulnerabilities that are exploited by criminal syndicates could equally be exploited by terrorist groups.
[5] CTED, "Thematic summary assessment of gaps in implementing key countering the financing of terrorism provisions of Security Council resolutions", December 2023, available at www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/thematic_summary_assessment_of_gaps_-_investigating_and_prosecuting_the_financing_of_terrorism_-_december_2023.pdf, and ibid., December 2022, available at www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/cted_2022_cft_gaps_assessment_final.pdf.
[6] S/2021/655 and S/2021/655.

2   Physical features of border posts and offices

The geographical location of and features of borders and boundaries constituted a challenge in many cases, and the set-up of border posts and offices needed improvements in many Member States.

Location of border posts

Most assessed Member States share thousands of kilometres of borders with one or more other Member States and for many, the contours of the land make the frontiers difficult to monitor. Land border posts were often far away from the boundaries, several kilometres inside the country. One Member State's only official border post with one of its neighbouring countries was inside the capital city itself and could easily be circumvented. In its 2021 global survey of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and other relevant resolutions by Member States, CTED highlighted difficulties in securing borders in parts of Africa, including lengthy borders across sparsely populated regions due to a shortage of resources, poor equipment, and the lack of inter-agency cooperation.[7]

Poor conditions and insufficient border posts and offices

In several Member States, although the main border offices were operational, several land border offices needed modernization or were insufficient to cover green borders.[8] In a few of these Member States, most of the structures were dilapidated, the infrastructure at land posts was limited and agents inspected documents in the open air or in temporary shelters.

Other borders were near conflict zones, affecting some Member States' ability to retain border management staff owing to safety concerns. In addition, insufficient communications systems often hampered timely interception of known and suspected terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters, crossing borders.

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[7] African Union Border Programme, *Delimitation and Demarcation of Boundaries in Africa: General Issues and Case Studies*, (Commission of the African Union, 2013). Available at www.peaceau.org/uploads/au-2-en-2013-delim-a-demar-user-guide.pdf.
[8] Stretches of land between official border posts.

3   Governance challenges

In most Member States CTED assessed, the Governments' limited ability to govern border communities created security vulnerabilities. Governments often lacked capacity, including community policing resources, to engage with communities in remote border areas, in some cases leading to marginalization that can fuel radicalization to terrorism.[9]

In certain contexts, radicalization can be exacerbated when human rights or women's rights in border communities are not protected, as marginalization, inequalities, and sexual and gender-based violence may increase susceptibility to terrorist recruitment.[10]

The limited reach of government institutions furthermore affected some Member States' capacity to address cross-border illicit activity. Transnational organized crime activities and terrorism become possible where there are governance vacuums and weak border controls. [11] Weak governance was often exacerbated by corruption among border officials, eroding the community's political, social and economic stability. The Counter-Terrorism Committee's assessments found that at several border-crossing points, money was extorted from passengers. These trends were indicative of governance challenges in border communities, which can lead local inhabitants to seek protection in terrorist groups.

> *In certain contexts, radicalization can be exacerbated when human rights or women's rights in border communities are not protected*

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[9] Eric Rosand and others, *Addressing the Overlooked Role of African Cities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism,* (Strong Cities Network, 2023). Available at https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/resource/addressing-the-overlooked-role-of-african-cities-in-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism/.

[10] Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), "Good practices on women and countering violent extremism". Available at www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/GCTF%20Good%20Practices%20on%20Women%20and%20CVE.pdf?ver=2016-03-29-134644-853 (accessed on 23 February 2024).

[11] GCTF, "Good practices in the area of border security and management in the context of counterterrorism and stemming the flow of 'foreign terrorist fighters'". Available at www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2016%20and%20before/GCTF-Good-Practices%20-BSM-ENG.pdf?ver=2016-09-13-124953-540 (accessed on 23 February 2024).

4   Broader socioeconomic conditions

A United Nations report found that border communities can experience specific socioeconomic vulnerabilities and marginalization,[12] often attributed to cross-border disputes and grievances that sometimes date back to the colonial demarcation of boundaries in Africa.[13] Economic hardship in border areas of many Member States can increase the risk of radicalization and recruitment to terrorism, particularly of young, marginalized people.

During CTED assessment visits, Member States noted that they had observed terrorist recruitment techniques in border communities, including false promises of employment or education and scholarships to impoverished parents. A few States recognized the need to increase investments in local social services and economic opportunities for at-risk populations.

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[12] United Nations Development Programme, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement* (2023). Available at www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement.
[13] African Union Border Programme, Delimitation and Demarcation of Boundaries in Africa: General Issues and Case Studies, (Commission of the African Union, 2013). Available at www.peaceau.org/uploads/au-2-en-2013-delim-a-demar-user-guide.pdf.

5   Management of national civil databases

In at least seven out of 15 cases, Member States had established and strengthened civil registration databases, including through the computerization of data. A few States had also incorporated the widespread use of electronic identity cards and the digitization of civil status documents into their civil registration process. Challenges relating to the management of the national civil database commonly identified by the Counter-Terrorism Committee included the following:

Absence of legal identity and government-issued identity cards: In several Member States, millions of people did not have a legal identity or government-issued identity card. In the absence of identification documents, some Member States used alternative identification, such as employment identification cards, or did not require identity documents to be presented, which led to difficulties verifying people's identities.

Lack of complete, computerized and centralized databases for civil registration and vital statistics: Civil registration data collection was especially hampered in Member States that experienced extended periods of political and security crises. Forged birth registration documents were common because records were neither verified nor authenticated or computerized. Although private sector partnerships offer opportunities to enhance the management of national civil databases, Member States were often reluctant to involve the private sector in civil processes. To establish evidence of identity, several Member States were recommended to use the International Civil Aviation Organization Traveller Identification Programme, which provides a coordinated approach to confirming the identity of air travellers.

6   Issuance of visas and admittance of foreign nationals

In certain Member States, particularly in West Africa, nationals from Member States in the region were permitted to live in other countries of the region using national identification cards. However, these documents were often unreliable. Visas obtained at borders and some diplomatic missions were in the form of stamps that were easily forged While visas issued at consular missions can be more secure, data was often not checked with police departments or other security agencies. Attempts to upgrade visa processing systems had also succumbed to logistical problems, such as the cancellation of supplier contracts in one Member State.

CTC ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Counter-Terrorism Committee has recommended that Member States engage with relevant entities to develop and implement measures in the following areas in a manner that fulfils their international counter-terrorism commitments and obligations under international law, including human rights and refugee law.

Status assessment and review of border conditions and border management initiatives

- Conduct a status assessment and detailed audit of border management of all border posts and maritime zones.
- Conduct a review of existing maritime security assessments and amend them in accordance with the Protocol of 2005 to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation.

Risk-based approaches to border management

- Proactively adopt a risk-based approach to border management, guided by a multidimensional threat assessment of their individual contexts.
- Enhance the capacity of agencies to conduct sectoral risk assessments guided by national risk assessments.
- Screen goods and people across border points, based on the risk assessment.

Socioeconomic aspects

- Prioritize youth employment to prevent recruitment into terrorist groups.
- Implement holistic and strengthened national development and good governance programmes, particularly in border communities.

Sensitization of communities

- Enhance sensitization campaigns on radicalization for members of communities in border regions.
- Train police officers in border areas in community policing, including to enable them to understand and address signs of vulnerability to radicalization, while respecting human rights.

Infrastructure development and maintenance

- Construct new posts at main border-crossing points where necessary and equip them with basic infrastructure.
- Construct integrated inter-agency border posts housing all relevant agencies (such as police, gendarmerie and customs) where this is lacking.

Civil registration

- Create a unique legal identity chain, including registration of all births in the civil registry and issuance and production of travel documents that meet International Civil Aviation Organization standards.
- Collaborate with the private sector in updating systems, including the register of births in a centralized database, and ensure that the database is housed within government.

United Nations Security Council
Counter-Terrorism Committee
Executive Directorate (CTED)