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The illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in Burkina Faso

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CAR	Conflict Armament Research
CNCA	Commission Nationale de Contrôle des Armes (National Commission for Arms Control)
CNLPAL	Commission Nationale de Lutte contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères (National Commission against the Proliferation of Small Arms)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMAT	État-Major de l'Armée de Terre (Ground Forces High Command)
FAMA	Forces Armées Maliennes (Malian Armed Forces)
FANCI	Forces Armées Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (National Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire)
HACIAU	Haute Autorité de Contrôle des Importations d'Armes et de Leur Utilisation (High Authority for the Control of the Importation and Use of Weapons)
USIGN	Unité Spéciale d'intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (Gendarmerie Nationale's Special Intervention Unit)

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Cover image: A worker manufactures a hunting shotgun in an artisanal workshop in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, February 2022.

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Field documentation and analysis carried out by Conflict Armament Research 2017–2021

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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of research conducted in Burkina Faso, under the framework of the project entitled 'Africa-China-Europe (ACE) dialogue and cooperation on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa' (led by Saferworld), pursuant to EU Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1298, between September and December 2021. It builds on research conducted by Conflict Armament Research since 2017.

The report combines a review of existing legislative frameworks governing arms and ammunition in Burkina Faso with the highlights of an analysis of seized weapons and ammunition across Burkina Faso, documented jointly with the Haute Autorité de Contrôle des Importations d'Armes et de Leur Utilisation (HACIAU) between June 2017 and July 2020. Following a second visit in December 2021, the report has now been updated to incorporate data on weapons seized in 2021. It integrates the results of stakeholder discussions of earlier drafts of the report.

The observable trends underlined by the data from 2017 to 2020, especially the tendency for non-state armed groups to continue to make good use of opportunities for resupply by seizing military weapons and ammunition and moving these across borders with relative impunity, have been further confirmed by the latest examples of documented seizures highlighted in this report.

This report acknowledges that the documentation of the 2021 seizures relies on a different methodology from that used to collect information presented in the earlier statistical analysis and highlights – namely that, in contrast to the essentially comprehensive nation-wide mapping exercise undertaken between 2017 and 2020, the information obtained during the December 2021 trip to Ouagadougou pertained to a selection of seizures to which the Commission Nationale de Contrôle des Armes (CNCA, which replaced the HACIAU in 2021) had immediate access.

These weapons and ammunition, whose presence nonetheless confirms worrying trends observed earlier, should not be considered statistically comparable to the 2017–2020 dataset and as such are presented separately herein.

The author presented and discussed an earlier draft of the report with a range of Burkinabè stakeholders, including representatives of the CNCA, the National Police, the National Gendarmerie, Burkina Faso Customs, the Special Brigade for Counter-Terrorism Investigations (Brigade Spéciale des Investigations Antiterroristes, BSIAT in its French abbreviation) and representatives of national civil society,¹ including during two visits to Ouagadougou, between 18 and 23 October and between 6 and 11 December 2021. On 10 December 2021, Burkinabè partners, two members of the Expert Working Group (EWG)² and the author attended the EWG working session organised as part of the ACE project, remotely attended by other members of the EWG from China and Saferworld staff.

Consultations with Burkinabè partners, held in December 2021, resulted in the validation of the then provisional conclusions and recommendations and the update of the data sample to include the most recent seizures. Recommendations and remarks presented at the conclusion of this report intend to foster an evidence-based discussion on ways in which duty-bearers could diminish or disrupt the flows to criminals or non-state armed groups that are affecting the security situation in the country as well as the wider sub-region.

Both the ability and responsibility to enact the measures and mechanisms required to mitigate the risks of illicit arms and ammunition flows rest in part with the national authorities of Burkina Faso, with whom the author continues to liaise, but also with those of neighbouring states and, indeed, in some cases, the wider international community. Based on lessons, empirical evidence, and trends highlighted in the report and discussed during the

EWG meeting held in December 2021, in January 2021 the CNCA conducted a consultation process including all its institutional partners. This was with a view to identifying their needs to better combat the illicit circulation of firearms and ammunition and to highlight priority and relevant areas of international assistance where partners of the Africa-China-Europe Dialogue project could provide adequate support. This aspect is further developed in the concluding section of this report.

Finally, it should be noted that the large majority of the items documented, whether from the original 2017–2020 dataset or those seized in 2021, remain at the time of drafting under judicial seal. As such, specific identifying information and photographs have been withheld from this report for reasons pertaining to confidentiality agreements in place between the author and the cooperating security forces and agencies of Burkina Faso.

¹ Burkinabè civil society was represented by Ms Mariam Liéhoun, coordinator of the WAANSA-Burkina (West African Action Network on Small Arms and Light Weapons, RASALAO in its French acronym) and by Col-Maj. (retired) Dibana Zerbo, former Permanent Secretary of the HACIAU and current director of Galomaso Consult.

² The nine-person Expert Working Group (three each from Africa, China and the EU) was established under the auspices of the ACE project to, through their joint research and outreach, support cooperative actions to tackle the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and inside Africa. The two members who attended the December 2021 meeting in Ouagadougou were Nounou Booto Meeti, of the Centre for Peace, Security and Armed Violence Prevention, and Mr Mwachofi Singo, of the Security Research & Information Centre.



Figure 1: A Bulgarian-manufactured MG-1M/M1 7.62 x 54 mm R medium machine gun seized in 2021 from an armed group in northern Burkina Faso. © Conflict Armament Research

2. Existing national rules and regulations concerning the production and trade of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition

Burkina Faso is as a leader in the region when considering states' initiatives aimed at regulating the production, possession and trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition. The country may owe some of its success to its long tradition of and considerable domestic industry for artisanal production of hunting rifles and pistols, to its dynamic private market for firearms and related ammunition, and to its recent efforts to support international and regional initiatives. As such, relevant government agencies have been a part of the national regulatory landscape for over 20 years – solid foundations which have only been strengthened by the domestication of regional frameworks like the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms, Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Associated Material, and subsequently by the ratification of the 2013 international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

In 2001, Burkina Faso established a national arms import and control authority, with a mandate over both civilian and military imports and stocks, in the form of the Haute Autorité de Contrôle des Importations d'Armes et de leur Utilisation (High Authority of the Control of Weapons Importations and Use – HACIAU), to improve the transparency and accountability of its control regime applying to transfers of military goods.³ The HACIAU mandate included the following responsibilities:

- To sign, with the relevant Minister, end-user certificates for all imports into national jurisdiction.
- To prevent all forms of weapons trafficking at a national level.
- To collect and exploit all information related to weapons transfers.
- To account for and inspect all conventional military weapons owned by the state.

Thus, already several years prior to the entry into force of the ECOWAS Convention, Burkina Faso had taken the significant step of creating a domestic agency mandated to control both the import and export of arms, in part to prevent the traffic of illicit arms. A national commission on SALW was also created in 2001, under the name of Commission Nationale de Lutte contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères (National Commission to fight against SALW proliferation – CNLPAL). Pursuant to the adoption of the ECOWAS Convention in 2006, the role of the CNLPAL was strengthened with a mandate for all matters pertaining to the problem of illicit SALW and ammunition, and the body was charged with monitoring, sensitisation, collection and recording, and advocacy activities.

In 2021, the CNLPAL and HACIAU were officially fused and integrated within a single entity designated the Commission Nationale de Contrôle des Armes (National Commission for Arms Control – CNCA).

In addition to the official acts creating these agencies, three laws and one ministerial order, in particular, provide the legal framework relative to the domain of SALW and ammunition in Burkina Faso. These are summarised, in chronological order of adoption, in the following table:

³ The HACIAU was created in response to allegations suggesting that Burkina Faso had violated international sanctions regimes between the late 1990s and the early 2000s.

Name of law or decree	Date	Notes
Décret n° 2009-301 portant régime des armes et munitions civiles au Burkina Faso	8 May 2009	Governs the production, transfer, sale, possession, import, transport and transformation of civilian firearms and ammunition – weapons of war and corresponding ammunition are excluded.
Loi n° 014-2019/AN portant mise en œuvre du Traité sur le Commerce des Armes au Burkina Faso	30 April 2019	Implements the provisions of the ATT, with the stated goals of governing the transfer, preventing and eliminating the illicit trade and diversion of conventional weapons, contributing to peace, security, international and regional stability, and reducing human suffering. Specifically forbids non-state actors in Burkina Faso from being the end recipient or end user of a weapon or ammunition of war.
Arrêté n° 2019-009PM/SG du 7 mai 2019	7 May 2019	Establishes official standard operating procedures for the documentation, management and tracing of illicit weapons and ammunition.
Loi n° 030-2021/AN portant régime général des armes, de leurs pièces, éléments, munitions et autres matériels connexes au Burkina Faso	18 May 2021	Enumerates strict penalties – in the form of imprisonment and fines – for illicit possession, production or trafficking of weapons or ammunition, as well as for producing unmarked weapons.

Table 1: Laws constituting the legal framework relative to small arms and ammunition in Burkina Faso

The laws from 2019 and 2021 are of particular importance, not only because they represent the most recent developments but also because together they constitute a robust domestic legal framework for the adoption of the standards of the ATT, regulating all civilian and military arms, their components, and munitions with the aim of preventing and eradicating illicit trade and diversion of conventional arms.

Anecdotally, it is interesting to note that Burkina Faso was the second country in Africa (after its neighbour Mali) to deposit instruments of ratification and one of the first to integrate the ATT into its national legislation. Burkina Faso's track record of submitting annual reports as a State Party to the ATT is mixed, however. Reports were submitted and made public for the first three years (2015–17); but since then only one further report has been submitted (for 2019), and that was not made publicly available.

3. Conclusions of the nationwide mapping exercise 2017–2021

Between June 2017 and July 2020, the author, acting in concert with CAR and the HACIAU, carried out photographic documentation of 4,035 weapons (held illegally or for illicit use) seized by Burkinabè law enforcement and security forces and kept in courthouses, police stations and gendarmerie units.

During the same nationwide documentation exercise, CAR also documented 9,785 rounds of ammunition belonging to 1,292 different lots, of various calibres, seized by the Burkinabè law enforcement agencies since 1991.

See figures 2 and 3 for an overview of the 2017–2020 documentation sites and general categories of weapons comprising the data.

What follows is a series of observational highlights on the illicit weapons and ammunition in the dataset, together with some reflections on their potential sources.

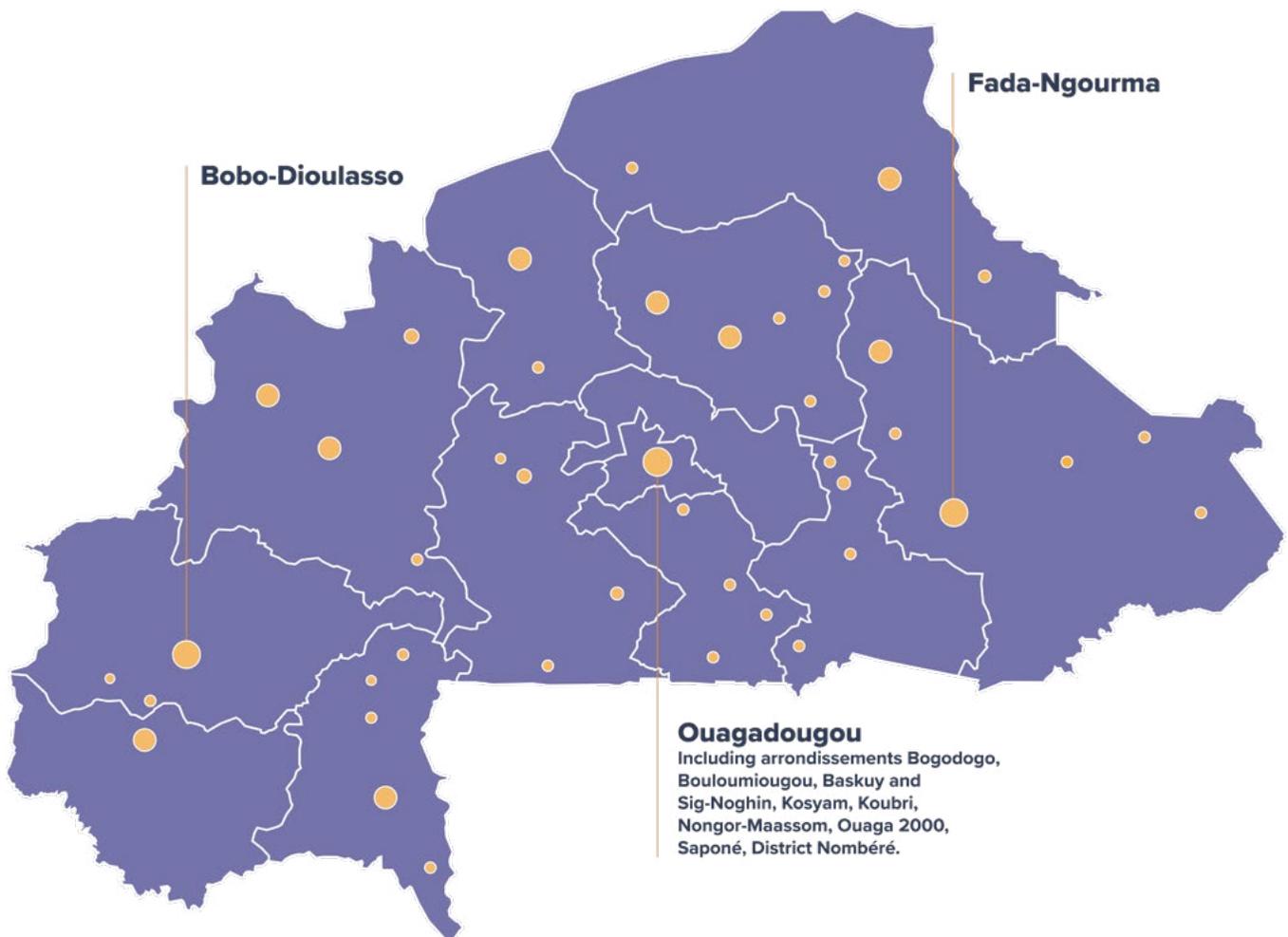


Figure 2: Locations of CAR documentations of arms and ammunition in Burkina Faso between 2017 and 2020.

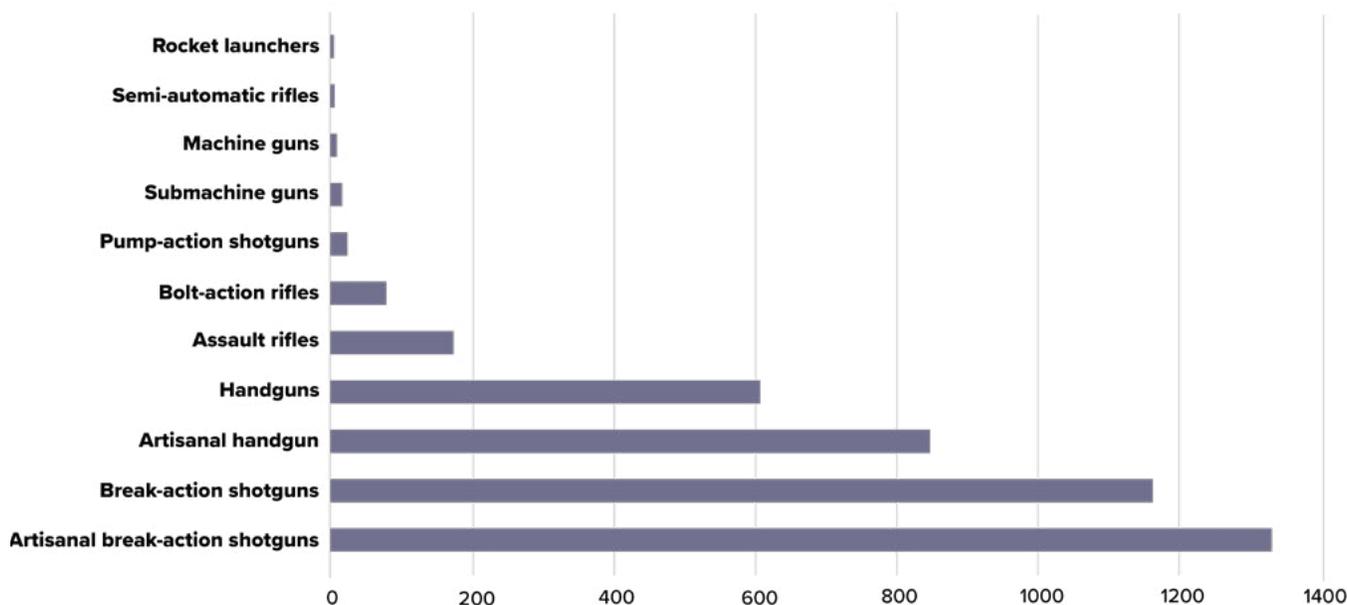


Figure 3: Breakdown of 2017–2020 seizures documented by general weapon category

Domestic production in Burkina Faso responsible for half the illicit weapons documented

An analysis of the illicit arms and ammunition in the dataset identifies 31 countries of manufacture, as illustrated in Figure 4 below.⁴ Weapons apparently manufactured in artisanal workshops in Burkina Faso represent just over half of the sample (51.37 per cent), numbering 1,987 weapons in total – these are typically single-shot break-action 12-gauge hunting rifles and pistols. These weapons are often referred to as ‘locally made’, but such descriptions are rather misleading in the sense that the geographically widespread nature of the documentations shows that they can travel long distances from their point of production or initial sale and can cross, in some circumstances, international borders.

Unlike industrially produced weapons, which are generally marked during the manufacturing phase, most of the handcrafted weapons under seizure in Burkina Faso (approximately 85 per cent of this sample) do not present any marking code. This lack of information on the weapon complicates, often to the point of making it impossible, the unambiguous identification of the weapon, its manufacturer, or even its year of production. The majority of handcrafted weapons under seizure cannot therefore be formally traced.

The legislation review that resulted in the adoption of decree n° 2009-301 (see Table 1 above), however, introduced a requirement for marking at manufacture and record-keeping of civilian weapons in Burkina Faso, resulting in manufacturers assigning each firearm a unique serial number and maintaining production and sales records. The presence of a large proportion of unmarked weapons in the seizures could hence result from the fact that some weapons may have been produced before the implementation of a legal marking obligation for artisanal manufacturers in Burkina Faso, while others may have been manufactured in neighbouring countries (where domestic legislations does not establish marking requirements) or may have been produced illegally.

Although documented in relatively small quantities, it should also be noted that the dataset also contains four artisanal shotguns apparently manufactured in Mali as well as four artisanal shotguns apparently manufactured in Ghana. An additional 62 semi-automatic pistols in calibre 7.65 x 17 mm SR, clearly manufactured in artisanal workshops but nonetheless showing a certain degree of technical sophistication and semi-industrial processes which set them apart from other examples of artisanal production found in the region, were also documented in Ouagadougou. According to information revealed by local partners, these weapons trace their origins to workshops in Ghana. To be sure, such weapons are not – in contrast with those weapons of war discussed

in more detail below – indicative of serious flaws in states’ physical security and stockpile management, nor do the quantities documented represent a significant proportion of the dataset. However, their presence in Burkinabè territory nonetheless demonstrates the existence of cross-border flows and the fact that the circulation of craft-produced firearms does not always remain limited to a small geographical space.

Artisanal weapons are often made to order, sold individually or in such small quantities as to make drawing meaningful, generalised conclusions about how they end up involved in illicit activities or in the hands of unauthorised individuals next to impossible.

These weapons are abundant in Burkina Faso, and their mechanisms of diversion are likely as myriad.

⁴ Figure 4 includes the top 18 countries of manufacture. Data attributed to ‘others’ included weapons and ammunition manufactured in 25 different countries: Albania, Algeria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, Ghana, Germany, Hungary, Iraq, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, the Netherlands, North Korea, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Sudan, Sweden, Taiwan and Zimbabwe.

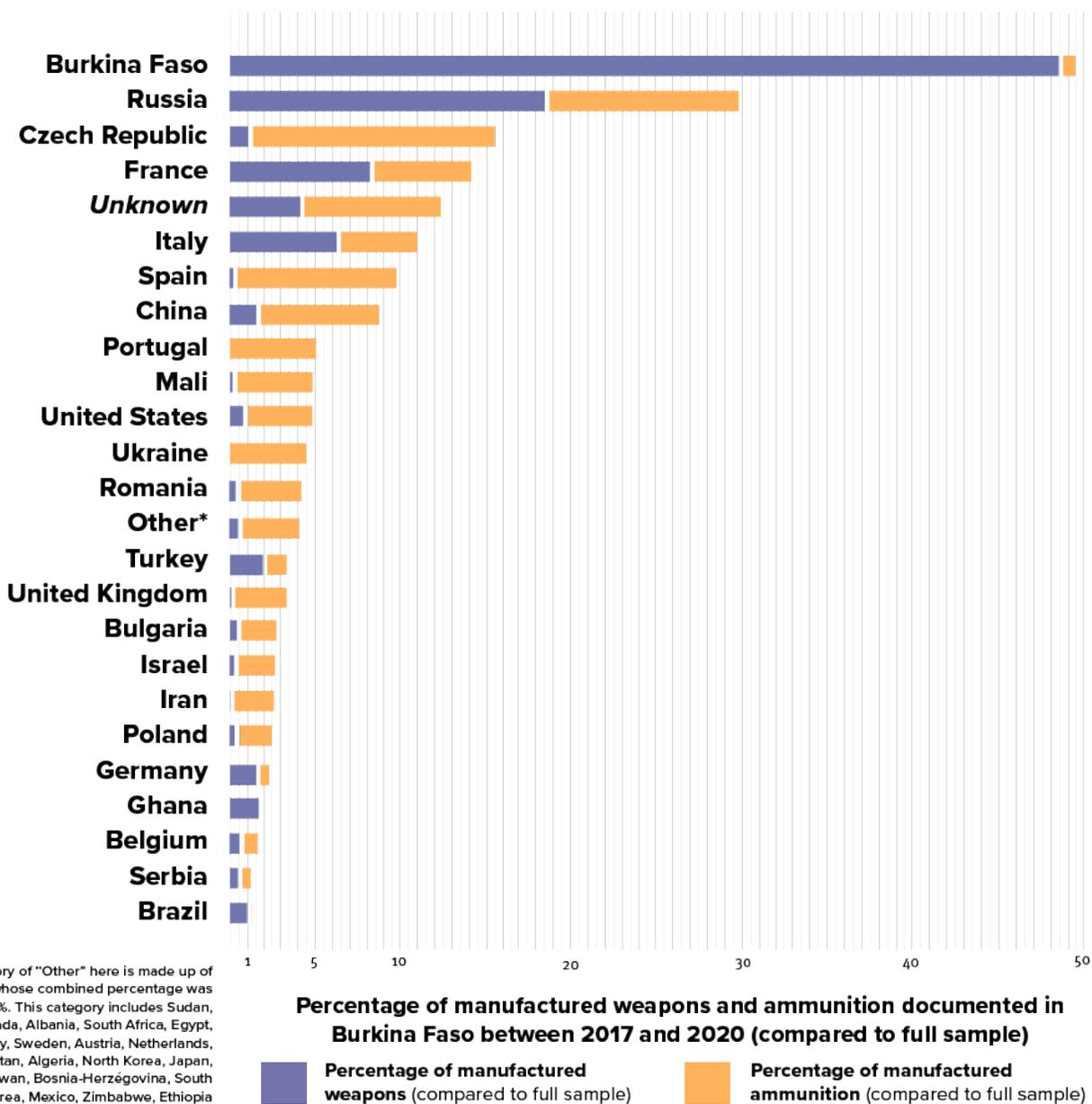


Figure 4: Countries of origin of illicit weapons and ammunition documented in Burkina Faso between 2017 and 2020.

More than half of industrially manufactured weapons seized are hunting rifles for civilian use

If one considers only the industrially manufactured weapons in the dataset, more than half (55.72 per cent) represent hunting shotguns intended for the civilian market. These weapons, while not manufactured locally, are legal to import, sell, and possess – with proper authorisation – and their prevalence is again a testament to the fact that hunting is both an element of traditional rural culture and historically a significant facet of the international tourist market in Burkina Faso. A perception of rising insecurity may also contribute to the general rural population's desire to acquire arms for self-defence.

Most of these weapons were manufactured in the Russian Federation (62.18 per cent), a distinction due in no small part to the popularity of the Baikal brand in Burkina Faso and, to a lesser degree, in the entire sub-region. It is indeed interesting to note that the 60 hunting weapons in the sample manufactured after 2000 were all Russian-manufactured Baikal shotguns. There is, however, no reason whatsoever to suspect these weapons were the subject of illegal import.

Given the prevalence of hunting rifles in Burkina Faso, coupled with the average age of those in the dataset (more than 90 per cent of the weapons documented were manufactured before 2000), the possible mechanisms of diversion and the reason behind the abundance of this type of weapon in the dataset are too numerous to note or to support any meaningful, generalised conclusions.

Supply chains for illicit weapons of war and ammunition are largely opportunist, most likely resulting from battlefield capture, loss or theft from state arsenals in the region

While weapons of war make up less than five per cent of the dataset, they are nonetheless interesting for several reasons. Firstly, they are most often the result of seizures in the wake of attacks by armed groups and anti-terror or anti-organised-crime operations. Secondly, their numbers appear to be on the rise in recent years, keeping pace with the unfortunate deterioration in the security situations in Burkina Faso's border regions as well as in neighbouring Mali and Niger.

Perhaps most importantly, weapons of war represent the type of weapon whose points of diversion are inherently easiest to determine, at least to the extent that, by their very nature, one can assume their initial diversion was

from state-owned arsenals – if not those of Burkina Faso or an immediate neighbour, then most likely from somewhere in the region.

It should be noted that frustrations and unrest among security personnel in Burkina Faso resulted in significant mutinies, in both 2007 and 2015, events which also led to diversion of state-owned weapons (including but not limited to weapons of war, as well as some pump-action shotguns and semi-automatic service pistols) and resulted in their subsequent seizure.

While many of the weapons of war showing signs of foreign origin appear to be 'legacy weapons' from older and more distant conflicts (in particular the war in Liberia from the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire between 2002 and 2012, and the fall of Colonel Qaddafi's regime in Libya in 2011), evidence of more recent diversion through battlefield capture in the Sahel and cross-border movement of armed groups is also visible in the dataset. Both cases are explored in more detail in Section 4 of this report.

It is interesting to note that almost half (47.07 per cent) of the ammunition documented is calibre 7.62 x 39 mm, designed for use in weapons of war. This figure is all the more compelling when compared to that of 12-gauge ammunition, the second most frequently occurring calibre in the sample, which represents only 17.48 per cent of the total, despite being the calibre of weapon most frequently documented (hunting rifles and artisanal weapons, as mentioned earlier).

This gap – and the prevalence of 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition – is most easily explained by the fact that ammunition of this calibre is generally sold in large quantities, as part of national procurement, unlike ammunition intended for weapons available on the civilian market. It is also necessary to consider the fact that most of this ammunition was recovered during operations carried out within the framework of anti-crime or anti-terrorist operations or, often, following attacks by armed groups when large quantities of materiel are seized. When the sample is adjusted to ignore ammunition seized in these contexts, the proportion of ammunition calibre 7.62 x 39 mm decreases to 19.16 per cent of the sample. Although diminished, this proportion remains the most significant, which suggests a considerable level of dissemination of prohibited ammunition within the country's borders and suggests a relative frequency of diversions from national arsenals (either from Burkina Faso or neighbouring countries). In any case, the statistical gap between weapons and ammunition

associated with calibre 7.62 x 39 mm raises questions about the real level of circulation of weapons of this calibre in illicit spheres.

More than half the illicit weapons stem from 1990s production

More than half of the weapons (56.70 per cent) for which it is possible to determine the year of manufacturing date from the 1990s – see Figure 5 for more details on year of manufacture. The percentage of weapons manufactured in the decade of 2010 (11.84 per cent) is the second highest, which provides an important insight into more recent trends in illegal traffic in Burkina Faso and, perhaps, an indication that the proportion of weapons that are diverted soon after being taken in custody by their first legal consignee is not negligible. Among these weapons, those of more recent manufacture – assault rifles and

semi-automatic pistols – date from 2017 and are of Russian, Turkish, and Brazilian manufacture, although it does not appear to be the case that these weapons entered Burkina Faso through illicit trafficking but rather were imported legally.

The composition of the ammunition sample is, as with the weapons, rather heterogeneous. CAR was able to identify 40 different manufacturing countries, with a predominance of ammunition produced in the Czech Republic (14.66 per cent) and the Russian Federation (12.93 %) (see Figure 4, above) from a sample composed mostly of ammunition produced between 1980 and 2000 (see Figure 5 below).

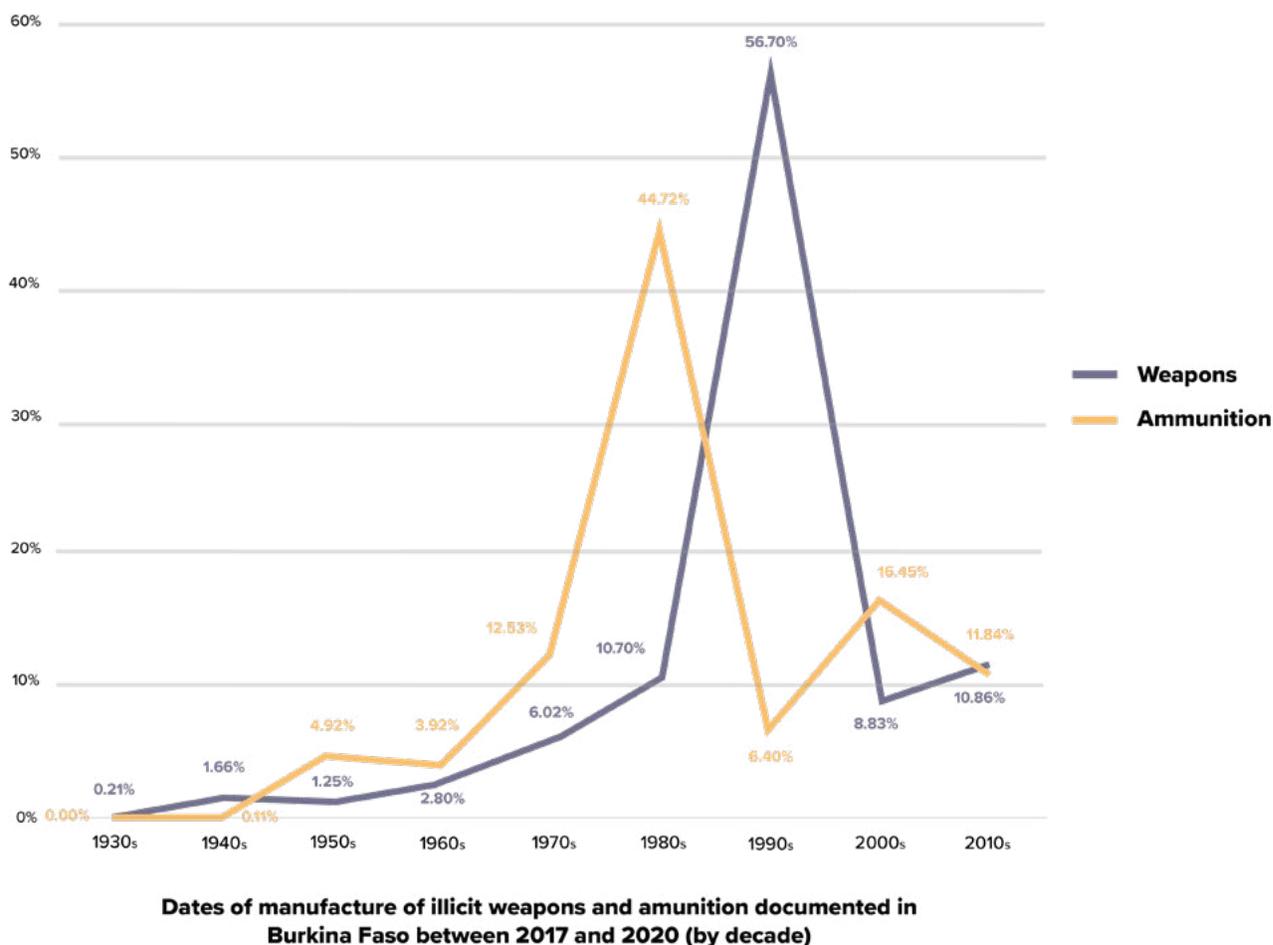


Figure 5: Dates of manufacture of illicit weapons and ammunition documented in Burkina Faso between 2017 and 2020

4. Evidence from the 2017–2020 dataset of SALW and ammunition of foreign origin

It bears repeating that not all seized arms or ammunition of foreign origin are an indication of illegal importation. While the available information does not provide entirely re-established chains of custody in sufficient quantities to draw statistically viable conclusions about points of diversion, the dataset does offer ample evidence of cases where diversion occurred after legal import by an authorised commercial agent.

The dataset's 76 Turkish-made pistols provide a compelling example. All were produced between 2006 and 2017, and all but five were produced after 2010. While these Turkish-made handguns represent a little over 21.5 per cent of all handguns seized, they make up the vast majority in the dataset produced after 2009. Information obtained by CAR following trace requests sent to Turkish producers and cross-checks made by the HACIAU File Service confirm the legal origins of the vast majority of Turkish pistols documented under seizure (74 out of 76, or over 97 per cent of the sample).

The relative prominence of legally imported late-model Turkish-made pistols reflects recent developments in the Burkinabè legal civilian market. Most importers with whom the author was able to talk declared that Turkey has for some years been their preferred supplier, in particular after EU member states – historically the main source of handguns in Burkina Faso – strengthened their domestic regulations and licencing process, which resulted in a decrease of export licences granted and an increase of commercial risks for the importing parties, and longer procurement cycles. Although the quality of the handguns manufactured in Turkey is not fully comparable with that attributed to handguns produced by Western European manufacturers, most of the Burkinabè importers consider that Turkish pistols represent a better value-for-money solution and prefer to take advantage of the faster export licences procedures in place in Turkey.

It would therefore seem that the makeup of available arms – both authorised and illicit – in Burkina Faso is determined more by market forces and available avenues for legitimate international trade, making illegal importation of industrially produced weapons the exception rather than the rule.

However, as noted earlier, the most glaring exception to this rule is military weapons. These may comprise a small proportion of the total dataset – 199 weapons, representing slightly more than five per cent of the total – but this is expected to rise as the security situation in the region continues to be plagued by non-state armed groups with a demonstrated ability to conduct asymmetrical warfare against isolated security forces, and in particular to carry out raids that provide them with large quantities of weapons, ammunition and vehicles.

With assault rifles being a workhorse staple of military arsenals, it is no surprise that this type of weapon is the most prevalent in the sample – of the 199 military weapons documented, 165 (83 per cent) were assault rifles. Considering the historical background of arms exports to West Africa during and immediately following the Cold War, it is likewise not surprising that these assault rifles, as with the dataset's weapons of war in general, were largely produced prior to the year 2000 in Russia, former socialist republics of Eastern Europe, or China.

Indeed, cross-referencing the data collected between June 2017 and July 2020 in Burkina Faso with the data available in the CAR overall database gives firm indications of the origin of some of the seized weapons documented. The following examples are mainly weapons diverted from the reserves of states in the sub-region:⁵

- **Four Chinese-manufactured Type 56-2 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifles**, seized separately by Burkinabè security forces in Ouagadougou, Tenkodogo and Dori, and by French forces in an undisclosed location. Their serial numbers interweave with those of weapons known to have belonged to the national stocks of Côte d'Ivoire, as profiled by the Panel of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire in 2011 and further corroborated by the proximity of the serial numbers to those on a list of purchases made by the Forces Armées Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI) between 2002 and 2004 obtained by the author.
- **One Russian-manufactured AKS-47 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifle**, seized in Batié, bearing ECOWAS markings on the left side of the weapon's receiver indicating it belonged to the national stocks of Côte d'Ivoire.
- **One Czech-manufactured vz. 58 V 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifle**, documented in Ouagadougou, whose factory markings and serial number were erased but whose receiver bears ECOWAS markings indicating Ivoirian state ownership.

- **Six Polish-manufactured Kbk-AKMS 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifles**, seized separately, whose characteristic Arabic markings, when coupled with information provided by Polish authorities, suggest – but do not confirm – transfer to Libyan stocks in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

These examples concretely illustrate the existence of several cross-border trafficking routes into Burkina Faso, although they provide little detail on the diversion mechanisms behind the illicit circulation of the weapons concerned.

In addition to older assault rifles that appear to have been diverted many years prior in more faraway conflicts in Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia or Libya, the dataset also contains military weapons diverted from the stocks of neighbouring countries. Ammunition of corresponding calibre is also observable, and its relatively recent production (within the last five years) is noteworthy especially because, while impossible to confirm without the original packaging or a bill of lading, it is a good indication of recent import by a state within the sub-region. A few examples include:

- **Three Russian-manufactured AK 103 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifle**, manufactured in 2017 and seized during counter-terrorism operations, bearing ECOWAS markings identifying the Malian Armed Forces as the last legitimate owner.
- **One Italian-manufactured Beretta 92 FS 9 x 19 mm semi-automatic pistol**, documented in Bobo Dioulasso, traced to a sale to the Malian Internal Security Ministry in July 2001.⁶
- **One Yugoslavian-manufactured M70B1 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifle**, seized in connection with anti-terror operations in Dori by the Unité Spéciale d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (USIGN), traced to a June 2013 sale to the Malian Defense Ministry.⁷
- **94 rounds of Bulgarian-manufactured 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 10_17**, indicating production in 2017, seized on two separate occasions in 2019.
- **Seven rounds of Russian-manufactured 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 3_17**, indicating production in 2017, seized on four separate occasions in 2019 and 2020.
- **Seven rounds of Bulgarian-manufactured 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 10_18**, indicating production in 2018, seized in 2020.

- **Three rounds of Chinese-manufactured 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 71_18**, indicating production in 2018, seized in 2020.
- **19 rounds of Bulgarian-manufactured 7.62 x 54 mm R ammunition bearing the headstamp 10_18**, indicating production in 2018, seized in 2020.

It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of recent diversions resulting in seizures on the other side of the border does not occur in exclusively one direction – weapons bearing specific ECOWAS import markings or other strong indications of Burkinabè national ownership have turned up in the hands of non-state armed groups operating in Mali, for example. In some such instances, tracing enquiries have identified interesting but not altogether surprising points of diversion: remote outposts of Burkinabè security forces which have come under attack in recent years, resulting in losses of weapons, ammunition and vehicles, as well as in casualties.

The few episodes listed above do not allow quantification of the extent of the phenomenon of battlefield capture and must necessarily be considered anecdotal, since it is not possible to assess correctly to what extent they are statistically representative. They nevertheless illustrate the capacity of radical and armed groups to take advantage of the weaknesses of the states they target, to diversify their supply chains based on which opportunities present themselves, and to maintain their military capacity without having to activate logistically complex and financially expensive modes of resupply.

⁵ The items in question – as with the entirety of the Burkina Faso dataset – were documented while under judicial seal and as such are subject to confidentiality agreements with the authorities having granted access to the author. While a comprehensive document encompassing all findings was provided to the CNCA, identifying information such as serial numbers is obscured for the purposes of this report.

⁶ Correspondence from Humbert CTTS S.A. Document on file.

⁷ Correspondence from the Permanent Mission of Serbia to the United Nations, dated 30 November 2020. Document on file.

5. Arms and ammunition observed in 2021

The author's December 2021 visit provided access to certain seizures made by Burkinabè authorities, including 17 firearms confiscated during counter-terrorism operations or in the aftermath of attacks on security forces perpetrated by non-state armed groups.

This dataset contains 16 automatic weapons, including assault rifles and medium machine guns, as well as grenade launchers, and more than 170 rounds of small-calibre ammunition and rocket-propelled grenades. These items should be considered as distinct from the weapons and ammunition documented during the 2017–2020 national mapping exercise, given that they consist exclusively of weapons and ammunition made available to the author by the CNCA in Ouagadougou. It therefore does not represent a comprehensive list of illicit seizures made in 2021, nor can it serve as the basis for a meaningful statistical analysis.

Several of the weapons seized were further examples of assault rifles manufactured during the Cold War by Warsaw Pact nations and whose points of diversion were impossible to determine. The following examples stand out, however, because they underline the presence in the illicit sphere of recently manufactured weapons, one of which was produced in 2019 and thus must have been diverted relatively soon after import:

- **One Bulgarian-manufactured MG-1M/M1 7.62 x 54 mm R medium machine gun**, manufactured in 2019 and legally exported to the Burkina Faso Ministry of Defence, seized in 2021 during a counter-terrorism operation.
- **One Bulgarian-manufactured MG-1M/M1 7.62 x 54 mm R medium machine gun**, produced in 2010, seized



in 2021, and bearing an ECOWAS import marking on the left side of the receiver indicating attribution to the stocks of the Malian Army (État-Majeur de l'Armée de Terre, EMAT)

The author also observed recently manufactured ammunition, including rounds of Bulgarian-produced 7.62 x 39 mm with the headstamps 10_17 and 10_18, indicating manufacture in 2017 and 2018 respectively. It is interesting to note that seized rounds with these headstamps were also documented during the 2017–2020 mapping exercise – as mentioned above – although, given the quantities of rounds produced in a given year and the lack of traceable information on an individual round, it is impossible to speculate on the likelihood of whether or not any of this ammunition shared a common legal end user or point of diversion.

Russian-produced 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 3_17, indicating production in 2017, was also seized in 2021, as in earlier years. It is possible, though by no means certain, that this ammunition stems from diversion from neighbouring Malian stockpiles. This hypothesis remains unconfirmed and is based on the circumstantial observation that nearly all the ammunition bearing the 3_17 headstamp observed by CAR in the sub-region was documented in Mali (207 out of 215 rounds).

The sample is relatively diverse: it includes items from a dozen manufacturing countries and a comparatively elevated proportion (more than 37 per cent) of recently manufactured (post-2016) ammunition. The presence of such weapons and ammunition, especially given its recent production and in some cases suspected points of diversion in neighbouring states, continues to illustrate the existence of cross-border flows as well as the threat of battlefield diversion.



Figure 6 and 7: Russian-produced 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 3_17 © Conflict Armament Research

6. Main vectors of supply

The data suggests that the principal vectors of supply for weapons seized in Burkina Faso stem from items which are legally obtainable – with authorisation – on the civilian market. Domestic production of single-shot shotguns, while well regulated by Burkinabè legislation, is nonetheless the source of more than half of these seizures. Similarly, industrially produced semi-automatic pistols and pump- or break-action shotguns legally imported (directly or after transit in third countries) from the Russian Federation and, to an increasing degree in recent years, Turkey, are also prevalent.

An analysis of seizure locations indicates that access to industrially manufactured weapons is easier in the capital region than in other parts of the country. That observation should not be surprising – Ouagadougou is a regional hub for transportation and commerce, with a greater number of points of sale (legal as well as illegal) and a market meeting different requirements from those of the more rural provinces. The prevalence of recent seizures of legally manufactured and imported weapons in the capital, however, nevertheless represents an element that deserves special attention from the national authorities.

As identified earlier in Section 4, battlefield capture represents another significant point of diversion and source of illicit supply, in particular when it comes to military weapons and ammunition of corresponding calibre seized from radical non-state armed groups. Considering the dynamic – and arguably deteriorating – security situation both in Burkina Faso's border regions and in neighbouring states (Mali and Niger in particular), it is not entirely surprising that such groups seem largely able to depend on opportunistic raids on state security forces' isolated outposts or convoys for resupply of serviceable weapons and ammunition, often both of very recent manufacture.

Indeed, the data suggests a worrying trend: the sample of military weapons documented consists of 44 weapons (around 22 per cent of the total) for which it is impossible to date the seizure, 56 weapons seized before 2018 (approximately 28 per cent of the total) and 99 weapons (approximately half of the total) seized between January 2018 and July 2020. Although these figures deserve to be considered cautiously, they nevertheless suggest that seizures of military weapons are likely to be on the increase.

On the other hand, the data also shows that 'legacy weapons' from older and relatively distant conflicts continue to circulate in the region, sometimes ending up seized by authorities in Burkina Faso. By these weapons' very nature it is difficult to determine the exact chronology of their diversion and chain of custody. Some may have followed a relatively direct trajectory into Burkina Faso shortly after diversion in the 1980s or 1990s, while others may have been in circulation in the illicit sphere elsewhere in the region for years or even decades prior to arrival and subsequent seizure.

While the sample of seized military weapons observed in 2021 does not lend itself to statistically valid comparison with previous years' data, it is nevertheless clear that the deteriorating security situation throughout the Sahel, including in Burkina Faso's border regions, continues to provide ample opportunities for non-state armed groups to resupply themselves with arms and ammunition. As states in the region, including Burkina Faso, continue to arm and equip their security forces for the fight to secure their more remote territories, non-state armed groups seem to avail themselves of the same procurements, as they succeed in capturing significant volumes of equipment from the very same security forces, through attacks, ambushes and direct combat.

7. Recommendations to curb diversion and illicit flows

Burkina Faso has made significant steps towards establishing systems and practices to curb diversion and illicit flows, including comparatively robust legislative frameworks regulating importation, production, ownership and trade, as well as pioneering procedures for tracing illicit arms.

Nevertheless, a combined analysis of the existing normative framework and the dataset suggests the following recommendations, which were discussed with the CNCA and its institutional partners during the author's visit to Ouagadougou in late 2021 and subsequently approved:

- Reinforce regulations and enforcement of existing laws concerning domestic production of weapons for the civilian market, as these remain of the utmost importance given the proportion of seizures these weapons represent. This would be in keeping with the domestic normative framework in this area, which appears to be sufficiently elaborated: artisanal manufacturers are aware of the regulations, and checks undertaken by CNCA staff indicate that they largely comply with the legal requirements, both in terms of marking their manufacture and in terms of collecting and keeping (manual) records about their commercial activities.
- Diversion and/or criminal misuse of handguns which were legally imported, and in some cases no doubt legally acquired, represent a significant risk to public safety. Authorities should:
 - consider more stringent methods to verify individual purchasers' fitness to possess a firearm
 - implement training and awareness programs – addressed to both the relevant national authorities and the licensed private traders – and more regular verification of the importers' sales records
 - develop additional awareness-raising activities to increase legal firearms owners' understanding of the importance to report theft or loss of a weapon
- Improvements in the collection and the management of this information could improve understanding of the weaknesses and risks of diversion specific to private firearms ownership.
- Diversion of military weapons and ammunition through battlefield capture will remain a sad reality for some time – both within and across Burkina Faso's borders – but more preventive measures to understand and minimise these risks are required to disrupt these illicit supply lines.
 - Specifically, Burkina Faso should lead by example when it comes to marking state-held weapons. The Police Nationale seem to have made considerable progress in marking the vast majority of their weapons and customs officers are expected to start the marking programme of their stockpiles, in compliance with existing ECOWAS standards, in 2022. Authorities should make additional – and significant – efforts to expand the scope of the process, in particular to include weapons operated by the Gendarmerie and the armed forces.
 - Enhanced marking of ammunition may provide additional information to improve understanding of diversion schemes and therefore to design more effective responses. European or Chinese manufacturers with whom Burkina Faso and other states in the region frequently contract to produce large quantities of ammunition should be encouraged to research and develop new solutions and institute pre-delivery marking. This would provide more information than the typical factory number and year of manufacture combination, which is largely inadequate when it comes to establishing chain of custody and tailoring adequate prevention initiatives. From a post-delivery point of view, accessible solutions to further improve the traceability of stockpiles of ammunition have been recently developed, in China as well as in Europe, and states like Burkina Faso may reap concrete benefits from adopting them.
- Authorities in Burkina Faso, namely the CNCA, are well-placed and well-equipped to carry out the tracing of seized weapons, whether civilian or military, and should continue to do so systematically. In the case of domestically

produced or legally imported weapons, internal tracing remains a relatively straightforward matter for the CNCA. For civilian weapons suspected of having been imported illegally, it will be necessary to contact the manufacturer or export authorities in the country of manufacture, just as with military weapons diverted from the stockpiles of another state in the region – unless they are marked with ECOWAS import marks as per Article 19 of the ECOWAS Convention. Concerned states and relevant non-governmental or intergovernmental organisations in a position to facilitate such requests should be encouraged to provide the highest level of cooperation possible.

- The lack of a normative framework or underlying procedures in Burkina Faso for the safe and timely disposal or destruction of weapons and ammunition seized (once they are no longer required as evidence in pending prosecutions) represents both a practical challenge and a potential risk. Not only does the sheer quantity of seizures built up over decades present an obstacle to adequately managing the available storage space, but it also poses hazards to public safety and represents a diversion risk itself. Most evidence rooms in use do not appear to be designed as armouries, nor are the personnel staffing them necessarily trained in firearms safety or the level of robust record-keeping required. To mitigate the risk of accidental injuries and prevent seized weapons and ammunition from finding their way back out into the illicit sphere, Burkina Faso should consider establishing mechanisms for their destruction following prosecution.

8. Quantification of needs from Burkina Faso stakeholders

Acting upon the recommendations formulated during the EWG Working Session held in Ouagadougou on 10 December 2021, the CNCA coordinated a consultation process that involved all its institutional partners. The objective of the initiative was to identify the main challenges experienced by the national authorities directly involved in the combat against the illicit circulation of firearms and related ammunition in Burkina Faso. Burkinabè stakeholders focused particularly on tools and equipment that could multiply and consolidate the results of initiatives taken in the past few years, and contribute to addressing particular problems, such as the accumulation of confiscated firearms and obsolete equipment in storage facilities across the country.

Such an approach was adopted with the intention to enable international assistance providers –including China and the European Union – to support practical solutions to achieve concrete, quantifiable and rapid results.

The needs identified via the consultation process were submitted to the author on 18 February 2022. In brief, they include the following, with Burkinabè authorities deeming it relevant to disaggregate their needs by area of activity:

- a) Hardware equipment required to ensure the deployment at national scale of the automated information system for the management and monitoring of weapons transfers and use (Système d'information automatisé de gestion et de suivi du transfert des armes et de leur utilisation – SITAUI in its French acronym). The system – initiated under the HACIAU's coordination – is designed to increase national authorities' capacity to better capture and manage all types of (state- and privately-owned) firearms-related data.
- b) Cameras and documentation kits to ensure the sustainability and full implementation of the provisions adopted through the Arrêté n° 2019-009PM/SG, in particular in record-keeping and tracing of seized illicit firearms and ammunition. Since 2019, Burkinabè authorities have created a national mechanism enabling the regular documentation, the systematic recording and the tracing (both internal and external) of seized weapons and ammunition. In order to reach its full

scope, however, the mechanism requires all security and law-enforcement agencies to be actively and regularly involved in the mechanism, in particular at the data-collection level, and additional means appear to be necessary.

- c) Firearms-marking machines to enlarge the scope of the efforts already undertaken to mark all state-owned firearms in compliance with ECOWAS standards and obligations. Although some agencies have nearly completed marking their stockpiles, others have not yet engaged on this issue. While it may not be the only challenge, the limited number of marking machines available in Burkina Faso is broadly identified by Burkinabè stakeholders as one of the most serious obstacles. This is particularly the case when weapons to be marked are allocated to units serving in areas that are distant from the main urban centres or regularly conducting long-range operations.

- d) Firearms-destruction machines to reduce the volume of obsolete firearms. The accumulation of unserviceable weapons within state-owned arsenals and of those confiscated under a final court decision have long been identified as potential sources of diversion and hazard by the CNCA and its partners. Firearms-destruction machines were therefore recognised by all the stakeholders who took part in the consultation process as essential to tackling this specific challenge.

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The China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA)

CACDA is a non-profit NGO founded in 2001 that focuses on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. Its main activities include the coordination and organisation of research, education and advocacy on issues of arms control and international security. In addition, CACDA has hosted and sponsored seminars and workshops on similar issues in China. Within the context of this project, CACDA has been established as an official partner and will be leading on the implementation of the project in China and contributing to overall project implementation in Europe and Africa. CACDA previously contributed to the implementation of EU-China-Africa dialogue and cooperation on conventional arms controls back in 2012–2014.

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