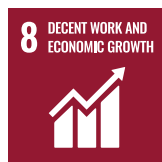


solidar



ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RIGHTS REPORT **BURKINA FASO**

Zoom on Decent Work
for small-scale artisanal miners





SUMMARY

How can the European Union (EU) better contribute to building an enabling space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Burkina Faso? How can the EU support the progressive realization of Economic and Social Rights - that is to say Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise, Decent Work and the Right to Social Protection for all - in connection with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The SOLIDAR Network is active in Burkina Faso through its member and partner organisations. Its first Economic and Social Rights Report on the country, published in early 2020, provided an overview of the challenges faced by the Burkinabé in respect to matters such as Decent Work, Social Protection as well as enabling space for civil society. Building on that report, the current one, realised under the leadership of SOLIDAR's member **Solidarité Laïque**, takes a closer look at the main challenges faced by the country in regard to the achievement of the rights of Decent Work and Social Protection for Burkinabé workers involved in small-scale informal artisanal gold mining in Burkina Faso.

The report concludes with recommendations for the EU and its Delegation to Burkina Faso on how to support the country in achieving the full realisation of these rights for its people and workers.

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1. ABOUT THE SOLIDAR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS MONITOR

In 2015, all United Nations member states signed up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a global commitment to transform our current model of economic development into one based on respect for human rights and the environment. In 2017 - with the aim of promoting policy coherence for development - the new European Consensus on Development announced the alignment of the development activities of the EU and its member states with the 2030 Agenda.

According to SOLIDAR, the 2030 Agenda constitutes a powerful framework to:

- Promote a model of sustainable development at the service of the greatest number and not of the few, making the full realization of human and environmental rights its main objective;
- Ensure the progressive realization of economic and social rights, namely decent work, social protection and freedom of association.

The Economic and Social Rights Monitoring Report (ESRM) is a tool developed by SOLIDAR members and partners within the framework of the EU-funded program “Organizing International Solidarity” (OIS).¹ The scope of the ESRM is to engage in a structured dialogue with the EU, and to contribute to the EU Programming for the period 2021-2027, by collecting the views and recommendations of civil society organizations (CSOs) on the contribution of national and European policies and programs to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal, and especially of:

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



SDG 3: Good health and Wellbeing

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG 4: Quality Education

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



SDG 8: Decent Work and economic growth

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals

¹ A presentation of the OIS programme is available at: <https://prezi.com/view/9zuxuivoqUSD3w1pGJSz>

² <https://www.solidar.org/en/publications/economic-and-social-rights-monitor-burkina-faso>

The ESRM aims to engage in a structured dialogue with the EU over the progressive realization of economic and social rights and the Agenda 2030, and to contribute to the EU Programming for the period 2021-2027, by paying special attention to EU and national contributions to the promotion of (1) an enabling environment for CSOs and Human Rights Defenders and (2) Decent Work and Social Protection for all.

Building on the first Economic and Social Rights Report for Burkina Faso published in early 2020,² the SOLIDAR Network in the country led by Solidarité Laïque realised the present report to **highlight the lack of Economic and Social Rights among small scale artisanal gold miners in Burkina Faso**, drawing the EU's and international partners' attention to the challenges and needs of these populations. The report focuses particularly on the **rights of Decent Work and Social Protection** for these groups, as well as on the necessity to counter the environmental degradation caused by artisanal mining, and **provides recommendations to the EU**, in light of the current development programming process for the 2021-2027 period, on promoting the full realisation of these rights for Burkinabé workers.

2. SMALL-SCALE INFORMAL ARTISANAL GOLD MINING IN BURKINA FASO: AN OVERVIEW

Burkina Faso is a low-income Sahelian country considered by the EU as a key strategic partner “in a region marked for several years now by increased illegal trafficking and terrorism in neighbouring countries and by regional stability in need of strengthening.”³ Despite the progress made in the past two decades, Burkina Faso faces many development challenges, particularly in terms of health and education, with 40.1% of its population living below the national poverty line.⁴

The country’s economy is mostly based on agriculture, which employs around 80% of the population, although, during the first and second decade of the 2000s, Burkina Faso also became a major gold mining country in Africa, and the fourth gold exporter at the global level.⁵ Gold production has seen an increase in particular over the past five years, and especially between 2017 and 2018, when, thanks to the creation of twelve additional industrial sites, production grew by more than 15%.⁶

Alongside the well organized industrial gold mining, that was possible thanks to the adoption of relevant mining legislation, the country also witnessed in recent decades the **remarkable growth of artisanal mining activities**, that are today **the primary source of income for a large number of Burkinabé**. In fact, while reliable data is limited, it has been estimated that the **number of small-scale artisanal mining sites (MAPE) ranges between 448 and 800 in the country**, and that **up to 2 million people work around the MAPE, as either dependents or peripheral workers**.⁷ According to a 2019 baseline study undertaken by the Artisanal Gold Council, Burkina Faso’s artisanal diggers produce an estimated 50 tonnes of gold yearly, which, although largely undeclared, bring in to the country some \$2 billion per year.⁸

Behind the wealth brought about by artisanal mining, however, there lies a reality of very precarious and poor living standards for people involved in this activity. In fact extraction, which is technologically rustic

³ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/burkina-faso/4352/burkina-faso-and-eu_en

⁴ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/burkina-faso/4352/burkina-faso-and-eu_en

⁵ https://www.lepoint.fr/economie/burkina-faso-boom-minier-la-malediction-n-est-pas-loin-14-09-2018-2251158_28.php

⁶ <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article99247>; <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/767774/economie/or-croissance-record-pour-les-exploitations-burkinabe/>

⁷ https://www.land-links.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/USAID-AMPR-Burkina-Faso-ASGM-Desk-Review_FINAL.pdf

⁸ <https://www.artisanalgold.org/2020/04/burkina-faso-quarantines-and-gold-prices-down-20/>

and labor intensive, entails serious health risks as well as damage to the environment, and people practicing it work without any protection or guaranteed safety standard, which often results in accidents as well as loss of human lives - for instance, in October 2019, 10 people were killed by the collapse of an artisanal gold mining site in Western Burkina Faso,⁹ and 5 more died due to a landslide in December of the same year.¹⁰

Mining regulations and the persistence of informality

An attempt to regularise artisanal mining activities was made by Burkina Faso with the approval of the first Mining Code in 1997, which included the possibility for small-scale miners to formalise their rights to mining by pursuing an ‘**authorisation for artisanal mining**’ (AAM). The latter, which was created with the objective of making it easier for domestic enterprises to follow a ‘graduation path’ leading, eventually, to large-scale mining, was relatively cheap to purchase, had a validity of 2 years while being renewable indefinitely, and granted the right - exclusively to Burkinabè nationals or to majority Burkinabè-owned companies - to extract gold over a specified area of up to a maximum of 100 ha.¹¹

In practice, however, research found that not only AAMs did not confer tenure security to artisanal miners, since, if a site under an AAM proved to be particularly fruitful, a wealthier entrepreneur could acquire an industrial mining license that entitled them to exclude the pre-existing AAMs, but also that **AAMs were mostly acquired by wealthy entrepreneurs based in the capital, rather than rural-based gold miners**, in the first place. In many cases, AAMs have in fact been held by national elites who also owned private gold trading companies called *comptoirs*, and who used the rural gold miners as their labour force. In this context, **rural gold miners were either**

⁹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/14/c_138471248.htm

¹⁰ <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article93856>

¹¹ <https://gatesopenresearch.org/documents/3-619>



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forced to sell their gold to the AAM holder, who bought at a lower price than what the miners could receive on the black market, or leave the site and risk not finding an equally prolific area to work. Clearly, this resulted in miners preferring to work in areas that were not under an AAM license, which is one of the variables that has fuelled the persistence of the informal mining sector in Burkina Faso.¹²

In 2015, the government adopted a new reform of the mining code, bringing about substantial changes to the existing legislation. For example, the new code stipulates that industrial exploration can take place on the territory of an AAM holder, “but if the AAM is not renewed because a mining title for industrial exploitation has been issued, the AAM holder is entitled to compensation.”¹³ Other major changes include “the introduction of a tax for the ‘local mining development fund’ that would support local communities affected by mining exploitation, removal of certain tax benefits and enhanced protection for the environment.”¹⁴

In 2016, the National Assembly of Burkina Faso initiated a parliamentary inquiry into mining titles and the social responsibility of mines, and found that over the 1995-2015 period the Burkinabè state suffered a loss of USD 920 Million through corruption, fraud, lack of taxation and non-payment of fees by artisanal and industrial permit holders. The parliamentary commission also noted that “permits for mining exploration and exploitation had been issued regardless of existing regulations for environmental protection, or the vicinity to infrastructures such as schools or health facilities. Mining permits had been issued without

informing provincial, departmental and municipal administration, and even against official objections by local administration and traditional authorities. **Local communities affected by mining operations complained about promises not held, damages to fields, dispossession with insufficient or no compensation, and pollution of natural resources.**”¹⁵

While the Burkinabé National Assembly has proposed some recommendations for improving the governance of the mining sector, the extent to which these will be implemented remains to be seen.



Author: Gilles Paire. Shutterstock.com

¹² Ibidem

¹³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317081755_The_drawbacks_of_privatization_Artisanal_gold_mining_in_Burkina_Faso_1986-2016

¹⁴ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/3/616>

¹⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317081755_The_drawbacks_of_privatization_Artisanal_gold_mining_in_Burkina_Faso_1986-2016

3. PROMOTING DECENT WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR ARTISANAL MINERS: EXISTING CHALLENGES



Decent work and social protection: a snapshot

According to the definition of the International Labor Organization (ILO), Decent Work¹⁶ consists of the combination of four elements: the free choice of work, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

Moreover, by virtue of their membership in the Organization, all ILO members also have an obligation to implement the following fundamental labour standards:

- freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining (Conventions Nos. 87 and 98);
- the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor (Conventions Nos. 29 and 105);
- the effective abolition of child labor (Conventions Nos. 138 and 182);
- the elimination of discrimination in respect to employment and occupation (Conventions Nos. 100 and 111).

Burkina Faso has been an ILO member since 21 November 1960.

The right to social protection is also a necessary precondition for the achievement of Decent Work, as well as for development more generally. Indeed, social protection is an essential tool to reduce and prevent poverty, social inequality, exclusion and insecurity, to promote equality of opportunity and outcomes, as well as to support the transition from informal to formal employment. By adopting Recommendation No. 202 on social protection floors (2012),¹⁷ the member states of the ILO have thus committed to guaranteeing every human being's access to:

- The security of an income throughout life, in the form of various social transfers (in cash or in kind);
- Affordable and quality essential services, including health care and education.

All these commitments have been upheld by the UN 2030 Agenda, and namely by SDG 1.3 'nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including floors', SDG 3 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages', SDG 4 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and SDG 8 'Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all'.

¹⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

¹⁷ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_165750.pdf

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3.1 Migration towards mining sites and precarious living conditions

The discovery of gold deposits in Burkina Faso has given life to a phenomenon which was labelled ‘gold rush’, involving the relocation and migration of a large number of people in search of work - originating both from other regions of Burkina Faso and from neighbouring countries - to mining sites. This often resulted in tensions and conflicts on these sites, due to disagreements over resources exploitation and cultural habits among migrant communities that were in contrast with those of local people.¹⁸

As families followed gold miners away from towns and cities to mining sites, the rise of makeshift camps was also witnessed, with people suddenly finding themselves deprived of social and health infrastructure, and facing a life of great precariousness. Over time, some private services started to become available near the sites, including catering, liquor stores, shops selling small electronic objects (typically, cell phones), telephone recharges, repair stores, and others. In fact, following people away from urban centers, many businesses also began moving near gold mines, giving rise to ‘mushroom towns’, with buildings made of wood and straws, and arranged more or less anarchically near the deposits.

The SOLIDAR Network, lead by SOLIDARITÉ Laïque, visited the Yabongso site in Yatenga Province, 8 km from Ouahigouya, where around 300 people live, a large part of whom come from a neighbouring village a few tens of kilometers away from the site. The camps built on the sites do not have a borehole, thus people have to walk for miles to have access to drinking water. This resource becomes scarce in the dry season, when the wells and

¹⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/50435520_Gratz_Tilo_2004_Les_frontieres_de_l%27orpaillage_en_Afrique_occidentale_Autrepart_302_135-150_Numero_special_Gouverner_les_hommes_et_les_ressources_Dynamiques_de_la_frontiere_interne

backwaters dry up, resulting in ‘traffic jams’ at the remaining water points and an increase in the demand for water. All the water sources to which the gold miners on the site have access are also not subject to any quality control, hence they run the danger of consuming unsafe water. **Sanitation infrastructure, including access to toilets, is also absent, and so is the existence of health infrastructure near the sites.** Moreover, **school facilities are also missing**, as gold panning sites are artisanal and temporary and cannot house structures such as schools or training centers.

In light of this context, **the SOLIDAR Network calls on the Burkinabé government and the EU to redouble their efforts in guaranteeing the right of Social Protection to miners, starting with bringing essential services (drinking water, health, education) closer to artisanal sites** in order to improve miners’ access to these services and hence their quality of life.



“ Our living conditions on this site are not adequate. We are around 300 people living on this site, which increases the need for drinking water consumption. We only have one water pump and when the pump stops working, we will have to buy water to continue the work (after digging, we wash the earth out to extract the ores). If we had a borehole for the site, this could help to reduce the drinking water problem. In terms of health, the health center is located in another village 3 km away. When someone is injured here, they have to be transported by cart or tricycle to the health center 3 or 4 km away and the transport can make their case worse. There has even been a death of a man at the site. Also our children are the most numerous in the colleges of the surrounding villages. It’s time to have a college nearby for us to allow our children, who are finishing elementary school, to continue school while staying with their parents. This could reduce expenses related to schooling and other costs that follow.”

- Testimony from Mr. Adama Ouedraogo from the Yabongso site.



3.2 The life of women in artisanal mining

In the artisanal mining sector, women and girls constitute between 40% and 50% of all workers, based on estimations.¹⁹ Due to its very risky nature, women working in small-scale artisanal mining sites (MAPEs) are generally confined to surface work - in particular sorting or crushing rocks, and raising the galleries - which is less lucrative than other activities. The wives of the gold miners who live on the site also crush their ore, which they collect at the edges of abandoned pits.

The SOLIDAR Network in Burkina Faso interviewed Aminata Tonde, a woman in her fifties, working since her youth on the site of Yabongso village located 8km from Ouahigouya in Yatenga:

“ There are many women who work like me on the site. We purchase some ground, brought up by men. You know it is difficult for us women to go down into the pits. Sometimes the men who go down the holes need a little cash on hand and sell us a small amount of land they have taken out. Like all these women, I have no other activity other than gold mining. It is essentially what I earn from this activity that allows me to take care of the schooling of my seven children. My husband also works on the site.”



Based on its observations, the SOLIDAR Network underlines that promoting access to decent work and income-generating activities for women and girls currently involved in gold mining is a major priority that needs to be addressed, in order to guarantee them the opportunity to diversify their source of livelihood and gain more financial security.

3.3 The life of children in artisanal mining

Artisanal mining sites are hotbeds of exploitation and the worst forms of child labor. Children who work there often do so on behalf of their parents to the detriment of their fundamental rights under Convention No.182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) of the International Labor Organization (ILO) - which Burkina Faso is a signatory of and ratified in 2001.²⁰

Mining work, as noted by the ILO in its 2013 study on children working in mines in Burkina Faso, Mali and Togo, “compromises children’s schooling, destroys their health, affects their personal development and impoverishes them. Inserted into this work because of their family vulnerability, child workers in mines and quarries risk perpetuating the vicious circle of poverty indefinitely.”²¹

While reliable and recent data is difficult to find, a large scale study conducted by UNICEF and published in 2013 found that 20,000 children between 5 and 18 years old work in 90 mines in Burkina Faso, and estimated that the number of children working throughout 700 mines in the country is as high as 700,000.²²

19 https://www.artisanalgold.org/2020/04/burkina-faso-quarantines-and-gold-prices-down-20/#_ftn6

20 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11200:0::NO::P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103033

21 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_232032.pdf

22 <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xtfpjg>





Health, safety and security risks for children in the mines

Children in the mines participate in various activities alongside women, mainly dealing with sorting or crushing rocks brought up from the galleries, working in difficult conditions including intense heat, lack of protection, and a hellish pace.²³ They are victims of economic exploitation by their employers who derive great benefits from their workforce, and by their families for whom they are real sources of income.

Children miners face a number of serious health risks, being particularly vulnerable to exposure to dust and chemicals, the effects of noise and vibrations, the falling of rocks, the improper use of explosives, insufficient ventilation and light, overwork, inadequate and inappropriate workspace, and the use of tools designed for adults that are bulky and heavy for children to handle. Such working conditions lead to severe respiratory problems, constant headaches, vision and hearing problems, as well as asthenia, arthropathy, skin, muscle and orthopedic injuries, which endanger both their mental and physical health. Children deaths²⁴ have also been recorded, due to collapses and suffocation.²⁴

Moreover, the health and safety of children in the mines is also threatened by their social environment: many young boys consume alcohol or narcotics, believing that they would make them stronger and better able to cope with the harsh environment and work underground. Even those who initially resist taking drugs often succumb to peer pressure. For young girls there are other threats, especially for those who are not under the protection or have been abandoned by their families or guardians. These girls, in fact, are often forced to resort

²³ <https://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/15150>

²⁴ https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_20595/lang--fr/index.htm

²⁵ *Ibidem*



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to prostitution, which results in teenage pregnancies with a higher frequency than the national average. In addition, they face childbirth problems and are threatened by a high prevalence of STIs and HIV/AIDS. Such health risks are increased by excessive sexual promiscuity and the exploitation of young girls (often virgins) who are sought after by male gold miners due to ill-inspired beliefs that having sex with a virgin or having unprotected sex will bring them greater luck in the pits.²⁵

Child miners and access to education

Universal access to education is strongly impacted on by several recurring crises in Burkina Faso, including: (1) the security crisis, which causes school closures as well as mass displacements of persons; (2) fast demographic growth, which puts pressure on state's resources and its ability to meet education demand; (3) low quality and equity of



access to education facilities in the country and (4) rise in privatisation of schools, which makes it difficult for poor communities to access education and hampers further the right to universal access to quality schooling.

Burkina Faso's Strategic Development Plan for Basic Education (PDSEB) 2012-2020 aims to increase the primary completion rate to 100% in 2021, to bring the completion rate of the 6th grade to 100% and of secondary school at 40% by 2025.²⁶ In addition, the National

Economic and Social Development Plan (PNDES) 2016-2020, in its second strategic axis - focused on developing human capital - sets the specific objective of "increasing the supply and improving the quality of education, higher education and training in line with the needs of the economy."²⁷

The involvement of children in artisanal gold mining, however, calls into question the possibility of achieving these objectives. In fact, the majority of children working in gold mining sites are out of the school system and therefore are deprived of any prospects for the future, being unable to read or write, due to parents seeing education as a long-term investment with no concrete profitability for the family, in contrast to the work in the mines which brings additional resources to the household.

According to a study carried out in 2018 in four MAPE sites in Yatenga province, 75% of child laborers on the sites have dropped out of school, and 12% of them have never attended school. 81.3% of these children are between 6 and 17 years old - the compulsory school age as per Burkina Faso's law.²⁸ The resources that children generate in mining operations also have a negative impact on other poor children, motivating them to work in the MAPEs and drop out of school.

In light of these existing challenges, **the SOLIDAR Network thus call on the EU to work with the government of Burkina Faso on programs and strategies to remove children from mining sites, promoting their reintegration into the school system including by offering incentives to families to send their children to school and by guaranteeing children ease of access to education infrastructure. Moreover, access to vocational training for workers should be facilitated.**

²⁶ <https://resources.norrag.org/resource/121/analyse-critique-des-politiques-educatives-et-de-developpement-du-burkina-faso-de-1960-a-2012-perspectives-ante-et-post-2015>

²⁷ <https://un-page.org/files/burkina-faso-plan-national-de-d%C3%A9veloppement-%C3%A9conomique-et-socialpdf>

²⁸ Ouédraogo, N.-O. F. (2020). Orpaillage et décrochage scolaire au Burkina Faso : Cas de la commune de Ouahigouya, 101.

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Drawing parallels with artisanal miners in Congo

Across Congo, nearly a million workers derive their income from the extraction of precious minerals such as copper and cobalt. **SOLIDAR Member Solsoc has been working for several years with Congolese civil society organizations to alert public opinion of the deplorable working conditions of artisanal miners but also of women involved in this activity.**

The majority working without any social protection, their income depends on their 'harvest' and on the price that the many intermediaries set in trading centers where the scales are often rigged. Digging wells 20 to 30 meters deep, without any security or appropriate equipment, they are exposed every day to often fatal accidents, and find themselves without cover to pay for their care. Women are assigned to wash minerals: feet in the water, bent backs, they spend long hours under the sun turning the earth and water in the basins.

Following the disruption of supply chains due to the COVID-19 crisis, operators have found themselves forced to accept discounted prices, and women who already saw themselves paid less than their male counterparts before the COVID-19 outbreak find themselves in even more precarious conditions. Added to the rise in the price of foodstuffs, this drop in income often means extreme poverty for women and children, which provides further fertile ground for their sexual exploitation and violence. Of course, illicit trade is also on the rise, also promoting banditry on sites neglected by the authorities. In addition, the working conditions in the wells are particularly conducive to contamination and yet, according to organizations active on the sites, the mines seem to be forgotten in the COVID-19 crisis response strategies put in place by the authorities.



Author: Solsoc

Beyond the immediate effects of COVID-19, this epidemic is the glaring indicator of the deep existing flaws in this sector of exploitation in the field of workers' rights and social justice.

On the ground, organizations of diggers and civil society are active in carrying out preventive actions and awareness-raising about hygiene measures but also demand that the authorities at all levels ensure the safety of the sector. In Lualaba for example, a province in the south of the DRC, the diggers got organised thanks to the support of Solsoc and its partner, Cenadep, and created the ATRAM, a cooperative providing services and fighting for the defense of miners' rights.²⁹

²⁹ <https://www.solsoc.be/s-informer/actualites/covid19-secteur-minier-rdc.html> and <https://www.solsoc.be/s-informer/videos/paroles-de-creuseurs.html>



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4. THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF ARTISANAL MINING AND ITS PUBLIC HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Artisanal gold extraction activities result in a great degree of environmental degradation in mining sites, which in turn cause serious health risks for workers in the mines, as well as negative consequences for Burkinabé people at large.

The main environmental problems that arise on mining sites are linked to deforestation and pollution of water and land. For example, trees are often uprooted and their trunks used to support the mining galleries, while soil, when not directly affected by mining, is systematically polluted by the release of toxic substances such as mercury or

cyanide. This results in a great degree of land degradation, that makes it impossible for the land to be reused for agricultural purposes.³⁰ As explained by Salif Kaboré, former Minister of Mines of Burkina Faso, in fact, “low-grade gold deposits like those generally exploited in Burkina Faso require the movement of enormous quantities of rubble, difficult to manage after treatment and costly to rehabilitate.”³¹ Moreover, groundwater located near mining sites is also contaminated with heavy metals, and the use of cyanide near villages pollutes the living environment and endangers the life of the herds, especially draft oxens.

30 <http://www.secheresse.info/spip.php?article55319>; and <https://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/15150>.

31 <https://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/15150>.

In general, exploitation of the land for mining purposes causes a decrease in biomass and forest cover with a corollary of loss of biological diversity, loss of fertile soils and an increase in desertified areas, as well as pollution, misuse and loss of water resources. These effects on the natural environment have in turn consequences on Burkinabé populations' social environment, causing rural exodus resulting in increased poverty in urban areas as well as an accentuation in localized food deficits.

In addition, there are many health conditions resulting from environmental pollution triggered by the extraction techniques used in artisanal mining, which are often still archaic and require the use of dangerous manual tools, as well as they are carried out without adequate protection equipment. In particular, an explosion of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, allergies and infertility have been reported, and data suggest that nearly 2/3 of artisanal mining workers present at least 3 symptoms of chronic exposure to mercury in Burkina Faso. This reduces the life expectancy of gold miners to 45 years, ten years lower compared to the Burkinabè national average.³² In addition, producing their food from a polluted physical environment, miners also become infected due to the consumption of contaminated food and water.³³

All in all, the state of the environment in mining sites in Burkina Faso is therefore a cause of major concern. In the country, where more than 40% of the population lives below the national poverty line,³⁴ the environment constitutes the primary source of economic capital. Poverty reduction plans, also in view of worsening climate change, thus necessarily require the inclusion of sustainable management strategies and the enhancement of the natural environment in general, especially through investment in renewable natural resources.

³² Ibidem

³³ https://www.memoireonline.com/01/12/5099/m_L-impact-de-l-exploitation-artisanale-de-l-or--cas-du-site-de-Fofora-dans-la-province-du-Poni41.html

³⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/overview>



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6. CONCLUSIONS

Achieving the full realisation of the Economic and Social Rights of people, and especially of vulnerable groups such as artisanal gold miners, is a persistent challenge in Burkina Faso. The deterioration of the security situation and the advent of the Coronavirus disease have exposed and exacerbated further the state's difficulties in responding favorably and effectively to the needs of its people. In this context, the continuous support of the European Union, as a major development cooperation partner for Burkina Faso, is crucial to address the existing challenges faced by the country.

With this report, the SOLIDAR Network in Burkina Faso has aimed to draw the EU's attention in particular to the needs and vulnerabilities of small-scale informal artisanal mining workers in the country. The evidence presented shows that the lack of regulation and formal organization of artisanal gold extraction, employing up to 2 million people, causes miners to experience abusive working conditions, as well as results in environmental degradation and threats to public health. Miners' families, and especially women and children, are also forced to live in unsanitary and precarious conditions, lacking access to essential services such as health centres and schools, as well as being deprived of opportunities to graduate from poverty.



In light of this, and in view of the undergoing EU-Burkina Faso development programming exercise to establish new priorities for cooperation in the 2021-2027 period, the SOLIDAR Network highlights the following as policy priorities that the EU should concentrate on in its partnership Burkina Faso:

- Provide strategic advice to the Burkinabé government to implement provisions **regulating artisanal gold mining activities, guaranteeing decent work for miners, especially women and girls, and establishing environmental safeguards** for the exploitation of the land;
- **Support the set up of a binding 'companies and human rights' national plan** accompanied by sanctions against companies that disrespect these principles, as well as the **introduction of mechanisms to ensure the traceability of minerals through the application of mandatory due diligence criteria;**
- **Strengthen civil society organisations and trade unions** by providing resources for and **support monitoring activities and campaigns against child labour in the mines** and exert pressure on the government to **strictly enforce the laws and regulations related to child trafficking, child labour and the exploitation of children;**
- Collaborate with the government in **providing financial aid to vulnerable families** in the mines **to encourage them to send their children to school;**



- Work with the government to **facilitate access to land for gold miners, providing financing to improve water systems and access to safe water** for vegetable production, as well as to breeding kits;
- **Invest in the construction of health centres and school infrastructure near mining sites** to improve mining population's and childrens' access to basic services, and advise the government in **implementing a socio-professional reintegration program for young people who have dropped out of school** because of their involvement in gold mining;
- **Promote access to credit for income-generating activities for gold miners, with a particular focus on women**, giving them the opportunity to diversify their source of livelihood and gain more security.

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Réseau des Organisations pour
le Développement de l'Education au Burkina (RODEB)

Coalition nationale pour l'Education pour
tous du Burkina Faso (CN-EPT/BF)

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of SOLIDAR and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union

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