



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Migration dynamics of pupils in Burkina Faso in a context of insecurity: Social and educational reintegration strategies for internally displaced pupils in the city of Koudougou

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### Abstract

Since 2015, the cities of Burkina Faso have been a refuge for many pupils who have fallen victim to terrorist attacks. These migratory movements put considerable pressure on educational services in urban areas. To this end, the State of Burkina Faso and its partners are supporting these pupils with a view to facilitating their adaptation to urban areas. In this context, the question arises as to the effectiveness of the strategies implemented to support the reintegration of internally displaced pupils. The aim of this study is to analyze the strategies implemented for the reintegration of internally displaced pupils in the town of Koudougou, in the context of the security crisis. The methodological approach is qualitative. Secondary and primary data were collected. The study revealed that armed attacks and the displacement of populations from certain localities, the deterioration of families' economic conditions and "fostering" are the main causes of pupils' migration to the town of Koudougou. The study also showed that the central government and its partners are implementing a number of strategies, notably orienting displaced pupils and taking charge of their schooling, reinforcing the educational offer and distributing school kits and food to displaced pupils for their reintegration. These strategies have made a considerable contribution to their reintegration in the town of Koudougou, but they have significant limitations.

**Keywords:** Migration Dynamics; Social and Educational Reintegration Strategies; Internally Displaced Pupils; Security Crisis; Koudougou

### 1. Introduction

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide has grown over the past two decades, from 21 million in 2000 to 41.3 million in 2019. In the case of Africa, migration within the continent has also increased since the beginning of the 2nd millennium, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) [1]. In Burkina Faso, the security crisis has had a profound impact on the social and economic life of citizens, and over three million children are in need of humanitarian assistance [2]. By March 31, 2023, there were over two (2) million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country, 52% of whom were children [3]. The closure of over 6,000 schools in the wake of the terrorist attacks has excluded almost a million pupils from the education system [4]. Faced with this difficult situation, many households have retreated to urban areas considered safer [5], such as the town of Koudougou. To cope with the massive influx of displaced pupils, the education system has put in place strategies to enable teaching activities to continue. Despite the efforts made by the Burkina Faso government and its partners, there are still limits to the implementation of strategies to reintegrate migrant pupils, and the percentage of children outside the education system, particularly at primary and secondary level, remains high at 54.3% [6]. This situation raises a central question: how are the central government and its partners contributing to the social and educational reintegration of internally displaced pupils in the city of

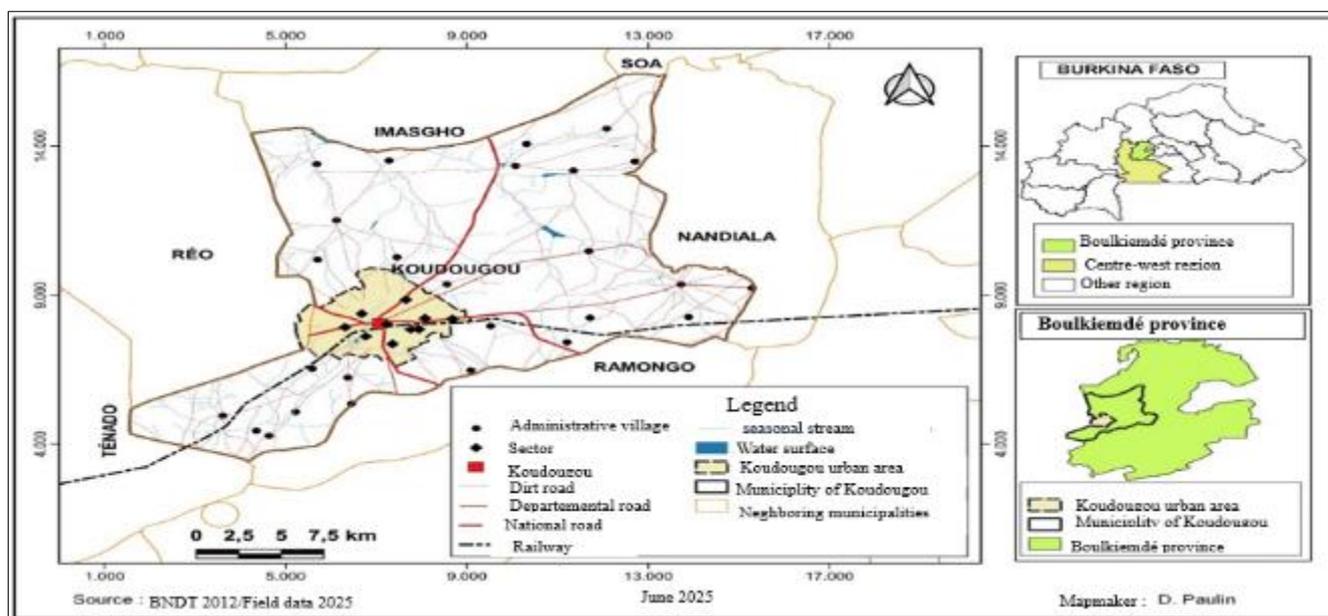
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Koudougou? The aim of this study is to analyze the strategies implemented to this end, while identifying the challenges and margins for progress. The main hypothesis of this study is that the central government and its partners contribute positively to this reintegration through various strategies. The chosen methodology is based on qualitative methods.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Presentation of the study area

The study area is located in the commune of Koudougou, in the Centre-West region. Koudougou is the third largest city in Burkina Faso.



**Figure 1** Location of the study area

Figure 1 shows the location of the town of Koudougou. As of February 2023, the Centre-West region, home to Koudougou, the country's third-largest city, was home to over 67,000 people displaced by terrorist attacks [7]. The influx of these displaced people into the city is putting pressure on local public services, particularly education.

### 2.2. Materials

The empirical material used in this study is based on a set of data collected from 189 individuals. This purposive sample covered a wide range of educational stakeholders, including migrant pupils, managers of educational structures, heads of decentralized and deconcentrated services and representatives of civil society. The study mobilized data collection tools such as interview guides, a direct observation grid and documentary sources. Nvivo software was used to process qualitative data for in-depth analysis.

### 2.3. Method

The methodological approach of this study is based on a qualitative approach. Three main data collection techniques were used. These are: documentary research, which refers to documentation related to the research theme; semi-structured interviews, which are well-suited to the qualitative method; and direct observation, which enabled us to record the behaviours and practices of local players in their environment. The documentation of these interactions proved important in the analysis of the data and the writing of this article. From an estimated parent population of 350, a sample of 189 people to be interviewed was obtained on the basis of T. Yamane's formula [8] quoted by G. Israel [9].

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{359}{1 + 359(0,05)^2}$$

$n = 189$

$n$  = Size of population to be surveyed

$N$ : Size of total population (359)  $e$  = Margin of error (5%)

Our sample size is 189.

### 3. Results of the study

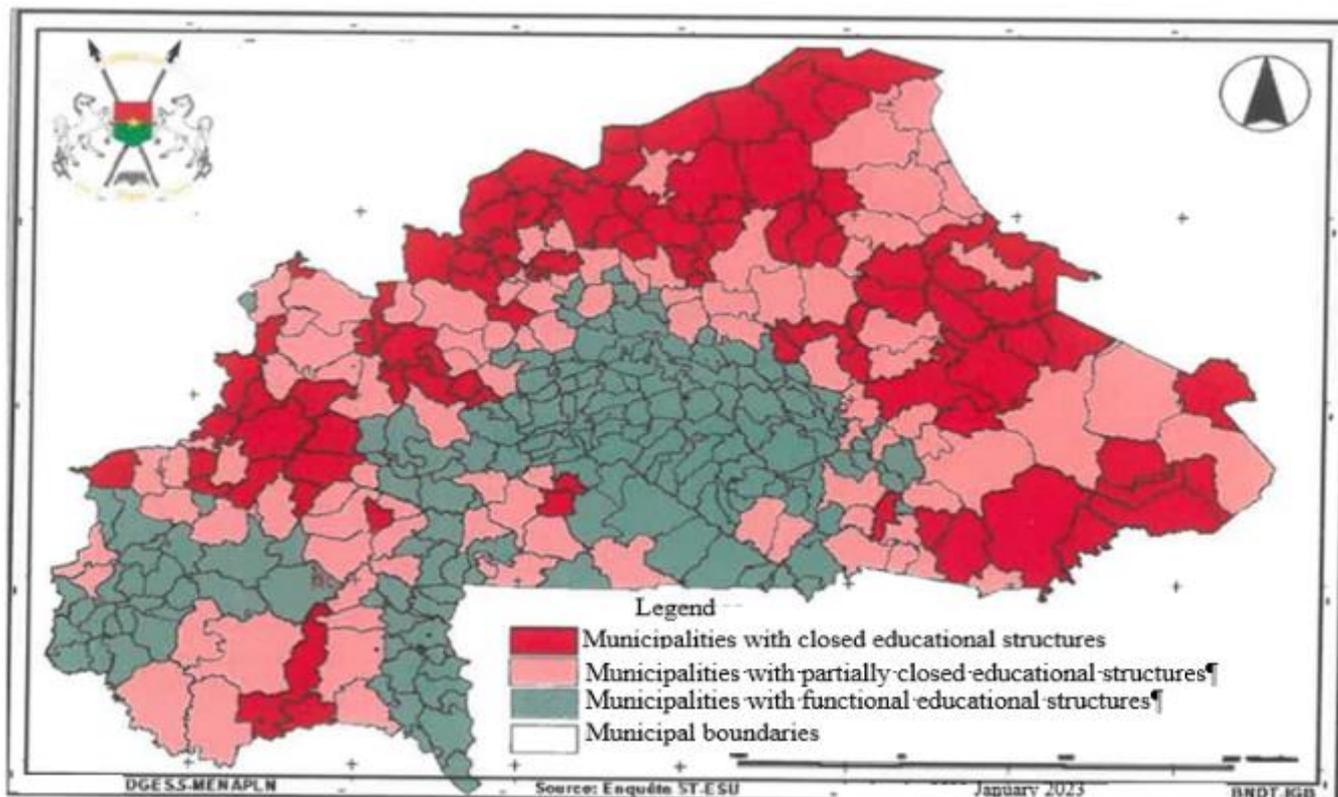
The results of the study concern the causes of the migration of pupils to the town of Koudougou, the strategies for social and educational reintegration and, finally, the limitations observed in the implementation of the strategies.

#### 3.1. Causes of migration of internally displaced pupils to the city of Koudougou

In recent years, the university town of Koudougou has become a refuge for many internally displaced pupils (IDP) in search of knowledge in a safe environment. According to OCHA figures, 5.9 people in Burkina Faso are in humanitarian need, including 2 million in the education sector alone [5]. According to the data collected, these displacements are due to three main factors: armed violence and displacements, the deterioration of household economic conditions, and "child fostering".

##### 3.1.1. The armed threat and forced evictions: a school under tension

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has seen a rise in terrorist attacks marked by an increase in population displacements. These attacks are the work of non-state armed groups localized in many regions of the country including the North, East, Centre-North, Sahel, Centre-West [10]. Armed attacks have contributed significantly to the closure of many educational facilities in several communes of Burkina Faso, as shown in figure 2.

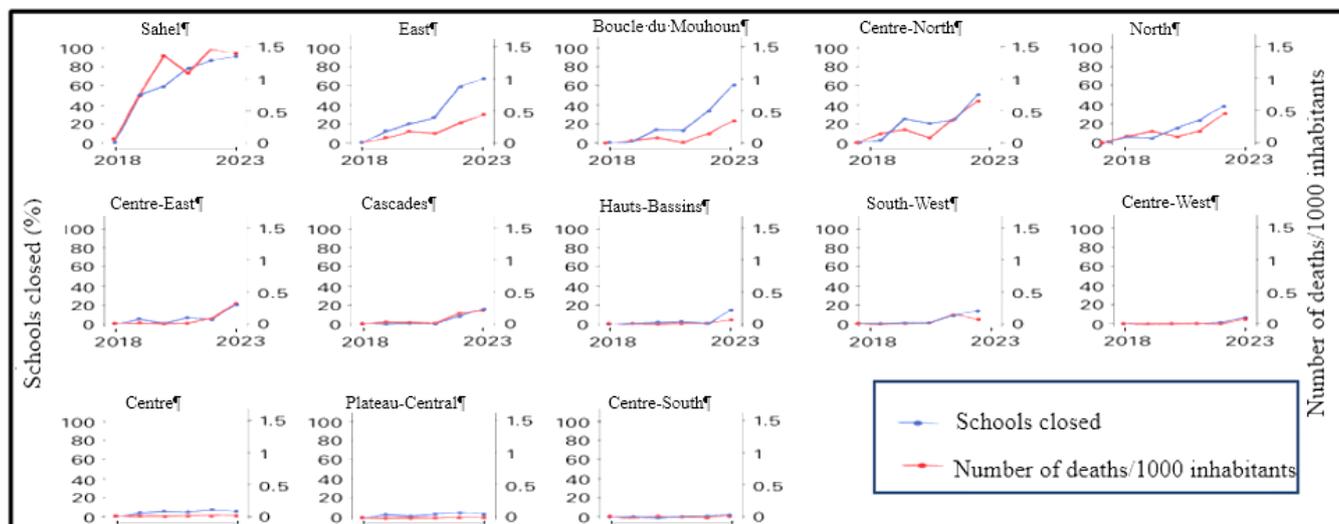


**Figure 2** municipalities affected by the security crisis

Figure 2 shows the municipalities affected by the security crisis, with both closed or partially closed educational structures and functional educational structures. The figure reveals the extent of the impact of the security crisis on

Burkina Faso's education system. It shows that the majority of municipalities in Burkina Faso had closed or partially closed schools in 2022.

In addition to school closures, terrorist attacks are sometimes accompanied by massacres of civilians, as shown in figure 3, which reveals the number of schools closed and the loss of human life in Burkina Faso's thirteen regions.



**Figure 3** Schools closed by region between 2018 and 2023

Examination of this graph [11] shows that while all regions are affected by deadly terrorist attacks, six regions are mainly affected by school closures, notably the Sahel (more than 90% of schools closed between 2018 and 2023), East (over 60% of schools closed between 2018 and 2023), Boucle du Mouhoun (around 60% of schools closed between 2018 and 2023), Centre-North (around 50% of schools closed between 2018 and 2023), North (40% of schools closed between 2018 and 2023) and Centre-East (20% of schools closed between 2018 and 2023). These regions also correspond to those hard hits by the security crisis, with around 1,400 deaths in the Sahel region and 250 in the Centre-East region.

The closure of schools has led to the displacement of civilians and pupils to towns such as Koudougou, considered safe for living and studying. These civilians, especially pupils, are paying a heavy price in rural areas. In fact, in these rural areas, confirmed cases of fires or threats against teachers, or even hostage-taking, force people to abandon their native localities. For pupils, this migration - sometimes the first of their lives - represents the start of a perilous journey towards survival and the pursuit of knowledge. Aminatou's words express this situation when she declares that: "While we were in class, we heard gunfire, and the teacher quickly told us to go home. Afterwards, we were forced to take to the road with my mother. They threatened the teachers and burned down our school." (Interview with Aminatou, internally displaced pupil, May 2024)

These comments are indicative of the difficult situation experienced by internally displaced pupils in their home localities, which has led to their forced displacement to the towns.

The increasing number of deadly attacks in rural areas has led to a profound disruption not only of Burkina Faso's education system, but also of the country's social fabric. Many formerly peaceful villages have been abandoned in the face of persistent violence and permanent insecurity. For many pupils, this unprecedented situation means a break with the classroom and the start of a tumultuous life. Seni's account of the situation is ample proof of this: "One evening, men with guns came to our village. They fired in all directions. My father informed us early in the morning that we could no longer stay in our village. We all left without being able to take much with us. In Koudougou, I was lucky enough to go back to school, but it's very difficult for us." (Interview with Séni, internally displaced pupil, May 2024)

These comments testify to the brutality, both physical and mental, suffered by pupils during their displacement. The destruction of school infrastructure is forcing families to leave their localities, or at the very least to let their children leave for other safe areas, notably the towns.

Finally, even in the absence of deadly attacks, the constant threat to the population is a reason for people to move to the towns. The perception of widespread insecurity is a cause of migration for many families, who fear a raid on their villages by armed terrorist groups. The need to keep their families' safe drives many villagers to the towns, as Tiga affirms

"We used to live peacefully, but when the terrorists started frequenting neighboring villages and even our market, I had no choice but to take my family far away to town to be safe." (Interview with Tiga, displaced in the town of Koudougou) This extract shows the psychological impact of the presence of armed groups in villages. This presence provokes preventive movements of families towards the towns, already aggravating a fragile education system.

### 3.1.2. *From economic insecurity to exclusion from school*

Terrorist attacks in rural areas have contributed significantly to the deterioration and even collapse of the local economic fabric. This reality has led to a worsening of the economic conditions of the already fragile local populations. In these predominantly agricultural rural regions, the main activities of the local population are farming, livestock rearing, gold panning and petty trading. In regions plagued by insecurity, terrorist attacks have forced populations to abandon their economic activities, destroying the local economic fabric of many rural municipalities that used to supply large urban centers with agricultural produce. Mr. KOUTA's statement describes this situation: "Terrorism has destroyed our families and our lives, but we used to be a lively community. We produce vegetables for the people in town, and we don't lack for food. Also, the profits from our livestock enabled us to look after ourselves and pay for our children's schooling. Today we're lost, and I don't even know where everyone is". (Interview with Mr. KUITA, internally displaced person in Koudougou, father of a displaced pupil, March 2024)

From Mr. KUITA's comments, it is clear that the terrorist attacks have contributed to creating difficult living conditions for many families from the rural areas affected by these attacks.

These economic upheavals in rural communities have had a direct impact on their children's schooling. These families, displaced from urban centers, find themselves in the town of Koudougou, with no income and dependent on humanitarian aid and local solidarity. Under these conditions, they are unable to meet their children's school fees (supplies, food, etc.) due to a lack of activities and financial income. Against this backdrop, Koudougou appears to be a refuge town, offering both a hope of security and a still-functioning educational infrastructure. However, this migration has led to an overload of reception capacities, plunging the new arrivals into an even more precarious situation. The security crisis is undeniably accompanied by a crisis in local economies, depriving local populations of their sources of income. This situation pushes them towards urban centers in order to secure their families and find better living conditions. The presence in town also aims to enable children to continue their schooling, which has been interrupted due to the security crisis. Afisou illustrates this reality when he says: "Before, my parents used to sell sesame and peanuts. But with the attacks, they have no more food to harvest. We came to Koudougou to look for work and continue our studies." (Interview with Afisou, internally displaced pupil from the town of Koudougou, May 2024) This testimony reflects a correlation between the security crisis and the impoverishment of households, seen as factors in the migration of pupils to the city of Koudougou.

In addition, the collapse of local economies has drastically reduced the financial power of school parents, limiting their ability to pay for their children's schooling, despite the support provided by the central government and non-governmental organizations in rural areas. The city naturally becomes the preferred place for pupils to access free educational services, but also for parents to access work opportunities. This reality is backed up by Mira, who tells us: "Here in Koudougou, I've been accepted into my school for free, and my father has a small job." (Interview with Mira, internally displaced pupil, May 2024) This statement reveals the importance of urban infrastructures and support strategies in the continuity of displaced pupils' schooling in towns.

### 3.1.3. *"Confiage" or "child fostering", an age-old Burkinabe practice*

A traditional African practice, "Fostering" consists of a family entrusting its child to a relative or close friend. According to the people we interviewed, this practice is mostly used in difficult contexts, and even more so in the current security crisis, as a strategy for adapting to the difficult security situation. For example, families affected by evictions or school closures send their children who have dropped out of school to relatives or family members living in urban centers. The aim of this mechanism is to enable these children to continue their schooling in a more stable environment. Harid explains: "When our school closed after the teachers left, my father sent me to live with my uncle here in Koudougou. The situation isn't always easy, but my uncle helps me enormously with my studies" (interview with Harid, displaced boarder in Koudougou, May 2024). This testimonial illustrates the importance of "Fostering" as a practice in response to the difficult situation linked to the security crisis in rural areas.

At the same time, conditions for the children remain precarious, as this practice sometimes contains limitations linked to the situation of the children entrusted to the families. In some cases, entrusted children take on heavy domestic responsibilities. This has a negative impact on their performance at school, forcing some entrusted children to drop out, thus increasing the school dropout rate. Bintou confirms this reality when she says: "I'm staying with my older sister in Koudougou. She works in a liquor store, sometimes until late at night, so I do all the housework, look after her child and study. Sometimes the housework is too much for me". (Interview with Bintou, internally displaced pupil in Koudougou, May 2024).

Bintou's comments reveal the multiple pressures placed on pupils placed with their host families, who are regularly forced to take on a variety of responsibilities, sometimes to the detriment of their studies. These comments highlight the limits of such a practice in a difficult security context characterized by a generalized fragile economic situation. The economic condition of the host family has a direct impact on the quality of life of the entrusted pupil, and in particular on his or her ability to remain in the education system. Many pupils drop out of school under the weight of invisible domestic burdens (unbeknownst to their parents) and because they are unable to reconcile these burdens with the demands of school.

### **3.2. Strategies for the educational and social integration of internally displaced pupils**

To address the humanitarian situation of internally displaced pupils, the central government and its partners are deploying strategies to help them continue their education. These include, firstly, orienting internally displaced pupils and taking charge of their schooling, and secondly, increasing the educational offer and providing school kits.

#### *3.2.1. Orientation of internally displaced pupils and provision of free schooling: a calming measure*

In implementing strategies to integrate displaced pupils in the city, the authorities in charge of humanitarian issues carry out a census of these pupils, followed by their assignment to schools in the city and the payment of school fees. As for the census of the city's internal pupils, it is being carried out jointly by the provincial directorates in charge of education, the provincial directorate for humanitarian action and the municipal authorities. This operation involves identifying the pupils, their schools and areas of origin. The aim of this census is to assess the number of displaced pupils in order to adjust the intake capacity of educational structures. In many cases, pupils have found themselves without official documents due to their hasty departure from their areas of origin. This makes it difficult to diagnose their actual level of learning, as Mr. Rabi, head of an educational structure, points out. "Sometimes, displaced pupils arrive without papers and we often misjudge their real level. We integrate them anyway, but it takes time to regularize" (interview with Mr. Rabi, head of an educational structure in the town of Koudougou, March 2024).

The authorities assign displaced pupils to public schools, taking into account the proximity of the pupil to the educational structure. Pupils are enrolled in the school closest to their place of residence. This criterion is designed to limit travel between the city and home. In addition, the enrolment of a displaced pupil in one of the city's public schools is free of charge. As a result, they are exempt from any financial contributions related to their schooling. However, these assignments quickly saturated classrooms, creating overcrowding in many schools. The free enrolment of internally displaced pupils by the central government and its humanitarian partners has enabled many pupils in difficult circumstances whose families had no financial means of supporting them to continue their education. Nati's words attest to the effectiveness of this measure when she declares: "I didn't pay anything for my daughter. They said it's free for us. That was a great relief to me, because I didn't have much anyway" (interview with Nati, mother of an internally displaced pupil, March, 2024). Her statement reveals a sense of relief following her child's acceptance into an educational structure in the city, and highlights the importance of such a measure. However, many educational establishments were waiting for the central government to reimburse them for the costs incurred in taking in displaced boarders.

#### *3.2.2. Increasing educational provision and distributing school kits: a response to the educational emergency*

As part of its ongoing efforts to provide care for internally displaced pupils, the central government and its social partners have opted to increase educational provision and distribute school kits to migrant pupils.

With regard to improving educational provision, the government and its partners have built additional classrooms, in particular temporary learning spaces (see figure 4). These facilities relieve overcrowding in overcrowded classrooms (up to 130 pupils per class). They also enable teachers to work in acceptable conditions.



**Figure 4** Temporary learning spaces built in sectors 8 and 9 of the city

Figure 4 shows the temporary learning spaces built in sectors 8 and 9 of the town of Koudougou. These transitional educational infrastructures make it possible to contain the influx of internally displaced pupils and ensure the continuity of teaching in sometimes minimal conditions, but in a safe environment.

As for the distribution of school kits, this is the work of numerous social partners, notably non-governmental organizations. School kits are made up of school supplies (notebooks, pens, bags, school clothes, etc.) for studies (as shown in figure 5), food (rice, oil, etc.) and money to support displaced households. These school kit operations, although not without their difficulties, were moments of relief for displaced pupils and their families. The kits were supplied by organizations such as UNICEF and Educo, which work alongside the central government in the field of education.



**Figure 5** Distribution of school kits to internally displaced pupils

Figure 5 shows internally displaced pupils with their kits during a school kit distribution operation in one of the town's educational facilities. It shows the effectiveness of these operations in supporting displaced pupils.

### **3.3. Strategies for integrating internally displaced pupils: clear limitations in the conception**

Despite the highly appreciable results achieved in implementing strategies to support internally displaced pupils in the city, there are some limitations. These are hampering the effectiveness of the activities of the State and its partners in

the field. For example, the construction of temporary learning spaces is part of a logic of continuity in educational activities. While these educational structures enabled displaced pupils to be accommodated and continue their schooling, they did not guarantee optimal learning conditions in the long term. Harsh climatic conditions and bad weather sometimes put a strain on transitional educational infrastructures (figure 6). Other infrastructures have never been used since their construction, testifying to their fragility and limitations. Mr. Labila confirms this situation when he tells us: "These buildings are not ideal, but I think they enable us to accommodate displaced children. Otherwise, we'll have no choice but to turn them away" (Interview with Mr. Labila, school principal, March 2024). This statement reflects the precariousness of temporary learning spaces in the implementation of support strategies for displaced pupils, particularly in extreme climatic conditions.



**Figure 6** Deteriorated temporary learning space

Images a and b in figure 6 show a temporary learning space built in sector 9 of the town which has never been used, the result of rapid deterioration due to the combined effects of abiotic factors (termites, wind, extreme heat).

Furthermore, our respondents acknowledge the late delivery of school kits, which often arrive several months after the start of classes. This slowness, while detracting from the intended purpose of the aid, underlines the administrative and logistical difficulties involved. These shortcomings extend far beyond school kits. They also concern the dissemination of information on the management of displaced pupils. Indeed, many families are unaware of the opportunities they have to enroll their children free of charge in public education structures once they are in the city. This lack of knowledge keeps many pupils outside the education system.

#### 4. Discussion of results

Numerous authors have examined the migration dynamics of schoolchildren, particularly in emergency situations. With regard to the causes of student migration, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IMDC) reported that in Yemen, armed conflict rendered almost 2,000 schools unusable and displaced many pupils in 2018. The resulting deterioration in household economic conditions was seen as the biggest barrier to schooling for internally displaced pupils. In response, the exemption of certain families from school fees and the easing of certain enrolment conditions were measures taken to increase displaced pupils' access to educational services [12]. Pilon, while acknowledging "Fostering" as a cause of internal migration of pupils, also points out the difficulty of carrying out a quantitative study on children considered as passive migrants. The author points out that "Fostering" is a strategy used in African societies in the context of unfortunate events such as illness, death, divorce or parental separation [13]. Furthermore, Ouedraogo and his collaborators, looking at the drop in the level of internally displaced pupils induced by the security crisis in Fada and Kaya in Burkina Faso, point to terrorist threats in the village or commune, terrorist threats and attacks on schools, and fear of the arrival of terrorists as the causes of school closures [14].

The strategies implemented to support internally displaced pupils are varied and fraught with shortcomings. Parents are very often the first to take charge of their children's schooling, despite the wide range of support measures available. In the commune of Titao in northern Burkina Faso, Sana's results showed that 79.3% of internally displaced pupils

appreciated their integration into their host schools. However, the author stresses that parents are the primary actors in facilitating the reintegration of their children, notably by re-enrolling them in schools and providing them with school supplies [15]. Also, the Mixed Migration Center (MMC) revealed in a study entitled "Educational realities and needs of migrant children and young people in West and North Africa", that 57% of respondents in the cities of Bamako, Conakry, Niamey and Tunis stated that migrant children in their care did not have access to educational services, 41% of whom did so for financial reasons and 13% lacked information on the availability of the service. However, the same study points out that in the specific case of Bamako, 63% of young migrants no longer needed educational services, but income-generating activities. For the successful integration of these young migrants, MMC facilitates the design and implementation of programs specific to their context, and advocates the inclusion of their protection and access to education [16].

According to IMDC, the parents of internally displaced pupils in the Somali region of Ethiopia are required to pay school fees averaging \$7. However, public schools located within the IDP settlements offer a number of facilities, including donations of school supplies, textbooks and uniforms, as well as free enrolment. These measures remain very limited, however, due to the very limited capacity and teaching staff in these schools. In some IDP camps, teachers have been recruited, albeit with language difficulties due to the ethnic diversity of the IDP pupils [12]. Free access to school as a strategy is a salutary measure, but it is not sufficient to guarantee schooling for all displaced pupils. For more effective interventions, IMDC proposes that displaced pupils be taken into account in national education plans, that psychosocial support be provided to pupils displaced by conflict-related trauma, that teachers be recruited and trained as the backbone of any education system, and that massive investment be made in education in emergency situations.

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## 5. Conclusion

In essence, the study highlights a multitude of causes that justify the migration of pupils to the town of Koudougou. Migration is fundamentally linked to armed terrorist attacks, difficult household economic conditions and the practice of "Fostering". The central government and its partners are mobilizing strategies to ensure the continuity of displaced pupils in the town of Koudougou. Essentially, these involve orienting them in the town's educational structures, taking charge of their schooling, providing school kits and food, and increasing the educational offer in the town by building temporary learning spaces. However, despite their crucial importance in managing migratory flows, these interventions have their limitations, mainly linked to the rapid deterioration of temporary learning spaces, the late provision of school kits and the lack of information for displaced pupils. These limitations raise the question of the sustainability of the strategies implemented, and call for in-depth collective reflection.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Acknowledgments*

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the internally displaced pupils, their families, and the heads of deconcentrated and decentralized services for their participation in this study. We hope that lasting solutions can be found to this security crisis for peaceful education in Burkina Faso and elsewhere.

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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