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Coface's political risks overview: the temperature is rising on the African continent

With numerous bouts of conflicts, terrorism, and social and political tensions, which show no signs of stopping in the near future, Africa will continue to experience fragility and destabilisation.

The countries on the African continent have been regularly afflicted by conflicts of different intensity and nature in recent decades, that made them suffer from a decline in investment and trade flows, delaying the development of some countries on the continent. In its latest panorama of political risks, Coface looks at the African continent and highlights, not only the latest trends in terms of conflicts, but also the risks of instability that impact the region's economic development.

Increasing conflicts

Between the conflicts linked to Islamist groups in the Sahel region and those of political origin, sometimes intertwined with ethnic, religious or even linguistic considerations, our indicators of political violence confirm a resurgence of violent events compared to the beginning of the 21st century. In 2018, there were almost twice as many conflicts across the continent as there were 10 years earlier.

The number of victims has also doubled and exceeds 70,000 deaths per year for the third time in 30 years (after the 1990-1991 periods, at the height of the Gulf War, and 1999-2000, marked by the fratricidal war between Ethiopia and Eritrea). At the same time, terrorism is spreading as another form of political violence, particularly in areas already affected by conflicts

Which countries will be exposed to instability in the coming months? After the Algerian and Sudanese springs, it appears that mobilisation movements might emerge in sub-Saharan Africa.

While democratic practice, at least in its electoral dimension, has become widespread on the African continent since the early 1990s, some recent examples, starting with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Algeria, show that it is not necessarily accompanied by a solid political and institutional framework.

Moreover, as events in 2011 in North Africa and the Middle East have shown, in a context of progress in mobilisation instruments (Internet access, demographic pressure, etc.), the exasperation of populations fueled by socio-economic pressures (unemployment and endemic poverty in particular) exposes some countries on the continent to the risk of future instability. Without necessarily leading to large-scale conflicts, as in Libya, or even to regime change, a fragile socio-economic context can, in the long term, cause unrest that can generate, at a minimum, uncertainty in the political environment.

Our political and social fragility index indicates that 10 countries - Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Mozambique, Uganda and the DRC - could be or continue to be shaken by political turmoil. The increase in mobilisation instruments is notably one of the factors behind the increased risk that could be a potential source of destabilisation in other countries in the longer-term.



P R E S S R E L E A S E

MEDIA CONTACTS

Karen YIK – T. +852 2585 9121 karen.yik@coface.com

Leo CHAK – T. +852 2585 9132 leo.chak@coface.com

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