



## GULF OF GUINEA NORTHERN REGIONS SOCIAL COHESION (SOCO) PROJECT

# Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention and Migration of People Policy Brief

Title: From Fragility to Shared Security: Strengthening Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention and Safe Mobility in Northern Ghana



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# Executive Summary

Northern Ghana is carrying a rising burden of fragility, conflict and forced migration that directly erodes human capital, scares away investment and traps communities in poverty. The SOCO Social Cohesion Study across 48 districts in six northern and Oti regions<sup>1</sup> shows that over half of respondents are farmers (53.8%), living in areas where land disputes, resource competition and insecurity are persistent. Nearly one in three respondents (27%) report migration due to conflict, and in communities perceived as fragile, almost half (48.8%) report conflict-driven migration, more than seven times the rate in more stable areas. This churn of people, assets and skills weakens local markets, disrupts services, and undermines Ghana's goals of poverty reduction and shared prosperity.

Evidence from 240 respondents (147 men, 93 women) indicates that economic challenges (20.4%), land disputes (16%), and insecurity/violence (15.9%) are the

leading drivers of fragility, closely linked to chieftaincy disputes, political interference and ethnic tensions. Women report far higher perceptions of fragility (82.9%) than men (18%), and youth aged 15–35 are the most likely to feel insecure and to move when violence erupts. Border regions such as Upper East and Upper West show the highest odds of both fragility and migration, reflecting spillovers from Sahelian insecurity.

This policy brief proposes a Social Cohesion and Safe Mobility Compact for Northern Ghana that combines conflict-sensitive local development, targeted economic inclusion for at-risk youth and women, and regionally coordinated early warning and migration management systems. This shift from fragmented projects to a coherent compact offers the most viable path to protect human capital, reduce displacement, and anchor shared prosperity in Ghana's most vulnerable regions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Study was conducted in the SOCO project implementation area (Upper East, North East, Northern, Savannah and Oti Regions)



# 1. The Development Challenge

Northern Ghana sits at the intersection of multiple stressors: entrenched poverty, high youth unemployment, long-running chieftaincy and land disputes, farmer–herder tensions, and growing security risks from porous borders and Sahelian instability. An estimated stock of over two million firearms in circulation, many held illegally, raises the stakes of local disputes and increases the risk of violence escalating quickly.

The SOCO study confirms that fragility is not abstract: 43.3% of respondents perceive their communities as fragile, with the Upper East and Upper West regions reporting the highest levels of concern. Almost 27% report migration due to conflict, with displacement concentrated in areas already facing resource pressure and limited economic opportunities. Youth and working-age adults, especially those aged 31–40, are most likely to move, taking skills and labour away from communities that can least afford to lose them.

The cost of inaction is cumulative and long-term: repeated shocks to schooling, farming and local businesses, rising pressure on host communities, and growing mistrust in state and traditional institutions. Left unaddressed, these dynamics can lock Northern Ghana into a low-growth, high-risk equilibrium that undermines national progress on poverty reduction and shared prosperity.

**Table 1: List of fragile and border districts in Northern Ghana**

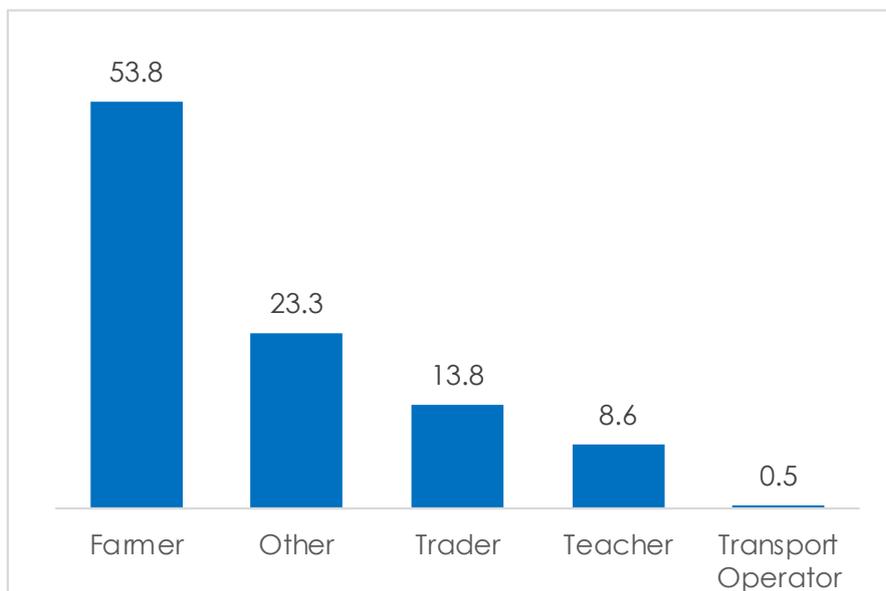
S#	Region	Districts
	Savannah	Bole District and Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District
	Upper West	Sissala East Municipal, Sissala West District, Jirapa Municipal, Lambussie Karni District, Lawra Municipal, Nandom Municipal, and Wa West District.
	Upper East	Kassena Nankana West District, Kassena Nankana Municipal, Builsa North Municipal, Builsa South District, Bongo District, Garu District, Bawku Municipal, Bawku West District, Pusiga District, and Tempene District.
	North East	Bunkpurugu-Nakpanduri District and Chereponi District.
	Oti	Nkwanta North District, Nkwanta South Municipal, Kadjebi District, Jasikan Municipal, and Biakoye District.

## 2. Key Findings from the SOCO Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention and Migration Study

### 2.1. Livelihoods are concentrated in high-risk, low-resilience sectors.

Results from the survey (Figure 1) indicate that 53.8% of residents in the Project area are farmers, 13.8% are traders, and 8.6% are teachers, underscoring the dependence on rain-fed agriculture and informal markets, which are highly exposed to conflict and climate shocks.

Figure 1: Occupational structure of respondents by region

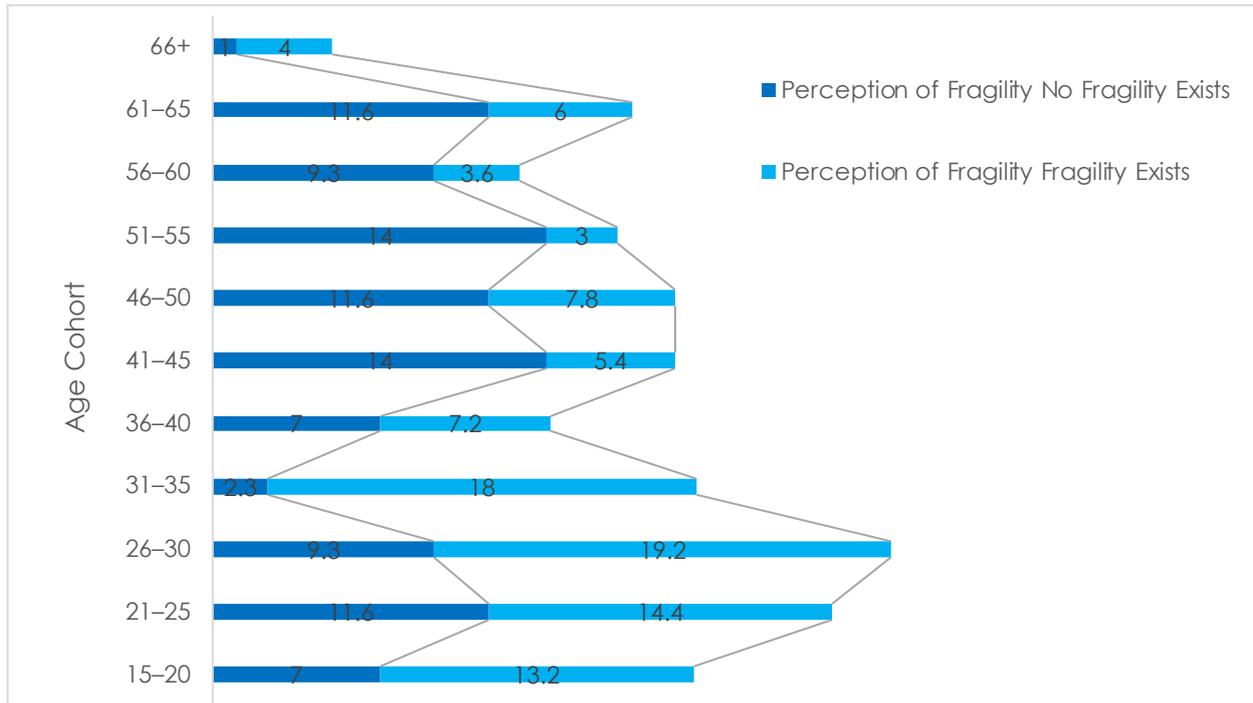


Source: SOCO Project Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention & Migration in Northern Ghana Study, 2024.

### 2.2. Perceived fragility is highest among youth and in border regions.

Youth aged 15–35 report the highest perceptions of fragility, while those aged 51+ report the lowest, reflecting generational differences in exposure to insecurity, unemployment, and migration pressures. (Figure 2).

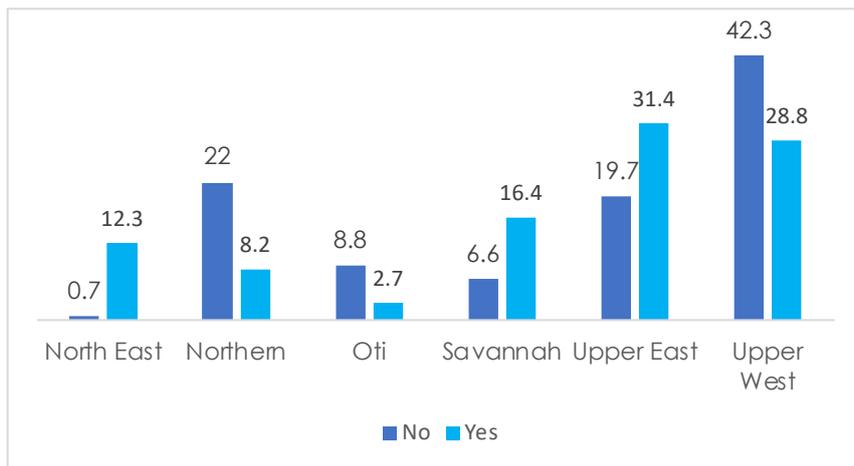
**Figure 2: Fragility by Age Group (%).**



Source: SOCO Project **Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention & Migration in Northern Ghana Study, 2024.**

Regional disparities in perceptions of fragility reflect localised conflict drivers such as resource competition, migration patterns, and historical grievances. The Upper West region records the highest level of fragility perception (42.3%), followed by the Upper East (31.4%), Northern (22%), and Savannah (16.4%).

**Figure 3: Fragility by Region (%)**

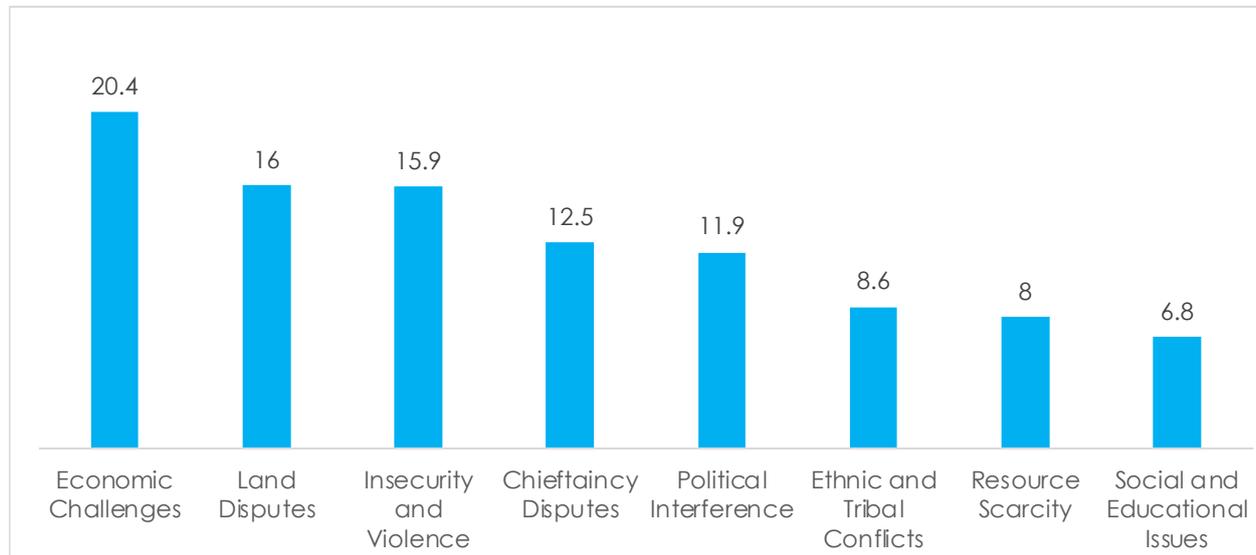


Source: SOCO Project **Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention & Migration in Northern Ghana Study, 2024**

## 2.3. Economic and governance drivers sit at the core of fragility.

Economic challenges are the single most cited driver of Fragility Conflict and Violence (FCV) (20.4%), followed by land disputes (16%) and insecurity/violence (15.9%). Chieftaincy disputes (12.5%), political interference (11.9%) and ethnic conflicts (8.6%) add layers of risk, while resource scarcity (8.0%) and social/educational deficits (6.8%) deepen marginalisation.

**Figure 4: Drivers of FCV (%)**



Source: SOCO Project **Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention & Migration in Northern Ghana Study, 2024**

These findings emphasise the need for comprehensive conflict-prevention strategies, including economic interventions, dispute-resolution mechanisms, and improved governance structures.

## 2.4. Historical grievances and negative interactions continue to shape today's tensions.

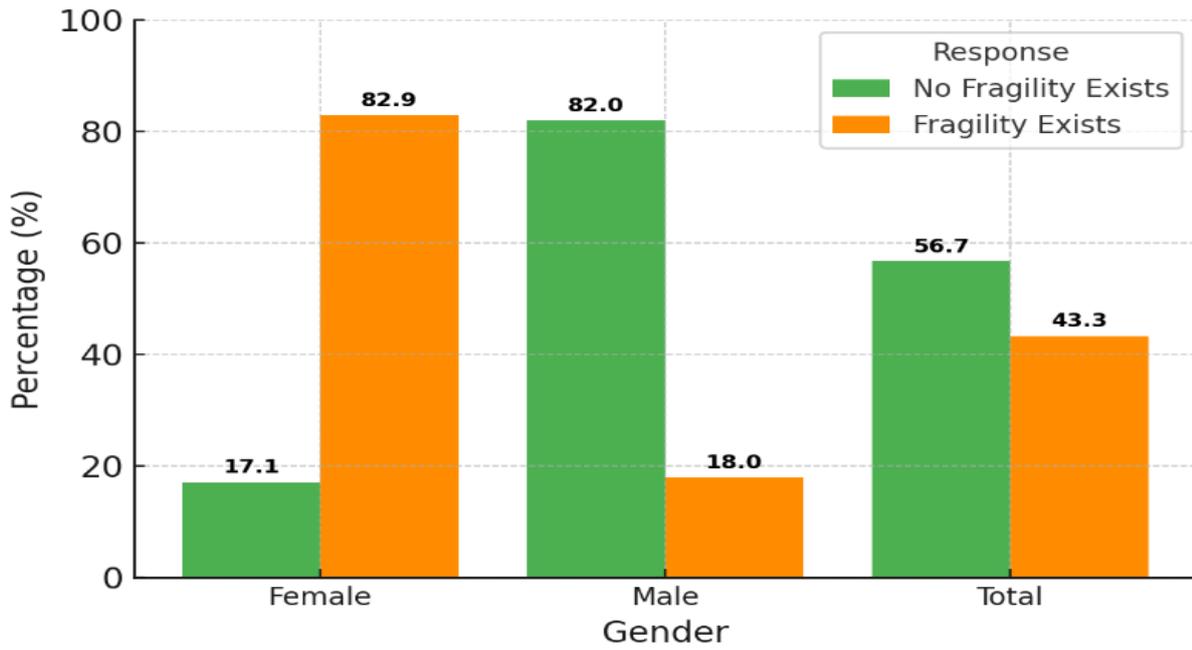
Land disputes (22.1%) and political/community dynamics (21.7%) are the most cited historical events influencing current community relations, followed by chieftaincy and leadership issues (15.6%), conflict resolution practices (12.5%), ethnic conflicts (11.1%), resource-sharing disputes (9.5%) and social/cultural interactions (7.4%).

## 2.5. Women and youth experience fragility most acutely.

82.9% of women report fragility compared to 18.0% of men; regression analysis shows males are significantly less likely than females to perceive fragility (OR 0.25). Younger people (15–35) are 4.48 times more likely to perceive fragility than those aged 51+, and individuals exposed to past tribal disputes are 7.39 times more likely to feel fragile.



Figure 5: Gendered Perspectives on FCV (%)



Source: SoCo Project Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention & Migration in Northern Ghana Study, 2024

## 2.6. Fragility and conflict are strong predictors of migration.

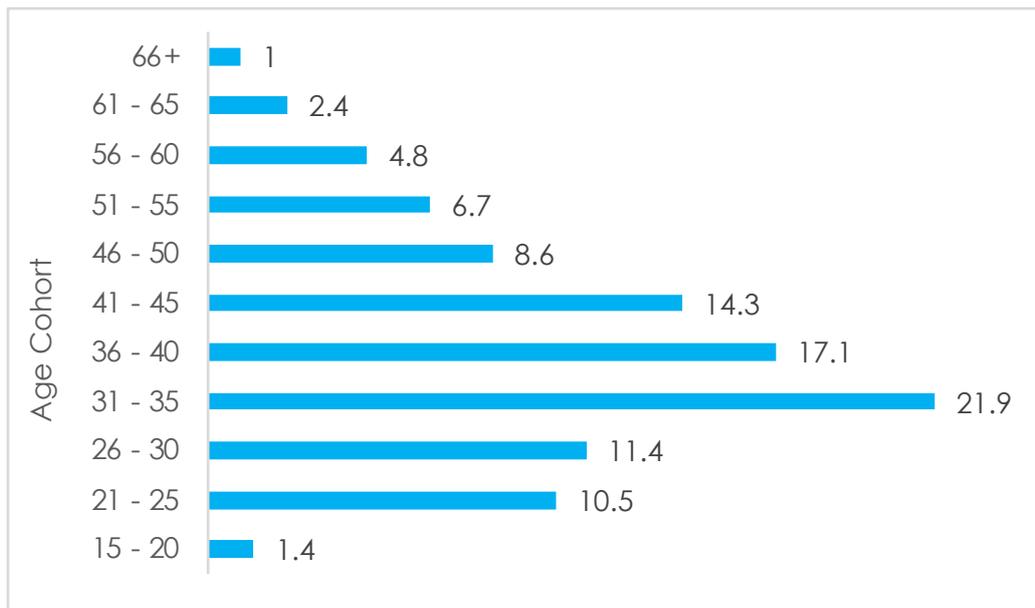
The Scoping results show that 26.7% of residents report conflict-induced migration; in non-fragile communities, only 6.6% report such migration, compared with 48.8% in fragile communities.

## 2.7. Chi-square results confirm a statistically significant association between perceived fragility and migration ( $\chi^2 = 53.9$ , $p < 0.001$ ).

Logistic regression shows that resource competition (OR 3.75), ethnic conflict (OR 2.14), and living in Upper East (OR 4.26) strongly increase the likelihood of migration; people aged 35–44 are 2.51 times more likely to migrate than other age groups, while men are less likely to move than women.



**Figure 6: Conflict-induced migration by region and age group**



Source: SoCo Project Social Cohesion, Conflict Prevention & Migration in Northern Ghana Study, 2024

## 2.8. Ghana has robust legal and policy frameworks—but implementation is uneven.

Key instruments include the MTNDPF 2022–2025, the National Security Strategy, the Youth Policy, the National Peace Council Act, 2011 (Act 818), and the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 2020 (Act 1030), Anti-Terrorism Act, 2008 (Act 762), Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, 2019 (Act 999), Ghana Police Service Act, 1970 (Act 350), Armed Forces Act, 1962 (Act 105), Chieftaincy Act, 2008 (Act 759), Alternative Dispute Resolution Act, 2010 (Act 798), Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), Public Order Act, 1994 (Act 491), and Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2019 (Act 989). International commitments (e.g., UNSCR 1325, CEDAW, CRC, Global Compact for Migration, SDGs) provide a strong normative base, but translation into consistent, well-resourced action in Northern Ghana remains partial.

## 2.9. Local peace infrastructures exist but are fragmented and project-driven.

Traditional conflict-resolution systems, community dialogues, restorative justice, cross-community engagement, and youth peace clubs are being used by actors such as NORPRA, Norsac, TAMA Foundation, STAR-Ghana, and the Northern Development Authority (NDA). These initiatives show promise, but coverage, coordination and financing are uneven, limiting their impact on systemic drivers of FCV and migration.

## 3. Policy Options

### 3.1. Scenario A: The Status Quo (Fragmented peace efforts in a high-risk environment)

In this scenario, Ghana continues to rely on existing peacebuilding projects, current mediation measures in hotspots, and the implementation of national frameworks (the Status Quo). Economic grievances, land disputes, and political interference remain largely unaddressed; border security and early warning systems have improved only marginally under current circumstances.

Consequently, conflict-induced migration will continue at current or higher levels, draining human capital from already deprived areas and increasing pressure on host communities. The Youth, especially in border regions, remain exposed to recruitment by armed groups and criminal networks, while there are probabilities that public and partner spending could repeatedly be diverted to emergency response instead of long-term development, slowing progress on poverty reduction and shared prosperity.

### 3.2. Scenario B: Incremental Change (More projects with a limited system shift towards system integration)

In this scenario, the Government of Ghana and partners scale up existing peace committees, dialogues, and livelihood projects, and improve coordination among national bodies (the National Peace Council (NPC), security councils, and line ministries). However, while conflict prevention is captured in Metropolitan, Municipal District Assemblies' (MMDAs') Medium-Term Development Plans,

conflict sensitivity is not systematically built into development planning, and migration is still mainly treated as a humanitarian issue.

The plausible consequences of using this approach are that in the medium to long term, local tensions will reduce in some communities and stabilise certain hotspots, but the underlying drivers of economic exclusion, contested land regimes, politicised chieftaincy, and weak border management will persist. Similarly, migration pressures may ease slightly in targeted areas but remain high elsewhere, while the overall fragility map of Northern Ghana may change slightly. The gains made will be vulnerable to shocks (elections, climate events, regional security developments) because institutional incentives and financing mechanisms are not fundamentally realigned.

### 3.3. Scenario C: A Social Cohesion and Safe Mobility Framework for Northern Ghana

This scenario proposes a coherent mechanism that links social cohesion, conflict prevention and migration management to core development and financing systems, anchored in the SOCO Project and Ghana's national frameworks.

The Key elements of this implementation arrangement are;

#### 1. Conflict-sensitive development and land governance.

All district development plans and major investments in Northern Ghana are screened for FCV and migration risks, with specific measures to address economic grievances,

land disputes and resource competition.

## 2. Targeted inclusion of at-risk youth and women.

Economic programmes in fragile and border districts should prioritise employment, enterprise support, and social protection for youth (15 - 35) and women, who, the scoping study shows, are most likely to feel fragile and to move (See Table 1 above).

## 3. Strengthened peace and mobility systems across borders.

Regional and district security councils, NPC structures, and local peace platforms are resourced to provide early warning, mediation, and safe mobility pathways, with a special focus on the Upper East, Upper West, and other high-risk corridors.

Implementing Scenario C to the latter has the potential to contribute to reductions in the incidence and impact of violent disputes, lower conflict-driven displacement, and more predictable conditions for investment and service delivery. Similarly, human and social capital will be retained and rebuilt in high-risk areas, supporting inclusive growth rather than flight and stagnation.



## 4. Recommendations

### 1. Ministry of Finance and NDPC: Link Financing to Conflict-Sensitive, Cohesion-Enhancing Development.

The Ministry of Finance, working with NDPC, should:

- Require FCV and migration risk screening for all major public investments in the six northern and Oti regions, using SOCO evidence on economic, land and resource-based drivers as the catalyst.
- Create an earmarked “Social Cohesion and Safe Mobility” window within the public investment and inter-governmental fiscal transfer systems that rewards districts which reduce conflict-related displacement and improve youth/women’s opportunities.
- Integrate social cohesion and migration indicators into national results frameworks and the Medium-Term National Development Policy Framework (MTNDPF: 2026 – 2029) monitoring for these regions.

### 2. Ministry of Interior, National Peace Council, and Security Agencies should strengthen Peace and Early-Warning Systems in High-Risk Corridors.

The Ministry of Interior, National Peace Council (NPC), and Regional and District Security Councils, in collaboration with the Boundary Commission of Ghana, should do the following;

- Prioritise Upper East, Upper West, Savannah and other high-risk districts for enhanced early warning, intelligence-sharing and joint civil–security planning, informed by the study’s regression evidence on fragility and migration hotspots.
- Scale up and institutionalise community peace committees, traditional mediation structures and youth peace clubs, with clear mandates, funding lines and accountability to NPC and local authorities.
- Strengthen cross-border cooperation with Sahelian neighbours on arms flows, trafficking and extremist threats, using existing security and migration frameworks.

### 3. MLGCRA, MMDAs and Development Partners: Put Youth and Women at the Centre of Local Cohesion and Mobility Responses.

The Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs (MLGCRA), district assemblies, and development partners should;

- Embed social cohesion, conflict prevention and safe migration objectives in district medium-term development plans, with budgeted actions that respond to the specific FCV drivers identified (economic challenges, land disputes, resource competition, ethnic tensions).



- Design and fund local programmes that combine livelihoods, skills and psychosocial support for youth and women in fragile and high-migration communities, including returnees and displaced persons.
- Partner with NGOs and traditional leaders to expand community dialogues, restorative justice, and peace education initiatives that address historical grievances and promote inclusive decision-making.

## 5. Conclusion

Investing now in a Social Cohesion and Safe Mobility Compact for Northern Ghana will protect human capital, stabilise communities in strategic border regions, and create the conditions for inclusive growth rather than recurrent displacement. The return on this investment is a safer, more cohesive northern Ghana that contributes fully to national poverty reduction and shared prosperity, rather than remaining a fault line where development gains are constantly at risk.

