

Country risk in the francophone area

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The francophone market also carries risks that a shared language does nothing to reduce. Between 2020 and 2023, several states of francophone West Africa experienced changes of regime by force, followed by tensions with their traditional partners, withdrawals from regional organisations and diplomatic realignments.¹ Regional and international sanctions, the suspension of financing and insecurity have affected trade and financial flows, obliging Geneva institutions exposed to these countries to reassess their relationships. French remains the language of business there, but the legal and political environment has deteriorated.

Sovereign credit risk is a second dimension. Several francophone states have resorted to resource-backed loans or to costly bond issues, as Part I described, and some have gone through debt restructurings. The credit ratings of most francophone African countries fall within the speculative category, which makes financing more expensive and limits the appetite of banks.² Finally, compliance risk, set out in Part H, is high in countries where corruption and politically exposed persons are present in business life. The francophone market is a market of the future, but it also demands a rigorous, country-by-country analysis of country risk, which the shared language makes easier to carry out without ever replacing it.

Caution. A shared language creates an impression of familiarity that can distort the assessment of risk. A francophone country is not, for that reason, a low-risk country: political instability, sovereign rating, exchange controls and exposure to corruption must be assessed with the same rigour as for a country whose language is foreign to the institution.

1 Notes

1. Coups d'état in Mali (August 2020, May 2021), Burkina Faso (January and September 2022) and Niger (26 July 2023); Alliance of Sahel States

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created by the charter of 16 September 2023, confederal treaty of 6 July 2024; withdrawal from ECOWAS announced on 28 January 2024, effective 29 January 2025; “Alliance des États du Sahel”, fr.wikipedia.org (accessed September 2026). ↩

2. Financial Afrik, “Baisse de la notation du Sénégal : impacts et perspectives” (16 November 2025): Senegal was downgraded by Standard & Poor’s in October 2024 and then by Moody’s, against the background of the disclosure of undeclared debt in 2024–2025 and the suspension of the International Monetary Fund programme, while Côte d’Ivoire retains its Ba2 (Moody’s) and BB (S&P) ratings. ↩

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