



# PROJECT WATA

Fighting maritime crime in West Africa through improved intelligence and cooperation.

## THE SITUATION

The Gulf of Guinea is a vital hub for international trade. However, in recent years, this region has become one of the world's major piracy hotspots. Pirate groups kidnapped more than 400 seafarers for ransom in the Gulf of Guinea between 2019 and 2023. Additionally, some pirate attacks in the region involve stealing oil products, which are later processed and sold on the black market.

Other maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea include illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, trafficking in counterfeit goods, drugs and arms, as well as human trafficking and people smuggling. Terrorist attacks against port infrastructure represent another key risk in the region. All of these security threats have a serious impact on the socio-economic development of both coastal and landlocked regional countries.

Regional collaboration between law enforcement agencies is essential to address these threats and ensure the security of the maritime environment. This need is recognized in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2634, which urges all UN Member States "to share information with INTERPOL for use in the global piracy database through regional information sharing arrangements."



## OBJECTIVES

Through Project WATA, INTERPOL provides sustainable support to relevant maritime security stakeholders in the region in order to make a long-term difference to maritime and port security. Its aims are to:

- Promote intelligence efforts and international cooperation to combat maritime crimes and terrorist attacks;
- Improve interagency cooperation between investigators and justice sector officials in complex maritime crime cases.

Project WATA is linked to another ongoing project, AGWE, which also tackles maritime crime in the same five countries: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activities under this project include:

- Improving the crime scene management capabilities of first responders (navies): Navies play a crucial role during investigations and prosecutions as they can identify different types of criminal activity and preserve the crime scene;
- Strengthening the security of port infrastructure. Capacity building will help officials to target criminals who exploit maritime routes and poorly protected infrastructure and border crossings;
- Teaching advanced interviewing of victims and witnesses: Professional interviewing techniques are key to most successful investigations;
- Producing a dedicated training curriculum to examine the investigation of different types of maritime crime and terrorism;
- Investigative and analytical support to counter any type of maritime crime, including transnational organized crime and terrorist activities. It includes case coordination meetings, deployment of operational support teams and preparation of analytical reports at the request of member countries;
- Updating the existing Guide for Investigating Acts of Maritime Piracy and tailoring it to the West African context. We will expand its scope to encompass all types of maritime crime and terrorism. We will then integrate it into national Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

## KEY SUCCESSSES

Some of the major outcomes of the project in 2022-2023 were:

- National trainers delivered crime scene preservation and evidence collection courses to 327 officers.
- Beneficiary countries have improved their capabilities to coordinate at the inter-agency level, process a crime scene, and conduct victim, witness and suspect interviews.
- Beneficiary countries have improved their capabilities related to port security.
- Support to two successful piracy prosecutions in Togo and in Nigeria, as well as a prosecutions of crew members involved in drugs trafficking by sea in Côte d'Ivoire.
- In cooperation with international partners, facilitated information sharing that resulted in the seizure of 4.7 tons of cocaine in the Gulf of Guinea.
- Organized investigative support meetings that led to the arrest of a high-ranking organized crime group member involved in international drug trafficking by sea affecting West Africa.
- Supported Nigeria and Togo to publish several INTERPOL diffusions and Blue Notices concerning maritime piracy suspects.
- Co-organized the first counter-terrorism INTERPOL operation in West Africa, achieving a good level of hits, including one for maritime piracy, and identifying key gaps that countries need to address in their fight against maritime-based crime.

**Timeframe:** 2022-2026

**Budget:** EUR 4.4 million

**Donor:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark



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