Burkina Faso/Benin: Conditions for Beninese nationals to enter and exit Burkina Faso; the process for obtaining permanent resident status, and the rights associated with that status (October 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Corroborating sources indicated that Burkina Faso and Benin are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as are Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo (France n.d.; Senegal n.d.; Action-visas.com n.d.).

During a 6 October 2005 telephone interview, the first counsellor at the Embassy of Burkina Faso in Ottawa indicated that under the agreements among ECOWAS member countries, Beninese citizens can enter and exit Burkina Faso at will simply by showing a valid passport, an identity card or ECOWAS laissez-passer (see also Action-visas.com n.d.) and a vaccination certificate.

However, without specific reference to Burkina Faso or Benin, ECOWAS states on the "Achievements" page of its Website that

[t]he visa and entry permit requirement has been abolished in all ECOWAS Member States. However, nearly all the States still maintain numerous check-points, and ECOWAS citizens are subjected to administrative harassment and extortion (7 May 2005).

The first counsellor at the Embassy of Burkina Faso in Ottawa added that nationals of any ECOWAS country can settle in Burkina Faso indefinitely, but they are responsible for keeping the documents used to enter the country up to date because the authorities in Burkina Faso do not issue any other identity documents (6 Oct. 2005).

During an 11 October 2005 telephone interview from Ouagadougou, the executive secretary of the Burkina Faso Human Rights Movement (Mouvement burkinabé des droits de l'homme et des peuples, MBDHP), an affiliate of the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH), corroborated the information communicated by the first counsellor at the Embassy of Burkina Faso in Ottawa. The executive secretary of the MBDHP also mentioned that many Malians and Beninese settle in Burkina Faso (11 Oct. 2005).

In terms of the rights associated with permanent resident status in Burkina
Burkina Faso, the first counsellor at the Embassy of Burkina Faso in Ottawa explained that residents originating from ECOWAS countries enjoy the same rights as citizens of Burkina Faso, with the exception of political rights, of the right to work in the public service, to enlist in the armed forces or to receive study grants (6 Oct. 2005).

According to the executive secretary of the MBDHP, who is also a jurist by training and a member of the Burkina Faso bar, ECOWAS nationals can easily settle in Burkina Faso, but they encounter problems when they want to enter the job market, as they have neither access to the armed forces, the public service, nor educational funds (MBDHP 11 Oct. 2005). In addition, even though the law does not prohibit them from practising certain professions, they are prevented from doing so by protectionist regulations put in place by certain professional bodies (for example, those of notaries, lawyers, and physicians) to restrict the domestic market (ibid.).

However, the executive secretary of the MBDHP stated that certain sectors, primarily the business sector, remain open and free of restrictions (11 Oct. 2005). Nevertheless, like citizens of Burkina Faso, other ECOWAS nationals must endeavour to obtain the documents required by the government to open a business (letters patent, tax card, builder's permit, and so on) (MBDHP 11 Oct. 2005). As an example, he mentioned the case of the Grande imprimerie du Burkina Faso, a large printing company whose owner is Beninese (ibid.).

In terms of access to public services such as health care and education (excluding post-secondary education), nationals of other ECOWAS countries do not have to pay any special fees (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

**References**


**Additional Sources Consulted**
Oral sources: A researcher at the Centre d'études africaines of the École des hautes études en sciences sociales [Paris] and a research professor in the Department of Public Law at the Université de Cotonou did not provide any information on the subject.

Internet sites, including: ECOI.net, Government of Burkina Faso, Investir en zone franc (IZF.net), ReliefWeb, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United States Department of State.

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