



## Protection Update for the Northwest and Southwest Regions – Cameroon

September-October 2023

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### Protection situation overview

The protection environment in September was marked by the “Back to School” lockdown enforced by Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG) in both regions from 02-18 September 2023. While a slight drop in the overall number of incidents was recorded in September (compared to the previous month of August), this was mostly due to the reduction of protection monitoring for security reasons as a result of the imposed lockdown.

Significant lockdown-related incidents impacted response activities and the general security context of the Northwest and Southwest regions. Communities faced protection concerns during this period of heightened violence and unrest, including:

- Disruption of daily activities, including the resumption of schools, leading to increased tensions and violence in affected areas.
- Targeted attacks on civilians, resulting in loss of life and injuries.
- Destruction of property, including vehicles, exacerbating the economic challenges faced by the local population.
- Crossfire between NSAGs and security forces, endangering the lives of civilians caught in the middle.
- Increased risk of explosive incidents, highlighted by the explosion of an improvised device in the town of Limbe which killed at least one person and injured several others near the popular *Ambas Bay Junction* area.

This period saw numerous attacks and threats against public schools, teachers, and students. In the Southwest region, protection incidents reported during this period included attacks on schools by NSAGs in the division of Manyu (Kupe-Manuenguba), where one (01) priest, and three (03) teachers were shot, and numerous community leaders abducted. In the same area, community members retaliated by capturing three NSAG members and handed them over to State Security Forces. In the Northwest, two (02) teachers were killed for advocating for schools to reopen in Mbesa village, near the Nigerian border (Boyo division).

In the Southwest division of Meme, movements were restricted and access to basic services limited. Children and community members remained indoors and without access to vital medical treatment. Constant shootings led to the death of a girl child by stray bullets. In Mabandakuba, several attacks in army barracks affected those who found themselves nearby. As the 1st of October (considered by Anglophone regions of Cameroon as “Independence Day”) approached, arbitrary arrests also increased, while and arrestees were forced to pay around 30k CFA each for their release.

Several humanitarian staff were abducted before and during the lockdown period. In the Northwest, four (04) Caritas workers were abducted in Bamessing village, while a food truck was diverted by NSAGs in Bamali village. In the Southwest, seven (07) Caritas workers were abducted while carrying out an assessment in Owe village (Muyuka subdivision). All abductees were released unharmed after advocacy.

The lockdown period was very challenging in Kumbo (Bui division, Northwest) with gun shots on a daily basis resulting in numerous civilians injured from stray bullets, and frequent detonation of IEDs. Reduced or poor network connection in and out of Kumbo made communication with and between humanitarian workers, service providers and affected community members. Reduced or poor network connection in and out of Kumbo made communication with and between humanitarian workers, service providers and affected community members.

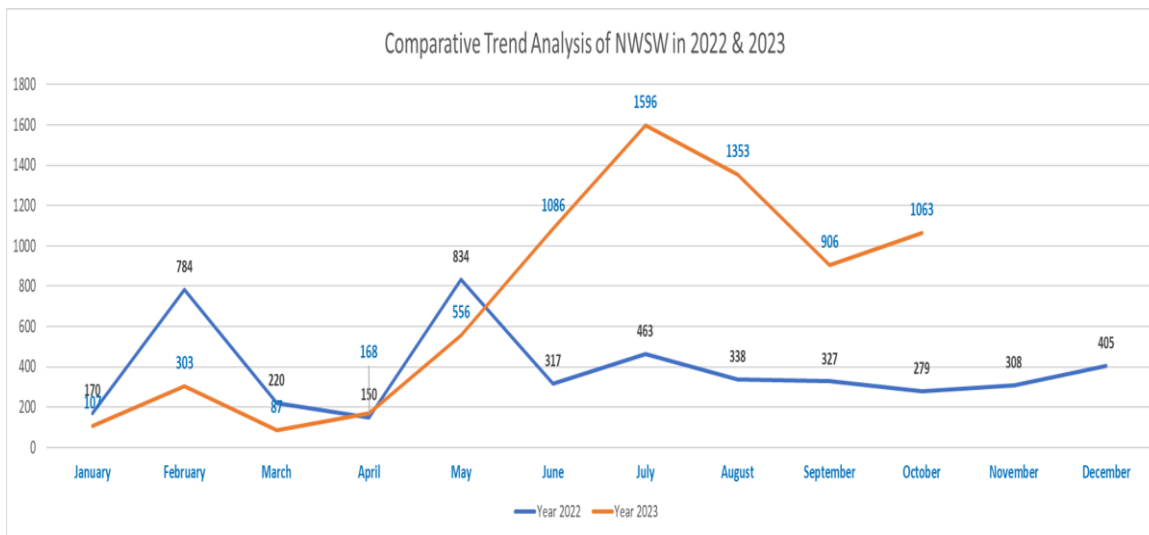
During this period, humanitarian access was further restricted in the Northwest, as an important transportation axis (bridge connecting Bamali to Ndop) was cut off before the lockdown. While temporary reparations were attempted, the road was still inaccessible throughout the month of September.

The protection environment worsened in October, with the situation being particularly tense between the last week of September and the first week of October. The October reporting period was marked by human rights violations against civilians, most of which were Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Strong military presence was observed in urban and semi-urban areas of Buea and Bamenda, such as the “Bongo Square” in Buea, and the “Grande Stand” in Bamenda, and around public buildings and schools in the days preceding the 1<sup>st</sup> of October.

The fact that Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG) did not this time declare a lockdown or restrictions of movement in anticipation of “Independence Day” contributed to increase the sentiment of fear and paranoia among NW and SW populations.

A total number of 1063 protection incidents were reported by Protection Monitoring partners (DRC, Intersos, IRC) during the month of October. This represents a 17% increase from the previous month of September.



Danish Refugee Council (DRC) carried out Protection monitoring activities in Meme, Fako and Kupe Manenguba (Southwest). A majority of reported incidents were kidnappings and arbitrary arrests. Men represented 65% of victims. NSAGs represented 75% of perpetrators, while State Security Forces represented 25%.

Intersos carried out Protection monitoring activities in Mezam and Donga Mantung, Momo, Menchum and Bafut (Northwest) and Fako, Meme, and Manyu Divisions (Southwest). Of the reported victims, 51% were men and 48% women. NSAGs represented 47% of perpetrators, while SSFs 33%.

International Rescue Committee (IRC) carried out Protection Monitoring activities in Meme, Fako, Manyu, Mezam, and Momo. IRC reported a slight increase in displacements including from Akwaya to Mamfe and Nigeria. Most victims of protection incidents and HR violations were reportedly from IDP communities (65%). Mezam was the most affected division.

Some of the most serious incidents reported in October in the Southwest region included:

- NSAG attacks on humanitarian staff on 30 October in Tombel (Kupe Manenguba, SW). The victims were rescued by SSFs who fired gunshots in the air.
- NSAG kidnapping of a youth leader and 2 traditional council members who they accused of being informants to SSFs on 10 October in Malande (Muyuka/Fako). All have reportedly been released since the event.
- Recurrent NSAG armed attacks have led to the fleeing of communities from Obonyi village (Akwaya) to Mamfe and neighboring Nigeria to seek refuge.

Populations' vulnerabilities are also increased by the challenging environmental conditions of the current heavy rain season. Roads are inaccessible and therefore access from plantation fields and farms to the markets is extremely difficult. This has a negative impact on the livelihood of communities already affected by the crisis.

## Protection Response

### September 2023

- 3,865 people received general protection assistance including legal assistance, livelihood and socio-economic inclusion services, and support with civil documentation.
- 3,404 received HLP assistance including legal assistance, counselling, and capacity-building on HLP related matters.
- 10,092 received Child Protection services of which around 50% benefitted from MHPSS support.
- GBV partners reached 10,907 persons through prevention activities, holistic support to GBV survivors, safety audits and risk & vulnerability mapping, vocation trainings-economic support-livelihood activities for women and girls.

***Most activities were conducted remotely during the lockdown-period and through alternative methods.***

### October 2023

- **3,258** people received general protection assistance including legal assistance, livelihood and socio-economic inclusion services, and support with civil documentation from Protection actors.
- **2,420** received HLP assistance including legal assistance, counselling, and capacity-building on HLP related matters from HLP AoR partners.
- **3,770** received Child Protection services of which around 50% benefitted from MHPSS support.
- GBV partners reached **9,661** persons through prevention activities, holistic support to GBV survivors, safety audits and risk & vulnerability mapping, vocation trainings-economic support-livelihood activities for women and girls.

## Coordination

- NWSW Protection Cluster monthly meeting was held on 14 September. The Protection Cluster and AoR coordinators updated partners on the Protection situation and response at regional level.

Partners were also briefed on on-going HNO-HRP 2024 and CERF UFE processes and discussed protection-related challenges.

- On 26 September, Protection Cluster coordination trained 24 members of government from various regional ministries in Bamenda, including MINJUSTICE, MICAFA, MINAS, MINPROFF, MINAT, MINDAT, MINPAT, MINDEVEL, and the Regional Assembly on Housing/Land/Property and Protection.
- As part of the in-person regional HNO-HRP Workshops from 25-27 October in Buea, Protection Cluster coordination facilitated sessions on the Protection Situation in NWSW regions in 2023, on Protection Mainstreaming and cross-cutting issues including Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) for about 30 participants (UN Agencies, INGOs, NNGOs and local humanitarian organizations).
- Co-Facilitation capacity-building for Caritas network on 31 October in Bamenda (in-person): Protection Cluster C coordination trained 13 members of the Caritas network (Caritas Bamenda, Buea, Kumba, Kumbo & Mamfe) on co-facilitation of the Protection Cluster. Topics included: Roles of Clusters, Cluster Lead Agencies (CLA), Co-Facilitators, Co-facilitation's impact, ways to ensure effectiveness, to minimize potential risks, comparative advantages between CLA and NGO co-facilitator roles.

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