



Topline Recommendations for G12+ donors following the Global Protection Cluster Briefing on the Protection Crisis in Central Sahel

Briefing date: Wednesday 7th October

The impact of the militarised approach to the crisis on the protection environment

Human rights abuses are reported across the three countries and perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, including Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG), Sahel G5 forces, community based armed groups and Government forces. These violations are reinforcing the already precarious loss of confidence between the civilian population and the defense and security forces, the vulnerability of civilians, family separations, intercommunity tensions, the weakening of local state authority, the fragmentation of the social fabric and cohesion.

The military operations in the Liptako Gourma region (called the region of the three frontiers Niger, Burkia Faso and Mali) are part of what drives forced displacement and cross-borders mixed movements. NRC's RRM team reports that about a third of the displacements is a result of military operations. The lack of effective civil military coordination is also increasing the risk of being at the wrong place at the wrong time for our teams. There have been several instances where we have had to abruptly cancel activities planned in an area because we find out that there are military operations planned. The blurring of lines between military and humanitarian action also increases the vulnerability of civilians to attacks. Military presence in schools' augments threats to education.

Recommendations

- The international community must refocus the narrative from a military response to protection response.
- Civilian protection must be at the core of any military operations. As concluded at the third conference on strengthening relations of trust between defense and security forces (DSF) and populations in the G5 Sahel space, held on January 20, 2020 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, an integrated strategy for the protection of civilians must be pursued.
- Furthermore, G5 and supporting states need to maintain cooperation with protection actors in implementing the Compliance Framework.
- We ask member states to push for an effective CivMil coordination mechanism, as a tool to achieve protection outcomes.

Despite recognition as a protection crisis, protection is under-funded and under prioritised.

Resources redirected to the Covid-19 response both at global and country level can compromise and overshadow efforts of protection actors to address existing vulnerabilities and needs caused by violence, conflict and displacements. The situation in the Sahel is primarily a protection crisis, with a direct impact on food insecurity, education and health crisis, and must be approached as such by addressing the access and respect for the fundamental rights of the population, basic services, justice, economic opportunities, security and respect for lifestyles and values.



Recommendations

- Donors need to invest a proportionate and sustainable manner in emergency protection response interventions and strengthening basic systems as well as dedicated protection services.
- Donors should support humanitarian-development protection responses, including case management, access to civil documentation, legal assistance and access to justice, GBV and childcare services, assistance for victims of explosive devices, trauma and mental health. When funding protection, in addition to support protection service delivery, we need to support mediation programs, community-based protection systems, community social cohesion and mediation efforts as well as conflict resolution and prevention.

An environment of impunity is fueling human rights abuses. Grave violations have been recorded throughout the region, including the recruitment of children and sexual violence, used in the context of conflict and violence.

Recommendation

- Duty bearers must adopt strong actions to investigate the criminal acts committed by defense and security forces and elements of armed groups, to strengthen the judicial system to ensure access to justice for civilians and the judicialization of military operations; and reinforce protection of civilians' aspects as well as accountability. Funding that supports the security forces must be conditioned on the respect for human rights, human rights due diligence and end to impunity. Respect of IHL by all parties to the conflict and right-based advocacy in that matter needs to be pursued by all parties.