

How can vulnerable populations in Niger have access to basic social services and humanitarian assistance in the post-July 26, 2023, political context?

On July 26, 2023, the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Fatherland (CNSP) announced that it had overthrown the current President Mohamed Bazoum and his government. The reaction of part of the international community resulted in a number of individual and collective sanctions: closure of land and air borders, suspension of development aid, suspension of financial and commercial transactions and freezing of the assets of the Republic of Niger and certain Nigeriens. This advocacy brief suggests three steps that members of the international community should take to preserve Nigerien people's access to basic social services and humanitarian assistance.



1. Introduce humanitarian exemptions to all the collective sanctions adopted against Niger, in order to guarantee the continuity of access of vulnerable populations in Niger to humanitarian services.

According to the 2023 humanitarian response plan, 4.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Niger. More than 700,000 people are displaced in Niger, including 400,000 internally displaced persons, 251,000 refugees and 50,000 asylum seekers¹. At present, many humanitarian actors are unable to deliver the goods necessary for vital assistance to the populations of Niger. For example: contingency stocks to respond to the nutritional emergency affecting more than 400,000 children in Niger ensure a response for only three months in a country where global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate reaches 12.2% and a severe acute malnutrition (SAM) 2.4%. According to some estimates, given the supply delays, if humanitarian exemptions allowing humanitarian cargo to enter Nigerien territory are not adopted by September 1, 2023, humanitarian actors will no longer be able to guarantee access to treatments for the malnourished Nigerien children. In this period of rain and increase in diseases such as cholera and malaria, the blocking of 10 containers of cholera and trauma kits, prevention, and diagnosis kits, 250,000 treated mosquito nets and one million malaria treatment kits is akin to a health disaster that will most severely impact children in Niger.

Sanctions also have an impact on the response to food insecurity which is hitting the Nigerien population hard. 13% of the population suffers from severe food insecurity (IPC levels 3 and 4) owing to the compounding effects of due to the conflict, the 2021 drought and the inflation to which the due to the collective sanctions adopted following the events of July 26. The sanctions adopted to date impact the ability of humanitarian actors to meet the vital needs of 3.3 million food-insecure Nigeriens. Caps have been imposed on the withdrawal of cash from banks, causing delays in cash transfers to populations affected by the food crisis. Food supplies are also blocked at the borders while the available contingency stocks will only be able to assist 1.2 million Nigeriens for a period of one month.

If the sanctions last until the start of the school year, in October 2023, some actors estimate that the stocks available can only cover the school material needs of 36,000 children in an emergency situation, out of a total of 150,000. This situation would jeopardize the access and quality of education for children, leading to risks such as dropping out of school, labor exploitation, child marriage and recruitment into armed groups.

Therefore, supporting the request of the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator addressed to ECOWAS on August 17, 2023, we, the NGOs signatories of this note, invite the authors of the collective sanctions already adopted, as well as the actors considering collective sanctions, to make the required amendments in order to:

- Ensure the unimpeded and timely delivery of aid and humanitarian workers, by land and air, to support activities that meet the basic needs of vulnerable populations in Niger. This materializes, for example, through the establishment of an air bridge for humanitarian actors through the issuance of the necessary authorizations for UNHAS flights to and from Burkina Faso and sufficient access to the fuel required for these flights. and domestic flights.
- Authorize all commercial and financial transactions necessary for the delivery of humanitarian aid in Niger.

- Ensure that humanitarian organizations and their staff involved in these transactions do not run any legal risk for their activities strictly related to the provision of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations in Niger.

2. Review the sanctions adopted to date by applying the principle of “Do no harm” to any measure adopted against Niger, in order to guarantee protection and minimize the negative impact on the living conditions of the populations.

According to a rapid survey conducted by the Protection cluster, nearly 50% of Protection actors will no longer be able to fully carry out their protection assistance interventions beyond 3 months. More than a million people, including women and children, would then be deprived of access to protection services. In the medium term, the various sanctions will not only limit access to humanitarian assistance, but they could exacerbate protection problems, including gender-based violence, child protection as well as tensions for the access to already limited resources, tensions between refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities. In the event that a military intervention were to take place, an increase in human rights violations is to be feared. Internal population movements and to neighboring countries are to be anticipated, which will increase humanitarian needs and pressure on natural resources in host areas. Ultimately, this would exacerbate inter-community tensions. Migrant and refugee populations could be victims of violence and refoulement in areas affected by conflict and without access to basic social services.

3. Creativity, flexibility, and adaptation of financing mechanisms must be demonstrated in order to maintain access to basic social services for the populations of Niger.

The suspension of development aid will have significant consequences on the access of the populations of Niger to basic social services such as education and health. The asset freeze and suspension of foreign aid to the development sector will reduce the government's overall budget and its ability to sustain basic social services, as well as its share of humanitarian response, including distributions of food during the lean season and the response to floods during this rainy season. If financial sanctions result in a decline in essential humanitarian and development assistance to populations, they risk leading to an accelerated increase in humanitarian needs and stifling development efforts. It is therefore imperative that humanitarian donors provide the funding required to meet at least the needs expressed in the humanitarian response plan. As for development donors, they should adopt funding strategies that give greater priority to people's access to basic social services.

Appropriate strategic adjustments by technical and financial development partners, like the identification of new local partners, is essential to preserving the functioning of basic social services. The strengthening of local capacity must be encouraged as well as activities to support the resilience of populations to deal with the consequences of sanctions. Where decentralized state technical services are still present, they must be supported in order to maintain their services to the populations. Humanitarian and development NGOs can also play a role in this maintenance of basic social services if they obtain funding enabling them to develop long-term intervention logic aimed at strengthening local actors and communities in the provision of these services.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-situation-des-mouvements-de-populations-au-30-juin-2023>.

Signatories:



For further information, please contact:

Djaffra TRAORE
Lead of the Advocacy Technical Group (GTH/OIREN)
Advocacy Coordinator/Action Against Hunger
Mobile: +227 81 51 51 60 | Skype: Djaff.T
djtraore@ne.acfspain.org

Mohammed Chikhaoui
Coordinator-Representative of the Humanitarian Working Group (GTH/OIREN) Niger
Mobile: +227 80 07 00 02 | Skype: momochic
RepresentantGTH@oiren.org
mohammed.chikhaoui@rescue.org