

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report aims to bring renewed attention to a severely underreported humanitarian situation that has persisted over the past year. It analyses the humanitarian needs of people living in towns and villages blockaded by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in Burkina Faso. In early 2025, violence intensified in parts of the country, humanitarian access remained critically constrained, and conditions worsened in several blockaded areas. The report highlights these blockades' impacts on access to food, healthcare, water, education, and protection, as well as the difficulties humanitarian organisations face in reaching affected communities.

Methodology

This analysis is based on a review of secondary data, including reports from humanitarian organisations, UN agencies, media outlets, and academic sources published between 2023 and early 2025. It incorporates both quantitative and qualitative information, with efforts made to triangulate data across sources to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Limitations

In many of the blockaded towns, insecurity, movement restrictions, and limited humanitarian presence have made regular data collection impossible. By early 2025, there was no comprehensive or regularly updated list of all blocked locations. Available estimates suggest that at least 40 towns and villages were affected in 2024, but the exact number and population figures remain unclear. Humanitarian organisations have no access at all to several areas under blockade, and needs are likely underreported or underdocumented. This report relies heavily on evidence from a few locations where access is still possible, such as Djibo, Pama, and Tougan. The conditions described in these cities are likely indicative of broader trends but may not fully capture the severity or variation of needs in more remote areas and others presenting humanitarian access difficulties. For sectors such as protection and education, reporting is particularly limited, and more needs assessments are necessary to analyse the full extent of the crisis.

KEY FINDINGS

- At least 40 towns and villages, primarily in Centre-Nord, Est, Nord, and Sahel regions, were under blockade by the end of 2024, affecting up to two million people. Many of these areas have been cut off from regular humanitarian access for over a year. The number of blockaded locations in 2025 remains unknown because of access constraints and underreporting. Significant information gaps persist, especially in locations where humanitarian organisations cannot operate. Needs are likely higher than currently reported.
- Blockades have caused acute shortages of food, water, and medicine. Armed groups have sabotaged supply routes and water infrastructure, prompting civilians to resort to unsafe water and food sources and adopt potentially harmful coping strategies.
- Civilians face widespread protection risks, including reported killings, abductions, gender-based violence (GBV), and forced displacement.
- Staff departures, supply shortages, and insecurity have severely disrupted health and education services. Some health facilities operate with only minimal staff and limited electricity, while most schools in blockaded areas have closed. Only a few continue to function under extremely difficult conditions.
- Humanitarian access remains extremely limited because of insecurity, logistical challenges, and the Government's policy requiring military escorts. Aid workers have faced threats, arbitrary detention, and physical assault by both state forces and NSAGs. Medical infrastructure and humanitarian assets have also come under attack.

OVERVIEW

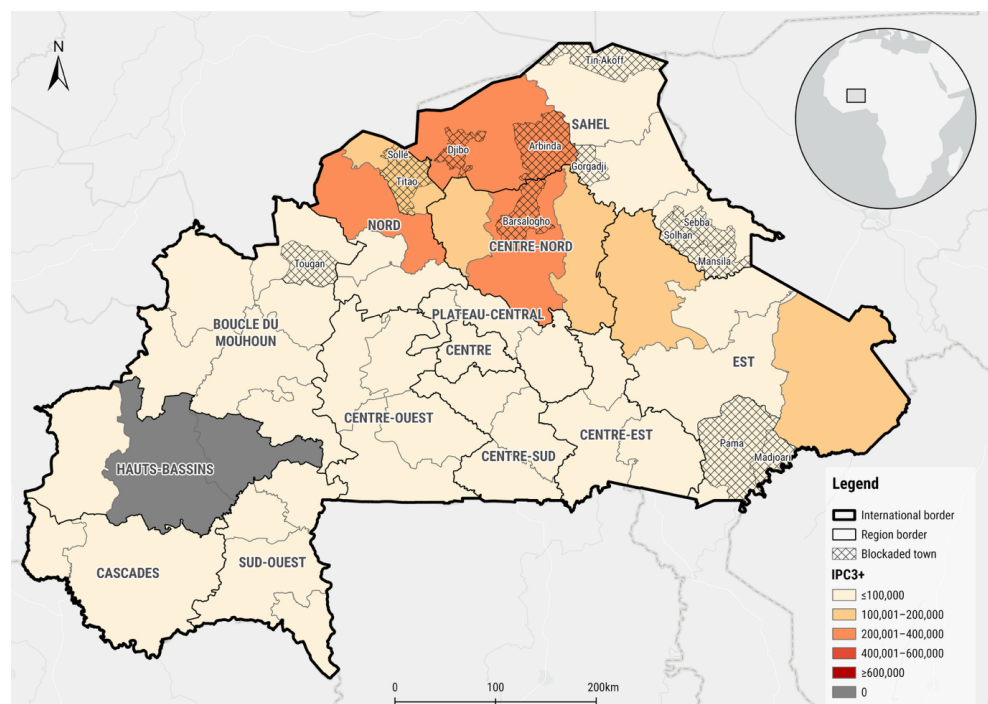
The conflict, which has persisted for nearly a decade, continues to affect civilians in Burkina Faso. 2024 recorded 7,483 conflict-related fatalities, with an additional 2,034 reported during the first quarter of 2025 – a figure that, while lower than the 8,498 deaths recorded in 2023, reflects sustained high levels of violence across the country (ACLED accessed 27/04/2025). In 2025, 6.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, representing over 25% of the population (OCHA 12/12/2024).

One of the most severe and underdocumented features of the current conflict is NSAGs' widespread use of blockades. In this context, blockades refer to the encirclement of towns or villages by NSAGs, who then control surrounding access roads, often using checkpoints,

improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and threats of violence towards civilians and humanitarian personnel to prevent the movement of people and goods. These tactics severely limit access to food, healthcare, and basic services and have led to a deterioration in humanitarian conditions across the country (TNH 05/12/2023). The escalation of attacks on supply convoys – both humanitarian and commercial – alongside the sabotage of water infrastructure has further aggravated the crisis (ECHO 26/11/2024; RI 22/10/2024).

Estimates suggest that by late 2024, around 40 localities were under blockade, affecting up to two million people (NRC 21/02/2024; RI 22/10/2024; Concern 23/09/2024). These figures reflect a steady increase from earlier in the year, when at least 36 towns were confirmed to be encircled (TNH 05/12/2023). Verified information on the number of blockaded localities in 2025 remains extremely limited because of access constraints and underreporting. The true extent of the blockade situation is likely underestimated.

Reported blockaded towns (2022–2024) and IPC Phase 3+ severity (April 2025)



Source: ACAPS using ACLED (accessed 15/05/2025) and IPC (accessed 15/05/2025)

This map reflects reported blockades between 2022–2024. Locations and severity levels are indicative and subject to data availability.

BACKGROUND

The roots of Burkina Faso's current crisis lie not only in the regional spillover of armed violence from neighbouring Mali but also in longstanding internal dynamics of insecurity and marginalisation. Before the conflict escalated in 2016, rural areas were already marked by political instability, localised violence, and the emergence of self-defence groups, who engaged in community policing and informal justice in areas where – because of weak governance structures, underinvestment in public services, and a lack of security infrastructure – the State had limited or no presence (Quidelleur 02/07/2024). The conflict expanded into Burkina Faso in 2016, when armed groups such as Ansarul Islam began operating in the country's northern Sahel region (Shelter Cluster 30/08/2021). A 2016 attack in Ouagadougou marked a turning point, launching Burkina Faso into direct confrontation with transnational NSAGs (Armed Conflict Survey 05/12/2023).

The Jama'at Nasr Al Islam wal Muslimin and the Islamic State – Sahel Province have gained ground, particularly in the north and east. Initially concentrated in the Liptako Gourma tri-border area with Mali and Niger, the conflict has gradually spread to other parts of the country, with armed groups expanding their reach across the northern and eastern provinces (Armed Conflict Survey 05/12/2023). While both seek to establish Islamic governance and remove state presence, they often compete for territory and influence (ACAPS 18/09/2024; Armed Conflict Survey 05/12/2023). By November 2024, NSAGs were estimated to control approximately 40% of the national territory (Counter-IED Report 30/09/2024; Concern 23/09/2024).

Two military coups in 2022 brought a junta led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré to power, which has since prioritised a military-first approach and rejected negotiations with armed groups. A nationwide recruitment campaign launched in 2022 for civilian militias (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland or VDP) further militarised the crisis. The VDP is a state-sanctioned civilian auxiliary force recruited and trained by the Government to support the Burkina Faso Armed Forces in combat and security operations. While the VDP operates under military supervision, reports suggest that it has a separate command structure and often operates with limited oversight (ACLEED 26/03/2024; ICG 15/12/2023). The Government, through the Burkina Faso Armed Forces and the VDP, has responded with expanded military operations but has also been accused of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and the targeting of civilians perceived to be supporting NSAGs (ACAPS 18/09/2024; TAR 14/04/2024).

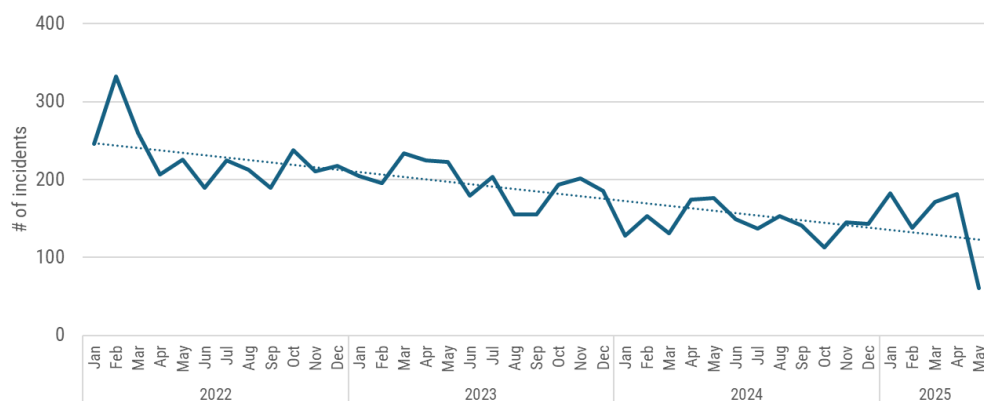
Among the tactics that have gained prominence in recent years are blockades imposed by NSAGs, who aim to isolate and control civilians as part of a broader strategy of territorial dominance and collective punishment. NSAGs use blockades to retaliate against communities they perceive as disloyal to them or to deter suspected collaborations with the

State (AI 02/11/2023). A combination of strategic objectives – denying supply routes, food, and logistical support not only to government forces but also the civilians who may support them and asserting territorial control – likely drives the use of blockades (RI 22/10/2024; TNH 05/12/2023).

Under international humanitarian law, a blockade is defined as a military operation that restricts or prevents the movement of goods or people into or out of a specific area. When implemented in a way that denies civilians access to essential goods necessary for survival, such as food or medicine, it is considered unlawful and violates international law (MSF accessed 14/04/2025). In Burkina Faso, the application of these tactics has resulted in prolonged sieges and severe humanitarian consequences.

Blockades have been reported across multiple regions, particularly in Centre-Nord, Est, and Sahel. Djibo, a major town in the Sahel region, has been under siege since March 2022, affecting over 300,000 residents, many of them already displaced from surrounding areas (RI 22/10/2024). The cumulative effects of the blockades include food shortages, medicine stockouts, and the collapse of basic services. Armed groups enforce these sieges by cutting off access roads, planting IEDs, and carrying out threats and attacks against civilians and humanitarian organisations. In several instances, armed groups have ambushed convoys, looted health centres, and harassed or assaulted aid workers. In some cases, they have poisoned wells and deliberately sabotaged water infrastructure (TNH 05/12/2023).

Conflict-related incidents in Burkina Faso (January 2022 – May 2025)



Source: ACAPS using ACLED accessed 15/05/2025

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Food security and livelihoods

Food insecurity affects at least 3.8 million people in Burkina Faso, including 1.26 million in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and 159,000 in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) conditions from June–August 2024. Nearly two million people remain internally displaced, many of them for extended periods or following repeated displacements (WFP 28/03/2025). Access to food and income sources is severely constrained in many besieged towns across the country. In locations such as Djibo (Sahel region), Pama (Est region), and Titao (Nord region), residents report persistent food shortages and the collapse of local markets as NSAGs restrict access to surrounding farmlands, grazing areas, and supply routes (TNH 05/12/2023; MSF 05/05/2023 a; AI 02/11/2023).

In 2022, NSAGs partially prevented residents of the towns of Djibo (Sahel), Sebba (Sahel), and Titao (Nord), as well as the village of Kantchari (Est), from farming or accessing pastures. In some instances, agriculture was only possible on plots within 1km of the town limits. Testimonies also indicate that threats of violence or ultimatums to leave accompanied these restrictions, leading to mass displacement and the abandonment of entire villages (AI 02/11/2023). In Djibo, IDPs report having to sell their livestock below market value because of the lack of fodder and access to grazing land (TNH 05/12/2023; AI 02/11/2023).

Pillaging and forced taxation contribute to livelihood losses. Armed groups collect livestock under the justification of religious taxes such as zakat, sometimes by force, depriving communities of essential economic assets. In some areas, the looting of shops and destruction of water points accompany these practices (AI 02/11/2023; TNH 05/12/2023).

Humanitarian convoys reaching blockaded towns often face delays or attacks. In some cases, NSAGs or state authorities impose military escorts, who sometimes facilitate limited aid delivery but also complicate the provision of principled humanitarian assistance. Even when access is possible, assistance remains insufficient to meet affected populations' needs (DW 08/05/2023; La Croix International 07/11/2024; AI 02/11/2023). In Djibo and Dori, reports indicate severely depleted markets, with scarce or unaffordable basic items such as millet, salt, or biscuits.

Price inflation further undermines food security. In 2024, cereal and livestock markets in Djibo were largely nonfunctional. Access to basic goods was limited, and prices were significantly higher than in previous years (TNH 05/12/2023; La Croix International 07/11/2024). Cereal prices in Djibo rose by 25% from 2021–2022, while livestock prices fell by over 50% as residents rushed to sell animals before they died (AI 02/11/2023). The rising cost of transportation from

besieged towns also contributes to economic vulnerability, with the costs of some routes rising seven times higher than before the crisis (La Croix International 07/11/2024).

In Djibo, some residents describe that, because of market depletion, they are unable to buy food despite having money, relying instead on bartering with small items or offering services such as labour or childcare to survive (MSF 05/05/2023 a; AI 02/11/2023). Reports from multiple areas under blockade indicate a dependence on coping mechanisms such as reducing meal frequency, relying on wild leaves and fruits, or exchanging food for services such as domestic labour, carrying water, or small-scale repairs. In the town of Tougan (Boucle du Mouhoun), an October 2023 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) screening found that 20% of children under five were acutely malnourished, including nearly 10% with severe acute malnutrition (MSF 28/11/2023 and 05/05/2023 b).

Although most data comes from towns where limited access still allows for occasional reporting, similar siege tactics and movement restrictions in other blockaded areas suggest comparable or even more severe disruptions to food security and livelihoods. Significant information gaps persist, particularly in towns entirely cut off from humanitarian access.

Health

In besieged towns, access to healthcare has significantly deteriorated, contributing to preventable deaths and poor health outcomes. Even before the conflict escalated, Burkina Faso already faced chronic health system fragilities, which have since worsened as a result of violence and movement restrictions (RI 22/10/2024). By the end of 2024, the national health system in Burkina Faso was under severe strain, with 31% of health facilities reported as nonfunctional or partially operating and nearly 18% fully closed. Available data does not specify which regions are most affected, but access challenges are more pronounced in areas under blockade. The crisis has disrupted essential services, including vaccination, emergency care, and maternal, sexual, and reproductive healthcare (OCHA 12/12/2024). These impacts are more pronounced in siege-affected areas, where access constraints are more severe and health needs remain unmet.

In blockaded towns such as Djibo, Pama, Sebba, and Titao, health infrastructure has been partially or fully closed because of the departure of medical staff, lack of supplies, and repeated insecurity (AI 02/11/2023; MSF 05/05/2023 b; TNH 05/12/2023). In Djibo, the main health facility has been operating with reduced capacity for over 18 months. In Pama, the facility was reported in 2023 as functioning with only three staff members and limited electricity, relying on solar panels to maintain basic surgical activities (AI 02/11/2023). Given the date of this source and the rapidly changing context, this information may no longer reflect current conditions. In Tougan and Kantchari, hospitals and pharmacies were empty or inaccessible by late 2024 (TNH 05/12/2023).

Health professionals are increasingly fleeing besieged areas because of insecurity and poor living conditions, leading to staff shortages and reduced capacity in the remaining facilities (AI 02/11/2023; OCHA 12/12/2024). These disruptions increase the risk of uncontrolled outbreaks, including measles, meningitis, hepatitis E, or dengue. While available data does not confirm their presence in blockaded areas, these regions face significant limitations in disease surveillance and response capacity (OCHA 12/12/2024; UNICEF 21/02/2025).

While there is a lack of documented information on mental health conditions in blockaded areas, mental health impacts are likely, particularly for individuals trapped under siege or repeatedly displaced (IMPACT 08/11/2024; TNH 08/02/2024).

WASH

WASH conditions have significantly deteriorated as a result of direct attacks on infrastructure, restricted humanitarian access, and population displacement. In several provinces, including Gnagna, Kompienga, Tapoa, and Yagha, over 70% of households report insufficient access to water points or functional latrines (IMPACT 08/11/2024). Blockaded towns likely face similar or even more severe WASH challenges, but humanitarian access for data collection remains limited.

Fuel shortages and insecurity severely constrain water trucking operations. During periods of siege, humanitarian organisations are unable to deliver more than half of their planned daily water volume to Djibo (AI 02/11/2023). The price of water has also increased dramatically during blockades. In Djibo, for instance, from 2022–2023, the cost of a 20L jerrycan rose from CFA 10 to CFA 100 (approximately USD 0.02 to USD 0.17), placing additional strain on already vulnerable households (AI 02/11/2023; RI 22/10/2024).

There are reports of the deliberate sabotage of water systems and poisoning of wells (TNH 05/12/2023). In Barsalogho, Djibo, and Sebba, armed groups deliberately target water systems as part of siege strategies. In 2022 alone, they destroyed at least 32 water points across Burkina Faso, the majority in Djibo, where residents were left with less than 3L of water per day – far below the WHO emergency survival threshold of 15L per person per day. There were also reported instances of water contamination, including cases where armed groups disposed of animal carcasses in wells (AI 02/11/2023; RI 22/10/2024).

Beyond infrastructure damage, civilians collecting water also face harassment and intimidation. In Djibo, women and children have been dispersed from collection points under threat of violence. From 2022–2023, armed groups also damaged polytanks, bombed water distribution stations, and disrupted water collection activities (AI 02/11/2023).

These unsafe conditions translate into serious health consequences. In Djibo, water points rendered inoperable leave residents relying on unsafe alternatives such as open ponds or makeshift wells, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases (Solidarités International 15/04/2022; TNH 05/12/2023). In Kantchari, a town under blockade, regional leaders reported widespread illness in late 2024 linked to poor water quality and dietary deficiencies (TNH 05/12/2023). Similar concerns were raised in Tougan and Pama, where health facilities were overwhelmed and WASH infrastructure was either damaged or insufficient (MSF 05/05/2023 b; AI 02/11/2023). These environments heighten the risk of disease outbreaks, particularly during the rainy season when malaria and other waterborne illnesses tend to spike (DW 08/05/2023).

Protection

People living in blockaded towns face multiple protection risks, including killings, GBV, forced recruitment, abductions, threats, and extortion. Civilians often experience coercion and control by NSAGs who restrict their movement, disrupt their livelihoods, and create pervasive fear (AI 02/11/2023; OCHA 12/12/2024; GI-TOC 21/10/2024). Despite growing concerns, protection risks in besieged towns remain severely underreported because of access constraints and security risks for both residents and humanitarian organisations.

IEDs continue to threaten civilians across Burkina Faso. 2024 recorded 146 IED-related incidents. Among 293 fatalities, 185 (63%) were civilians, with women and children disproportionately affected. The use of IEDs near markets, water points, and roads further restricts movement and access to vital services (OCHA 12/12/2024). While most data refers to Burkina Faso in general, there are documented IED attacks against humanitarian and commercial convoys attempting to supply besieged towns such as Arbinda, Djibo, and Sebba in 2022. These attacks resulted in civilian casualties and further limited access to essential goods and humanitarian services (AI 02/11/2023).

In 2024, NSAGs issued ultimatums in towns such as Djibo and Titao ordering civilians to evacuate or face execution. According to testimonies, these orders may aim to depopulate areas and deter collaboration with the State, allowing NSAGs to expand territorial control (AI 02/11/2023; Jeune Afrique 18/09/2024). While the full scale remains unclear, some residents have fled to nearby towns or military camps. In May 2022, for example, at least 50 civilians were killed while trying to escape the siege of Madjoari in Kompienga province when armed groups attacked them along the route to Nadiagou (AI 02/11/2023).

GBV is a serious concern in besieged areas. Women and girls face increased risks of psychological violence, the denial of resources, forced marriage, physical assault, and sexual violence (Protection Cluster 06/03/2025; La Croix International 07/11/2024). Armed groups also abduct women and girls from besieged areas. In January 2023, NSAGs kidnapped 66

women and children near the village of Liki in the department of Arbinda while they gathered firewood and wild foods, underscoring the vulnerability of civilians attempting to meet basic needs under siege (AI 02/11/2023). Access to protection services, including legal aid, psychosocial support, and assistance for GBV survivors, is nearly nonexistent in blockaded towns (TNH 08/02/2024). Available sources do not provide systematic data on child protection, but anecdotal reports suggest risks of forced recruitment and family separation in conflict-affected areas (UN 17/04/2025; DW 19/05/2022).

Education

By March 2024, over 5,300 schools were non-operational across Burkina Faso, affecting more than 800,000 children (UNICEF 06/04/2024). The most affected regions include Centre-Nord, Est, and Sahel (OCHA 12/12/2024). These closures disproportionately affect girls, who are 2.5 times more likely to be withdrawn from school than boys in displacement and crisis contexts, often owing to household responsibilities, early marriage, or heightened protection risks during periods of insecurity (RI 22/10/2024).

Humanitarian organisations reported that the destruction of infrastructure, displacement of teachers, and movement restrictions make it nearly impossible to sustain schooling under blockade conditions. In besieged areas, such as Diapaga, Djibo, and Solhan, armed groups threaten or intimidate teachers, prompting them to flee and leave facilities abandoned. In Diapaga (Tapoa province), following an attack on nearby Partiaga in late 2023, all teachers left, leaving the area school completely shut (AI 02/11/2023; Le Monde 03/11/2023). Some communities attempt to sustain informal learning efforts, but these remain limited. In Djibo, a few schools were still operating in mid-2023 under severe constraints, including a lack of food, staff, and safe facilities (AI 02/11/2023).

Although temporary solutions such as radio-based education and accelerated learning have been introduced, these are not accessible in most blockaded towns. UNICEF-supported radio education reached over 635,000 children in insecure areas in 2024, but coverage in besieged locations remains uncertain (UNICEF 26/03/2025).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Climate and environmental issues

Climate variability and environmental hazards further aggravate challenges for people in blockaded towns. Drought, erratic rainfall, and extreme heat place additional pressure on food security, health, and water access. Forecasts for March 2025 indicated temperatures exceeding 40° C in parts of Burkina Faso, with climate change making extreme heat five times more likely than historical averages (Climate Central 04/03/2025). These climate shocks threaten agricultural production and limit coping mechanisms, particularly for communities already relying on wild leaves or small-scale urban farming to survive (ACF 27/12/2024). During the dry season, water scarcity becomes more severe, while the rainy season increases the risk of vector-borne and waterborne disease outbreaks (TNH 08/02/2024; DW 08/05/2023). In 2024, floods affected more than 16,000 people in nine regions – including Centre-Nord, Est, and Sahel – already affected by blockades. While floodwaters have since receded, the damage to infrastructure and disruption to livelihoods have added pressure to already affected populations, and future flooding remains a risk during the upcoming rainy season (OCHA 12/12/2024). As the lean season approaches (typically June–August), households in besieged areas are likely to face compounding risks.

Political and media constraints

Since 2022, the country has undergone two military coups, leading to the suspension of democratic institutions and the militarisation of public life. The Government's decree on general mobilisation, adopted in April 2023, grants authorities extensive powers, including the forced conscription of civilians and requisition of goods and services. Civil society members and journalists critical of the junta have been conscripted or forcibly disappeared (HRW accessed 25/04/2025; AI 02/11/2023). Human rights groups have cited these disappearances as part of a broader crackdown on dissent. The restriction of public dissent, suppression of independent media, and control of humanitarian narratives create an environment of fear and misinformation. Authorities are suspending media outlets, expelling journalists, and placing pressure on humanitarian responders to adopt official terminology, including demands to refer to NSAGs as terrorist groups (TNH 08/02/2024). These dynamics increase public anxiety and reduce the space for civil society engagement or accurate reporting on the crisis.

Humanitarian funding cuts

Reduced humanitarian funding has further limited the capacity to respond to growing needs in blockaded areas. In early 2025, the US suspended most USAID-funded humanitarian operations, affecting the delivery of essential services such as food assistance, health, and WASH programming in Burkina Faso (INTEROS 03/03/2025; AJ 28/03/2025). In the Sahel region alone, 31 humanitarian projects have been suspended, affecting around 70,000 children and 60,000 women, primarily in sectors such as WASH, protection, shelter, and education (UNICEF 02/05/2025). The abrupt cessation of funding has particularly affected remote and conflict-affected regions, where needs are most acute. Other major donors, including France, Germany, and the UK, have also implemented budget cuts in recent years, widening the gap between needs and available resources (ISS 25/02/2025). The erosion of trust between humanitarian organisations and the Government – exemplified by the expulsion of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in 2022 – contributes to delays and disruptions in aid delivery (AI 02/11/2023). Since the military takeover, authorities have adopted an increasingly securitised approach to humanitarian operations, and tensions have grown around the control of aid narratives and access procedures. At the same time, humanitarian responders face mounting public scepticism, as online narratives portray them as culturally insensitive, politically biased, or aligned with foreign interests. Misinformation, highly politicised cases, and the perceived association of some aid efforts with state structures aggravate this distrust (Insecurity Insight 14/05/2025). These compounding funding constraints undermine both the scale and continuity of assistance, leaving affected populations increasingly exposed to unmet needs.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

Access to humanitarian assistance in blockaded towns across Burkina Faso remains critically constrained. Movement restrictions, active conflict, and logistical barriers combine to isolate communities and severely reduce the reach of humanitarian operations. By late 2023, less than 1% of people in half of the blockaded towns had received assistance from INGOs, largely as a result of security concerns, limited resources, and funding shortfalls (NRC 14/03/2024). This situation has persisted into 2025. In the first quarter of the year, humanitarian access remained extremely limited in several regions, with security incidents reported in towns such as Arbinda, Diapaga, and Djibo (UNICEF 02/05/2025; RFI 14/05/2025).

Attacks on supply convoys – particularly humanitarian ones – further disrupt access. Between August–September 2022, nine attacks were recorded on humanitarian convoys attempting to reach Djibo, with further incidents reported on routes to Sebba and Arbinda later that year (AI 02/11/2023; TNH 08/02/2024). The widespread use of IEDs, combined with the destruction of key road infrastructure, make many routes impassable, although specific bridges and road segments have not been consistently documented in available sources.

Humanitarian organisations also report that armed groups often do not distinguish between humanitarian convoys and military ones, despite visible humanitarian markings. This lack of distinction increases operational risk and deters delivery efforts (AI 02/11/2023).

As a result, humanitarian organisations have become increasingly reliant on UNHAS flights to access besieged areas. Air services remain extremely limited, however, with only one cargo helicopter operating in 2023 and transport costs twelve times higher than by road (NRC 14/03/2024; UNICEF 26/03/2025). Flights are also confined to areas under government control, excluding many of the most affected towns (AI 02/11/2023). Interruptions to UNHAS flights, such as those to Djibo, between mid-October and December 2023 further reduced the delivery of humanitarian aid to blockaded populations (NRC 14/03/2024).

The Government's policy requiring all convoys, including humanitarian ones, to travel under military escort further complicates access. While intended to protect convoys from attack, this measure compromises the neutrality of humanitarian responders and has led several organisations to suspend or scale down their operations. For some organisations, such as MSF, the use of armed escorts is considered incompatible with humanitarian principles and may prevent their engagement in blockaded areas (AI 02/11/2023; Sida 31/03/2024).

Beyond security threats from armed groups, humanitarian personnel also face intimidation, harassment, and violence from state forces and civilian auxiliaries. Cases have been documented in Barsalogo, Djibo, Kaya, and Sebba, where humanitarian workers were detained, threatened, or assaulted – sometimes by security forces or VDP groups and in other cases by armed groups (AI 02/11/2023). Organisations also report difficulties in coordinating with authorities, particularly regarding escort requirements and how humanitarian principles are interpreted (AI 02/11/2023; NRC 14/03/2024).

In October 2024, MSF temporarily suspended its operations in Djibo because of growing insecurity and repeated incidents targeting medical and water distribution sites. Between November 2023 and July 2024, MSF-supported facilities were subject to multiple shootings, vandalism, and supply constraints. The decision was made after threats to staff and patients and the death of a team member under unclear circumstances (MSF 21/10/2024).

The cumulative impact of these constraints has left populations in blockaded towns facing extreme and prolonged deprivation. Some towns have not been reached at all, while in others, humanitarian presence is limited to sporadic air deliveries or remote coordination (RI 22/10/2024). In this context, people trapped under siege remain largely cut off from assistance, with their needs growing ever more acute.