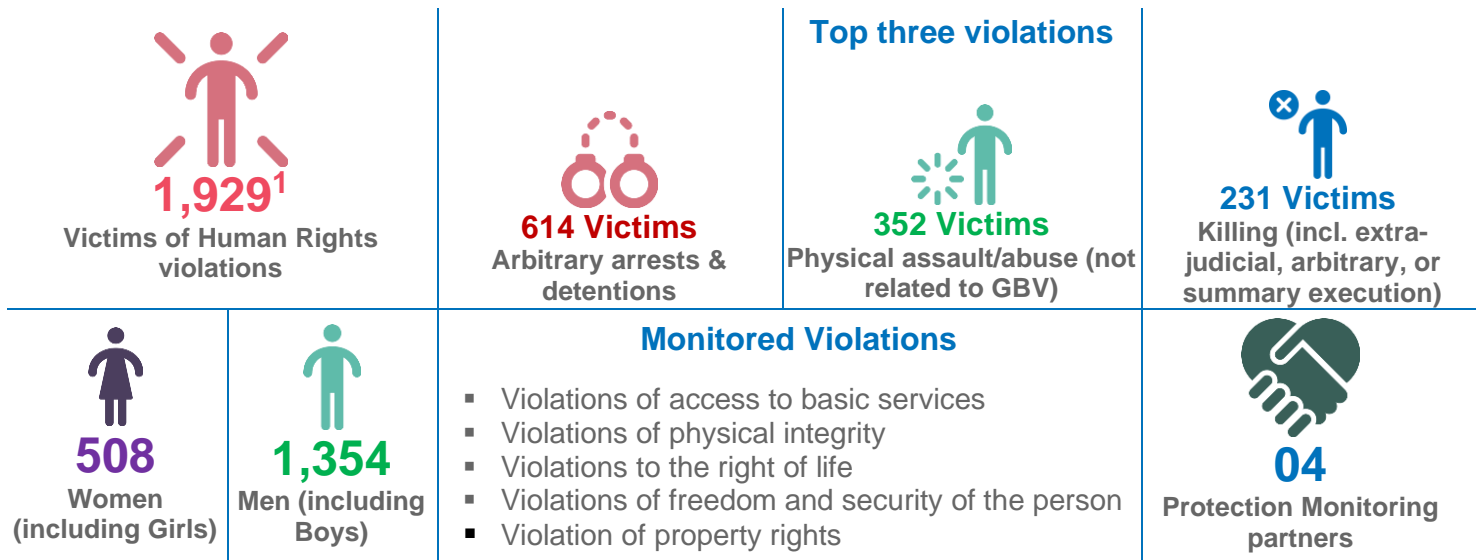


Key Figures



Overview

The protection environment in the NWSW regions remained tense and unpredictable between the months of July to September, with an increase in criminality, non-State armed groups (NSAGs) incursions into urban areas like downtown Bamenda, attacks on State Security Forces (SSF) positions, threats to civilians, and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by NSAGs.

Population movements, including pendular movements continue to be recorded across both regions, with triggers ranging from armed attacks and fear of insecurity to the search for social infrastructure such as schools and housing. Most of the infrastructure in rural areas – schools, hospitals, markets and homes have been deliberately destroyed by NSAGs (and reportedly SSFs), and the civilian population has been forced to move to urban areas in search of these amenities. This movement has led to population increases in urban areas, creating a strain on social infrastructure, and leading to strained relations in some areas. This sudden increase in population is driving up food prices and rent, as the available housing is not sufficient to meet needs.

A number of NSAG leaders have either been killed or captured by the SSF, but rather than decreasing the conflict, this has led to a multiplication of NSAG factions and a significant increase in the use of IEDs, attacks on SSF positions and calls for lockdowns by NSAGS, all in a bid to pressure the government into releasing their captured comrades, attack the credibility of the central government and, question their commitment to resolving the anglophone crisis. Civilians continue to

¹ Some victims suffered multiple human rights violations.

get caught in the crossfire, leading to multiple displacements, and severely affecting community resilience.

Between July and September, population displacements were recorded in Muyuka and Buea in Fako division, Mbonge (Meme), Akwaya and Mamfe in Manyu division and Ekondo-Titi (Ndian) in the South-West region. In the North-West regions, civilians fled from Ndu, Nkambe and Ako in Donga-Mantung division, Kumbo, Jakiri and Noni in Bui division, Tubah (Mezam), Widikum (Momo) and Menchum Valley (Menchum) to avoid getting caught in the crossfire and retaliatory attacks from NSAGS.

There are indications that the civilian population is growing tired of the on-going conflict, frequent lockdowns, adhoc movement restrictions and opportunistic criminal activities of armed gangs within the regions. In July, women in Mbessa village, Boyo division, staged a protest march against NSAGs in the area, who then reacted by killing one woman and one man. In August, Community force Members in Egangge, Akwaya subdivision, Manyu division, attacked an NSAG commander and his followers who were travelling along a road. This resulted in an exchange of gunfire, during which one community force member and one NSAG fighter were killed.

During focus group discussions (FGDs) with IDPs, they have repeatedly expressed the wish for peace, so they can return to their areas of origin and live in dignity.

Key Highlights

In Bamenda, in the North-West region, following their ban on yellow taxis in Bamenda, and instructions to re-spray the taxis blue and white, NSAGs continued reprisals against drivers who had not complied with their directive, abducting drivers and burning their vehicles. This sparked fear and tension among the community of taxi drivers, causing them to limit their movement to self-protect. They held a peaceful protest on 15 August, calling on the administration of the North-West region to protect them from attacks from NSAGS.

In the South-West region, abductions for ransom, extortion of communities and armed robbery continued to be reported. Most of these acts were perpetrated by NSAGs seeking to fund their activities while others were perpetrated by criminal gangs taking advantage of the current insecurity in the region. Some of the abducted individuals were obviously because of their socio-economic status – the wife of a judge, the son of a quarter head, while others were seemingly random. Cocoa farmers were also increasingly targeted, due to the onset of the cocoa season.

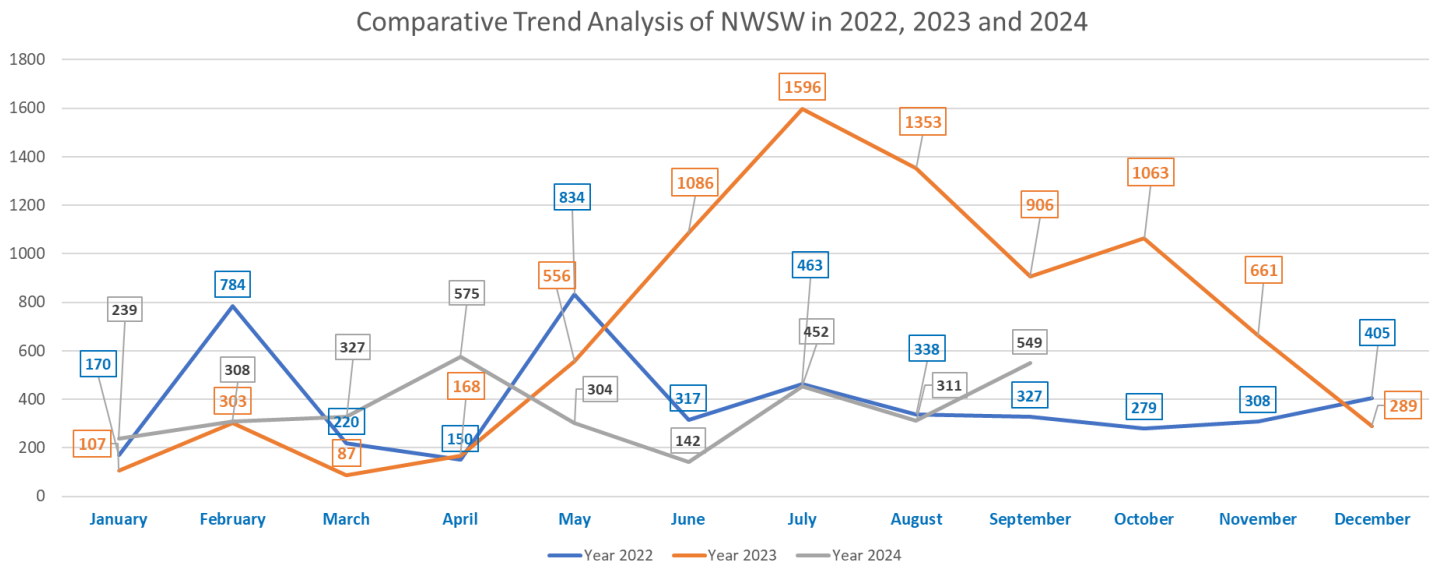
NSAGs continued to mete out severe punishments to the civilian population for non-adherence to the weekly Monday lockdowns and for perceived collusion with State Security Forces - in Mundemba, NSAGs abducted 15 commercial motorcycle from their homes for allegedly collaborating with the State Security Forces, 3 civilians were killed in Mezam Division, NW region, and three women were also killed on their farmland at Kossala, SW region for violating the Monday lockdown. Another three individuals were burnt to death in Mundemba Subdivision for allegedly opposing NSAG activities and discouraging youths from collaborating with them. This incident led to the displacement of over 70 persons including 33 children to nearby bushes and Mundemba town.

Attacks against education increased in the months leading up to the resumption of the new academic year in September. In the last week of August, contending NSAG factions called for different

lockdowns between the 2nd and 30th of September aimed at disrupting the resumption of schools in the NWSW regions. Across the two regions, teachers and school children were attacked and abducted by NSAGs in a bid to enforce the lockdowns. In one incident in Nkambe, both school children on their way to school and traders on their way to the market were accused by NSAGs of promoting government activities and had their personal items – money, phones and school items extorted by the NSAGs.

During the reporting period, humanitarian access was severely hampered by security incidents, lockdowns, and roadblocks. In August, a group of humanitarian workers were abducted in the North-West region while implementing their activities. They were accused by NSAGs of encouraging voter registration for the upcoming presidential elections and were only released after lengthy negotiations.

Comparative Trend Analysis



Human rights violations in the NWSW regions peaked again in July 2024, following a lull in May and June. Reasons for this could be attributed to the increase in SSF operations to dislodge NSAGs from both regions as well as the increase in use of IEDs by NSAGs. Seven incidents of arbitrary arrests and detentions, affecting 303 victims were recorded in July alone, as SSFs increasingly carried out “cordon and search” operations in the regions to rout NSAGs. NSAGs on their part, increased illegal checkpoints which were used to extort money from unsuspecting civilians, some of whom were abducted for ransom.

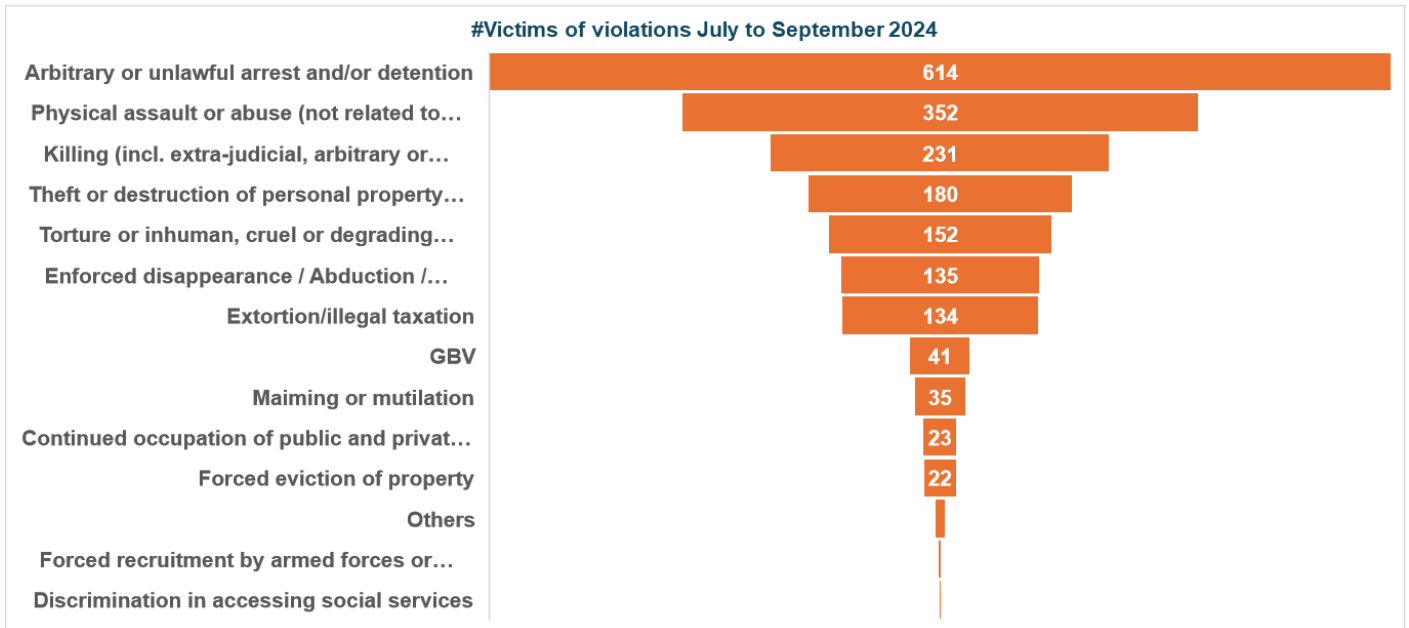
In September, a significant increase in protection and security incidents was reported, and this could be attributed to the increase in NSAG presence in almost all communities in the NWSW in a bid to enforce the lockdown and a corresponding increase in SSF activities to curb NSAG activities.

About eight different NSAGs and activists declared various lockdown periods aimed at drawing the attention of the UN General Assembly which held on 10 September 2024 and jeopardizing school resumption in the NWSW regions. Civilians faced reprisals from both NSAGs and SSFs for either refusing to adhere to the lockdown or respecting the lockdown. In Mezam division, NSAGs ambushed and killed 3 civilians (one male, two females) on a motorbike for disrespecting the lockdown, and in Ndian division, the SSF sealed several shops in Mundemba, accusing the traders of respecting

NSAG lockdown instructions. Three businessmen were arrested for resisting when their shops were about to be sealed.

Typology of Violations

The highest number of violations recorded were arbitrary arrests and detentions, as SSF increased “cordon and search” operations in the NWSW regions. Large groups of civilians were arrested during these activities, for reasons ranging from perceived association with NSAGs to no reasons at all. Some victims of this violation are reported to suffer additional violations such as long periods of interrogation, torture and other cruel or inhumane treatment.



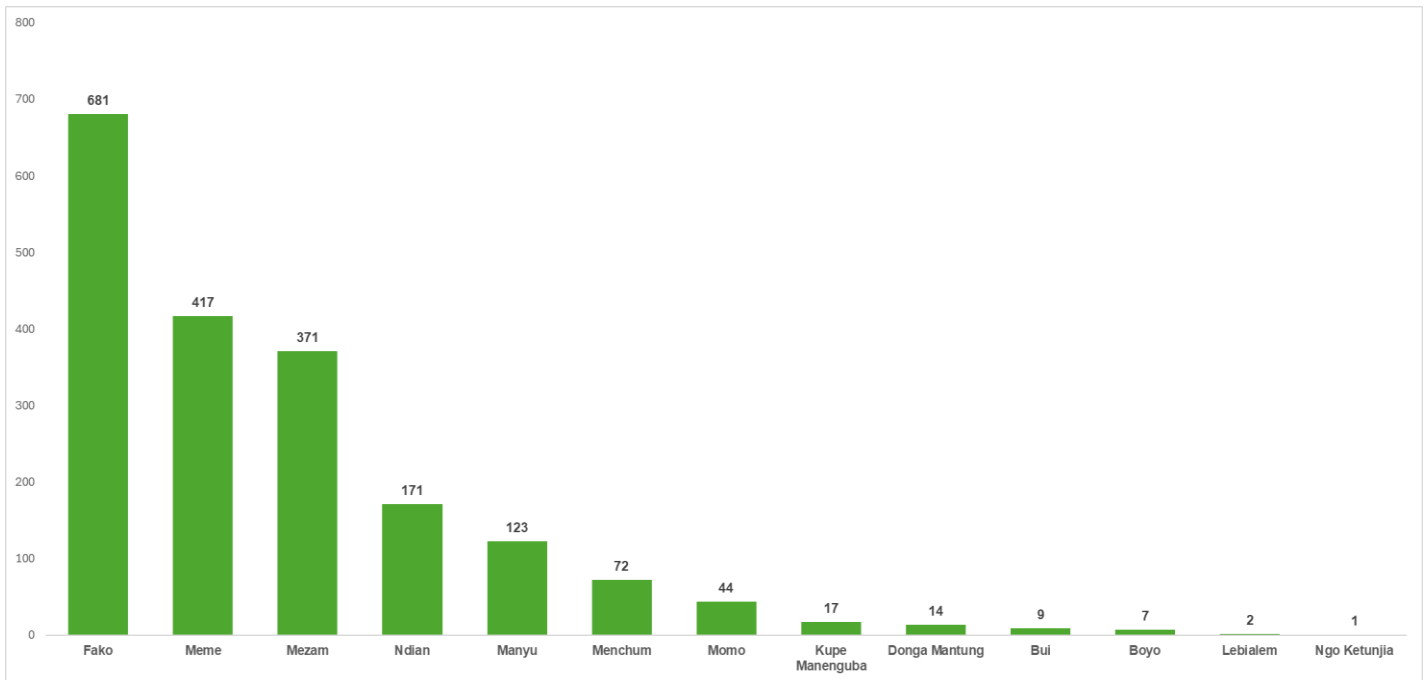
The protracted crisis continues to take its toll on the mental health of the affected population including children, and MHPSS practitioners are currently struggling to manage caseloads as civilians increasingly suffer from psychosocial distress.

Psychological/emotional abuse or inflicted distress (Physical assault or abuse (not related to) SGBV) increased in September, as both NSAGs and SSF increased activities in both regions to enforce the lockdowns and to stop the civilian population from respecting them, respectively. The civilian population were regularly subjected to threats and ultimatums from parties to the conflict, for perceived support to either party, further increasing their mental distress.

Non-adherence to lockdowns or perceived support to SSF is often met with swift reprisals from NSAGs whose methods include summary executions and dismemberment – in August, 3 civilians were killed in Mezam Division, NW region, and three women were also killed on their farm at Kossala, SW region, for not respecting the weekly Monday lockdowns.

Locations of Violations

The highest number of violations were recorded in Buea (457 victims) and Muyuka (199 victims), both in Fako division in the South-West region, followed by Meme also in the SW region, and then Mezam in the North-West region.



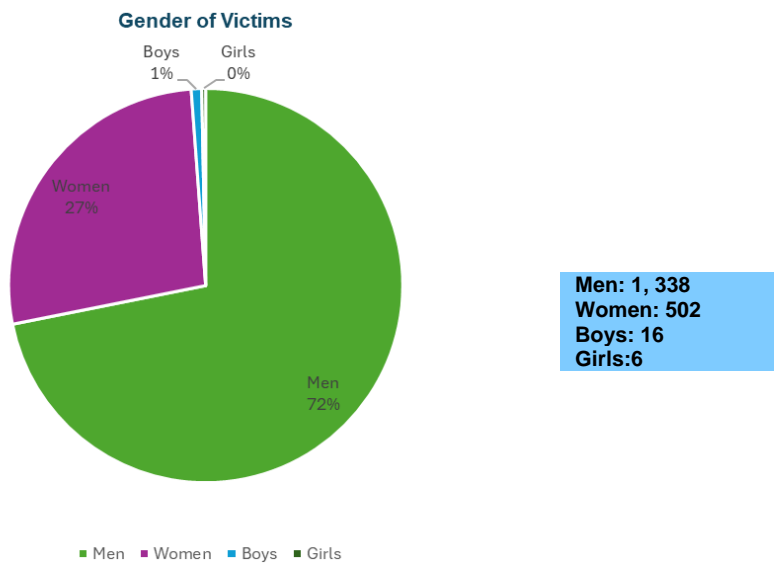
The high number of human rights violations in Fako could be attributed both to the strong military and NSAG presence, as well as increased activities of both parties to the conflict in Fako, as well as the presence of many humanitarian actors, which makes monitoring and reporting of violations much easier than in other divisions.

Security sources suggest that the increase in NSAG activities in the SW region could be because they had previously been accused by their political leaders of not being as active as their counterparts in the NW region. Hence the ramp up in efforts to prove these accusations wrong.

In addition to this, the SSF have largely focused their “cordon and search” operations in the SW region. In July, 161 people were arbitrarily arrested during two operations in Meme division, while 139 were detained during four different incidents in Ndian division. In September, about 70 men were arrested during a raid by SSF in the community of Bonakanda, Buea (Fako division). The reasons for their arrests remain unknown, but some of them were reported to have been tortured before being carted away in military vans.

In Meme division, the highest number of human rights violations are often reported in Mbonge (155 victims) and Kumba 2 (175 victims), while protection incidents in Mezam tend to occur in Bamenda 2 (102 victims) and Bamenda 3 (153 victims).

Victims



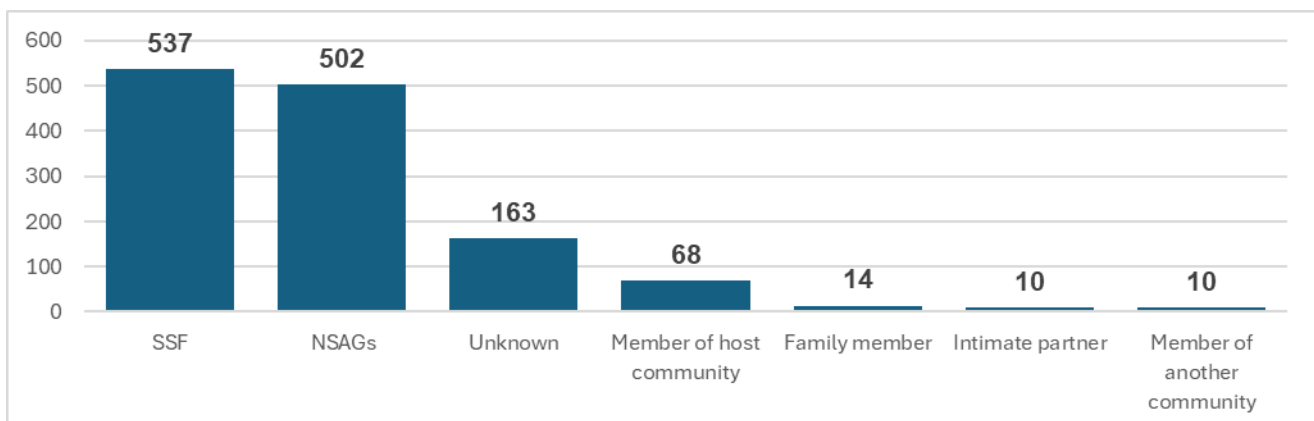
Protection monitoring reports show that men and boys are disproportionately affected by human rights violations, and it is important that the humanitarian community understand the underlying reasons for this, so they can be supported to strengthen their resilience.

Protection actors have reported that it is particularly difficult to engage men and boys during humanitarian activities, and they are less likely to seek protection assistance. Women are more likely to attend the sensitization and awareness-raising sessions and so know where to seek support when they need it.

It was also discovered during FGDs with young men aged 18 – 15 years that this age group tend to be targeted by both SSF and NSAGs. They are routinely suspected (often without proof) of carrying out criminal activities within communities and are regularly approached by NSAGs to join their ranks, putting most of them in a very precarious position. When asked if they ever sought legal assistance or recourse for the violations committed against them, they simply shrugged.

Alleged Perpetrators

In Q3 2024, 41% of reported violations were allegedly committed by SSFs while 38% were committed by NSAGs. Once again, this could be attributed to increased activities by both parties to the conflict in September. An increase in SSF presence tends to trigger reactions from NSAG factions or lead to increased armed clashes between both parties, with civilians inadvertently getting caught in the middle.



13% of the violations were committed by unknown assailants, and these can be assumed to be criminal gangs who have taken advantage of the on-going insecurity to exploit the civilian population. While some NSAGs have been reported to carry out criminal activities such as abductions for ransom, extortion and illegal taxation in a bid to raise funds for their cause, no direct link has been made between these criminal gangs and NSAGs to suggest that they are working in tandem.

Response

Protection actors provided services ranging from Psychological First Aid (PFA), awareness raising and sensitization to profiling for cash for protection, NFIs and Shelter. However, a lot more still needs to be done, and both budget and access constraints make it difficult to refer cases.

Advocacy

To the Government of Cameroon	To the Humanitarian Community
1. State Security Forces (SSF) should respect due process under both national and international legislation concerning the arrest and detention of civilians.	1. There is need for increased advocacy to both parties to the conflict for the respect of IHL and IHRL and the protection of civilians
2. SSF should consider the IHL principles of military necessity and proportionality, to limit the civilian casualties of their operations	2. Donors should increase funding for protection activities to respond to victims of human rights violations including SGBV
3. Establish effective mechanisms for holding police/gendarmerie officers accountable for human rights violations, including independent investigations, disciplinary actions, and prosecutions.	
4. Measures should be put in place to curb drug abuse, including the ban of drugs like Tramadol, and State medical facilities should implement drug rehabilitation programs	

This quarterly update was drafted using protection monitoring data collected by the following partners:

