

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS WORKING PAPER

Living under embargo: The impact of armed forces embargo on the population and their resilience facing such constraints
(Based on examples of cities in Mali and/or Burkina-Faso)

Issuance date: 4 february 2025

Application Deadline and Instructions:

Applications must be received by 3 March 2025

All applications must be submitted electronically to pauline.poupart@sipri.org and marie.riquier@sipri.org with, in the subject line "WP –Living under embargo".

1. Introduction

The Research and Action for Peace (RECAP) project, funded by the European Union, is implemented by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in 18 countries of West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin¹.

The overall objective of the project is to strengthen the role of civil society, including regional, national, and community practitioners and researchers, in the promotion of effective peacebuilding, crisis management, and prevention of conflict and violent extremism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin to enable more informed decision making by policymakers.

The present call is administrated jointly by WANEP, SIPRI, and DRC.

2. Rationale

WANEP, DRC and SIPRI are soliciting proposals for research from RECAP network members for the development of a working paper on **Living under embargo: The impact of armed forces embargo on the population and their resilience facing such constraints (based on examples of cities in Mali and/or Burkina-Faso)**

From 2020, cities like Léré, Timbuktu, Farabougou, Boni in Mali; Djibo, Pama, Diapaga, Nouna, and Arbinda in Burkina-Faso from 2022 have experienced, sometimes repeatedly, a situation of "blockade" or "embargo" by jihadi groups operating under the banner of the *Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM, affiliated to al-Qaeda) or the Sahel Province of the Islamic State (IS Sahel).

Despite the local particularities, the forced isolation of the cities in the two countries can be depicted as a war strategy serving as "a show of force against the national defence and security forces, an instrument of subjugation of the populations and an obstacle to humanitarian aid"², leading aggravated life conditions and even hunger for many individuals trapped.

¹ ECOWAS countries and Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania.

² "[Au Burkina Faso, "la mort nous guettait": Amnesty International raconte la vie sous blocus djihadiste](#)", Le Monde, 3 November 2023.

In this context, this working paper will identify the strategies and resilience factors developed by the populations put in a situation of “embargo”, and “blockade” by jihadi groups. It will thoroughly describe the contexts and ideally compare one city in Mali and one in Burkina-Faso.

It will identify the drivers leading to such situations and the modalities of the embargoes. It will analyze the responses from the armed forces (State and non-state) and military authorities in the context of post-coups in the two assessed countries.

This paper will finally enable policy recommendations and responses to protect and provide overall care (on the humanitarian, medical, socio-economic, and political levels) to populations (displaced and residents) living or having lived under embargo.

2.1 Background

Patterns of “blockades” and “embargos” are shared between the cities. They start with intimidations and threats towards the populations of a given location, generally for their ties with State authorities or with non-state “defence groups”, before the destruction of bridges or cutting off the main access roads preventing both people and trade mobility.

The cities chosen usually have strategic positions as Léré, bordering Mauritania and connecting Segou in the Centre and Timbuktu in the North of Mali³ or Djibo, located 200km North of the capital Ouagadougou and close to the Malian border in Burkina-Faso, also known for its regionally connected cattle markets.⁴

Populations are usually prevented from cultivating and herding cattle, reducing food access⁵. Shortages of first necessity goods like flour, sugar, milk, and oil, as well as important price rises, followed by cuts in electricity and mobile phone networks.

In Djibo, in Burkina-Faso, 350,000 persons were put under an embargo for more than seven months in 2022 and were reduced to eating leaves to survive. Among them, an important number were Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) fleeing the numerous jihadi attacks in the Yagha province and often pressured by the jihadis to move to the towns.⁶ In both Mali and Burkina, humanitarian access to the concerned populations has been growingly constrained when armed groups do not directly target humanitarians.⁷

In both countries, populations felt “abandoned” by the authorities despite the alerts made⁸. Malian authorities refrained from using the word “blockade” to explain the situation in Timbuktu and Farabougou⁹. The military solution is the one currently privileged against the jihadi groups. Burkinabese authorities, for example, attempted to send escorted convoys to Djibo with limited success, given the multiplication of attacks, sabotage, and use of mines against them.

Local negotiations by the population through community representatives took place, leading to temporary and precarious “cease-fires” between jihadi groups and non-state “defence groups” when active, like the “Niono agreements” for the region of Segou in Mali in 2021.¹⁰ If the State acknowledges these talks, they usually remain informal and short-termed outside of ending the blockades and associated measures for the civilians.

The daily situation of the populations in the regions concerned by these embargos is, therefore, a striking illustration of the great exposure of civilians to dire insecurities and the necessity to protect their basic needs based on their specific demands and in complement or reinforce the tools and strategies they put in place to navigate the tensions between surrounding State and non-State armed actors.

³ ["Au Mali, le blocus djihadiste sur la ville de Léré est levé"](#), Deutsche Welle, 13 January 2025

⁴ ["Burkina: sous blocus jihadiste, Djibo 'au bord de la famine'"](#), APA News, 5 October 2022.

⁵ ["Burkina Faso: 'La mort nous guettait': Vivre dans des localités assiégées au Burkina Faso"](#), Amnesty International report, 2 November 2023.

⁶ Dicko, H, ["De la difficulté d'intervenir au Sahel"](#), MSF Crash, 24 June 2024.

⁷ ["Au Burkina Faso, Médecins sans frontières suspend ses activités dans la ville de Djibo"](#), Le Monde Afrique, 21 October 2024.

⁸ ["Burkina Faso: la vie sous blocus à Djibo"](#), MSF, 5 May 2023.

⁹ ["Mali: sous 'blocus djihadiste', la vie à Tombouctou est 'intenable'"](#), APA News, 13 August 2023.

¹⁰ ["Mali: Enabling Dialogue with the Jihadist Coalition JNIM"](#), ICG report n°306 Africa, 10 December 2021.

2.2 Objective of the consultancy

WANEP, DRC and SIPRI are soliciting applications from Members of the REcAP Network to produce a working paper on **Living under embargo: The impact of armed forces embargo on the population and their resilience facing such constraints (Based on examples of cities in Mali and/or Burkina-Faso)**.

This study aims to produce an evidence-based working paper analysing the embargo situations that will serve as a tool for influencing policy and practice in the protection of civilians.

In this context, the study will thoroughly assess the different situations that took place in Mali and Burkina Faso (or both) to illustrate the concrete consequences of the embargos on the populations and the strategies they put in place to survive these periods, both at individual and community levels and regarding socio-economic, humanitarian, and political aspects through negotiation attempts.

More specifically, the objectives of this working paper are as follows:

- An assessment of the embargo situations chosen for study by the applicant (modalities, causes, specific consequences at the local and regional levels).
- A problem analysis containing
 - o A stakeholder analysis, including identification and analysis of the needs and challenges of concerned populations;
 - o An assessment of the role of humanitarian actors (local, regional, international) in response to the embargo situations;
 - o An assessment of the responses given by the State (in terms of security, humanitarian and economic assistance, and political response).
- A comparison between one city in Mali and one city in Burkina-Faso is welcomed.
- Recommendations for involved State and non-state actors active in protecting civilians in the countries and at the regional and international levels.

The working paper's findings and recommendations should contribute to understanding the shortcomings and provide concrete and evidence-based recommendations to stakeholders to address the highlighted challenges.

This working paper will be presented by its author and discussed during a REcAP Network online research Meet Up with fellow authors, members of the REcAP network, the EU and interested stakeholders and partners.

3. Scope of work and methodology

The researcher(s) or institution should clarify their research question, methodology, geographical scope and work plan in their proposal, indicating how the objectives of the research and working paper will be achieved.

The study should cover the previously mentioned countries of Burkina Faso and Mali (ideally from a comparative perspective).

The researcher(s) will be responsible for implementing all stages of the study, from the design of the methodology to the drafting of the final report, including document review and data collection in the field.

The researcher(s) will apply the highest rigour, quality and professionalism standards. The quality of the research produced will be assessed at each stage to meet the contract expectations.

The researcher(s) will carry out the following tasks:

- Carry out a **literature review** based on existing documentation (scientific and academic literature, NGO reports) to provide a summary of current knowledge on the subject.
- Drawing up a **preliminary preparatory report** highlighting: the definition of the subject of the study; the research and data collection methodology to be used in the field; the methodological approach to data processing and analysis adopted; the findings and conclusions of the literature review. It will be validated together with the Scientific Committee as part of the Inception report.
- Conduct **key informant interviews with main stakeholders**, especially representatives of local organisations in contact with impacted populations, including representatives of national, international and regional institutions such as the European Union, ECOWAS, UNOWAS, etc.
- **Write the first draft of the working paper** based on the analysis of the desk review.
- **Produce a PPT presentation of the conclusions**, which will be presented during research Meet Up to the REcAP Network, the EU and interested stakeholders and partners.
- **Write the final draft of the working paper** including comments received from the REcAP Scientific Committee and EU FPI and during the Stockholm forum.
- Produce a **high-quality working paper** as a resource or tool for **advocacy and policy discourse**.

If travel is required, the researcher(s) or institution will be responsible to arrange transportation, accommodation, insurance, securing proper visas and research authorizations for their research activities and to make adequate provision in the Financial Proposal.

The researcher(s) or institution is also responsible for any staff or sub-consultant they may engage as part of this mission. The final research product is subject to REcAP's internal review and editing process, and the researcher(s) or institution will resolve all necessary revisions within the scope of the contract.

Based on a request from the REcAP Project Secretariat, and conditional on the final product not revealing information that can put anyone or an organization in danger, the researcher(s) or institution might present a briefing of the findings for the public with a focus on targeting practitioners in the field, policymakers, and financial and technical partners.

4. Expected deliverables & timeline

The Researcher(s) or institution will submit the following deliverables as mentioned below and according to the proposed timeline:

- A working paper in **French**.

The working paper should be approximately thirty (30) pages, excluding the cover page, the executive summary in French and English (no more than one page each), the table of contents, the list of abbreviations and acronyms, the list of references (single spacing using Calibri 12) and the appendices. Appendices should include at least the list of people met/interviewed and any other tool or element required to assess the methodology used for the study.

- The researcher(s) will provide the deliverables by e-mail to the SIPRI coordination team (marie.riquier@sipri.org and pauline.poupart@sipri.org)
- The researcher(s) might be invited to a virtual meeting with REcAP's Scientific Committee to discuss the contents, including policy claims and positions, intellectual arguments, and other issues.

Expected deliverables	Indicative description	Maximum expected timeframe
Inception report	Inception meeting with project secretariat and/or Scientific Committee to clarify ToRs. The contents will include methods, approaches, research tools, calendar, detailed research questions as well as approaches to be adopted to supervise and support countries experts.	5 working days after signing the contract
<i>Comments</i>	<i>Comments & Feedback from the project secretariat or Scientific Committee</i>	<i>2 working days</i>
Draft working paper	Desk research, work meetings and analysis. The draft working paper embedded with in-depth situation analysis, key findings and action-oriented recommendations is presented to the REcAP Scientific Committee. The researcher might be invited to a virtual meeting with REcAP's Scientific Committee and the EU FPI to discuss the findings.	20 working days
<i>Comments</i>	<i>Comments & feedback from the Scientific Committee and/or the EU FPI</i>	<i>7 working days</i>
Final working paper	Final version taking into consideration comments & feedback from the Scientific Committee and/or the EU FPI	7 working days

5. Duration of Assignment and payment schedule

- The assignment is expected to last for 32 working days throughout a maximum of two (2) months from the contract signature date.
- The maximum budget available per working paper is six thousand euros (6,000 EUR).
- The payment schedule will be as follows:

Instalments	Indicative description	%
First instalment	Upon approval of the Inception report	30%
Last instalment	Upon approval of the Final version	70%

6. Qualifications

Interested researcher(s) are expected to have the following qualifications:

- Be a member or a prospective member of the REcAP Network. Members of the REcAP's Scientific Committee cannot apply. However, other researchers from their respective organisations can apply.
- Have a Master's degree or PhD in a relevant field.
- At least 3 years of research experience in the field of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, prevention of violent extremism.
- Excellent command of French (spoken, read, and written)
- Proficient in English (spoken, read and written)
- Female researchers are strongly encouraged to apply.

7. Application

Interested researcher(s) should submit the following documents to the SIPRI coordination Team (marie.riquier@sipri.org and pauline.poupart@sipri.org) before **23:59 GMT on 3 March 2025**.

- A **technical narrative proposal** demonstrating the technical and operational capacity of the researcher(s) or institution and his/her team to carry out the assignment within the given timeframe, with an updated curricula vitae of the lead expert and the overall approach, problematic and methodology with proposed timeline.
If you plan to work with additional colleagues, describe their role, their level of knowledge, and how their experience is related and beneficial. Describe the overall staffing plan for the project.
- A **financial proposal** detailing the estimated number of working days and fee rate per expert mobilised, transport and subsistence costs (in case of missions) and other reimbursable costs required to fulfil the assignment.
The amount of VAT/indirect tax, if applicable, must be indicated separately.
Purchase of mobile phones or computers is not eligible. As the project financing this research is funded by the European Union, the financial proposal must be in Euros (EUR).

Only those shortlisted will be contacted.

8. Evaluation criteria for research proposals

The following criteria will be used by the Scientific committee to evaluate research proposals:

No.	Criteria	Max. Score
1	Education: Master's degree or PhD in a relevant field;	10
2	Languages: Excellent command of French (spoken, read, and written). Proficient in English (spoken, read, and written).	10
3	Research Experience: At least 3 years of research. Familiarity and knowledge of the selected topic/theme as well as evidence of previous research experience in the selected theme/topic	20
4	Relevance technical narrative proposal: Does the research proposal address the objective of the research? Are the research objectives and research questions well-constructed and easily understood? Do they align with the research problem?	25
5	Methodology: Technical soundness and quality of the proposed methodology including understanding of the assignment and innovativeness of the approach to undertake it.	25
6	Overall quality of proposal: the degree to which the proposal complies with the application guidelines and is of high quality (table of contents, organization, pagination, margin and font size, ideas effectively presented, referencing, well prepared vitae etc.)	10