# **Title; Humanitarian crisis amid the Military coup in the Niger Republic; what went wrong?**

# **Running Head; Crisis in the Niger Republic amid the military coup**

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## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Humanitarian crisis means any event or series of events that are harmful to the health or security of the general population. The Niger Republic is recently facing serious crisis amid the military coup of 26th of July, 2023. Our fear is that if nothing is done about it quickly, there could be a civil war in Niger and other neighbouring countries.

### **Aim**

The aim of this present article is to provide comprehensive knowledge about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Niger, highlighting the factors that caused it and providing possible solutions for them.

### **Methodology**

A literature search was done about the recent humanitarian crisis amid the military coup in the Niger Republic through databases such as PubMed, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, World Health Organization, United Nations, Online Newspapers and Reports between a 10-year-period.

### **Result**

We found that the humanitarian crisis amid the military coup in Niger Republic has further amplified the vulnerability of millions of Nigeriens to more problems in the Niger Republic. The number of Nigeriens in need of humanitarian assistance has reportedly increased by 65% from 2.3 million in 2019 to 3.8 million in 2021. More than two million children in Niger have been impacted by the crisis in the country and are in need of humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, other causes of humanitarian crisis in the Niger Republic include; sociodemographic factors, climate change and other natural disasters.

### **Conclusion**

The humanitarian crisis in Niger, caused by different factors such as socioeconomic stagnation, environmental causes, food insecurity, terrorist activities, and internal displacement is an alarming situation that requires an urgent solution and a response from the international community. There is a need to analyse all the underlying causes of humanitarian crises and find long-lasting solutions for them.

Keywords; Humanitarian crisis, The Republic of Niger, The military coup, Consequences, Solutions

## **Highlights**

* Niger is facing crisis.
* Coup is the cause.
* Life is hard.
* Help is needed.

## **Main Text**

## **Introduction**

Niger is a landlocked country in West Africa and has been facing a humanitarian crisis for ages.1 The term humanitarian crisis means any event or series of events that are harmful to the health or security of the general population. A humanitarian crisis can be caused by various factors, including political unrest in the country, internal displacement of people, military conflicts, a lack of healthcare services, and a poor education system. Women, children, and internally displaced people are usually at high risk during a humanitarian crisis.1 Another major cause of humanitarian crises is environmental causes, such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, tsunamis, and heatwaves.2 Millions of people have been affected by the severe humanitarian crisis in Niger for years.1,2 According to the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), Niger ranks 189th out of 191 countries.1,3 Additionally, 16% of the Niger population needs urgent humanitarian aid. It is also estimated that in the 2023 lean season, at least 3.3 million Nigeriens will be affected by severe food insecurity, and 7.3 million will become food insecure.1 Furthermore, the socioeconomic challenges within Niger, including poverty, malnutrition, a lack of education, and limited access to healthcare facilities, have severed the humanitarian crisis.2 Another very important contributing factor to the crisis is the alarming situation in neighbouring countries. As a result, Niger has become a destination for refugees fleeing wars and civil wars. Moreover, the decline in agricultural productivity and lack of water resources have aggravated the situation in the country. While Niger is dealing with a few of difficulties as mentioned earlier, the coup of July 26th, 2023, that overthrew the government has exacerbated an already dire situation.3

Looking at the recent humanitarian crisis in Niger Republic, our fear is that if nothing is done about it quickly, there could be a civil war in Niger and other neighbouring countries. This crisis could also cause chaos within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the world. We therefore aimed to write this present article to provide comprehensive knowledge about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Niger, highlighting the factors that caused it and providing possible solutions for them.

## **Burden of crisis in the Niger Republic**

According to the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations International Children Funds (UNICEF), the humanitarian crisis amid the military coup in Niger Republic has further amplified the vulnerability of millions of Nigeriens to more problems in the country.4 Mr. Stefano Savi, UNICEF’s Niger representative said that more than two million children in Niger have been impacted by the crisis in the country and are in need of humanitarian assistance.4 The number of Nigeriens in need of humanitarian assistance has reportedly increased by 65% from 2.3 million in 2019 to 3.8 million in 2021, with a probability of geometric increase to date.5 One concerning trend is the alarming increase in deportations of Nigerien citizens, soaring by 77% from 2016 to 2022. These deportations expose vulnerable migrants to severe human rights violations, denial of basic civil rights, and limited access to necessities such as health services and shelter.

Prior to the recent coup in Niger, approximately 1.5 million under-five children were predicted to be suffering from malnutrition in 2023.4 In addition, Niger is one of the most violent and poorest countries in the world, often ranking at the bottom of the UN’s Human Development Index (HDI). This factor automatically complicates the present crisis in the country. Again, UNICEF reported that 21 containers of “life-saving supplies’ for Niger have been stuck at the border in Benin and the Benin port in Cotonou. Another 29 containers for Niger were said to be currently at sea with emergency food and syringes.4

Armed conflicts have taken root in several regions of Niger, including Diffa, Tillaberi, Tahoua, Maradi, and the capital city, Niamey. The epicenter of this instability lies in neighbouring countries like Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso, where militant groups have wrought havoc. Niger has not been spared, with continuous political unrest and insecurity leading to a staggering 376,809 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 279,446 refugees and asylum seekers by October 2022.4 Despite the returns of around 65,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Diffa and Tillabery in the year 2021, the number of IDPs in Diffa, Maradi, Tillabery and Tahoua was reported to reach over 264,000 in September 2021. This is a 41% increase compared to September 2019.6 The Niger’s government planned to organize the return of about 104,600 IDPs by the end of December 2021.5 Unfortunately, the efforts of the government were sabotaged due to political crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Niger Republic is home for approximately 250,000 refugees, an increase to 42% over the past three years but over 17% over the past two years.7

## **Miliary coup in the Niger Republic**

The Niger Republic has a history of jihadist activity and political instability characterized by military intervention and weak democratic institutions since 2018 till date.8 The military coup in question is not an isolated event but rather part of a recurring pattern. The root causes of these coups often include political, corruption, ethnic and economic disparities all of which contribute to a fragile political environment.8 Niger Republic represents the last of the three central Sahel states to succumb to a military coup, after two countries, namely; Mali in the year 2020 and 2021, and two coups in Burkina Faso in 2022.8 From the look of things, we observed that the recent coup in the Niger Republic on the 26th of 2023 that overthrown President Mohamed Bazoum and his family8 has exacerbated the present humanitarian crisis in Niger. According to a report, the western Tillaberi region in Niger is the most affected by conflict, although there has been a notable geographic shift from the northern part to the western part of the country.8

Several reports have shown that there are many humanitarian crises caused by military coups including displacement of people from their homes making them refugees, food insecurity, inequalities in healthcare and educational services, psychological problems etc. 9–11 For example, in Syria, it was estimated that less than half of Syrian population is still living in their homes with over 4 million registered as refugees in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt.9 In Myanmar, over a hundred thousand civilians were displaced from their homes due to intensified conflicts between the military, ethnic armed groups and people’s defence force.10 While in Africa, over 12 million people were displaced by armed conflicts and violence and there were hundreds of thousands of people displaced by natural disasters, like earthquakes, flooding, etc.11,12 Conflict and political instability are culprits of displacement and refugee which can also be possible in the case of Niger republic.

The recent military coup in the Niger Republic can also cause food insecurity in Niger as it has happened in many countries like Yemen, Sri Lanka, Mali, Egypt, Nigeria and Gabon.13–18 The political instability and conflict in Niger can undermine food security by damaging economic infrastructure causing internal displacement and contributing to food price inflation. Another way a military coup in the Niger Republic can cause a humanitarian crisis is the inequalities in healthcare and education. Citizens of Niger would definitely face some difficulties in accessing good health care and educational services because of the coup. This crisis could manifest in Niger just like what happened in Myanmar, a country where its healthcare system prior to the takeover by the military juntas faces a lot of inequalities and a lack of visible health equity and now the healthcare infrastructures have all but collapsed. Also, chronically ill patients such as hypertensive, diabetes etc., have difficulty accessing healthcare for their medications.10 Also, the coup in Myanmar led to the blockage of all humanitarian aid which increased the potential of infections such as COVID19, HIV etc.10 This could definitely happen in the Niger Republic too if no urgent intervention to address the coup. A report also showed that the coup attempt in Guinea Bissau in 2022 which was linked to the drug trade and also as an assassination attempt caused underperformance of Guinea Bissau health care.19 Therefore, Niger is at risk of socio-economic repercussions due to anticipated sanctions and suspension of development and budgetary aid from the international community. These pressures are likely to further strain Niger’s already fragile economy8 hence causing more humanitarian crises in the country.

## **Other causes of humanitarian crisis in the Niger Republic**

Aside from the military coup in Niger, other causes of humanitarian crises in Niger include but are not limited to political corruption by the Nigerien politicians (especially President Mohamed Bazoum and his family members), climate change, religious and inter-ethnic conflicts 8 as well as other sociodemographic factors such as age, educational status, income, etc. A 2022 global review reported that violence related to the activities of armed actors in the Niger Republic and neighbouring areas in other West-African countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria have led to severe protection concerns and aggravated chronic food insecurity and malnutrition in Niger.5 In Niger, as in many other countries in the Sahel, livestock herders face a double threat to their way of life. Pastureland is shrinking at an alarming rate as temperatures rise and rainfall decreases due to climate change.5 At the same time, the presence of armed groups along traditional pastoral routes (transhumance) has made it harmful to search for greener pastures in the country.5

Religious conflict has been defined as ‘the struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize or eliminate their rivals.20 Niger with a current population of 27,422,947 (according to Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data)21 has Islam (90%) as the most practised religion in the country followed by Animism otherwise known as traditional indigenous religious beliefs (4.11%), Christianity (0.3%), The Baha’i Faith (0.04%) and 0.1% of the Nigerien population without religion.22–24 Due to these inter-religious practices in Niger, there could be conflict, leading to killings among the Nigeriens, scarcity of food, etc. Young people, individuals with low educational status and low-income earners tend to be involved in arguments and misunderstandings, due to their level of reasoning, exposure, and financial and economic status. The younger population in Niger tend to have higher unemployment (or vulnerable employment) and are prone to child labour and sales of productive assets while the older population in the country tend to have reduced demand, work hours, earnings, etc. Also, higher costs for food and energy; erosion of savings and falling asset values; reduced access to credit (financial deleveraging); tight liquidity conditions and reduced remittance inflows. Individuals with low income tend to spend less on foodstuffs, health, education as well and social welfare programmes.25

## **Consequences of humanitarian crisis amid the military coup in the Niger Republic**

There are quite a lot of consequences that could result from the humanitarian crisis, especially amid the military coup in Niger. For instance, Niger's socioeconomic fabric has been profoundly impacted by the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency in the southeast, creating a state of standstill. Communities have disintegrated, and their cultural values are under threat. In the Diffa region, the Lake Chad Basin crisis further compounds the situation. The southwestern region has witnessed an uptick in banditry and the presence of non-state armed groups, spilling over from Nigeria.26 Again, the military coup in Niger can disrupt the economic growth of the country with the use of weaponry leading to environmental degradation, including water and air pollution.27 Niger, despite its agricultural potential, grapples with food insecurity and drought. Accessibility, affordability, and availability of food have become pressing issues, exacerbated by violence against farmers, lack of seeds, and limited access to fuel for transportation. Cattle herders and livestock are also targeted, worsening the food crisis. Shockingly, the prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under five stands at 12.2%, with severe acute malnutrition surpassing the critical threshold of 2%.1

In addition, the crisis has left a devastating impact on education in Niger. The ongoing coup in Niger has resulted in the closure of schools and educational institutes, leaving countless youths vulnerable to militant influence. Girls, in particular, face the risk of early marriage as they discontinue their education to contribute to their family's economic stability. In the past year alone, nearly 990 educational institutions were rendered non-operational, affecting approximately 84,000 students.1 Furthermore, the healthcare system in Niger faces numerous challenges, including a shortage of qualified healthcare workers, insufficient infrastructure, and inadequate access to essential medications. The UN Population Fund grapples with acquiring critical equipment and medications for sexual and reproductive health, heightening the risk of maternal mortality.28 Also, epidemics such as malaria and cholera are widespread in Niger, sadly, vaccine availability for these diseases is scarce, likely due to the ongoing crisis in the country.29 The emergence of COVID-19 exacerbated the fragile healthcare system in the management of other health crises, like polio and cholera are put on hold in Niger.30 School closures due to the pandemic have further hindered education access, with an estimated 3.8 million students missing out on learning in Niger.1 Overall, the collapse of infrastructure has limited job opportunities and industrial growth in the Niger Republic. ECOWAS sanctions have further added to the woes by closing borders, suspending flights, and freezing assets. 1Tourism has dwindled, and international investments have halted due to insecurity in the country.

## **Possible solutions**

The humanitarian crisis in Niger, caused by different factors such as socioeconomic stagnation, environmental causes, food insecurity, terrorist activities, and internal displacement is an alarming situation that requires an urgent solution and a response from the international community. There is a need to analyse all the underlying causes of humanitarian crises and find long-lasting solutions for them. The challenges faced by the healthcare system should be addressed urgently, providing basic healthcare services to everyone in the affected areas. These include providing the victims with food, clean water, and shelter. Also, the vulnerable population, i.e., women, children, internally displaced people, and the elderly, should be provided with the best possible. We urge the ECOWAS and other international bodies like Amnesty International, and the African Union to come together in order to make peace at all costs with the head of the Junta in Niger. Each party should have a peaceful dialogue and try to solve the conflict amicably.

Another way to put an end to the crisis amid the military coup in Niger is reshuffling the democracy and the military system of the country. ECOWAS and other world leaders should engage the military Junta to conduct another free and fair election following the recent coup. This election should not be a family business or based on tribe, religion or ethnicity. Rather, the election should be based on political competency and the sound health of any candidate. Conducting a new democratic election would surely restore peace to Niger. No citizen of Niger should be victimized during the election period. A study from 2019 suggested that the government take notice of all the areas affected by the military conflicts and should take proper measures to ensure the safety of the suffering community.31 Moreover, the government, along with funds from international organizations, should make agriculture and reforestation plans to combat climate change caused by drought and desertification. The economic growth of the Republic of Niger is unstirring because of the presence of armed groups in different regions, which causes conflicts, and because of the disruption of the educational system. Therefore, we urge international organizations like UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, and WHO to support small-scale businesses and promote entrepreneurship for the Nigeriens. This can be helpful in the revival of economic conditions in Niger. ECOWAS and Niger government should apply some strategies at the country level to promote education for both genders, and more job opportunities should be made available for the people, especially those leaving in the rural areas. Furthermore, researchers have recommended the World Medical Association (WMA) partner with respective medical associations worldwide such as; the National Medical Associations (NMA), including Medical Students Associations (MSAs) to deploy medical experts, health volunteers, medical students, nurses, psychologists, social workers to any country like Niger facing a crisis or any other natural disaster.12 It would be helpful if the WMA helped Niger too by providing their utmost support during this trying time for the population of Niger.

## **Conclusion**

To tackle this complicated situation in Niger, a more humanitarian approach is required. This approach should involve better understanding, compassion, and harmony. The management of refugees and the internally displaced population is crucial for Niger. The federal government itself cannot solve this humanitarian crisis; thus, help from international countries and organizations is needed. Donor countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, etc. organizations, and regional parties should consider helping Niger by increasing financial aid. Many of the underlying causes of humanitarian crises can be solved with financial help, which will ensure the effective implementation of development programs. Therefore, the solution to the humanitarian crisis faced by the Republic of Niger includes international cooperation and long-term relief solutions. Further research is also suggested to learn more about the crisis and implement a better solution in the long run.

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