RESPONDING TO THE URGENT NEEDS OF REFUGEES,
INTERNALLY DISPLACED, RETURNEES AND
OTHERS OF CONCERN
Regional Overview

The Sahel region continues to face a severe humanitarian and protection crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and major flooding across the region. To address the significant needs of displaced populations and their hosts, UNHCR scaled its emergency response, in coordination with the Governments of the region as well as key humanitarian and development actors.

Widespread and indiscriminate violence by armed groups have intensified since the beginning of 2020 whilst social and political tensions are rising, forcing more people to flee across the region. In Burkina Faso, the number of internally displaced persons has reached over 1,000,000 in August 2020 while internal displacement doubled in Niger since the beginning of the year. In Mali, internal displacement continues to increase while the deterioration of the security in neighbouring countries pushed over 6,000 Malian refugees return to their country of origin in 2020. As of 30 September 2020, a total of 3,530,175 persons have been displaced across the region, exacerbating pressure on the already limited natural resources and social services in the new hosting areas. This volatile context allowed armed groups to expand their range of operations southwards with a growing impact on coastal countries.

Along with this increase in violence, the Sahel has seen a growing number of fatal incidents due to landmines, unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices (IED) in 2020. Often living in the most conflict-affected areas, refugees and IDPs are particularly exposed to this risk. In a recent incident in a refugee camp in eastern Chad, on 24 June 2020, four refugee children from ages 9 -12 were killed and three others seriously injured when they picked up an unexploded device and tried to open it. In Burkina Faso, on 6 June 2020, a vehicle carrying two refugees hit an IED near Mentao refugee camp. Both were evacuated to Djibo, where they received treatment for their injuries. In Niger, five incidents have killed at least five refugees and displaced people while injuring many others since the start of the year. In Mali, the civilian population accounts for almost half of the victims of landmines and improvised device explosions in the entire country. At least 42 civilians were killed in 82 incidents between January and May this year, mainly in the Mopti, Gao and Kidal regions. In addition to the high death toll, injuries and their after-effects, including psychological damage, the presence of explosive devices hinders the delivery of humanitarian aid and development activities.

In addition to this dire security situation, the Sahel is seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of floods, droughts, and other climate-related hazards. These extreme weather events represent an additional challenge for governments already grappling with endemic poverty, and chronic vulnerabilities, critically compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which has weighed heavily on already weak and depleted national health systems across the region. Since August, the region has recently experienced torrential rains for the past two months, causing devastating floods across large swathes of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger. This has impacted over 700,000 people, among them thousands of displaced persons, destroying homes, health centres and farmland and aggravates the lack of access to clean and renewable energy sources to meet basic needs for light, water and cooking fuel. As living conditions further degrade and livelihoods opportunities disappear, this dramatic situation is likely to...
generate increasing displacement of populations within the region and possibly southward to some of the Coastal countries and northward to North Africa and Europe.

In this extremely difficult context, UNHCR has scaled up its emergency response in line with the strategy laid out in its Appeal issued in June 2020. Focusing on shelter interventions, distribution of core relief items, prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, education and the environment, UNHCR has also increased its support to national health systems to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate the spread of the virus in highly vulnerable communities.

To mobilize financial and technical support from all relevant stakeholders and ensure the humanitarian response is complemented by more long-term development and peacebuilding interventions to address the deep-seated and intertwined root causes of the Sahel conflict, UNHCR is closely engaging and coordinating with the governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger and all relevant actors in the region. To facilitate and structure this cooperation, the five governments have established -with UNHCR support- the Bamako Process, an intergovernmental process to implement the conclusions of the Bamako Declaration. Officially launched on 12 October 2020, the Bamako Process will focus on five areas of interventions including:

1) Humanitarian access and civil-military coordination
2) Protection in the context of the UN framework for the prevention of violent extremism
3) Access to asylum in the context of mass influx and mixed movements
4) Solutions for refugees, IDPs and other civilian population
5) Access to civil registration, identity document and nationality.

Key figures

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Evolution of Persons of Concern

- 57% increase in IDPs since January 2020
- 9% increase in Refugees since January 2020

FUNDING (AS OF 14 OCTOBER 2020)

USD 185.7 million

UNHCR’s financial requirements 2020

- 72% funded*
- 9% Funding gap

* Including indicative allocation of softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions.
UNHCR’s Operational Priorities

Based on its mandate, UNHCR is working to provide protection and seek solutions for the benefit of refugees, IDPs, returnees, persons at risk of statelessness and host communities, and in line with its responsibilities under the IASC, for civilians as a whole. Throughout its interventions, UNHCR is promoting inclusion as well as the meaningful participation of and accountability to affected people. In line with its Sahel Strategy and its Sahel Appeal launched in 2020, UNHCR is focusing the scale up of its activities on the following operational priorities.

COVID-19 Response

In the Sahel, the COVID-19 pandemic added a health emergency to one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world creating an additional burden on a region grappling with fragile national health systems, limited access to water and sanitation facilities and precarious living conditions in overcrowded communities. Drawing from its extensive experience in emergency response and its unique field presence, UNHCR scaled up and adapted its interventions to ensure continuity of assistance despite the operational constraints created by the pandemic.

Throughout the Sahel, protection activities and processes were adjusted to allow for social distancing through remote case management via telephone, preventive measure in registration processes. UNHCR stepped up its engagement and advocacy with Governments to allow for voluntary returns and safeguard the principle of non-refoulement despite border closures.

HIGHLIGHT: Community engagement and risk communication

In West Africa the COVID-19 Regional Risk communication and community engagement digital platform launched by UNHCR and its partners is used by community mobilisers disseminating prevention messages and national platforms exploring innovative two-way communication venues to engage IDP, stateless and refugee communities throughout the region. This regional effort was complemented at country level through various initiatives. In Burkina Faso, UNHCR has partnered with a local NGO specialized in journalism and the provision of information to populations faced with crisis to produce a short daily COVID-19 news program for IDPs and host populations. As part of this partnership, news programs in French and local languages were broadcasted to refugees, IDPs and host populations through 37 partner radios across the country. Over 160,000 pandemic-related posters have also been distributed. Questionnaires to assess the knowledge of IDPs and host communities on the COVID-19 were completed by 850 families. The results of these surveys allowed to assess information needs and gaps and inform the development of radio programs on COVID-19 prevention as well as on issues of peaceful coexistence and material needs. In Mauritania, in the Mbera camp, a crisis committee, including UNHCR, partners, refugee leaders and community volunteers, was set up to jointly manage communication and mobilization. The training of 226 community facilitators has enabled a door-to-door awareness campaign and mobile messaging in the various languages spoken by refugees, as well as engagement of host communities.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS*

• 114,695 people received essential healthcare services
• 13,786 people (including children, parents and primary caregivers) provided with mental health and psychosocial support services
• 34,746 women and girls have accessed sexual and reproductive health services
• 13,384 households most vulnerable to/affected by COVID-19 who received livelihoods support

*Including Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.
UNHCR enhanced communication with communities to provide persons of concern and host communities with relevant, culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible information on COVID-19 and prevention measures to be adopted. Country operations have also increased their direct support to national health systems to strengthen their infection prevention and healthcare responses, including through the provision of medical equipment and supplies and training of health personnel.

UNHCR scaled its WASH and shelter interventions and increased the distributions of core relief items to help decongest the most overcrowded sites to allow for social distancing, isolation of suspected or confirmed cases and to ensure that seemingly simple hygiene measures such as washing one’s hands would be possible in most hosting areas. Country operations also increased their focus on strengthening community-based protection mechanism and enhancing the resilience and self-reliance of refugee and IDP communities including through the ramping up of cash assistance.

Already jeopardized by insecurity in the region, education was further disrupted by the pandemic. After the closure of schools throughout the Sahel, UNHCR worked with Governments and partners to ensure displaced children and youth have access to safe distance learning alternatives. As schools progressively reopened from July, UNHCR supported health training for teachers and community awareness-raising activities on COVID-19 and basic prevention measures while upgrading water and sanitation facilities in schools. UNHCR also coordinated with the UN country teams, Inter-Agency platforms and key donor countries to contribute to a coordinated response to the COVID-19 crisis and to ensure that persons of concern are included in all relevant response plans.

**HIGHLIGHT: A new UNHCR-African Development Bank partnership in the Sahel**

As part of its effort to promote a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing the needs of refugees and IDPs, UNHCR has entered into a tripartite agreement with the African Development Bank and the G5 Sahel to support the COVID-19 response across the five countries of the Sahel region. Funded through the framework of the African Development Bank’s COVID-19 response facility, the USD 20 million project will allow the Governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger to strengthen their national health response to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and limit its social and economic impact in a region already facing a dire humanitarian crisis. Implemented with the support of UNHCR, the project will prioritize activities in areas most impacted by conflict and violence, with high a concentration of forcibly displaced people and limited presence of government institutions.
Prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

In the Sahel, gender-based violence, already endemic in the region, further increased due to COVID-19 and the subsequent movement restrictions that have exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and hampered access to services for survivors. To address this situation, UNHCR is working with partners to implement strong referral mechanisms, strengthen health and support structures (including through the introduction of new mobile health services) in main hosting areas which have historically been underserved.

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, this dramatic SGBV situation was further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted women and girls. Traditionally caring for sick family members, they are also exposed to negative family coping mechanisms like child marriage in times of crisis.

In the past months, the region has seen an increase in domestic violence and abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced and early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, and increasing instances of rape and other forms of sexual violence as the conflict exacerbates, etc.

In this extremely difficult context, UNHCR is stepping up its response to strengthen existing health structures, increase prevention activities, maintain effective referral mechanisms for survivors of SGBV to ensure that the GBV cases are identified and monitored, and that the most critical ones receive immediate support including in the most remote areas despite a shrinking humanitarian access. UNHCR also worked to maintain access to quality reproductive, child, and maternal health services to women and adolescent girls.

Various initiatives were introduced to that effect, including emergency cash assistance, remote individual case management and psycho-social counselling over the phone for women and girls as well as LGBTI individuals and other persons with specific needs during the pandemic.

Targeted campaigns on Instagram, Facebook, and rural radios in Burkina Faso and Niger helped disseminate information on GBV services and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) complaints mechanisms within internally displaced, stateless and refugee communities. These messages also included strategies for maintaining psychosocial wellbeing, managing anxieties related to the pandemic.

**Key achievements**

- **303** community-based protection committees/groups working on SGBV prevention and response
- **1,456** reported incidents of SGBV through the new mobile clinics
- **373** of reported SGBV incidents for which survivors receive medical assistance
- **387** sensitization and capacity-building sessions on SGBV
- **16,792** persons received information on GBV and the services available
- **Over 850,000** people have accessed protection services

*Including Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.
HIGHLIGHT: Mobile health clinics launched throughout the Sahel

Mobile health clinics were set up in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Composed of case and health workers locally recruited and trained, these mobile teams can reach the most inaccessible areas to UNHCR’s teams to provide direct care, including basic health consultations and psychosocial support to SGBV survivors from IDP, refugee and host communities. They also contribute to strengthening prevention and community-based protection through awareness raising, sensitization of community leaders on SGBV and provision of comprehensive information on how to survivors can seek support.

The launch mobile clinics have allowed the scale up of our SGBV response with the identification of over 1,400 SGBV cases to date, over 500 of whom received immediate medical service, psychosocial support and other services.

In addition, over 300 community-based protection committees and working groups on SGBV prevention and response have been set up and over 16,000 persons received information on GBV and the services available.

The newly established mobile clinic in the Sahel provides much needed primary health care to IDPs, refugees and host community and a strengthened response to cases of SGBV in the Sahel. ©UNHCR/Burkina Faso
Shelter & Non-Food Items
Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

With displacement constantly on the rise across the Sahel, and many forced to flee multiple times, most of the displaced populations live in overcrowded or substandard shelters. Residing in congested sites, or among host communities in historically underserved areas, refugees and IDPs are often deprived of privacy and exposed to theft and violence.

With limited access to water and hygiene facilities, they are at heightened risks of contamination as COVID-19 continues to spread in the region. To address this issue, UNHCR operations are implementing targeted shelter interventions and the distributions of core relief items and exploring ways to decongest the most affected hosting areas in coordination with the national and local authorities.

As forced displaced increased in Burkina Faso, UNHCR scaled up its shelter response with the direct provision of 6,115 shelters (in-kind and Cash-Based Intervention) to since the most vulnerable families beginning of 2020. A total of 1,286 Refugee Housing Units (RHU) were constructed in different regions including 441 RHU in North Center, 502 in Sahel and 343 in the North.

Cash grants for construction materials for shelter were distributed to 394 households. These interventions implemented directly enabled UNHCR to shelter 5,222 IDP households and protect them from the extreme weather event of the past months. In addition to UNHCR’s interventions, its partners contributed to the shelter response with the construction of 4,435 shelters in hosting areas throughout the country.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS*
- **106,282** persons of concern receiving shelter support
- **10,329** of households receiving core relief items and multi-purpose cash grants

*Including Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

STORY: Improving living conditions of displaced persons in the Sahel

In the Youba internally displaced site near Ouhagouya in the North region of Burkina Faso, A. Tall, 38, lives with her husband and their six children. They arrived in the site in February 2020, after their community had been attacked in Tengsobare, in the commune of Barga. For several days, they slept in the open air until the aid arrived. “We slept outside, as we had no shelter. It wasn’t easy for us”, she said. « We feared the arrival of the rainy season. But we now live in a resistant shelter which has a solar lamp inside. Our living conditions have improved, for we are now protected from wind blows, rains and sunshine. We are so happy, and grateful to UNHCR for such a relief.”

A. Tall and her daughter Alima sitting around a cooking pot on fire, in front of their tent strengthened with cement. ©UNHCR/I.Mahamat.
In **Mali** and **Niger** despite significant challenges related to security conditions, UNHCR continued to support adequate shelter for IDPs in both countries and Malian refugees in **Niger** through the construction of shelters and the provision of cash grants, shelter materials and maintenance tool kits. In **Mali**, 1,566 households composed of 4,213 individuals received direct shelter and NFI support from UNHCR since the beginning of 2020. In **Niger**, UNHCR provided a total 3,133 emergency shelters to 14,286 IDPs and allocated land to 15,578 IDPs for permanent shelter construction. In **Mauritania**, UNHCR continued to support adequate shelter for Malian refugees through provision of cash grants for construction materials for shelter to 599 households.

As part of its global cluster responsibilities for conflict driven displacement, UNHCR also reaffirmed its leadership in the CCCM sector. In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR has spearheaded the creation of the site management working group and organized a CCCM training to strengthen the knowledge of humanitarian actors on the management of displacement sites, improving coordination between actors and promoting the effective use of guidelines and existing tools and skills, as well as "to prepare effective interventions. This workshop brought together 49 participants from 10 organizations (Governmental, international and national NGOs and United Nations agencies) involved in the coordination and management of activities in favor of IDPs.
Education

The combined impact of insecurity and the spread of COVID-19 in the Sahel has devastating effects on children’s access to education, with school closures no longer restricted to conflict areas but generalized to the entire countries. Displaced children are affected the most. UNHCR Operations in the Sahel have worked with Governments and education partners to improve refugee, IDP and returnee children access to quality and safe education opportunities through the construction and rehabilitation of classrooms, teacher payment and training, support to distance learning initiatives, provision of stationary kits and cash assistance for school enrolment, as well as scholarships to access university.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis and the mandatory school closures that have impacted all the displaced children included in national education systems across the region, UNHCR has actively participated in the development of COVID-19 education response strategies to cope with education disruption and ensure refugee and IDP children an equitable access to national distance learning programs.

Since June, UNHCR supported the safe reopening of schools by improving access to water and strengthening WASH infrastructure in schools (hand-washing stations, latrines, water pumps and boreholes), constructing additional classrooms to allow social distancing measures (including during end-of-year exams), equipping teachers with personal protective equipment (masks, hygiene kits for classrooms, etc.) and providing teachers and students with appropriate training on education in emergencies, COVID-related hygiene practices, and psychosocial support. The negative outcomes of prolonged school closures disproportionately impact displaced children, who not only see their education interrupted but also lose the safety offered by a school, risking greater exposure to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation. The situation is especially precarious for girls who are more at risk of permanently dropping out, exposing them to forced marriage. Ensuring continuity of education for displaced children and youth remains a challenge, especially in rural areas where the digital divide exacerbates the education divide.

**HIGHLIGHT: Solar radios for distance learning in the Sahel**

In Burkina Faso and Mali, UNHCR distributed solar radios and school kits to enable refugee, internally displaced and host community children to access learning programmes broadcast by national and community radios and continue their education. This helped ensure that children were productively engaged, and families were involved in their children’s education, which promoted family unity and reduced stress both at home and within communities. As of end of August, 1,776 solar radios were distributed out of 7,510 solar radios targeted for the end of 2020 in Burkina Faso and Mali.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS***

- **8,800** children equipped for distance learning + back to school support
- **43** classrooms constructed or rehabilitated to strengthen the education reception facilities in refugee and IDP hosting areas.
- **171** schools supported with WASH interventions
- **139** teachers trained on COVID, WASH, Education in Emergency and Psychosocial Support.

*Including Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.
Environment and Energy

Climate change effects add a complicating factor to an already dramatic humanitarian situation in the Sahel. Record hot spells and unpredictable weather patterns such as the current floods tend to exacerbate inter-communal tensions and violence. To address this critical dimension of the regional crisis, UNHCR is adopting a do-no-harm approach and an eco-friendly response to strengthen community-based preparedness to prevent climate-related forced displacement and promote the use of clean energy as well as plastic and waste collection in areas hosting displaced populations.

In line with the regional strategy and by its new Strategic Framework on Climate Action, UNHCR has focused its efforts on reforestation, land restoration and access to renewable energy, including promoting clean fuel, introducing solar energy to power water pumps, or to provide light in public places in order to reduce the risk of Gender Based Violence (GBV).

In Burkina Faso and Niger UNHCR distributed natural gas kits to refugees and IDPs to reduce the use of firewood for domestic cooking and address the risk of deforestation in the region. Solar lamps are being distributed to displaced communities across the region as part of UNHCR’s shelter and education assistance and are also serving as a source of clean electricity for phone and other household appliances. UNHCR is also promoting reforestation activities, land reclamation, solid waste collection and recycling. In Burkina Faso, UNHCR is exploring the possibility to recycle plastic into bricks for the building of houses and schools. UNHCR’s activities include climate-smart agricultural and pastoralist livelihood support and WASH and shelter activities.

The ultimate objective of UNHCR’s environment response is to strengthen the resilience and capacity of displaced and host communities to face the impacts of climate change, to prepare for seasonal shocks and to adapt to evolving and future challenges.
Data collection and analysis

To inform programming and raise awareness on the crisis in order mobilize financial and technical support from all relevant stakeholders, UNHCR is stepping up its data collection and analysis. Together with DRC, UNHCR engaged a wide range of actors to create a systematic, harmonized and region-wide collection and analysis of key protection data. In parallel, UNHCR is conducting research and prospective analysis of climate change impacts on human security in the Sahel to better predict climate-related movements and integrate these considerations in its planning.

In partnership with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), UNHCR is spearheading the Project 21, a harmonized regional wide protection monitoring system in the three pilot countries, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Data collection, including through telephone interviews when access is not possible, continues in the three countries. The system has been jointly developed by UNHCR and DRC, adapted to COVID-19 pandemics, following consultations and inputs from 20 protection monitoring actors both in the pilot countries and those regionally based. This transnational project aims to bring evidence-based understanding of the protection environment, risks and needs, which allows for joint advocacy, informed programming and coordination of the response between partners.

During the three-month pilot phase, data related to GBV, education, physical protection, community engagement, documentation/nationality, child protection and solutions was collected, and the findings and analysis are shared monthly in a summary snapshot and quarterly in a narrative report. DRC and UNHCR hope to make this project as participative as possible with more protection actors. The pilot phase which will conclude in October will be followed by the system review period ahead of its a roll-out to the rest of the West and Central Africa region. Beside Project 21, UNHCR will also work on the collection and analysis of climate and disaster risk data to better understand and predict displacement trends and climate-related mobility in the Sahel and the potential population movements towards the coastal countries (Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo) and northward (North Africa and Europe). Already feeding into our strategic planning, particularly in our contingency planning and preparedness activities, this prospective research and analysis also supports our evidence-based advocacy and resource mobilization.

Emergency Preparedness

In line with the commitment taken in the UNHCR Sahel Crisis Appeal, UNHCR’s stockpiles in Accra and Douala currently hold enough shelter kits and non-food items to cover the needs of 20,000 households and which can be dispatched to impacted countries within days. Emergency teams are also ready to be deployed within 48 hours.

Coastal states are increasingly impacted by developments in the Sahel, due to the growing number of new arrivals from Sahel countries, necessitating adequate preparedness. While the spillover of the Sahel crisis primarily takes the form of population displacement with over 15,000 persons estimated to have arrived in Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Benin and Togo since the beginning of 2020, there has been a gradual spillover of violence, with some coastal states increasingly targeted by attacks by armed groups. In response to these worrying trends, contingency plans are being updated in Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. In Benin, UNHCR is working with OCHA, WFP, and UNICEF to support the UNCT in developing a contingency plan where UNHCR will take the lead for Refugees.

**Key achievements**

- 2,714 of monitoring missions conducted and recorded
- 16 joint assessment, planning and evaluation exercises held

*Including Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.
Funding the Sahel response

Sahel Appeal funding received and allocated per country (USD) – As of 15 October 2020

Special thanks to:

DONORS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO UNHCR RESPONSE IN THE SAHEL (2020)

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DONORS WHO HAVE PROVIDED Unearmarked Contributions (2020)

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Estimated budget for the 2021 Sahel Response

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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>73,078,678</strong></td>
<td><strong>48,784,974</strong></td>
<td><strong>86,729,319</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,226,479</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,321,533</strong></td>
<td><strong>228,140,982</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNHCR SAHELM CRISIS RESPONSE
2020
RESPONDING TO THE URGENT NEEDS OF REFUGEES, INTERNALLY DISPLACED, RETURNEES AND OTHERS OF CONCERN

PROGRESS REPORT

OCTOBER 2020

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