



# Sahel Crisis

Responding to the urgent needs of refugees, internally displaced, returnees and others of concern



**1.5 million**  
IDPs

**820,825**  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-  
SEEKERS

**684,038**  
RETURNEES  
(REFUGEES AND IDPs)

**106,555**  
OTHERS OF CONCERN

**\$185.7 million**  
NEEDED IN REVISED  
FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

To respond to the deepening crisis, UNHCR requires \$185.7 million to provide lifesaving protection and assistance to refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities the Sahel region.

This includes the \$96.7 million in initial requirements for 2020, \$29.3 million to implement COVID-19 prevention and response measures in displacement areas, and an additional \$59.7 million to scale up its emergency response, focusing on shelter and core relief items, prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, education and the environment.

**JUNE 2020**



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## Overview

The central Sahel region—Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger—is facing a severe humanitarian and protection crisis. Massive displacement, most of it driven by intense and largely indiscriminate violence perpetrated by a range of armed actors against civilian populations, is taking place across the region. While internal displacement is on the rise substantial numbers of refugees have fled to neighboring countries, and the situation risks spilling over into the coastal countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo.

Local communities have demonstrated remarkable generosity but are at a breaking point. National capacities are overwhelmed, and international support has been disproportionately dedicated to security assistance, with limited resources being made available for urgently needed humanitarian and development activities.

This context is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is already affecting areas hosting refugees and IDPs. Despite a low number of tests and cases detected so far, the steady increase of infection rates indicates a forthcoming emergency that far exceeds the capacity of national health sectors. The immediate socio-economic impact will have longer-term consequences for food security and access to services and livelihoods throughout the Sahel region, disproportionately impacting displaced populations and jeopardizing durable solutions.

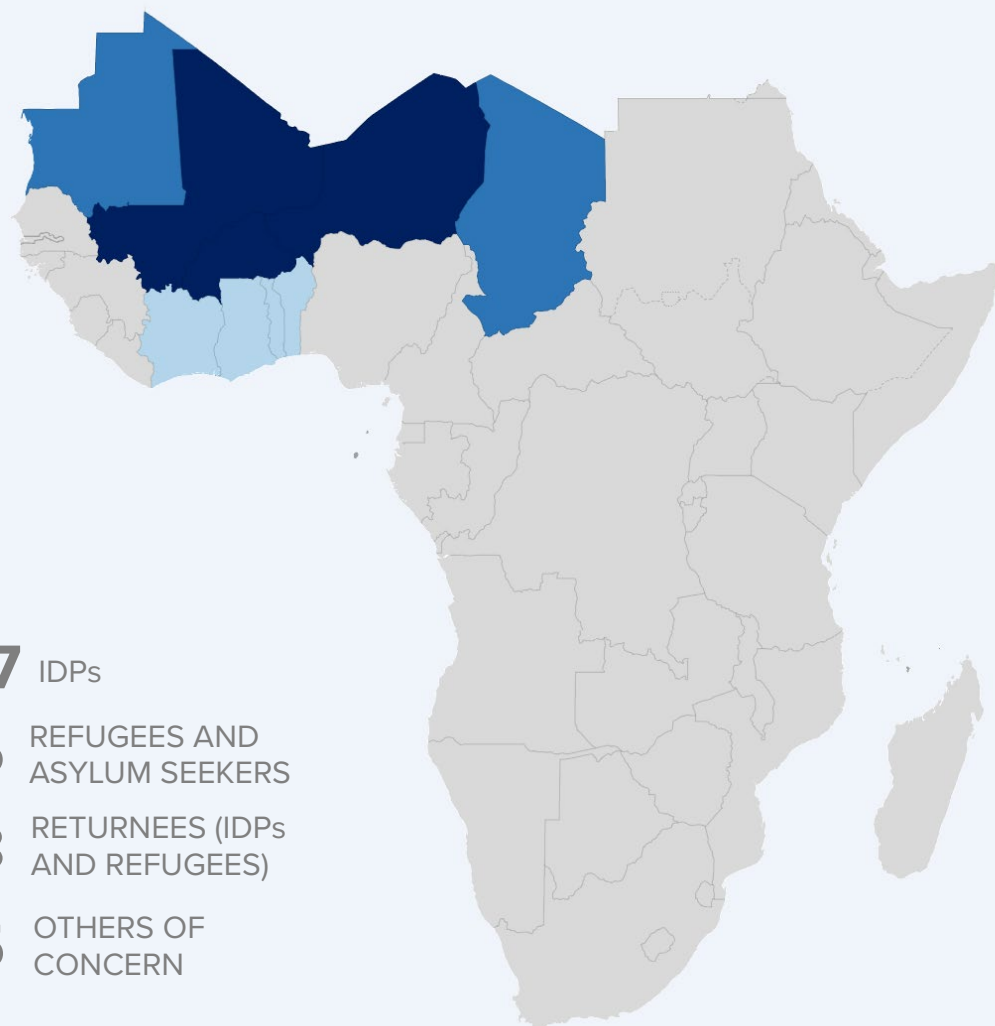
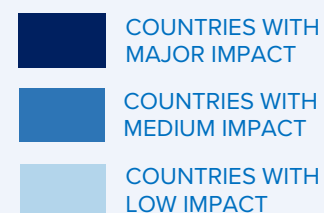
Coupled with the just starting lean season, which is predicted to be one of the most serious in decades, this situation will likely generate further large-scale displacement of populations within the region and beyond: possibly southward to coastal countries, as well as northward to North Africa and Europe.

“

The emergency in the Sahel is a humanitarian and protection crisis of major proportions, where horrifying violence against vulnerable populations is becoming endemic. We must act swiftly with a comprehensive and inclusive response, with the rights and well-being of millions of displaced people at the heart of what we do.”

**Filippo Grandi**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



1,531,577	IDPs
820,825	REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS
684,038	RETURNEES (IDPs AND REFUGEES)
106,555	OTHERS OF CONCERN

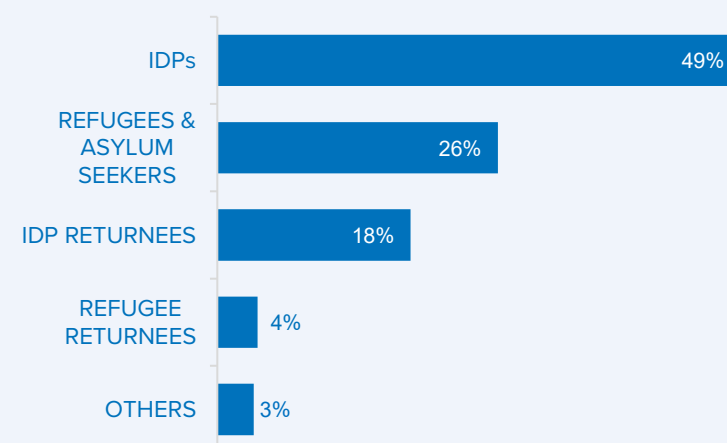
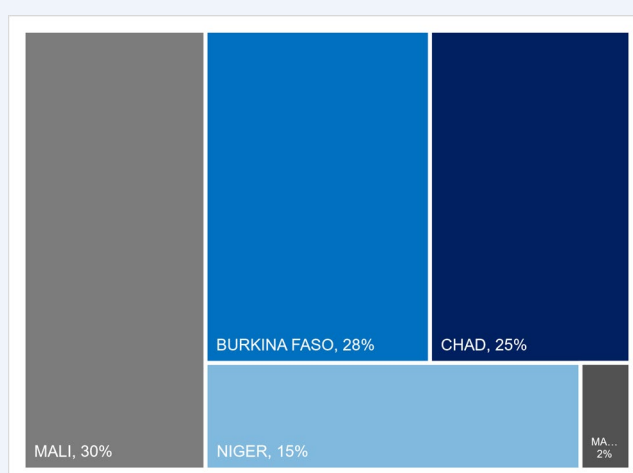
## EVOLUTION OF IDP POPULATION (LAST 12 MONTHS)



## EVOLUTION OF REFUGEE POPULATION (LAST 12 MONTHS)



## PEOPLE OF CONCERN BY STATUS



## PEOPLE OF CONCERN AFFECTED

	BURKINA FASO	CHAD**	MALI	NIGER	MAURITANIA	TOTAL
REFUGEES	21,371	475,470	28,706	223,094	63,222	811,863
REFUGEE RETURNEES			83,833	34,300		118,133
ASYLUM-SEEKERS	33	3,838		3,551	1,540	8,962
IDPs	848,329	208,382	250,998	223,868		1,531,577
IDP RETURNEES			565,905			565,905
OTHERS		102,945		3,610		106,555
TOTAL	869,733	790,635	929,442	488,423	64,762	3,142,995

*\*\*The majority of refugees in Chad are from Sudan and CAR*



## Working environment

Insecurity, geography, climate and a global pandemic: all conspire to present UNHCR and its partners with one of the most difficult operating environments in the world.

Since an initial outbreak in northern Mali in 2011, armed conflict has spread to central Mali, to Niger, to Burkina Faso, and is likely to impact coastal countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

As one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world, millions continue to flee indiscriminate attacks by armed groups against civilians such as summary executions, the widespread use of rape against women, as well as attacks against state institutions, including schools and health facilities.

Refugees finding themselves in the Liptako-Gourma, the border triangle where Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger converge, are seeking safety in areas that are also plagued by violence and poverty. Many have been displaced several times.

The situation is interlinked with the situations in Cameroon, Libya and Nigeria due to the shared ideology between armed groups, similar operating modes, their geographic proximity, and their illicit financing methods.

The security situation is complicated further by the broad range of regular and irregular armed actors, including national armies, international forces and a UN peacekeeping mission, as well as insurgent groups, community-based armed groups, traffickers and criminal gangs.

Ongoing insecurity and hostilities between parties to the conflicts, the presence of improvised explosive devices and landmines, as well as other physical constraints such as lack of road infrastructure, flooding, and rough terrain make humanitarian access extremely difficult and, at times, risky.

Attacks on civilians are only the latest drivers of displacement in a region already struggling with extreme poverty, scarce basic services, and climate change, and now the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While security expenditures by governments are on the rise, this has not been matched by investment in public or social services, meaning that humanitarian assistance is a lifeline for more than three million people whose needs continue to outpace available resources. During 2020-2021, elections will take place in eight of the nine countries covered by this strategy. If these are not carefully managed, they could add to the existing instability.

The region is vast and is one of the most at risk from adverse effects of climate change. Those effects are already being felt. Competition for land and the impact of climate change have generated divisions between communities based on ethnic affiliation. These tensions are exploited by insurgent groups, leading to more inter-ethnic fighting.

In addition, governments in the Sahel are taking general measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and protect populations. Although these measures are not specific to refugees, IDPs, stateless persons or returnees, limits on mobility within and across borders disproportionately impact these populations in their search for protection and solutions.

## UNHCR's response to date

UNHCR's protection-centered response has focused on the urgent needs faced by people of concern—refugees, IDPs, returnees, persons at risk of statelessness and host communities. Throughout its interventions, UNHCR has ensured the inclusion and meaningful participation of, and accountability to, affected people.

### Shelter and core relief items

UNHCR has provided emergency structures, construction materials, CRLs and cash grants. Since the beginning of the year, UNHCR has provided shelter assistance to over 25,000 families and aims to conclude the distribution of CRLs to 16,500 families by the end June 2020.

### Prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence

UNHCR has been implementing a comprehensive prevention and response strategy ensuring that survivors' psychosocial, medical, legal and subsistence needs are met in a holistic manner. For example, in Burkina Faso and Niger, UNHCR and its partners began running mobile clinics in conflict-affected areas to provide medical and psychosocial support to SGBV survivors, complementing existing programs.

Furthermore, in the Tillabery and Tahoua regions of Niger, UNHCR is upgrading 11 safe spaces dedicated to the care of SGBV survivors and adding 50 more case workers, social workers, psychologists, and legal counsellors to ensure timely services and social distancing.

### Education

UNHCR is working with governments to enable emergency education for displaced children and youth via access to safe distance learning alternatives. This support includes health training for teachers and community awareness-raising activities on COVID-19 and basic prevention measures as well as upgrades to water and sanitation facilities in schools. For instance, UNHCR has assisted 21,000 primary school-aged children in Mali and Niger.

### COVID-19

Since the beginning of COVID-19, UNHCR operations are helping to reinforce national healthcare systems, WASH structures, and services in areas hosting displaced populations and surrounding communities to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on people of concern and host communities. In western Niger for example, UNHCR is supporting the authorities of Tahoua and Tillabery to rehabilitate and extend existing health structures to allow for the isolation and treatment of potential COVID patients.

Moreover, UNHCR Niger is supporting the salary payment of 130 national medical staff for an initial period of three months in addition to training 600 healthcare workers in all refugee hosting areas. In Burkina Faso UNHCR has installed 1,728 communal and individual water stations in several refugee and IDP hosting areas, as well as a 5,000- liters water reservoir in Dori where we are trucking water. Furthermore, UNHCR has been supporting refugees to make tens of thousands of reusable masks being distributed to refugees, IDPs and host communities across the Sahel.

## Strategic priorities

UNHCR's response is structured around a three-pronged geographical approach:

- Countries already facing a severe humanitarian crisis (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger)
- Countries already impacted (Chad, Mauritania)
- Countries which might be impacted by a spill-over of the current situation (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo)

Drawing from its mandate, protection leadership, Inter-Agency Standing Committee responsibilities and comparative advantage such as wide field presence, and underscored

by solid data collection and analysis, UNHCR's response prioritizes the following:

- Scale-up of emergency preparedness and response, focusing on shelter and CRIs.
- Protection and physical safety, transforming the commitments made during the Bamako Dialogue into a result-oriented process. This pillar also prioritizes SGBV response and education.
- Partnerships for solutions with a strong development orientation to strengthen the resilience of displaced and host communities, as well as service provision by local authorities to promote social cohesion and limit the impact of displacement on the environment.

## Critical needs by sector

### Shelter and core relief



- Close to 500,000 vulnerable people immediately need in-kind shelter and core relief items
- Another 42,200 households urgently require cash grants for shelter materials and 53,100 families for core relief items
- At least 65% women of reproductive age need to receive sanitary materials

### Protection, including prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence



- Over 310 community groups need support to ensure protection and assistance (including prevention and response to SGBV)
- Activities need to be intensified in order to identify at least 1,000 SGBV incidents and provide medical and psychosocial assistance to the survivors
- 13 joint assessments and 377 monitoring missions need to be conducted and recorded to support data collection and analysis

### Education



- Some 638 teachers need additional training, including for distance education
- Over 150 educational facilities need to be constructed or improved
- Almost 270 WASH educational facilities need to be constructed or rehabilitated

### Environment and energy



- Over 47% of households need access to sustainable energy
- Almost 40% of households need alternative and/or renewable energy (such as solar, biogas, ethanol, environmentally friendly briquets, or wind)

## Planned activities and implementation

UNHCR's Sahel strategy is a scaled-up response to the unprecedented violence and displacement crisis in the Sahel initially covering 2020-2021. Activities planned pre-COVID 19 will be implemented in line with public health measures imposed as a result of the pandemic. This includes addressing shelter needs in overcrowded settlements, supporting distance education, providing effective response to SGBV incidents aggravated by confinement measures, and continuing other protection activities such as registration, documentation and facilitating access to asylum.

### Shelter and core relief items

Refugees and IDPs are often residing in overcrowded camps and sites or among host communities, living in already precarious conditions in traditionally underserved areas. Due to poverty, many resort to building flimsy shelters using tree branches or cardboard, exposing themselves to theft and violence. In these dire living conditions, with limited access to WASH facilities, forcibly displaced people are often unable to apply the most

basic preventive measures such as social distancing and handwashing, exposing themselves to heightened risk of contracting COVID-19 as the virus spreads towards major hosting areas. To address these issues, UNHCR operations are implementing targeted shelter interventions and distributing CRIs as well as exploring ways to decongest the most affected hosting areas in coordination with the national and local authorities.

Shelter needs are acute, especially for IDPs in the areas of Mopti in Mali, and Burkina Faso's North and Central Sahel regions. Therefore, UNHCR's scale-up focuses primarily on meeting at least 25% of IDP shelter and CRIs needs as part of wider inter-agency efforts. In addition, shelter interventions aim to offer sustainable, eco-friendly housing being developed to integrate refugees and IDPs into host-communities and promote peaceful coexistence.

Planned shelter activities include delivery and distribution of tents, prefabricated housing units, shelter kits and cash for shelter, as well as reception centers for both newly displaced IDPs and refugees.

## Prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence

Incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, trafficking, forced and early marriage, and unwanted pregnancy have become widespread in conflict areas of the Sahel.

UNHCR will work with its partners and the military to ensure prevention actions, put in place strong referral mechanisms for survivors of SGBV, reinforce existing health structures, and

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