

UNHCR Sahel Crisis Response

September-October 2020

The conflict continues to escalate across the **Sahel**, whilst social and political tensions are rising, forcing more people to flee across the region.

The **impact of climate change** is affecting the poorest and most vulnerable in Sahel, particularly in **Niger where floods** severely impacted refugees and host populations.

UNHCR started the construction of a **new blood bank in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso** as part of its contribution to the strengthening of national health infrastructures and services.

Key figures

3,530,175 PERSONS OF CONCERN

1,885,797 IDPs

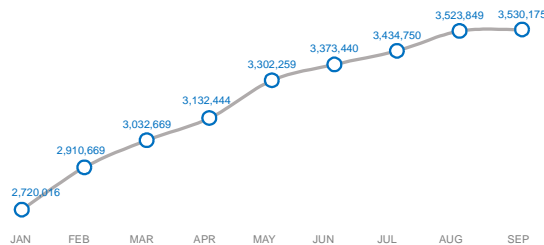
854,797 REFUGEES

685,973 RETURNNEES

103,608 OTHERS

Evolution of Persons of Concern

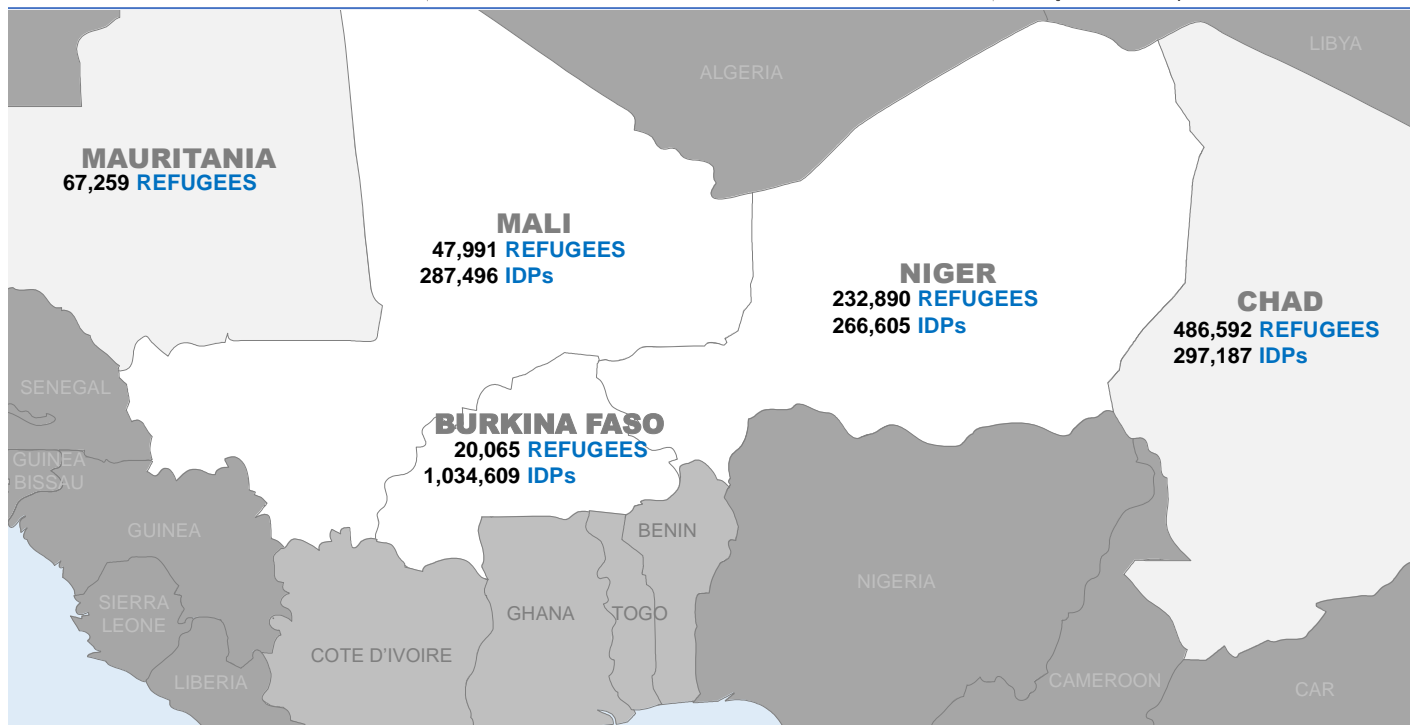
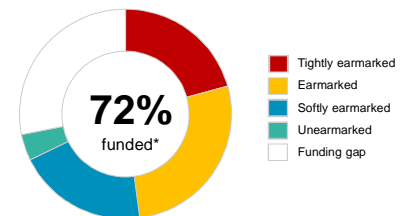
57% increase in IDPs since January 2020
 9% increase in Refugees since January 2020



FUNDING (AS OF 14 OCTOBER 2020)

USD 185.7 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2020



OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Political and security developments

- In the **Sahel**, the conflict continues to escalate whilst social and political tensions are rising, forcing more people to flee across the region. In **Burkina Faso**, the preparation of the legislative and presidential elections, scheduled on 22 November, is ongoing. As displaced continues to grow in the country, thousands of people who left behind their identity papers and other important belongings are at risk of being excluded from the vote. In **Mali**, the *Comité National pour le Salut du Peuple* (CNSP) organized a second round of national consultations from 10 to 12 September, while the security situation remains concerning across the rest of the country.
- Among other violence targeting displaced populations in the Sahel, on 4 October 2020 a gruesome attack near the town of Pissila, in **Burkina Faso**'s Centre-Nord region caused the death of 25 IDPs, adding to the hundreds of people killed in the country this year, spread across dozens of attacks targeting civilians. Schools and teachers are also targeted across the region. On September 6, a school director was killed by gunmen in the Centre-Ouest region in **Burkina Faso**, while in **Mali** on September 29, a teacher was abducted in the Mopti region. On October 16, the lifeless body of a primary school principal was found on the Gorom-Markoye axis in the Sahel region, just days after school started. In **Niger**, violence against civilians is endemic across the country and attacks also target humanitarian workers, despite efforts made by the Government and its partners. In **Mauritania**, the overall political and security situation remains stable, though the political instability in Mali remains of major concern.
- The mounting impacts of climate change are also hitting countries hard, affecting the poorest and most vulnerable. In **Niger** particularly, heavy floods have severely impacted refugees and host populations, affecting their livelihoods. In the Tillabery and Tahoua regions, over 800 refugee houses and emergency shelters were destroyed or damaged by the floods which disrupted the delivery of assistance by UNHCR and its partners.

Population Movements

- Despite official border closures to limit the spread of COVID-19, violence continues to fuel forced displacement within and across the borders of the **Sahel** countries. In **Burkina Faso**, internal displacement continues to increase with growing number of IDPs travelling up to 600kms to settle in the Hauts Bassins or Cascades regions which offer more fertile lands and economic opportunities. In **Mali**, Burkinabe refugees continue to arrive in the Mopti region where UNHCR is supporting the national authorities in their registration. In **Niger**, while internal displacement continues to insecurity and violence, UNHCR has completed the reinstallation in Intikane of all refugees and IDPs who fled the area after a deadly attack in May 2020. A group of 392 who had return to Mali earlier this year came back to the Ayerou due to the precarious security conditions in their region of origin. Despite these challenges, over 3,300 Malian refugees expressed an interest in returning to Mali during the various information sessions conducted by UNHCR teams across Western Niger. In **Mauritania**, new arrivals of refugee are still limited due to the tightening of border controls since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. As of end of October 2020 the country is host to the largest number of Malian refugees in the Sahel, with a total of 67,259 individuals.

Protection Monitoring

- The pilot phase of Project 21 concluded in October 2020. Launched by UNHCR in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Project 21 is a harmonized regional wide protection monitoring system in the three

pilot countries, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Developed by UNHCR and DRC in consultation with 20 protection monitoring actors in the pilot countries and at regional level, 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. The pilot phase will be followed by the system review period ahead of its a roll-out to the rest of the West and Central Africa region.

- In parallel and complementary to Project 21, UNHCR Operations have continued their protection monitoring activities. In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR and its partners conduct protection monitoring and health screening among asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs to identify their most pressing needs. In the Hauts Bassins region, two IDP protection needs assessment missions revealed the existence of spontaneous sites where IDPs have built makeshift shelters, with no access to Core Relief Items (CRIs). A total of 216 identity cards were distributed to refugees whose identity cards had expired at the end of 2019 but could not be replace due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In **Mali**, over 100 protection incidents were recorded by UNHCR's partner in September and October, including violations of the right to property, to physical and/or mental integrity, to liberty and security of the person, and to life. In Gao, UNHCR and its partners identified and assisted 12 survivors of different cases of trauma following physical abuse during attacks perpetrated by armed elements (assault and battery, theft, robbery, extortion, threat with weapon). In **Niger**, from 21 to 24 September, UNHCR organized a training to NGO partners involved in protection monitoring and data collection in order to harmonize protection monitoring system in the country and better align and coordinate protection interventions and advocacy.

UNHCR RESPONSE

Covid19

- 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. In this difficult context UNHCR operations in the Sahel continue to support governments in the implementation of their COVID-19 response plans while directly implementing activities to support forcibly displaced populations. These include distributing protective equipment, advocating for preserving access to asylum and international protection, supporting inclusive national health responses, strengthening shelter interventions to improve living conditions in hosting areas, strengthening community-based protection mechanism and livelihoods interventions to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic.

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.*

- Among various interventions across the region, in **Burkina Faso**, the UNHCR Representative inaugurated the start of the construction of a new blood bank to be donated by the organization to the regional health authorities of the Sahel as part of its contribution to the strengthening of national health infrastructures and services. The blood bank will enable a faster and more efficient response to blood transfusion needs for refugee, internally displaced and host populations referred to health centers in Dori. It will significantly reduce the mortality rate due to blood shortage in the town of Dori. Indeed, the nearest blood bank in Dori is currently located in Kaya and there is no possibility of on-site storage for blood collections. The High Commissioner of the Seno, the

Regional Director of Health and the Mayor of Dori were present for this event, this construction of this blood bank being a priority for both the Ministry of Health. It will play a key role in the Government's COVID-19 response and in the national health system in the Sahel Region. The donation also included medication and masks. The construction work is to be completed in the next three months.

HIGHLIGHT: Production of soap and masks by refugees and IDPs resumes

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Niger, UNHCR has implemented special measures including strengthening communications with refugees on hygiene and sanitation and increasing distributions of hygiene supplies.

In **Niger**, despite the stressful and traumatic situation due to COVID-19 outbreak, many refugees and IDPs have contributed to COVID-19 prevention for the benefit of both displaced and host communities. From the beginning of the pandemic, UNHCR and its partners started a local production of hygiene products, including antiseptic soap, bleach and face masks, to respond to the urgent need of the population at a time when the local market could not match to the soaring demand. The project also aimed generating an income for refugee and IDP households and stimulates the local economy in line with UNHCR's commitment to support resilience and economic inclusion of displaced populations.

From April to July, the project involved over 1,300 from refugee, IDP and host communities across the country, from Abala, Ouallam and Agadez to Hamdallaye, Niamey and Maradi. After being trained, they produced within three months over 30,000 liters of laundry and liquid soap, 9,000 bars of soaps, 4,200 liters of bleach and 1,600 masks which were distributed to their communities.

After the success of this first phase, UNHCR decided to resume the production as of 1 November with 140 beneficiaries and a target production of 30,000 liters of bleach, 18,000 solid antiseptic soaps, 15,000 liters of liquid soap, 65,000 masks.

Beyond the positive results in terms of emergency response, this activity is an excellent temporary replacement for many psychosocial activities who have to be put in stand-by due to the forced social distancing required by the COVID-19 situation. The activity also help many vulnerable displaced persons to cope with the situation and to develop hope and resilience in their current situation.



Soap production by refugee in Niger as part of UNHCR's COVID response. ©UNHCR Niger

Shelter and Core Relief Items

- The need for shelter and basic household items is growing with the scale of displacement in the Sahel, where refugees and IDPs often reside in overcrowded conditions. During the period under review, rain and flooding have caused damage to makeshift shelters, highlighting the need for decent housing for refugees and IDP communities and their hosts. UNHCR operations are working with partners to build, repair and rehabilitate shelters while distribution of shelter kits to affected populations are ongoing.



The recent rains are causing severe floods the city of Niamey and all over Niger. Since the beginning of the rainy season, the floods around the country are reported to have caused 71 dead, 90 injured and affected over 350,000 including over 9,000 IDPs and refugees. ©UNHCR Niger

- In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR supported families who have been affected by the heavy rains throughout September and October through the construction of emergency shelters and distributions of shelter kits. In the Sahel region only, over 1,200 shelters were built in different sites affected by floods and an additional 222 RHUs were built in the Dori Stadium for families who lost their homes. UNHCR also obtained from the regional authorities of the Centre North the allocation of a five-hectar land to contribute to the reduction of overcrowding in IDP sites in the city of Kaya and facilitate the relocation of families who were residing in flood-prone areas which will help reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection. The Operation is also rehabilitating the Goudoubo camp from which refugee families had to flee earlier this year. The construction of shelters, security posts and WASH infrastructures started in September with the aim to relocate the first refugee households by early Novembers. In **Chad**, the localities of Iraiba, Guerda and Amdjarass endured heavy rainfalls during the month of September and October, which destroyed the shelters of 6,155 refugee households. UNHCR responded with the distribution of plastic sheeting to those affected to help them rebuilt their dwellings. To respond to the flood crisis in N'djamena, UNHCR distributed 6,000 blankets and 6,000 mosquito nets to 3000 affected and displaced people. A UNHCR shelter expert was also made available to support the Government in building emergency shelters in dedicated sites in N'djamena capital city. In **Mali**, UNHCR distributed 65 shelter rehabilitation kits in Gossi, Hamzakoma and Ber in Timbuktu to help repair the damage caused by the heavy rains of September. In **Niger**, by far the most affected by the heavy floods, refugee, IDP and host communities suffered significant damages on their dwellings and livelihoods. In the Tillabery and Tahoua regions, 112 brick houses recently built on the refugee site in Abala have been destroyed and over 700 emergency shelters in both regions were damaged. The floods have caused important delays regarding food distribution, shelter distribution and sanitary evacuations. In response, over 3,000 emergency shelter kits have been distributed to Malian refugees and IDPs in the Tillabery region. UNHCR also supported the city of Niamey with 45 Refugee Housing Units and conducted cash distributions to the most vulnerable among the refugee and host communities.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

- *Already endemic in the Sahel, gender-based violence 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.*
- Mobile health clinics have expanded their reach and intensified activities 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. In **Burkina Faso** only, over 100 survivors of SGBV have been identified in September and October and provided with emergency care and psychological support. In **Niger**, two mobile clinics are now fully operational and are now providing assistance to survivors of SGBV as well as reproductive health services.
- UNHCR is also sustaining its coordination and sensitization efforts to address SGBV more effectively and comprehensively in the region. In **Burkina Faso**, workshop on SGBV organized by a UNHCR Partner, INTERSOS, was held in Ouahigouya in the North region to enhance collaboration between care providers in the region and improve access of survivors of GBV to services. On 25 September, a SGBV sensitization campaign was organized in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso by UNHCR's partner, Cooperation and Support Initiatives for Humanitarian and Development Actions (ICAHN) in Dori, with the participation of 2,700 individuals from the IDP and host communities. In Ouagadougou, UNHCR had a meeting with the Permanent Secretary of the National Council for the Promotion of Gender to understand the community and institutional mechanisms to fight against SGBV and to reinforce synergies. In **Mauritania**, UNHCR's protection partner 'Save the Children' delivered a training of trainers 'session on gender-based violence for community-based structures. The training targeted 70 women members of the 'women mobilizer and support' group and provided them with additional knowledge and tools regarding identification and referral of GBV incidents to UNHCR and its partners. In urban areas, UNHCR partners continue to ensure psychosocial support and legal counselling for person of concern.

Education

- Across the region, UNHCR is supporting the authorities and other UN agencies, such as UNICEF, in their efforts to progressively reopen schools including through the provision of personal protective equipment and by supporting the rehabilitation and cleaning of school environment.
- In the Sahel alone, almost 2,000 teachers were trained to ensure safe practices in school upon the resumption of classes and UNHCR support refugee/IDP families across the region to ensure the re-enrolment of their children. In **Burkina Faso**, the school year 2020-2021 restarted on 1 October and UNHCR continues to support authorities' efforts to facilitate displaced and host community children's access to education. On 16 October, the UNHCR Representative, together with the Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, the Governor of the Sahel Region and the Mayor of Dori attended an official ceremony in Dori. It consisted in handing over to the Government seven classrooms, two administrative blocks and several latrines built by UNHCR at four highschools amounting to 213,000 USD.

- In **Mali**, as part of the Education Cannot Wait project, UNHCR and its partners distributed over 1,300 solar radios and 1,300 school kits in schools in refugee and IDP hosting areas in the Gao and Timbuktu regions. In **Niger**, to support the return to school in September, UNHCR and its partners constructed seven emergency classrooms in Ayerou and Intikane and rehabilitated 21 classes in Telemces and Ouallam while carrying out campaigns to sensitize parents on COVID-19 prevention. In **Mauritania**, students in Mbera camp are attending catch-up classes to supplement the distance-learning courses and complete the previous school year impacted by COVID-19-related school closures. To facilitate the return to school, UNHCR continued to work its partners to rehabilitate WASH facilities. In **Chad**, UNHCR supported refugee students in preparing and sitting for the last sessions of the Baccalaureate in September and October. In total (first and second sessions) 516 refugees, including 240 young women, were awarded the Baccalaureate degree for a success rate of 43.3%, above the Chad national average of 38.5%. Among these graduates, eight were granted a DAFI scholarships which will allow them to continue their studies.



All over West and Central Africa, children are starting to back school. In Mali, classes resumed on 14 September after nearly six months of school closure. ©UNHCR Mali

- Despite these efforts and encouraging results, many children have dropped out of school as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic as the statistics are already showing in the countries where formal enrollment has taken place prior to the return to school. In **Chad**, as schools have been getting ready to welcome back students in November, UNHCR has already observed an increase in drop-out rates among refugees with a 22% decrease in the number of students enrolled in the final year and 25% drop for students in the last year of upper secondary compared to last year.

Energy and Environment

- The **Sahel** is one of the regions most impacted by climate change in the world. This has been caused by

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