The Central Sahel – Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – is facing one of the most challenging and complex humanitarian crises worldwide. The compounded impact of escalating conflict and insecurity, climate change and weather extremes, and Covid-19 is devastating communities across the sub-region and driving needs to unprecedented levels. A record high of 13.4 million people in the three countries – one person in five – now need life-saving assistance and protection. Coordinated action, sufficient resources and a principled response are urgently required to bring operations to scale and turn the crisis around. The future of millions, 4 people in 5 under 35 years of age, is at stake.
Regional overview

PROTECTION CRISIS
The main driver of the dramatic deterioration of the situation in the Central Sahel is conflict and insecurity. From the epicentre in the border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, violence has quickly spread across vast areas, heightening the risk of spillover into new regions, including West African coastal countries. Civilians are caught between armed groups, intercommunal violence and military operations. Schools, health centres, religious and other public institutions are frequently targeted, threatening civilians’ lives and livelihoods, limiting access to basic social services, deepening needs and tearing the social fabric of communities. More than 6,600 people have been killed in the past 12 months. Human rights violations including sexual and gender-based violence and violence against children, are on a sharp rise.

IMPACT ON ESSENTIAL SERVICES
The three countries face a structural gap in basic social services in rural areas. Fueled by long-standing failures, the security crisis limits or disrupts access to vital services in many of the affected communities, in turn further driving insecurity and exacerbating inequalities. More than 150 health centers are non-functional, and some 3,500 schools are closed, depriving violence-affected communities of most essential care and education. The disruption of basic services is deeply affecting an entire generation of youth in a region struggling to reap a window of opportunity for a demographic dividend.

FAST-GROWING DISPLACEMENT
The deteriorating security has resulted in massive displacement. The number of internally displaced people in the Central Sahel has risen twentyfold from 70,000 to 1.5 million since 2018. The rapid increase is especially staggering in Burkina Faso where violence has forced one million people to flee their homes since early 2019, including 400,000 people in 2020. Niger’s eastern Diffa region in addition continues to host 125,000 people internally displaced people and 168,000 Nigerian refugees who have fled violence related to the unabated Lake Chad basin crisis. Large-scale displacement is straining weak services and scarce natural resources, such as land and water, further exacerbating tension and social conflicts. Displaced families, in particular women and children, are at greater risk of violence, exploitation and recruitment by non-state armed groups.

Deteriorating food insecurity
The upsurge of violence has also become the main driver of a dramatic food crisis, hitting conflict-affected communities the hardest. Agropastoral production, livelihood for 4 in 5 families in the sub-region, is particularly exposed to the impact of conflict and climate change. Recent drought-flood cycles have hit communities hard, while insecurity and displacement are limiting access and means to produce food. Across the region, 7.4 million people are acutely food insecure – three times more than last year and a massive increase compared to the average of the last five years. In Burkina Faso, an estimated 11,000 persons are already facing famine levels of food insecurity. Close to 1 million children in the sub-region are affected by life-threatening severe acute malnutrition, and the vicious cycle of insecurity, displacement and disruption of basic social services directly impacts the nutritional status of the most vulnerable. Prioritizing acute malnutrition and food insecurity hotspots and mobilizing for accelerated response will be crucial to save lives and livelihoods. Without urgent action, a catastrophe is looming.

**Displacement**

- Internally Displaced People: 1.6M
  - Burkina Faso: 1.0M
  - Mali: 287K
  - Niger: 266K

**Food Insecurity**

- Food insecure people (phase 3+): 7.4M
  - Burkina Faso: 1.6M
  - Mali: 3M
  - Niger: 2M

*Sources:* CMP, CONASUR, Government, IOM

*Source:* Cadre Harmonisé March 2016 - 2020 (projected situation), Burkina Faso: Cadre Harmonisé July 2020 (current situation)
COMPOUNDING IMPACT OF COVID-19

There are more than 6,700 confirmed cases of coronavirus throughout Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, where a range of prevention and containment measures against the spread have been imposed. While the pandemic has not had a devastating health impact as initially feared, pandemic-related prevention measures had significant consequences on communities already ravaged by conflict and emergencies. The closure of markets, quarantines and curfews for several months deeply affected livelihoods, traditional pastoral movements and access to food for the most vulnerable. Children’s access to school feeding programmes was curtailed. The full socio-economic impact could double the number of households at risk of food insecurity. The pandemic has also increased exposure to protection risks, especially for internally displaced and refugee children, and children without family. Socio-economic stress in vulnerable households increases the risk of violence and exploitation against women and girls.

THREATENED ACCESS

The increasingly militarized and politicized environment in the Central Sahel constitutes a major challenge for humanitarian partners. Multiplying security incidents and military operations against armed groups constrain access to conflict-affected areas. To ensure the delivery of aid to hard-to-reach communities, humanitarian actors are increasingly exposed to risks and targeted in attacks. Effective assistance to the people most in need relies on acceptance, humanitarian principles, and the necessary distinction between humanitarian, political and military actions on the ground.

SEVERE FUNDING GAPS

Aid agencies have rapidly scaled up to respond to needs across the Central Sahel. Priorities include the provision of protection services, access to food, shelter, water, sanitation, health and education. Enhanced efforts are required to support the most vulnerable populations’ access to essential services. The response, however, is severely hampered by the lack of resources. While security budgets across the region are massively increasing, humanitarian funding and development investments are not keeping up with the fast escalating needs. Ten months into 2020, average funding of the three response plans stands at 40 per cent. More resources are urgently required to deliver timely and adequate life-saving assistance, and avoid a catastrophe for millions.

LASTING SOLUTIONS

The crisis in the Central Sahel hits communities at the bottom of global development indices that were already highly fragile due to the convergence of poverty, social exclusion, population growth, lack of education, weak governance and conflict. The sub-region also counts among the world’s most exposed to disasters and is a hotspot of climate change. Unpredictable weather patterns, droughts, floods and land degradation are severely impacting fragile rural and pastoralist livelihoods and exacerbating conflict dynamics.

People in the Central Sahel are facing a catastrophe. Without humanitarian aid there will be more death, displacement and suffering. Life-saving aid, however, is not enough on its own and needs to be accompanied by longer-term interventions focused on reducing needs. Humanitarian assistance and development efforts must be complementary, based on principles of do-no-harm and community acceptance. For meaningful improvement in the lives of millions of people, the affected communities need peace, good governance and development investments rolled out on a massive scale.

SECURITY INCIDENTS

1,644 incidents (Jan - Sept. 2020)

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<tr>
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<th>Niger</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>91</td>
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<td>164</td>
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Source: ACLED. Security incidents include battles, explosions / remote violence, riots, violence against civilians and strategic developments (looting / property destruction).

COVID-19

6,703 cases

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>3,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>1,201</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: JHU CSSE
Operational priorities

On 8 September 2020, a Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) was held to prepare and inform the Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel through joint analysis and recommendations. Focusing on operational lessons learned and forward-looking plans for three thematic tracks, the SOM was building on iterative consultations with humanitarian and development partners in the Central Sahel region. Key observations and recommendations of the SOM and preceding consultations include:

**BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES**
National and local authorities are facing significant structural challenges in the provision of basic services, including climate change, poverty, population growth and urbanization. These are amplified by the impact of insecurity. Functioning services are disrupted in fragile areas and non-adapted in areas affected by population influx. Humanitarian aid needs to be balanced with longer-term development, attuned to the situation and supporting the State in providing structural responses. An integrated approach, focusing on productive means and basic services in the same geographic areas, will strengthen resilience of communities.

- Respond to the crisis in an urgent, inclusive and sustainable manner, with the necessary resources, strengthening coherence and complementarity of actions;
- Reinforce coordination and articulate humanitarian and development action through common analysis and joint-up flexible, multi-annual planning and funding instruments;
- Accompany national and local institutions in the adaptation of basic services, offer technical support and enhance national capacity;
- Integrate conflict sensitivity, do-no-harm approach and community engagement as key elements for successful programmes.

**PROTECTION**
The Central Sahel is facing a protection crisis, marked by the multiplicity of non-state armed groups, tension between security forces and civilians, human right violations, shrinking humanitarian access and worsening inter-community tensions. A sense of frustration, power inequalities, as well as tension around natural resources and environmental stress add to the pressure. Access to justice has been considerably impeded by the crisis. There is urgent need to place protection of civilians, in particular women and children, at the heart of the humanitarian, political and military response.

- Tackle the protection crisis in a holistic manner, addressing governance challenges, respecting fundamental rights, providing access to basic services, justice, economic opportunities and security;
- Promote the rule of law, implement regional and international commitments, accompany and strengthen capacities of national institutions;
- Reflect centrality of protection in humanitarian response plans with consistent allocation of resources, strengthen coordination between state protection services, humanitarian and development actors;
- Strengthen the protective environment and provide accessible quality services to ensure respect for human rights, security, dignity and coverage of needs;
- Engage in innovative solutions that strengthen social cohesion and inclusion, support community-based, non-military peace initiatives and promote an independent and inclusive national dialogue.

**ACCESS / HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES / CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION**
The measures and policies taken to limit the influence of armed groups and regain control over territories have direct impact on civilians and basic services, humanitarian aid, and the space for negotiation on access. The imposition of armed escorts and tendency to maintain actors in safer areas limit operational capacities. Civil-military coordination, necessary
to establish relations between civil and military authorities and humanitarian actors and to guarantee humanitarian principles, remains weak. Structured dialogue is needed between States and their partners engaged in humanitarian, development and peace-building work to define cooperation, make clear distinctions, and establish red lines where they co-exist.

- Commit to international law and principles that protect and preserve humanitarian assistance and access;
- Ensure context-based analysis and clarification of roles and responsibility in the triple nexus, maintain clear distinction between humanitarian, political and military actions on the ground;
- Enable humanitarian actors, where required, to negotiate access with all parties to the conflict;
- Support civil-military coordination at national and regional levels;
- Ground peacebuilding in community-based conflict mitigation and social cohesion, integrate social cohesion perspectives into humanitarian and development response.

The full reports on the thematic panels at the SOM and the outcome of the country and regional consultations can be found here: https://www.unocha.org/centralsahel2020
Over the past two years, Burkina Faso has witnessed the unfolding of an unprecedented humanitarian emergency. Conflict and insecurity have provoked what is now the fastest growing displacement crisis in the world, forcing more than one million people to flee their homes. Overlaying parts of the country already fragilized by climate variability and a sense of exclusion and now compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis has caused the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance to more than double, to 2.9 million.

The country is facing large-scale protection challenges arising from spiraling insecurity and the erosion of people’s access to livelihoods and basic social services in its northern and eastern regions, along the borders with Mali and Niger. Exacerbating the impact of attacks on the state and civilian populations by armed groups and of military counter-operations, intercommunal tension and stigmatization are increasing. Trust in the State has been eroded by protection and human rights violations committed by armed forces. At least 940,000 people are in need of protection assistance.

Many of the displaced have had to flee several times. Despite the generosity of host communities, more than 75 per cent remain without adequate shelter. Where livelihoods have been upset by insecurity and displacement as well as climate-related effects, food insecurity has increased dramatically. Nationwide, 3.3 million people are facing critical food shortages – twice as many as at the same time last year. In 2020, nearly 285,000 under five children suffering from acute malnutrition, of which 85,000 of its most severe form, were in need of assistance in zones most affected by conflict and insecurity. Rapid nutrition assessments conducted in IDP-hosting areas show rates of severe acute malnutrition well above emergency thresholds. At the same time, access to basic services amongst affected communities has continued to worsen. As of September 2020, 99 health centres were closed and 199 functioning at minimum capacity, jeopardizing the access of nearly 1.2 million people to basic health care. More than 2,200 schools were unable to reopen with the resumption of schooling from 1 October 2020, depriving nearly 350,000 students of access to education.

In the first half of 2020, humanitarian assistance reached 1.8 million people through the provision of food aid, therapeutic nutrition, emergency shelter and access to health care, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and protection.

Flooding induced by heavy rainfall and violent winds – seasonal risks to which displaced people are particularly vulnerable – affected more than 106,000 people between April and September. The period in the lead up to the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for late November 2020 could see growing security risks, increasing challenges in terms of humanitarian access.

Since 9 March 2020, Burkina Faso has confirmed more than 2,200 cases of Covid-19. Strict quarantine measures announced in March were mostly lifted by August. Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso remain the epicentre of the epidemic, but cases have been confirmed in all 13 regions. Widespread transmission in communities affected by the crisis, particularly among the displaced population, could be catastrophic. Protection concerns, particularly cases of gender-based violence, are on the rise.

Further strengthening of humanitarian response capacity is required to cope with a volatile and worsening situation and rapidly increasing needs. Humanitarian and development partners must continue to collaborate to coordinate and ensure complementarity in their support for fragile and vulnerable communities, and increasingly engage in ways that foster social cohesion and resilience. Such collaboration in areas as diverse as access to water, provision of healthcare and nutrition services, livelihoods support and site management in urban settings is already returning results and must be expanded to reduce needs even as life-saving services and protection are provided.
The crisis in Mali continues to worsen. Violence and insecurity have spread from the north to the central regions and across the border into Niger and Burkina Faso. While instability in the north is mainly driven by an armed insurgency, the central regions are experiencing a rise in social unrest, banditry, and intercommunal violence. Communities face increasing attacks and insecurity is disrupting basic social services - including schools and health centers - many of which are forced to shut down. Intercommunity conflict, armed attacks and other forms of violence could further escalate, causing more displacement. Among the estimated 12.9 million people affected by the crisis in Mali, 6.8 million people need humanitarian assistance in 2020.

Growing instability has led to a new surge in internal displacement. In all, close to 290,000 people are displaced within the country, four times more than in early 2019.

The absence or poor availability of social services, particularly in conflict-affected areas, deepens vulnerability and creates protection risks. Displaced communities are at particular risk of sexual or gender-based violence and family separation. Some 1.4 million people do not have sufficient access to water, hygiene and sanitation services. Tensions around water sources are frequent. In addition, Mali remains highly vulnerable to climate shocks such as droughts and floods, weighing on people’s access to basic social services.

Food insecurity is rising, and 1.3 million food insecure people need emergency assistance. Conflict accentuates food shortages, as families are uprooted from their homes and livelihoods upended. Heavy rains in August also caused significant damages to crops, equipment, housing, grain stores and livestock. Food insecurity could jeopardize the gains that Mali obtained in the nutrition realm with a decrease in the national prevalence of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM).

Around 188,000 Malian children are expected to be affected by SAM in 2020 while an estimated 1.2 million people are exposed to the risk of water-borne epidemic diseases. In some areas, risk of floods or drought could exacerbate the situation since climate shocks have deteriorated access to clean water in Mali.

The issue of access has been complicating the work of humanitarian actors in Mali due to the deterioration of security conditions. Women, children and individuals with specific needs, such as people living with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the crisis. Men and boys, who make up the majority of civilian casualties, will continue to be at risk of being targeted in violent attacks. Armed conflict is disrupting access to basic social services and exacerbating gender-based violence.

As of October, Mali had recorded more than 3,200 cases of COVID-19 and 131 deaths. Schools opened doors in mid-September but remain quasi non-functional due to unresolved grievances and insecurity in the north/centre. Universities remain closed, larger gatherings banned, and a nightly curfew in place. The weakened health system will not be able to cope with an increase of cases. In conflict-affected areas, 23 per cent of facilities are not functioning, the remaining are without required equipment and treatment capacity. As COVID-19 spreads, resources are being diverted from basic healthcare and other health emergencies. Vaccinations and primary healthcare, including related to malnutrition, are likely to be severely impacted. Risk of widespread contamination is high in crowded places where vulnerable people gather, such as IDP sites. The situation may increase inter-community clashes over access to services, food or medical supplies.
Niger remains extremely vulnerable to a multitude of shocks and natural disasters. Climate change, chronic food insecurity and malnutrition and demographic pressure compound entrenched poverty, resulting in recurring humanitarian crises. Armed violence by non-state armed groups in neighbouring countries is spilling over, and insecurity and attacks are severely disrupting essential social services and jeopardizing national development efforts.

In 2020, the humanitarian situation in the western Tahoua and Tillaberi regions took a significant turn for the worse, and the situation in eastern Diffa remained highly insecure and volatile. Attacks and threats by non-state armed groups, banditry, inter-ethnic violence and subsequent military operations by Government forces led to significant displacement.

As of October 2020, almost 500,000 people had been forced to flee their homes and are living in vulnerable conditions across the country. This includes some 103,000 IDPs in Diffa, 168,000 Nigerian refugees in Diffa and Maradi, and 140,000 IDPs and 60,000 Malian refugees in Tillaberi and Tahoua. As a result of the state of emergency declared in these three regions and military operations against armed groups, humanitarian access is limited in some locations and people’s access to markets, education, essential services and livelihoods has been disrupted.

In 2020, more than 2.4 million children still suffer from acute malnutrition, including 533,000 from its most severe form. Taking into account the impact of Covid-19, 2.7 million people are struggling with food insecurity. Structural vulnerabilities in Niger are unlikely to improve significantly. People will remain vulnerable to climate shocks such as droughts and floods, as well as malnutrition, food insecurity and disease outbreaks. Resilience programming, including further investment in prevention and capacity-building, is critical to reduce the vulnerability of people and communities and better respond to the root causes of these crises. Armed conflicts in Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria continue to result in instability and forced displacements in border areas. As a consequence of insecurity, humanitarian organizations in Niger have faced increased access constraints, affecting their ability to respond to affected people’s needs, in particular in Tahoua Tillaberi and Diffa.

Despite challenging conditions, as of May humanitarian organizations had delivered cash assistance (food and non-food) to 1.9 M people. As of July, they had delivered safe drinking water to more than 167,000 people, and provided access to protection services to 85,000 people in affected areas.

Niger has registered more than 1,200 Covid-19 cases and 69 deaths. The government has declared a health emergency and developed an emergency response plan. Of the five regions affected, Niamey is at the epicentre with 94 per cent of all cases. The pandemic hits an already fragile health system. In Tillaberi, Tahoua, Diffa and Maradi, access to healthcare, already difficult due to the state of emergency and insecurity, is even more constrained, particularly for IDPs. Confined and overcrowded living conditions are putting the displaced at additional risk. Worsening food insecurity, pressure on coping mechanisms and the deterioration of preventive services threaten to increase malnutrition.

By August 2020, Niger had registered around 550,000 people affected by floods, 69 deaths, thousands of houses and schools collapsed, and several thousand hectares of cropland and livestock destroyed. In Niamey, the Niger River overflowed its banks when its levels reached 6.69 meters, surpassing the previous record high of 6.4 meters, and the resulting floods shut down the capital.
needs, financial requirement and funding data for 2020 and before are based on the Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) and the Financial Tracking System (FTS), as of 8 October 2020. The 2020 requirement also includes the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP). 2021 preliminary projections of people in need and financial requirement are informed by the 2020 HRP revision and ongoing planning for 2021. Final figures will be confirmed at national level and included in the 2021 country HRPs. In 2021, Covid-19 related requirement will be integrated in the HRPs.

Needs and requirement at a glance

This overview was produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in collaboration with humanitarian partners to inform the Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) on 20 October 2020, co-hosted by the Governments of Denmark and Germany, the European Union and the United Nations.

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Past, current and projected requirement

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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