

Central Sahel

Advocacy Brief



January 2020

Children under attack

The surge in armed violence across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is having a devastating impact on children's survival, education, protection and development. The Sahel, a region of immense potential, has long been one of the most vulnerable regions in Africa, home to some countries with the lowest development indicators globally.



The sharp increase in armed attacks on communities, schools, health centers and other public institutions and infrastructures is at unprecedented levels. Violence is disrupting livelihoods and access to social services including education and health care. Insecurity is worsening chronic vulnerabilities including high levels of malnutrition, poor access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

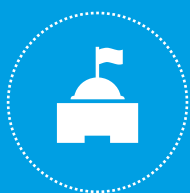
As of November 2019, 1.2 million people are displaced, of whom more than half are children.¹ This represents a two-fold increase in people displaced by insecurity and armed conflict in the Central Sahel countries in the past 12 months, and a five-fold increase in Burkina Faso alone.*

Reaching those in need is increasingly challenging. During the past year, the rise in insecurity, violence and military operations has hindered access by humanitarian actors to conflict-affected populations.



The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) continues to spur inter-agency cooperation. UNISS serves as the regional platform to galvanize multi-country and cross-border efforts to link development, humanitarian and peace programming (triple nexus). Partners are invited to engage with the UNISS platform to scale-up action for resilience, governance and security.

A humanitarian emergency is unfolding, with the risk of spillover to the neighbouring coastal countries.



UNICEF calls on government and their partners to invest and strengthen emergency preparedness systems of national institutions to be ready to scale-up essential services in the event of insecurity or in case of an influx of displaced people.

¹ UNHCR operational data portal 30 November (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger), OCHA Burkina Faso, Humanitarian Snapshot 9 December 2019; CMP Mali 21 November 2019 Report, DREC Niger statistics of September 2019

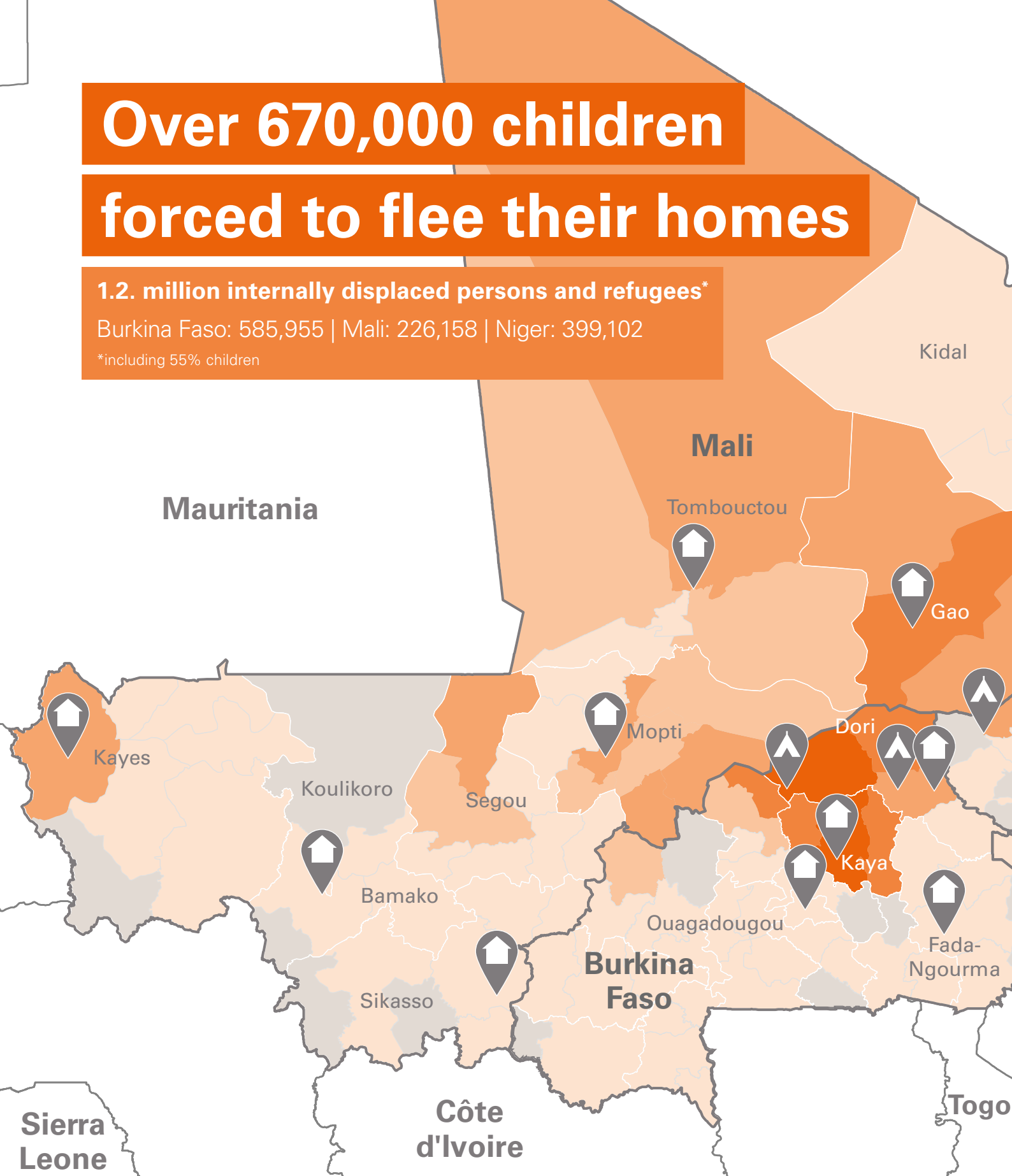
* January 2019 to End-November 2019 data comparison

Over 670,000 children forced to flee their homes

1.2. million internally displaced persons and refugees*

Burkina Faso: 585,955 | Mali: 226,158 | Niger: 399,102

*including 55% children



#People displaced

(IDPs + Refugees in thousands)



UNICEF offices



Refugee camps

≤5

5-10

10-20

20-50

> 50

Source: OCHA, UNHCR, IOM, governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNICEF.

4.9 million children in need of humanitarian assistance²

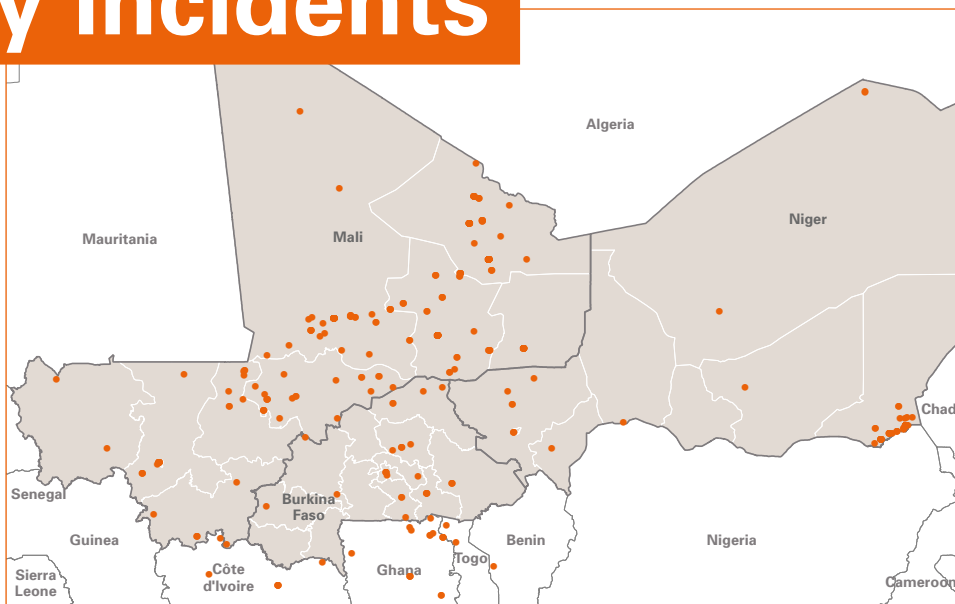


Delivering humanitarian assistance, including in hard-to-reach areas and to communities that host displaced populations, is a priority. Coordination by all actors is needed to assess, open and maintain access to affected populations.

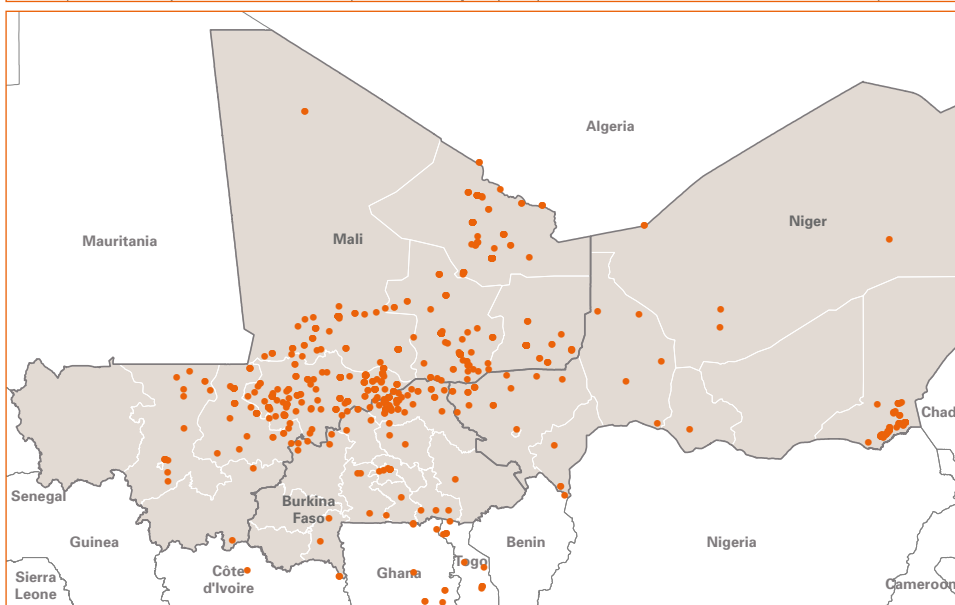
² Amend footnote: Draft 2020 Humanitarian Response Plans/ UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), as of December 2019.

Security incidents

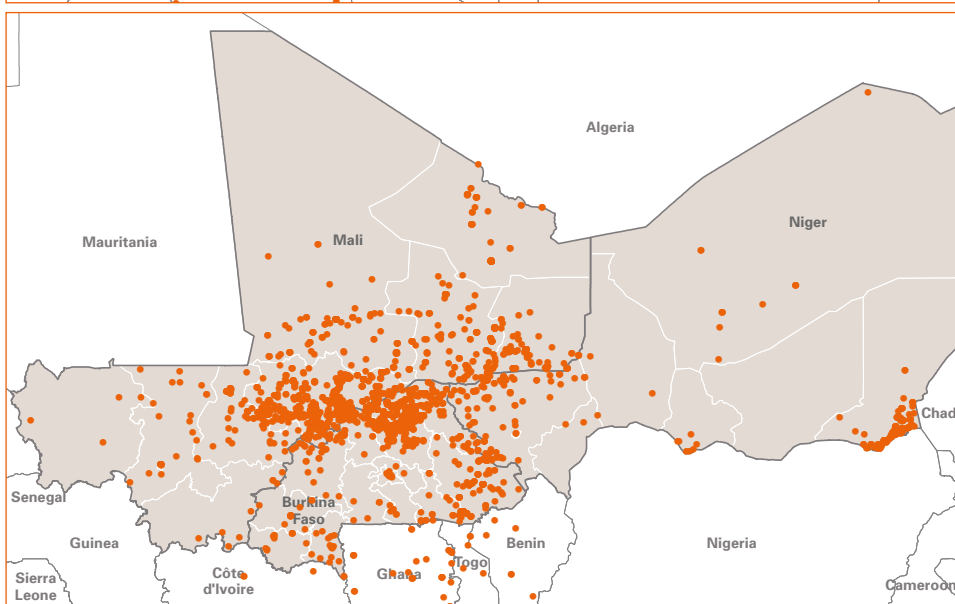
2014-15



2016-17



2018-19



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) 2 year window data; data filtered for security incidents include 'Battles' or 'Explosions/Remote violence' or 'Violence against civilians' according to ACLED definition. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNICEF.

Over the past 2 years armed groups have intensified attacks in parts of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Insecurity is spreading at a rapid pace. Women and children are bearing the brunt of the violence. Renewed, increased and concerted efforts are needed to curb the ongoing violence in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and stop it from spreading further into neighbouring countries.



In this dangerous and volatile security context, UNICEF calls on all military forces and non-state armed groups to respect humanitarian spaces allowing safe and sustainable access to deliver humanitarian assistance to affected populations, including women and children, wherever they are.

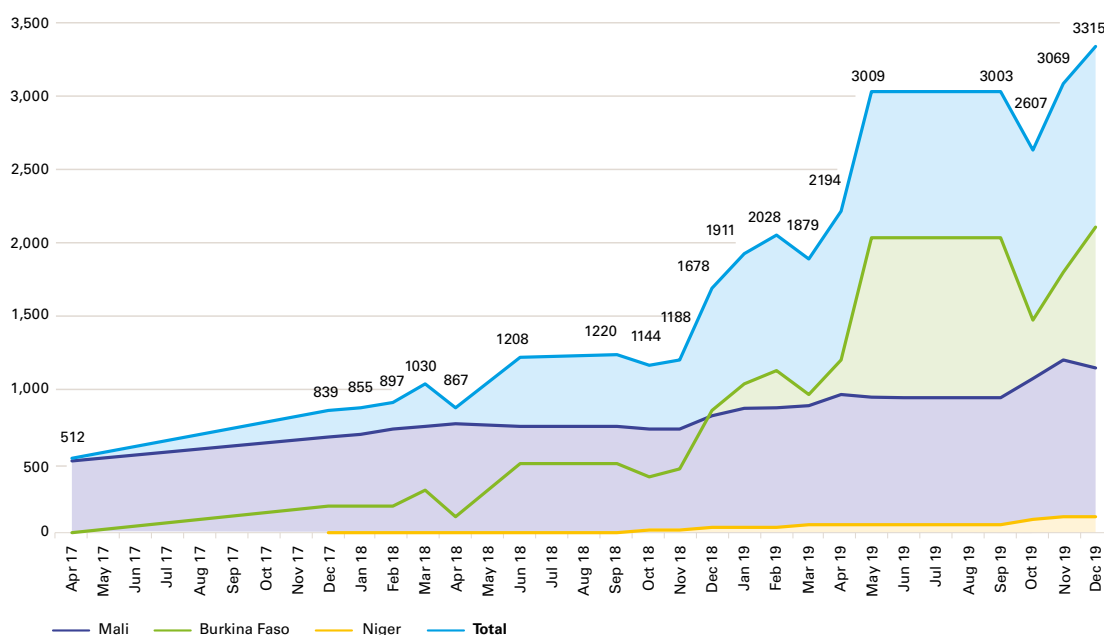
Attacks and threats on schools, students and teachers

Education is a major challenge across the affected countries. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger over 8 million children, 6-14 years old, are out of school, which represents almost 55 per cent of children in this age group.³ Across the Central Sahel, attacks and threats on schools and against teachers and students are becoming more and more common, which further worsens the situation of children.

Between April 2017 and December 2019, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger witnessed a six-fold increase in school closures due to violence.⁴ More than 3,300 schools are closed as of December 2019 affecting almost 650,000 children and more than 16,000 teachers.⁵ The situation continues to worsen with increased violence around schools in the three countries.

More than 20 direct attacks against schools and education personnel have been reported during the summer school break in Burkina Faso and around the beginning of the academic year in Niger and Mali, from July to October 2019.⁶ Threats against schools, students and teachers have become a regular occurrence.

Schools closed between April 2017 and December 2019



³ Burkina Faso DHS 2010, Niger DHS 2012, Mali MICS 2015

⁴ Across the three countries, the number of schools closed or non-operational increased from 512 in April 2017 to 3,315 schools in December 2019

⁵ Ministry of Education and Education Cluster, December 2019: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger

⁶ Cluster / Education in Emergency Working Groups and Ministry of Education, MRM task force in Mali

dimanche 03 décembre 2011

Singulier: mon, ton,
notre, votre

Féminin Singulier: ma, ta, sa

masculin pluriel: nos, vos, leurs

Récitation: Travail
donc

Travaille donc, petit
écolier!

Le pays a besoin de
tes bras,

et aussi de ton cerveau.

Travaille bien petit
écolier!

Demain un soleil
radieux

Brillera pour les
fils courageux.

Tall Rosalie
et son frère





Hussaini's story

Despite violence that destroyed his school and forced him to flee his home, Hussaini, 14, has been able to continue his studies through Radio Education in Northern Burkina Faso. The programme broadcasts lessons and works with trained facilitators, who provide students with guidance and support.

[names changed]

"I was in class in my village. We heard screaming. Then people started firing guns. There was shooting everywhere. They shot at our teachers and killed one of them. They burnt down the classrooms. I was scared. I felt weak and lost. Then we just ran. I ran all the way home. My father said we have to leave, and so we did, all of us, my parents, grandparents, my sisters and brothers. We all escaped together to Gorom-Gorom. It took us four days walking day and night. We asked for water in villages along the way. I was frightened, very frightened. I used to love school, to read, to count, and to play during recess. It's been a year since I last went to school. One day when I was playing ball with

my friends, some people approached us and said they were going to give us a radio to learn. It's good. All the family listens to the [radio] lessons now. There are lessons in Fulfulde, Songhai and Tamashek. [The radio school focal point] 'Abdoulaye' helps us. He is like an older brother. The lessons teach us to read, write and do maths. I hope for peace, so that all children can go back to school again. Going to school is good, because then you can become an adult and help others. I want to be a doctor and cure other people, poor people. As a doctor I could help many. I miss my village, my school. We had good teachers. I don't know where they are today."

**"They shot at our teachers
and killed one of them.**

**They burnt down the
classrooms. I was scared."**



Key asks: Education



UNICEF calls on governments, armed forces, non-state armed groups and other parties to the conflict and the international community to take concerted action to stop attacks and threats against schools, students, teachers and other school personnel – and to support quality learning for every child.



UNICEF calls on governments, communities and the private sector working together to increase efforts to provide education, protection and psychosocial support to children. All school-aged children, including refugees, migrants and displaced girls and boys must be able to continue learning through access to quality and safe education.



UNICEF calls on all parties to conflicts to protect education and uphold the principles of the Safe Schools Declaration⁷, which calls for stopping attacks on schools, education facilities and personnel. UNICEF calls for governments to endorse, implement and abide by the principles of the Declaration; work to create protective learning environments; and follow guidelines for protecting schools from use by military or non-state armed groups during conflicts.



UNICEF calls on governments and partners to diversify available options for quality education and formalize culturally suitable alternative learning pathways towards recognized qualifications. These alternatives can and should include innovative, inclusive and flexible approaches, responsive to learners' diverse needs.

⁷ The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict. <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/>

Child protection

This complex emergency is a crisis of children's care and protection. Children and their families fleeing conflict are at greater risk of violence, exploitation and recruitment by non-state armed groups.

In the first three quarters of 2019, 571 grave violations against children were recorded in Mali, compared to 544 in 2018 and 386 in 2017. As of the end of September 2019, 277 children were reported killed and maimed, more than twice the total number of children in 2018.⁸ Similarly, in Niger and Burkina Faso children have been victims of abduction, killing, recruitment and use by armed groups.

The insecurity adds to the already significant chronic challenges children face in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Rates of child marriage, economic exploitation or unsafe migration can increase during high levels of insecurity as protection or livelihoods survival strategies. This comes in addition to a significant increase of violence against children who are caught in the cross fire, hundreds of them having been forcibly separated from their families, killed or maimed.

For families who have remained in conflict-affected areas, the situation of children is quickly deteriorating. Thousands of schools and other social services structures are either non-functioning or have been closed, leaving tens of thousands of children with little support and increasing their risk to be recruited by armed groups.

For children who have been forcibly displaced, there is an increasing risk of separation from their caregivers, and of sexual and physical violence, exacerbating existing inequalities and violence.

In already fragile host communities, the burden of forced displacement rapidly becomes more and more unsustainable. Adolescent girls are exposed to sexual abuse, child marriage or child pregnancy in addition to pre-existing gender inequalities – nearly 60% of all girls are married before the age of 18, with the highest prevalence in the world in Niger at 76 per cent and over 18% per cent of all girls are married before the age of 15.⁹ Boys and girls may also suffer additional violence while already 8 in 10 children across the three countries have experienced violence.

Across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, over 1 million children under 1 have not had their births registered.¹⁰ Without a legal identity, children are at greater risk for recruitment into armed groups and may not have access to education, health, and other basic social services.

⁸ UN verified information

⁹ UNICEF Global Databases, MICS/DHS (2010-2018)

¹⁰ UNICEF Global Databases, MICS/DHS (2010-2018)



Ismail's story

Ismail followed his flock into Mali and got caught in a crisis

"We're nomads," says Ismail*. "We move with our animals. We follow the grazing, we follow the water." Ismail is from Niger and his ancestors have been tending their flocks in the Sahel for generations.

Ismail and his brother wandered with their animals across the wide-open land. They crossed the border into Mali, as they've done many times before, but this time, things got dangerous very quickly. "We heard a helicopter overhead, and we got scared," he recalls. "Then suddenly they opened fire on us."

Security forces mistook Ismail and his teenage brother for members of an armed group and they were hit with gunfire, injuring them both. "I blacked out," says Ismail. "I don't remember what happened. All I remember was them firing on us and our animals."

His brother was seriously injured, but Ismail was even worse hit. Their livestock, their most valuable family possession, was lost in the attack. They were both taken to a hospital and doctors amputated Ismail's leg. Ismail wells up

with tears when he recalls how frightening it was when they told him they were going to remove his leg, but he accepted it as the doctor said it was the only option.

When he was released from the hospital, he found that his ordeal was far from over. He went to detention for questioning about his activities. For Ismail, who had set out from home to look after his animals, the journey was becoming more and more terrifying.

With help from UNICEF, Ismail was released from detention and he is now in a UNICEF-supported center for boys who have been separated from their families. He is getting counselling and he's in a safe place with his brother.

Ismail's story is one of many. We have seen a big spike in violence in 2019 and it is very alarming. The data depicts a disturbing picture of more children being injured in attacks and the consequences are devastating for them and their families.

*Name changed

**"We heard a helicopter
overhead, and we got scared.
Then suddenly they opened
fire on us."**



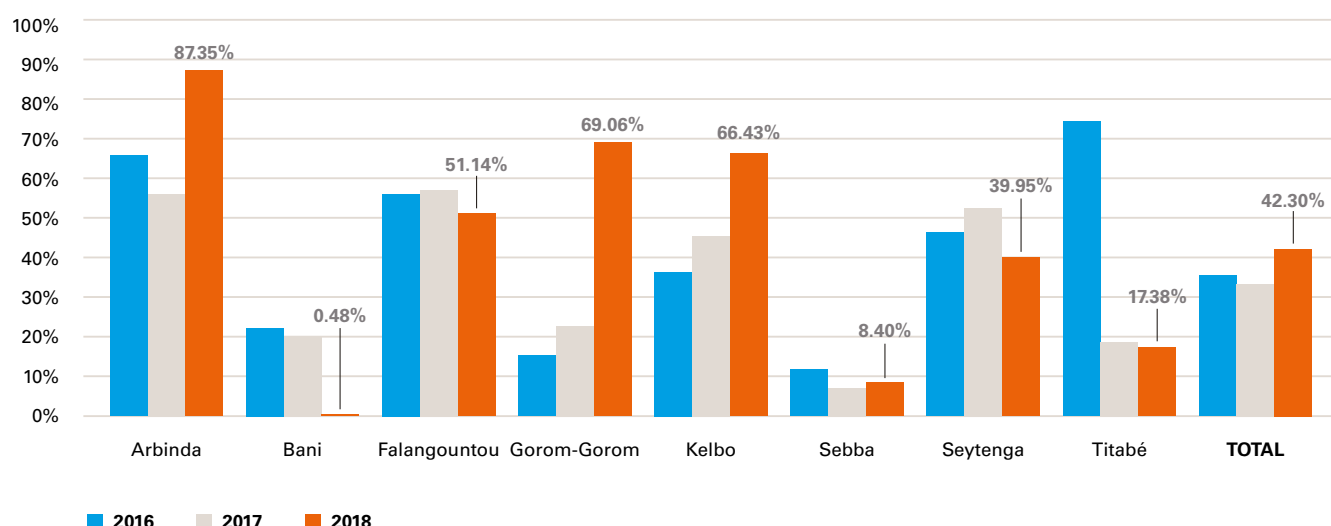
UNICEF calls on all states to protect children in the Sahel, abide by their obligations under international law and to immediately end violations against children. UNICEF also calls on states with influence over parties to conflict to use that influence to protect children.

Burkina Faso:

Birth registration

Together with the EU, UNICEF works towards universal registration of births in Burkina Faso but the security context has had a significant impact on already relatively low registration rates, particularly in the northern Sahel region. Despite the worsening security situation in the Sahel, birth registration rates have increased in Arbinda from 66 to 87 per cent thanks to the innovative approach of providing birth registration services through health platforms. Nevertheless, insecurity and attacks against civil registration centers jeopardize gains which have been made.

Birth registration rate of children aged 0-11 months per targeted commune based on births in health centres



Children on the Move

Through a regional project for the protection of children on the move, funded by the United Kingdom government Department for International Development (DFID), UNICEF works with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other partners to provide a continuum of care and protection in countries of origin and during transit, through one-stop social welfare shops, mobile teams, decentralized child protection services, and community networks for identification and referral.

Key asks: Child protection



UNICEF calls for all survivors of sexual abuse and gender-based violence to be assisted with services that are timely and sensitive to their needs. This includes age- and sex-appropriate medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance as well as opportunities for livelihoods, life skills and education.



Children associated with armed forces and non-state armed groups are first and foremost victims of recruitment, a violation of their rights. Children who have been arrested because of their association with an armed group must be transferred to the care of relevant civilian authorities as quickly as possible to facilitate their return to their families and communities. UNICEF calls on governments and security forces to respect children's rights, avoid detention or use it as a measure of last resort and only within the framework of internationally accepted standards for child justice.



With insecurity and forced displacement on the rise, children are at risk of being separated from their families. UNICEF calls on governments and their partners to ensure that families are kept together, and children are rapidly reunified with their parents or provided with safe alternative family-base care based on their best interests. When children are separated or unaccompanied, decisions affecting their return, reintegration in their communities, and family reunification must be based on durable care arrangements in the best interests of the child.



Women and children without legal documents are at greater risk of rights violations and their access to social services is further limited; civil registration is the first step to recognizing the legal existence of children and protect their rights. It is essential to strengthen civil registration systems and provide birth certificates so that children have an identity and can access services.

The disruption of social services

Access to basic services, including health care, nutrition, education safe drinking water and other social services has been seriously compromised, impacting all aspects of children's lives – their safety, health and wellbeing. Displaced children and their families are being hosted in communities that even before the crisis had limited access to social services, putting a further strain on these communities.

Many children miss out on routine immunization because of armed violence and insecurity, which damage and weaken health systems, disrupt the delivery of routine health care and divert scarce human and financial resources from health to security priorities.

When displaced women and children, and host communities do not have access to basic health services, or clean water and sanitation, it increases their risk of infectious diseases including acute respiratory infections, diarrhea, malaria and measles – all leading causes of child mortality.

It is estimated that over 709,000 children under 5 years old will suffer from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in 2020.¹¹ In Burkina Faso, results from the recent nutrition rapid SMART survey that took place in October 2019 in the crisis affected areas indicate that the situation is deteriorating fast.¹² SAM prevalence has reached unprecedented levels of 4-6 per cent in some areas, which, is above the 2 per cent emergency threshold. Although global and severe acute malnutrition prevalence¹³ remain stable at national level in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, when compared to previous years, the situation remains of serious concern especially in a context of conflict and household food insecurity.

Burkina Faso Health

As of December 2019



96

health structures are closed, a 5-fold increase since May 2019, and 113 are working with minimum operations¹⁴



1.2 million

people affected by health structure closure, 7 times more than in May 2019



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¹¹ Estimation from 2020 HRP (Niger and Mali) and UNICEF HAC (Burkina Faso); figures could change during the year according to any observed deterioration of the situation

¹² Burkina Faso municipalities of Arbinda, Barsalogho, Kaya, Djibo, Titao, Matiacoali (Est, Centre-Nord, Nord and Sahel regions)

¹³ Niger and Mali preliminary results of 2019 National Nutrition Surveys (SMART method)

¹⁴ Source: Health Cluster Bulletin n.3, December 2019

Despite high food production, insecurity has had a critical impact on household food security. Based on the latest food security projections¹⁵ more than 4.8 million people could be food insecure (Phase 3 -Phase 5) during the 2020 lean season (June-August), representing a 50 per cent increase compared to 2019 predictions.¹⁶ Food insecurity, compounded by limited access to health services and safe drinking water, as well as poor knowledge on optimal child feeding practices will have a serious impact on the nutritional status of young children, and on the capacities of communities to bounce back later, if nothing is done now to protect the nutritional status of young children and prevent life-threatening acute malnutrition. With support from DFID, ECHO and USAID (FFP and OFDA), UNICEF works alongside FAO and WFP on joint vulnerability analysis and integrated programming to prevent further deterioration in the food security and nutritional status of populations and respond to their most acute needs.

Displacement and increased insecurity have disrupted access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and slowed down investment in already limited water supply infrastructures. In Burkina Faso, 1.9 million people are in need of humanitarian WASH assistance, including 400.000 IDPs.¹⁷ The sharp increase in displaced populations during 2019 and insecurity have placed water infrastructures in host communities under pressure. Access to safe water is estimated to have reduced by 11 percent from 2018 to 2019, across areas where IDPs represent more than one fifth of the

population, with some areas witnessing an over 40 per cent decrease.¹⁸

Without safe water, sanitation and hygiene, children's health and nutrition are compromised. They are exposed to preventable diseases including diarrhea, typhoid, cholera and polio; they are at risk of malnutrition.



© UNICEF/Vincent Tremeau

Building resilience in the Sahel

With funding from the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and alongside WFP, UNICEF is working with communities in the Central Sahel to become more resilient to shocks including drought, floods, conflict and epidemics. Through this project, UNICEF works with host country governments to provide water, sanitation and hygiene services, improve access to protective learning environments, prevent and treat malnutrition and strengthen social protection services in underserved, insecure and vulnerable areas.

¹⁵ Cadre Harmonisé (Regional comprehensive analytical framework for Identification of Risk Areas and Vulnerable Populations in West Africa and the Sahel), November 2019

¹⁶ Cadre Harmonisé exercise, March 2019

¹⁷ Humanitarian Need Overview 2019

¹⁸ Burkina Faso WASH sector group, October 2019



Aissata's story

Aissata's son, Ayoub, has just been vaccinated by Mamadou Kassé, who traveled 9km by donkey cart to reach the families in the remote village of Kombaka. Mamadou Kassé, 29, is a community health worker in Mali's increasingly volatile central region of Mopti, where fear, insecurity and a partial ban on traveling by motorcycle between towns have all significantly limited women and children's access to health centers.

Mopti is among the regions of Mali with the lowest levels of vaccination of children – only 37 per cent of children here are fully vaccinated. The spike in insecurity in the past year has hampered vaccination of children even more severely: in 2017, UNICEF and partners recorded 16,500 children who did not receive their dose of the Penta3 vaccine, whereas in 2018, this number more than quadrupled – to over 70,000 children not vaccinated with Penta3.

Even before the spread of insecurity, accessing healthcare was already a challenge for

populations in Mopti: one in four households is more than 15km away from the nearest health center, and there is only one qualified doctor per every 18,000 people in Mopti – far below the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended standards.

Faced with these challenges, UNICEF and partners such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, are bringing healthcare including vaccines as close to children's homes as possible – leveraging both innovative and traditional means to bringing critical health services to children most in need.

Even before the spread of
insecurity, accessing healthcare
was already a challenge for
populations in Mopti.



Key asks: Social services



UNICEF urges all parties to protect medical and education facilities and personnel, and to facilitate access to social services and humanitarian assistance, in line with their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law.



UNICEF calls on governments to increase or at least maintain national commitments to budgets for social service budgets. As the conflict worsens, attention has been oriented to the security dimensions. Cutbacks on investment for social services have a direct impact on access to basic services including education, health, nutrition and water and sanitation. The increase in security allocation will will constrain governments' abilities to include and maintain the cost of treatment for severe acute malnutrition, vaccines and essential services into national health budgets.



While responding to urgent needs, we call on governments and their partners to invest in durable solutions for the prevention and care of malnutrition including promoting the availability, access and use of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable foods. Optimal infant and young child feeding practices including exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life and good dietary practices for children, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women must be prioritized. Working with communities to detect growth faltering and early signs of malnutrition is critical.





Floods increase the risk of cholera outbreaks in Niger

In 2018, Niger was hit by a large-scale cholera outbreak in four regions (Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder).

When a cholera epidemic breaks out in a community, it impacts access to basic services such as education, with a decrease in school attendance, and creates fear among the population.

Official reports show that females and children under 15 were most affected by the epidemic in Niger, accounting respectively for 56 percent and 44 percent of cases.

“One morning when I woke up, I started feeling bad. I had a fever, diarrhea, and even vomiting. So, I was referred to the closest health center. In the aftermath of the cholera outbreak, we were told that the cause of the disease was the water from the pond that we were drinking” says Zeinabu, a cholera survivor.

As more people were becoming affected, with 3,821 infected individuals and 78 deaths registered in 2018 in the four

regions of Niger, community mobilizers, with the support of traditional leaders, engaged in awareness campaigns in the affected areas. Joint efforts by UNICEF and its partners contributed to stopping the epidemic. No case of cholera has been registered in 2019; children have returned to school as parents no longer fear for the health of their children.

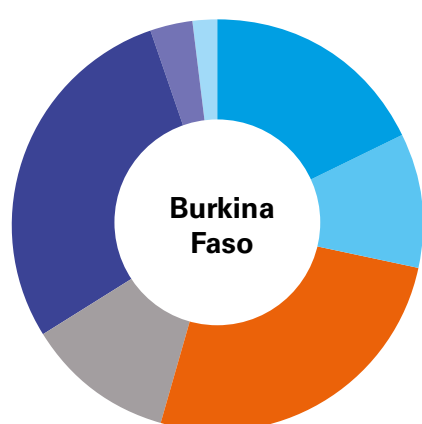
To avoid future outbreaks, UNICEF continues to closely monitor the quality of the water in households and provides water purifiers that neutralize microbes and viruses. With the support of partners, UNICEF works to improve access to drinking water, basic sanitation, handwashing facilities and hygiene in schools, provide information to populations on good hygiene practices, and strengthen the countries capacity in surveillance, preparedness and response to epidemics.

“One morning when I woke up, I started feeling bad. I had a fever, diarrhea and even vomiting.”

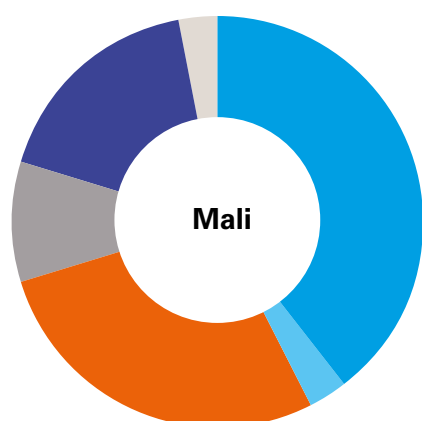
2020 funding needs

Urgent funding is needed to meet the humanitarian needs of children across the affected countries. Funding support will help meet the needs of crisis-affected children and strengthen the linkages between humanitarian and development programmes. This funding will allow UNICEF to provide essential health, WASH, child protection, nutrition and education services to the most vulnerable children and strengthen emergency preparedness. As of end-November 2019, UNICEF humanitarian programmes for children in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger were 59 per cent underfunded.

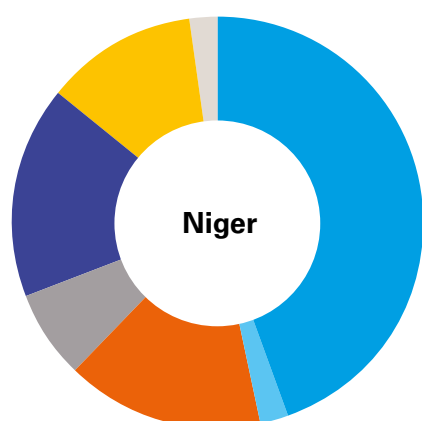
For further information on funding needs please visit <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/>



Sector	2020 requirements (US\$)
● Nutrition	17,315,100
● Health	10,281,116
● Water, sanitation and hygiene	25,263,857
● Child protection	11,228,787
● Education	27,727,668
● Rapid response management and implementation	3,050,000
● Communication for development	1,800,000
Total	96,666,528



Sector	2020 requirements (US\$)
● Nutrition	20,500,000
● Health	1,600,000
● Water, sanitation and hygiene	14,400,000
● Child protection	4,850,000
● Education	9,000,000
● Cluster coordination	1,500,000
Total	51,850,000







Sector	2020 requirements (US\$)
● Nutrition	26,460,000
● Health	1,410,000
● Water, sanitation and hygiene	9,103,000
● Child protection	4,212,000
● Education	9,816,000
● Non-food items/shelter	7,183,000
● Cluster/sector coordination	1,188,000
Total	59,372,000



Published by
United Nations Children's Fund
Regional Office for West and Central Africa
Dakar, Senegal
January 2020

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