

Sahel Crisis: 29 million Sahelians need humanitarian assistance and protection.

Dakar, 27 April - A new record high of 29 million Sahelians in six countries – Burkina Faso, northern Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and north-east Nigeria – are now in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, five million more people than last year. United Nations aid agencies and non-governmental organizations expressed today their concern over this rapid worsening of the crisis.

“As the Sahel crisis protracts in time, an entire generation of children is at risk. With security incidents continuing to spike, the impact on children is devastating. The number of violent attacks increased eight-fold in the Central Sahel and tripled in the Lake Chad basin. Violence and insecurity are severely disrupting basic social services: nearly 5,000 schools are closed or non-operational, jeopardizing the future of hundreds of thousands of children, and 1.6 million children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition. To address the immediate needs of the population while building the foundation for sustainable development, we need a paradigm shift and to act together with the governments and the people of the Sahel,” highlighted Marie-Pierre Poirier, Regional Director of UNICEF.

Growing needs in the Sahel are being exacerbated by ever-shrinking humanitarian space, which is dragging the entire response into a negative spiral. “The rising insecurity and the lack of distinction between military and humanitarian responses represent a real danger to people and operations. Our local acceptance is increasingly challenged and a large number of vulnerable children is at risk of never knowing peace, a full year of school and a day without hunger,” Said Hassane Hamadou, Norwegian Refugee Council Country Director in Mali.

The number of people forcibly displaced has never been higher: from central Sahel to the Lake Chad Basin, 5.3 million people are uprooted and in need of protection. “The conflict in Sahel is growing wider, more complex and involving more armed actors. Civilians end up paying the price as they face an increasing number of deadly attacks, gender based violence, extortion or intimidation, and are forced to flee, often multiple times.

Our response to what is an unprecedented humanitarian and protection crisis, triggering the displacement of millions of persons, must also include the host communities which generously share the little resources they have. We must ensure that these communities continue to coexist peacefully, at a time when the pandemic has had a devastating impact on livelihoods, particularly those living from hand to mouth,” said Xavier Creach, UNHCR Sahel Coordinator and Deputy Director for West and Central Africa

Women and children are among the most vulnerable. “Gender based violence is on the rise. Local communities are expressing their concern about seeing women and girls suffer. They are being abducted, raped, and married by force. This is unacceptable and immediate actions are required. Putting women and girls at the center of the humanitarian response deployed on the ground is essential. The promotion and protection of women's health and rights is vital for their own well-being and so that they can continue to promote and protect the health of others. Yet, the fight against gender based violence is still largely underfunded.” warns Fatoumata Haidara, Regional Director for the Sahel at Plan International.

“We’ve seen hunger jump by almost a third in West Africa – to the highest levels in the best part of a decade - and the areas of most concern are the Central Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin where escalating conflict is driving hunger,” said Chris Nikoi, Regional Director of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in West Africa. “Soaring food prices are also pushing a basic meal beyond the reach of millions of poor families who were already struggling to get by. We need immediate assistance to help those most in need as well as long-term solutions to the root causes of hunger and malnutrition in the Sahel.”

This unparalleled situation requires immediate action, yet among the main challenges to deliver effective aid remains the funding shortfall. “It is urgent to prioritize humanitarian action. Behind the numbers and data, there are stories of human suffering. Without sufficient resources, the crisis will further escalate, eroding communities’ resilience and putting millions more children, women and men at risk. At the end of April, only 9% of the required US\$ 3.7 billion has been received. This is not enough.” reminded Julie Belanger, Regional Director at OCHA.

For further information, please contact:

Naomi Frerotte, OCHA, frerotte@un.org +33 6 20 81 87 15
Diane Yameogo, UNICEF, diyameogo@unicef.org, +221 77 332 43 26
Tom Peyre-Costa, NRC, tom.peyrecoosta@nrc.no, +33 6 58 51 83 91
Romain Desclous, UNHCR, desclous@unhcr.org, +221 786 396 385
Jaire Somo Moutcheu, Plan International, jaire.somo@plan-international.org, +237677660377
Richard Mbouet, WFP, richard.mbouet@wfp.org, +221 77 284 06 00