

UNHCR

SAHEL+ STRATEGY

2024 - 2025



Context

The Central Sahel region is going through a deep transformation calling for a new form of engagement to address the worsening humanitarian crisis characterized by escalating forced displacement and urgent protection needs.

Despite this, **the Sahel remains a region of solidarity.**

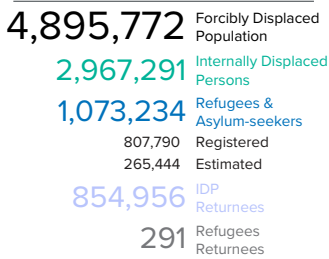
State policies combined with the hospitality of local actors and communities have allowed close to 4,9 million forcibly displaced people to find protection.

In addition to massive internal displacement, over 650,000 refugees from the Central Sahel have already reached neighboring countries which, despite their fragilities and security concerns, are keeping their borders open and allowing access to asylum and overstretched basic services.

UNHCR's effective presence in the Sahel is fundamental to provide protection and assistance to the displaced population and to strengthen the resilience of hosting communities.

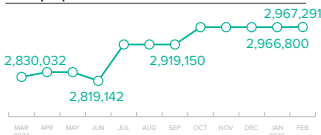
Further, with the Sahel's proximity to North Africa and the Mediterranean, an increasing number of forcibly displaced people are joining mixed movement routes towards Europe. Although the numbers are relatively small as compared to movements within the region, movements beyond the region are expected to increase significantly should there be no investment in the Sahel.

Key figures

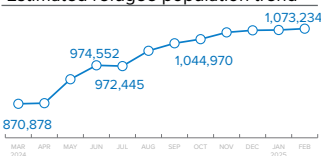


Algeria: No available data
 Refugees and asylum-seekers from various nationalities, including from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.
 Refugees and asylum-seekers include the **estimated** and the **registered** population.
 Refugees returnees are cumulative from January 2025 to date.

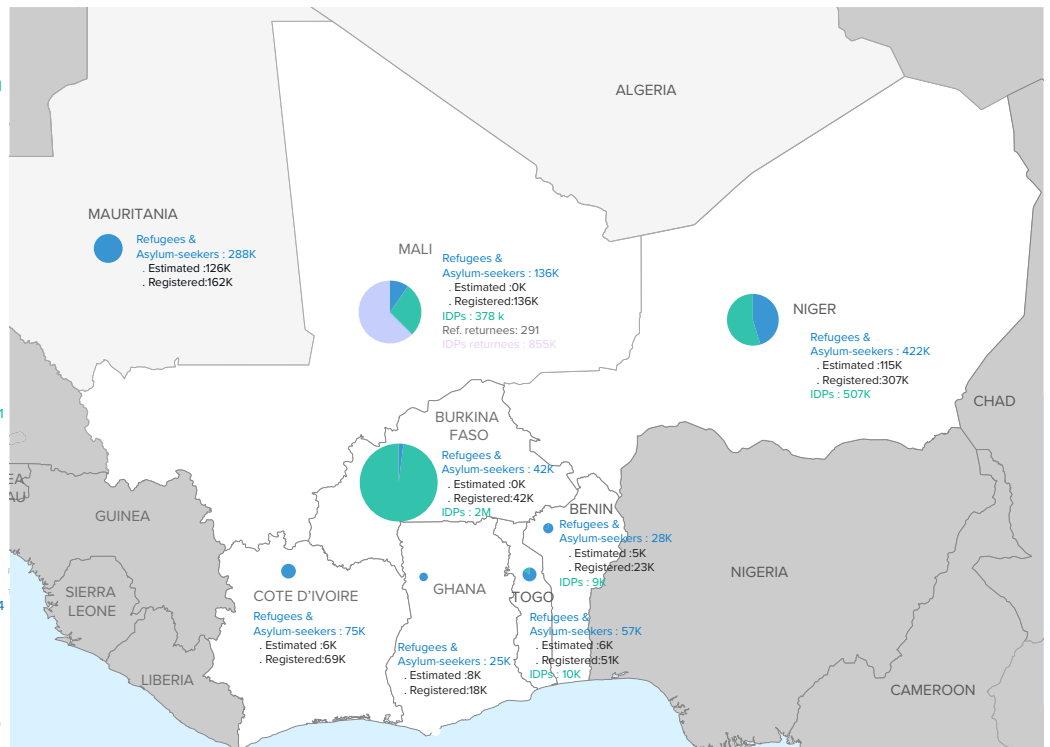
IDP population trend



Estimated refugee population trend



Source: UNHCR, Governments, IOM



The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. For more information, please contact rbwcadima@unhcr.org

UNHCR'S NEW SAHEL + APPROACH

All these factors resulted in a significant transformation of the Sahel, which demands a new strategic approach to address the needs of the forcibly displaced in the region and beyond. UNHCR will from now on prioritize interventions at the community level to reinforce self-reliance, resilience, and peaceful coexistence, aiming at working on solutions from the start.

SIX SIGNIFICANT SHIFTS ARE REQUIRED

1. From a focus on the emergency response towards **self-reliance and resilience from the start**.
2. From the delivery of individual humanitarian assistance towards community interventions benefitting displaced people and host communities to strengthen **social cohesion**.
3. From in kind contributions towards **cash based interventions** to reduce operational costs and support local economies.
4. From partnerships with humanitarian actors to strengthening synergy with development and peace actors **to ensure the sustainability of solutions**, through continued advocacy for inclusion of forcibly displaced people in national development plans, and welfare systems.
5. From international partnerships to **enhancing capacities of local actors** which have better access, understanding and acceptance by communities.
6. From a geographical focus on the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) **to include neighboring countries** (Algeria, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mauritania, and Togo)

As a result, communities in the Sahel will be increasingly resilient and cohesive to absorb shocks and to sustainably host, protect and include displaced persons. The objective is to prevent the conflict from destabilizing new regions, weakening social cohesion and undermining community resilience while increasing the scale and spread of forced displacement. With regard specifically to the displaced population, UNHCR will aim to:

Our keys objectives

1

Provide protection and assistance

2

Reduce risk of multiple displacements

3

Achieve solutions

THEMATIC PRIORITIES



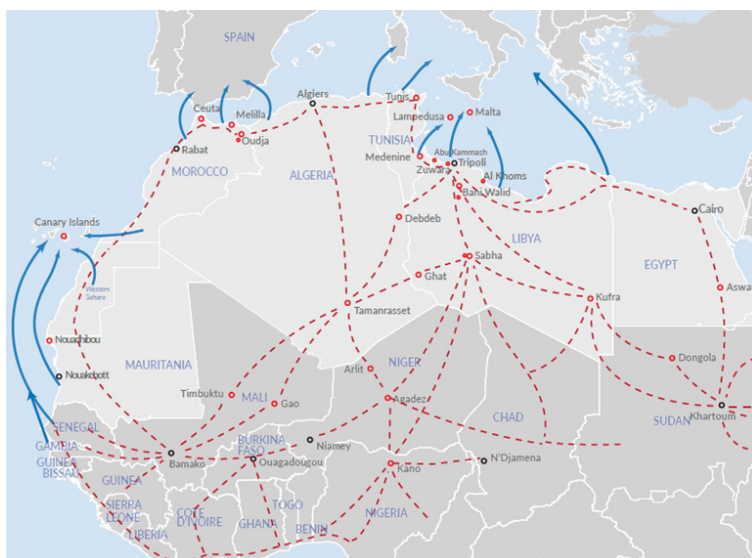
IDP's family: Madam Mairama and her baby.

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ASYLUM AND MIXED MOVEMENTS

Asylum countries are facing the challenge of responding to the arrival of significant numbers of refugees while being confronted with security risks due to the spillover of the armed conflict on their territories.

They are simultaneously areas of origin, transit, and destination of mixed movements. All people on the move face risks of human rights abuses, including death at sea and in the desert, torture, rape, trafficking in person and detention.



Children affected by prolonged school closures and lack of livelihood opportunities are also moving in greater numbers to mining and agricultural sites.

UNHCR WILL WORK TO:

- Support states to guarantee access to territory and to asylum while taking into consideration their national security concerns.
- Implement a route-based approach for a comprehensive response to mixed movement.
- Enhance access to protection and solutions for refugees and other displaced people, including complementary pathways to third countries for refugees, as a meaningful alternative to risky onward movements.

URBANIZATION

Rapid urban growth in the Sahel has led to the proliferation of unplanned settlements with inadequate infrastructure and services such as sanitation, healthcare, and education. This rapid urban expansion puts immense pressure on already scarce natural resources.

The demographic transition, characterized by a young population demanding education and employment, further strains urban systems. Forced displacement intensifies these urban pressures, as displaced populations seek refuge in cities, adding to the urban sprawl and service demands.



Adama Bamogo, an IDP in a UNHCR shelter in Kaya northern, poses on the roof of a Voute nubienne house.

© UNHCR/Anne Milmaut

UNHCR WILL WORK TO:

- Play a catalytic role to ensure inclusion and, as necessary, the provision and expansion of essential services (civil documentation, education, health care, water, and sanitation, etc.) to meet the demands of the increased population.
- Support peaceful coexistence and social cohesion, including through support to land tenure and contribute to reduce tensions over access to natural resources.
- Strengthen access to livelihood and self-reliance.

YOUTH AND GENDER



Left to Right: Socrate, Nouria, Ousmane, Mariam and Salif are IDP and students posing in their classroom.

Displaced youth are exposed to a variety of specific risks, including summary executions, forced recruitment, human trafficking, and smuggling. With schools under attack and the economic collapse, many youths lack meaningful livelihood prospects and opportunities.

Violence against women and girls, including widespread use of rape and other forms of sexual violence, forced and early marriage and unwanted pregnancy, is endemic across the region.

UNHCR WILL WORK TO:

- Enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems and support alternative learning solutions to address the issue of school closures due to attacks.
- Support technical and vocational education and training and promote youth entrepreneurship.
- Promote child protection and prevention of violence against women and girls through community-based action and mobile outreach. Strengthen direct care and support for survivors of gender-based violence.

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CLIMATE ACTION

The Sahel region includes some of the most climate vulnerable countries with the lowest capacity to adapt to extreme weather conditions, since they have the lowest ability to leverage investments. Temperatures in the Sahel region are expected to rise 1.5 times faster than the rest of the world, leading to more severe weather conditions, increased food insecurity, and a decimation of traditional agricultural livelihoods.

Sahelian populations, and more specifically forcibly displaced people are likely to face increased vulnerability as a result of hazardous weather conditions. Moreover, climate change and increasing demand for land, water, and other natural resources contribute to fuel tensions between communities, drive violence and armed conflicts resulting in forced displacement.

UNHCR WILL WORK TO:

- Advocate with host governments, development actors and international financial institutions to include forcibly displaced and stateless persons and their hosts in their plans, policies, and environmental promotion financing.
- Increase the resilience and adaptation capacity of forcibly displaced and stateless people by prioritizing environmental sustainability solutions across site and settlement planning in relation to water, shelters and energy and livelihood (Environmentally-friendly Agriculture).



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Ahmedou Ag Albohary, heads the Mbera Fire Brigade, poses for a photograph at Mbera camp in the Hodh Ech Chargui region of south-eastern Mauritania. Having arrived at the refugee camp from Mali in 2012, he now leads the volunteer brigade of some 200 active refugee members.

Partnerships for protection, inclusion and solutions

UNHCR will strengthen strategic collaborations and partnerships to achieve better protection, inclusion and solutions for forcibly displaced Sahelians, with particular focus on:

Localization: National and local actors in the Sahel, including governments, local civil society and communities are often the first to respond. They share what they have, including what they lack. UNHCR will invest in developing their capacities to ensure the efficiency, adequacy, and sustainability of the response. This would require:

- 1) Increasing engagement with local NGOs and associations, leveraging their understanding of the local context and needs, while also building their capacity to manage future challenges independently;
- 2) Promoting partnerships with refugee/IDP-led organizations;
- 3) Prioritizing local third-party involvement to support the local economy and build local expertise, when involving third parties in the implementation of UNHCR programmes.

Development actors: UNHCR will play a more effective coordinating role with development actors to ensure the long-term improvement of the human rights environment and sustained

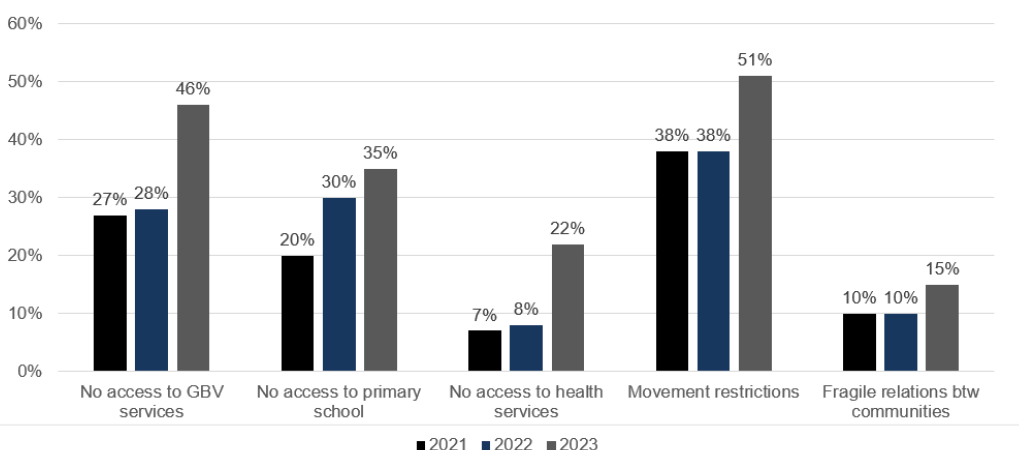
access to services in displacement affected areas. Interventions will address fragility drivers, by creating stabilizing conditions conducive to social cohesion.






They will also play a fundamental role in curbing the spread of the spill-over effect or secondary movements. For instance, the current strategic collaboration with the African Development Bank on resilience, youth employment, and climate change adaptation in the Central Sahel illustrates such opportunities, as well as the coordination with the World Bank around the Prevention and Resilience Allocation and the Window for Host Communities and Refugees in the Gulf of Guinea, or the Coastal States Stability Mechanism (CSSM) supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO).

Protection data for programming: Data and analysis will help to identify areas of need, track progress, and assess the protection dividends of development investments in host areas, supporting more transparent discussions with governments and development agencies, including on the contributions of forcibly displaced people to their host communities.

PROTECTION RISKS IN THE SAHEL

PROJECT 21



RESOURCE REQUIREMENT IN USD (OP)		
	2024	2025
 Burkina Faso	119,623,446	110,404,143
 Mali	74,247,728	86,061,062
 Niger	137,602,052	111,066,672
 Mauritania	45,564,661	45,530,706
 CIV MCO	66,523,922	57,456,316
SAHEL+ (All of the above)	443,561,809	410,518,899



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency