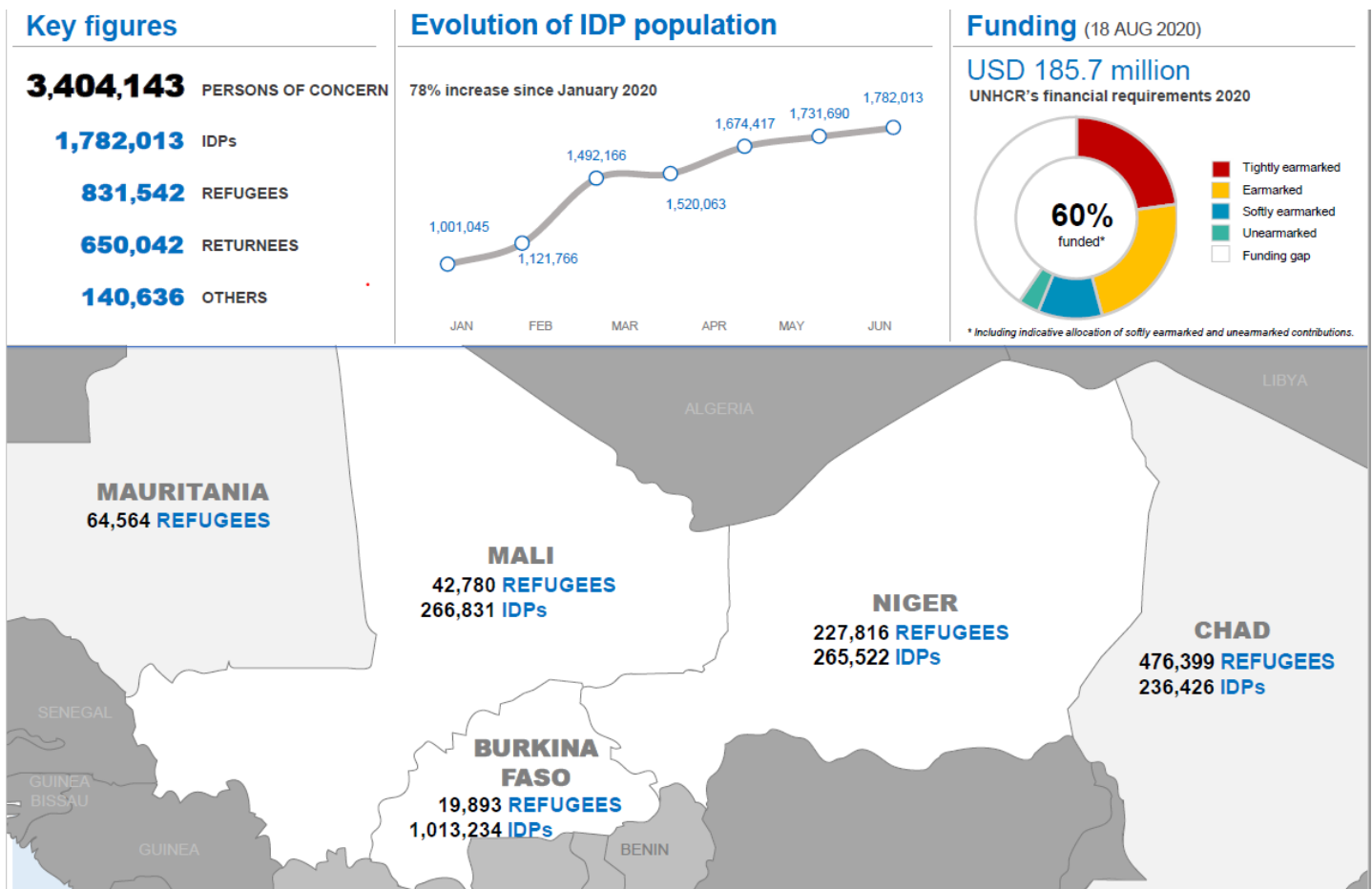


UNHCR Sahel Crisis Response

1-31 August 2020

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 number of **internally displaced persons has reached over 1,000,000** in August 2020, representing over 5 percent of the total national population.

Following the torrential rains and heaving flood which affected over **700,000 people across the Sahel**, UNHCR is scaling up efforts to reinforce existing shelters, build new ones in safer areas, and to relocate affected displaced families and works with the governments in the region to **include refugees, IDPs and their host communities** in their response.



OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Political and security developments

- Widespread and indiscriminate violence by armed groups continues across the **Sahel** forcing more people to flee. In addition to this dire security situation, the region has experienced torrential rains since early August causing devastating floods. Over 700,000 have been directly impacted, among them thousands of displaced persons, all in urgent need of shelter, clean water, and health services across large swathes of **Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger**. These events are multiplying risks for host and displaced communities that are already grappling with extreme poverty, food insecurity, armed conflict and climate risks, critically compounded this year by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Refugees, internally displaced, and their hosts were already on the brink and in urgent need of our assistance. These floods bring a menacing new level of hardship, while hampering our efforts to respond to one of the world’s worst and fastest-growing humanitarian crises.”

Millicent Mutuli, Director of UNHCR’s Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa.

- In **Burkina Faso**, the security situation continues to deteriorate further in the Centre-North, East, North, Sahel and Centre regions. The defense and security forces (DSF) continues to be by attacked. In the Centre-North region two soldiers died and four were injured following the ambush of a convoy of goods that they were escorting. Armed groups continue to target civilians, including community leaders. At least 20 civilians were killed in a market in the East region and on 11 August, the Grand Imam of Djibo was kidnapped by armed groups, his body was found in the Province of Soum a few days later. On August 2, children from a village near Ouahigouya in the northern region marched on improvised explosive device (IED), which caused six of them to die, while four were evacuated to Ouahigouya for treatments. In addition, 800 individuals have reportedly fled from Tangaye to Ouahigouya in search of safety due to the general deterioration of the security situation and the presence of IEDs in the area. In the Sahel region, humanitarian access continues to be a challenge and armed groups have taken control of the road between Bourzanga and Djibo affecting humanitarian organizations. In Ouagadougou, gun crime is on the rise and is likely due to the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In **Chad**, the army maintains a heavy presence in the Lake Province and has widely re-grouped into larger strategic locations. Meanwhile, small groups of Boko Haram / ISWAP and affiliated militants are still roaming in the rural areas where they stage regular attacks against the civilian population, often killing men, abducting women and looting belongings, assets and livestock. Security forces are regularly targeted by asymmetric attacks, such as mines /IEDs and ambushes. Most the Boko Haram / ISWAP operations take place in the close vicinity of the Niger and Nigeria borders. The current rise of the water from the Lake, due to the rainy season, plays in favour of the militants, who operate adeptly on small and medium-size motorized barges. The Chadian army has limited equipment and skills to operate on water. While the humanitarian community has not been specifically targeted in the Lake Province to date, recent Islamic State communications indicate that they consider humanitarians as a legitimate target raising perceived threat levels. Opportunistic attacks /kidnappings cannot be ruled out in the future as operations in the area become more hazardous.
- In **Mali**, a military coup on 18 August 2020 unseated President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita announced his resignation on national television after his arrest by the rebel soldiers, following a series of demonstrations by thousands of Malian citizens in June and July, to demand his departure. of the President. , Government and the National Assembly were dissolved.. A few hours later, in an address on the same public channel, the mutineers introduced themselves as the *Comité national pour le salut du peuple* (CNSP), in charge of the country. They declared the establishment of a curfew and the closure of air borders and the formation of a

transitional civilian government, responsible for holding new elections. As a result, ECOWAS suspended Mali from its decision-making institutions, closed borders and halted financial flows with the country. This uncertain socio-political context deepened the already fragile socio-economic situation of both displaced and host populations.

- In **Mauritania**, following the coup d'état in Mali, UNHCR conducted a mission to Fassala, a major entry point to the country for Malian refugees. After the field verification and meetings with the local authorities, UNHCR identified common concerns regarding the possible influx of refugees, even though the situation is calm for the time being. The local authorities have committed to ensure a humanitarian corridor with reinforced screening processes to prevent COVID 19 in case of a massive arrival of Malian refugees.
- In **Niger**, the Tillabery and Tahoua region have seen a rise in the kidnapping of civilians, especially among pastoralist groups who have recently been targeted by insurgent groups racketeering the populations living in the areas under their control. During the month of August 2020, several instances of theft of cattle have been reported in the region, especially around the town of Inates which hosts a significant number of displaced populations.



People carry their belongings in a street flooded by the Niger River in the Kirkissoye neighbourhood in Niamey, Niger, on August 27, 2020. © AFP/Boureima Hama

Population Movements

Armed attacks, kidnappings and human rights violations are still causing displacement across the region with the number of IDPs reaching over one million in Burkina Faso only. As of 8 August 2020, a total of 1,013,234 persons are internally displaced in Burkina Faso which represents 5% of the country's total population or 1 in 20 people.

- In **Mali**, in the Mopti region, 3,322 Burkinabe refugees, including 1,069 men and 2,253 women, were registered by UNHCR and its Governmental partner CNCR during August 2020.
- **Mauritania** is host to the largest number of Malian refugees in the Sahel, with a total of 66,582 refugees, as of end of August 2020. Despite the COVID 19 mobility restrictions, migrants and asylum seekers are still compelled to undertake risky journeys and on 6 August, a small boat with 28 people, which is said to have departed from Dakhla, Western Sahara, heading to the Canary Islands sank off the coast of West Africa. The

only survivor was rescued by the Mauritanian coast guard and received assistance from IOM, UNHCR, and partners.

- In **Niger**, 361 refugees returned from Mali to their village of Ayorou, in Western Niger, during August 2020. Despite the insecurity and political instability in Mali, over 2,200 Malian refugees currently living in Ayorou and Ouallam have confirmed their intention to return to their country of origin. In an effort to ensure that repatriations are taking place in a voluntary and dignified way, UNHCR continues to sensitize and inform refugees on the conditions in their area of origin and on the kind of support they can expect should they decide to return. UNHCR also relocates refugees within Niger to ensure that the sites and settlements are not too crowded. In August, over 500 refugees living in the Telemcress temporary site were relocated in dignity and safety to the refugee hosting area of Intikane.

Protection Monitoring

- In **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council continue to pilot Project 21, a harmonized regionwide protection monitoring system which allows for the collection and analysis of data on GBV, education, physical protection, community engagement, documentation/nationality, child protection and solutions.
- In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR and its partners continue their efforts to strengthen protection monitoring. A meeting was held with protection monitoring partners (MBDHP, ICAHD and INTERSOS) to discuss challenges in the field. Partners reported difficult access to targeted regions due to floods and the security context (Boucle de Mouhoun). UNHCR and ACT Alliance partners, together with OCHA, CONASUR, United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UNMGCY) and their partners have deployed multifunctional teams to carry out consultations with internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities on behalf of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Internal Displacement. Focus group discussions with children, women, men, old and youth, and community structures from IDP and host communities have been carried out in the regions of the Sahel, North, Centre-North and East. In the coming month, information will be collected, and a final report will be issued by the end of September and sent to the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. Training to competent institutions on internal displacement and the international protection have been carried out across the country by UNHCR.

- In **Chad**, a total of 146 protection incidents were reported by the Chadian Red Cross and OXFAM in the Lake Chad province in August 2020. The main incidents by types are: 59 cases of abductions representing 40% of the total number of reported incidents; 57 incidents of homicides/murders (39%) and 10 incidents of fires (7%). These numbers collectively represent 84% of all reported incidents. The majority (94 %) of victims are adults ranging from 18 to 59 years of age, and 74% of all victims are men. Non state armed groups reportedly represent the main group of perpetrators responsible for 90% of all incidents documented in August 2020. The localities with the highest number of incidents reported are the sub-prefects of Ngouboua, Kangalam, Kaiga Kindjria and Liwa, bordering with Nigeria. The month of August



Focus group discussion held with women from the host community in Kaya and facilitated by UNHCR, ICAHD and ATAD. ©UNHCR/Burkina Faso.

2020 has seen the highest number of protection incidents reported since the beginning of the year, which could be explained by the reopening in early August of telephone networks in the departments of Fouli and Kaya that were suspended since 24 March following the launch of the military operation 'Wrath of Boma'.

- In **Mali**, intercommunal conflicts continued to occur while the risk of intra-communal clashes remained high in the North and the Centre. Direct security risks on civilians continued to be reported due to road mine/IED planting, armed robberies, and kidnappings. Out of 2,677 incidents recorded between January and August 2020, violations of the right to property and of physical and/or mental integrity were the two highest categories with the greatest number of incidents for each month, without exception. In August only, 402 human rights violations were recorded. However, attacks on villages decreased from 17 in July to 9 in August. Most of those attacks were perpetrated in Timiniri commune, Bandiagara circle, and Dougoutene commune, Koro circle, in Mopti, central Mali.

UNHCR RESPONSE

Covid19

- *To address the new challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Sahel, UNHCR Operations are strengthening national healthcare systems, WASH structures and services in the main hosting areas and expanding livelihoods opportunities and cash assistance to help mitigate the negative socio-economic impact of the pandemic on refugees and IDPs.*
- In **Burkina Faso**, there are no confirmed cases amongst populations of concern to UNHCR. The Government of Burkina Faso announced the reopening of its air borders on 01 August 2020, however, the land borders remain closed until further notice. UNHCR and its partners continue to support the Government in addressing the crisis and focusing its efforts on sensitization, prevention and response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on persons of concern in nine regions of the country. On 21 August, the EU donated some 700 solar radios and 45 loudspeakers to UNHCR. These will benefit over 350,000 IDPs in the Regions of Centre-North, North and Sahel and will allow IDP families to listen to the radio programs developed by UNHCR's partner, the Fondation Hirondelle, on COVID-19. In Dori over, 580 people have benefited from awareness raising sessions during the reported period. In order to facilitate the respect of preventative measures, in the Centre-North region, UNHCR provided some 9,700 bales of soap. Moreover, the second phase of the cash-based interventions to help COVID-19 prevention has started in Bobo Dioulasso with a total of 366 refugees reached in August 2020 and receiving on average XAF 15,000.
- In Southern **Chad**, masks, soaps and hand washing devices were donated as part of community protection activities for refugees in Iriba and Guereda camps. The distribution of these materials aims to strengthen the capacity of these community structures by ensuring their protection and that of their families so that they can become more involved in preventive activities and the fight against this pandemic.
- In **Mali**, UNHCR continues to support three government-led COVID-19 regional response plans in Mopti, Timbuktu and Gao (covering Menaka). In August, 82 individuals benefitted from six awareness sessions on COVID-19 protective measures against COVID-19, organised by UNHCR's partners.
- In **Mauritania**, registration of Malian asylum seekers, which had been suspended for three months, resumed in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou in August. To minimise contact, interviews are being conducted by telephone. Interviewed asylum-seekers are requested to physically present themselves to the registration centre only when they need to submit necessary documents and register their biometric information. All the staff are provided with PPEs to protect themselves. Based on the survey on socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19 on refugees conducted in July in Mbera camp by UNHCR and its camp management partner, LWF, it appears

that the most acute problem refugees face is their loss of livelihoods due to the stringent measures adopted by the Government to prevent the propagation of COVID-19. The study found that while 100 percent of the respondents are aware of COVID-19 and appropriate preventive measures, 62 percent could not afford to buy hygiene items to practice the preventive measures. The study confirmed a strong need for the continuation of the general food distribution as 75 percent stated that their economic situation was negatively impacted by the COVID-19, and that 83 percent had to spend their savings to cope with the situation during the past 30 days.

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.*
- In **Burkina Faso**, some heavy rainfalls impacted several parts of the country during the reported period. UNHCR and shelter partners continue to support families affected by floods through shelter and core relief items (CRIs) support and advocacy for prompt relocation to non-flood prone areas. UNHCR continues to provide support to families who have been affected by the rains and the winds. In Dori, the preparation of the stadium has started and nearly 200 displaced families who were living in flood prone areas will be relocated to the site, In Djibo, the construction of 53 shelters out of the 120 planned is being finalized. Similarly, in Centre-North, assessment of shelter needs continued allowing the identification of 7,000 vulnerable families and the delivery of shelter kits is on-going and the construction of the shelter will start shortly. In addition, still in Centre-North, 100 households who were affected by floods received shelter support through plastic sheets and core relief items. In Bobo Dioulasso, a workshop for the launch of the second phase of the shelter and core relief item project implemented by Plan International was organized. The project foresees the construction of 320 shelters and the distribution of 320 CRI kits in the Provinces of Kossi and Sourou in the Boucle de Mouhoun. The first phase of the project has been completed with the building of 300 shelters in the town of Kossi. In addition, following consultations with IDPs and technical partners, the Shelter Cluster continued its review of shelter prototypes to ensure durable shelter solutions, which are better adapted to the climate in Burkina Faso. The Cluster has also enhanced its engagement with local partners. As per the principles of the Grand Bargain, a local partner was identified and encouraged to join the Cluster. This localization approach will ensure the capacity building of local actors which complement the capacity of international actors during and after the crisis.
- In **Mali**, 258 shelters were distributed in eight different sites for displaced persons in Mopti, as part of the partnership with IOM. In addition, in Timbuktu, distribution activities of shelter kits to rehabilitate or construct 350 shelters was launched, during the reporting period.
- In **Mauritania**, the monthly general food distribution for July and August took place for 57,729 refugees in Mbera camp in



Construction of 202 shelters at the municipal stadium in Djibo in the Sahel region.
 ©UNHCR/Burkina Faso

partnership with WFP. Regardless of the imminent needs revealed during the rapid sampling survey, WFP reverted to providing both components of the hybrid ration (food and cash) to the most food insecure households, while less vulnerable group received only cash or did not receive any assistance during this round due to the lack of funding.

- In **Niger**, UNHCR and its partners have distributed plots of land to over 940 refugees in Ayorou and Ouallam. A total number of 149 social houses are under construction in the Tillabery region. In Ouallam, 42 have been completed while another 107 were still under construction at the end of August. Similar constructions are ongoing in the area of Intikana. The project employed 537 refugees and 246 members of the host community, both in brick production and in construction of social houses, as of 31 August 2020. In addition, 6881 IDP and refugee households have received an emergency shelter kit, containing mats, tarpaulin, wood, ropes and tools for construction which can be used to provide a simple but sturdy shelter that restores physical security, including against sexual and gender-based violence.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

- *In August, UNHCR operations in the Sahel, intensified sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response programs by expanding mobile clinic services in hard to reach areas and strengthening referral mechanisms as well as sensitization campaigns and legal assistance.*
- In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR conducted 5 days training session on case management and psychosocial care for 23 GBV staff from the partner Initiatives de Coopération et d'Appui aux actions Humanitaires et de Développement (ICAHD), the modules addressed were: Definition of key concepts, Survivors' centered approach, case management process, psychosocial activities, specific case management (domestic violence and early marriage). In the Centre-North, the mobile clinic provides basic health consultations, including the identification and response to cases of SGBV. A total of 42 individuals benefited from sensitization on the prevention and response to SGBV, while cases were identified and referred to appropriate care/services. Such clinics are already active in the Region of the Centre-North and Sahel and will soon be extended to the regions of the North, Hauts Bassins, Est and Plateau Central. On 3 August, UNHCR together with its partner CSSI, inaugurated the start of the mobile clinic on the site of Wendou near Dori, which hosts IDPs and the majority of refugees who spontaneously relocated from Goudoubo camp. The mobile clinic will provide free basic health consultations, including the identification and response to cases of SGBV. These services are available to IDPs, refugees and host communities living in the area.

- In **Mali**, UNHCR, through its partners, in Gao, Mopti, and Timbuktu, continues to conduct sensitization sessions on SGBV. UNHCR Mali undertook a Rapid Gender-based violence (GBV) Assessment. The first phase completed in August 2020, consisted of a desk review and consultation with stakeholders to gather relevant data on the GBV and protection context in the four targeted areas (Cercle d'Ansongo (Gao), Cercle de Douentza et la commune Sokoura (Mopti), Cercle de Ménaka (Menaka) and Cercle de Gourma-Rharous (Tombouctou), as well as information on existing legal provision and frameworks. The second phase of the assessment was scheduled in September 2020 and will consist in key informants' interviews to complete the



The newly established mobile clinic in the Sahel provides much needed primary health care to IDPs, refugees and host community and a strengthened response to cases of SGBV in the Sahel. ©UNHCR/Burkina Faso

desk review and consultation with primary data from refugee and IDP communities. This assessment is a first step to map GBV services, capacities within communities and potential risks in order to inform the deployment of emergency mobile GBV services by October 2020.

- In **Mauritania**, UNHCR is enhancing communications with both men and women on SGBV prevention as well as legal, safety, health, and psychosocial support. In urban areas, UNHCR partners in Nouakchott ensured the continuity of psychosocial support through counselling sessions by phone via a trained psychosocial worker.
- In **Niger**, close to 5,500 people have been benefitted from the services of the two mobile clinics set up. This includes medical, psychosocial and judicial assistance for 166 cases of sexual and gender-based violence reproductive health services and distribution of dignity kits to 861 females in addition to support with income-generating activities. Furthermore, 4,559 displaced persons have participated in mass awareness campaigns and group discussions on SGBV.

Education

- *As the countries of the Sahel continue the progressive reopening of schools for exam level classes, UNHCR is supporting the authorities and partners in their efforts to ensure a smooth return to school by contributing to sensitization and capacity-building activities for teachers and students on safety measures against COVID-19. UNHCR and its partners also rebuilt, rehabilitated or are constructing new classrooms in addition to installing water systems. Moreover, UNHCR is providing personal protective equipment and assists in the cleaning and fumigation of school premises. UNHCR is also supporting access to distance learning opportunities through distribution of radio stations.*
- In **Burkina Faso**, in order to facilitate distance learning during the school holidays, UNHCR and partners have distributed portable radios to refugee students. In Bobo Dioulasso, this distribution was completed and has benefitted over 140 primary and secondary students.
- In **Chad**, national exams, especially the end of year of Lower Secondary exam (Brevet d'Etudes Fondamentales) and the Baccalaureate exam were the principal concern for students. The first one took place in the first week of August and 1,550 refugee students participated, including 933 girls. The results were shared in late August and 81% (1,1257) refugee candidates were awarded the diploma, of these 723 were girls. Regarding the Baccalaureate exam, the first session was launched on August 17th with the participation of 1,114 refugees including 684 young women. One examination centre was located inside a refugee camp (Farchana) allowing refugees and host community to take the exam close to home thus limiting movements during the pandemic and during the rainy season peak. Haraze in Southern Chad, which remains inaccessible during the rainy season, got its first examination centre supported by UNHCR for a total of 55 candidates including 9 refugees. Furthermore 12 Sudanese refugee teachers have been selected to be among the graders of the Baccalaureate exam. All results will be published at the end of September.
- In **Mali**, as part of Japan's Emergency Grant funded project, the construction



Refugee Baccalaureate candidate at Farchana in Chad. ©UNHCR/A. Ngargoune

works of 24 classrooms continues, in the regions of Gao, Mopti, and Timbuktu. Additionally, in Menaka, 500 school kits were distributed to Education and Activity Center (EAC) students. Moreover, as part of the Education Cannot Wait (EcW) funded project, a distribution of school supplies for 2,500 EAC students was planned.

- In **Mauritania**, in preparation for the school re-openings in September, UNHCR conducted a survey on WASH facilities in the six primary and its secondary schools of Mbera camp. The results are being analyzed and will be used to improve WASH facilities to prevent the proliferation of COVID-19. UNHCR also distributed 200 masks to teachers and the school guards of Mbera camp.
- In **Niger**, UNHCR and its partners have rehabilitated classrooms in the Tahoua and Tillabery regions, distributing school kits to primary and secondary refugee students, along with teaching aid kits for teachers who were forced to move after the attack on the Intikane camp and the destruction of the school. UNHCR and its implementing partner, NRC, is also organizing catch-up classes in the Maradi region for over 2,600 children, including 1,200 Nigerian refugees. UNHCR also supported 100 Nigerian refugees enrolled in distance secondary program to keep up with the Nigerian curriculum and prepare for Nigeria exams.

Energy and Environment

- *The **Sahel** is one of the regions most impacted by climate change in the world. This has been caused by decreased rainfall and a depletion of soil due to agricultural overexploitation and progressive deforestation of the original savannahs as a result of cutting firewood, bush fires and stray animals. To address this critical dimension of the regional crisis, UNHCR is adopting a do-no-harm approach and an eco-friendly response. It is to strengthening community-based preparedness to prevent climate-related forced displacement and promoting and supporting the use of clean energy as well as plastic and waste collection in areas hosting displaced populations.*
- In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR held an initial meeting with *Conceptos Plasticos*, a Colombian private company, which bring communities together to recycle plastic into bricks for the building of houses and schools. Another meeting is planned soon to discuss possible collaboration with UNHCR.
- In **Mauritania**, the National Tree Week was launched in Mbera camp on 14 August. During the week, UNHCR in collaboration with SOS Desert and Action Contre la Faim (ACF) planted 5,000 trees throughout Mbera camp. The NGO RET also planted 4,000 trees in the host community in an effort to restore the natural resources that have been depleted due to firewood collection by refugees.

COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP

- *To support a comprehensive and sustainable response to forced displacement in the Sahel, UNHCR believes strongly in the need to build and sustain partnership and collaboration to raise awareness of the crisis and mobilize financial and technical support from all relevant stakeholders.*
- In **Mauritania**, as of 1 August, the national health program (Inaya) was extended to Hodh Chargui region to include the Mbera camp thanks to the refugee sub-window of the IDA18 (World Bank). The extension of this program to the main hosting area will ensure the inclusion of refugees in national health system in line with Mauritania's pledge during the Global Refugee Forum. UNHCR will continue to support the provision of free primary health care in the camp for all refugees for the immediate future while strengthening its engagement with the government and other development actors, in particular the African Development Bank, to ensure a sustainable inclusion of refugee in national development plan and public services.

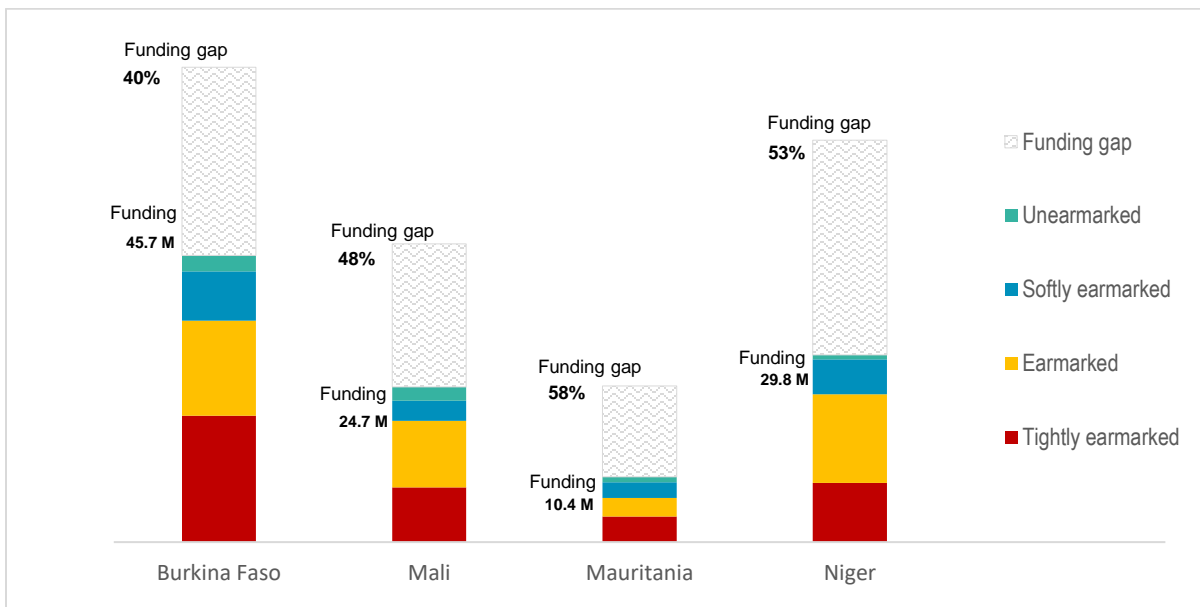
COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

Communication and advocacy pieces recently published by UNHCR on the Sahel crisis:

- [Mounting violence forces one million to flee homes in Burkina Faso](#) (News Release, 18 August 2020)
- [1 million forced to flee violence in Burkina Faso reaching tragic milestone](#) (News Release, 26 August 2020)
- [Schools caught up in armed conflict sweeping across the Sahel](#) (News Release, 27 August 2020)

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Sahel Appeal funding per country (USD) – As of 18 August 2020



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