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More than 30 million Sahelians need life-saving assistance and protection

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UN and NGO partners raise the alarm: Over 30 million Sahelians, most of whom are women and children, require life-saving assistance and protection, an increase of almost two million from 2021 [EN/AR]

Dakar, 27 June 2022- Over 30 million Sahelians, most of whom are women and children, require lifesaving assistance and protection in 2022, an increase of almost two million from 2021. The United Nations humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations continue to raise the alarm over the rapidly and severely exacerbating crisis in the Sahel.

“In times of conflict, violence impairs education systems and displaces people. As a result, large numbers of children are left without an education and face dire protection issues. Attacks on schools are on the rise, affecting students, teachers, and communities. About 7,900 schools are closed in the Sahel due to violence, a 56 per cent increase since 2021”, warns Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “When refugee and internally displaced children are out of school, they become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Reported cases of child recruitment, killing and maiming of children, and sexual violence by armed groups and armed forces have been rising; child marriages and early pregnancies among school-age girls are at risk of being further exacerbated by the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation and climate change”.

Growing needs in the Sahel are being exacerbated by the ever-shrinking humanitarian space, which is dragging the entire response into a negative spiral. “Although needs are continuously exacerbating, reaching people in conflict-affected areas is an ongoing challenge due to rising criminality, kidnappings, and increasing violence”, says Maureen Magee, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Regional Director for Central and West Africa. “Insecurity and violence are depriving affected communities of vital services, including access to health, education and water, sanitation, and hygiene services, resulting in a vicious cycle of vulnerability. Aid workers are ever more at risk and have been abducted and killed”.

“While needs are at record highs across the Sahel, resources are at rock bottom, and the cost of responding is skyrocketing forcing us to provide half rations in many countries across the Sahel” said Elvira Pruscini, World Food Program’s Deputy Regional Director for West Africa. “Life-saving assistance is essential and should be complemented with multiyear resilience interventions to reduce humanitarian needs over time and pave the way toward sustainable solutions to hunger and malnutrition. We can and should also be supporting national food and social protection systems to immediately mitigate this crisis while supporting governments”.

“Between June and August 2022, over 18.6 million people (15 per cent of the region’s total population) are expected to experience severe food insecurity, including 2.1 million people experiencing emergency levels of food insecurity,” noted the regional representative for West and Central Africa at the international organization Action Contre la Faim, Mamadou Diop.

For Poirier of UNICEF, “Prevention and long-term solutions to child malnutrition requires improving equitable access to nutritious foods and quality health services, and facilitating access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation, as a well as promoting appropriate infant and young childcare practices”.

“For far too many women and girls who are experiencing displacement, gender-based violence is a daily occurrence. Forced marriage and child marriage, physical and sexual violence, and sexual exploitation all contribute to thousands of people feeling trapped and powerless”, noted the Regional Vice President for West Africa for the International Rescue Committee, Modou Diaw. “They are primarily impacted by harmful social norms and multiple discriminations based on age and gender, which are exacerbated by the socio-economic crisis and conflict”.

As the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and partners launch the 2022 Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview for the Sahel, they call for immediate action to address the critical situation. However, funding shortfalls remain among the significant challenges to delivering effective aid. "It is urgent to secure humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable as millions of people struggle every day. Without sufficient resources, the crisis will further escalate, eroding communities' resilience and putting children, women, and men at risk", warns the Head of West and Central Africa Office at OCHA, Charles Bernimolin. "By June, only 15 per cent of the required US\$3.8 billion has been received to support the humanitarian response plans for Burkina Faso, northern Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and north-east Nigeria. This is not enough".

Link to pdf download of original report:

<https://reliefweb.int/attachments/5bf98820-b44f-4e90-b7c9-f303dcc7ad22/Press%20release-%202022%20Sahel%20Crisis.pdf>

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