



The Sahel, epicentre of many neglected crises.

Rationale

The Sahel zone comprises several countries including Burkina Faso, Niger, North Est Nigeria, Far North Cameroon, Chad, and Mali. For many years, these countries have been facing a series of health, climate, and security crises. While these crises have long been forgotten, the Sahelian zone is nevertheless facing several major challenges such as a growing food insecurity, the re-emergence of certain diseases, the massive displacement of populations, weakened health systems and an increase in insecurity and violence.

Key messages

- The Sahelian zone is experiencing an **unprecedented humanitarian crisis** with a total of **30.4 million people in need** of humanitarian assistance, nearly **6.3 million** internally displaced (as of 6 September 2022), more than **30 million people estimated to be food insecure**, and **1,4 million children under five** suffering from severe wasting
- The **COVID-19** crisis has disrupted essential health services. For certain diseases such as malaria, an increase in cases and deaths has been observed for populations at risk.
- The Sahel is home to many **outbreaks** such as cholera, yellow fever and measles. The Sahel also faces the challenge of Monkeypox present in two of the six countries, Nigeria and Cameroon, with a significant risk of spreading to other countries In the fight against these diseases, several challenges are encountered such as the difficulty to reach some communities, the disruption of immunization services due to COVID-19 or the exhausted response capacity.
- **Climate change** as well as the deteriorating **security situation** exacerbates the situation in the Sahelian zone with difficulties in providing health care in conflict-affected areas or attacks on health personnel and infrastructure.

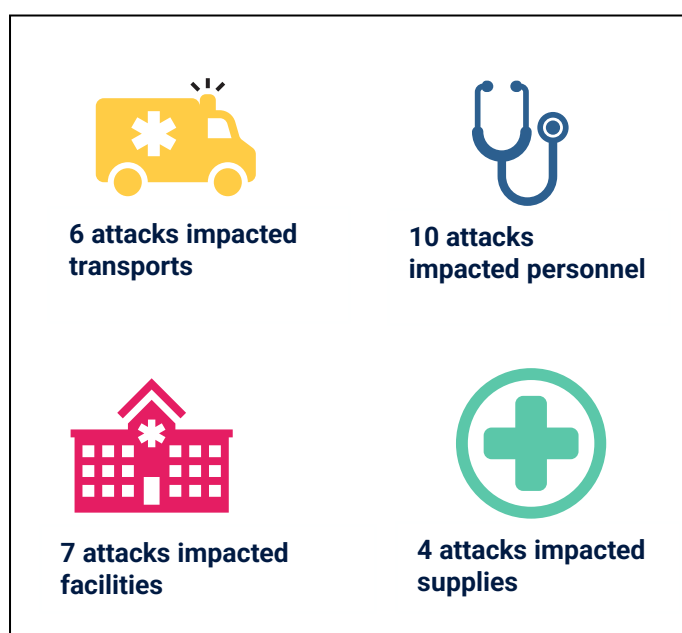
1. Overview of the health systems situation

Table 1. Overview (source: WHO/AFRO)

Country	Poverty rate (%)	Healthy Life Expectancy (years)	UHC service coverage index (%)	Overall functionality of the health system (%)
BURKINA FASO	41.40	54	44.3	57
CAMEROON	37.50	54	44.3	46
CHAD	42.30	51	28.2	34
MALI	41.90	55	41.6	51
NIGER	40.80	56	37.4	47
NIGERIA	40.10	54	44.5	45

- The countries of the Sahel zone are among the least developed in the world with thousands of inhabitants living in poverty. In general, the Sahelian countries, except for Chad which has a health system less functioning compared to other countries, have health systems that provide average coverage of their populations in terms of access, quality, and demand for health care, including the resilience of the system to the various shocks.
- For the UHC service coverage index, both Chad and Niger are found to be struggling to cover most essential services in their countries. For the rest of the countries, the data remains below the regional average of **46%**.
- It is also important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly disrupted health systems, particularly in Chad according to the [HeRams data](#).

Figure 1. Attacks on health care in Nigeria and Burkina Faso from 01/01/2022 to 03/11/2022



- Conflicts and crises affect all the mechanisms contributing to health including the infrastructure and the people that serve them. In **Burkina Faso**, **Niger** and **Cameroon** for example, access to health services remains a challenge for the population living in conflict-affected areas.
- Since January 2022 the [WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care \(SSA\)](#) has recorded/reported a total of **12 attacks** resulting in **4 injuries** in **2 countries** (Burkina Faso and Nigeria).

2. The Sahel, a hotspot for epidemics

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries in the African Region have been faced with the re-emergence of certain vaccine-preventable diseases. In the Sahel, many diseases (including vaccine-preventable diseases) are outbreak-prone with a high risk of spreading to other countries in the Region. More recently, Nigeria and Cameroon have recorded cases of monkeypox, with Nigeria being the most affected country in the region with 604 cases and 7 deaths as of 3 November 2022.

Yellow Fever – Worrying situation

- Between 2021 and 2022, several countries experienced cases of yellow fever, indeed, this is the **largest transmission of yellow fever (YF) for more than 20 years** in regions previously protected by preventive and systematic vaccination. As of November 2022, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger have **ongoing yellow fever outbreaks**.
- In **Cameroon**, since the beginning of the epidemic in 2021 a total of 2,824 suspected cases of YF has been reported, of which 17 are probable and 35 are laboratory confirmed.
- In **Chad**, as of 4 October 2022, 1,902 suspected cases of YF have been reported, of which 37 are probable and 30 are laboratory confirmed with seven deaths (Case fatality ratio 0.4%).
- From January 2021 to 20 October 2022, a total of 30 cases of yellow fever, of which seven are probable and 23 are confirmed, have been reported in **Nigeria**.

Cholera – Recurrent threats

- **Recurrent threat of cholera in the Sahel** where 5 countries (Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Mali and Cameroon) reported nearly 110,000 cases in 2021 with an average of 2.8% of case fatality rate.
- In 2022, **cholera epidemics are ongoing** in Nigeria and Cameroon where, as of March 2022, there were 701 cases and 19 deaths in Nigeria and 2,376 cases and 65 deaths in Cameroon.
- In **Cameroon**, there are 12,779 suspected cholera cases (including 1149 laboratory-confirmed cases) and 263 deaths since 2021
- In **Nigeria**, there are 10,754 suspected cholera cases for the year 2022 only with the 5-14 age group most affected.
- Major **challenges in the fight against cholera** include a shortage of OCV & other Cholera commodities as well as an exhausted response capacity.

Measles – Regular outbreaks

- Most countries of the Sahel zone regularly experience **large and disruptive measles outbreaks** (>20 cases/million population).
- In **Cameroon**, as of 2 October 2022, a total of 2,144 measles cases have been confirmed, of which 1,585 are linked to spikes.
- In **Chad**, a total of 2,781 suspected measles cases and nine measles deaths have been reported since the beginning of 2022. Only 27% of confirmed cases have been vaccinated and half of laboratory-confirmed cases are under five years of age with 17% between five and nine years of age.
- In **Mali**, as of 25 September 2022, there were 2,017 suspected measles cases and 683 confirmed cases with one death, the most affected age group being 0-59 months.
- **Challenges** in the fight against measles include the difficulty of reaching nomadic populations and the disruption of routine and supplementary immunization.

Malaria – endemic in most Sahelian countries

- The Sahel zone is **home to some of the countries most affected by malaria**.
- According to the 2020 data on the estimated malaria incidence (per 1,000 population at risk), the 6 countries in the Sahel region have some of the **highest incidence rates** in the African region, particularly in Nigeria (313.8 per 1,000 population at risk), Burkina Faso (389.9 per 1,000 population at risk), Mali (357.5 per 1,000 population at risk) and Niger (324.1 per 1,000 population at risk)
- Malaria cases and deaths by population at risk (children and pregnant women in low-lying and humid areas) have **increased for the first time since 2000 due to service disruption during COVID-19**.
- Of the 250M people living in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria, 79% of the population live in **high risk-areas**, i.e. countries having climatic suitability for malaria transmission.

3. Food security situation

- Since 2016, the evolution of food insecurity has been of increasing concern in Africa and most particularly in the Sahel zone. Increased insecurity coupled with health crises, climate change and forced population displacement will drive more than **30 million people** into crisis and emergency situations according to WHO projections (June – August 2022) for the 6 Sahel countries. The number of people in crisis or worse is estimated to reach nearly **19.5 million** in Nigeria, **4.4 million** in Niger, **3.5 million** in Burkina Faso, 2.4 million in Cameroon, **2.1 million** in Chad, **1.8 million** in Mali. Evidence shows persistent high levels of wasting among children under five in the Sahel. In 2022, it is estimated that 6.3 million children aged 6-59 months in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Mauritania will suffer from wasting: more than 1.4 million of them with severe wasting.
- Over **1.3 million children under five** are expected to suffer from wasting in North-East Nigeria in 2022, including almost 317,000 Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) cases. In addition, over 152,000 pregnant and lactating women will be acutely malnourished and need nutrition interventions.

BURKINA FASO

2.6 million will be in crisis situation at worst

Phases	Current	Projected
M	16 419 719	14 153 776
U	3 815 147	5 094 525
C	1 529 104	2 196 110
E	116 835	436 393
F	0	0



In Burkina Faso, the situation is alarming with **three regions** in the northwest of the country experiencing catastrophic levels of acute food security.

CHAD

1.7 million will be in crisis situation at worst

Phases	Current	Projected
M	11 667 619	9 979 878
U	2 723 795	3 637 535
C	940 455	1 593 833
E	22 789	143 412
F	0	0



In Chad, it is projected that at least **1.7 million people** will be in crisis, the most affected regions are in the North-West.

MALI

1,8 millions will be in crisis situation at worst

Phases	Current	Projected
M	17 046 827	15 444 742
U	3 488 560	4 411 105
C	1 114 367	1 684 507
E	47 160	156 560
F	0	0

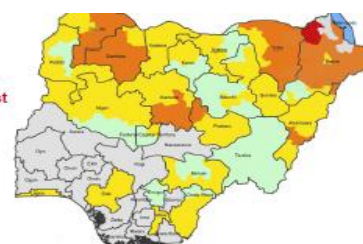


In Mali, several regions in the **Northern part** of the country are under pressure or in crisis. There are also several thousand people in a food and emergency.

NIGERIA

18 millions will be in crisis situation at worst

Phases	Current	Projected
M	111 339 485	95 759 981
U	34 977 255	45 462 670
C	12 707 875	17 398 004
E	228 708	619 116
F	0	13 551



In Nigeria, the situation remains worrying in **the northern and western regions** of the country, with millions of people in crisis or in an emergency.

CAMEROUN

2.3 million will be in crisis situation at worst

Phases	Current	Projected
M	17 478 091	17 878 588
U	6 645 418	6 291 162
C	2 272 873	2 206 250
E	157 238	177 619
F	0	0



In Cameroon, the situation is also alarming, with more than **2.3 million people** predicted to be in crisis in the worst-case scenario. The southern regions are less under pressure.

NIGER

3,6 millions will be in crisis situation at worst

Phases	Current	Projected
M	16 562 594	14 226 080
U	5 792 162	7 069 076
C	2 429 802	3 337 933
E	148 583	300 051
F	0	0



In Niger, **the entire country is affected**, with most of the country in a crisis, particularly in the north and south-east of the country.

Phase 1: Minimale Phase 2: Sous pression Phase 3: Crise Phase 4: Urgence Phase 5: Famine

4. A crisis exacerbated by massive displacement, climate change and violence

The situation in the Sahel has deteriorated significantly in recent years due to the security crises. However, it would be simplistic to reduce the Sahel crisis to the security situation alone. Several other factors play a major role in this crisis. These include the forced displacement of populations due to climate and/or conflict, the effects of environmental change and the increase in violence.



The Sahel is experiencing one of the fastest growing **displacement crises** in the world due to increased fighting, security incidents and climate change. According to UNHCR data, there are more than 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in **Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger** (as of 30 September 2022), a figure that has been rising steadily since 2018. In **Nigeria** alone, and especially in the northern region, more than 2 million are IDPs. Although data on IDPs and their access to health is lacking, it is recognised that IDPs are among the most vulnerable populations with often **inadequate access to health**.

In the Sahel, droughts are becoming increasingly intense with **temperatures rising 1.5 times faster than in the rest of the world**. It is also noticeable that this climate change is causing heavy rainfall, characterised by violent storms and higher than normal rainfall. However, the land is too dry to absorb the rising water levels, which has led to destructive river flooding and numerous episodes of flooding, as was the case in **Mali and Niger** in 2019, for example.

These **natural disasters** degrade the natural resources essential to agropastoral livelihoods that underpin the economy in much of the area. In addition, climate change is increasingly reducing available agricultural land and water is becoming scarce. This situation threatens the millions of people who depend on livestock and agriculture to survive.

5. WHO Response

- To support the 6 priority countries in the Sahel, WHO has set up an **Incident Management Support** team in Dakar, Senegal. The team assists the countries in strengthening epidemic surveillances and health management information systems, strengthen access to health services, improve coverage quality of health services for gender based-violence survivors, improving prevention and response to sexual abuse and harassment (PRSEAH), reinforce countries' capacities to prepare for, monitor, analysing and respond to food insecurity and its consequences on the nutritional status of the population, strengthen national supply chains.
- In 2021, WHO reached more than **300,000 people** with emergency health kits in **Burkina Faso**, supported the cholera vaccination of **204,800 people** in **Cameroon**, trained nearly **4,000 health workers** on surveillance, facilitated access to quality primary health care in hard-to-reach areas in **Mali**, reached nearly 1.8 million people aged 1 year and above with cholera vaccines, and responded to the various cholera, measles, Cvdvp2 and COVID-19 outbreaks in **Nigeria**.
- As of May 2022, the WHO funding needs for the period of January-December 2022 was estimated at **\$62,7723,892**.

References

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Sources

- Data are from WHO and ([integrated African Health Observatory](#)).
- **Photography:** WHO/Billy Miaron

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