

The Sahel, a forgotten zone despite ongoing convergent crises

Blog article

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The Sahel includes several countries in West and Central Africa such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon (North), Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria (Northeast) and Mali. Infamously known for its security instability and the precariousness of the populations living there, the Sahel is today home to [30.4 million people](#) in need of humanitarian assistance. While the Sahel crisis has been forgotten, the region faces a multitude of humanitarian, health, security, and environmental challenges.

A hub of insecurity, humanitarian and environmental crisis

Insecurity and violence have been recurring concerns in the Sahel for several years, but many other factors have exacerbated the situation in this area prone to many crises. Indeed, climate change is also having a significant negative impact on the health of Sahelian populations, their agriculture and their livelihoods. A [Climate Risk Profile](#) developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) projects an even bleaker future with temperatures projected to rise between 2.0 and 4.3°C by 2080, a decrease in the availability of water in a region already experiencing intense drought, and an increase in annual rainfall of up to 16mm by 2080. It is also projected that because of climate change heat-related mortality will increase by factor 4 by 2080.

These crises also play a major role in the increasing displacement of people in the region. In Burkina Faso, for example, as of 31 July 2022, there were [1,902,151 internally displaced persons](#). Other surrounding countries such as Mali and Niger are also experiencing this phenomenon with thousands of people internally displaced either due to security instability and/or the impact of climate change. [Evidence](#) on IDPs shows that this population is vulnerable and is generally deprived of adequate health care and can lack food and shelter.

Health systems under pressure

The current context in the Sahel plays an important role in disrupting access to essential health care in the zone. Indeed, insecurity and conflict affect health infrastructures and health workers in conflict-affected areas, making it harder for the population living in these areas to reach health facilities. At least [12 attacks](#) since the beginning of the year have had an impact on transportation, health personnel, facilities and/or supplies. This is for example the case in Burkina Faso and Nigeria where these attacks have resulted in four injured people.



Health systems are also experiencing several important shocks. For example, several countries in the African region and in the Sahel have experienced a resurgence of several vaccine preventable diseases, which for a long time were under control in the region, following COVID-19. This is the case, for example, of [yellow fever](#), a disease that has long been contained thanks to systematic and preventive vaccination, which, between 2021 and 2022, experienced the greatest transmission in over twenty years. Indeed, in Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon, a yellow fever epidemic is underway. This increase in yellow fever cases can also be explained by a disruption of immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, yellow fever is not the only epidemic spreading in the Sahel region, there are several other [regular epidemics](#) such as measles, thousands of cases of cholera in Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Mali or Cameroon, and the highest rates of malaria in the region in Burkina Faso, Mali or Niger. More recently, [cases of monkeypox](#) have also been recorded in two Sahelian countries, Cameroon and Nigeria, Nigeria being the most affected country in the African Region with 604 cases and 7 deaths as of 3 November 2022.

Finally, the [food security situation](#) remains particularly worrying, with millions of people in the six Sahelian countries experiencing catastrophic levels of acute food security according to WHO/AFRO projections. When looking at vulnerable populations such as children and pregnant women, the data is equally alarming. In north-eastern Nigeria, for example, more than [1.3 million children](#) under five are expected to suffer from wasting in 2022, including nearly [317,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition](#) (SAM).

Urgent need for more funds

To respond to the various challenges faced in the 6 Sahel countries and to improve access to health care for populations in need, an Incident Management Support team in Dakar, Senegal has been set up. The WHO/AFRO Dakar Hub is responsible for assisting these countries in strengthening epidemic surveillances and health management information systems, increasing access to health services, improving coverage quality of health services for gender-based violence survivors, strengthening countries' capacities to prepare for and respond to food insecurity and its consequences as well as reinforcing national supply chains. To date, several projects have been conducted, such as supporting access to health care in hard-to-reach areas in Mali or vaccinating over 200,000 people against cholera in Cameroon.

Although the presence of this hub is being strengthened in the Sahel, to be able to respond to the needs of the populations more funds are needed. These funds, for the January-December period, amount to \$62,7723,892 (as of May 2022). Indeed, as Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, Director of WHO/AFRO, pointed out, "[humanitarian assistance, including for emergency health services, has been severely impaired by chronically low funding. Without immediate response, millions of lives risk being lost as these emergencies slip off the world's attention.](#)"

For more information about the Sahel:

- [The Sahel zone fact sheet](#)

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