UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

EVALUATION OF UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO MULTIPLE EMERGENCIES IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL REGION: BURKINA FASO, NIGER, MALI.

EVALUATION REPORT
AUGUST 2022

UNHCR Evaluation Service

UNHCR's Evaluation Policy confirms UNHCR's commitment to support accountability, learning and continual improvement through the systematic examination and analysis of organizational strategies, policies, and programmes. Evaluations are guided by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, and utility, and are undertaken to enhance the organization's performance in addressing the protection, assistance and solution needs of refugees, stateless people and other persons of concern.

Evaluation Service
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Case Postale 2500
1211 Genève 2
Switzerland
www.unhcr.org

Acknowledgements

Evaluation information at a glance	
Title of the evaluation:	Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to Multiple Emergencies in the Central Sahel Region: Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali.
Timeframe covered:	January 2020 – December 2020
Expected duration:	14 months
Type of evaluation:	Centralised
Countries covered:	Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali (and Senegal)
Evaluation manager / contact in UNHCR:	Marcel van Maastrigt, UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland Iesha Singh, UNHCR Regional Bureau in Dakar, Senegal
Support staff:	Adam Kiari Kimé, Aissata Ba, Dana Naamani, Dramane Yacouba Diallo, Ibrahim Toure, Ingrid Bazie, Ismaila Yalcouye, Ousmane Niang

Table of contents

Tables

Figures

List of abbreviations

AGD: Age, Gender and Diversity
ALNAP: Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
AOI: areas of inquiry
BO: branch office
RB: UNHCR Regional Bureau (regional level)
BWPO: Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization
CBI: cash-based interventions
CBP: community-based protection
CCCM: camp coordination and camp management
COP: country operations plan
CRIs: core relief items
DESS: Division of Emergency, Security and Supply
DIMA: Data and Information Management and Analysis
DIP: Division of International Protection Services
ERTs: emergency response teams
ES: Evaluation Service
FG: focus group
FO: field office
FU: Field Unit
HHI: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
HQ: UNHCR Headquarters (international level)
IDP: internally displaced persons
IRB: institutional ethics review board
IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LGBTI: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
KII: key informant interview
NFI: non-food items
OECD–DAC: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OS: online survey
PHRC: Partners' Human Research Committee
POC: populations of concern

RDS: respondent-driven sampling
RHU: refugee housing unit
RISO: Partners' Research Information Security Office
SGBV: sexual and gender-based violence
TOR: terms of reference
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH: Water, sanitation, and hygiene

Executive summary

Introduction and background

1. The external evaluation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) response to Multiple Emergencies in the Central Sahel Region was triggered by the declaration of the L3 emergency in Burkina Faso, effective February 2020. The scope of the evaluation was expanded to include related level 2 emergencies in Mali and Niger since these responses are part of the Sahel emergency strategy and face similar security and humanitarian emergency crises. The UNHCR Evaluation Service commissioned the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization (BWPO) to conduct a centralized evaluation, herein titled, *Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to Multiple Emergencies in the Central Sahel Region: Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali*.

Purpose, scope and methodology

2. The purpose of this evaluation is to analyze the extent to which UNHCR provided a timely and effective response to the complex emergencies in the three countries, considering the enabling and constraining contextual factors. The evaluation also gathered evidence to guide, and where needed, enhance UNHCR's response to complex and recurrent emergencies involving multiple populations of concern (POCs) including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and others. The simultaneous evaluation of the response to the level 3 emergency in Burkina Faso and the level 2 emergency response in Niger and Mali allows for a synthesis of similarities and differences in national contexts. In addition, considering the three countries together enables analysis of the regional dimension of UNHCR's response by including the UNHCR Sahel Strategy and the UNHCR Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa (herein titled, *the Bureau*), as well as Headquarters (HQ) support through the Emergency and IDP Policies, and resources for a 'whole of house' emergency response and scale-up.

3. The evaluation is designed to guide adaptation to emerging and dynamic realities in complex environments and adopts both a retrospective and a forward-looking approach considering the progression and effectiveness of the response in 2020, as well as providing insights and recommendations for adjustments and improvements for relevant operations. The evaluation is organized based on five areas of inquiry (AOI) below. This evaluation employed a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach, consisting of three phases (inception, main evaluation data collection, and validation), taking place between March 2021 and June 2022.Data collection modalities included (1) 155 key informant interviews with UNHCR staff, partners, and government officials; (2) 64 focus groups with persons of concern including refugees, IDPs, returnees, and host communities; (3) online surveys with 161 UNHCR staff, partners, and government actors whose work related to the Sahel situation completing the surveys; and (4) a respondent driven sampling (RDS) survey with 4144 IDPs in remote and urban sites across the three countries.

OUTPUTS How well UNHCR addressed needs?	AoI1	*To what extent have the operations effectively responded to the needs of diverse populations of persons of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) both in countries of asylum as well as in countries of origin?*	*How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected UNHCR's ability to respond to the crises in the three countries?*	AoI3	CONTEXTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS
INPUTS Were resources sufficient, timely, and appropriate?	AoI2	*To what extent have financial, physical and human resources been made available to the response in timely, sufficient, and appropriate manner following L2 emergency declarations in Mali and Niger and L3 declaration in Burkina Faso?*	*To what extent do UNHCR's existing emergency preparedness policies and IDP Policy enable operations to implement the planned response?*	AoI4	How did internal and external contextual factors enable or constrain UNHCR's ability to address needs?
			How has UNHCR's ongoing decentralization affected the response and what was the role of the Regional Bureau and HQ?	AoI5	

Summary findings

4. Faced with unprecedented challenges, UNHCR was largely effective in responding to the needs of diverse populations of persons of concern (POCs) in accessible areas of the Central Sahel Region. Stakeholders positively viewed the scale-up of the response following the emergency declaration, corresponding to increased budget, protection assistance capacity, and partner coordination. However, UNHCR's response faced several major challenges, including 1) insufficient resources for the scale of the response needed; 2) diverging approaches to coverage and response across and within country offices; 3) the insecurity and volatility of the Sahel context, 5) the COVID-19 pandemic, which led UNHCR to declare a global L2 emergency one month after the Sahel declaration.

5. While response coverage was insufficient to fully address the needs of the population, both partners and POCs recognized the invaluable role played by UNHCR in providing emergency, life-saving assistance, particularly with regards to shelter, NFI, and protection in line with Sahel Strategy priorities. UNHCR covered diverse POCs and targeted the most vulnerable in accessible and secure areas as well as in locations where UNHCR and implementing partners had a strong and well-established presence. Overall, this approach maximized response coverage and relevance in the face of limited resources and the scale of the emergency. Nevertheless, significant differences in coverage emerged across countries per population group. There was a lack of consistency in defining UNHCR's responsibilities toward IDPs

6. Differences in coverage between IDPs and refugees also reflected a lack of experience or expertise with specific groups. In Burkina Faso and Niger, refugee needs were better addressed than IDPs and returnees, whereas the opposite was true in Mali.. Response coverage was poorest in more insecure and remote areas, where UNHCR could not access and thus could not address the needs of POCs. Insecurity and resulting security policies arose as the most consistent and important barrier to response coverage, especially in Mali.

7. The Sahel Strategy provided a high-level framework to guide the response and helped communicate UNHCR's priorities in the Sahel internally and externally. However, the

strategy was not fully translated into country operations, resulting in priorities outlined in the Sahel strategy that were not always aligned with budget allocation and the activities implemented at country level. In part this reflects the inadequate inclusion of country offices in the development of the strategy and limited regional oversight to ensure coherence across countries in the ongoing implementation of regionalization. These factors undermined response cohesion and relevance at the regional level. In addition, the strategy did not spell out differentiated approaches to sectoral priorities for refugees and IDPs based on UNHCR's mandate. This contributed to the tension between status-based and area-based responses across countries.

8. In some instances, UNHCR assistance was not fully relevant or appropriate to the needs of PoCs or the specific contextual conditions of the Sahel. For instance, although shelter was identified as one of the most pressing needs, the Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) provided were not suited to the local climatic conditions. UNHCR also fell short of achieving objectives set for CRIs and longer-term shelter due to distribution challenges and the use of ill-adapted materials. The mobilization of physical assets in 2020 was significantly affected by the pandemic with shipments being delayed or stuck at borders due to COVID-19 movement restrictions. This was further exacerbated by the lack of preparedness as illustrated, for instance, in a lack of locally based warehouses.

9. As mandated protection is a UNHCR core priority in each country and 27% of the Sahel appeal was for protection (including for SGBV). However, it is not clear to what degree it was sufficiently mainstreamed beyond a Thus, while For example, in Niger, UNHCR and partners developed a community-based network to provide information on protection incidents, particularly crucial in less accessible border areas. In Mali, UNHCR's SGBV activities were considered effective in addressing immediate needs by providing "dignity kits" and counseling over the short-term but were often unable to meet other needs such as legal assistance and more long-term psychological support. Given that each

10. Across the three countries, UNHCR adopted a common approach to targeting based on social vulnerability (which posed implementation challenges) and to protection incident monitoring through the roll-out of an inter-agency system, Project 21. The country offices further had a common commitment to establishing the centrality of protection and standards for how to do so (i.e. a needs-based, participatory approach guided by age, gender and diversity criteria).However, each country had different interpretations and operational challenges (i.e. needs, resources and experience) translating to varied levels of effectiveness across components of the protection objectives. In part this stems from an initial insufficient consideration of social and structural barriers to protection activities across countries. It also stems from limited resources and/or partner capacity to follow-up of protection incident reporting. Communication gaps with POCs and host communities sometimes undermined response effectiveness and left beneficiaries feeling uninformed or frustrated about assistance provision.

11. At the onset of the emergency, UNHCR had to navigate the dual leadership and coordination mechanisms for both refugee settings (where UNHCR has full leadership responsibility) and IDP/mixed displacement contexts (where OCHA has overall coordination leadership responsibilities and UNHCR has (co)leadership responsibility for three specific clusters – shelter/NFIs, CCCM and protection). This presented both

challenges and opportunities. UNHCR invested efforts in bringing actors on board and developing coordinated, cohesive programming to minimize gaps, avoid overlaps, and maximize the response. In Mali, limited involvement of government agencies led to the establishment of crisis committees to share information on large IDP influxes with officials. Both UNHCR staff and partners recognize UNHCR's leadership role in this regard. However, additional clarity around roles and responsibilities within inter-agency coordination mechanisms in IDP and mixed settings is needed, especially at the field level and where there may be pre-existing coordination mechanisms to navigate.

12. The work of UNHCR's implementing partners was crucial in 2020., as partners could access zones inaccessible to UNHCR's staff and continued to work with persons of concern during the COVID-19 crisis. Partners were positive when describing their collaboration with UNHCR and note that in general, UNHCR is flexible and responsive to changing conditions. Nonetheless, partners did highlight some challenges including: (1) UNHCR's complex administrative and financial procedures; (2) unclear reporting mechanisms; (3) a lack of engagement/communication on the availability of funding and strategic planning, (4) challenges with regard to data sharing/data access, and (5) limited resources and capacities related to monitoring and reporting, especially with regard to much-needed security monitoring.

13. Despite discussions around the Triple Nexus, the inclusion of long-term perspectives in UNHCR response and investments needs further conceptualization and translation into practice. All three countries promote the integration of PoCs into national and local programs and services. Out of the three, Niger has progressed the furthest and provides a potential roadmap for such efforts in its design and development of urbanized sites like the 'lotissements humanitaires' under which refugees, IDPs and host communities have access to land, social housing (depending on vulnerability) and access to infrastructure and integrated services through multi-actor partnerships. Generally, however, stakeholders consider that short-term perspectives still dominate the response, and many perceived a tension between responding to short-term priorities in times of emergency and working toward more sustainable solutions for POCs. More immediate efforts to assess or address the latent and sometimes explicit tensions between host communities and displaced populations are lacking.

14. While the Sahel response was better funded than other responses globally (90% vs. an average of 52%), funds were still insufficient to address the scale of the problem. In terms of enabling factors, the emergency reserve activated by the emergency mechanism was considered essential in kick-starting the emergency response for an initial three-to-six-month period. However, the late and/or sporadic arrival of funds, the short emergency funding cycle and more broadly, UNHCR's one-year funding cycles constrained long-term and multi-partner planning. straining partnerships and presenting reputational risks for UNHCR.

15. Staff for certain technical profiles were insufficient and often late to arrive, owing largely to deployments being hindered by COVID-19 mitigation restrictions. High turnover of UNHCR staff, partner staff, and government actors presented challenges for the coherence and fluidity of the response, with stakeholders noting that UNHCR's three-month deployments do not provide sufficient time for staff to achieve programmatic

objectives. This was exacerbated by the lack of local/regional human resources (including a reserve roster Importantly, emergency response mechanisms were not sufficiently tailored to each country and did not consider major pre-existing differences in staffing, size, experience or expertise.

16. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already acute needs in the Sahel, negatively impacting the three countries' economies, health systems, and government capacities. It also increased vulnerabilities among POCs, taking a heavy toll on the physical and psychological health and livelihoods of displaced populations and host communities alike.

17. COVID-19 severely limited the effect of the emergency response. COVID-19 strained resources and complicated resource allocation to cover COVID-19 needs on top of the emergency needs resulting from the Sahel crises. Furthermore, COVID-19 exacerbated both internal and external communication issues. UNHCR's transition to remote work and virtual platforms necessitated a learning curve at first and online meetings were not always possible due to internet connection issues; a problem especially acute for those in field offices and for partners and counterparts. Pandemic-related restrictions in movement compounded humanitarian access challenges.

18. Despite challenges, staff, partners, and beneficiaries felt that UNHCR reacted quickly and appropriately to the pandemic. UNHCR and partners adapted to alternative methods of service delivery, shifting toward radios and cash-based interventions (CBI), for example. UNHCR also worked to inform POCs about COVID-19 and to provide preventative materials (e.g. masks, antibacterial gel, etc.), which were seen to increase hygiene awareness and practices.

19. UNHCR's emergency mechanisms, triggered by the declarations and guided by the 2017 Emergency Policy, enabled UNHCR's response overall and increased financial, human, and physical resources. However, the response is also constrained by the centralized nature of the emergency response and the lack of responsiveness and sensitivity to realities on the ground. UNHCR's resource management decision-making lacked adequate engagement with local staff and partners and resources were not sufficiently adapted to country-specific resource needs or capacity shortfalls. This resulted in the untimely arrival of resources to country operations, especially during pandemic-related border closures and movement restrictions, as well as resources that were contextually inappropriate.

20. This evaluation indeed finds that the emergency mechanisms lack adaptability to local needs and contexts, including pre-existing levels of preparedness and experience, as well as the country offices' capacity to plan and forecast beyond the emergency period. The duration of the emergency declaration was seen as a limitation and stakeholders expressed a desire for increased flexibility around how long an emergency declaration can last, considering that even with a three-month extension, six months is not always sufficient in emergency situations like the Sahel. Finally, the pre-emergency and emergency phase of the Policy is detailed, but the post-L3 engagement and disengagement phase is not well delineated in the policy nor in practice.

21. The IDP Policy is an important commitment to UNHCR's responsibilities towards IDPs, but ambiguity as to how to operationalize UNHCR's role, has led to different interpretations across the organization. This is especially important given that UNHCR is increasingly shifting towards having a larger IDP footprint in the Sahel. As a policy providing a guiding framework and the overall principles and values to achieve UNHCR's goals, the IDP Policy (like the 2017 Emergency Policy) lacks concrete guidance on how to achieve its goals or mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness, offering broad objectives rather than specific directives. There are no scenarios incorporated in it and there is no related strategy that is sufficiently sensitive to contextual nuances and acknowledges and incorporates the limitations that UNHCR faces in practice.

22. While decentralization, regionalization and the role of the Bureau were seen as positive overall, especially in terms of technical support and guidance on the response, UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization remains work in progress. The establishment of the Bureau coincided not only with the emergency declarations in all three countries, but also with COVID-19 shortly thereafter. Both events were described as major impediments to Bureau staff being able to step into their roles and serve as the bridge between HQ and country operations because the Bureau was still working out roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities related to the transition whilst dealing with the immediate needs created by these two sets of emergency situations. At the same time, UNHCR's decision-making process related to programming remains quite concentrated at the country level, creating marked differences between country operations and undermining a regional approach. Stakeholders also reported that clear communication about decentralization and regionalization has not reached staff throughout the operations and thus, is not universally understood at all levels. Any roll-out and sensitization strategy has been inadequate.

Conclusions

23. This evaluation analyses UNHCR's achievements and challenges in its emergency response to crises in the Central Sahel Region. This section builds on the detailed findings presented in the evaluation report, drawing five main cross-cutting conclusions relevant to one or more of the areas of inquiry.

CONCLUSION 1: POLICY AND STRATEGY

24. The UNHCR emergency response in the Sahel was guided by three main policy and strategic documents: The Sahel strategy outlining three response priorities for 2020-21, the Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, which provides the framework for UNHCR's engagement in emergency preparedness, and the policy on UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, which outlines UNHCR's approach to strengthen protection and secure solutions for IDPs.

25. The strategic vision outlined in the Sahel strategy and guiding principles of the 2017 Emergency Policy and IDP are insufficiently known or internalized, which has resulted in unequal adoption across countries. Country operations each dictate how resources are best allocated, leading to notable differences from one country to another undermining a cohesive and harmonious regional approach to a situation that transcends borders. In

the absence of guidance and oversight to operationalize directives, aspects of the Policies have not been translated into practice as intended.

26. In addition, the Policies, on their own, do not provide sufficient sensitivity to contextual nuances or to the limitations that UNHCR faces in the field on a situational basis, opening the way for staff to prioritize immediate concerns over policy objectives. The Emergency Policy and related deployment of resources following the emergency declaration proved insufficient to account for (unequal) needs, capabilities, and readiness across countries to absorb and effectively utilize the influx of resources. Nor did it adequately integrate guiding principles for the transition to a "post-emergency declaration" phase considering the limited country-level experience, which resulted in country offices implementing unsustainable efforts that had to be scaled back.

27. While valuable, the Sahel strategy fell short in addressing the trends and needs of different population groups, notably IDPs. The strategy was a missed opportunity, for example, to strengthen knowledge and acceptance of the IDP policy, acknowledge the relative lack of experience or expertise dealing with large IDP populations at county level, and recognize the changing nature of displacement in the region and tension between status-based and area-based programming.

CONCLUSION 2: GOVERNANCE

28. UNHCR has undertaken important changes in its governance structure, notably through its regionalization and decentralization efforts. However, there are opportunities to improve response cohesion at the regional level, since programmatic decision-making processes are centered at the country office level, and to increase strategic considerations for local needs and capabilities. UNHCR appears to be struggling to find the right balance between the need to generate country-specific solutions while consolidating policies and regional strategies for coherence. The Sahel response was complicated by the relative newness of decentralization efforts and the absence of updated guidance on governance arrangements pertaining to oversight, as well as a concrete explanation of roles and responsibilities regarding the strategic planning and operationalization of the Emergency and IDP Policies.

29. The lack of uniform implementation of the Sahel Strategy and the Policies in part reflects the limited sensitization and lack of knowledge and operationalization of the policy and strategic documents as noted in conclusion 1. It also reflects inadequate systems and oversight mechanisms to ensure the implementation of policies and strategies in an appropriate and consistent manner (e.g. through predictable assessments of effectiveness or impact). Current efforts to better delineate regional roles and responsibilities together with Bureau support to ensuring country strategic plans are aligned with global policy priorities and contextual specificities are a good step in the right direction.

30. Efforts to standardize emergency response resources and tools did not sufficiently consider local contexts and solutions. Short-term funding mechanisms and the centralized and standardized nature of the deployment of essential human, material and financial resources following emergency declarations overshadowed opportunities for more localized and sustainable approaches.

CONCLUSION 3: SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

31. UNHCR increased its capacity to respond to the Sahel emergency and address the needs of rapidly growing and diversifying POCs. However, the response remained insufficient to fully address the needs of the affected populations, particularly in more inaccessible areas. UNHCR did not sufficiently consider and adapt to the rapid growth of the crisis and resources mobilized through the emergency declaration were insufficiently used to enable catalytic investments and build a sustainable scaled-up response. An underestimation of protection needs and a lack of consideration for political, structural, and cultural barriers in each country undermined operations ability to implement protection objectives.

32. The context of the emergency response (insecurity, rapid deployment) also hindered meaningful communication and engagement with POCs, including limited efforts to address tensions between host communities and displaced populations. However this also reflects UNHCR's limited consideration for durable solutions and the triple nexus. More clarity and strategic direction may be required on this at the global level.

33. UNHCR responded quickly and appropriately to the COVID-19 pandemic and implemented innovative and potentially sustainable approaches as it adapted to related constraints. Nevertheless, limited regional and country level preparedness and travel and shipping restrictions imposed by the pandemic delayed operation timeliness and effectiveness.

CONCLUSION 4: MONITORING, REPORTING, AND ANALYSIS

34. While UNHCR increased its capacity to respond to the Sahel emergency, it did not match it with dedicated monitoring and reporting associated with the increase in Emergency and IDP resource mobilization. This lack of baseline and adequate monitoring data and reporting makes it difficult to assess the effects of the emergency declaration alone.

35. UNCHR struggled with data harmonization, both internally and externally. With respect to the former, the evaluation team encountered significant variation in availability, quality, and content of UNHCR program data and reports both within and between countries, making it difficult to draw meaningful comparisons between programs and population groups. This stems in part from a lack of harmonization of indicators and reporting structures (e.g. format, frequency, etc.) within UNHCR. Externally, challenges with data sharing/data access and limited resources and/or capacities related to monitoring and reporting among partners are also important obstacles to quality and timely data. While UNHCR has made strides in harmonizing data collection methods and tools across implementing partners, more work remains when it comes to monitoring, analyzing, and reporting the data collected to effectively translate it into improved service delivery to PoCs.

36. The evaluation also notes that country offices lacked a clear approach to monitoring and analyzing contexts, risks and security where they operate. Community-level assessments of tensions and conflicts, which could inform the deployment of efforts to enhance social cohesion, were also limited. Inadequate forecasting, early warning, and contingency planning efforts left country offices unprepared for the rapidly deteriorating

situation and resulting increases in assistance and protection needs. Furthermore, there wasn't evidence that emergency preparedness included the development of regionally harmonized and consistent contingency plans as intended and described in the Sahel Strategy.

CONCLUSION 5: COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

37. UNHCR's leadership and contribution to multiple inter-agency modalities for the coordination of the response to the Sahel emergency is highly valued. However, there is considerable complexity in the context of mixed-displacement situations with multiple coordination mechanisms at play. UNHCR's strategic approach, experience and capabilities in coordination varied across countries and appears to have been particularly inadequate in the first few months following the emergency declaration.

38. UNHCR relies heavily and effectively on implementing partners to carry out response activities. COVID-19 created a further need for implementing partnerships, but at the same time undermined oversight. UNHCR's lack of clarity with partners on funding and operational decisions around strategic planning/planning assumptions, however, hindered partnerships and collaboration, for example, through last minute funding changes or operational requests.

39. One of the three priority areas of intervention of the Sahel Strategy is capitalizing on partnerships for protection and solutions. However, while this evaluation finds evidence to support progress towards the former, there is little to no evidence of advancement towards the latter. UNHCR's investment in partnerships has advanced and strengthened progress towards objectives with regards to UNHCR's protection mandate. This has not been the case for the solutions agenda, though, which remained at the strategic rather than operational level in 2020. Development of solutions for refugees, IDPs and other civilian populations also arose as one of five areas of intervention targeted in the Bamako Process, as outlined in the Strategy. However, despite the definition of these objectives strategically, the humanitarian-development link is rarely operationalized, with few exceptions.

Recommendations

40. Recommendations were co-created during a consultation with UNHCR stakeholders and are designed to be cross-cutting and reflect findings and conclusions outlined across AOIs. They are as follow:

    A. The Sahel operations must be guided by a multi-year regional strategy considering the scale and trend of the Sahel crisis and coordinated by the regional bureau, with clear oversight and accountability

        i. Country plans need to be reviewed and set clear and attainable objectives aligned with the regional strategy, providing measurable commitments to implementing the IDP policy and enabling durable solutions across the triple nexus)

ii. COs need to clearly articulate how political, structural, and cultural barriers in each country can impact operations and develop mitigation measures accordingly.

iii. At the regional level, The RB should improve and institutionalize internal reporting from COs and evaluation of performance against regional objectives. This should serve to facilitate oversight and accountability and facilitate regional coordination.

B. The Sahel operations must be supported by a robust regional fundraising and advocacy plan before, during and after emergency declarations to sustain activities

i. COs need to pro-actively adjust priorities based on forecasted growth of needs by PoCs and considering resources availability.

ii. The RB must increase advocacy with donors to promote operational and financial flexibility during emergency declarations

iii. In the context of protracted crises, HQ must allocate resources to strengthen the financial and operational transition from emergency declaration period to post-declaration operations

C. The Sahel operations must be supported by systems and tools that facilitate and promote the roll-out, adoption, and implementation of the emergency and IDP policies

i. The RB, with support from DESS, must operationalize the policies to guide CO leadership on how to deliver on core commitments and goals.

ii. For this the RB should develop short knowledge acquisition and exchange opportunities, including case-based examples of good practices, and potential mentorship opportunities.

iii. The RB must further develop mechanisms to track COs progress toward commitments and goals outlined in the policies to serve the dual purpose of learning and accountability (see also recommendation 1.c)

iv. In the context of emergency declarations, HQ and RB should design a more adaptive support mechanisms tailored to CO capacities, experience, and other contextual factors

D. The Sahel operations must improve engagement with partners, counterparts and PoCs towards durable solutions.

i. In the context of rapidly changing nature of displacement, the RB, with support from HQ, must allocate more resources to strengthening the coordination capacities of COs.

ii.   COs, with support from RB, must develop plans for communication and engagement with PoCs that consider community tensions, misinformation, and rapidly changing availability of resources for operations.

iii.   COs must allocate resources to assess and strengthen the expertise of implementing partners and counterparts in areas aligned with UNHCR's core commitments and goals, notably protection.

E. Emergency declarations must be accompanied by a strengthening of information systems, monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge management adapted to the operational environment.

i.   DESS and RB should develop Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) surge roster and increase MEL capacities such as MEL Toolkit of COs as part of emergency preparedness plan.

ii.   DESS and RB should develop clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including indicators and methodologies, to capture and leverage critical information and performance indicators, forecasting and early warning, and protection monitoring.

iii.   RB and COs should Assess the impact of internal capacity-building efforts to inform future investment in additional human and financial resources for training and technical support.

1   Introduction

1.1   Evaluation overview

1.1.1   PURPOSE AND SCOPE

41. This evaluation assesses UNHCR's response to multiple emergencies in the Central Sahel Region, focusing on the countries of Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali over the period of January to December 2020. The evaluation serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning, providing insights into UNHCR's response to increasingly complex regional crises. To this end, the evaluation sought to determine the extent to which UNHCR has effectively and efficiently addressed the needs of populations of concern and considered how internal and external factors affected UNHCR's ability to address needs.

42. The evaluation emerged from UNHCR's declaration of a Level 3 emergency in Burkina Faso in February 2020. Considering the regional dimension of the crisis, including shared security and humanitarian emergencies, the scope of the evaluation was expanded to include the response to the related Level 2 emergencies in neighboring Niger and Mali, also declared in February 2020. The emergency declarations in all three countries were extended in September, for an additional period of 3 months.

43. With this multi-country approach, the evaluation examines the regional dimension of UNHCR's response by considering UNHCR's Sahel Strategy and the role of the Regional Bureau in Dakar. As a result, the evaluation contributes to learning related to UNHCR's ongoing decentralization and regionalization process and the changing role of the Regional Bureau in support of Level 2 emergencies. In addition, this evaluation also necessarily addresses the first ever system-wide Global Level 2 Emergency declaration for the COVID-19 situation on March 25, 2020.

44. The primary internal users for the evaluation are UNHCR's Senior Management and the divisions directly involved in emergency response and policies at the global regional and country level, including DESS, DIP, the Principal Advisor on IDPs, and DRS. Potential external users of this evaluation include UNHCR's partners including but not limited to governments, non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, and donors, especially those that partnered with UNHCR in the Sahel emergency response.

1.1.2   SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

45. This evaluation analyses the extent to which UNHCR provided a timely and effective response to the complex emergencies in the three countries during the emergency declarations, corresponding to the year 2020, and considering the enabling and constraining contextual factors at the country and regional level. The evaluation gathered evidence to assess, and where needed, enhance UNHCR's response to complex and recurrent emergencies involving multiple populations of concern (POCs) including IDPs, refugees, returnees, and others. It serves to support analysis of the implementation of the 2019 Emergency Preparedness and Response Policy and the 2019 IDP Policy, especially in the context of COVID-19. Specifically, the objectives of the evaluation were to:

a. Contribute to strategic reflections on UNHCR's emergency preparedness in the region as well as globally.

b. Assist in identifying and developing UNHCR's strengths towards the effective implementation of complex and crosscutting emergency responses.

c. Contribute to the further refinement of the Sahel Strategy.

d. Identify internal and external constraints to the effective implementation of emergency responses.

e. Include an analysis, where appropriate, of the inclusion of initiatives under the GCR in the response.

f. Document and analyze good practices, and lessons learned on UNHCR's emergency response capabilities.

46. To achieve these objectives, the evaluation adopted a convergent mixed-methods design that leveraged conventional and participatory quantitative and qualitative methods, engaging persons of concern to UNHCR, key stakeholders across the different levels of the agency, and its partners. The evaluation therefore draws on multiple sources of evidence including a review of internal and external documents; key informant interviews, and a survey with UNHCR staff, partners and government actors; and focus group discussions with people of concern. The evaluation is also undertaking a rigorous quantitative survey among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) using respondent driven sampling (RDS). The inception, data collection, and analysis phases were conducted between May and September 2021.

2 Context

2.1 UNHCR Response to Forced Displacement in the Sahel

2.1.1 SCALE AND CAUSES OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

48. This evaluation focused on UNHCR's response to forced displacement in the Central Sahel Region. UNHCR's declaration of a Level 3 emergency in Burkina Faso and Level 2 emergencies in Niger and Mali in February 2020 was prompted by an unprecedented escalation of humanitarian needs in the region due to rising armed and intercommunal conflicts.

49. Complex and interconnected factors have compounded to worsen the security crisis in the Central Sahel. These include chronic vulnerability, pre-existing inter-communal tensions, and structural fragility (weak states' widespread poverty). Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger rank among the lowest countries in terms of GDP, life expectancy, and literacy rates, but among the highest countries in terms of fertility rates and maternal and infant mortality rates. With 75% of the population's livelihood linked to agriculture and where the temperature is rising 1.5 times faster than anywhere else in the world, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has placed the Sahel region under the "code red for humanity" predicting the population to be at the highest risk of experiencing catastrophic effects of climate change, conflicts, and economic downturn. These climatic changes are degrading the necessary resources of survival for the population and have been the source of both forced migration and escalating tensions in the region.

50. In this context, and since the 2011 fall of the Libyan regime and the 2012 Malian crisis, armed groups have rapidly expanded in the region, each with distinct patterns of violence and objectives. Most notably, violence has been perpetrated against civilians by multiple insurgencies and armed groups, including the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Al Qaeda-affiliated Jama 'at Nusrat Al Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM), as well as self-defense militias and national military forces. Rampant banditry and local conflicts have further contributed to insecurity. In 2020, a total of 2,693 political violence and protest events were recorded, a nearly 30% increase from 2019.[1]

51. Together, these factors have created one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world. Between 2019 and 2020, the population of concern increased by 87% in Burkina Faso, 48% in Mali, and 30% in Niger.[2] As of January 2020, which corresponds to the beginning of the period under consideration for this evaluation, there were a total of 1.5 million IDPs and refugees in Central Sahel. By December 2020, the end of the evaluation period, that figure had increased to 2.6 million, with an additional 700,000 people of concern.[3] A year later, the total population of concern stands at 4.3 million.

52. Forced displacement occurs both internally and across borders, but IDPs account for over 95% of all forced displacement. As of January 2021, of the three countries in the Central Sahel Region, Burkina Faso hosted the largest number of IDPs. Niger hosted the largest

---

[1] 2021 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

[2] UNHCR Global Focus Platform: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger [Accessed November 4, 2020]

[3] R4Sahel Coordination Platform for Forced Displacements in the Sahel. Accessible at: https://r4sahel.info/en/situations/sahelcrisis

number of refugees and asylum seekers, and Mali hosted the largest number of other persons of interest, most of whom are former refugees who have returned to Mali. An additional feature of displacement in Central Sahel is the multiple displacement of already displaced populations due to the dynamic nature of security threats.

Figure 1: Political Violence in Central Sahel (number of events per month, all events)[4]
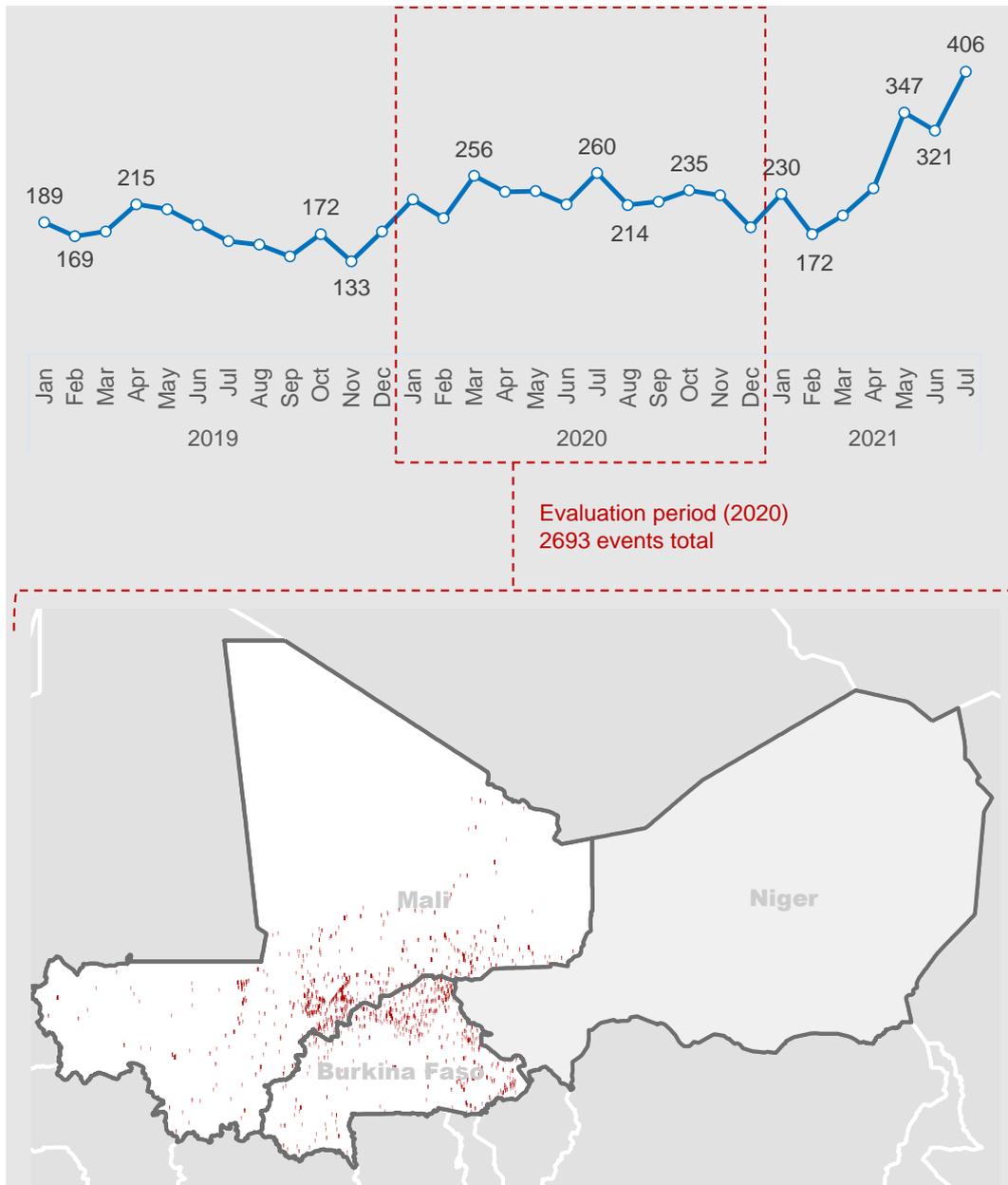
53. Figure 2 presents the evolution of the number of IDPs and refugees since January 2017 through August 2021, in each of the three countries of interest, along with a timeline of the major insecurity events (red symbols), political changes, and humanitarian declarations. This timeline focused on events around 2020 (expanded) - particularly from February to November 2020 - or the period during which the Sahel Emergency was activated.

---

[4] Ibid.

Figure 2: Displacement trends and key events
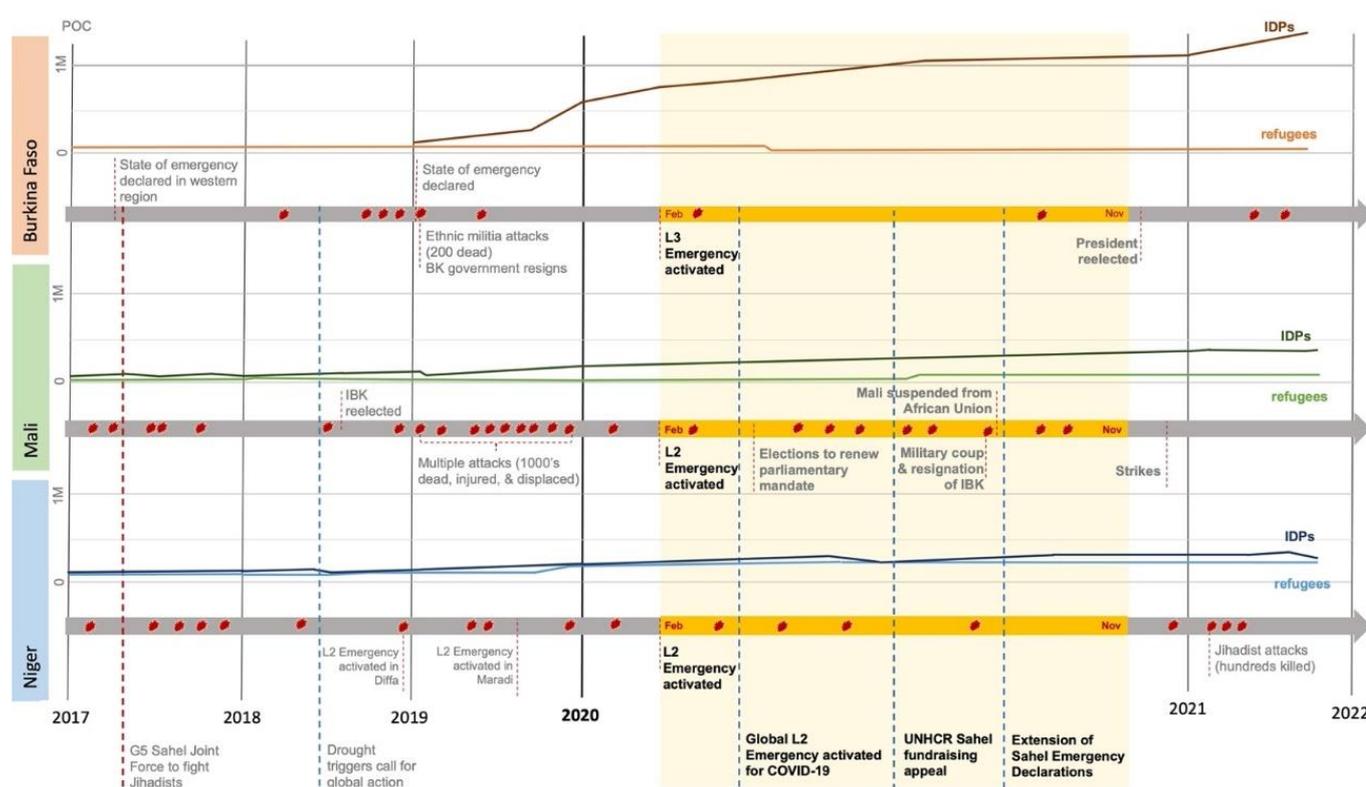
54. Humanitarian access in the Central Sahel Region is severely limited most significantly due to insecurity; political, geographical, and environmental barriers; moving and hidden population dynamics; and COVID-19. Deteriorating and fluctuating security conditions as well as sporadic or prolonged security incidents make for a volatile operating context and one where persons of concern, local communities, and humanitarian actors alike are put at risk in the face of sudden shocks or the eruption of violence. Geographical and environmental barriers characterized by rough terrain, poor roads, and severe climatic conditions make especially remote areas particularly difficult to reach. The nature of displacement itself can also hinder humanitarian access. For instance, it is challenging to access populations on the move, which applies both to nomadic populations of concern and those experiencing multiple displacements. In urban areas, persons of concern are often hard to access because they tend to live among the host community, making them "less visible" to humanitarian actors. The COVID-19 pandemic presents yet another major barrier to humanitarian access. Pandemic-related movement restrictions, especially at the onset of the public health crisis, further limited humanitarian access to populations in need of assistance. All of these factors, especially when compounded, create a complex and challenging operating environment marked by highly-restricted humanitarian access to the population of concern.

2.1.2 UNHCR'S SAHEL STRATEGY AND RESPONSE

55. In response to worsening humanitarian crises in the Sahel and in the context of the emergency declaration, in early 2020 UNHCR developed a Sahel Strategy[5][OBJ] outlining

---

[5] UNHCR (2020). *Crisis in the Sahel:UNHCR emergency and protection response.* Available at:
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Crisis in the Sahel- UNHCR emergency and protection response.pdf

three response priorities for 2020-21. This strategy was developed on the back of a visit by the High Commissioner in early 2020. The first priority area of intervention is "responding rapidly and effectively to new displacement" in which UNHCR aimed to scale-up its emergency preparedness (via development of regionally harmonized and consistent contingency plans) and response (focusing on shelter and core relief items, CRIs).

56. The second priority area is "placing protection at the center of the response" whereby UNHCR aimed to ensure protection and physical safety through a result-oriented process that prioritizes SGBV, education, and an environment-centered response. To achieve this goal, UNHCR first aimed to establish and support the Bamako initiative, an intergovernmental initiative, led by governments and organized by technical committees to provide protection to forcibly displaced persons and local communities. In terms of SGBV, UNHCR committed to working with partners to ensure prevention, strong referral mechanisms for survivors, reinforcement of existing health structures, and new mobile health services in inaccessible areas. In terms of education, UNHCR sought to strengthen the reception and teaching capacities of schools and the provision of alternative learning opportunities in insecure areas, prevent the radicalization and recruitment of children/youth and create protective learning environments, and ensure the continuity of education for refugee learners. Lastly, to build a more environment-centered response, UNHCR aimed to adopt an eco-friendly response for shelter and non-food items, develop community-based preparedness, promote and support the use of clean energy by displaced and host communities, and engage youth in plastic and waste collection.

57. The third and final priority area of intervention is "capitalizing on partnerships for protection and solutions" whereby UNHCR sought to establish partnerships with a strong development orientation and local authorities to strengthen the resilience of displaced and host communities, promote social cohesion, and limit the impact of displacement on the environment. UNHCR committed to raising awareness of the humanitarian and protection crisis in the Sahel through data collection and analysis, communication and media coverage, and proactive resource mobilization. In doing so, UNHCR aimed to better highlight the scale of needs and gaps for persons of concern, increase the number of actors in the Sahel, and provide oriented and targeted support. Importantly, the Sahel strategy did not address the COVID-19 pandemic which was only emerging when the strategy was drafted.

2.1.3   NEEDS OF PERSONS OF CONCERN

58.   Building on the Sahel strategy, UNHCR's June 2020 Appeal for the Sahel Crisis identified critical needs in four sectors: shelter and core relief, protection (including prevention and response to SGBV), education, and environment and energy (Table 1).

59. Shelter and core relief are among the top needs in the Sahel region. Refugees and IDPs often reside in overcrowded camps or precarious conditions among host communities, often in underserved areas where they may be exposed to theft and violence. Poor shelter conditions have heightened risks of exposure to COVID-19, as many people of concern are unable to practice preventive measures such as social distancing (given crowded living conditions) and handwashing (given limited access to WASH facilities).

60. Protection and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are a high priority issue. Sexual violence has become endemic in conflict-affected areas of the Sahel, including incidences of rape, abuse and exploitation, trafficking, forced and early marriage, and unwanted pregnancy.

61. With respect to education, the combined impact of conflict and insecurity as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in prolonged school closures and interruptions in education, which are likely to disproportionately impact displaced children. These children, particularly girls, face heightened risk of abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation in the absence of secure school environments.

62. Energy and environmental concerns are also prevalent throughout the region. Central Sahel is one of the world's most impacted regions in terms of climate change and environmental degradation. Environmental issues, and the resulting competition for limited natural resources, are linked to conflict, instability, and displacement across the region.

Table 1: Critical needs of persons of concern by sector in the Sahel region, as outlined by UNHCR's June 2020 Appeal

Sector	Critical needs
Shelter and core relief	• Close to 500,000 vulnerable people immediately need in-kind shelter and core relief items • Another 42,200 households urgently require cash grants for shelter materials and 53,100 families for core relief items • At least 65% women of reproductive age need sanitary materials
Protection, including prevention & response to SGBV	• Over 310 community groups need support to ensure protection and assistance (including prevention and response to SGBV) • Activities need to be intensified in order to identify at least 1,000 SGBV incidents and provide medical and psychosocial assistance to the survivors • 13 joint assessments and 377 monitoring missions need to be conducted and recorded to support data collection and analysis
Education	• Some 638 teachers need additional training, including for distance education • Over 150 educational facilities need to be constructed or improved • Almost 270 water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) educational facilities need to be constructed or rehabilitated
Environment and energy	• Over 47% of households need access to sustainable energy • Almost 40% of households need alternative and/or renewable energy (such as solar, biogas, ethanol, environmentally friendly briquets, or wind)

63. The priorities and needs outlined in the appeal provide perhaps the clearest evidence of the rapid shifts in UNHCR response due to the rapidly changing context. For example, in 2019, UNHCR Mali's priorities were primarily focused on assistance for the return of Malian refugees and IDPs including protection of persons of concern through socio-economic activities and access to basic rights.

64. To meet the urgent needs of POCs in the region, the UNHCR appealed for $185.7 million in 2020 to provide lifesaving protection and assistance to refugees, IDPs, returnees and

host communities in the Sahel region.[6] The appeal includes funds for Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and regional activities. Most of the funds ($169.2 million) were dedicated towards the three countries of focus in this evaluation, as outlined in Table 2. Over half the appeal was budgeted for shelter and core relief items (36%) and protection needs (22%), with an additional 7% for SGBV. This is consistent with UNHCR IASC cluster responsibilities. As of January 2021, UNHCR's 2020 financial requirements had been 90% funded in Burkina Faso,[7] 100% funded in Mali,[8] and 80% funded in Niger.[9] This is high considering that, globally, UNHCR faces a 48% funding gap (projected as of October 2021).

Table 2: Financial requirements (in USD) per country – UNHCR 2020 Appeal

	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger	TOTAL	(% of total)
BY SECTOR					
Camp management and coordination	4,168,110	300,001	1,305,014	5,773,125	3%
Education	5,122,082	3,268,233	4,394,178	12,784,493	8%
Environment and energy	1,186,958	2,042,851	3,073,815	6,303,624	4%
Health	3,269,980	1,974,584	3,226,615	8,471,179	5%
Livelihoods	1,783,474	1,680,800	4,288,039	7,752,313	5%
Partnerships and coordination	2,121,089	1,038,968	1,708,981	4,869,038	3%
Protection	11,778,756	11,379,898	13,487,783	36,646,437	22%
Registration, data & protection monit.	4,000,408	1,374,209	2,235,728	7,610,345	4%
SGBV	4,250,789	1,686,477	5,569,523	11,506,789	7%
Shelter and core relief items	30,834,720	18,461,559	11,615,543	60,911,822	36%
WASH	1,750,393	2,256,438	2,578,397	6,585,228	4%
BY BUDGET CATEGORY					
Op. Plan 2020 (ExCom approved)	32,126,993	16,603,790	33,810,417	82,541,200	49%
Sahel Crisis Additional Needs	25,428,392	20,842,229	12,227,985	58,498,606	35%
COVID-19 Activities	12,711,375	8,018,000	7,445,213	28,174,588	17%
GRANDTOTAL	**70,266,760**	**45,464,019**	**53,483,615**	**169,214,39**	
% FUNDED	90%	100%	80%		

65. In addition, the Sahel strategy was implemented in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the strategy was not revised in response to the pandemic, the appeal noted that it created new challenges and required a specific response to prevent the

---

[6] UNHCR (2020) *Sahel Crisis: Responding to the urgent needs of refugees, internally displaced, returnees and others of concern.* Available at:
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Appeal%20for%20the%20Sahel%20Crisis_June%202020.pdf
[7] UNHCR (2021). *Funding Update 2020. Burkina Faso as of 5 January 2021.* Available at:
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/fundingupdates/2021-01-
05/Burkina%20Faso%20Funding%20Update%2005%20January%202021.pdf
[8] UNHCR (2021). *Funding Update 2020. Mali Situation as of 5 January 2021.* Available at:
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/fundingupdates/2021-01-
05/Mali%20Situation%20Funding%20Update%2005%20January%202021.pdf
[9] UNHCR (2021). *Niger Update: Sahel Situation, Sahel Situation, January 2021* at;
https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/84572; UNHCR (2021). *Funding Update 2020. Niger as of 5 January 2021.*
Available at: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/fundingupdates/2021-01-
05/Niger%20Operation%20Funding%20Update%2005%20January%202021.pdf

spread of COVID-19 and protect populations. The Sahel appeal therefore included funds to implement COVID-19 prevention and response measures in displacement areas, accounting for as much as 17% of the total appeal. UNHCR worked specifically to strengthen national healthcare systems and to maintain the continuity of its service to persons of concerns through enhanced public health and livelihood measures (e.g., sanitation services) and the use of technology (e.g., online educational opportunities).

2.2 UNHCR's Mandate, Policies, and Processes

66. UNHCR has a well-developed set of institutional policies and procedures guiding its operations in general, and emergency responses specifically. In a refugee situation, UNHCR has a mandated role to lead coordination of all sectors. In an IDP situation, UNHCR is mandated to lead or co-lead three clusters: shelter, protection, and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), with OCHA leading overall inter-cluster coordination. In a mixed displacement situations like the Sahel which involves refugees, IDPs, and other affected groups, UNHCR's leadership and coordination arrangements are shared with UNOCHA. This evaluation considers UNHCR's core mandate and is specifically concerned with two policies and one ongoing process relevant to the framing and implementation of the emergency response in Central Sahel, summarized below and described in greater detail in Annex 1:

- The 2019 Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response,[10] herein referred to as the *Emergency Policy*.

- The 2019 (updated) Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement,[11] herein referred to as the *IDP Policy*

- The UNHCR restructuring process initiated in 2019, herein referred to as *decentralization and regionalization*

2.2.1 EMERGENCY POLICY

67. UNHCR's engagement in emergency preparedness and response is guided by the Emergency Policy, the scope of which covers UNHCR's engagement in situations at risk of a humanitarian emergency in which urgent and advanced preparedness action and/or an operational response are required. The objectives of the Policy are for UNHCR to "proactively anticipate, prepare for, and respond to emergencies with urgency, speed, and nimbleness" and to "effectively assure protection and support for persons of concern while from the outset working towards and leveraging solutions in the most optimal manner." As a means to achieve these objectives, the Policy summarizes UNHCR's engagement with various actors including its support role for host governments in emergency preparedness and response; its mandated lead role coordinating humanitarian actors involved in the refugee response; and its active, participatory role in inter-agency responses in internal displacement emergencies and other humanitarian emergencies.

---

[10] UNHCR (2019). Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response. Avalable at :
https://cms.emergency.unhcr.org/documents/11982/124166/Policy+on+Emergency+Prep
aredness+and+Response+-+UNHCR+HCP+2017+Rev.1/08206217-d33f-4634-a6a6-
d695bf940e37
[11] UNHCR (2019). Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement.
Available at: https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5d83364a4.pdf

The Policy also describes UNHCR's commitment to engaging with the private sector and civil society in its emergency preparedness and response activities. Furthermore, the Policy outlines preparedness in the pre-emergency phase and describes the activation of emergency declarations, outlining the consequences and required actions triggered by the declaration.

2.2.2 IDP POLICY

68. The scope of UNHCR's IDP Policy covers "all aspects of UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, including in relation to preparing for and delivering protection and solutions as part of a collective response in support of States and affected populations". The purpose of the IDP Policy is to reaffirm UNHCR's commitment in situations of internal displacement, both operationally and within inter-agency response mechanisms, requiring that UNHCR mobilize and deploy resources and capacities to strengthen protection and secure solutions for IDPs. The Policy is meant to guide and synergize UNHCR's engagement across the full spectrum of forced displacement, accounting for UNHCR's responsibilities for distinct categories of forcibly displaced people in humanitarian crises. To achieve UNHCR's vision for IDPs and displacement-affected communities, the Policy defines several guiding considerations, outlines how to operationalize UNHCR's commitments at various stages (preparing for emergencies, delivering a protection and solutions response, and disengaging responsibly) and describes several enablers of engagement, including (1) integrated programming; (2) data, information, and management; (3) resource mobilization and funding; and (4) workforce management. In so doing, the Policy describes how to operationalize UNHCR's commitments at various stages, preparing for emergencies, delivering a protection and solutions response, and disengaging responsibly.

2.2.3 UNHCR'S DECENTRALIZATION AND REGIONALIZATION

69. Announced by the High Commissioner in January 2019 and designed to be in place and functional by 2020, UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization aims to place UNHCR capacities, authorities, and resources closer to the people it serves by moving UNHCR's Regional Bureau to the field. This restructuring is being implemented to "simplify systems and processes, decrease bureaucracy, improve the effectiveness, efficiency and adaptability of the response, delineate accountabilities and responsibilities, facilitate recruitment processes and HR management, diversify sources of funding, and strengthen partnerships with development actors."[12] The role of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa, as with the other six Bureaus established globally, covers a spectrum of activities, including setting regional strategies and priorities, managing performance and compliance, identifying and monitoring emerging issues and risks, and providing technical support and guidance to country operations. Under the process, the Bureau is also meant to become an important hub for collaboration and strategic engagement with implementing and operational partners regionally in addition to creating a space for addressing cross-cutting operational challenges. Importantly, decentralization and regionalization shift more authority and decision-making to the Bureau and country operations, though a strong core at Headquarters is still central to the plan.

---

[12] UNHCR. Quick Guide to UNHCR's Regionalization & Decentralization Process. 2019 Feb;7.

3 Evaluation methodology

3.1 Evaluation questions

70. While the UNHCR response to the Sahel displacement crisis is articulated in its response strategy documents, no explicit theory of change or logic model has been defined. The evaluation team reconstructed one for the purpose of guiding this evaluation, articulating the causal link between UNHCR priority areas and strategic outcomes (see Annex 2). The evaluation matrix was designed to reflect this theory of change along five core evaluation questions or Areas of Inquiry (AoIs), as illustrated in Figure. For each area of inquiry, this evaluation employs the relevant OECD–DAC evaluation criteria, following the ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies (Annex 3). The evaluation matrix details the evaluation questions and specific sub-questions, evaluation criteria and sources of information (Annex 4).

Figure 3: Areas of Inquiry

OUTPUTS How well UNHCR addressed needs?	**AoI1**	*To what extent have the operations effectively responded to the needs of diverse populations of persons of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) both in countries of asylum as well as in countries of origin?*
INPUTS Were resources sufficient, timely, and appropriate?	**AoI2**	*To what extent have financial, physical and human resources been made available to the response in timely, sufficient, and appropriate manner following L2 emergency declarations in Mali and Niger and L3 declaration in Burkina Faso?*

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected UNHCR's ability to respond to the crises in the three countries?	**AoI3**	CONTEXTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS
To what extent do UNHCR's existing emergency preparedness policies and IDP Policy enable operations to implement the planned response?	**AoI4**	How did internal and external contextual factors enable or constrain UNHCR's ability to address needs?
How has UNHCR's ongoing decentralization affected the response and what was the role of the Regional Bureau and HQ?	**AoI5**	

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 OVERVIEW

71. To explore the five areas of inquiry, this evaluation used a convergent mixed methods design that leveraged conventional and participatory quantitative and qualitative methods. Primary data collection (key informant interviews and focus groups) took place between June and August 2021. The methodology acknowledges the dynamic nature of the Sahel response and adopted both a retrospective and a forward-looking approach considering the progression and effectiveness of the response during the period of evaluation. It seeks to guide adaptation to emerging and dynamic realities in complex environments, and to provide insights and recommendations for adjustments and improvements for relevant operations.

72. Throughout the design and implementation of the evaluation, the team aimed to include the voices and experiences of all people of concern. Special consideration was given to Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) perspectives in all primary data collection activities carried out as part of the evaluation, particularly with persons of concern, including through dedicated interviews and focus group discussions. The evaluation is also undertaking a rigorous quantitative survey with persons of concern using respondent driven sampling.

3.2.2   DATA SOURCES

73. This evaluation relied on a combination of existing evidence documented by UNHCR (secondary data) and primary data collected throughout the evaluation from multiple sources (internal and external key informants, persons of concern) using multiple methods (survey, interviews, and focus group discussions). Emphasis was placed on triangulating information from multiple sources collected through various methods to reduce the risk of bias. Findings were also validated through a series of discussions between the evaluation team and various stakeholders of the Evaluation. Annex 3 presents the data sources and data collection techniques that were used to collect and triangulate the data by Area of Inquiry, Evaluation Questions (EQ), and sub-questions.

Figure 4: Overview of the methodology
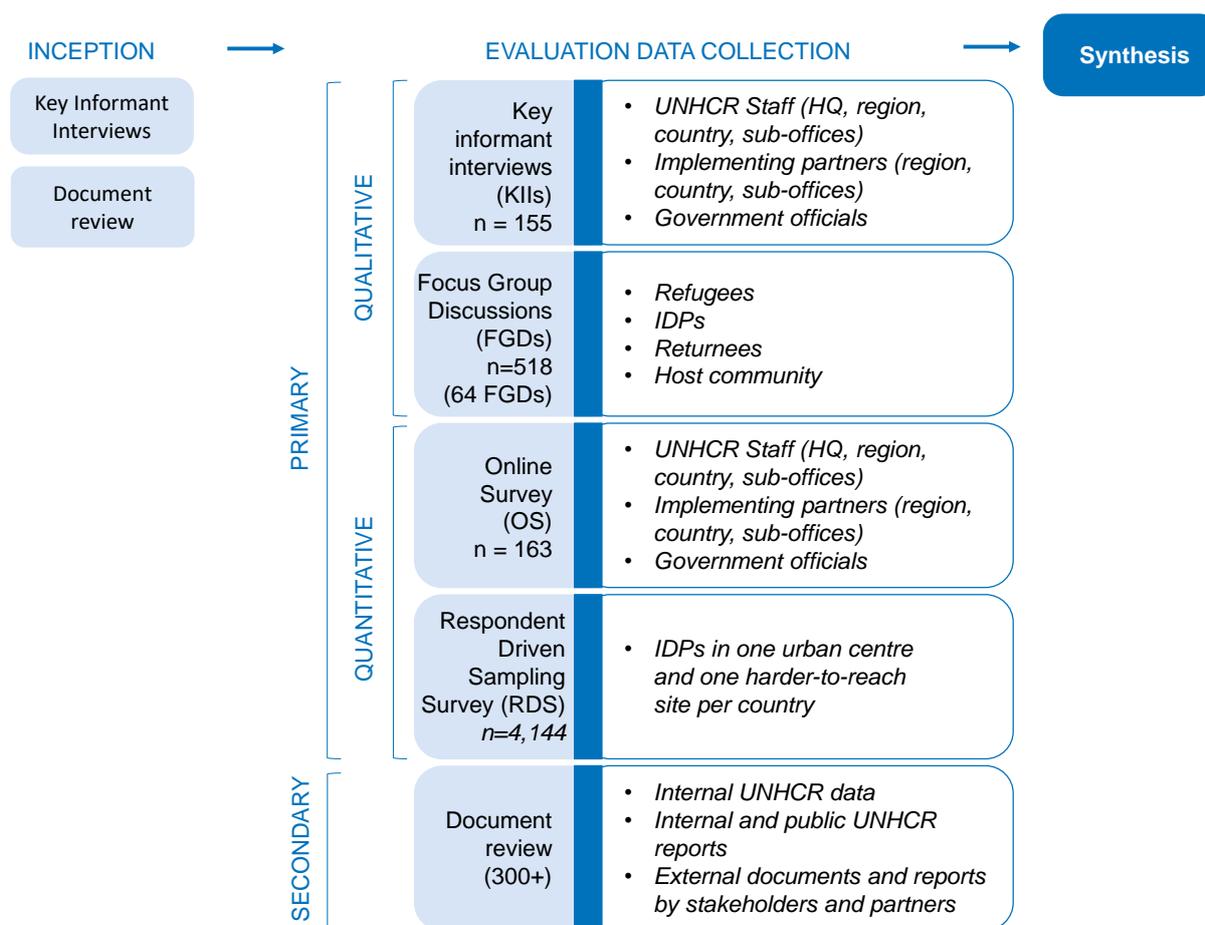
74. During the inception phase (February-March 2021), systematic document review and interviews with 11 key stakeholders and feedback sessions were conducted to refine the

evaluation objectives and propose and validate the methodological approach used in this evaluation. During the subsequent evaluation phase, the evaluation drew on five main sources of evidence at the global, regional, and local level, as outlined in Figure 4, with country-level details available in Annex 5.

75. At the 'local level' the evaluation team conducted primary data collection nationally, with additional field data collection at four sites per country. The sites, presented in Figure 5, were selected in consultation with UNHCR during the inception phase to represent a variety of population and settings for UNHCR intervention, and included Sub-offices, field offices, and field units. A similar process was used to select two sites per country for the implementation of a Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) study with IDPs, including an urban area and a hard-to-reach area.

76. Data collection for each country was led by an evaluation expert from the core evaluation team, supported by a pool of experienced national consultants. The teams, in coordination with UNHCR, adapted instruments and selection within the country contexts. Instruments were designed to ensure the evaluation team was able to gather input from multiple stakeholders.

Figure 5: Map of selected evaluation sites per country

● Evaluation Site – Country office
◉ Evaluation Site – Sub-office, Field office or Field unit
○ Respondent Driven Sampling study site
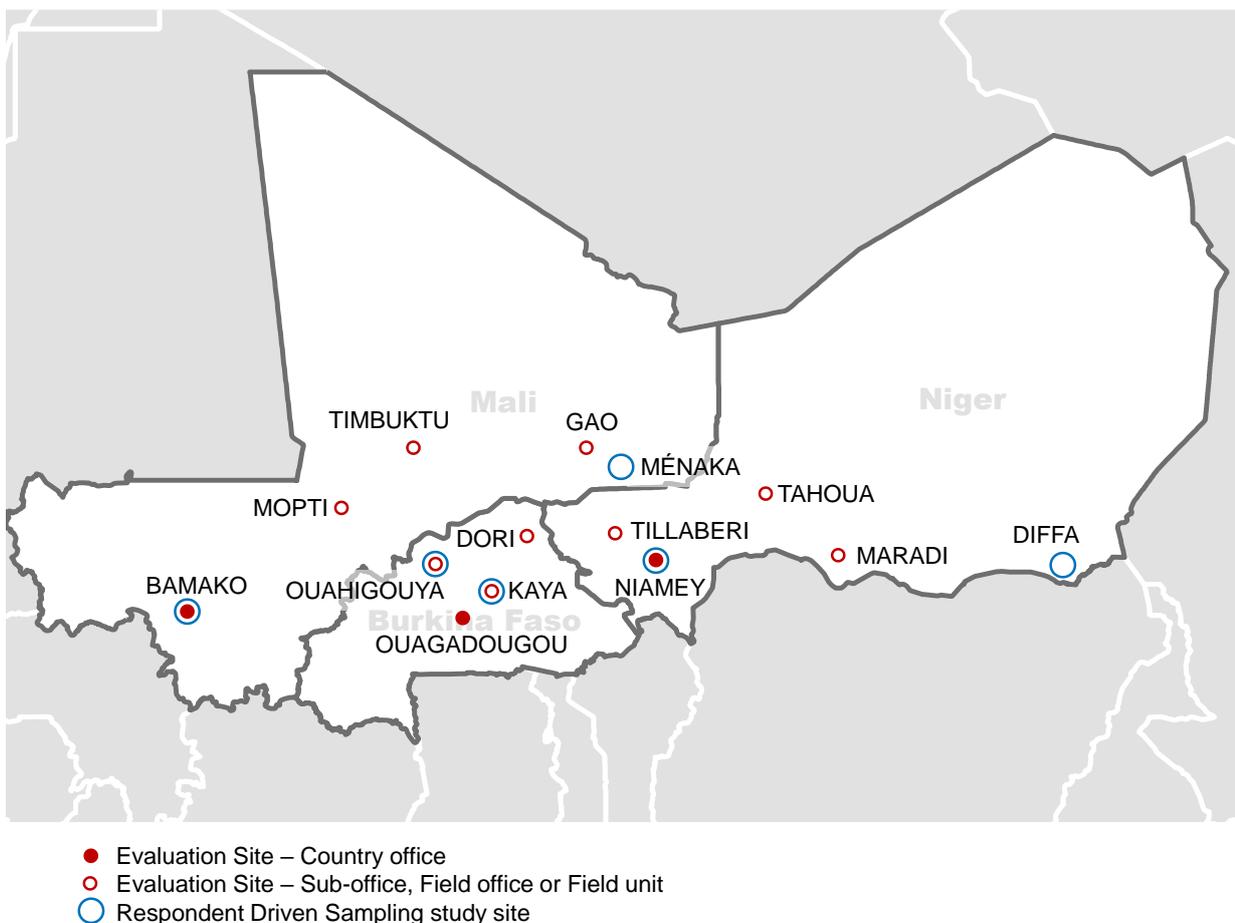
77. At each study sites and globally, **key informant interview** samples were drawn using purposeful sampling after discussions with UNHCR, who provided lists and contact

information for UNHCR staff (regional, country, and field levels), UNHCR implementing partners (regional, country, and field levels), and government officials (country and field level).

78. At each field site, the evaluation team members recruited **focus group discussion** participants based on geography, POC status, gender, and participation in UNHCR activities. Recruitment procedures were impartial to ensure broad representation.[13] After recruitment was completed, each focus group was led by an evaluation team facilitator, who followed group discussion tools designed to provide consistency across contexts while also incorporating contextually appropriate nuances. The focus group guides included a participatory exercise ranking of the experience of extreme character profiles using visualization techniques.

79. **Online surveys** were sent via a secure email survey link with several reminders during a five-week period between July and August 2021 to UNHCR staff whose work is related to Central Sahel, as well as with implementing partners and government officials. The survey employed a semi-structured format to elicit participants' views.

80. Initial participants of the **Respondent Driven Sampling Study,** called seeds**,** were identified, screened, and selected at the six study sites based on their ability to recruit diverse peers within their social networks who meet eligibility criteria. The sample was then generated via a chain-referral sampling method, whereby participants recruit eligible peers via coupons. Understanding the social structure reduces the risk of bias due to the selection of the initial seeds.

81. In total, for this evaluation, the team relied on data from 155 semi-structured key informant interviews, 64 semi-structured focus groups with a total of 518 persons of concern, including refugees, IDPs, returnees, and host populations, 163 online survey respondents, and about 100 documents reviewed. The respondent driven sampling (RDS) study resulted in 4144 surveys with IDPs in remote and urban sites across the three countries, the results of which are summarized in Annex 10.

3.2.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

82. This evaluation report is the culmination of the Evaluation Phase, describing the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations gathered throughout the past year in line with the evaluation matrix. Before drafting the final report, the core evaluation team members participated in an iterative analysis process including triangulation workshops in which findings were drafted and directly traceable to a diverse range of data sources and stakeholders to enhance accuracy and reliability of data. Specifically, interviews and focus groups were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by members of the evaluation team. The data were then grouped into themes per evaluation team group discussion.

---

[13] Recruiting persons of concern posed a series of challenges that influenced our sampling strategy in each country. In each context, we first restricted our recruitments to the geogaphic locations of our key informant interviews to ensure consistency across our data collection. Within the selected locations, we then worked with UNHCR and partners to recruit focus group participants. In Burkina Faso, we hired a local assistant to recruit IDPs and host community participants directly. In Mali, we worked with UNHCR directly to recruit participants in collaboration with our research assistant. In Niger, our research assistants worked with community leaders and responsables of refugees or IDPs committees in Ouallam and Tillia (Tahoua) and UNHCR partners in Maradi to recruit the participants.

83. For the online survey data, descriptive statistics were computed (frequencies and averages) and cross-tabulation was produced. Using a deductive approach to data analysis, open-ended perception questions were analyzed by tallying conceptually equivalent (per evaluation team group discussion and majority decision) indicators mentioned by study respondents and analyzed for response patterns and trends. The RDS data are similarly analyzed using RDS Analyst (www.hpmrg.org). Data are weighted by social network size. Secondary data were analyzed and triangulated with other data to minimize bias and ensure the credibility of the findings and conclusions.

84. Throughout the evaluation the team leaders supervised data collection, ensuring regular data quality checks and adhesion to the evaluation data collection and management protocols. Workshopping sessions were held to extract inputs to answer each of the evaluation questions, discuss, triangulate & consolidate main findings across countries and data streams, and ensure findings were structured around the evaluation matrix, with each finding directly traceable to evidence. The interpretation of findings was supported and validated through country debriefs and will be further validated during upcoming co-creation workshops and validation workshops.

3.2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

85. The evaluation team maintained the highest ethical standards in the collection, processing, analysis and use of the data gathered during this evaluation. The evaluation protocol and all data collection instruments were reviewed by Partners Human Research Committee (PHRC) and Partners' Research Information Security Office (RISO) for ethical review and approval. RISO provided guidance and insight for the proper collection and management of data to ensure privacy and confidentiality of participants. All participants (key informants, survey respondents and focus group participants) were given information about the evaluation and time necessary to decide whether to participate. Informed consent was sought in all cases, outlining the goals of the evaluation and the voluntary and confidential nature of interviews, presenting the team, and discussing the potential risks and benefits from participating in the interview.

3.2.5 LIMITATIONS

86. The evaluation team faced various limitations while conducting the evaluation, including challenges presented by the unpredictability and contextual challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international travel restrictions meant that some evaluation team members were unable to visit the country to undertake project site visits as initially planned. However, local evaluation team members were able to travel within the country to hold interviews and focus-group discussions in all three countries.

87. Although all interactions were designed to elicit participation and engagement, remote interactions due to COVID-19 restrictions may have affected the quality of interaction with stakeholders. In some cases, this was exacerbated by the inferior quality of internet connectivity. At the same time, the quality of in-person interaction may have been hindered by the necessary adherence to protective behaviors, including the use of personal protective equipment and adherence to social distancing.

88. Data collection during emergency operations affects the availability and attention of stakeholders, an issue complicated by competing demand for stakeholders due to other ongoing audits and evaluations. At the same time, rapidly changing security conditions hinder data collection planning and implementation. In response, the team adopted a coordinated and flexible but highly focused and targeted approach to make data collection as efficient as possible. More generally, stakeholders (internal and external) may have been unwilling to express criticisms or be fully open about potential shortcomings to external observers. To reduce this risk, the team ensured that the confidential nature of the interactions and the objectives and features of the evaluation were transparently and clearly communicated with UNHCR personnel and external stakeholders.

89. An important challenge is differentiating the UNHCR response from the wider humanitarian response in Central Sahel. UNHCR operates through a network of implementing partners and thus people of concern may not always differentiate between sources of assistance. The evaluation sought to ensure that participants were clearly focused on the relevant activities and interventions.

90. Finally, there are some limitations to the generalizability of findings. The document review is based on all documents available to the evaluation team at the time of the evaluation. There were differences across countries with regards to the completeness, level of detail and timeliness of the documents. At the same time, responses from key informants, focus groups and even surveys may not be generalizable or transferable to other times and places. The external validity of the findings was impacted by the delay or non-participation of a few stakeholders, especially in Niger, and low response rate among some groups (e.g., small sample of online survey respondents at the Bureau and especially at the Headquarters level). Additionally, in Niger, all focus group participants were located in an urbanized site, in the ZAR in 2020 or in opportunity villages. Their views might not reflect those of refugees, IDPs or host communities outside of those areas/ sites. However, to mitigate these issues, the evaluation team ensured that findings and main conclusions were triangulated across several data sources.

4 Key findings

4.1 Response (AOI1)

To what extent have the operations effectively responded to the needs of diverse populations of persons of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) both in countries of asylum as well as in countries of origin?

92. In this section, we look at coverage, relev*ance* and effectiveness of the response overall and then explore the specific aspects of the response, as guided by the areas of intervention of the Sahel Strategy, in greater detail.

93. Notwithstanding important differences in UNHCR's mandate with regards to IDPs and refugees (see 2.2) and differences in coordination mechanisms in serving these populations, this evaluation examines coverage for refugees and IDPs in parallel. This is in part a reflection of UNHCR's commitment to provide solutions for refugees, IDPs and other civilian population (Sahel Strategy). It reflects UNHCR's promotion of an area-based approach rather than a legal status-based approach. It also reflects the lack of consistency in defining UNHCR's responsibilities across respondents interviewed for this evaluation, including those served by UNHCR. Finally, it reflects an increased understanding that selective service provision can have adverse consequences for social dynamics especially in the socially fragile context of the Sahel.

4.1.1 RESPONSE COVERAGE

94. **Overall, response coverage by UNHCR and other humanitarian actors was insufficient to address the full extent of population needs.** The large scale of, and rapid increase in population needs exceeded the available resources and the capacity of both UNHCR and other humanitarian actors. According to UNOCHA's Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview for the Sahel Crisis, humanitarian response plans were funded at an average 53 percent in 2020.[14] While UNHCR's Sahel Appeal was better funded (at 90% for Burkina Faso, 100% for Mali, and 80% for Niger, see Table 2), coverage gaps remained. Notably, UNHCR faced access challenges and, notably, different approaches to prioritization and operationalization of the IDP policy.

95. **UNHCR's needs-based approach inherently prioritizes more vulnerable groups.** This reflects UNHCR commitment to protect the refugees and other displaced persons. Women, children, gender-based violence victims, older persons, persons with disabilities, and those with protection cases in general were cited as the populations most targeted, and thus best served by the response. Single men, on the other hand, were cited as a demographic group perceived as less vulnerable in general and thus less likely to receive UNHCR support. Whilst recognizing the need to prioritize vulnerable groups, some key informants did express the potential adverse consequences of not being adequately served, such as recruitment into armed groups or local militias.

96. **Given the spectrum of forced displacement, finite resources, the scale of the crisis, and humanitarian access constraints, UNHCR's needs-based approach was limited**

---

[14] OCHA. Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview. Sahel Crisis. Humanitarian Program Cycle 2021. April 2021. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021%20Sahel%20Crisis%20HNRO%20EN.pdf

to accessible geographic locations. It was not without challenges. Country-specific limitations in implementing the needs-based approach are discussed in more detail below.

- **In Burkina Faso and Niger, the most frequently cited barrier to implementing a needs-based approach was the capacity to identify the most vulnerable.** UNHCR personnel and partners interviewed cited the government's limited capacity to produce comprehensive and timely lists of target beneficiaries as a major impediment to providing assistance. While registration is not a prerequisite for access to assistance, lack of government capacity and delays around IDP registration has made it particularly difficult to identify and thus serve IDPs in a timely manner Implementing partners, and to a lesser extent, UNHCR conduct their own needs assessments through surveys and focus groups, as well as use information from protection monitoring to inform the delivery of needs-based assistance. However, these needs assessments are variable in quality and are limited to areas accessible directly to UNHCR or indirectly through partners and thus, gaps remain. Furthermore, while UNHCR has clear eligibility criteria and vulnerability assessment standards in place, POCs have expressed some confusion with the process, generating frustrations. For example, in focus groups in Burkina Faso, POCs felt that the criteria for receiving assistance were opaque and that the prevailing perception was that "who gets on a list" was less a matter of vulnerability criteria and more about having the right connections. In Niger, refugees and IDPs alike expressed their lack of understanding of assistance eligibility and a general sentiment of inequity.

- **In Mali, support is limited to targeted areas, in some instances creating intra-/inter-group tensions.** Key informants explained that in practice, UNHCR typically prioritizes areas with the highest number of POCs, rather than attempting to reach smaller groups of vulnerable people in more isolated areas. This can incentivize POCs to gather in locations where they are more likely to receive assistance, leading to over-crowded conditions and heightened tensions with host communities, as many people compete for the same resources and assistance, particularly with regards to access to water sources. Indeed, this tension was exemplified by the perception of members of different categories of POCs in the same area commonly stating that other groups were receiving more assistance than them. This was particularly true with regards to cash assistance and food delivery: tensions were reportedly sparked because certain groups of individuals were perceived to be more vulnerable than others and received more of these types of assistance.

97. **UNHCR's response covered diverse populations of concern, albeit with notable country variations in coverage per population group, in part reflecting a lack of experience or expertise with specific groups and diverging implementation of UNHCR's IDP mandate.** In Burkina Faso and Niger, key informants and UNHCR staff generally considered that refugees are better served than IDPs and returnees, whereas the opposite was true in Mali. In all three countries, there is a notable imbalance in the "mixed situation, with greater IDP numbers than those of refugees, significantly so in Burkina Faso. The size of the IDP population's needs combined with issues regarding IDP prioritization resulted in unequal, generally lower, coverage of the needs for IDPs. Mali is an exception possibly because of the insecurity which reduces access to refugee

populations. This difference also reflects diverging approaches to UNHCR's mandate with regards to IDPs.

Table 3: Response coverage based on document review

Population	Population Size	Basic & Domestic Needs		Shelter & Infrastructure		Registration & Profiling	
		Coverage (%)	C:N ratio	Coverage (%)	C:N ratio	Coverage (%)	C:N ratio
BURKINA FASO							
IDP[15]	1,074,993	5	0.08	12	0.2	77	3.35
Refugees[16]	33,150	--	--	35	0.6	70	Fully met
MALI							
IDP[17]	332,957	6	0.16	4	0.13	--	--
Refugees[18]	73,268	18	0.32	3	0.06	3	0.06
Returnees[19]	8,077	--	--	47	0.94	--	--
NIGER							
IDP[20]	144,280	11	0.13	30	0.35	70	0.95
Malian refugees[21]	87,203	14	0.17	2	0.04	100	Fully met

*Figure 6: UNHCR response perceived coverage for populations of concern,
UNHCR online survey respondents
(Mean score on a 1-5 scale, with higher score corresponding to better reach)*

Burkina Faso				Mali				Niger				All respondents			
Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations	Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations	Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations	Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations
4.1	3.8	2.9	3.4	3.2	3.6	3.7	3.2	4.1	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.9	3.6	3.2	3.4

---
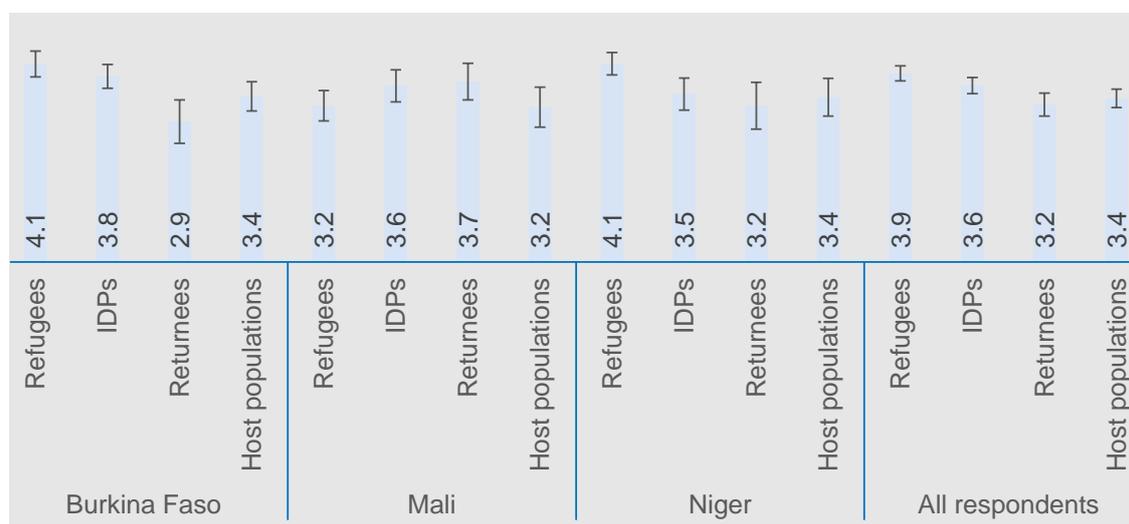
[15] UNHCR Global Focus Platform: Burkina Faso. https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/8657 [Accessed August 6, 2021].
[16] UNHCR. 2021. Burkina Faso Operations Plan Year-End Report.
[17] UNHCR Global Focus Platform: Mali. https://reporting.unhcr.org/mali [Accessed August 8, 2021]
[18] UNHCR. 2021. Mali Operations Plan Year-End Report.
[19] UNHCR. 2021. Mali Operations Plan Year-End Report.
[20] UNHCR. 2021. Niger Operations Plan Year-End Report.
UNHCR Global Focus Platform: Niger. https://reporting.unhcr.org/niger [Accessed August 8, 2021]
[21] UNHCR. 2021. Niger Operations Plan Year-End Report.

- **Burkina Faso:** Refugees were the group with the highest degree of coverage in Burkina Faso according to the document review (Table 3 – outlining the difference particularly for shelter and infrastructure) and online survey results (

- Figure 6). While their circumstances have been complicated by recent waves of violence, by and large, refugees in Burkina Faso are well-established beneficiaries of UNHCR and are able to access services because of longer-term engagement. In 2020, operational expenditure dedicated to IDP projects was three times greater than for refugee programs.[14] Despite an increasing focus on IDPs during the period of the evaluation, the recent and rapid growth of the sizable IDP population and the relative newness of the IDP response for UNHCR presented challenges to coverage. Coverage for refugee returnees to Burkina Faso was not reported in UNHCR documents nor was it mentioned in interviews, and in fact coverage here, was ranked lowest by Burkina Faso survey respondents compared to the other countries.

- **Niger:** Likewise, refugees were the group with the highest degree of coverage in Niger when looking at basic and domestic needs assistance as well as registration and profiling, especially those in urbanized sites (lotissements humanitaires), ZAR (zone d'accueil des refugies), and opportunity villages (villages d'opportunité). Key informants noted that in the Tillaberi and the Tahoua areas, the sudden increase in the number of IDPs (an increase of more than 47% in 2020), and the high mobility of the population rendered them more challenging to identify in a timely manner and thus to cover. In the Maradi region, IDPs were fewer (17,262 as of December 2020) and easier to access, but still relatively less supported. In focus groups, 95% and 76% of refugees reported receiving shelters and NFI respectively, whereas 80% and 50% of IDPs reported the same thing. According to UNHCR respondents, returnees in to Niger are not considered part of the Sahel situation but rather associated to the Nigeria situation This explains why they were not reported in documents or interviews and ranked lowest of any POC group among survey respondents.

- **Mali:** In contrast to Burkina Faso and Niger, returnees were the group with the highest degree of coverage in Mali, specifically for shelter and infrastructure. Returnees are significantly much smaller in number compared to refugees and in particular, IDPs. Coverage for refugees in particular was much lower than for returnees and IDPs. Key informants suggested that UNHCR is better able to assist returnees and IDPs in Mali because they do not face language barriers, more often possess identification, and can often rely on local support networks. In contrast, refugees tend to live in more insecure and harder-to-reach areas of Mali, such as the tri-border area.

98. **In general, response coverage was greatest in locations where UNHCR and implementing partners had a strong and well-established presence.** Persons of concern were best covered in locations with humanitarian infrastructure in place to provide comprehensive services. Though approaches to the humanitarian structure differed by country and context, well-covered sites included camps in Burkina Faso, areas with large numbers of IDPs and returnees in Mali, and urbanized sites in Niger, described in greater detail below. Importantly, coverage is closely related to humanitarian access with greatest coverage provided in relatively more secure locations.

- **Burkina Faso:** Refugees living in camps, such as in Goudoubo and Mentao in the Sahel region, were among those whose needs were most addressed in 2020. For IDPs, the Centre Nord region, served by the Kaya office, was considered relatively well covered since UNHCR has increased its presence and capacity to respond to the influx of IDPs there.

- **Mali:** POCs were best covered in areas in close proximity to the cities of Gao, Timbuktu, and Mopti. POCs, particularly refugees, located in Koro, Gossi, Kidal, and Ménaka were less well-served, although in 2020 UNHCR opened an office in Ménaka which has improved assistance coverage there. Koro, Gossi, and Kidal are highly insecure and far from UNHCR field offices, making assistance difficult to provide.

- **Niger:** Refugees and IDPs were best-covered in the *lotissements humanitaires* or urbanized sites in Ouallam, Abala, and in Ayorou (Tillabéri) before the attacks in the Ayorou department, in the *ZAR* (Tahoua) before it closed in June 2021, and in and around the *villages d'opportunité* (Maradi). In those locations, refugees and IDPs were in a fixed environment and thus more easily accessible, so UNHCR could provide comprehensive protection services as well as water sources, education, and health. IDPs were also partially covered in areas such as Bankilaré, Gothèye, Téra, and Torodi in Tillabéri region, where education and information services were provided.

99. **In all three countries, insecurity is the most important barrier to accessing and addressing the needs of populations of concern. Response coverage was poorest for those in insecure and remote areas.** Humanitarian access in the Central Sahel region was severely limited, with key informants citing insecurity as the most constraining factor to geographic coverage. The prominence of security as a barrier to access is reflected in the online survey results, where 31% of UNHCR respondents identified populations in insecure areas as left out of the response. Geographic and environmental barriers were also reported as challenges to access in the Sahel, with key informants citing rough terrain, poor roads and infrastructure, and severe climatic conditions, all of which make certain areas particularly difficult to reach. Notably, areas with the compound effect of both remoteness and insecurity are the most challenging of all. For example, response coverage in the tri-border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger was identified as especially limited. Stakeholders from all three countries spoke to the difficulties of setting up operations and accessing POCs in this region due to the precarious and prolonged situation of insecurity there and its remote nature. This region hosts many Burkinabè refugees who have yet to be registered and therefore cannot access essential humanitarian support. Other hard-to-reach (HTR) locations are described by country below.

- **Burkina Faso:** The border areas with Mali and Niger, such as Loroum and Yatenga have low coverage owing to high levels of insecurity. Key informants also considered that the coverage has not been adequate for returnees and asylum seekers in the North region, served by Ouahigouya office, nor for the rapidly growing IDP population in the East region, served by the Fa'Da office. Insecurity was important to POCs as well: IDP focus group respondents in Dori reported that the placement of their site outside the town made them vulnerable to potential attacks. In that context, security equipment was considered highly important to carry out response in the field. Many

spoke to how the procurement of bullet-proof vests and vans in Burkina Faso, increased security in terms of protection and deterrence and enabled the response.

- **Mali:** Koro, Gossi, Kidal, and Ménaka were cited by UNHCR KII informants as especially difficult locations to reach given poor roads and insecurity. Burkinabè refugees in particular are concentrated in insecure areas (Gossi, Koro, tri-border area) that are far from the UNHCR field offices responsible for them. Stringent security protocols, discussed further below, often prohibited UNHCR staff from accessing these locations.

- **Niger**: Response coverage is severely limited in red zones along the border with Mali and Burkina Faso as well as remote or other insecure areas such as Inatès and Chinagoder in Tillabéri. In insecure areas where UNHCR has managed to provide services, it has not been without incident. For example, in the Tahoua region, UNHCR field missions were suspended following the killing of two refugees in the ZAR in May 2020. While implementing partners continued the work in the field, UNHCR's field missions did not resume until October 2020.

100. **Security policies, while accepted and understood as important and necessary, were seen as a barrier to response coverage, especially in Mali. UNHCR is prohibited from entering no-go "red zones."[22]** Consequently, populations residing in those areas are excluded from the response, unless they move to areas with greater humanitarian access. The latter option, however, is not always possible and puts the burden of humanitarian access on the population. In other high-risk areas, UNHCR may have been allowed to go but only under strict security protocols (e.g. with military escorts, in armored vans). These protocols were seen by staff as slowing down or constraining the response because it forced them to depend on the availability and approval of escorts and equipment. This was particularly true in Mali, where staff consider that strict security protocols have had a number of negative consequences on response coverage, as described in greater detail below. UNHCR key informants signaled the importance of acquiring the necessary tools, training, and partnerships to operate in insecure contexts more effectively. Given that security regulations rest with DO/SG (UNDSS) and host country, this raise the question of how UNCHR institutionally address this problem at a higher level.

- **Burkina Faso:** Armored vans were seen as essential assets in a context marked by insecurity and violence. The increased armored vehicle fleet due to the L3 declaration in Dori, for example, led to a noticeable improvement in response coverage in Burkina Faso's Sahel region.

- **Mali:** In Mali, access to insecure areas was constrained by stringent security protocols and MINUSMA and UNDSS guidelines, which, for example, prohibited staff from spending the night in places where there is no MINUSMA presence. UNHCR personnel frequently felt that protocols were overly restrictive and failed to account for their own assessment of the security situation, despite their presence in the field. When UNHCR travel was allowed by MINUSMA and UNDSS, it was often only permitted with a

---

[22] The mechanisms determining "red zones" seems to vary by country but for the sake of this evaluation, "red zones" are areas deemed inaccessible to UNHCR for security reasons.

military escort or in bulletproof cars, which could take weeks to organize. Staff felt that security restrictions made it difficult for UNHCR to be impactful. For example, military escorts caused locals and armed groups to associate UNHCR with the MINUSMA personnel accompanying them, which at times prevented trust-building and community acceptance by removing the perception of independence and neutrality, while also increasing UNHCR's exposure to armed groups who attack and steal 4X4 vehicles. International staff, who can become targets of kidnapping, had to be housed in MINUSMA bases rather than UNHCR guest houses like national staff, which further associated them with MINUSMA in the eyes of locals.

- **Niger:** In the Tahoua region, beyond Ouallam in the Tillaberi area, and at the border with Nigeria, any mission had to be escorted or in convoy. Armed escorts, although necessary because of the security situation, were not regular, and their coordination with Niamey created delays. Escort requirements limits access to refugees and IDPs. Security is also a problem for implementing partners. No kidnappings of partner personnel occurred in 2020 but some organizations have had their vehicles (including ambulances) stolen on the road. Partners advocated for using unmarked vehicles (no logos or marks). In general, poor roads, vast distances, and flooding increase the challenge of covering many areas. For example, the evaluation team held a focus group in Tillia, for which it took team members more than 14 hours to travel the 130km distance from Tahoua.

101. **In each of the three countries, UNHCR key informants described various political obstacles from the national to the local level, all of which negatively affected response coverage.** In Mali, for instance, the national government was resistant to establishing camps. In Burkina Faso (e.g. Ouagadougou and Bobo) and Niger (e.g. Niamey), authorities were often wary of humanitarian interventions, especially in urban areas. Obtaining land to provide shelters for displaced populations was also a common source of contention with local authorities in all three countries.

102. **Spatial dynamics and the nature of displacement itself further hindered humanitarian access. In the Sahel, some displaced populations are more difficult to identify because they tend to be more mixed in with host communities, making them "less visible" to humanitarian actors.** This is particularly true for IDPs in all three countries and was most frequently mentioned in the context of urban areas in Burkina Faso (Ouagadougou and Bobo Diolasso) and Niger (Niamey). Key informants also cited challenges in accessing populations on the move, including nomadic populations of concern and those experiencing multiple displacements, especially due to insecurity.

4.1.2 RESPONSE RELEVANCE

103. **Regional response priorities, as per the Sahel strategy, were not always reflected in the programming implemented in countries, undermining response cohesion and relevance at the regional level.** UNHCR staff at the Regional Bureau and Headquarters level considered the Sahel strategy to be essential and valuable in providing coherence to the response and communicating UNHCR's priorities internally and externally. However, the priorities outlined in the Sahel strategy did not always align with the budget allocated or activities performed in the field. Key informants reasoned that this was because, while considered well-designed, the strategy was still felt as a "top-

down" document. The level of training and sensitization received on the Sahel strategy was uneven among the field staff interviewed. Moreover, Country Offices maintain a high level of programmatic freedom and retain decision-making power on all activities without oversight at RB / HQ level. Whereas such independence contributes to flexibility and responsiveness, it can hinder coordination from a regional perspective. It can also mean that additional emergency resources are used to either fill existing gaps or develop activities with limited planning for durability. Thus, strategy and implementation were not always aligned.

104. The Sahel strategy makes mention of IDPs and refugees but does not spell out dedicated priority areas for interventions for particular groups, nor does it explicitly refer to UNHCR's IDP policy. The strategy notes the sharp increase in IDPs in Burkina Faso but does not highlight this as a key trend for the region, failing to recognize that IDP needs would dwarf those of refugees in Mali and Burkina Faso, and thereby failing to bring country operations to focus particularly on this group of PoCs.

105. Importantly, considering UNHCR's difference in mandates with regards to IDPs and refugees, the strategy notes that "Based on its mandate, UNHCR will work for the benefit of refugees, IDPs, returnees, persons at risk…" but the strategy does not spell out how differentiated approaches to sectoral priorities that are relevant for refugees and IDPs, and promotes an area-based approach rather than a legal status-based approach. As a result UNHCR's commitment and level of responsibility toward IDPs appeared unclear to many respondents.

106. **Community-based protection (CBP) has been central to UNHCR's protection strategy in the Sahel but, while considered key to improving response relevance, it is challenging to implement and evaluate.** UNHCR recognized host communities as first responders to the displacement crisis, especially in the case of IDPs, and has included host communities in the response to build local resilience and promote integration of displaced populations. CBP mechanisms are widely viewed as a good practice as they leverage local knowledge and allow for a context-specific response that is well-tailored to the population's needs. In Niger, for example, UNHCR and partners developed a network of monitors, focal points, and community people/ committees to provide information on protection incidents, though they cite the need for continuous monitoring and refresher trainings for this approach to be effective. The network was crucial to access areas less accessible to UNHCR such as border areas and in order to continue to document protection incidents when UNHCR staff could not be in the field due to COVID-19. Some of the staff interviewed, however, described various challenges related to CBP efforts, including the fact that CBP activities results are challenging to monitor and evaluate effectively without extensive training and follow-up of partners. Furthermore, protection challenges (e.g. child marriage) are sometimes rooted in cultural factors that require longer-term CBP interventions designed to address behavior changes that lie beyond the scope of UNHCR's mandate. Government judicial systems were also seen as an obstacle to CBP across the Sahel, as they are slow, often under-resourced and/or understaffed, and frequently have extensive case backlogs, hindering adequate reporting of or response to protection violations. Informants reported that CBP was also significantly hindered by COVID-19 mitigation measures including movement restrictions

in 2020 which limited access to and activities within communities, discussed in greater detail in section 4.3.

107. **The top needs of persons of concern were not always aligned with the assistance they received, undermining response relevance in the eyes of most POCs.** For UNHCR this affected how its response is perceived, regardless of whether the agency is mandated / sector lead to aid in response to that specific need. While focus groups with POCs underlined important variations in both their needs and satisfaction with the assistance received (described in greater detail below), POCs commonly requested longer-term, self-sustainable livelihood solutions, recognizing that short-term dependent assistance would eventually end. While appreciative of lifesaving interventions, POCs frequently spoke of less tangible aspects of assistance such as dignity and autonomy as being equally essential. These perspectives were true across all categories of POCs – Refugees, IDPs and returnees – but were especially pronounced among persons who had been displaced for longer periods of time.

- **Burkina Faso:** Access to water and sanitation (WASH) was a major concern among IDPs and was frequently linked to the inadequacy of shelter, despite WASH and shelter being under the mandate of different agencies for IDPs. Most IDPs live with host communities, forcing them to share a confined space. Where they had received shelter, IDPs expressed these were often too small for the size of the household or were otherwise not adapted to the terrain. The lack of appropriate shelter (for which UNHCR if sector lead for IDPs), combined with poor access to WASH (for which UNHCR is not a sector lead for IDPs), often contributes to the erosion of dignity and exposes IDPs, especially women, to SGBV. Some female IDPs explained that women were sometimes forced into marriage or sexual transactions to provide basic necessities for their families. Host community focus group participants also noted that hosting IDPs increased pressure on the water sources in their communities and created a potential source of tension. Notably, POC respondents in focus groups felt that they had not been consulted enough on their needs. The fact that participatory assessments were only able to be carried out in the Sahel region annually, owing to insecurity, massive displacements and the pandemic, may provide a potential explanation.[23]

- **Mali:** In Mali, many refugees, returnees, and IDPs explained that their health, education, and security needs were priorities that were not consistently met. While the government helps enroll displaced children in schools for free, parents cannot afford to pay for school materials. In addition, displaced children are often enrolled in schools far from where they live, so it can be unaffordable or dangerous for them to travel to schools. Thus, there is a high risk of school abandonment. Children may also have missed many months of classes due to a combination of security, COVID, and displacement and need to catch up. However, these educational needs are not met by UNHCR. Other POCs mentioned that they needed greater security from bandits and armed groups, as well as greater access to/availability of health services, neither

---

[23] UNHCR. Operations Plan: Burkina Faso 2020. 2021.

of which was substantially provided. They also said access to energy sources was an important need that was not often considered.

- **Niger:** Based on focus group discussions, shelter and food were the most often expressed needs by refugees and IDPs, with health and income generating activities close behind. Refugees and IDPs considered the latter to be important and necessary to ensure independence after assistance ends and considered them needs that are largely unaddressed by UNHCR's response. Partners and UNHCR staff corroborated the POCs need for IGA. One group of refugees who did not express need for IGA were refugees in the ZAR, an 18 km area that allowed them to keep their livestock and continue to be herders, and which was considered a potential alternative to camp. Unfortunately, the area was closed in June 2021 because of insecurity.

4.1.3 RESPONSE EFFECTIVENESS

108. **UNHCR's response was considered effective overall, more so for refugees in Burkina Faso and Niger and for returnees and IDPs in Mali.** Most stakeholders, including UNHCR staff, partners, government actors and beneficiaries, considered UNHCR's response effective at addressing the needs of POCs they served in general. The response was considered most effective for refugees, followed by IDPs, host communities, and returnees, according to online survey respondents (Figure 7), a finding that corroborates with other data sources. In Burkina Faso and Niger, refugees were better served reflecting the fact that the refugee population was smaller relative to the whole POC population as well as better known to UNHCR and more established in specific areas. In Mali, staff survey respondents gave lower ratings of response effectiveness for refugees compared to counterparts in the other two countries, likely owing to less accessibility for refugees compared to IDPs and returnees.

Figure 7: UNHCR response perceived effectiveness
UNHCR online survey respondents
(Mean score on a 1-5 scale, with higher score corresponding to more effectiveness)

	Burkina Faso				Mali				Niger				All respondents			
	Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations	Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations	Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations	Refugees	IDPs	Returnees	Host populations
	4.3	3.9	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.3	4.2	3.5	3.3	3.5	4.1	3.7	3.3	3.4
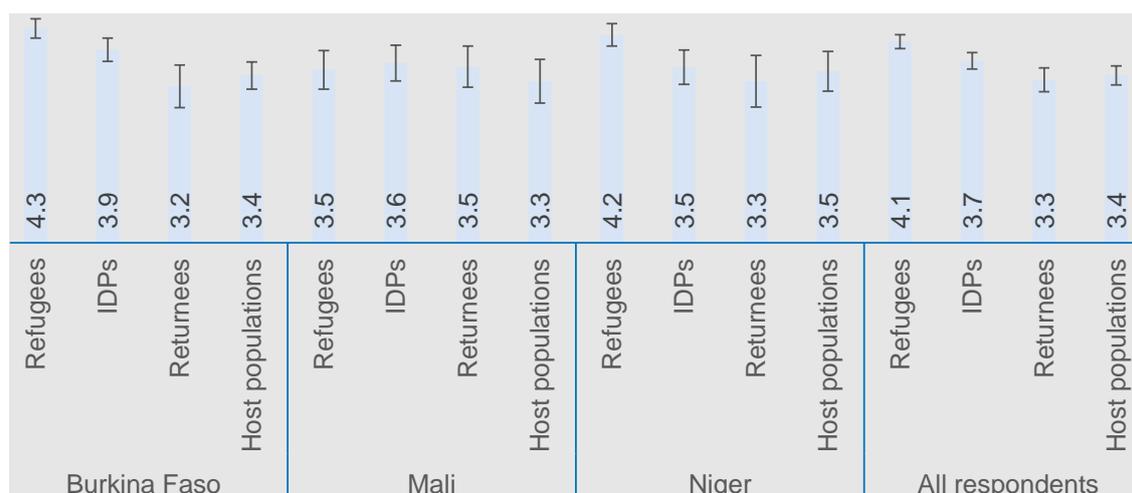
109. **There is a communication gap surrounding assistance, undermining response effectiveness and resulting in beneficiaries feeling uninformed and/or frustrated about assistance provision.** Across the three countries, POCs interviewed in focus groups reported that they were often unaware of when assistance would arrive and what

would be distributed. In some instances, beneficiaries complained about the long delay between the time at which someone came to register them and/or document their needs and the time at which they finally received some support. For example, in focus groups, refugees in Ouallam, Niger indicated that UNHCR has not followed-up with people with specific needs since their arrival in Ouallam in 2020. Key informants confirmed delays and logistical issues especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In other instances, beneficiaries said that the distribution of items such as NFIs was unpredictable and unplanned, creating a rush on distribution days and frequent imbalances between needs and supplies. During focus groups with IDPs in the Pissila settlement surrounding Kaya in Burkina Faso, participants gave the example of having asked for buckets at one meeting with humanitarians and subsequently receiving an excess of buckets by multiple partners, long after they were no longer needed. For other services- such as healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and legal assistance - interventions are generally more targeted, reaching a smaller number of beneficiaries. Moreover, these services were not as heavily prioritized as shelter and NFIs in 2020 and contingent upon available resources, were discontinued at times, creating unmet expectations and often leaves both beneficiaries and partners frustrated.

4.1.4 RESPONDING RAPIDLY AND EFFECTIVELY TO NEW DISPLACEMENT: SHELTER AND CRI

110. The first priority area of intervention outlined in UNHCR's Sahel Strategy is "responding rapidly and effectively to new displacement" via shelter and CRI provision. The coverage, relevance, and effectiveness of UNHCR's shelter and CRI response are explored in detail below.

Coverage

111. **UNHCR has made progress with regard to shelter and CRI provision but coverage remains a challenge. Shelter coverage fell short of the stated goal to cover 25 percent of the needs assessed as of January 2020, especially for IDPs**. Across the three countries, UNHCR provided shelter mostly in the form of pre-manufactured Refugee Housing Units (RHU) and tents, as well as NFIs such as buckets, carpets, utensils. At times, CRI was also included as part of the shelter response to cover rent or building costs. Partners and staff interviewed expressed the opinion that although UNHCR's shelter and CRI interventions are lifesaving, improvements are needed in terms of coverage. In focus groups with refugee, IDP, and returnee beneficiaries, participants were asked to share which forms of assistance they received from UNHCR. Overall, across the 3 countries, shelter and NFI were the most common forms of assistance received. However, shelter coverage was unevenly distributed across the population of concern. According to UNHCR's Global Focus platform, less than half of coverage needs were met in 2020. For IDPs, only 30% of shelter and infrastructure needs were met in Niger in 2020, with this number being even lower in Burkina Faso (12%) and Mali (4%).[24] For refugees, 35% of shelter needs were met in Burkina Faso, whereas less than 5% were met in Mali and Niger. Differences in shelter and NFI coverage across countries and population groups are explored in greater detail below:

---

[24] UNHCR Global Focus Platform: Mali (Mali. https://reporting.unhcr.org/mali) Niger (https://reporting.unhcr.org/niger), Burkina Faso (https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/8657).

- **Burkina Faso:** Document review findings indicate that shelter and NFI coverage is greater for refugees than for IDPs in Burkina Faso, but the country has less overall shelter and NFI coverage than other countries. Nonetheless, the much higher number of IDPs in Burkina Faso and the very short time frame in which this number has grown needs to be taken into consideration when looking at Coverage: Need (C:N) ratios (See Table 3 for breakdown by country and Annex 7 for document review methodology).

- **Mali:** According to document review findings, returnees' shelter and NFI needs are covered to a greater degree than those of refugees and IDPs. Refugees, who are clustered in the insecure tri-border region, and IDPs in parts of Mopti and Timbuktu were far more difficult to access, resulting in insufficient coverage and unmet needs. According to figures provided by KII participants in Mopti, for example, over 50% of IDPs assessed did not receive shelter.

- **Niger:** According to document review findings, IDP's shelter and NFI needs are covered to a greater degree than those of refugees, though this may be explained in part by the fact that most Malian refugees had been provided shelters in previous years, and thus no longer had this need in 2020. Because of limited resources, emergency shelters and NFI were prioritized in Tahoua and part of Tillabéri regions. Priority was also given to the most vulnerable during the rainy season. A fraction of the most vulnerable refugees received land as well as housing in sustainable material or social housing in urbanized sites. Other refugees had emergency shelters or RHUs but were awaiting housing in sustainable material in the *ZAR* and in the *villages d'opportunité,* which could explain why only 76% of refugees focus group participants received shelter assistance. About 10% of social housing was dedicated to the most vulnerable in host communities but not delivered at the time of the evaluation. UNHCR's negotiation to include IDPs in the *lotissements humanitaires* project is expected to improve shelter assistance for IDPs in Niger.

Relevance

112. **Although shelters were identified as one of the most pressing needs, there were widespread complaints regarding the quality and appropriateness of the shelters provided.** Emergency and premanufactured Refugee Housing Units (RHU) were not appreciated by beneficiaries interviewed in the focus groups, and UNHCR staff at all levels tended to agree, reporting that shelters were not adapted to the climatic conditions in the Sahel. Key informants and focus group participants described that the shelters could get unbearably hot and did not withstand the wind or rain, particularly during the rainy season. As a result, they had to be replaced approximately every 6 months, presenting an unwelcome strain on resources (human, material and financial) and a major dilemma considering the protracted nature of displacement. Furthermore, refugee and IDP focus group participants criticized the small size of both tents and RHUs, which they deemed impractical for larger households. In addition to the shelters themselves, POC focus group participants widely reported that the lack of corresponding infrastructure for water and sanitation forced them to abandon the shelters provided by UNHCR. Some UNHCR staff also mentioned this issue, noting that WASH was the responsibility of a different humanitarian partner. Other important cases related to shelter appropriateness are described in further detail below:

- **Mali:** Key Informants added that RHUs were expensive and not transportable, which made them inappropriate for nomadic groups. Given underfunding, many IDPs used cloth and straw for shelter instead. In some areas in Mali, such as Gao and Timbuktu, the lack of access to water near shelters had negative consequences not just for health and sanitation, but also for the livelihoods of individuals; without water, people could not ensure the survival of their livestock. Not uncommonly, the inappropriateness of housing solutions led to the abandonment of shelters.

- **Niger:** In Ouallam and Maradi, IDPs in focus groups mentioned delays in obtaining shelters and NFIs for newcomers and/or replacing shelters and NFIs when stolen or destroyed by armed bandits. IIn Maradi, refugees indicated that flooded shelters had not been restored and in one village, . POCs complained about an installed water pump not being repaired.

Effectiveness

113. **Emergency needs, like shelter and CRIs, were met in a more effective and timely manner compared to other primary services, but UNHCR fell short of achieving objectives set for CRIs and longer-term shelter.** Most stakeholders considered that there is room for improvement and that a more decentralized and localized response to shelter and NFIs could improve both effectiveness and timeliness. For example, UNHCR staff explained that the absence of nearby warehouses, especially in some remote locations, hindered a rapid response, especially for the provision of emergency NFIs. Table 4 below summarizes the extent to which UNHCR's response achieved its stated objectives set to address the needs of diverse populations of concern, presenting the needs met by sector and POC category in each of the three countries for the year 2020, based on available data. UNHCR largely achieved its objectives related to cash grants for shelter and met shelter provision objectives for some populations (refugees in Burkina Faso and IDPs in Niger), but failed to meet other shelter objectives, especially in terms of longer-term shelter. UNHCR also fell short of meeting objectives for core relief item provision, reaching less than half percent of the target objective.

- **Burkina Faso:** Data from the document review showed that four times the operational level targets for shelter were achieved for refugees in Burkina Faso. IDPs received the target number of cash grants but did not receive the target amount of long-term shelters and shelter support. The main constraint to providing shelter and infrastructure was the inaccessibility of the areas where beneficiaries were located due to insecurity, the lack of space to set up IDP sites, as well as shortages of manpower and materials due to COVID-19 associated border closures. Shortages in funding also led recipients of shelter support to only receive partial assistance for basic and domestic needs.[25] This may also be the result of how fast the number of IDPs increased in a relatively shortly short period of time.

- **Mali**: Document review findings suggest that the shelter and infrastructure response was more effective for IDPs and returnees compared to refugees. These figures confirm insights from key informant interviews. The effectiveness and timeliness of NFI provision in Mali was contingent on storage proximity. For instance, without a

---

[25] UNHCR. 2021. Burkina Faso Operations Plan Year-End Report.

warehouse in Timbuktu, where there were more significant numbers of IDPs and returnees, UNHCR had to move goods from Mopti, which could take up to 6 months due to security constraints and poor roads. In addition, as refugees were located in more remote and inaccessible areas, it was challenging to bring them the requisite shelter materials and NFIs.

- **Niger:** UNHCR met its objective in emergency shelter for IDPs. However, according to UNHCR staff and documents, this represents between 20% and 50% of the IDPs' shelter needs. There is no mention of other actors stepping in to provide additional shelters. In focus groups, IDPs in Maradi and Ouallam indicated that only one third of the IDPs had received shelters or only one tent instead of two. While UNHCR reached its objective for emergency shelters for IDPs, it only met 18% of its objective in permanent shelters for Malian refugees (658 out of 3,600 targeted in 2020), Construction of permanent shelters was hampered by a suspension of activities, loss of manpower and knowledge and reduced performance du to COVID 19, insecurity, as well as technical problems (lack of water supply, brick machine breakdown, and quality control).

Table 4: Needs met as a percentage of objectives,
by sector and POC category in 2020

	Population	Basic & Domestic Needs	Shelter & Infrastructure	Registration & Profiling
BURKINA FASO	IDP	Cash grants 100% Core relief items 33% Sanitary mat. 100%	Cash grants 100% Long-term shelter 19% Shelter support 76%	70%
	Refugees	Sanitary mat. 66%	Shelter 100% (4x OL)	70%
MALI	IDP	Cash grants 0% Core relief items 47% Sanitary mat. 42%	Cash grants 100% Long-term shelter 19% Shelter support 76%	- -
	Refugees	100% (7.2x OL)	Cash grants 53.3% Shelter 7.1%	9%
	Returnees	- -	Cash grants 95% Long-term shelter 60% Shelter support 22% Trans. shelter 42%	- -
NIGER	IDP	Cash grants 20% Core relief items 31% Sanitary mat. 17%	Emergency shelters 100% (1.2x OL)	100%
	Refugees	Cash grants 44% Core relief items 9% Sanitary material 57%	Build. constr. 100% Land allocations 29% Long-term shelter 18%	Nbr. Regist.12-14% Data updated 53-80%

114. **A more sustainable approach to housing is not yet being effectively implemented and still faces economic and political barriers.** Considerations for an "eco-friendly response for shelter" as outlined in the Sahel Strategy, exist programmatically, but are as of yet unrealized. The most frequently cited example of mainstreaming environmental sustainability was in the construction of shelters using sustainable material such as brick. Whereas no one contests the value of switching to sustainable material and UNHCR has

conducted pilot projects using more permanent and sustainable housing options, key informants cautioned that such projects face important barriers, including the comparatively greater cost of these shelters and other obstacles described below:

- **Burkina Faso:** A pilot project implemented to build shelters with sustainable materials, while appreciated by beneficiaries, cost almost eight times that of the RHU. Offering cash for housing and allowing beneficiaries to build their own homes or to pay rent to host community landlords has worked in some instances, but in other cases, the population used the cash allocated for housing for other necessities, leaving them without housing.

- **Mali:** UNHCR informants noted that they have trouble acquiring sufficient tracts of land for POCs to use, especially if they want to settle in the area long-term, making a sustainable approach difficult to achieve. This has created tension between short-term housing, which is not sustainable, and longer-term housing, for which there are not enough plots of land. When authorities have been resistant to the construction of camps, UNHCR has had to turn to solutions involving host communities. Many staff interviewed also described having spent much time in negotiations with authorities to access land for the construction of shelters.

- **Niger:** In terms of sustainable housing, UNHCR has had both successes and failures. One successful example comes from Niger's *lotissements humanitaires (Tillaberi),* where POCs were provided with sustainable housing and a plot of land. This approach was widely regarded as a good practice among interviewees. On the other hand, the partial collapse of some houses in Ouallam stoked fear among refugees about being hit by bricks, despite several iterations of testing to ensure that the design and materials were up to safety standards. Reportedly, the sustainable materials used to build these shelters proved unsuitable for the climate in the Sahel and were in fact hazardous. Some POCs indicated that they prefer sleeping in tents.

4.1.5   PLACING PROTECTION AT THE CENTER OF THE RESPONSE

115. The second priority area of intervention outlined in UNHCR's Sahel Strategy is placing protection at the center of the response. The strategy outlines SGBV, education, and an environment-centered response as central to UNHCR's approach to protection. Overall, UNHCR has only made progress towards addressing the first two priorities in select locations. Importantly, there are notable differences as to how the three country operations approached and addressed these priority protection areas. Overall, there is a sense that while protection is an important part of the response, it exists alongside core relief delivery and perhaps not centrally as the Sahel strategy intended. Coverage and effectiveness of UNHCR's response per country on each of these prioritized protection areas, as well as health and livelihoods, are described below.

SGBV

116. **UNHCR has covered SGBV needs through direct care and support for survivors via mobile clinics, community prevention and protection activities, and support for service expansion. However, SGBV needs were initially under-estimated in part because of underreporting related to stigma, and coverage is limited to targeted locations.** UNHCR made a number of inroads to serve SGBV survivors' varied needs.

Mobile units, prevention trainings, and community mobilization activities in Mali (Ménaka) and Niger (Tillabéri, Tahoua, and Maradi) were cited as improving UNHCR's coverage of SGBV needs. Though the mobile clinic approach was also employed in Burkina Faso (Kaya and Dori), it was discontinued due to low effectiveness and government preference for the implementation of more permanent solutions. UNHCR subsequently shifted to developing privileged referral systems and working in partnership with NGOs dedicated to providing expanded services to SGBV survivors, although there are very few such centers across Burkina Faso to date. UNHCR's 2020 year-end reports in Burkina Faso, for instance, where SGBV is cited as an unmet need, indicated that the prevalence of SGBV "turned out to be much greater than anticipated" and thus, recognized the "inadequacy of the existing mechanisms." In Mali, SGBV assistance was mostly concentrated in Ménaka, with other regions remaining uncovered, and this assistance was not considered comprehensive enough. Staff in Niger saw both mobile units and "one stop shops" in Tillaberi and Niamey (for refugees only) as equally important mechanisms but recognized that many needs of SGBV survivors remain unmet. Among SGBV cases reported in the Malian refugee population, less than 30% received material, medical (including mental health), or legal assistance[26] due to limited coverage.

117. **UNHCR's mobile SGBV response to date does not effectively address the long-term needs of survivors.** While the implementation of mobile units and the distribution of dignity kits and basic hygiene items were seen as effective means of addressing short term needs, they were widely considered as insufficient to provide effective SGBV care in the long term. UNHCR carried out activities to address the psychosocial care needs of SGBV survivors, mainly through mobile clinics in Burkina Faso (Sahel and Centre Nord regions), Mali (Ségou, Mopti, Gao, Ménaka and Timbuktu), and Niger (especially in Tillabéri and Tahoua). However, key informants still commonly considered mobile units to be poorly suited to effectively provide the long-term psychosocial support care that survivors require. Likewise, the long, complicated process of obtaining justice in all three countries requires a more stable presence than mobile units are designed to provide. While Niger's one-stop-shops potentially offer a more sustainable solution to SGBV service provision, they have yet to be evaluated for effectiveness.

118. **Across the Sahel, systematic barriers undermine the effectiveness of UNHCR's ability to provide care and justice for survivors. Beyond limitations in existing mechanisms, UNHCR key informants highlighted different political, structural, and cultural barriers.** In Burkina Faso, the entrenched practice of child marriage was cited as a key driver of SGBV. In Niger, stigmatization of survivors was cited as causing an underreporting of cases whilst a lack of latrines and crowded shelters was mentioned as a risk for SGBV. In Mali, fear of retribution from perpetrators and the ineffectiveness of the government judicial system were cited as decreasing the likelihood that survivors pursue justice. The decline of basic social services and health services in the region, owing largely to insecurity, was also a major limiting factor.

---

[26] Niger Year-end report 2020, Malian refugees, SVBG prevention and response, available at hhttps://reporting.unhcr.org/niger?year=2020

Education

119. **In 2020, most of UNHCR's work around education focused on classroom construction and the provision of education materials; nonetheless, coverage gaps remain.** UNHCR staff and partners throughout the Sahel understand the importance of education programs for building sustainable livelihoods and countering violent extremism among refugees (UNHCR's mandate with regards to education does not include IDPs, but as noted in this report, a more inclusive response is critical to foster social cohesion). In all three countries, education interventions were primarily focused on the construction of schools or the addition of classrooms to existing schools, in part because it is relatively easy to assess and obtain funding for infrastructure. UNHCR's coverage of educational needs tended to be most comprehensive in areas with a well-established presence, such as in camps in Burkina Faso and urbanized sites in Niger, but was otherwise quite limited. Educational coverage per country is described below.

- **Burkina Faso:** In Burkina Faso, education activities led by UNHCR were largely focused on the construction of classrooms. These activities were mentioned in all locations with a particular emphasis on the Sahel region where the presence of two refugee camps meant more dedicated staff and a larger capacity to address education needs as the camps hosted classrooms for refugee and local learners alike. Key Informants considered the attacks on the Mentao and Goudoubo camps in May and December 2020 respectively as having led to a major gap in education. However, the provision of radios for adaptation to distance learning during the pandemic was seen to improve education coverage.

- **Mali:** As with the other two countries, education activities in Mali centered on classroom construction. However, activities were not always carried out as planned due to budget, logistical, and/or security constraints, leaving coverage gaps. In Mopti, UNHCR only built three classrooms instead of its planned six. As in Burkina Faso, greater educational access for learners was attributed to radio provision during the pandemic.

- **Niger:** Classroom construction with WASH infrastructure, equipment (benches and tables) and education material addressed needs of refugees, IDPs, and host communities in Ouallam and Ayourou (Tillabéri), Intikane (Tahoua), and in opportunity villages (Maradi). Within focus groups (conducted in urbanized sites), 100% of the refugees and 73% of IDPs reported having received education assistance. In addition, sschool kits were distributed across a broader geographic area adding refugees in Abala, and IDPs in Tera, Bankilaré, Gothèye, and Torodi, in rural Tillabéri. While these activities were seen as addressing essential gaps, key informants recognized that infrastructure was concentrated in urbanized sites and that the number of kits represent a fraction of the need. In Intikane, for instance, 300 kits were distributed for more than a thousand students. There was no mention of support for teachers.

120. **Notwithstanding the importance that education plays within UNHCR's protection response strategy, it has not yet translated into an effective response in practice.** Overall, UNHCR fell short of achieving its education goals in 2020. In Mali, key informants noted that infrastructure improvements were insufficient and, in some instances, decreased the effectiveness of interventions: in Mopti, for example, building only half of

the planned classrooms caused overcrowding (180 students per class). In Niger, school kits were distributed in 8 locations but considered insufficient to effectively serve the number of IDP students to be covered. Only 43% for Malian refugee children were enrolled in primary school at the end of the year due[27] to the attacks in Intiake and relocation of school activities to Telemesse. In focus groups, refugees in Ouallam complained about the quality of education, while refugees in Ouallam and Maradi mentioned the lack of school uniforms as well as money for students and remedial courses as examples of insufficient responses to education needs among POCs.

121. Across all three countries, the effectiveness of UNHCR's education programs were further limited by country-specific contextual factors and the global COVID-19 pandemic, which prevents children from going to school even where there is space in classrooms. In Mali, for example, although the government supported the free enrollment of displaced children, the prohibitive cost of school materials as well as the security risks traveling to school keep children from attending. In Niger, the objective of supporting refugee and IDP children's pursuit of higher education was not achieved because of the lack of student candidates. In focus group discussions, respondents in Niger were generally positive about education but indicated that teaching quality could be improved. In Burkina Faso and Niger, cultural factors such as the tradition of child marriages and the need for children to provide household help to their families were cited as barriers to school attendance. The COVID-19 pandemic also led to extended periods of school closure, further disrupting school attendance. To mitigate the negative impact of such closures, UNHCR provided radios so children could effectively access distance learning opportunities in Burkina Faso and Mali. No such program was established in Niger, however.

Environment

122. **Despite its prominence in the Sahel strategy, UNHCR's response as it relates to the environment remains at the strategic level and has not yet translated into implementation.** By and large, environmental needs, including eco-friendly shelter and NFIs, community-based preparedness, clean energy, and waste-reduction remain unaddressed in UNHCR's Sahel response. Niger's 2020 Year-End Operational Plan has several indicators related to environment-centered responses and alternative energy, and the environment is included as part of Niger's development approach. However, Niger's environmental projects to date, including land restoration, fuel substitutes, tree planting, and awareness-raising activities on environmental protection, remain limited and have been superseded by other priorities. Only 10-20% of the beneficiaries received fuel as a substitute to wood for example. Only one staff member is dedicated to alternative energy and environment in Niger, and that person covers the whole country. The evaluation team lack sufficient data to properly judge such efforts in Mali and Burkina Faso but note that environmental strategies were not cited as effective elements of the response. There was little mention of an environment-centered response in either country except within the context of seeking more durable models of shelter.

---

[27] 2020 Year-End Operational Plan, Population Group: Internally Dis placed Persons in Tillabery and Tahoua Regions in Niger, Population Group: Malian refugeesin Niger (Year-End report),

Health

123. **Health is not identified as a priority area in UNHCR's Sahel Strategy, which reflects the limited resources allocated to supporting health services for refugees and, consequently, the effectiveness of such interventions. UNHCR's health** response coverage was limited overall, but most comprehensive in Niger. While UNHCR's mandate with respect to health includes refugees, it does not extend to IDPs. However, exclusionary approach to service delivery can be detrimental to social cohesion, and UNHCR promoted an area-based approach regardless of legal status. Thus, IDPs must often rely on existing government infrastructure, which is limited in many parts of the three countries, particularly in remote areas. Mobile units dedicated to SGBV victims were equipped with basic health necessities. These were cited as effective interventions for displaced and host communities alike, as they have greater geographical reach, but as noted above, these efforts lack sustainability compared to one-stop-shop centers. Certain differences emerged at the country level, as described below.

- **Burkina Faso:** UNHCR in Burkina Faso supported the construction of some community health centers which benefit both host communities and displaced populations, but the quantity and quality of these were inadequate to provide an effective health response. Additionally, some partners and UNHCR staff identified the maintenance of pre-existing health centers as an issue and cited examples of abandoned community health centers. Moreover, health centers often provide only emergency first aid leaving other health needs unaddressed. Insufficient health programming appears to be a trend that creates frustration among POCs. Only 9% of refugees reported they had accessed healthcare. Focus group participants across populations of concern explicitly cited health services as insufficient in Burkina Faso; refugee participants in Dori were especially emphatic about the lack of functioning latrines.

- **Mali:** In Mali, close to none of the refugee, IDP, and returnee focus group participants received health-related assistance, with the exception of first aid kits. Key informants in Mali rarely mentioned health-related activities in describing the response.

- **Niger:** In Niger, access to health care varied by population and location. Refugees and the host community generally had access to free primary health care, including mental health, in either state health centers or UNHCR – run health centers in urbanized sites, and *opportunity villages*. Nonetheless, in Maradi, the evaluation team observed that one of the UNHCR-run health centers was not operational and that the single ambulance dedicated to transferring people to a health facility was also used to transport workers, and thus not always available. Of concern for refugees and host communities is the fact that UNHCR's health infrastructures are due to be transferred to the local authorities and then government-run in the near future, and that health care will be no longer be free. Despite the fact that health coverage is not a UNHCR priority for IDPs, there was some health coverage for IDPs depending on location. IDPs in Ouallam mentioned receiving basic health care via a local NGO, whereas IDPs in Maradi reported having very limited access to basic health care. Two mobile clinics provided health care to IDPs and refugees in less accessible areas in Tillaberi and Tahoua. Health center closures in Ayourou and Banibangou in October 2020 due to insecurity decreased access to health in those areas.

Livelihood programs

124. **Livelihood programs and income generating activities were considered a top priority among populations of concern.** For many refugees and IDPs, access to income generating activities is seen as a priority. In focus groups, both refugees and IDPs expressed the desire that microprojects be financed, production materials be distributed, training and vocational programs be offered, cattle be sold, access to loans be provided, and youth be recruited by UNHCR's local partner organizations. Income generating activities (IGAs) were also seen as particularly important for empowering youth and women and building resiliency across POC groups. It is important to note that while IDPs had similar responses as refugees, UNHCR's mandate with regards to livelihoods only applies to the former and not the latter. It is worth noting that IDPs don't necessarily know this and thus might influence how the population at large evaluates UNHCR's response. At the same time, unequal treatment of IDPs and refugees risks fueling tensions and hinder social cohesion.

125. **UNHCR established livelihoods and/or resilience programs designed to support the financial independence of refugees in all three countries, but they are largely considered insufficient and unsustainable.** UNHCR's focus on the emergency response took priority over livelihood activities in its 2020 Sahel response but these appear to have a higher priority moving forward. As such, livelihoods programming is considered an ongoing process in these three countries. To date, UNHCR's livelihood activities are perceived to be small-scale and project specific, and thus not seen as translating into a cohesive livelihoods' strategy. Many staff interviewed recognize that UNHCR does not always have the internal capacity and competence to implement livelihoods programs and that identifying partners with experience in this domain is a priority. Self-reliance and livelihoods opportunities for refugees, as well as for IDPs, emerged as unmet needs in Burkina Faso and Mali's year-end reports.

126. Although respondents highlighted different projects in each country, some consistent trends emerged. For instance, **livelihoods programming can create tensions within communities based on who is excluded**, as was the case in the IGA project in Mali and the soap project in Niger. In addition, **elements of these programs in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger were seen as insufficiently tailored to the local context**. We detail specific project findings for each country below.

- **Burkina Faso:** UNHCR has a dedicated Livelihoods and Resilience unit, which although small, is growing. It is noteworthy that the unit was able to raise funds within a short period of time to expand its activities. Staff interviewed from the unit noted two important shortcomings, both related to capacity. Firstly, they conceded that UNHCR has limited internal expertise to implement livelihoods programs, and secondly, most interventions are modelled on the assumption of a rural context, whereas many displaced populations are in fact located in urban or peri-urban areas. The expansion of activities in livelihoods has been accompanied by the creation of new partnerships, for instance with the World Bank, FAO, and Caritas Suisse. These partnerships bring expertise and diversify the pool of partners for projects. Previously, UNHCR had only one implementing partner on livelihood projects, Veterinaires Sans Frontières – whose expertise is most adapted to rural contexts – but now UNHCR is piloting projects in the urban center of Kaya with FAO and Caritas Suisse.

- **Mali:** During focus groups, IDPs in Mali mentioned that IGA projects were particularly empowering for women and youth. IDPs stated, however, that more production materials needed to be distributed, trainings offered, cattle sold, and loans provided. They also requested that their youth be recruited by UNHCR's local partner organizations, in order to give them employment and to build a more effective relationship between POCs and those assisting them. Limited access to water also hampered the effectiveness of some IGA initiatives promoting cattle raising and agriculture. While UNHCR did build water sources, these did not meet the high demand, and building boreholes and repairing broken sources was often delayed. In places in which sources were built, tensions further arose between IDPs and host communities around access to this vital resource.

- **Niger:** In general, livelihood activities were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. IGA were in demand among refugees and IDPs in Maradi "because the assistance will stop." The demand was stronger from IDPs maybe because livelihood projects were not supplied in part because IGA to IDPs were not part of UNHCR's mandate. However, some refugees and IDPs added that IGA should be adapted to their nomadic lifestyle and take into account their interest and work with livestock. One example of an IGA in Niger had refugees and host communities involved in the production of personal protection kits (soap, masks) to fight COVID. Participants were generally satisfied with the project, with three overall caveats: 1) unequal treatment of participants (refugees received cash whereas host community did not); 2) the project ended without participants knowing or understanding why; and 3) there was no follow-up. For example, participants mentioned they would have liked continuing soap production as an income generating activity. Participants felt that communication about the process and the objectives of the project was lacking.

127. **Cash Based Interventions (CBI), while generally perceived as useful and effective by POCs, are sometimes insufficient to cover POC needs and difficult to implement/monitor.** In general, refugees and IDPs were satisfied with CBI received and described them as effective. They explained that they use multipurpose cash to cover needs unaddressed by UNHCR, to pay back debts, to start income generating activities, to buy cattle, to buy food or medicine, to pay for school materials, and to rehabilitate their homes, among other expenses. Despite these positive perceptions, POCs also described a number of limitations of CBIs. Some refugees in Maradi, Niger, for instance, stated in focus groups that they preferred receiving food than cash, as the high cost and limited supply of food rendered the CBI insufficient to cover their needs. Also in Niger, refugees in Ouallam received 30,000 CFA (about $50 USD) at the time of their relocation from Mangaize; to install themselves in Ouallam but this was deemed insufficient to pay their debts and started anew. In Mali, IDPs received around 100,000 or 120,000 CFA (around $170-200 USD), which some noted is not enough to lift them from extreme poverty to self-sustainability. Additionally, UNHCR faces challenges in implementing CBIs that limit their effectiveness when implemented. Key informants noted that there are sometimes delays in POCs receiving cash because they do not have sim cards and the cash is sent through mobile operators. UNHCR also finds it difficult to monitor how POCs spend the cash after distribution. These findings align with those of a 2018 UNHCR review of multi-purpose cash and sectorial outcomes, wherein multipurpose cash was found to have positive

cross-sectoral outcomes but was not without limitations.[28] Among these, the report cautions that multipurpose cash can't tackle systematic issues, is often too small to contribute much to outcomes across multiple sectors (especially when the amount or duration of assistance are limited), requires regular monitoring and outcome measuring, and cannot replace protection or sector-specific programming.

4.1.6 CAPITALIZING ON PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS

The third priority area of the Sahel Strategy is capitalizing on partnerships for protection and solutions. This section explores coordination, partnerships, and data collection, as well as management and synthesis as it relates to protection. The following section explores longer-term perspectives and the triple nexus.

Coordination

128. **In the mixed displacement context of the Sahel, UNHCR navigates multiple inter-agency coordination modalities. While UNHCR's coordination efforts are seen to support a coherent and harmonious response, additional clarity around roles and responsibilities within mixed-flow coordination mechanisms are needed.** In a refugee situation, UNHCR has a mandated role to lead coordination of all sectors. In an IDP situation, UNHCR is mandated to lead or co-lead three clusters: shelter, protection, and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), with OCHA leading overall inter-cluster coordination. In a mixed displacement situations like the Sahel which involves refugees, IDPs, and other affected groups, UNHCR's leadership and coordination arrangements are shared with OCHA. UNHCR's coordination efforts to date are generally viewed as positive by key informants and survey respondents alike. Over three-quarters of UNHCR staff survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: "UNHCR's coordination efforts with implementing partners (government and NGOs) supported a coherent/harmonious response to address the needs of populations of concern in 2020." These findings correlate with responses to the same question on the partner survey as well.

129. However, ongoing challenges in coordination efforts have been voiced by internal and external informants alike. For one, many informants spoke to the competitive rather than collaborative nature of relationships between some actors, each with their own agenda, and highlighted a need for increased "community building" and collective understanding through the cluster/refugee coordination models. Others noted that as UNHCR's approach to refugee and IDP situations are distinct, there is considerable complexity in the context of mixed-displacement situations with multiple coordination mechanisms at play, including potentially, working with the government's Direction Nationale du Développement Social(DNDS) for IDPs and La Commission Nationale Chargée des Réfugiés (CNCR) for refugees in Mali. Moreover, while the UNHCR-OCHA joint note on mixed situations[29] provides some guidance for coordination in practice, some felt that

---

[28] UNHCR (2018). Multi-Purpose Cash and Sectorial Outcomes: A Review of Evidence and Learning. Accessible at: https://www.unhcr.org/5b0ea3947.pdf
[29] UNHCR (2014). Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice. Accessible at: https://www.unhcr.org/53679e679.pdf

there was a need for clarity in roles and responsibility among actors at the beginning of the coordination process.

130. **Refugee sector coordination is better established and more effective than IDP cluster coordination mechanisms as a whole. Countries had varying levels of rootedness and operational experience with refugee and IDP coordination mechanisms, which presented both opportunities and challenges at the onset of the emergency.** In general, the coordination mechanisms designed for a refugee response work more smoothly and effectively compared to IDP mechanisms.

- **Burkina Faso:** In Burkina Faso, refugee coordination is considered to work more smoothly than IDP coordination, owing largely to the fact that the former is more established and better understood than the latter. UNHCR's initial engagement in Burkina Faso in 2012 was to support Malian refugees, who were mainly localized to the North and Sahel region and limited in number. UNHCR's IDP response in Burkina Faso is more recent and the escalation grew exponentially over a very short time, allowing little time for staff to learn, set up, and navigate appropriate systems.

- **Mali:** In Mali, coordination with the government was cited as difficult, which is particularly relevant for IDPs. Government agencies often lacked sufficient staff and resources, particularly in areas outside of Bamako, where security constraints limited their movements. KII respondents also explained that some government officials prioritized other commitments, and that following a coup in 2020 it was difficult to know with whom to coordinate. Indeed, there was a subsequent reshuffling of responsible actors who needed time to settle into their new roles. One particularly effective area of collaboration, however, was UNHCR's function of setting up crisis committees wherever there were large influxes of IDPs. These crisis committees could then inform the government about IDP locations and needs. With regard to refugees, UNHCR faced obstacles in accessing those locations in which they were settled, making coordination difficult. In these situations, UNHCR relied heavily on local NGO partners, but its ability to oversee and monitor the partners' work was limited, impacting proper coordination.

- **Niger:** In general, refugee coordination is considered to work better than IDP coordination in Niger. Management of refugee coordination was considered straightforward and comprehensible, with UNHCR fully in control of the coordination without having to wait on another partner. IDP coordination, on the other hand, is conditional on the leadership of certain state institutions, frequently described by UNHCR key informants as under-resourced and understaffed, which often translates into delays in operationalizing coordinated actions.

131. **While coordination of the cluster mechanism appears to be improving, it still faces important challenges.** The clusters are designed to improve coordination amongst different stakeholders engaged in responding to the needs of IDPs. The cluster mechanism exists at both the country and field level and is also supported by the global cluster. Overall, the approach is appreciated and perceived as bringing in technical expertise as well as transparency in how resources are allocated. Moreover, the cluster is often the mechanism through which information is shared amongst humanitarian actors.

Internal and external stakeholders noted the existence of regular cluster meetings, also observing that inter-cluster and working group meetings were less frequent and more challenging to convene. In Tillabery, Niger, for example, at the request of the Regional Department of Women and Children, thematic related to the SVBG and Child Protection Working groups, not under UNHCR's responsibility, were addressed within the general Protection Working group while at the same time there was no UNHCR's human resource to staff the Protection working group . Additionally, other group, such as the anti-mine group, was deemed necessary at the national level but not at the regional level because of the lack of partners. **Waning attendance, low government participation, and high staff turnover were identified as factors that diminish the effectiveness of the cluster system.** Furthermore, cluster meetings sometimes compete with other coordination mechanisms related to program implementation and can be seen as placing additional pressure on limited partner time. In Burkina Faso, some interviewees pointed to the need for a mindset shift so that actors previously accustomed to long-term development programs instead learn to work in a humanitarian setting where coordination meetings are part and parcel of programming and not secondary "if we have time" activities. Thus, the cluster system in Burkina Faso is seen to be only as good as the coordination capacity and this is an area where both partners and UNHCR staff have identified gaps. It is worth observing however, that in relatively small field offices with a low density of humanitarian actors and where formal clusters are absent, ad-hoc coordination mechanisms are organized by the few humanitarian actors present and that these work relatively well. **The challenge often lies during the transition period from informal to formal coordination mechanisms.**

132. **Whereas UNHCR-led registration of refugees was considered straightforward and effective, government-lead registration and profiling of IDPs was more problematic.** Generally, country level findings indicate that refugee registration led by UNHCR was more effective and consistent than IDP registration, which is led by the government with UNHCR playing a supportive role. Stakeholders explained that this is a function of more experience and control in the process to register refugees than IDPs. Refugee registration is better established than IDP registration, the latter of which presents a somewhat 'newer' challenge. Key informants also cite that the volume and rate of IDP displacement outpaced the government's capacity for registration. Limited access to IDP populations in insecure, remote, and even urban areas further compounds impediments to registration. Key informants raised several additional issues in the way that registration is conducted by the authorities, including data protection concerns and corruption. POCs with specific vulnerabilities such as disabilities and female headed households are prioritized in the registration process, consistent with the protection/social vulnerability-based targeting approach. Regional Bureau and Headquarters staff also highlighted that consideration and inclusion of IDPs in the responses, including approaches to supporting government-led IDP registration, were operationally different between countries (detailed below), reflecting an important divide within UNHCR regarding IDPs and agency mandates. Protection efforts were hampered by inadequate POC registration, so that those in need of protection were not always identified and covered by UNHCR.

- **Burkina Faso:** In Burkina Faso, UNHCR's implementation partners often complained that they struggled to access reliable and timely lists of IDPs for the purposes of planning their interventions, whereas many IDPs lamented the opacity

of the registration process through local committees. IDP registration is centrally managed by the CONASUR and implemented by agents of the Action Sociale et Humanitaire at the local level. These agents often lack the necessary expertise to administer the registration process, although UNHCR has dedicated considerable efforts to build capacity with both equipment and training. In contrast, for refugees, UNHCR takes the lead on registration and identification of needs and can thus process information in a timely manner as there is no intermediary. Moreover, the much smaller size of the refugee population compared to the IDP population makes registration far more manageable and less susceptible to delays and errors.

- **Mali:** Registration of refugees by UNHCR is complicated by accessibility issues but overall is more effective than the registration of IDPs by the Malian government's Direction Nationale Du Dévéloppement Social (DNDS). UNHCR key informants reported that the DNDS was overly centralized, does not have the staff or resources to effectively register IDPs, and is often unwilling to travel to insecure zones. One UNHCR key informant said that "There are [DNDS and CNCR] offices in the north and center with no staff…" Close to border entry points, the security situation permitting, UNHCR and partners set up signs that provided refugees with information on how to get registered as well as relevant phone numbers, with monitors to assist and sensitize them. UNHCR partners have also set up crisis committees wherever there are influxes of POCs, including IDPs, to inform the government of the locations where IDPs must be registered.

- **Niger:** MAH-led registration of IDPs in Niger was considered less timely and effective than UNHCR-led refugee registration. MAH is a new Ministry with limited resources and capacity, with only one trained staff member at the regional level and none in the field. While UNHCR supports the Ministry financially and trains staff to build their skills , it is a slow process. In Maradi, delays in biometric registration for new refugees was noted by partners and refugees in focus groups.

Partnerships

133. **The partnership between UNHCR and governments is collaborative and has enabled the response overall. At times UNHCR has faced challenges working with governments and their institutions.** In all three countries, informants noted the importance of UNHCR's relationships with national and local authorities. UNHCR staff and government actors interviewed across all three countries mutually spoke to a positive relationship between UNHCR and government institutions, which was seen as enabling the response overall. Government authorities typically expressed appreciation of UNHCR's technical expertise and support, whereas UNHCR staff recognize the governments' willingness and engagement in the response overall. However, a number of challenges constrain the partnership. **UNHCR key informants reported that limited government capacity and bureaucratic procedures have slowed down aspects of the response.** UNHCR staff in field offices often have to contend with the lack of communication channels between the central government and regional offices, and key informants spoke to challenges in navigating government bureaucracy and protocols. **Heavily centralized approval processes around funding and activities, for instance, often resulted in slow and ineffective decision-making and action at the local level**. UNHCR staff also reported difficulty in identifying focal points within government

institutions, especially where there has been frequent staff turnover or significant political events.

- **Burkina Faso:** UNHCR staff cited specific sectors for which government collaboration has been challenging, such as the creation of a GSAT cluster in Burkina Faso, which the government resisted for over a year for political reasons. The management of IDP registration through CONASUR and the setting up of the CCCM cluster were also challenging and required a bolstered diplomatic effort to engage the government which led to many delays. As a result, the CCCM cluster did not become functional until the summer of 2021.

- **Mali:** For certain activities led by the government but run jointly with UNHCR, government officials were only available on a part-time basis. This caused delays that UNHCR could not overcome given that the final decision and approval lay with the government. Several KII respondents said that in these scenarios, UNHCR sought to complete tasks itself that ideally would have been conducted jointly in order to obtain results more quickly. Government officials' limited availability also made coordination difficult due to poor attendance to cluster meetings, although anecdotal suggestions were made that UNHCR was also not always present. As a result, there was sometimes little harmonization in terms of assistance to POCs. Collaboration with the government was especially difficult in the field, where state agents have few means and where access and travel are limited due to insecurity. In addition, local governors and regional authorities were at times not informed by Bamako about responses and activities to be held in their areas. The coups in 2019 and 2020 further challenged the partnership by making it difficult for UNHCR to understand who had decision-making power and resulting in turnover of state agents.

- **Niger:** Based on both government partner interviews and key UNHCR staff, bilateral relationships were reviewed as productive and positive. As to be expected during an electoral period, there was limited involvement during the presidential election period by the authorities, which resulted in a lack of resources (material and human) at all levels. This in return created delays in coordination and in the response. In Ouallam, in the context of the establishment of the lotissements humanitaires, local authorities were frustrated with UNHCR. They mentioned that only the commune was respecting the agreement signed both by UNHCR and the commune, suggesting a lack of information and misunderstanding about what the host community would receive and when. At the same time, UNHCR staff emphasized the need to prioritize involvement with local authorities so the authorities would have a better understanding of UNHCR's mandate and could facilitate the implementation of sustainable solutions.

134. **While partners recognize UNHCR's flexibility and responsiveness to changing conditions, many highlighted challenges related to UNHCR's complex reporting mechanisms, unwieldy bureaucracy, and limited funding cycles.** In general, partners interviewed spoke to a positive partnership with UNHCR and were grateful for its flexibility and adaptability. That said, partners did highlight several challenges partnering with UNHCR. First, reporting mechanisms were not always clear to partners. In Niger, for example, some stakeholders noted that reporting mechanisms were difficult to understand, compounded by the fact that at times they received unclear or even

conflicting demands from Niamey and the sub-office. Partner key informants wanted more training from UNHCR and engagement on activities, budgets, and reporting mechanisms. This was a sentiment shared in Mali, where local NGOs often did not have the experience or expertise to be able to follow these procedures, discouraging such partnerships. Second, partners spoke to the bureaucratic burden of UNHCR administrative and financial procedures, which were lengthy and time-consuming. Some partners self-financed activities, hoping for reimbursement later, in order to speed up the implementation timeline of activities. This option, however, was not feasible for all partners as many do not have the capacity to absorb upfront costs. Furthermore, UNHCR's administrative processes and procedures often resulted in delays that affected the relevance of the response. Partners described scenarios wherein by the time activities were launched, POCs had gone elsewhere, or their needs had changed. Even when POC needs were addressed, it was often after much delay, to the frustration of POCs and partners alike. The late arrival of funds also negatively impacted partner's relations with donors, having to request extensions to make up for lost time. Lastly, UNHCR's propensity to work on the basis of annual contracts were seen, by partners and UNHCR staff alike, as a major limitation to longer-term planning. As of 2021, UNHCR will be experimenting with multi-year planning in a phased approach, which includes Burkina Faso in 2022. This initiative has been well received.

135. **UNHCR balances access, expertise, and capacity when building new and existing partnerships. UNHCR relies heavily on implementing partners to carry out response activities and recognizes the need for a broad range of actors to minimize gaps, avoid overlaps, and maximize the response through greater sectoral and geographical coverage.** UNHCR made concerted efforts to maintain existing partnerships in the region and to bring new actors on board for coordinated and comprehensive programming. Both UNHCR staff and partners recognize UNHCR's leadership role in this regard but speak to the complex decision-making involved. In Mali, for example, UNHCR has long-term partnerships with NGOs specialized in specific sectors (shelter, WASH, education, protection etc.) in which they possessed the requisite expertise, in as many areas of the country as possible. However, UNHCR recently decided to have individual NGO partners work on multiple aspects of the response at the same time, each in a general region in which they are based, making use of their local knowledge to increase UNHCR's accessibility to as many areas as possible. While this shift in priorities has increased access, it also diminished sector expertise, and therefore certain interventions' effectiveness. Moreover, some remote areas in all three countries are only accessible to smaller local organizations who lack the administrative capacity to absorb all of UNHCR's administrative procedures and reporting standards. Every four years, UNHCR opens a recruitment process to hire new local partners to work with and hold existing partners accountable. However, this can lead to some turnover in partners in the field, disrupting work there because new partners must be trained and must gain the trust of local stakeholders from scratch, although in some cases a change in partners is necessary and merits the efforts. Some sub-office staff feel that they are insufficiently consulted during this recruitment process, which must balance access, expertise, and capacity considerations. Likewise, some staff believe that UNHCR should privilege local NGOs over INGOs to an even higher degree, although there is a lack of evidence on the effect of localization on impact and quality and social scientists continue to debate as to

whether this improves the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions or not.[30] While INGOs often have greater access to funds and technical staff, INGOs may be seen as less flexible, with slower procedures, and with heightened risk since international staff may be more exposed to jihadist attacks. In Burkina Faso for instance, UNHCR has chosen to work with a local protection partner rather than work with an international NGO as had been the case in the past, because the international NGO faced greater restrictions on movement. Ongoing coordination and harmonization between different actors remains key in ensuring a coherent and complementary response and avoiding duplicity or gaps. An example from the education sector in Niger, wherein UNHCR's partner was building classrooms in durable material in one location while a non-UNHCR partner built emergency classrooms, illustrates problems that can arise when coordination issues arise around the 4 Ws (who is doing what, where, when).

Data collection, analysis, and management

136. **UNHCR made strides in harmonizing data collection and analysis to support regional-level protection monitoring.** UNHCR relies heavily on partners to conduct protection monitoring and to respond to protection needs, as it has neither an adequate budget nor the capacity to do so alone. Thus, data collection and analysis sits squarely within the Sahel strategy's approach to capitalizing on partnerships for protection and solutions. The strategy outlines the important task of harmonizing protection monitoring to allow a more complete understanding of the protection context and to support multisectoral interventions with a rights-based approach. UNHCR has made progress towards this objective, but important limitations remain.

137. Nearly three-quarters of UNHCR survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "UNHCR facilitated harmonized data collection and analysis (e.g. protection monitoring) in 2020," with similar results for the same question on the partner survey. This is in large part attributed to the work of Project 21, a region-wide harmonized protection monitoring system launched in the three pilot countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Developed by UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council in consultation with 20 protection monitoring actors in the pilot countries and at regional level, the transnational project aims to bring evidence-based understanding of the protection environment, risks, and needs to promote joint advocacy, informed programming and coordination of the response between partners[31]. The pilot phase of Project 21 concluded in October 2020 and was generally considered a successful first step towards minimizing duplication, maximizing allocation of resources according to need, and reducing gaps.

138. **Notably, uptake and integration of data harmonization activities appeared stronger in Burkina Faso and Niger as compared to Mali in 2020**. Information sharing and data harmonization were included as an objective in Niger's operations plan and specified performance indicators to judge progress. For example, for IDPs in the Tillabéri and Tahoua region, 413 information products were shared with partners in 2020 (exceeding the OL and OP target of 190 and 220 respectively) and eight joint assessments were conducted.[32] In Burkina Faso, a guidance note was circulated by the UNHCR to its

---

[30] ODI. Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study. 30 June 2021. Availabe at: https://odi.org/en/publications/interrogating-the-evidence-base-on-humanitarian-localisation-a-literature-study/
[31] UNHCR. UNHCR Sahel Crisis Response September-October 2020. https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/675
[32] UNHCR. 2021. Niger Year-End Report.

partners to harmonize the methodology and frequency of data collection and data sharing as part of protection monitoring efforts.[33] On the other hand, the document review yielded no such information regarding data harmonization or sharing in Mali plans or reports.

139. **Responding to protection needs identified during monitoring activities was limited by sector-wide resource and capacity constraints that impacted the efficacy of partnerships and coordination required to respond.** While monitoring activities are considered adept at identifying protection needs and detecting protection violations, UNHCR staff reporting that there are remain gaps in responding to cases. These findings are consistent with responses from partner survey respondents. Informants believe that this requires that UNHCR maintain strong relationships and coordination with partners to ensure that they have the capacity to respond and that while there are strong monitoring and reporting systems to allow for effective follow-up, they are often compromised by limited resources. Thus, further investment in resources and capacity building as it relates to responding to cases is still needed. Well-functioning information flows and monitoring systems must be coupled with effective coordination, referral, and response mechanisms to ensure protection is afforded to populations of concern.

140. Partners, particularly government partners, look to UNHCR to lead on data and information management as per refugee sectorial responsibilities and IDP cluster responsibilities. Across the Sahel, a significant portion of UNHCR resources is dedicated to strengthening the capacity of governments to build, manage and protect the database of IDPs. Thus, there is an expectation that UNHCR can deliver training and provide quality control in this area. Some UNHCR staff and partners raised ethical concerns pertaining to the collection of information on displaced populations, noting that the government was sometimes collecting information that could undermine the safety of individuals if the information were not adequately protected. Informants in Burkina Faso, for example, frequently raised questions and concerns related to limitations around the data management of governmental institutions, particularly with regard to ethics, data protection, and impartiality of assistance, which were said to have a direct impact on UNHCR's legitimacy vis-à-vis local populations. Training on data protection is seen as crucial, and while some training has already been provided for government officials and partners in Burkina Faso, for instance, staff still considered these issues were not sufficiently or systematically addressed.

141. UNCHR's internal information management systems are limited. In Burkina Faso, both internal and external informants felt UNHCR's IM unit seemed understaffed and lacked sufficient capacity, translating to less effective data monitoring, analysis and reporting. The IM provides technical support, tools and data analysis, transmitting information to different entities based on needs. In Niger, there is only one IM officer to cover the entire country. Although there was no indication that only having single officer cover this portfolio was a problem in and of itself, the lack of assistance means limited resources to, for example, support and train partners in data collection and monitoring.
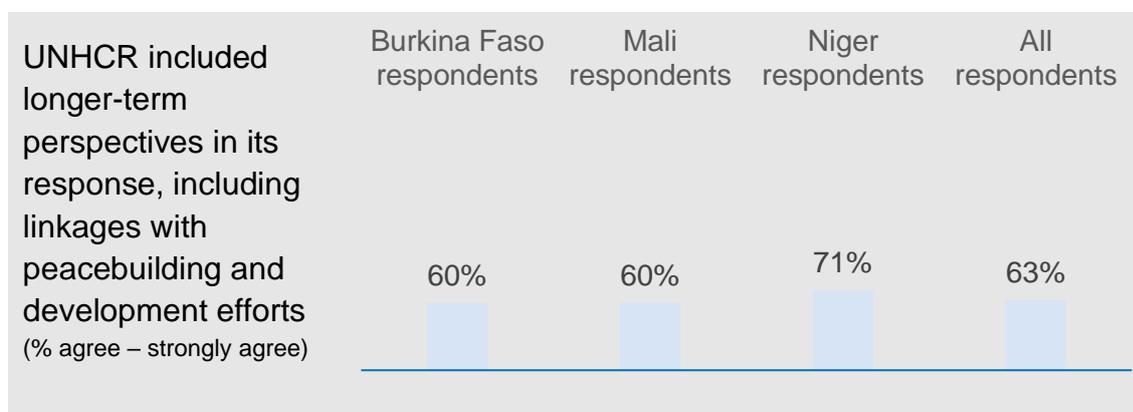
---

[33] UNHCR. Guidance note to UNHCR Burkina Faso partners in charge of protection monitoring 2020. [French: Note d'orientation aux partenaires du HCR Burkina Faso en charge du monitoring de protection 2020] [Internet]. 2020. Available from: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76890

142. **In all three countries, security monitoring was not timely enough or comprehensive enough to effectively detect early warnings and inform operational action.** The Sahel response did not sufficiently consider the potential for further degradation of the security situation and the rapidly growing needs of POCs. While systems were in place to manage security risks, these were either relatively new or in need of strengthening. Information on the security situation was not always readily available or timely. Many staff felt that protection monitoring alone is not a sufficiently dynamic tool to detect early warning and that safety monitoring needs to be conducted with a strong understanding of the prevailing security context. They noted that humanitarian access could be improved if better alert systems, such as the security risk management reports, were more regular. Hence, a preventive approach relying on effective alert mechanisms is also recommended. In Burkina Faso and Niger, the establishment of a civil-military coordination platform improved information sharing on security incidents, as well as planning for escorts when necessary. The platform created opportunities to discuss and advocate for civilians' protection as well. In Mali, UNHCR monitors security developments with both international and local NGO partners and share the data they collect with other actors. However, this data is limited to those areas in which partners are operating, creating "blind spots" in security that affect planning and implementation efforts alike.

4.1.7   LONGER-TERM PERSPECTIVES AND THE TRIPLE NEXUS

143. **A dilemma remains between responding to short-term, emergency priorities and working toward more sustainable solutions. Any notion of the triple nexus or related considerations for from the integration of emergency and development and/or peacebuilding approaches is notably absent from the 2017 policy on emergency preparedness and response.** In the Sahel, to date, a focus on short-term, emergency solutions has dominated UNHCR operations. Nonetheless, there is recognition that UNHCR has made some strides in incorporating longer-term perspectives in the response: in the online survey, 60% of the respondents from Burkina Faso and Mali and 71% from Niger agreed or strongly agreed that UNHCR had included longer-term perspectives in its response (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Long-term perspective in UNHCR Sahel response
UNHCR online survey respondents (% of respondents)

UNHCR included longer-term perspectives in its response, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts (% agree – strongly agree)	Burkina Faso respondents	Mali respondents	Niger respondents	All respondents
	60%	60%	71%	63%

144. However, most key informants considered that while longer-term perspectives are included in the strategic design at the regional level, **delivery of more sustainable**

solutions remains uneven across countries and overall underdeveloped. Findings reveal existing tensions between responding to short-term priorities especially at times of emergency and working toward more sustainable solutions in the protracted situation of the Sahel. This forces UNHCR to make difficult choices and compromises. The dilemma between emergency shelters vs. sustainable housing is one of the most prominent examples. According to several stakeholders, **UNHCR's ability to balance an emergency vs. sustainable approach is constrained by UNHCR's limited operationalization of its vision of durable solutions** as described below. Additionally, there is a lack of financial and human resources as well as the need to demonstrate impact to donors. Humanitarian actors working in conflict situations often have their approaches and strategies developed towards prioritizing emergency efforts over development because they are adapted to the situation but also cheaper, can reach more beneficiaries and therefore appear to have more impact to satisfy donors. Furthermore, funding from donors is often short-term, preventing UNHCR from being able to plan longer-term development activities. This tension was especially pronounced in Niger, where operations are actively seeking a longer-term approach by incorporating development linkages within the response, (described in greater detail further on). Despite this, **operations continue to face challenges in their longer-term approaches. UNHCR's funding mechanism is also not supportive**. The reluctance of Governments to engage in solutions for IDPs other than returns has also been a critical challenge to sustainability.

145. **Importantly, stakeholders noted that UNHCR's Sahel response did not sufficiently consider the potential for further degradation of the security situation and the rapidly growing needs of POCs.** Acknowledging the difficulty inherent in predicting the evolution of the Sahel situation, it nevertheless appears that some investments and activities implemented during the emergency declaration did not take into adequate consideration the sustainability of those efforts, forcing some interventions to be abruptly stopped with negative consequences for POCs and partners. While UNHCR does make contingency plans in case emergencies arise, the funds are not always available to actually implement them, at least not right away and not always fully.

146. **The interpretation of the Triple Nexus concept, as well as expectations for how it should be operationalized are not consistent within UNHCR.** The evaluation team recognizes that UNCHR is not primarily responsible for the operationalization of the Triple Nexus, but that it, among other actors, has an important role to play. Overall, stakeholders across different levels of UNHCR as well as its partners recognize the importance and value of integrating considerations for peaceful coexistence and sustainable development within humanitarian assistance. However, for many key informants, UNHCR's work related to the Triple Nexus remains more theoretical and conceptual and has not yet reached a stage of practical implementation. Key informants interviewed at the Bureau and HQ levels were able to identify emerging frameworks and approaches in planning exercises and high-level conferences. However, few respondents at country office level could point to tangible programs representing the operationalization of the Triple Nexus, except in Niger where this appears more explicit compared to Mali and Burkina Faso, as evidenced by document review, interviews, and survey findings (Figure 8). In Niger, concrete programs such as the *lotissements humanitaires* in the Sahel region of Niger and the *villages d'opportunité* in Maradi are seen as seminal

examples of projects focused on long-term development and social cohesion and linking aspects of the Triple Nexus. Even so, **UNHCR informants consider that "Niger is a laboratory" and that apart from these site-specific examples, operationalization of the Triple Nexus is not fully institutionalized.** Findings suggest that peacebuilding and development were approached differently throughout the response and are thus explored in turn in the sections below. Perceptions of key informant partners in Burkina Faso in general reflected the belief that the Triple Nexus was insufficiently implemented, but partners in Dori and Ouahigouya in particular noted that synergies across organizations to pursue the Triple Nexus had improved.

147. **To date, UNHCR's peacebuilding efforts are limited to small-scale activities promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion, but a more strategic approach to peacebuilding is needed to magnify UNHCR's work in this field**. When describing such efforts during key informant interviews, UNHCR staff tended to define peacebuilding in terms of peaceful coexistence and social cohesion projects or activities aimed at preventing, mitigating, or reducing tensions or conflicts between refugees, IDPs, and host communities. These efforts are critically important in the Sahel, where there are clear tensions within and between displaced groups and host communities, as evidenced by UNHCR staff and partner interviews, and focus group discussions. Displaced participants, for example, described unpleasant or hostile exchanges with host communities who blamed them for insecurity. The frustration on the part of host communities, on the other hand, typically stems from the perception that displaced populations receive preferential treatment. Awareness and training activities on peaceful coexistence and one-off activities (e.g. friendly football matches in Ouahigouya, planting trees in Intikane) are considered to promote socialization between host communities and displaced populations and to build trust and social cohesion at the community level. However, these activities are small-scale, opportune, and specific to a time, place, and/or partner and have not translated into a cohesive, comprehensive, or sustained approach at the national or regional level. UNHCR documents in Burkina Faso highlight the gap that remains, stating that "activities planned to strengthen social cohesion proved insufficient in light of the scale of the situation" following a rise in negative intercommunity incidents and mistrust.[34] Niger's *lotissements humanitaires* and *villages d'opportunité,* are widely considered a good practice in coexistence due to their inclusion of refugees, IDPs, and host communities alike, and offer a more sustainable and cohesive approach but are still geographically limited.

148. **Efforts to date do not sufficiently assess or address the latent and sometimes explicit tensions between host communities and displaced populations. Findings suggest a lack of community-level assessments aimed at understanding the nature of the tension, which could inform social cohesion and coexistence activities.** In Niger, some communities are stigmatized because they are perceived as harboring jihadists while others experience intra- or intercommunity conflicts related to land. Additionally, there is limited know-how to assess the effects of peacebuilding activities in the field. For example, UNHCR's partners in Niger noted that there are indications of positive effects of the program (intermarriages, sharing of water points) but that those are anecdotal and lack formal evaluation. Furthermore, there is a tendency to standardize

---

[34] UNHCR Global Focus Platform: Burkina Faso. [Internet]. Available from: https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/8657

implemented peaceful coexistence and social cohesion projects (awareness and training activities for example) without comprehensively evaluating these projects, hindering an assessment of the effectiveness of these activities and restricting decision-making as to whether they were helpful or harmful, should be continued, or have the potential to be scaled up.

149. **In addition, each of the three countries have adapted different approaches to integrating sustainable development into the response, in line with each country's specific context.** Both strategically and operationally, Niger is ahead of the other two counties. To UNHCR, the main aim of sustainable development is to create a safe socio-economic environment that fosters independence, self-reliance or autonomy of POCs. While all aimed at the same goal, UNHCR's strategic planning documents at the country level highlight different priorities and goals, which are adapted to their respective country-specific contexts. Niger stands apart from the other countries with a more comprehensive development-link at both the strategic and operational levels, as described below. Importantly, UNHCR staff and partners interviewed in all three countries concur that long-term development is necessary, but noted that limited state capacity, governance deficits, and chronic insecurity limit the implementation of development programs per se.

- **Burkina Faso:** Here, UNHCR has advocated for the inclusion of displaced populations in the government's national development plans. There have also been efforts to gradually shift the management and provision of social services in refugee camps from UNHCR to national authorities, although this shift has been hindered by growing insecurity within camps.[35] Other strategic priorities centered on improving refugee access to livestock and agricultural land and developing a long-term plan targeting the integration or repatriation of long-term urban refugees.[36] Findings suggest that these strategies in general hadn't translated into 2020 operations, but they are expected to be granted higher importance in the near future.

- **Mali:** UNHCR's Mali's 2018-2022 Multi-Year Multi-Partner Protection and Solutions Strategy (MYMPPSS) intends by 2022 to improve the access of refugees, IDPs, and returnees to local systems and services and ensure that they become increasingly self-reliant. To achieve this goal, registration was intensified along with efforts to increase awareness of the importance of registration among populations of concern.[37] Besides these registration efforts, however, little was done in the way of development in Mali in 2020, with sites set on ramping up these efforts in the coming years.

- **Niger**: In Niger, UNHCR promotes the integration of all POCs into national and local programs and services, mirroring the goals of the other countries. Where Niger stands out however, is in its design and development of urbanized sites like the *lotissements humanitaires* (Tillaberi) under which refugees, IDPs, and host communities have access to land, social housing (depending on vulnerability) and access to

---

[35] OCHA. Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Burkina Faso 2020 [Internet]. 2020. Available from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/burkina-faso/document/burkina-faso-plan-de-r%C3%A9ponse-humanitairejan-2020

[36] UNHCR. 2021. Burkina Faso Year-End Report.

[37] UNHCR. Factsheet: Mali. 2020 Oct;

infrastructure and integrated services provided at a "one-stop-shop" center. To implement these projects, UNHCR partnered with several development actors, UN agencies and administrative authorities, creating synergy among several actors. As such, international NGOs and partners have reinforced infrastructure on the sites constructing for example, household latrines, and an agro-food center, reinforcing public health systems, and building classrooms and latrines. [38] UNHCR is also negotiating IDP access to the urbanized site projects and with it, access to social housing. Niger's comparatively strong development linkages are likely due to the government's "out of camp" vision and UNHCR's historical experience with development in the country. Notably, UNHCR staff and local authorities in Niger indicated that implementing urbanized sites are not without challenges. In addition to the involvement of the government and funding agencies, partners and focus group respondents mentioned that the process of establishing urbanized sites needs to be transparent. Despite many information sessions and a complaint mechanism, local authorities and POCs in Ouallam expressed frustration with a lack of information and misunderstanding of the process, whereas in Maradi, host communities welcomed refugees who brought with them several types of infrastructure (health, school, water). A thorough evaluation of urbanized sites project could provide information on the factors that facilitate and hinder the implementation process, results, and sustainability of those projects. An evaluation is planned of the Tilaberi project by the donor, GIZ in 2022.

150. **While well-intentioned, development like projects are sometimes out of touch with the context and do not meet the objectives of fostering independence, self-reliance or autonomy .** For instance, even though education is part of development, building schools is not necessarily the best way to advance this goal, as youth prioritize work over school to feed their families. Similarly, while IGA programs are necessary to support short-term needs, they do not achieve sustained self-sufficiency in the long run and must be coupled with socio-economic initiatives such as established agricultural production or starting a small business and support in their implementation. As indicated in the Niger 2020 Year-End report, performance indicators (access to microfinance, enrollment in some kind of training, receipt of cash/vouchers or production kits) were usually met. However, even in Niger's urbanized sites and *villages d'opportunité,* livelihood and self-reliance activities reached only about 30% of the refugee population,[39] suggesting that self-reliance is an objective that will take both more resources and time.

151. **Engaging state actors and development actors is central to sustainable development and increased work is needed to strengthen the humanitarian-development link.** Although undertaking development work per se is beyond the mandate of UNHCR, leveraging partnerships for solutions is a priority in the Sahel Strategy and many UNHCR staff consider it **crucial to work with development actors to better bridge the gap between humanitarian and development activities. The 2020 Sahel Strategy, however, provides no clear strategic objectives related to actual partnership with state and development actors that could be linked to**

---

[38] UNHCR, Interim Report to GIZ, 2021 (in file)

[39] Niger Year-end report 2020, Malian refugees, Self-reliance and Livelihoods, available at hhttps://reporting.unhcr.org/niger?year=2020

development . An updated strategy is currently being developed and represents an opportunity to review this.

152. **Key informants cite an opportunity for improvement in this regard and in particular a need to better define roles, responsibilities, and communication between different actors, as well as clear communication to the involved POCs.** This is especially true when it comes to UNHCR's strategy beyond the emergency and upcoming plans to shift responsibilities from UNHCR to local authorities, as is the case with camps in Burkina Faso and urban sites in Niger. **On this, too, the 2020 Sahel strategy is generally silent. The 2017 policy on emergency preparedness and response similarly provides no guidance linking post-emergency transition and development , including partnerships with state and development actors although it is too currently under revision.**

4.2 Resources (AOI2)

To what extent have financial, physical, and human resources been made available to the response in a timely, sufficient, and appropriate manner following the L2 emergency declarations in Mali and Niger and L3 declaration in Burkina Faso?

153. **While the Sahel response was well-funded, resources were still insufficient to address the scale of the problem.** In all three countries, the growing needs of POCs in the Sahel region have led to major increases to the budget that was planned for the year of 2020. A first $5 million dollar envelope per country was made available to operations to kick-start the emergency response and was followed by an appeal for greater funding in June 2020. [40] The $186 million USD appeal to provide lifesaving protection and assistance to refugees, IDPs, returnees, and host communities in the Sahel included $97 million in initial requirements as per the operational plan for 2020, $29 million to implement COVID-19 prevention and response measures in displacement areas, and an additional $60 million to scale up UNHCR's emergency response as per the Sahel Strategy. [41]

154. During the course of 2020, UNCHR established two supplementary budgets: one in support of global activities to protect refugees and other persons of concern from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic ($404 million) and one in support of the refugee and displacement crisis in the central Sahel region ($59.7 million). In addition, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocated a record sum of $96 million to countries of the Central Sahel in 2020, more than in any previous year. As of January 2021, UNHCR's 2020 financial requirements had been 90% funded in Burkina Faso, [42] 100% funded in Mali, [43] and 80% funded in Niger. [44]

---

[40] UNHCR. 2020. Sahel Crisis: Response to the urgent needs of refugees, intenrally displaced, returnees and other of concern.
[41] Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. Standing Committee 80th meeting. Update on budgets and funding (2020-2021). Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/605c429d4.pdf
[42] UNHCR (2021). Funding Update 2020. Burkina Faso as of 5 January 2021. Available at: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/fundingupdates/2021-01-05/Burkina%20Faso%20Funding%20Update%2005%20January%202021.pdf
[43] UNHCR (2021). *Funding Update 2020. Mali Situation as of 5 January 2021.* Available at: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/fundingupdates/2021-01-05/Mali%20Situation%20Funding%20Update%2005%20January%202021.pdf
[44] UNHCR (2021). *Niger Update: Sahel Situation, Sahel Situation, January 2021* at; https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/84572; UNHCR (2021). *Funding Update 2020. Niger as of 5 January 2021.* Available at: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/fundingupdates/2021-01-05/Niger%20Operation%20Funding%20Update%2005%20January%202021.pdf

Figure 9: UNHCR response resource mobilization
UNHCR online survey respondents
(Mean score on a 1-5 scale,
with higher score corresponding to more sufficient resources)

	Burkina Faso respondents			Mali respondents			Niger respondents			All respondents		
	Financial resources	Physical assets	Staff	Financial resources	Physical assets	Staff	Financial resources	Physical assets	Staff	Financial resources	Physical assets	Staff
	2.8	2.8	3.3	2.8	3.1	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.5	2.9	3.0	3.2
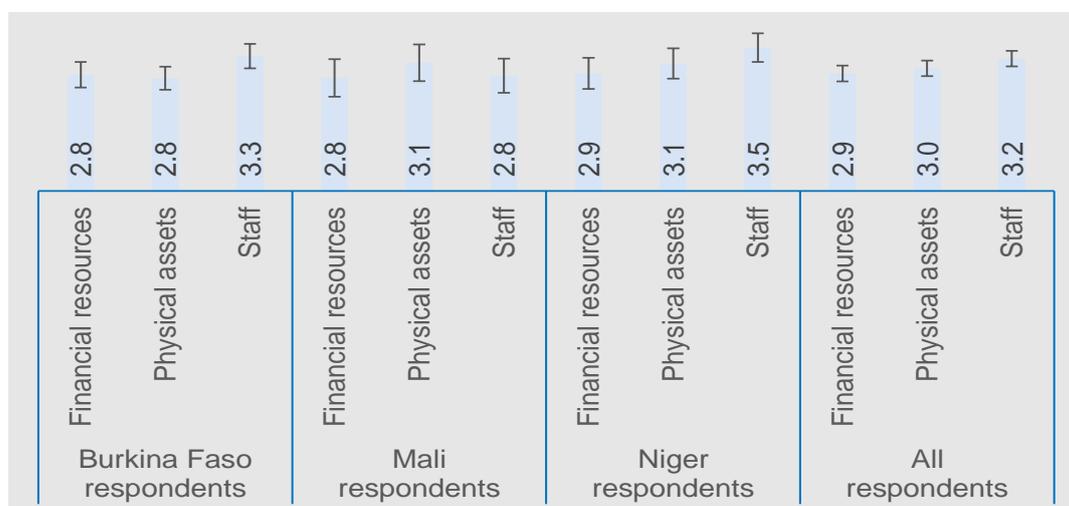
155. Despite increases in UNHCR's financial resources in 2020, KII and online respondents indicated that needs were still far greater than the allocated resources, although respondents at the Bureau and Headquarters perceived financial resources to be sufficient given the number of staff in the country operations and absorption capacity. Figure 9). Importantly, considering the rapid degradation of the Sahel situation, there was a need to further scale the resources available in the context of the substantial growth in needs. Significant Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) funding gaps remained in 2020, for example. HRP financial requirements were only 7% funded in Burkina Faso, 10% funded in Mali, and 4% funded in Niger as of April 2021.[45]

156. **Financial resources dedicated to the IDP response were particularly limited. While allocation of resources to address the needs of IDPs as per UNHCR's cluster responsibilities did increase, it did not keep pace with needs.** In Burkina, for example, operational expenditures dedicated to IDP CCCM, shelter, and protection projects grew three times faster than for refugee programs but still were still insufficient to address an IDP population currently 70 times larger than refugee population. As resources were insufficient to meet the needs of IDPS within UNHCR mandate, the gap extended to needs beyond UNHCR mandate but that would have been considered under the broad area-based approach promoted by UNHCR over a legal status-based approach.

157. **The emergency declarations were associated with an increase in financial, human, and physical resources. Some gaps remained, however, and additional resource allocations/ did not always take into consideration pre-existing resource levels, experience, and skill levels at the country level.** One population that benefited from the increase in resources were IDPs, where stakeholders expressed that the influx in resources following the declarations allowed for a stronger IDP response. In Mali, the emergency declaration allowed for the opening of a sub-office in Ménaka, which improved

---

[45] OCHA. Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview. Sahel Crisis. Humanitarian Program Cycle 2021. April 2021. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021%20Sahel%20Crisis%20HNRO%20EN.pdf

access to refugees and IDPs in the area. KII in countries and online survey respondents indicated increased coverage of protection activities and shelter/NFI provisions. Some UNHCR staff also pointed out that long-term projects (livelihood and sustainable housing) were bolstered with international organizations' funding in Burkina Faso and Niger. Nonetheless, KII participants and 46% of online survey UNHCR staff mentioned a deficit in resources. Among KII and those who mentioned an area of deficit in the online survey, the main sectors were shelters/NFI and protection monitoring. Other sectors included education infrastructures, CBI, and livelihood/ income generating activities. UNHCR staff in Mali indicated that they had to prioritize areas with the greater number of POCs due to the funding shortage.

158. **The influx in resources that follows an emergency declaration is positive but does not necessarily account for readiness at the country level.** Stakeholders indicated that the influx of resources associated to the emergency declaration allowed for increased geographical coverage and protection activities. But, as noted by UNHCR staff, the influx of resources could have been maximized if, at the time of the influx, experienced staff had been already available in the field. The pandemic hindered and delayed the arrival of human resources in country.

159. **Resource management and planning lacked engagement with UNHCR staff and partners, and more broadly engagement with all stakeholders in a context of localization of humanitarian assistance.** In general, stakeholders reported that resources were often procured and managed from the top-down at the country level without leveraging engagement of UNHCR staff and partners at the local level. Some UNHCR staff in Burkina Faso did not have a shared understanding of the resource allocation process and criteria, while others were lacking information on the resource allocation decision process even though they were establishing and maintaining partnerships. KII respondents in Niger sub-offices noted that they were consulted but that resource management is handled by the country office. They mentioned that being a cost-center would diminish delays and increase effectiveness of their response, especially when they faced emergency situations. Stakeholders in Burkina Faso and Niger suggested the need for greater consultation throughout the process. Although this may take time, the consultation would facilitate defining a common strategy and vision for the response and would maximize resources allocation. Additionally, decentralization and increased autonomy of sub-offices for funding re-allocations up to an agreed level would reduce implementation delays associated to resources allocation.

160. **UNHCR's resource management system makes resources available at the beginning of each year, but internal procedures create bottlenecks in resource mobilization. Internal and external stakeholders mentioned that UNHCR's bureaucratic processes were lengthy and complex, resulting in slow resource mobilization.** Multiple reporting mechanisms also amplified the burden. Only around 40% of the online UNHCR staff said that processes for mobilizing, allocating and managing resources, either financial, physical, or human, were effective or very effective. Some UNHCR staff and partners in Niger noted that while the emergency was declared in February 2020, implementation of the emergency response didn't begin until June 2020. In Mali, UNHCR staff mentioned that the emergency declaration and COVID-19 pandemic came with an increase of funds but also an increase in reporting related to COVID-19,

causing additional burden and preventing staff from conducting activities related to assistance. One UNHCR staff member stated that "we have the feeling that we spend more time reporting than working."

161. **As part of any post-emergency transition and planning, UNHCR's one-year funding cycles, along with the late and/or sporadic arrival of funding limited the response, especially in terms of long-term, multi-year and multi-partner planning.** While UNHCR is perceived to be flexible and adaptable in its allocation of resources, UNHCR's year-to-year financing cycles are perceived as a major limitation for multi-year, multi-partner planning. These short-term funding structures were cited by respondents as rigid and not necessarily conducive to field realities. As a respondent noted: "The clock is reset on December 31, but needs do not stop at the end of the year." UNHCR staff and partners explained that short funding cycles made it difficult to plan long-term projects or projects that do not align with UNHCR one-year funding cycle such as education. The late and/or sporadic arrival of funding also strained partner relations and caused challenges to planning programs over the course of the year. Stakeholders also said that financial planning still needs more input, engagement, and joint planning with implementing partners. Importantly, the allocation of resources, while responding to some needs, is sometimes focused on filling funding gaps in existing projects and/or that resources are allocated to activities with little clarity on how to sustain these efforts. One example is the hiring of planning and protection in Niger. Those posts were fulfilled in the context of the emergency declaration but were deemed necessary before the declaration. Nonetheless, on the online survey, 58% of UNHCR staff and partners agreed or strongly agreed that "the way UNHCR managed resources enabled effective coordination efforts with implementing partners in 2020."

162. **The emergency declaration provided an opportunity to increase staffing in number and in quality in all three countries. However, the fast growth of operations presented new challenges for human resource management in terms of recruitment, onboarding, and training, especially on aspects of logistics and procurement.**. The first hurdle emerged during recruitment. Staff reported difficulties in filling technical profiles in the region such as WASH, protection officers, and in identifying people with analytical skills. Some technical profiles have yet to be filled over a year later. Language barriers were also cited as a major obstacle given difficulties of finding French speaking individuals. The next hurdle arose at the time of deployment. Stakeholders reported that staff were often late to arrive and had limited possibilities to work remotely before being onboarded, owing largely to deployments being hindered by COVID-19. Some mentioned that delays in regional hiring may have resulted in delays at the country level. A final hurdle arose with regard to onboarding and training, with many stakeholders citing a need for more capacity building (e.g. UNHCR's mandate, planning and evaluation) both among staff and partners to ensure that everyone had the proper understanding of their role and skill sets. Alternatively, stakeholders mentioned that human resources might be used to hire locals. Although it might be more difficult to find local personnel with specialized know-how/certain technical skills, local people know the culture and language, often the areas, and local hire could be faster, as people are already in the country. In Niger, local hiring has facilitated the implementation of a protection community approach, and an increasing presence of monitors, focal points, and community people in the field.

4.3 Contextual and institutional factors (AOI 3-5)

4.3.1 COVID-19 (AOI 3)

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected UNHCR's ability to respond to the crises in the three countries?

163. **The COVID-19 pandemic posed a major challenge for the 2020 response.** Globally, it limited travel and the mobility of human and material resources. It also negatively impacted countries' economies, health systems, and government capacities. Triggering downward spirals, it increased vulnerabilities among populations of concern, taking a heavy toll on the physical and psychological health and livelihoods of the displaced population and host communities alike. These conditions, combined with the crises already faced by POCs throughout the Sahel due to political violence and instability, amplified existing needs.

164. **Despite challenges, UNHCR responded to the crisis quickly and appropriately to the pandemic**. Stakeholders highlighted efforts to distribute protective kits (e.g., masks and antibacterial gel), COVID-19 information campaigns, and CBI to support livelihoods in response. UNHCR staff were also proud that UNHCR, along with other members of the humanitarian community, advocated to include POCs in social welfare programs and public health response plans.

165. Figure 10 presents selected results from the online survey looking at staff perceptions on how COVID-19 affected the response. Most staff reported that COVID-19 decreased the reach, timeliness, and effectiveness of UNHCR's response. Around 17% of UNHCR respondents however, reported that the reach of UNHCR's response increased because of COVID-19.

166. Lower but still majority percentages were also reported on COVID-19's negative effect on the complementarity/harmony of UNHCR's response and UNHCR's longer-term response planning, including linkages with development and peacebuilding efforts. While most UNHCR staff saw COVID-19's effect on UNHCR's coordination efforts as negative, the majority did not feel that COVID-19 affected the partnerships themselves. Most partner respondents reported that COVID-19 only had negative effects on UNHCR response reach and timeliness but did not affect UNHCR response relevance or effectiveness, partnerships, response complementarity/harmony, or longer-term response planning. Staff respondents' responses on COVID-19's effect on the relevance of the response were split while most partner respondents did not feel that COVID-19 affected the relevance of UNHCR's response. In general, a higher percentage of UNHCR staff in Niger reported COVID-19's negative effect on the response compared to the other two countries, with UNHCR Mali staff reporting the least negative consequences of COVID-19.

*Figure 10: COVID-19's effect on UNHCR's response,
according to UNHCR online survey respondents
(% reporting positive or negative effect. Neutral not represented)*

		Burkina Faso resp.	Mali resp.	Niger resp.	All resp.
Reach	*Positive*	15%	23%	17%	17%
	Negative	63%	43%	67%	60%
Relevance	*Positive*	24%	27%	17%	25%
	Negative	36%	23%	52%	36%
Timeliness	*Positive*	5%	23%	10%	11%
	Negative	65%	37%	73%	62%
Effectiveness	*Positive*	7%	13%	6%	9%
	Negative	50%	33%	63%	51%
Coordination	*Positive*	7%	13%	6%	9%
	Negative	42%	10%	52%	38%
Parnterships	*Positive*	3%	23%	13%	12%
	Negative	32%	7%	27%	25%
Complementarity	*Positive*	7%	10%	15%	13%
	Negative	36%	13%	48%	34%
Long-term planning	*Positive*	5%	17%	8%	10%
	Negative	37%	17%	44%	35%

167. **COVID-19 restrictions limited contact with POCs and forced UNHCR to find alternative methods of service delivery**. Across all contexts, UNHCR key informants described COVID-related logistical challenges in carrying out their duties in the field. Lockdowns, curfews, and other COVID-19 mitigation efforts restricted UNHCR's access and ability to provide and monitor assistance.

168. **COVID-related travel and shipping restrictions delayed the arrival of staff and assets to operations in each country**. In Mali, UNHCR key informants reported that accessibility was even more limited than usual as UNDSS had to account for sanitary conditions on top of security conditions. One staff said they could only go in the field if it was a question of "life and death." UNHAS flights and UN cars could not be filled for fear employees would be too close to each other. As a result, activities such as shelters, food distributions, and protection activities slowed down although continued with the implementation of social distancing. Refugees and IDPs mentioned the suspension and scaling down of services, most notably delays in food distributions as well as delays in the renewal of identity cards and programs related to livelihoods. In Niger, one focus group respondent stated that "COVID-19 means starvation for us". Focus group participants reported that early marriages and GBV cases increased. COVID related access constraints also made it more challenging for UNHCR staff to understand POCs' needs, register them, and understand local security developments.

169. **UNHCR staff and partners adapted to provide key services despite restrictions on travel and contact with POCs**. Staff, partners, and beneficiaries all felt that UNHCR reacted quickly to adapt and deliver emergency assistance by virtual means. Based on assessments of new needs, UNHCR worked with community leaders (monitors, focal points, and key informants) to ensure that they maintained some level of (indirect) presence in the field. This forced UNHCR to depend more on local partners, potentially strengthening local capacity but provided fewer opportunities for monitoring their effectiveness. Some NGOs adapted to reduced in-person accessibility by working through community radio to reach more POCs, for example by providing school lessons over radio.

170. **Many UNHCR key informants reported the constraints posed by the pandemic produced an "indirect positive" in forcing UNHCR to innovate and experiment with new modes of work and delivery that were more flexible than typical programs.** As one key informant succinctly put it, "COVID-19 has boosted our imagination." At the country level, key informants in Niger were proud of UNHCR's ability to create income generating activities by involving POCs to producing hygiene kits (soap, gel, and masks) in Tillabéri region. Through this project, refugees and IDPs became providers and not only recipients of assistance. The kits were distributed to hospitals, public schools, and UN agencies, simultaneously helping POCs and the broader COVID-19 response. In Ouallam, refugees and the host community participated in this program. However, whilst refugees were paid through a cash for work program, host community people claimed not to have received money, creating some frustrations and a feeling that they were treated differently within the same activity. In Mali, UNHCR key informants were proud of their efforts to distribute solar-charged radios so students could follow classes from home.

171. **COVID-19 created the need for additional resources on top of the emergency declaration, which UNHCR was able to provide but not up to levels needed. COVID-19 severely limited the effect of the emergency declaration.** The Sahel emergency and COVID-19 arriving simultaneously additionally caused confusion about where money for specific programs came from for some UNHCR staff. UNHCR key informants believed the pandemic severely limited the effect of the emergency declaration, which came into force mere weeks before the pandemic hit. Many staff specifically cited problems in supporting POCs at risk of statelessness and repatriation efforts due to COVID. In response to these challenges, funding for COVID-19 was diversified, including from UNHCR HQ and organizations such as the African Development Bank.

172. **Distrust of public health measures and COVID-19 misinformation is high among all POC groups. Nonetheless, hygiene awareness has improved.** Many POCs in focus groups reported not believing in COVID, which UNHCR key informants reported made it more difficult to implement social distancing and mask wearing. Because of the widely-held perception that COVID-19 was brought to the area by (undefined) "outsiders", some locals were less enthusiastic about coming into contact with UNHCR staff. But even for those who did believe COVID-19 was real, POCs perceived COVID-19 was not a priority compared to other emergency needs, even though for UNHCR it was a priority. Some felt that all the funds and time UNHCR spent on the COVID-19 response and COVID-19 restrictions could have been better dedicated to other, more salient needs such as income generating opportunities or CBI. Despite these perceptions about the pandemic, the response to COVID-19 increased hygiene awareness among POCs. In Niger, UNHCR staff and focus groups respondents mentioned that even now, hygiene has improved in the urbanized sites and the "villages d'opportunité" with an increase of washing hands stations and distribution of hygiene kits. To date, there is no data available to verify this observations.

173. **Coordination was a challenge with less field presence.** Without the ability to be in the field, monitoring was instead done by phone, on Microsoft Teams, or through reporting. Although these mechanisms were necessary alternatives, they were sometimes ill-adapted. Environment and energy projects, for instance, need field inspections given the technical nature of the interventions, for which remote alternatives were insufficient alternatives.

174. **Remote work forced UNHCR to adopt virtual tools, many of which will remain useful after the pandemic subsides.** Although informants described a difficult adjustment period at the beginning of the pandemic, UNHCR staff in all three countries reported that they became more familiar and accustomed to virtual exchanges over time. These tools – in particular Microsoft Teams – created new opportunities for cross-cutting exchanges, including field office participation in coordination meetings, closer collaboration with the national office, and expanded opportunities for participation in trainings. Informants in Mali noted that the office in Bamako made sure to regularly include staff from field offices in high-level calls, which helped mitigate the isolation created by remoted work and incorporate voices that might not be present in normal times.

175. **Despite some increase in accessibility to certain meetings and cross-cutting exchanges due to virtual tools, remote work exacerbated both internal and external**

communication issues, especially where internet access was limited. Many UNHCR staff described Teams as a difficult platform to use. Relatedly, access to the internet was a major problem, especially for government partners, NGOs, and field offices. There was a widespread frustration related to dropped calls and meetings being cancelled due to poor connectivity. This reduced the number of meetings overall and in particular with government partners, many of which were considered crucial for planning, coordination, and implementation.

176. **Remote work due to COVID-19 also negatively impacted team morale within UNHCR and new hires in particular felt the isolation associated with remote work.** Informants described remote conferencing as a difficult medium over which to build relationships, taking the camaraderie out of the day-to-day and making individuals feel more isolated from their co-workers, which caused team cohesion to suffer. Remote work due to the pandemic and the increase in hiring due to the emergency declaration arrived within weeks of each other. As a result, UNHCR had to transition to remote onboarding causing new staff to feel disconnected from their country teams.

177. **On top of an already difficult working environment, COVID-19 took a toll on staff mental health and wellbeing, with negative impacts felt disproportionately by local staff based in field offices.** While UNHCR field staff were proud of their efforts, the "stand and deliver" mentality within UNHCR as it faced multiple crises created higher levels of pressure on staff coupled with a decrease in leave time and increase in social isolation due to remote work. Multiple key informants reported a lack of acknowledgement of these efforts from management. In addition, informants across all contexts said that working at home meant working longer hours with no boundary and separation between home and work. As one key informant in Niger put it, "My children said they were seeing me more often when I was working at the office than at home." These dynamics were exacerbated by team meetings scheduled across different time zones, which created late meetings that ran long into the night. These negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing were felt disproportionately by field office staff, and by local staff most acutely.

4.3.2   EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND IDP POLICY (AOI 4)

To what extent do UNHCR's existing emergency preparedness policies and IDP Policy enable operations to implement the planned response?

Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response

178. **UNHCR's emergency mechanisms, triggered by the three emergency declarations in the Sahel in 2020 and guided by the 2017 Emergency Policy, enabled UNHCR's response. These declarations were widely perceived to have mobilized resources, facilitated a faster response, increased visibility of the crisis, and resulted in better articulation and advocacy with different stakeholders.** Regional Bureau and Headquarter stakeholders in particular praised the then renewed Emergency Preparedness Policy and perceived it as providing guidance by outlining objectives, principles, processes, and accountabilities for what needs to happen before and during an emergency. On the other hand, **few UNHCR staff at the country or field-level could provide details on the 2017 Emergency Policy.**

179. **The centralized and standardized nature of the deployment of essential human, material, and financial resources overshadowed opportunities for more locally-adapted, sustainable approaches. Country and field-level key informants reported that emergency response mechanisms are insufficiently decentralized and often do not reflect the conditions on the ground.** Key informants cited country offices' prior experiences in implementing emergency declarations, pre-existing levels of staff capacity, and insecurity and accessibility to POCs as important contextual considerations affecting their ability to abide by the Policy, which the document itself does not adequately recognize or address. They suggested increasing local ownership for operations, mapping out local capacities, and deploying resources that geographically closer and more align at the regional rather than HQ-level to overcome these barriers. While UNHCR institutionalized regionalization in 2019, the 2017 Emergency Policy pre-dated this process and does not reflect this shift.

180. **Generally, the emergency response was constrained by a lack of corresponding guidance or strategy to translate broad policy into ground realities.** For instance, the 2017 Emergency Policy outlines that "Special attention will be paid to ensuring rapid and well-supported admission, reception, and registration of new arrivals." In practice, however, limited government capacities and restricted access to many zones in which POCs reside, especially in the tri-border area, hampered the ability of country offices to effectively do so. There are no scenarios in the policy looking at this eventuality and providing guiding principles. Similarly, providing more scenario around complicated practical issues with regards to the "humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence" can be challenging and create For security reasons, like other humanitarian responders, UNHCR staff at times had to travel to local areas with military escorts, such as with MINUSMA personnel, which led some observers to associate UNHCR with armed forces, impeding community acceptance efforts. Respondents in Niger noted that the concept of neutrality and impartiality is difficult to apply in practice due to the close working relationship with the government and the need for escorts in red zones. These contextual factors limited country offices' ability to fully implement the Policy and, in the absence of scenarios within the Policy itself or practical guiding documents, it was not always clear to operations on how best to overcome or work around such obstacles. Because it did not consider practical limitations to the application of some of its stipulations, nor consider contextual differences across the three countries, the policy was not sufficiently relevant to be useful in guiding country offices' actions. Again, this oversight is partly the result of the centralized nature of the Policy's design and the limited involvement of country offices in its conceptualization but also reflects a missed opportunity during strategy development to reinforce and translate the Policy into practice. **Furthermore, while accountabilities and responsibilities around Emergency Policy monitoring and compliance are outlined within the Policy itself, this evaluation did not find evidence of consistent efforts to monitor and support Policy implementation.**

181. **The fixed duration of the emergency declaration was seen as constraining, inflexible, and arbitrary given the protracted nature of displacement dynamics in the Sahel.** Many stakeholders reported that there was not enough time to make optimal use of the additional resources that were mobilized after the emergency declaration. Even with a three-month extension, they explained, the emergency period does not always

provide sufficient time to achieve outputs or outcomes in protracted emergency situations. This was especially the case in the Sahel because the emergency declarations coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, causing delays in implementation of activities due to staffing and resource mobilization in addition to increasing reporting requirements for staff.

182. **The pre-emergency and emergency phase of the 2017 Emergency Policy is detailed, but the post-engagement and disengagement phase is not well delineated in the policy nor implemented in practice. UNHCR lacked a sufficient "transition plan" for operations to shift away from emergency activities towards a return to "regular" yet adapted responses, especially since displacement conditions remained at emergency levels even after the official end of the emergency declaration.** Key informants mentioned that the emergency declaration was lifted while POCs numbers were still increasing and the security situation was deteriorating, forcing country teams to do more with less. Many staff reported that country offices could not sustain operations to meet some of the expectations that were raised in 2020 and that funding did not continue at the same level. Some UNHCR staff in Burkina Faso perceived the emergency expiration as abrupt and lacking a smooth transition. The 2017 Emergency Policy explicitly states that "The expiration of an emergency declaration does not necessarily imply that the crisis it relates to has come to an end. Rather, it indicates that advanced preparedness actions are in place or that the operational response has been stabilized and is being sustainably delivered through regular processes and procedures, thus exceptional mobilization of capacities and application of emergency procedures and systems are no longer required." The text implies that the declaration serves to rapidly increase funding to meet new needs, but that these expanded operations – and therefore their funding – should remain stable thereafter. Multiple UNHCR key informants perceived that this is not what occurred in the Sahel, suggesting a lack of an adequate disengagement phase.

183. **UNHCR is generally prepared to respond in the face of sudden shocks and progression and/or evolution of violence, but there appears to be opportunity for improved emergency preparedness internally.** The 2017 Emergency Policy describes pre-emergency phase preparedness including efforts to strengthen institutional risk analysis, information generation, preliminary preparedness and planning, training, and resource mobilization. Accompanying guidance outlined in UNHCR's Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE)[46] and for IDP Emergencies (PPIE)[47] are expected to provide practical actions and tools for risk assessment, minimal preparedness and advanced preparedness actions including scenario-based contingency planning. While this evaluation did not explore UNHCR's adherence to these guidelines in depth, key informants noted that in 2019, none of the three operation countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, or Niger) had systematic risk analyses or contingency plans in place. Staff key informants considered contingency plans to be useful only when accompanied with proper budgets and resources to carry them out, which was not always the case despite explicit mention in the Policy.

---

[46] UNHCR. Emergency Handbook. Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE). Available at:
https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/34912/preparedness-package-for-refugee-emergencies-ppre
[47] UNHCR. Emergency Handbook. Preparedness Package for IDP Emergencies (PPIE). Available at
https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/408136/preparedness-package-for-idp-emergencies-ppie

Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement

184. **The 2019 IDP Policy is an important framework in relation to UNHCR's mandate and responsibilities towards IDPs but lacks contingent operational strategies (either at the regional or country level) on how to operationalize UNHCR's role and has led to different interpretations across the organization. Due to the agency's strong history and mandate concerning refugees, there remain divided views within the agency at all levels with regard to UNHCR's mandate in relation to IDPs.** When faced with limited resources, staff struggle with the dilemma as to how to serve both IDPs and refugees in a satisfactory way, resulting in differentiated approaches to IDPs across countries. This is especially important given that UNHCR is shifting towards a larger IDP footprint. In Burkina Faso, for example, where the IDP population was over 30 times greater than that of refugees in 2020, heavy emphasis was placed on the IDP population owing to its relative size. As UNHCR's IDP footprint grows, key informants consistently highlighted the need for further guidance on how to address this shift operationally. It is probably too early to assess how the recent internal IDP stocktaking exercise (in November 2021) may support this.

185. **The 2019 IDP policy also lacks sufficient sensitivity to contextual nuances and does not adequately acknowledge the kind of scenarios and limitations that UNHCR faces in practice.** The IDP policy is meant to be broad enough to apply to its operations globally. The absence of a contingent strategy at regional or country level providing guidance on how to account for context-specific factors undermines UNHCR's ability to translate the policy into implementation. A common theme that emerged, for example, was that different country operations and government partners have different levels of experience with IDPs. As a policy, guiding principles do not take into account different levels of rootedness and likely falls short of providing robust support for those operations where IDP responses are newer.

186. **In the same way the Policy describes "enablers of engagement," but does not provide any scenarios accounting for constraints. This generates challenges in aligning policy to practice and creates expectations and objectives that are overly ambitious and unrealistic, undermining UNHCR's ability to achieve them.** Thus, the Policy states that "When cluster or cluster-like arrangements are established, UNHCR will assume leadership and coordination functions in line with our global responsibilities." The Policy does not account for commonly found humanitarian contexts like the Sahel where States lack capacity to lead IDP responses and cluster effectiveness is limited by government and even UNHCR (funding) constraints on participation.

187. **Similar to the 2017 Emergency Policy, the 2019 IDP Policy does not sufficiently acknowledge contexts with severely constrained humanitarian access and insecurity and provide scenarios with these.** As discussed above, UNHCR cannot access clusters of POCs due to insecurity in Mali in particular, and thus at times prioritizes responses in those areas where there are the most POCs. As a result, those POCs in more isolated areas may receive less assistance even if they face greater needs, which create dilemma with regards the IDP policy on allocating resources towards the greatest needs and risks.

188. **As with the 2017 Emergency Policy, the 2019 IDP Policy is not sufficiently supported by concrete and cascading/parallel strategic guidance on how to achieve its goals or mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness.** Most respondents noted that the Policy has not been rigorously applied or operationally tested. For example, the IDP Policy states, "[UNHCR will] place protection and solutions at the center of humanitarian action through direct engagement with displacement-affected communities, prioritizing protection analysis and strategy-setting, the timely and effective delivery of protection services and mainstreaming protection across all sectors/clusters." These are worthy goals and objectives. However, the Policy itself does little to benchmark what successful implementation would look like and there is no corresponding strategy to guide such implementation according to scenario. Likewise, while the policy claims that protection and conflict analysis will be used to ensure a "do no harm" approach to solutions, it is unclear the extent to which, or the mechanisms through which, this is to be achieved in practice. The same can be said of the Policy's very broad commitment to "[…] contribute to transition strategies that link humanitarian and development action, and activities that build and sustain peace." Clarifying, specifying, and harmonizing the mechanisms for implementing these protections and procedures is especially crucial as UNHCR staff across all three contexts expressed some level of uncertainty in their role and responsibilities towards IDPs alongside other actors.

189. **Few staff in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were familiar with or could speak about the 2019 IDP Policy.** Some staff key informants mentioned that UNHCR's policies in general were crucial to provide a framework for the response at the national and regional levels. However, some referred to the Kampala Convention, the Sahel Strategy, or the government's plan when asked about the IDP Policy, suggesting confusion within UNHCR staff as to what the IDP Policy actually means for their day-to-day responsibilities vis-à-vis IDPs. Key informants noted the absence of facilitators or resources at the regional or country level who could help translate guiding principles in the IDP Policy into more detailed and context-specific instructions, whether as part of or separate to, the Sahel Strategy.

190. **Finally, the IDP Policy's emphasis on direct engagement with displacement-affected communities remains to be fully implemented.** The IDP Policy states that UNHCR should "be accountable to all those that we serve by ensuring, to the extent feasible, the proximity and community engagement that gives a first-hand understanding of their diverse perspectives, priorities, risks, needs, capacities and expectations." In the Sahel, two-way communication and consultation of POCs in intervention design and implementation was perceived as limited and focus group respondents explained that they in fact have little understanding or knowledge of what they could expect from UNHCR in terms of services or assistance. One example is the distribution of cash. Some beneficiaries receive cash whereas others do not, which is often confusing to beneficiaries. This is also compounded by the fact that beneficiaries do not know when the distribution will happen.

4.3.3 DECENTRALIZATION AND REGIONALIZATION (AOI 5)

How has UNHCR's ongoing decentralization affected the response and what was the role of the Regional Bureau and HQ?

191. **Overall, the decentralization and regionalization processes have helped improve UNHCR operations and responses.** Country and HQ staff described the Regional Bureau as helpful in providing strategic and technical support. For example, KII participants at the regional and HQ level noted that the arrival of a Senior Operations officer for the Sahel situation was helpful in bridging communication between the Bureau and operations and improving response effectiveness. Indeed, country operations interacted more frequently with the Bureau in 2020 than they did with Headquarters, and the Bureau interacted with Headquarters considerably more than the country operations did, indicating a shift toward the Bureau's intermediary role. Respondents additionally cited training, data collection, and protection as areas where the Bureau provided crucial support.

192. When asked about whether and how UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization efforts affected the 2020 Sahel response, responses indicating a positive impact were most common, with decentralization and regionalization said to have increased the reach (49%), relevance (44%), timeliness (42%), and effectiveness (43%) of UNHCR's response. A majority of responses also indicated decentralization/ regionalization's positive effect on UNHCR's response by improving partnerships and coordination (35%), facilitating the complementarity/harmony of UNHCR's response (42%), and improving longer-term response planning, including linkages with development and peacebuilding efforts in 2020. Around a sixth to a quarter of respondents reported that decentralization and regionalization had no effect on these aspects of the response. Finally, a small but non-zero fraction of participants said that decentralization and regionalization negatively affected these aspects of the response.

193. **Decentralization and regionalization and the role of the Bureau was perceived as a positive overall although implementation of decentralization and regionalization remains a work in progress**. According to Bureau and HQ key informants, the Bureau was established to fill an advisory and supporting role to operations by providing guidance and feedback, procuring, and mobilizing resources, and monitoring/analyzing data. Many key informants felt that more work is needed for the Bureau to reach its full intended vision and potential. The sentiment is also consistent with findings from the document review, where the evaluation team was unable to identify comprehensive guidance or descriptions on roles regarding the decentralization process. The stated goals of regionalization are to simplify systems and processes; decrease bureaucracy; improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability of the response; delineate accountabilities and responsibilities; facilitate recruitment processes and HR management; diversify sources of funding; and strengthen partnerships with development actors. **Decentralization documents also do not include longer-term planning perspectives or plans to quantify or assess the effect of decentralization.**[48]

194. **Clear communication about decentralization and regionalization has not yet reached staff throughout all operations, and those roles and responsibilities resulting from decentralization and regionalization are not universally understood at all levels.** There remains a perception among regional key informants in

---

[48] UNHCR. 2020. Planned and Unexpected Survey Report Summary.
UNHCR. Quick Guide to UNHCR's Regionalization & Decentralization Process. 2019 Feb;7.
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. 2019. Update on UNHCR reform [Internet]. Available from:
https://www.unhcr.org/5d81f9620.pdf

particular that the Bureau still hasn't fully defined its role as the bridge between HQ and country operations because it is still working out roles, responsibilities, and accountability within this shift. As a consequence of unclear boundaries surrounding their scope of work, many regional staff felt they wore multiple hats and were overstretched. Others described feeling that they needed to convince operations of the Bureau's usefulness. Documents reviewed do not provide a complete nor concrete description of roles and responsibilities at HQ or the Bureau following regionalization. Where they are described, the roles and connections are vague. For example, when describing mechanisms for response harmonization within and across regions, roles and responsibilities are vaguely described: "Technical experts, with functional links to the divisions at Headquarters, will be fully integrated within the regionalized bureau structures and lines of authority." [49]

195. **UNHCR's decision-making process for implementation of operations is concentrated at the country level with stakeholders feeling that country offices often worked in silos.** There were limited examples of collaboration between the three countries despite the interconnected nature of the crisis. This undermines a cohesive regional approach to a regional crisis and creates important differences in the response across countries. There is therefore also tension between the push for country-level autonomy and regionalization, which is exacerbated by the absence of clear expectations and roles.

196. **Beyond issues of conceptualization, a series of contextual obstacles in the Sahel impeded the process of implementing decentralization and regionalization in 2020.** The establishment of the Bureau coincided not only with the emergency declarations in all three countries, but also with COVID-19 shortly thereafter. In KIIs with Bureau personnel, both events were described as major impediments to Bureau staff being able to set up and carry out their role effectively. They described insufficient funding relative to the challenges of standing up the Bureau amidst the crises as hampering their efforts. **The 2017 Emergency Policy pre-dated decentralization and regionalization and thus, does not account for or provide guidance on roles at differing operational levels.**

197. **The Sahel Strategy provides an important illustration of the role of the Regional Bureau and an attempt to bring some level of coherence across country operations in the region.** Issues like the continued centralization of decision-making at the country level and other obstacles to decentralization and regionalization explain in part why the strategy was not uniformly implemented.

---

[49] Executive Committee of the, High Commissioner's Programme. Update on UNHCR reform [Internet]. 2019. Available from: https://www.unhcr.org/5d81f9620.pdf

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

199. The Central Sahel Region recorded over 1.5 million IDPs, 193,000 refugees and some 8,000 returnees as of year-end 2020, making it one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world. The factors forcing individuals out of their homes range from attacks by non-state armed groups to prolonged political crises and climate-related food insecurity. The different types of displacement, combined with a global COVID-19 pandemic, a volatile security context, and porous borders between countries create additional layers of complexity which UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies must confront in their response strategies.

200. This evaluation analyses UNHCR's achievements and challenges in its emergency response to crises in the Central Sahel Region. This section builds on the detailed findings presented in the evaluation report, drawing five main cross-cutting conclusions relevant to one or more of the areas of inquiry. A detailed table linking findings and conclusions is available.

CONCLUSION 1: POLICY AND STRATEGY

201. The UNHCR emergency response in the Sahel was guided by three main policy and strategic documents: The Sahel strategy outlining three response priorities for 2020-21, the Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, which provides the framework for UNHCR's engagement in emergency preparedness, and the policy on UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, which outlines UNHCR's approach to strengthen protection and secure solutions for IDPs.

202. The strategic vision outlined in the Sahel strategy and the guiding principles of the 2017 Emergency Policy, and IDP Policy provide an essential framing for UNHCR's emergency response in the Sahel, strengthening resource mobilization, visibility, and advocacy. However, UNHCR faced challenges operationalizing the documents and translating the policies into practice.

203. First, the Policies are insufficiently known or internalized, which has resulted in unequal adoption across countries. Since country operations each dictate how resources are best allocated within the country, this can lead to notable differences from one country to another, undermining a cohesive and harmonious approach to a situation that transcends borders and requires a regional approach. For instance, relatively low awareness and/or acceptance of the IDP policy, lack of clarity around specific roles/responsibilities, and limited oversight around the IDP mandate resulted in different approaches to responding to IDP needs in each country.

204. Second, the Policies, on their own, do not provide sufficient sensitivity to contextual nuances or to the limitations that UNHCR faces in the field on a situational basis, opening the way for staff to prioritize immediate concerns over policy objectives. For example, the Emergency Policy and related deployment of resources following the emergency declaration proved insufficient to account for (unequal) needs, capabilities, and readiness across countries to absorb and effectively utilize the influx of resources. Nor did it adequately integrate guiding principles for the transition to a "post-emergency declaration"

phase, which resulted in country offices implementing unsustainable efforts that had to be scaled back or abandoned at the end of the emergency declaration, highlighting a lack of planning for sustainability also reflecting a lack of country-level experience and guidance in dealing with such transitions and the humanitarian development nexus. Similarly, the IDP policy, lacks concrete guidance as to how UNHCR is meant to achieve goals stated in the Policy or implement mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness. In the absence of illustrative scenarios or case examples in the Policy themselves or accompanying strategic and planning documents to operationalize directives, aspects of the Policies have not been translated into practice as intended.

205. While the Sahel Strategy was valuable in establishing and communicating a clear vision of UNHCR's priorities, it lacked sufficient country-level engagement and buy-in, such that ultimately decisions at the country-level were not necessarily aligned with the regional strategy. This is also evidenced in how difficult certain aspects of the Sahel strategy were to implement, especially when it came to the protection agenda. An underestimation of protection needs and a lack of consideration for political, structural, and cultural barriers in each country undermined operations ability to implement the protection objectives set in the Strategy effectively. The strategy also fell short in addressing the trends and needs of different population groups, for IDPs in particular. The strategy was a missed opportunity, for example, to strengthen knowledge and acceptance of the IDP policy, acknowledge the relative lack of experience or expertise dealing with large IDP populations at county level, and recognize the changing nature of displacement in the region. For example, the strategy notes the sharp increase in IDPs in Burkina Faso but does not highlight this as a key trend for the region, thereby missing an opportunity to encourage country operations to focus on this group of PoCs in a consistent and coherent way.

CONCLUSION 2: GOVERNANCE

206. UNHCR has undertaken important changes in its governance structure, notably through its regionalization and decentralization efforts. However, there are opportunities to improve response cohesion at the regional level, since programmatic decision-making processes centered at the country office level, and to increase strategic considerations for local needs and capabilities. UNHCR appears to be struggling to find the right balance between the need to generate country-specific solutions while consolidating corporate policies and regional strategies for coherence. The Sahel response was complicated by the relative newness of decentralization efforts and the absence of updated guidance on governance arrangements pertaining to oversight, as well as a concrete explanation of roles and responsibilities regarding the strategic planning and operationalization of the Emergency and IDP Policies.

207. The lack of uniform implementation of the Sahel Strategy and the Policies in part reflects the limited sensitization and lack of knowledge and operationalization of the policy and strategic documents as noted in conclusion 1. It also reflects inadequate systems and oversight mechanisms to ensure the implementation of policies and strategies in an appropriate and consistent manner (e.g. through predictable assessments of effectiveness or impact). Current efforts to better delineate regional roles and responsibilities together with Bureau support to ensuring country strategic plans are

aligned with global policy priorities and contextual specificities are a good step in the right direction.

208. Efforts to standardize the resources and tools for emergency response did not sufficiently consider local contexts and solutions. Short-term funding mechanisms and the centralized and standardized nature of the deployment of essential human, material and financial resources following emergency declarations overshadowed opportunities for more localized and sustainable approaches.

CONCLUSION 3: SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

209. UNHCR increased its capacity to respond to the Sahel emergency and address the needs of rapidly growing and diversifying populations of concern. However, the response by UNHCR was insufficient to fully address the needs of the affected populations within its mandate, particularly in more inaccessible areas. At times the response failed to align assistance with the needs expressed by POCs or was inappropriate given the environment. Resources mobilized through the emergency declaration often served to fill gaps in funding of existing programs and were not sufficiently leveraged to build a sustainable scaled-up response. As noted in conclusion 1, the mobilization of resources did not necessarily reflect emergency response readiness across countries.

210. UNHCR struggled to provide a consistent and coherent response to populations of concern, with different approaches resulting in different coverage per population group across countries, while facing significant challenges to identify and address the needs of populations in insecure areas. For important protection needs, including efforts to address SGBV, coverage was notably limited by insecurity. Arguably, the context of the emergency response (insecurity, rapid deployment) also hindered meaningful communication and engagement with POCs, including limited efforts to address tensions between host communities and displaced populations.

211. The gap in meaningful engagement with POCs during the emergency response partly reflects the existing tension between responding to short-term, emergency priorities and working towards more sustainable solutions. As noted in conclusion 1, consideration for durable solutions and the triple nexus are notably absent from the 2017 policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, and the 2020 Sahel Strategy provides limited reflection on this issue. More clarity and strategic direction may be required on this at the global level. More generally, the two policies and strategic documents framing the response did not provide sufficient consideration for nexus principles on development or peacebuilding so that delivery of more sustained development solutions and interpretation of the triple nexus remained uneven across countries and overall underdeveloped. In Burkina Faso and Mali, development-oriented projects have not fostered independence, self-reliance, or autonomy of POCs at any great scale. In Niger, the seeds for this are more evident in the lotissements humanitaires and villages of opportunity. Programs in 2020 did not sufficiently meet objectives of addressing the root causes of insecurity and displacement. Admittedly these objectives are beyond UNHCR's mandate, but ensuring consistency, coherence and convergence within the triple nexus approach is part of UNHCR's commitment, alongside efforts to support durable solutions to forced displacement. Furthermore, while a strategic and holistic approach to peacebuilding may be overly ambitious within (1) the limitations of UNHCR's mandate and (2) the context of

an emergency response, more immediate efforts to assess or address the latent and sometimes explicit tensions between host communities and displaced populations are lacking. Niger's 'lotissements humanitaires' and 'villages d'opportunité' are widely considered a promising template for UNHCR to build on in this respect.

212. UNHCR was able to respond quickly and appropriately to the COVID-19 pandemic and to implement some innovative and potentially sustainable approaches as it adapted to related constraints. Nevertheless, limited regional and country level preparedness and travel and shipping restrictions imposed by the pandemic delayed the timeliness and effectiveness of operations.

CONCLUSION 4: MONITORING, REPORTING, AND ANALYSIS

213. While UNHCR increased its capacity to respond to the Sahel emergency, it did not match it with dedicated monitoring and reporting associated with the increase in Emergency and IDP resource mobilization. This lack of baseline and adequate monitoring data and reporting makes it difficult to assess the effects of the emergency declaration alone.

214. More broadly, UNCHR struggled with data harmonization, both internally and externally. With respect to the former, the evaluation team encountered significant variation in availability, quality, and content of UNHCR program data and reports both within and between countries, making it difficult to draw meaningful comparisons between programs and population groups. This stems in part from a lack of harmonization of indicators and reporting structures (e.g. format, frequency, etc.) within UNHCR. Externally, challenges with regard to data sharing/data access and limited resources and/or capacities related to monitoring and reporting among partners are also important obstacles to quality and timely data. While UNHCR has made strides in harmonizing data collection methods and tools across implementing partners, more work remains when it comes to monitoring, analyzing, and reporting the data collected in order to effectively translate the insights from these efforts to improved service delivery to PoCs.

215. The evaluation also notes that country offices in the Sahel lacked a clear approach to monitoring and analyzing contexts, risks and security where they operate. Community-level assessments of tensions and conflicts, which could inform operations and the deployment of efforts to enhance social cohesion, were also limited. Inadequate forecasting, early warning, and contingency planning efforts left country offices unprepared for the rapidly deteriorating situation and resulting increases in assistance and protection needs. Furthermore, there wasn't evidence that emergency preparedness included the development of regionally harmonized and consistent contingency plans as intended and described in the Sahel Strategy.

CONCLUSION 5: COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

216. UNHCR's contribution to the response to the Sahel emergency is highly valued and contributes to multiple inter-agency coordination modalities. However, as UNHCR's approach to refugee and IDP situations are distinct, there is considerable complexity in the context of mixed-displacement situations with multiple coordination mechanisms at play. The contribution of coordination mechanisms into a coherent and harmonious response varies across countries and populations of concern with refugee sector

coordination better established and more effective than IDP cluster coordination mechanisms.

217. Challenges to coordination include factors outside of UNHCR control, such as low government participation and high staff turnover. However, UNHCR's experience and capabilities in coordination also varied across countries and appears to have been particularly inadequate in the first few months following the emergency declaration.

218. In terms of partnerships, UNHCR relies heavily and effectively on implementing partners to carry out response activities. COVID-19 created a further need for implementing partnerships, but at the same time hindered oversight. UNHCR's lack of clarity on funding and operational decisions around strategic planning/planning assumptions, however, hindered partnerships and collaboration, for example, through last minute funding changes or operational requests.

219. Finally, as noted in conclusion 3, partnerships with state actors and development partners are recognized as central to sustainable development and solutions. Indeed, one of the three priority areas of intervention of the Sahel Strategy is capitalizing on partnerships for protection and solutions. However, while this evaluation finds evidence to support progress towards the former, there is little to no evidence of advancement towards the latter. UNHCR's investment in partnerships has advanced and strengthened progress towards objectives with regards to UNHCR's protection mandate. This has not been the case for the solutions agenda, though, which remained at the strategic rather than operational level in 2020. Development of solutions for refugees, IDPs and other civilian populations also arose as one of five areas of intervention targeted in the Bamako Process, as outlined in the Strategy. However, despite the definition of these objectives strategically, the humanitarian-development link is rarely operationalized, with few exceptions.

5.2 Recommendations

220. Recommendations were co-created during a consultation with UNHCR stakeholders and are designed to be cross-cutting and reflect findings and conclusions outlined across AOIs. They are as follow:

A. The Sahel operations must be guided by a multi-year regional strategy considering the scale and trend of the Sahel crisis and coordinated by the regional bureau, with clear oversight and accountability

    i. Country plans need to be reviewed and set clear and attainable objectives aligned with the regional strategy, providing measurable commitments to implementing the IDP policy and enabling durable solutions across the triple nexus)

    ii. COs need to clearly articulate how political, structural, and cultural barriers in each country can impact operations and develop mitigation measures accordingly.

    iii. At the regional level, The RB should improve and institutionalize internal reporting from COs and evaluation of performance against regional

objectives. This should serve to facilitate oversight and accountability and facilitate regional coordination.

B. The Sahel operations must be supported by a robust regional fundraising and advocacy plan before, during and after emergency declarations to sustain activities

    i.   COs need to pro-actively adjust priorities based on forecasted growth of needs by PoCs and considering resources availability.

    ii.   The RB must increase advocacy with donors to promote operational and financial flexibility during emergency declarations

    iii.   In the context of protracted crises, HQ must allocate resources to strengthen the financial and operational transition from emergency declaration period to post-declaration operations

C. The Sahel operations must be supported by systems and tools that facilitate and promote the roll-out, adoption, and implementation of the emergency and IDP policies

    i.   The RB, with support from DESS, must operationalize the policies to guide CO leadership on how to deliver on core commitments and goals.

    ii.   For this the RB should develop short knowledge acquisition and exchange opportunities, including case-based examples of good practices, and potential mentorship opportunities.

    iii.   The RB must further develop mechanisms to track COs progress toward commitments and goals outlined in the policies to serve the dual purpose of learning and accountability (see also recommendation 1.c)

    iv.   In the context of emergency declarations, HQ and RB should design a more adaptive support mechanisms tailored to CO capacities, experience, and other contextual factors

D. The Sahel operations must improve engagement with partners, counterparts and PoCs towards durable solutions.

    i.   In the context of rapidly changing nature of displacement, the RB, with support from HQ, must allocate more resources to strengthening the coordination capacities of COs.

    ii.   COs, with support from RB, must develop plans for communication and engagement with PoCs that consider community tensions, misinformation, and rapidly changing availability of resources for operations.

    iii.   COs must allocate resources to assess and strengthen the expertise of implementing partners and counterparts in areas aligned with UNHCR's core commitments and goals, notably protection.

E. Emergency declarations must be accompanied by a strengthening of information systems, monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge management adapted to the operational environment.

    i. DESS and RB should develop Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) surge roster and increase MEL capacities such as MEL Toolkit of COs as part of emergency preparedness plan.

    ii. DESS and RB should develop clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including indicators and methodologies, to capture and leverage critical information and performance indicators, forecasting and early warning, and protection monitoring.

    iii. RB and COs should Assess the impact of internal capacity-building efforts to inform future investment in additional human and financial resources for training and technical support.

6 Annexes

Annex 1: Overview of UNHCR Policies and Processes

Emergency Policy

UNHCR's engagement in emergency preparedness and response is guided by the 2019 Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response.[50] This most recent revision builds on the 2015 Emergency Policy and its 2017 update. The scope of the Emergency Policy covers UNHCR's engagement in situations at risk of a humanitarian emergency in which urgent and advanced preparedness action and/or an operational response are required. The Policy applies to all UNHCR staff members and affiliate workforce personnel in headquarters, regional, and county operations engaged in any aspect of emergency preparedness and response. Compliance with the Emergency Policy is mandatory, and compliance is monitored by the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS), working closely with the Regional Bureau, Divisions, and Services.

The objective of the Emergency Policy is for UNHCR to be able to proactively anticipate, prepare for and respond to emergencies with urgency, speed, and nimbleness to effectively assure protection and support for persons of concern and, from the outset, work towards and leveraging solutions in the most optimal manner. As a means to achieve this objective, the Policy calls for UNHCR to recognize, support and facilitate the fundamental role of host governments in emergency preparedness and response, lead and coordinate with humanitarian actors involved in the refugee response, participate fully in inter-agency responses in internal displacement emergencies and other humanitarian emergencies, and engage the private sector and civil society in joint and inclusive comprehensive emergency preparedness and response activities, resource mobilization, and capacity building.

Furthermore, the Emergency Policy outlines preparedness in the pre-emergency phase. Operations at elevated risk of a new or escalated emergency shall be included on the High Alert List for Emergency Preparedness (HALEP) coordinated and maintained by DESS. The Policy describes the activation of emergency declarations, summarized for Level 2 and 3 emergencies in

---

[50] UNHCR (2019). Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response. Available at : https://cms.emergency.unhcr.org/documents/11982/124166/Policy+on+Emergency+Prep aredness+and+Response+-+UNHCR+HCP+2017+Rev.1/08206217-d33f-4634-a6a6-d695bf940e37

Table 5, and outlines the consequences and required actions triggered by the declaration.

Table 5: Summary of Level 2 and 3 activation of emergency declarations

Emergency Level	Level 2 (Niger, Mali)	Level 3 (Burkina Faso)
Significance	Applies to a situation in which additional support and resources, mainly from the Regional Bureau, are required for the operation to be able to respond in a timely and effective manner	Signifies an exceptionally serious. situation in which the scale, pace, complexity or consequences of the crisis exceed the existing response capacities of the country operation and Regional Bureau(s) concerned and thus call for a corporate, whole-of-UNHCR response.
Activation	Triggers authorization by the Regional Bureau to mobilize and/or re-allocate resources available under its auspices and may seek specific support from Headquarters Divisions.	Automatically triggers the establishment of coordination mechanisms, deployment of staff and supplies, access to additional financial resources, real-time reporting and follow-up mechanisms.
Declaration	Declared by the High Commissioner through a UNHCR broadcast message (on advice of the Assistant High Commissioner Operations (AHC-O) following consultations with the relevant Regional Bureau Director(s) and DESS)	
Duration and Expiration	Level 2 and 3 declarations last a maximum of six months, after which they expire automatically. In exceptional circumstances, the AHC-O may recommend to the High Commissioner a three-month extension of the activation (recommendation must be made before the initial six-month declaration expires). Thus, the maximum duration is nine months. The expiration of an emergency declaration does not necessarily imply that the crisis it relates to has come to an end. Rather, it indicates that advanced preparedness actions are in place or that the operational response has been stabilized and is being sustainably delivered through regular processes and procedures, thus exceptional mobilization of capacities and application of emergency procedures and systems are no longer required. A new emergency may be declared again at a later stage should the situation so require.	

IDP Policy

In 2019, UNHCR released an updated Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement.[51] The scope of the IDP Policy covers "all aspects of UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, including in relation to preparing for and delivering protection and solutions as part of a collective response in support of States and affected populations." It applies to the work of all UNHCR personnel at field, country, regional, and headquarters level. Compliance with the IDP Policy is mandatory and monitored by the Division of International Protection (DIP) in close collaboration with the Regional Bureau and Headquarters Divisions.

The purpose of the IDP Policy is to reaffirm UNHCR's commitment to be a predictable and effective responder in situations of internal displacement both operationally and within inter-agency response mechanisms, as an integral aspect of UNHCR's worldwide operations and protection leadership role in humanitarian crises. It also requires that UNHCR operations mobilize and deploy resources and capacities in support of governments and affected communities to strengthen protection and secure solutions for IDPs. Furthermore, the IDP Policy is meant to guide and synergize UNHCR's engagement across the full spectrum of forced displacement, accounting for UNHCR's responsibilities for distinct categories of

---

[51] UNHCR (2019). Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement.
Available at: https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5d83364a4.pdf

forcibly displaced people in humanitarian crises (refugees, IDPs, returnees, stateless people, and other persons of concern) and for inter-agency arrangements. Importantly, the Policy also commits UNHCR to progressively adjust and adapt its internal systems and processes to distinct emergencies, including those that result in significant internal displacement.

To achieve UNHCR's vision for IDPs and displacement-affected communities, the IDP Policy includes several guiding considerations and describes several enablers of engagement, including (1) integrated programming, (2) data, information, and management, (3) resource mobilization and funding, and (4) workforce management. In so doing, the Policy describes how to operationalize UNHCR's commitments at various stages, preparing for emergencies, delivering a protection and solutions response, and disengaging responsibly.

UNHCR's Decentralization and Regionalization

In January 2019, the High Commissioner announced a new organizational design to place UNHCR capacities, authorities, and resources closer to the people it serves by moving UNHCR's Regional Bureau to the field. This restructuring, herein referred to as decentralization and regionalization, was set to be in place and functional by 2020. Decentralization and regionalization were implemented to "simplify systems and processes, decrease bureaucracy, improve the effectiveness, efficiency and adaptability of the response, delineate accountabilities and responsibilities, facilitate recruitment processes and HR management, diversify sources of funding, and strengthen partnerships with development actors."[52]

According to the 2020 Update on Decentralization and Regionalization, UNHCR's transformation seeks the right balance between HQ and the field by reinforcing strong country operations, building a strong regional Bureau, and retaining a strong center at Headquarters to drive the High Commissioner's Mandate and Strategic Directions.[53] The process aims to better position UNHCR to protect populations of concern, work with other actors to find solutions, and address future challenges and opportunities.

The role of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa, as with the other six Bureaus established globally, covers a spectrum of activities. These activities include setting regional strategies and priorities, managing performance and compliance, identifying, and monitoring emerging issues and risks, and providing technical support and guidance to country operations. Under the process, the Bureau is also meant to become an important hub for collaboration and strategic engagement with implementing and operational partners and create a space for addressing cross-cutting operational challenges. The Regional Director appointed at the Bureau has primary authority and accountability for overall strategic decision-making, regional prioritization, and quality assurance and technical experts will be integrated at the Bureau, with functional links to the divisions at Headquarters.[54] According to the 2020 Update on Decentralization and Regionalization,[55] each Bureau is responsible for covering the following key areas and related responsibilities:

[52] UNHCR. Quick Guide to UNHCR's Regionalization & Decentralization Process. 2019 Feb;7.
[53] Executive Committee of the, High Commissioner's Programme. Update on UNHCR reform [Internet]. 2019. Available from: https://www.unhcr.org/5d81f9620.pdf
[54] Ibid.
[55] UNHCR. Update on Decentralization and Regionalization in UNHCR. [Internet]. 2020. Available from: https://www.unhcr.org/5d1b87787.pdf

- **"Strategic planning and partnerships:** ensure the region's overall coherence with UNHCR's global strategic priorities and the High Commissioner's 'Strategic directions 2017-2021,' set region-wide priorities, manage and direct all regional resources, and assess contextual changes to adjust regional priorities.

- **Protection:** elaborate regional protection priorities and monitor and support the exercise of UNHCR's core protection mandate at the country level.

- **Operations support:** assist country offices with a wide range of services such as human resources, supply chain management, financial controls, and information and communications technology.

- **External engagement:** design and implement regional communications strategies, manage public information requests and relationships with external partners, and coordinate reporting and information management."

While UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization shifts more authority and decision-making to the Bureau and country operations, a strong core at Headquarters is still central to the plan. Headquarters functions are meant to "provide normative Policy guidance, establish and update standards for protection and the provision of assistance and solutions, provide functional guidance to counterparts in the regionalized Bureau, maintain coherence, share best practices and lessons learned, and knowledge management."[56] Other critical components of the HQ restructuring include the formation of a Partnership Service which merged Partnership and Interagency Coordination units into a single entity, the creation of a separate and reinforced Governance Service, and the establishment of a Bureau Liaison unit within the Office of the Assistant High Commissioner to ensure a continuous flow of information.

---

[56] Ibid.

Annex 2: Theory of change

To develop the evaluation design of UNHCR's response to multiple emergencies in the Central Sahel Region as it relates to the TOR (Annex 10), the evaluation team designed an evaluation matrix within the framework of a theory of change model (Figure 11). The team developed the theory of change to illustrate the causal link between UNHCR's three strategies, or priority areas of intervention (respond rapidly and effectively to new displacement, place protection at the center of the response, and capitalize on partnerships for protection solutions), and strategic outcomes as described in the Sahel Strategy. Guided by these strategies, UNHCR supplies inputs in the form of human, physical, and financial resources to facilitate immediate outputs in the form of its operational activities. Ultimately, the long-term protection impacts for persons of concern are achieved through intermediary outcomes.

This evaluation will not measure impact. Instead, it will focus on the strategies, inputs, outputs and outcomes at various levels of analyses (global, regional, national, community, and individual). The underlying assumption is that UNHCR operates in an environment influenced by governments, implementing partners, donors, and host communities. This evaluation will explore three specific institutional and contextual factors within the larger enabling environment (UNHCR's institutional reform, UNHCR's emergency and IDP Policy, and COVID-19 pandemic) and how they affect UNHCR's ability to achieve outcomes.

Figure 11: Theory of change developed by the evaluation team

Annex 3: Definitions and interpretation of ALNAP adapted OECD-DAC criteria

The evaluation team selected four complementary ALNAP adapted OECD-DAC criteria to guide this evaluation. Table 6 outlines the four criteria and provides the definition according to the ALNAP and the evaluation team's interpretation for this evaluation.

Table 6: Definitions and interpretation of ALNAP adapted OECD-DAC criteria

Criteria	Definition according to the ALNAP	Evaluation team's interpretation for this evaluation
Coverage	The need to reach major population groups facing life-threatening suffering wherever they are.	Whether and how UNHCR is able to reach diverse populations of concern and address their needs.
Relevance/ Appropriateness	Relevance is concerned with assessing whether the project is in line with local needs and priorities (as well as donor Policy). Appropriateness is the tailoring of humanitarian activities to local needs, increasing ownership, accountability, and cost-effectiveness accordingly.	Whether and how UNHCR's response is aligned with and tailored to the needs of diverse populations of concern.
Effectiveness	Effectiveness measures the extent to which an activity achieves its purpose, or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of the outputs. Implicit within the criterion of effectiveness is timeliness.	Whether and how UNHCR's response achieves the planning objectives set to address the needs of diverse populations of concern and does so in a timely manner.
Connectedness	Connectedness refers to the need to ensure that activities of a short-term emergency nature are carried out in a context that takes longer-term and interconnected problems into account.	Whether and how the nature of UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts support a complementary/harmonious response with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts.

Annex 4: Evaluation matrix

The evaluation is guided by an evaluation matrix presented in Table 7, with evaluation questions organized by the five revised Areas of Inquiry and four selected ALNAP adapted

OECD-DAC criteria: Coverage, Relevance/Appropriateness, Effectiveness, and Connectedness (definitions and interpretations in Annex 3). AOI 1 explores UNHCR's response to multiple emergencies in the Central Sahel Region and how well UNHCR addressed the needs of diverse persons of concern. AOIs 2-5 look at how different contextual and institutional factors enabled or constrained UNHCR's response, and thus feed into and contextualize AOI 1, thereby providing a better understanding of the response within a wider context. Best practices and lessons learned will be documented across the AOIs to provide leverage points for improved intervention.

This evaluation will not measure impact. Instead, it will focus on the strategies, inputs, outputs, and outcomes at various levels of analyses (global, regional, national, community, and individual). The underlying assumption is that UNHCR operates in an environment influenced by governments, implementing partners, donors, and host communities. This evaluation will explore three specific institutional and contextual factors within the larger enabling environment (UNHCR's institutional reform, UNHCR's emergency and IDP Policy, and COVID-19 pandemic) and how they affect UNHCR's ability to achieve outcomes. Table 8 presents the evaluation questions, indicators, and data sources by Areas of Inquiry. In the Matrix, Online survey is abbreviated to "OS," Key informant interviews to "KII," and Focus groups to "FGs."

Table 7: Evaluation matrix with evaluation questions by Area of Inquiry and selected ALNAP adapted OECD-DAC criteria

		OUTPUTS How well UNHCR addressed needs?	INPUTS Were resources sufficient, timely, and appropriate?	CONTEXTUAL AND INSTITUIONAL FACTORS How internal and external contextual factors enabled or constrained UNHCR's ability to address needs		
		AOI 1 RESPONSE	AOI 2 RESOURCES	AOI 3 COVID-19	AOI 4 POLICY	AOI 5 DECENTRALIZATION
ALNAP adapted OECD-DAC Criteria	**Coverage**	To what extent did UNHCR address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	Were resources sufficient for UNHCR to address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	How did COVID-19 affect UNHCR's ability to address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	Have emergency and IDP policies guided and facilitated UNHCR's ability to address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	What effect, if any, did decentralization have on UNHCR's ability to address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?
	Relevance/ Appropriateness	Was the response relevant to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	Were resources relevant and appropriate to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	In the context of COVID-19, was UNHCR response relevant and appropriate to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	Did emergency and IDP policies provide relevant and appropriate guidance for operations to implement the response in 2020?	What effect, if any, did decentralization have on the relevance/ appropriateness of UNHCR's response in 2020?
	Effectiveness	How effectively did UNHCR respond to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	Were resources requested/dispersed in an effective and timely manner in 2020?	How did COVID-19 affect the effectiveness and timeliness of UNHCR's response in 2020?	Were emergency and IDP policies effective at guiding operations to implement the response in 2020?	What effect, if any, did decentralization have on the effectiveness and timeliness of UNHCR's response? Were the roles of the Bureau and HQ effective in 2020?
	Connectedness	Did UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts support a complementary/ harmonious response to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	How did resources affect UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts to support complementarity/ harmony of the response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	How did COVID-19 affect UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts to support complementarity/ harmony of the response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	Have emergency and IDP policies guided and facilitated UNHCR's coordination efforts to support a complementary/ harmonious response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	What effect, if any, did decentralization have on UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts to support complementary/ harmonious response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?

Table 8: Evaluation matrix with Area of Inquiry, evaluation questions, sub-questions, and data collection instruments

Area of Inquiry	Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection instrument
1. To what extent have the operations effectively responded to the needs of diverse populations of persons of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) both in countries of asylum as well as in countries of origin?	1.1. <u>Coverage:</u> To what extent did UNHCR address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	1.1.1. Did UNHCR's response reach diverse populations of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations)? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
		1.1.2. Were there differences in reach/coverage between populations of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations)? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
		1.1.3. Were there any groups that were left out? If so, which ones?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
		1.1.4. Did UNHCR's response address the different needs of the population of concern? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
		1.1.5. Were there unaddressed needs? If so, which ones?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
	1.2. <u>Relevance/ Appropriateness:</u> Was UNHCR's response aligned with the needs of diverse populations of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) in 2020? Why/Why not?	1.2.1 Was UNHCR's response aligned with the needs of diverse populations of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations)? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
		1.2.2. Was the response more relevant/appropriate for some groups than others? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review

	1.3. <u>Effectiveness:</u> How effectively did UNHCR respond to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	1.3.1. Was UNHCR's response to address the needs of diverse populations of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) effective and timely? Why or why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
		1.3.2. Was the response more effective/timely for some groups than others? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
		1.3.3. Was UNHCR's response more effective at addressing some needs than others? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
	1.4. <u>Connectedness:</u> Did UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts support a complementary/ harmonious response to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	1.4.1. Did UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts support a coherent/ harmonious response to address the needs of populations of concern? Why/why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
		1.4.2. Did UNHCR facilitate harmonized data collection, processing, and analysis (eg. protection monitoring)? Why/why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
		1.4.3. Did UNHCR's response include longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts? Why/why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
2. To what extent have financial, physical and human resources been made available to the response in timely, sufficient, and appropriate manner following the	2.1. <u>Coverage:</u> Were resources sufficient for UNHCR to address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	2.1.1. Were resources (funds, staff, physical assets) sufficient for UNHCR to address the needs of diverse populations of concern? Why/Why not and what effect did that have on the response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		2.1.2. Were there any surpluses or deficits for certain resources? If so, please explain.	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review

emergency declarations?			
	2.2. <u>Relevance/ Appropriateness:</u> Were resources relevant and appropriate to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	2.2.1. Were resources (funds, staff, physical assets) aligned with the needs of diverse populations of concern? Why/Why not and what effect did that have on the response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		2.2.2. Were there any resources that were that were particularly relevant/appropriate? If so, please explain.	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		2.2.3. Were there any resources that were that were not particularly relevant/ appropriate? If so, please explain.	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	2.3. <u>Effectiveness:</u> Were resources managed in an effective and timely manner in 2020?	2.3.1. Were resources (funds, staff, physical assets) requested in a timely and effective way? Why/why not and what effect did that have on the response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		2.3.2. Were resources (funds, staff, physical assets) dispersed/deployed in a timely and effective way? Why/why not and what effect did that have on the response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	2.4. <u>Connectedness:</u> How did UNHCR's resource management affect partnerships and coordination efforts to support complementarity/ harmony of the response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	2.4.1. Did the way UNHCR budgets, requests, disperses, and allocates resources affect partnerships and coordination efforts? If so, how?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners) c. Secondary document review
		2.4.2. Did the way UNHCR budgets, requests, disperses, and allocates resources affect the complementarity/harmony of the response? If so, how?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners) c. Secondary document review
		2.4.3. Did the way UNHCR budgets, requests, disperses, and allocates resources affect longer-term response planning, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners) c. Secondary document review

3. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected UNHCR's ability to respond to the crises in the three countries?	3.1. <u>Coverage:</u> Did COVID-19 affect UNHCR's ability to reach diverse populations of concern and address their needs in 2020? If so, how?		a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
	3.2. <u>Relevance/ Appropriateness:</u> In the context of COVID-19, was UNHCR response relevant and appropriate to the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020? Why/Why not?		a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
	3.3. <u>Effectiveness:</u> Did COVID-19 affect the timeliness and effectiveness of UNHCR's response in 2020? If so, how?		a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. FG guide (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) d. Secondary document review
	3.4. <u>Connectedness:</u> How did COVID-19 affect UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts to support complementarity/ harmony of the response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	Did COVID-19 affect UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts in 2020? If so, how?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners) c. Secondary document review
		Did COVID-19 affect the complementarity/harmony of UNHCR's response and the response of other actors in 2020? If so, how?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners) c. Secondary document review
		Did COVID-19 affect longer-term response planning, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR, partners) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners) c. Secondary document review
4. To what extent do UNHCR's existing emergency preparedness policies and IDP Policy enable operations to implement the planned response?	4.1. <u>Coverage:</u> Have emergency and IDP policies guided and facilitated UNHCR's ability to address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?	4.1.1. Did the Emergency Policy facilitate UNHCR's ability to reach diverse populations of concern and address their needs? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		4.1.2. Did the IDP Policy facilitate UNHCR's ability to reach diverse populations of concern and address their needs? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	4.2. <u>Relevance/ Appropriateness:</u> Did emergency and IDP policies provide relevant and	4.2.1. Did the Emergency Policy provide relevant and appropriate guidance for operations to implement the planned response in 2020? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review

	appropriate guidance for operations to implement the response in 2020?	4.2.2. Did the IDP Policy provide relevant and appropriate guidance for operations to implement the planned response in 2020? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	4.3. <u>Effectiveness:</u> Were emergency and IDP policies effective at guiding operations to implement the response in 2020?	4.3.1. Was the Emergency Policy effective at guiding operations to implement the response? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		4.3.2. Was the IDP Policy effective at guiding operations to implement the response? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	4.4. <u>Connectedness:</u> Have emergency and IDP policies guided and facilitated UNHCR's coordination efforts to support a complementary/ harmonious response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	4.4.1. Did the Emergency Policy guide and facilitate UNHCR's coordination efforts to support a complementary/ harmonious response? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		4.4.2. Did the Emergency Policy integrate longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		4.4.3. Did the IDP Policy guide and facilitate UNHCR's coordination efforts to support a complementary/ harmonious response? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		4.4.4. Did the IDP Policy integrate longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts? Why/Why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
5. How has UNHCR's ongoing decentralization affected the response and has the role of the Regional Bureau and HQ been effective?	5.1. <u>Coverage</u> What effect, if any, did decentralization have on UNHCR's ability to address the needs of diverse populations of concern in 2020?		a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	5.2. <u>Relevance/ Appropriateness:</u> What effect, if any, did decentralization have on the relevance/ appropriateness of UNHCR's response in 2020?		a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	5.3. <u>Effectiveness:</u> What effect, if any, did decentralization have on the	5.3.1. Did decentralization affect the effectiveness/timeliness of UNHCR's response? If so, how?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review

	effectiveness of UNHCR's response in 2020?	5.3.2. Were the roles of the Bureau and HQ effective? Why/why not?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
	5.4. <u>Connectedness:</u> What effect, if any, did decentralization have on UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts to support complementary/ harmonious response in 2020, with longer-term perspectives, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	5.4.1. Did decentralization affect UNHCR's partnerships and coordination efforts? If so, how?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		5.4.2. Did decentralization facilitate a complementary/ harmonious response? If so, how?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		5.4.3. Did decentralization facilitate longer-term response planning, including linkages with peacebuilding and development efforts?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review

Annex 5: Interviews, focus groups, and surveys conducted by stakeholder and country

Table 9: Interviews, focus groups and surveys conducted by stakeholder and country

Key Informant Interviews	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger	RB: Dakar	HQ: Geneva	TOTAL
UNHCR staff	29	26	30	13	6	104
Partners	15	5	10	3	-	33
Government	11	4	3	-	-	18
TOTAL	55	35	43	16	6	155

Focus groups	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger	RB: Dakar	HQ: Geneva	TOTAL
Refugees	35 (5 FG)	12 (2 FG)	72 (7 FG)	-	-	119 (14 FG)
Returnees	0 (0 FG)	50 (6 FG)	0 (0 FG)	-	-	50 (6 FG)
IDPs	84 (13 FG)	87 (10 FG)	40 (4 FG)	-	-	211 (27 FG)
Host community	42 (6 FG)	47 (6 FG)	49 (5 FG)	-	-	138 (17 FG)
TOTAL	161 (24 FG)	196 (24 FG)	161 (16 FG)	-	-	518 (64 FG)

Online Survey	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger	RB: Dakar	HQ: Geneva	TOTAL
UNHCR staff	62	30	48	7	3	150
Partners & government	1	3	7	-	-	11
TOTAL	63	33	55	7	3	161

RDS	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger	RB: Dakar	HQ: Geneva	TOTAL
IDPs	1415	1407	1322	-	-	4144
TOTAL	1415	1407	1322	-	-	4144

All instruments	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger	RB: Dakar	HQ: Geneva	TOTAL
TOTAL[57]	1694	1671	1581	23	9	4978

---

[57] May count some respondents multiple times (maximum 2 times if respondents participated as key informants and online survey participants)

Annex 6: Good practices and lessons from the Sahel response to the wider organization

The list presented in Table 10 is not an exhaustive record of all good practices encountered through this evaluation, but a selection of those most cited/reported by staff.

Table 10: Selected lessons learned

Practice	Location	Lesson Learned
Needs-based approach, targeting the most vulnerable	Regional/ transversal	Improved response coverage and relevance, given limited resources. UNHCR prioritizes the registration of the most vulnerable, including those living with disabilities, those with small children, those with large households, and those with inadequate housing.
Regional POC database	Regional/ transversal	Made monitoring displacement much easier for the entire Sahel region.
Community Approach to Protection	Regional/ transversal	Employing a CBP approach, UNHCR established a network of monitors, focal points, and community members in the field to gather and relay protection information to UNHCR. The network was crucial when UNHCR staff had limited access to the field.
Security monitoring	Regional/ transversal	UNHCR monitors security developments with the help of partners (NRC, AMSS etc.) who collect data in the field and share it in meetings. Expansion of security monitoring to more partners and locations could improve. In Burkina Faso and Niger, coordination and information with security forces is done through the civil-military platform regular meetings.
Contingency planning	Regional/ transversal	UNHCR makes contingency plans to prepare for shocks or evolution of violence (i.e. coups, sudden influxes of refugees) though resources need to be in place to carry it out.
Including host communities in the response	Regional/ transversal	Encourages host communities to welcome displaced persons. Also builds trust and acceptance and diffuses tensions since host communities often live in difficult conditions as well. Peacebuilding and coexistence projects facilitate inclusion.
Mobile clinics	Regional/ transversal	Mobile clinics have been implemented in Meneka in Mali, Kaya in Burkina Faso, and Tillabéri and Tahoua in Niger. In Mali, mobile teams provide services to SGBV victims, and these teams include social workers, psychologists, nurses, and lawyers, while the services include prevention and community mobilization activities, and the provision of "dignity kits." Mobile units were seen to increase access to these services. In Niger, the mobile clinics focus on health, including primary health care but also pre- and post-natal, protection, and SVBG. There are mental services available but not within the mobile clinic.
Security equipment	Burkina Faso	Armored vans were seen as appropriate and essential assets in a context marked by insecurity and violence. Having the adequate security equipment improves accessibility and allows the team to pursue activities.

		The increased armored vehicle fleet in Dori has led to a noticeable improvement in accessibility in the Sahel region.
Transforming Sub Offices into cost centers	Burkina Faso (Kaya)	When sub offices become cost-centers, they gain autonomy and can adapt resource allocation rapidly to respond to the context. It also creates greater ownership for fiscal management at the field level.
Purposive social activities bringing together host communities and displaced populations	Burkina Faso	Over and above allocating a percentage of assistance for host communities, activities that promote socialization between displaced populations and host communities are appreciated by POCs and support the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance delivery. A positive example of Intersos' activities in Ouahigouya was cited wherein football matches and fairs were organized.
Joint programs with development agencies.	Burkina Faso	UNHCR's partnerships with the World Bank and UNDP in Burkina Faso on specific programs has been cited as extremely useful to mobilize resources for non-emergency but still very important livelihoods programs. In addition to the partnership model being useful for resource mobilization, it brings in expertise in sectors that UNHCR may not always possess.
Distribution of solar-charged radios as a response to COVID-19	Burkina Faso, Mali	Distributing solar-charged radios permitted students to not fall behind on their classes during the pandemic, as they could follow classes from home.
Billboards/signs near border points with key information and contacts for POCs	Mali	Close to border entry points, UNHCR and partners conducted the good practice of having signs that gave POCs information on how to get registered and with relevant phone numbers, with monitors to assist them and sensitize them; these places were sometimes a little removed from the border however because of security issues
Opening of a sub-office in Ménaka	Mali	Opening a sub-office in Ménaka was seen as an effective manner of overcoming accessibility issues in the country. Opening another sub-office in Kidal was recommended following the success in Ménaka.
Integrated response and populations (refugees, IDPs, host)	Niger	The *lotissements humanitaires* and *villages d'opportunité* have been built as sustainable solutions for refugees and starting in 2020 for IDPs. The project promotes POCs' autonomy and integration within host communities. Within the *lotissements* and *villages*, an integrated response is provided (protection, water, health, education, coexistence).

Annex 7. Document Review Methodology

A thorough review of 86 published reports and documents internal to the UNHCR was conducted to examine the coverage, relevance, and appropriateness of UNHCR's response, as well as the extent to which it has been conducted in coordination and partnership with other humanitarian actors. UNHCR's long-term actions plans and its collaboration with development and peacebuilding actors were also examined.

Coverage and effectiveness of the response were assessed for each population of concern within each country, to the greatest level of detail that the data allowed. This was done using three of UNHCR's achievement indicators,[58] selected because (1) they were consistently and similarly reported by most response teams, allowing for a meaningful comparison across countries and populations of concern; and (2) they were associated with objective, quantitative measurements of need and response outputs, which are essential to calculate coverage and effectiveness.

The methodology adopted to assess each of these aspects of the response is described below, followed by country-specific and cross-cutting results of the document review.

Response Coverage

Coverage was defined as the proportion of the population of concern that received a given service from the UNHCR: Coverage = # POC receiving service in 2020/ total # POC in 2020.

The number of POC reached to cover a given need was extracted from the UNHCR's Year-End & Indicator Achievement Reports. When two or more objective outputs were available addressing a given need, the sum of outputs (or the sum of the number of POC reached) was used. As such, the coverage of basic and domestic needs, for example, was calculated as the number of POC that have received core relief items *plus* the number of POC who received cash grants during the year of 2020 divided by the total number of POC reported at the end of the year in that population of concern. When the number of households reached was reported instead of that of persons of concern, the number of POC reached was calculated as the number of households multiplied by 6 (the average number of POC per household in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger).

The denominator, or the total number of persons of concern in each population, was extracted from the Year-End report, when available. When the number of POC was not reported in the Year-End report, values reported on Global Focus were used instead.[59]

---

[58] UNHCR's achievement indicators used were: (1) Population has sufficient basic and domestic items (% of households whose needs for basic and domestic items are met), wherin the outputs are # POC receiving cash grants or vouchers; # POC receiving core relief items in 2020; (2) Shelter and infrastructure established, improved, or maintained (% of households living in adequate dwellings), wherin the outputs are # POC receiving land allocations for shelter; # shelters provided in 2020; and (3) Quality of registration and profiling improved or maintained (% of POC registered on an individual basis), wherin the output is # POC registered individually over the year of 2020.

[59] In Niger, the total number of IDPs reported on Global Focus was 298,458, whereas the total number of IDPs was estimted at 154,178 in the 2020 Year-End report. Since there was no break down on the number of IDPs by situations in the 2020 Year-End report, it was assumed that the number of IDPs iwas related to the Diffa region. The number of IDPs for Tillaberi, Tahoua and Maradi regions was estimated by substracting the total number of IDPs in the 2020 Year-End report from the total number of IDPs indicated on Global Focus.

There were frequent and important discrepancies between the values reported in these two sources, which constitues a significant limitation to this analysis.

To adjust for the actual need for a specific intervention within the population of concern, the absolute coverage was divided by the proportion of the population of concern that was reported to be in need at the end of the year of 2020. This value is henceforth referred to as the coverage-to-need (C:N) ratio. The proportion of the population of concern that was in need by the end of the year was calculated as 100%-percentage of the population whose needs were met at the end of the year. A C:N ratio close to 1 indicates that the proportion of the population reached is approximately equal to the proportion that was in need by the end of the year. A ratio greater than 1 incdicates that the proportion of the population reached was greater than the proportion that was in need at the end of the year; C:N ratio closer to 0 indicates that the proportion reached is much smaller than that in need by the end of the year.

While the ratio is not very informative as a stand-alone value, it is useful to compare response coverage while adjusting for the size of needs of the population of concern across different population subgroups. In ideal conditions, we expect response coverage to be greater for populations of concern with greater needs. Hence, significant differences in C:N ratios across sub-populations or areas of response indicate possible inequities in response coverage which may be worthy of futher investigation. In other words, the C:N ratio highlights differences in response coverage across groups and needs rather than the adequacy of response coverage for a given population of concern.

Response relevance and appropriateness

The optimal indicator of response relevance and appropriateness consists of direct reports from the population of concern on their perception of the response. When such reports are not available, the next-best alternatives are documented consultations with persons of concern or documented plans to hold such consultations.

Response effectiveness
Response effectiveness was defined as the percent achievement of the operational level target for each of the three areas of the response. This percentage was directly extracted from the Year-End and Indicator Achievement Reports.

Annex 8. Key References

1. UNHCR Global Focus: Burkina Faso. [Internet]. Available from: https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/8657

2. UNHCR. 2021. Burkina Faso Year-End Report 2020.

3. UNHCR. Global Focus: Mali 2020 [Internet]. [cited 2020 Jul 25]. Available from: https://reporting.unhcr.org/mali

4. UNHCR. 2021. Mali Year-End Report 2020.

5. UNHCR Global Focus Platform: Niger. [Internet]. Available from: https://reporting.unhcr.org/niger

6. UNHCR. 2021. Niger Year-End Report 2020.

7. UNHCR. 2020. Rapport Final: Consultations avec les personnes déplacées internes et les communautés hôtes au nom du panel de haut niveau du Secretariat General des Nations Unies sur le Déplacement Interne [Internet]. Available from: https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org.internal-displacement-panel/files/burkina_final_interagency_report.docx

8. UNHCR. 2020. Country Operational Update. Burkina Faso: January to February 2020. [Internet]. Available from: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/74564

9. UNHCR. 2020. Operational Update November - December 2020, Burkina Faso.

10. UNHCR. 2020. Niger Operations Plan 2020.

11. UNHCR. Guidance note to UNHCR Burkina Faso partners in charge of protection monitoring 2020. [French: Note d'orientation aux partenaires du HCR Burkina Faso en charge du monitoring de protection 2020] [Internet]. 2020. Available from: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76890

12. UNHCR. 2020. Monthly Protection Monitoring Report, Eastern Region.

13. UNHCR, INTERSOS. 2020. Monthly Protection Monitoring Report, Boucle du Mouhoun.

14. UNHCR, MBDHP. 2020. Monthly Protection Monitoring Report, Sahel Region.

15. UNHCR, ICAHD International. 2020. Rapport Mensuel Octobre 2020 - Hauts-Bassins & Cascades.

16. UNHCR, INTERSOS. 2020. Monthly protection report - December 2020; Central Plateau Region.

17. OCHA. 2020. Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Burkina Faso 2020 [Internet]. Available from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/burkina-faso/document/burkina-faso-plan-de-r%C3%A9ponse-humanitairejan-2020

18. UNHCR, DRC, DDG, ANDDH. Monthly Protection Monitoring Report Diffa Region. 2020.

19. UNHCR. 2020. Factsheet: Mali October 2020.

20. UNHCR. 2020. Sahel Crisis: Responding to the urgent needs of refugees, internally displaced, returnees and others of concern. [Internet]. Available from: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Appeal%20for%20the%20Sahel%20Crisis_June%202020.pdf

21. UNHCR. 2021. Burkina Faso Funding Update 05 January 2021 [Internet]. Available from: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/fundingupdates/2021-01-05/Burkina%20Faso%20Funding%20Update%2005%20January%202021.pdf

22. UNHCR. 2019. Operations Plan Mali 2020.

23. UNHCR. 2021. Mali Situation Funding Update.

24. UNHCR. 2021. Sahel Situation Update. Niger: January 2021. [Internet]. Available from: https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Niger%20-%20Factsheet%20Sahel%20%20January%202021%20.pdf

25. UNHCR. 2020. Impact of COVID-19 on the protection of displaced and stateless populations in West & Central Africa June 2020. [Internet]. Available from: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/77587

26. UNHCR. 2020. West & Central Africa Update. Regional Operational Update: Main Highlights May-June 2020. [Internet]. Available from: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/77665

27. UNHCR. Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement. Int J Refug Law. 2020 21;32(1):148–59.

28. UNHCR. 2019. Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response. [Internet]. Available from: https://cms.emergency.unhcr.org/documents/11982/124166/Policy+on+Emergency+Preparedness+and+Response+-+UNHCR+HCP+2017+Rev.1/08206217-d33f-4634-a6a6-d695bf940e37

29. UNHCR. 2020. Planned and Unexpected Survey Report Summary.

30. UNHCR. 2019. Quick Guide to UNHCR's Regionalization & Decentralization Process.

Annex 9: Summary findings structured by areas of inquiry

Table 11: Key findings

Main findings of Area of Inquiry 1

Response: To what extent have the operations effectively responded to the needs of diverse populations of persons of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host populations) both in countries of asylum as well as in countries of origin?

Overall Response Coverage
- Overall, response coverage was insufficient to address the full extent of needs of the population.
- While maximizing coverage, UNHCR's needs-based approach inherently prioritizes more vulnerable groups over others.
- UNHCR's needs-based approach was limited to accessible geographic locations given the spectrum of forced displacement, finite resources, the scale of the crisis, and humanitarian access constraints.
  - In Burkina Faso and Niger, the most frequently cited barrier to implementing a needs-based approach was the capacity to identify the most vulnerable.
  - In Mali, the needs-based approach is limited to select areas, sometimes creating intra-/inter-group tensions.
- UNHCR's response covered diverse populations of concern, albeit with notable country variations in coverage per population group, in part reflecting a lack of experience or expertise with specific groups and diverging views around UNHCR's IDP mandate.
- In general, response coverage was greatest in locations where UNHCR and implementing partners had a strong and well-established presence.
- In all three countries, insecurity is the most important barrier to accessing and addressing the needs of populations of concern. Response coverage was poorest for those in insecure and remote areas.
- Security policies, while accepted and understood as important and necessary, were also seen as a barrier to response coverage, especially in Mali. UNHCR is prohibited from entering no-go "red zones."
- In each of the three countries, UNHCR key informants described various political obstacles from the national to local level, all of which negatively affected response coverage.
  - In Mali, for instance, the national government was resistant to establishing camps.
  - In Burkina Faso and Niger, authorities were often wary of humanitarian interventions, especially in urban areas.
  - Obtaining land to provide shelters for displaced populations was also a common source of contention with local authorities in all three countries.
- Spatial dynamics and the nature of displacement itself could also hinder humanitarian access. In the Sahel, some displaced populations are more difficult to identify because they tend to be more mixed in with host communities, making them "less visible" to humanitarian actors.

Overall Response Relevance
- Regional response priorities, as per the Sahel strategy, were not always reflected in the programming implemented in countries, undermining response cohesion and relevance at the regional level.
- Community-based protection (CBP) has been central to UNHCR's protection strategy in the Sahel but, while considered key to improving response relevance, it is challenging to implement and evaluate.
- The top needs of persons of concern were not always aligned with the assistance they received, undermining response relevance in the eyes of POCs.

Overall Response Effectiveness
- UNHCR's response was considered effective overall, more so for refugees in Burkina Faso and Niger and for returnees and IDPs in Mali.
- There is a communication gap surrounding assistance, undermining response effectiveness and resulting in beneficiaries feeling uninformed and/or frustrated about assistance provision.

Responding Rapidly and Effectively to New Displacement: Shelter and CRI
Coverage
- UNHCR has made progress with regard to shelter and CRI provision but coverage remains a challenge.
Relevance
- Although shelters were identified as one of the most pressing needs, there were widespread complaints regarding the quality and appropriateness of the shelters provided.
Effectiveness
- Emergency needs, like shelter and CRIs, were met in a more effective and timely manner compared to other primary services, but UNHCR fell short of achieving objectives set for CRIs and longer-term shelter.

- A more sustainable approach to housing is not yet being effectively implemented and still faces economic and political barriers.

Placing Protection at the Center of the Response

SGBV
- UNHCR has covered SGBV needs through direct care and support for survivors via mobile clinics, community prevention and protection activities, and support for services expansion. However, coverage is limited to select locations.
- UNHCR's mobile SGBV response to date does not effectively address the long-term needs of survivors.
- Across the Sahel, systematic barriers undermine the effectiveness of UNHCR's ability to provide care and justice for survivors. Beyond limitations in existing mechanisms, UNHCR key informants highlighted different structural barriers to UNHCR's SGBV response.
  o In Burkina Faso, the entrenched practice of child marriage was cited as a key driver of SGBV.
  o In Niger, stigmatization of victims was cited as causing an underreporting of cases and furthermore, a lack of latrines and crowded shelters were mentioned as a hazard for SVBG.
  o In Mali, fear of retribution from perpetrators and the ineffectiveness of the government judicial system were both cited as decreasing the likelihood that survivors pursue justice.
  o The decline of basic social services and health services in the region, owing largely to insecurity, was also a major limiting factor.

Education
- In 2020, most of UNHCR's work around education focused on classroom construction and the provision of education materials; nonetheless, coverage gaps remain.
- Notwithstanding the importance that education plays within UNHCR's protection response strategy, it has not yet translated into an effective response in practice.

Environment
- Despite its prominence in the Sahel strategy, UNHCR's response as it relates to the environment remains at the strategic level and has not yet translated into implementation.

Health
- Health is not identified as a priority area in UNHCR's Sahel Strategy, which reflects the limited resources allocated to supporting health services for POCs and, consequently, the effectiveness of such interventions.
- UNHCR's health response coverage was limited overall, but most comprehensive in Niger.

Livelihood programs
- Livelihood programs and income generating activities were considered a top priority among populations of concern.
- UNHCR established livelihoods and/or resilience programs designed to support the financial independence of POCs in all three countries, but they are largely considered insufficient and unsustainable.
- Livelihoods programming can create tensions within communities based on who is excluded, as was the case in Mali's IGA project and the soap project in Niger.
- Elements of these programs in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger were seen as insufficiently tailored to the local context.
- Cash Based Interventions (CBI): In contrast to IGA programs, CBI are easier to administer, but are sometimes insufficient to cover POC needs and difficult to implement/monitor.

Capitalizing on Partnerships for Protection and Solutions

Coordination
- In the mixed displacement context of the Sahel, UNHCR navigates multiple inter-agency coordination modalities. While UNHCR's coordination efforts are seen to support a coherent and harmonious response, additional clarity around roles and responsibilities in coordination mechanisms are needed.
- Refugee sector coordination is better established and more effective than IDP cluster coordination mechanisms as a whole.
- Countries had varying levels of rootedness and operational experience with refugee and IDP coordination mechanisms, which presented both opportunities and challenges at the onset of the emergency.
- While coordination of the cluster mechanism appears to be improving, it still faces important challenges.
  o Waning attendance, low government participation, and high staff turnover were identified as factors that diminish the effectiveness of the cluster system.
  o The challenge often lies during the transition period from informal to formal coordination mechanisms.
- Whereas UNHCR-led registration of refugees was considered straightforward and effective, government-lead registration and profiling of IDPs was more problematic.

Partnerships

- While the partnership between UNHCR and governments is collaborative and has enabled the response overall, at times UNHCR has faced challenges working with governments and their institutions.
  - UNHCR staff informants reported that limited government capacity and bureaucratic procedures have slowed aspects of the response.
  - Heavily centralized approval processes around funding and activities, for instance, often resulted in slow and ineffective decision-making and action at the local level.
- While partners recognize UNHCR's flexibility and responsiveness to changing conditions, many highlighted challenges related to UNHCR's complex reporting mechanisms, unwieldy bureaucracy, and limited funding cycles.
- UNHCR balances access, expertise, and capacity when building new and existing partnerships. UNHCR relies heavily on implementing partners to carry out response activities and recognizes the need for a broad range of actors to minimize gaps, avoid overlaps, and maximize the response through greater sectoral and geographical coverage.

Data collection, analysis and management
- UNHCR also made strides in harmonizing data collection methods and tools across implementing partners to support regional-level monitoring and reporting, but further investment in capacity building and system inter-operability is still needed.
- Monitoring and responding to protection needs was limited by the sector-wide resource and capacity constraints that impacted the efficacy of partnerships and coordination required to implement.
- In all three countries, security monitoring is seen as key to improving humanitarian access but is not timely enough or comprehensive enough to effectively detect early warnings and inform operational action.

Longer-term perspectives and the Triple Nexus
- A dilemma remains between responding to short-term, emergency priorities and working toward more sustainable solutions. Any notion of the triple nexus or related considerations for a continuum from emergency to development and/or peacebuilding is notably absent from the policy on emergency preparedness and response.
  - Delivery of more sustainable solutions remains uneven across countries and overall underdeveloped.
  - Findings reveal existing tensions between responding to short-term priorities especially at times of emergency and working toward more sustainable solutions given the protracted situation in the Sahel, which forces UNHCR to make difficult choices and compromises.
  - UNHCR's ability to balance an emergency vs. sustainable approach is constrained by UNHCR's limited operationalization of its vision of durable solutions.
  - Operations continue to face challenges in their longer-term approaches, some of which arise from the UNHCR funding mechanism itself.
- Importantly, stakeholders noted that UNHCR's Sahel response did not sufficiently consider the potential for further degradation of the security situation and rapidly growing needs of POCs.
- Interpretation of the Triple Nexus concept, as well as expectations of how it should be operationalized are not consistent within UNHCR. UNHCR informants consider that "Niger is a laboratory" and that apart from these site-specific examples, operationalization of the Triple Nexus is not fully institutionalized. This is especially lacking considering UNHCR's mandate and the necessity to act in an emergency situation.
- To date, UNHCR's peacebuilding efforts are limited to small-scale and opportune activities promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion, but a more strategic and wholistic approach to peacebuilding is needed to magnify UNHCR's work in this field.
- Efforts to date do not sufficiently assess or address the latent and sometimes explicit tensions between host community and displaced populations. Findings suggest a lack of community-level assessments aimed at understanding the nature of the tension, which could inform cohesion and coexistence activities.
- In addition, each of the three countries have adapted different approaches to integrating sustainable development into the response, in line with each country's specific context. Notably, UNHCR staff and local authorities in Niger indicated that implementing urbanized sites are not without challenges.
- While well-intentioned, development projects are sometimes out of touch with the context and do not meet their objective of addressing the root causes of insecurity and displacement.
- Engaging state actors and development actors is central to sustainable development and increased work is needed to strengthen the humanitarian-development link.
  - Although supporting development is beyond the mandate of UNHCR, leveraging partnerships for solutions is a priority in the Sahel Strategy and many UNHCR staff consider it crucial to work with development actors to better bridge the gap between humanitarian and development activities.
  - The strategy, however, provides no clear strategic objectives related to actual partnership with state and development actors that focus on durable solutions.

- There is a need to better define roles, responsibilities, and communication between different actors, as well as clear communication to the involved POCs. On this, too, the Sahel strategy is generally silent. The policy on emergency preparedness and response similarly provides no guidance on durable solutions for "post-emergency" transition, including partnerships with state and development actors.

Main findings of Area of Inquiry 2

Resources: To what extent have financial, physical and human resources been made available to the response in timely, sufficient, and appropriate manner following L2 emergency declarations in Mali and Niger and L3 declaration in Burkina Faso?

- While the Sahel response was considered to be well-funded, resources were still insufficient to address the scale of the problem.
- The emergency declarations were associated with an increase in financial, human, and physical resources. Some gaps remained, however, and additional resources did not always consider pre-existing resources, experience, and skill levels at the country level.
- The influx in resources that follows an emergency declaration is positive but does not necessarily account for readiness at the country level.
- Resource management and planning lacked engagement with UNHCR staff and partners, and more broadly engagement with all stakeholders in a context of localization of humanitarian assistance.
- UNHCR's resources management system makes resources available at the beginning of each year, but internal procedures create bottlenecks in resources mobilization. Internal and external stakeholders mentioned that UNHCR's bureaucratic processes were lengthy and complex, resulting in slow resource mobilization.
- UNHCR's one-year funding cycles, along with the late and/or sporadic arrival of funding limited the response, especially in terms of long-term, multi-year and multi-partner planning.
- The emergency declaration provided an opportunity to increase staffing in number and in quality in all three countries. However, the fast growth of the organization presented new challenges for human resource management in terms of recruitment, onboarding, and training, especially on aspects of logistics and procurement.
- Overall, physical assets (shelters, NFI, security equipment, etc.) in 2020 were not timely.

Main findings of Area of Inquiry 3

COVID-19: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected UNHCR's ability to respond to the crises in the three countries?

- The COVID-19 pandemic posed a major challenge for the 2020 response.
- Despite challenges, UNHCR responded to the crisis quickly and appropriately to the pandemic.
- COVID restrictions limited contact with POCs and forced UNHCR to find alternative methods of service delivery.
- COVID-related travel and shipping restrictions delayed the arrival of staff and assets to operations in each country.
- UNHCR staff and partners adapted to provide key services despite restrictions on travel and contact with POCs.
- Many UNHCR informants reported the constraints posed by the pandemic produced an "indirect positive" in forcing UNHCR to innovate and experiment with new modes of work and delivery that were more flexible than typical programs.
- COVID created the need for additional resources on top of the emergency declaration, which UNHCR was able to provide but not up to levels needed. COVID severely limited the effect of the emergency declaration.
- Distrust of public health measures and COVID misinformation is high among POCs. Nonetheless, hygiene awareness has improved.
- Coordination was a challenge with less field presence.
- Remote work forced UNHCR to adopt virtual tools, many of which will remain useful after the pandemic subsides.
- Despite some increase in accessibility to certain meetings and cross-cutting exchanges due to virtual tools, remote work exacerbated both internal and external communication issues, especially where internet access was limited.
- Remote work due to COVID-19 also negatively impacted team morale within UNHCR and new hires in particular felt the isolation associated with remote work.
- On top of an already difficult working environment, COVID-19 took a toll on staff mental health and wellbeing, with negative impacts felt disproportionately by local staff based in field offices.

Main findings of Area of Inquiry 4

Policies: To what extent do UNHCR's existing emergency preparedness policies and IDP policy enable operations to implement the planned response?

Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response

- UNHCR's emergency mechanisms, triggered by the three emergency declarations in the Sahel in 2020 declarations and guided by the Emergency Policy, enabled UNHCR's response. These declarations were widely perceived to have mobilized resources, facilitated a faster response, increased visibility of the crisis, and resulted in better articulation and advocacy with different stakeholders.
    - While Regional Bureau and Headquarter staff praised the renewed policy for outlining objectives, principles, processes, and accountabilities for what needs to happen before and during an emergency, few UNHCR staff at the country or field- level could provide details on the Emergency Policy.
- Generally, the emergency response was constrained by a lack of guidance to translate broad policy to ground realities.
    - The centralized and standardized nature of the deployment of essential human, material, and financial resources overshadowed opportunities for more localized, sustainable approaches.
    - Country and field-level key informants expressed that emergency response mechanisms are insufficiently decentralized and often do not reflect the conditions on the ground.
- As a result, the Emergency Policy guidance could not be rigorously applied in practice because it was not sufficiently tailored to local contexts and did not sufficiently account for limitations imposed by those local contexts.
- Similarly, the fixed duration of the emergency declaration was seen as constraining, inflexible, and arbitrary given the protracted nature of displacement dynamics in the Sahel.
- The pre-emergency and emergency phase of the Emergency Policy is detailed, but the post-engagement and disengagement phase is not well delineated in the policy nor in practice.
    - UNHCR lacked a sufficient "transition plan" for operations to shift from emergency activities towards a return to "regular" yet adapted responses, especially since displacement conditions remained at emergency levels even after the official end of the emergency declaration.
- UNHCR is generally prepared to respond in the face of sudden shocks and progression and/or evolution of violence, but there appears to be opportunity for improved emergency preparedness internally. None of the three operation countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, or Niger) had systematic risk analyses or contingency plans in place.

Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement

- The IDP Policy is an important framework of UNHCR's mandates and responsibilities towards IDPs but ambiguity as to how to operationalize UNHCR's role has led to different interpretations across the organization. Due to the agency's strong history and mandate concerning refugees, there remain divided views within the agency at all levels with regard to UNHCR's mandate in relation to IDPs.
- The IDP policy also lacks sufficient sensitivity to contextual nuances and does not adequately acknowledge and adjust to limitations that UNHCR faces in practice.
- Additionally, while the Policy describes "enablers of engagement," it fails to account for constraints. This generates problems aligning policy to practice and creates expectations and objectives that are overly ambitious and unrealistic, undermining UNHCR's ability to achieve them.
- Nor does the Policy sufficiently acknowledge contexts with severely constrained humanitarian access and insecurity.
- As with the Emergency Policy, the IDP Policy is not sufficiently supported by concrete guidance on how to achieve its goals or mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness.
- Few staff in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were familiar with or could speak about the IDP Policy in detail.
- Finally, the IDP Policy's mandate to directly engage with displacement-affected communities is not yet fulfilled.

Main findings of Area of Inquiry 5

Decentralization/ regionalization: How has UNHCR's ongoing decentralization affected the response and what was the role of the Regional Bureau and HQ?

- Overall, the decentralization and regionalization processes have helped improve UNHCR operations and responses.
- While decentralization and regionalization and the role of the Bureau was perceived as a positive overall, implementation of decentralization and regionalization remains a work in progress.
- Decentralization documents also do not include longer-term planning perspectives or plans to quantify or assess the effect of decentralization.
- Clear communication about decentralization and regionalization hasn't reached staff throughout all operations, and those roles and responsibilities resulting from decentralization and regionalization are not universally understood at all levels.
- UNHCR's implementation decision-making process is centralized at the country level.

- Beyond problems in conceptualization, a series of contextual barriers in the Sahel impeded the process of implementing decentralization and regionalization in 2020.
- The emergency preparedness Policy pre-dated decentralization and regionalization and thus, doesn't account for or provide guidance on roles at differing operational levels.
- The Sahel Strategy provides an important illustration of the role of the Regional Bureau and an attempt to bring some level of coherence across country operations in the region. Issues like the continued centralization of decision-making at the country level and other barriers to decentralization and regionalization explain in part why the strategy was not uniformly implemented.

Annex 10: RDS Survey Report Abstract

Title: Respondent Driven Sampling Survey of IDPs in Urban and Remote sites in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

Objectives: The specific objective of this study is to profile IDPs': 1) personal situation and experiences including socio-demographics, living/housing situation, exposure to violence and other problems, health conditions, mental health, and disability; 2) access to and perceptions about assistance (goods, services) and information; 3) knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors surrounding COVID-19.

Methods: The study adopted Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), a chain-referral sampling method, to recruit survey participants. This sampling approach reduces the risk of bias associated with snowball sampling and enables the use of statistical analysis to provide results that are representative of hard-to-reach populations. Two study sites per country, an urban center and a remote site, were selected to represent different displacement contexts with high influx of IDPs. Kaya and Ouahigouya in Burkina Faso, Bamako and Ménaka in Mali, and Niamey and Diffa in Niger were selected as urban centers and Ouahigouya in Burkina Faso, Ménaka in Male and Diffa in Niger were selected as harder-to-reach remote sites in each country, respectively. Fixed-site RDS, wherein participants with valid coupons visit the study site and are interviewed in person, was implemented in both sites per country with a total of 4144 surveys: Kaya (n=700), Ouahigouya (n=715), Bamako (n=707), Ménaka (n=700), Niamey (n=733), and Diffa (n=589).

Conclusions and Implications: The following section draws from findings and presents conclusions and implications by country and site type as well as cross-cutting themes.

Country comparison

Burkina Faso: Burkina Faso has the largest proportion of IDPs who do not have formal education and who work in the informal economy. Mental health issues are prevalent among IDPs in Burkina Faso, with around one in four screening for anxiety and depression. Most IDPs in Burkina Faso, and more than in other countries, report that their needs increased during the pandemic and that they have difficulties complying with physical distancing measures, mainly because of their need to earn a living. Only 36% of IDPs in Kaya said that they would get vaccinated against COVID-19 if offered, the lowest of any site. In Ouahigouya, nearly one in five IDPs have a disability, the highest proportion of any site. These findings suggest a need for mental health support and pandemic relief efforts for IDPs in Burkina Faso.

Mali: In Mali, many IDPs (and their children) do not have ID documents. Among all six sites, Bamako has the highest percentage of IDPs who reported anxiety and depression and also had the largest proportion living in self-constructed shelters. Ménaka had the highest reporting of violence experienced by IDPs since displacement, including psychological and emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and kidnapping. Less than one in ten IDPs in Ménaka received assistance, the lowest of all sites. These findings suggest a need for increased registration efforts to improve documentation for IDPs in Mali broadly, for mental health and shelter support for IDPs in Bamako, and for protection and assistance efforts for IDPs in Ménaka.

Niger: Collectively, the two sites in Niger account for the highest percentages of IDPs who are single mothers, elderly (60+), and have chronic conditions. Housing conditions vary greatly by site, wherein IDPs live in camps in Niamey and in self-constructed shelters in Diffa. The two sites in Niger differ widely with regards to documentation. While nearly all IDPs in Niamey have identity documents, two out of three IDPs in Diffa do not. The majority of IDPs in Niger had to resort to begging to satisfy basic needs. Of the three countries, vaccination rates among IDPs in Niger was the highest, especially in Diffa, which has the highest testing and vaccination rates among IDPs of any site. Niamey has the highest percentage of IDPs who received assistance and who received information on assistance and

protection. Despite this, Niamey is the site where the greatest percentage of IDPs had difficulty meeting unmet needs. Compared to the other six sites, Niamey also has the greatest proportion of IDPs who experienced discrimination and who are "not at all" socially or economically integrated. More IDPs in Diffa have been robbed or have experienced extortion than in any other site. These findings suggest that camp settings in Niamey do not adequately meet IDPs basic needs or sufficiently address social cohesion and coexistence and indicate that IDPs in Diffa require greater access to registration, shelter and protection.

Site comparison

Remote sites: Compared to urban sites, remote sites have higher percentages of young IDPs (18 to 29 years) and IDPs with disabilities, IDPs who are living on the street, and those with out-of-school children. In addition, higher percentages of IDPs in remote sites report work-related problems since displacement, including being forced to work without pay, working without receiving the agreed amount of payment, or working for lodging or food. These findings suggest a potential need for increased assistance efforts targeting shelter for IDP families and education for children as well as increased workplace protection efforts for adult IDPs in remote areas. A lower percentage of IDPs in remote sites received assistance or received information about rights and options for protection compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Among those that did receive assistance, greater percentages of IDPs in remote sites considered that the assistance *arrived* after the need arose. Efforts must be undertaken to scale-up and improve coverage and timeliness of assistance for IDPs in more remote areas, which will require innovative solutions to overcoming humanitarian access limitations.

Urban sites: IDPs in urban sites feel less socially integrated than their counterparts in remote sites, suggesting a potential need for programming aimed at social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in urban sites. In addition, IDPs in urban sites had contact with more people outside their households the previous day and a greater percentage had known contact with someone with COVID-19. Thus, IDPs in urban areas may be at increased risk of COVID-19 exposure and infection and should be prioritized for interventions aimed at COVID-19 prevention, detection, and treatment.

Cross-cutting conclusions

This survey highlights the vulnerability of IDPs in the Central Sahel region, many of whom experienced hardships since displacement and currently face difficulties meeting basic needs. Findings underscore the importance of protection and humanitarian assistance efforts for IDPs.

IDPs face challenges integrating into the social and economic fabric of their current places of residence. There are tensions between and among displaced groups and the larger host community as evidenced by experiences while implementing this study as well as the survey results themselves which indicate that IDPs face discrimination in some sites. Such findings highlight a need for more efforts toward addressing emerging tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion among host communities and the IDP population, as well as within IDP sub-groups. Economically, few IDPs feel integrated in the local economy and employment is a prevalent unmet need among IDPs, calling for more cohesive socio-economic strategies and actions for IDPs. This need has become even more critical in the context of COVID-19, given high levels of pandemic-related income loss and reduced access to assistance in some areas.

Results indicate that many IDPs in the Central Sahel region experienced difficulties complying with COVID-19 mitigation measures and experienced symptoms consistent with COVID-19. Despite this, testing and vaccination rates are low. This calls for increased advocacy efforts for inclusion of IDPs in national and local COVID-19 information, prevention, and mitigation campaigns, as well as testing and vaccination efforts.

EVALUATION OF UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO MULTIPLE EMERGENCIES IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL REGION: BURKINA FASO, NIGER, MALI.

Key Information	
Title of the evaluation:	Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to Multiple Emergencies in the Central Sahel Region: Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali.
Type of evaluation:	Centralised
Time frame:	December 2020 - July 2021
Evaluation commissioned by:	UNHCR Evaluation Service
Evaluation Manager contact information:	Marcel van Maastrigt, Geneva ES maastrig@unhcr.org Iesha Singh, Dakar RB singhie@unhcr.org
Date:	October 2020

Introduction

The centralized evaluation of UNHCR's response to the emergency situation in three countries in the Central Sahel Region; Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali is commissioned by UNHCR's Evaluation Service, in line with UNHCR's Evaluation and Emergency Response policies.

UNHCR declared a Level 3 emergency in Burkina Faso, and a Level 2 emergency in Niger and Mali in February 2020 to enable the operations to increase staffing and operational resources to address the protection, assistance and coordination needs of the rapidly deteriorating situation in the region – including an increasing number of IDPs. The situation in the region has continued to deteriorate; to respond to the continuing crises, UNHCR extended the emergency levels in September, for an additional period of 3 months.

The countries mostly impacted by the crises in the Central Sahel, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, share several security and humanitarian emergencies and, as a result, a similar range of populations of concern are affected (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host population, persons at risk of statelessness). The crises in the region furthermore share root causes that transcend borders. The evaluation of the response to a level 3 emergency is mandatory under the Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response (UNHCR/HCP/2017/1. The inclusion of the response to the related level 2 emergencies in the region will provide additional analytical depth, and insights. In order to ensure analytical synthesis across the three operations, the evaluation will be carried out by a single evaluation team. The regional approach to the evaluation will also allow for the inclusion of the UNHCR Sahel Strategy.

The evaluation is intended to analyse the extent to which UNHCR is providing a timely and effective response to the complex emergencies in the 3 countries, taking into account the enabling and constraining factors in the regional-, and countries' context.

The evaluation will furthermore gather evidence to guide, and where needed, enhance UNHCR's response to complex and recurrent emergencies involving multiple populations of concern: IDPs, refugees, returnees, and others.

In 2019, UNHCR released an updated IDP Policy, which recommitted UNHCR to be a predictable and effective responder in situations of internal displacement both operationally and within inter-agency response mechanisms, in support of affected States and communities. The evaluation will also serve

to support analysis of the implementation of the 2019 UNHCR IDP Policy and support development of other efforts, such as the 2020 IDP Initiative and IDP Step-Up in the context of COVID-19.

The intended users of the evaluation include the operations in the three countries, as well as the region, the Regional Bureau, and partners and counterparts. Divisions in HQ involved in emergency response: DESS, DIP, the Principal Advisor on IDPs, DRS, as well as Senior Management involved in emergency policies. External partners and donors involved in complex emergencies will also benefit from the findings of the evaluation.

Background

1. The security situation in the region in 2019 and 2020 is characterized by increasing indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, and massive human rights abuses, including the use of rape by armed groups. The result is continuing, and often multiple, displacement of populations. The instability in the region is the result of decades of conflict.

2. The current armed conflicts can be partially traced back to an initial outbreak in northern Mali in 2011, against the background of the regime shift in Libya, and has since spread to Niger, and Burkina Faso. In recent years, the security situation has continued to deteriorate drastically in the region. Political instability has been exacerbated by periods of famine as well as attacks on civilians by armed groups; the impact of the overthrow of the Malian government in 2012 was aggravated by famine in the region, and the coup in Burkina Faso in 2015 occurred in a period of violence involving increasingly public targets. The response by the international community; the deployment of the UN mission in Mali in 2013, and the collaboration on security issues by the regional governments in the G5 Sahel as of 2017 did not stem the violence. Attacks in 2019 such as on villages in the Mopti region in Mali and in the Burkinabe Sahel region caused further displacements (displacements in Burkina Faso quadrupled in the first 6 months of 2019).

3. The situation is interlinked with the situations in Cameroon, Libya, and Nigeria due to the shared ideology between armed groups, geographic proximity, and their illicit financing methods. The security situation in complicated further by the broad range of regular and irregular armed actors.

4. The region is at risk from adverse effects of climate change; competition for land and water resources have generated divisions between communities based on ethnic affiliation. These tensions are exploited by insurgent groups, leading to more inter-ethnic fighting.

5. The increasing violence perpetrated on the civilian populations: indiscriminate attacks by armed groups against civilians, the widespread use of rape against women, and attacks against state institutions, including schools and health facilities have led to massive internal and cross-border displacements in 2019 and 2020, particularly in Burkina Faso.

6. In Burkina Faso, an estimated 2.2 million people require humanitarian assistance in 2020, representing a nearly 50 per cent increase from 2019. As of September 2020, more than a million people have been displaced internally, representing a more than sixteen-fold increase in the number of IDPs in the country from January 2019. Currently over six out of ten IDPs in the three central Sahel countries are in Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso has one of highest reported COVID-19 related fatality rates in sub-Saharan Africa. The pandemic and related restrictions is aggravating a critical situation, with an escalating health crisis.

7. In Mali, an estimated 1.3 million people will face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity during the 2020 lean season, while an estimated 1.2 million people are exposed to the risk of water-borne epidemic diseases. The issue of access has been complicating the work of humanitarian actors in Mali due to the deterioration of security conditions.

8. Niger hosts multiple populations of concern with diverse protection and humanitarian needs: refugees from Mali and Nigeria settled in villages, or in camps, and asylum seekers from 11 other African countries settled in urban areas. Nigerien refugees who returned as a result of the conflicts in the neighbouring countries of asylum are subsequently displaced in Niger as a

result of violence; this population is particularly at risk of statelessness. Niger also receives mixed migratory movements en route to the Mediterranean. As a consequence of insecurity, humanitarian organizations in Niger have faced increased access constraints, affecting their ability to respond to affected people's needs.

9. The security situation continues to deteriorate in the region, prompting the international community to reiterate its call for the protection of civilians. Conflict, climate shocks, endemic poverty, and chronic vulnerabilities are exacerbated by multiple displacements, food insecurity, with the COVID-19 pandemic creating an additional burden on governments' limited resources to cope with the massive displacements.

10. In the countries most affected by the crises, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, the numbers include over 1.5 million IDPs.

	Source	Data	Population
Burkina Faso	*Government*	8 Sep 2020	**1,034,609**
Mali	*Government*	31 Jul 2020	**287,496**
Niger	*Government*	31 Aug 2020	**265,522**

11. The number of refugees in the region has increased exponentially in the past years to the numbers below:

	Source	Data	Population
Niger	*UNHCR, Government*	31 Aug 2020	**232,326**
Mali	*UNHCR, Government*	31 Jul 2020	**43,752**
Burkina Faso	*UNHCR, Government*	31 Aug 2020	**19,950**

Sahel Strategy and Sahel Appeal

12. The UNHCR Sahel Strategy is meant to address the severe humanitarian and protection crisis in the Central Sahel Region, caused by shared drivers of insecurity and displacement. The countries in the region, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, are facing similar humanitarian emergencies and could, as a result, be bound by potentially disastrous future scenarios.

13. The current situation in the region underpinning the Strategy includes continuing massive, and often multiple, displacements, both internal and cross-border. The increasing violence, particularly the violence aimed at the civilian population, as well as the lean season will increase and protract displacements. Capacities with national governments and local communities to respond to the needs of the displaced populations have been depleted and both host communities and displaced populations are in dire need of humanitarian and development assistance. The Strategy aims to enhance the focus on the need for a consolidated humanitarian and development response, against the background of a disproportionate level of effort towards supporting regional security.

The Strategy, covering UNHCR's response for the initial period of 2020 – 2021, has the following priority interventions:

1   **Provide rapid response to new displacements**, targeting the countries currently affected by the humanitarian crisis: Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. Simultaneously, the Strategy seeks to mobilise support for other countries affected by displacements (Chad, Mauritania) and enhance emergency preparedness for countries at risk of being affected (Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire).

> UNHCR operational response will cover the needs of refugees in the region. The response will furthermore include the provision of shelter to IDPs through tailored approaches: emergency housing, cash for shelter, and the construction of urban settlements.

2   **Placing protection at the centre of the overall response**. The Bamako Ministerial Declaration and Conclusions signed in Geneva on 9 October 2019 by Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad[60] lay out 5 priority areas of intervention to address the humanitarian crisis as well as its root causes. The declaration did not include next steps towards the operationalization of the Conclusions; UNHCR will take this forward and propose the establishment of an intergovernmental process led by governments and organized around five technical committees matching the five areas of intervention of the Declaration. UNHCR will through support to national governments and local authorities ensure the primacy of protection considerations and standards in the operationalization of the conclusions. UNHCR will seek the participation of other UN agencies and link the provisions of the Bamako Process with the humanitarian and security response as agreed in the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.[61]

3   In order to support protection mainstreaming in the varied response mechanism by a multitude of international and national actors, UNHCR will support humanitarian actors and governments through **harmonized data collection and analysis** to allow better understanding of the protection context. Protection monitoring shall also be used in strategic manner in supporting multisectoral intervention with a rights-based approach.

4   **UNHCR will prioritise the prevention of and response to SGBV**, as sexual violence has become endemic in the areas affected by conflicts. Supported by wide UNHCR presence as well as mobile teams, care and support for survivors will be provided, prevention activities carried out, capacity building on community protection will rolled out, as well as advocacy towards increased services for survivors.

5   **UNHCR will strengthen the reception and teaching capacities of schools** to provide children and youth protection from enlistment, exploitation and injury, to alleviate the psychological impact on children and youth, and to support peace through conflict sensitive curricula.

1.1 Sahel Appeal

In June 2020 UNHCR launched the UNHCR Sahel Appeal to request the funds necessary to respond to the needs of refugees, IDPs, returnees and other populations of concern in the Sahel region. The appeal includes funding required for the operation in Mauritania, a country increasingly affected by the regional crisis. The funds will serve to implement the priority interventions as identified in the Sahel Strategy.

The appeal includes funding additional to the regular budget of 96.7 million USD, to scale up the provision of shelter and core relief items, as well as the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, and education. A further 29.3 million USD is requested to support COVID-19 related interventions:

---

[60] La Déclaration Ministérielle et les conclusions de Bamako signées en marge de 70e session du Comité exécutif du HCR (ExCom) le 9 octobre 2019. Bamako Declaration 2019
[61] UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel

Operations	Operational plan 2020 (ExCom approved)	Sahel Crisis additional needs (Scale up)	COVID-19 activities	Total
Burkina Faso	32,126,993	25,428,392	12,711,375	70,266,760
Mali	16,603,790	20,842,229	8,018,000	45,464,019
Mauritania	14,203,297	-	1,079,298	15,282,594
Niger	33,810,417	12,227,985	7,445,213	53,483,615
Regional activities	-	1,201,394	-	1,201,394
Total	96,744,497	59,700,000	29,253,886	185,698,382

- UNHCR Response

Across the region, UNHCR is working with and supporting the receiving/host governments and other actors **to build and strengthen mechanisms and capacities to address the protection and basic human needs of all populations affected** by the crisis: refugees, IDPs, returnees, persons at risk of statelessness and host communities. In line with UNHCR policies and standards, including a participatory approach as outlined in the Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, UNHCR has ensured the meaningful participation of those affected.

In order to **address the most urgent shelter needs**, UNHCR has provided different modalities of assistance dependent on the local contexts, these include: the provision of emergency structures, construction materials, core relief items, and cash grants. An example of a context-tailored approach are the '*villages d'opportunités*' in Niger in which local infrastructure and facilities are improved to allow for the integration of the refugees, and provide concrete benefits for the local population. The locations are chosen in close coordination with national, regional and local authorities. In Burkina Faso, UNHCR is supporting the government to develop a mobile CCCM unit to facilitate emergency shelter response in multiple regions.

The operations in the region are carrying out a **comprehensive strategy to prevent, and respond to, Sexual and Gender Based Violence**. The response includes the varied needs of the survivors; medical, legal, psycho-social, as well as subsistence needs. The various assistance modalities are mutually reinforcing and intended to complement existing, local, support structures and programmes. An example are the mobile clinics in conflict-affected areas in Burkina Faso and Niger through which UNHCR and partners provide medical and psychosocial support to SGBV survivors.

UNHCR, in close coordination with local education authorities, is **providing emergency education to displaced children and youth**. Additional to improving school infrastructures, the assistance includes training and capacity building for teachers and school administrators on the prevention of COVID-19. As a result of these interventions, over 20,000 primary school students were assisted in Mali and Niger.

UNHCR operations are helping to reinforce WASH structures and services in areas hosting displaced populations **to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic** on people of concern and host communities. These interventions include the rehabilitation of structures that enable the isolation and treatment of COVID-19 patients in crisis affected areas in Niger. In Burkina Faso, UNHCR is supporting the national efforts by paying salaries of medical staff and providing training, and by installing water stations in affected communities. UNHCR has been supporting refugees to make tens of thousands of reusable masks being distributed to refugees, IDPs and host communities across the Sahel.

In line with the Sahel Strategy and priority protection interventions, UNHCR in the region is **ensuring the inclusion of protection in the humanitarian response** by governments and other agencies by providing technical expertise and resources to enable analysis of data on IDP at household level,

including on protection risks, such as in Burkina Faso. These efforts towards coordinated and targeted interventions based on evidence-based analysis are further complemented by the regular refugee registration activities, enabling UNHCR to provide complementary and consolidated data on affected populations.

− Evaluation Scope and Preliminary Key Areas of Inquiry

The evaluation has the following objectives:

a. Contribute to strategic reflections on UNHCR's emergency preparedness in the region as well as globally;
b. Assist in identifying and developing UNHCR's strengths towards the effective implementation of complex and crosscutting emergency responses;
c. Contribute to the further refinement of the Sahel Strategy;
d. Identify internal, and external constraints to the effective implementation of emergency responses;
e. Include an analysis, where appropriate, of the inclusion of initiatives under the GCR in the response;
f. Document and analyse good practises, and lessons learned on UNHCR's emergency response capabilities;

a. Scope

- The evaluation will cover the emergency operations in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, in the period January – December 2020.

b. Preliminary Key Areas of Inquiry

- To what extent have the operations been able to effectively respond to the needs of diverse populations of persons of concern (refugees, IDPs, returnees, stateless persons, host populations (both in countries of asylum as well as in countries of origin)?
- To what extent have financial and other resources been made timely available to the operations, after the L3 declaration?
- To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on UNHCR's ability to respond to the crises in the three countries – how well has UNHCR been able to respond to the COVID-19 crisis itself?
- To what extent do UNHCR's existing emergency preparedness policies, and the IDP Policy, enable operations to implement the planned IDP response?
- What has been the role of the Regional Bureau and HQ in the response to the crisis? What impact, if any, has there been of UNHCRs ongoing decentralization?

− Approach and Methodology

UNHCR welcomes innovative and participatory data collection methods. Considering the continuing limitations in access to locations, and populations, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, evaluators will be asked to include alternative data collection methods in the submission, including (but not limited to) remote, or virtual data collection and use of national consultants to ensure effective engagement of both staff, partners and persons of concern in affected areas.

The evaluation methodology will include a mixed methods approach: review of internal UNHCR data, and review of external documents and reports by stakeholders and partners. The evaluation will include data collected through key informant interviews with UNHCR staff in Headquarters, regional-, and national offices. Interviews with partners, donors, government staff, as well as with displaced populations will add to the analysis. The evaluation will also include analysis of secondary monitoring data provided by UNHCR, partners and other agencies. The findings are expected to be supported by both quantitative and qualitative data.

The methodology, including details on data collection and analytical approaches, and the final areas of inquiry and evaluation questions will be prepared by the evaluation team during the inception phase, in close collaboration with UNHCR staff in the field and HQ. The inception report will include a detailed description of the methods and data collection tools to be used.

IX.   The methodology is expected to:

1. Reflect an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) perspective in all primary data collection activities carried out as part of the evaluation – particularly with persons of concern; IDPs.
2. Refer to and make use of relevant internationally agreed evaluation criteria such as those proposed by OECD-DAC and adapted by ALNAP for use in humanitarian evaluations[62].
3. Refer to and make use of relevant UN standards analytical frameworks.
4. Be explicitly designed to address the key evaluation questions – considering evaluability, budget, and timing constraints.

A Reference Group will be created, comprised of senior UNHCR staff (at country, regional, and HQ level), staff from relevant UN agencies, and partners. The Reference Group members will provide strategic input and constructive feedback based on their respective organisational perspective. The role of the Reference Group is particularly important during the review of the inception-, and draft-reports.

The evaluation will include validation workshops at country level, and possibly at regional level and HQ level to strengthen data interpretation and analysis. The format of the workshops will be agreed upon during the inception phase.

Ethical Considerations

The evaluation process should support and respect ethical participation of persons of concern; IDPs and meet the standards and ethics of UNHCR and the UN Evaluation Group. As the scope of the evaluation includes the participation of IDPs, the evaluation protocol and tools pertaining to the collection and management of data pertaining should be reviewed by an institutional ethics review board (IRB) and receive clearance prior to commencing.

The evaluation should adhere to UNHCR's Data Protection Policy to ensure personally identifiable information is adequately safeguarded.

The Evaluation Team is required to sign the UNHCR Code of Conduct, complete UNHCR's introductory protection training module, and respect UNHCR's confidentiality requirements.

Evaluation Quality Assurance

In line with established standards for evaluation in the UN system, and the UN Ethical Guidelines for evaluations, evaluation in UNHCR is founded on the inter-connected principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, which in practice, call for: protecting sources and data; systematically seeking informed consent; respecting dignity and diversity; minimising risk, harm and burden upon those who are the subject of, or participating in the evaluation, while at the same time not compromising the integrity of the exercise.

The evaluation is also expected to adhere with 'Evaluation Quality Assurance' (EQA) guidance, which clarifies the quality requirements expected for UNHCR evaluation processes and products. The Evaluation Manager will share and provide an orientation to the EQA at the start of the evaluation – including standards for the format and structure of key deliverables. Adherence to the EQA will be overseen by the Evaluation Manager.

---

[62] See for example: Cosgrave and Buchanan-Smith (2017) Guide de l'Evaluation de l'Action Humanitaire (London: ALNAP) and Beck, T. (2006) Evaluating Humanitarian Action using the OECD-DAC Criteria (London: ALNAP)

Organisation, Management and Conduct of the Evaluation

UNHCR Evaluation Service will serve as the **Evaluation Manager**. They will be responsible for: **(i)** managing the day to day aspects of the evaluation process; **(ii)** acting as the main interlocutor with the evaluation team; **(iii)** providing the evaluators with required data and facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders; **(iv)** reviewing the interim deliverables and final reports to ensure quality – with the support from the country and regional offices, relevant HQ Departments Division and the Reference Group.

The language of work for this evaluation will be English and French. The deliverables will be in English. The final evaluation report will be in English and should include an executive summary in both English and French, to be provided by the evaluation team.

Expected Deliverables and Evaluation Timeline

The evaluation should be carried out between **December 2020 and May 2021** with management response and dissemination occurring June to July 2021.

Key deliverables include:

  a. Inception report (15-25 pages excluding annexes) and desk review (10 pages) - confirming the scope of the evaluation, the evaluation questions, methods to be used, all data gathering tools, as well as the analytical framework – and summarizing findings derived from a review of existing documentation;
  b. End of mission initial debriefs after each mission (or remote data collection) including a ppt or aide memoire;
  c. Workshops with relevant staff in HQ and Regional Bureau, to validate the findings;
  d. Draft and Final evaluation reports (40-50 pages), including a 5-page stand-alone executive summary;
  e. Communications deliverables beyond the above reports, including:
    ▪ Presentations tailored to specific audiences, including donors, partners and humanitarian country teams.
    ▪ Presentations to be used for international conferences and meetings, to be determined.
    ▪ A set of key messages (up to 5) to be used for external and internal audiences to reflect on the key findings of the evaluation
    ▪ A one-page summary highlighting the key findings of the evaluation (format and details to be agreed with the Communications Specialist of the Evaluation Service)
    ▪ Quotes/examples from the field – personal testimonies of the returnees, refugees and people who were stakeholders of the programs under evaluation (details to be agreed) which help illustrate key conclusions of the evaluation.

The evaluation process will include an inception phase, a period for data collection followed by analysis and a series of sensemaking and validation workshops with stakeholders at various levels of the organization. The deliverables include a presentation on findings, conclusions and recommendations to senior management.

The evaluation is expected to be completed according to the indicative timeline below:

	Deliverables	Indicative timeline	# Of estimated workdays*
Inception Phase **90 (total, all team members)**			122
Initial briefings with the Principal Advisor on IDPs, and Senior Management involved in IDP policies, the Department of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS), Division of International Protection (DIP), Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRC) and other relevant staff at HQ. 5-day mission to UNHCR HQ in Geneva. Initial document review. Interviews with key stakeholders at HQ and country office.		December 2020	60
Submission of draft inception report,	Draft inception report, including desk review findings, refined key evaluation questions and relevant sub-questions; evaluation matrix, proposed detailed methodology, data analysis plan, workplan with deliverables, final report outline	End December 2020	20
Submission of final inception report. Presentation of key evaluation questions, methodology, data analysis plan to HQ units involved, Bureau and Reference Groups	Final inception report – including methodology, refined evaluation questions, evaluation matrix, data analysis plan and draft outline of final evaluation report.	Early January 2021	10

Data Collection Phase 210 (total, all team members)			
Stakeholder interviews and document review	Virtual data collection Document review Data analysis	January 2021	60
Field missions (or remote alternative)	Data collection at country level Debrief presentation in-country with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders	January 2021-March 2021	150
Data Analysis and Sensemaking Phase 55 (total, all team members)			
Data analysis and synthesis	Refined data analysis plan Data summary tables shared with UNHCR	April 2021	35
Data analysis and sensemaking meetings with UNHCR Evaluation Service and other relevant stakeholders	Meeting notes with further analysis needs identified and follow-up actions listed		
Virtual validation workshops of the preliminary findings for the country operation and Regional Bureau	PowerPoint presentations per case study	May 2021	15
Virtual workshop with the Reference Group of the preliminary findings	PowerPoint presentation; meeting notes	May 2021	5
Report Drafting and Finalization Phase 95 (total, all team members)			
Submission of draft report	Draft report with executive summary: max 50 pages.	End of May 2021	50
Review of comments on draft		June 2021	20
Submission of final reports and Executive Summary	Report: max 50 pages. Executive summary in French and English	June 2021	10
Presentations or virtual webinars on findings to Regional Bureau(-x), Senior Executive Team, donors, UN agencies, UNHCR's implementing partners, etc.	Dissemination PowerPoint and evaluation brief (5-page summary of evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations)	July 2021	15

*This is an estimate of minimum working days and does not equate to the intended number of total person days. Evaluation teams will need to specify the expected level of effort of each team member (person days) and calculate the total number of days worked for the team.

Functional requirements for the evaluation team.

The team should consist of 1 Team Leader, 1 Deputy Team Leader and 5 Team Members. The evaluation team should be able to work in English, and French.

Diversity is expected in the team in terms of gender and nationality – with a strong preference for teams with experience in the Sahel region and for senior experts from the region.

(1) Team Leader / (1) Deputy Team Leader

- A graduate degree in International Affairs/Relations, Economics, Sociology, or area related to the subject of the evaluation.
- Minimum of 15 years of experience conducting centralized evaluations of global, regional and country level initiatives.
- Demonstrated experience and understanding of UN or other large organizations/governments.
- Experience conducting evaluations in humanitarian settings, including in complex environments, involving multiple populations of concern.

- Proven experience in successfully leading an evaluation/research team and managing team members remotely.
- In depth knowledge of and proven experience with various data collection and analytical methods and techniques used in evaluation and operational research.
- Strong expertise in facilitating workshops aimed at sensemaking, data interpretation and synthesis across multiple data sources and types.
- Previous evaluation experience in a range of geographic regions.
- Experience leading a team comprising international and national team members.
- Strong facilitation/presentation skills with experience presenting to senior executives.
- High proficiency in English and French.

(5) Team Members

- A graduate degree in international refugee law or human rights and justice.
- Minimum of 10 years of experience conducting humanitarian research at global, regional and country levels.
- Proven experience working on humanitarian response issues, and complex humanitarian crises.
- Demonstrated experience and understanding of UN or other large organizations/governments.
- Working knowledge of internal displacement issues across geographic regions of the world.
- High proficiency in English and French.