

Sahel+

Global Appeal 2026 situation overview

Countries affected: Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger and Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo



Kadidja Chaibou a Malian refugee stands in the ruins of her home in Harobanda, Niamey swept away by Niger's worst floods in 20 years. The disaster affected over 1.4 million people, including thousands of refugees and displaced families. © UNHCR/Helen Ngoh

2026 Population planning figures

5.7 million forcibly displaced people, returnees and stateless persons



The Central Sahel, comprising Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, is facing worsening conflict and insecurity. These factors, together with climate shocks, rising food insecurity and economic fragility are driving forced displacement.

By the end of 2026, the Central Sahel, Mauritania and the coastal States of Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, collectively referred to as the Sahel Plus, are expected

to host around 5.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless people, from 4 million as of 30 September 2025. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are expected to rise by 16%, from the current 2.9 million, with three quarters of them in Burkina Faso.

UNHCR anticipates a 17% increase in refugees and asylum-seekers by the end of 2026, from the current 1.1 million, with

more people from the Central Sahel seeking safety in the coastal States.

The situation in Mali remains concerning, with potential increase in displacement toward Mauritania while arrivals from Burkina Faso since April 2025, have already raised Mali's refugee population to over 251,000, nearly doubling the 2024 figures.

Protection risks in the Central Sahel remain acute: attacks on civilians, movement restrictions and arbitrary detention are widespread. Violence against women and girls affect millions. School closures linked to insecurity have doubled since 2019, exceeding 14,800 by mid-2025.

Mali and Niger are expected to remain critical transit hubs for mixed movements. While departures along the West Africa Atlantic route have declined since 2025, largely due to reinforced maritime controls and reduced embarkations from Mauritania and Senegal, flows through the Central Mediterranean route are increasing, with 36,700 irregular crossings between January and August, up 9% compared to the same period in 2024. Transit corridors are shifting inland through Niger.

Yet, funding cuts have forced UNHCR to reduce its programmes in the Central Sahel by 17% in 2025, with further reductions expected in 2026. UNHCR will continue to prioritize core protection interventions, while maintaining a strong presence in the region.

UNHCR's 2026–2027 Sahel Plus strategic approach is guided by three priorities, **delivering life-saving emergency assistance, strengthening protection and solutions** and **advancing socio-economic inclusion**.



Budget needs for the Sahel emergency in 2026, inside the region and in neighbouring countries:

\$330 million

It emphasizes engagement with States on their national priorities, coordinated action with UN sister

agencies, and collaboration with development actors and civil society, including refugee-led organizations.

UNHCR will maintain emergency response capacity through sustained distribution of essential items while supporting authorities in conducting registration to inform joint planning with humanitarian and development partners and ensure access to critical services. Scaling up in-kind and cash assistance will allow displaced and vulnerable host families to meet priority needs with dignity while supporting the local economy.

UNHCR will **advance protection and solutions** by supporting access to territory, while strengthening national asylum systems and helping Sahel States accede to key international refugee, IDP and statelessness conventions. Focus on community-based protection structures will enhance localization, inclusion and social cohesion.

UNHCR will continue promoting regional cooperation frameworks aligned with States' security and development agendas. Examples include the Lomé Declaration, affirming the commitment of the coastal States and Burkina Faso, to a sub-regional protection and solutions strategy for 2026-2030.

UNHCR will support ECOWAS to strengthen regional asylum frameworks and ensure national policies are aligned with protection standards.

UNHCR and IOM will enhance protection and durable solutions for displaced people through routes-based approaches addressing mixed movements. This includes protection-sensitive entry and admission; inclusion and development; return and reintegration.

Data on population movements and protection risks will be better managed to inform joint planning, with UNHCR working alongside government statistics institutions and UN agencies to ensure displaced and stateless populations are included in national data systems.

Social and economic inclusion will be advanced by supporting government-led resilience, inclusion and solutions plans such as the Refugee Agribusiness Sustainability Programme (GRASP) in Ghana, aimed at fostering food security and economic growth for refugee and host populations. Access to land will ease the integration of forcibly displaced people and contribute to operationalizing out of camp approaches such as opportunity villages in Niger. Partnerships with development actors will expand self-reliance projects such as greenhouses for vegetable farming and fish processing in Burkina Faso.

Climate sensitivity will be streamlined across programming, including the use of solarized water supply, systems climate-resilient agriculture and eco-friendly shelters in Niger and Mali.



Malian refugees Mohamed Ibrahim and his family in Mbera camp, Mauritania, after fleeing escalating insecurity in Mali. With UNHCR support funded by CERF, they received essential aid and protection. © UNHCR/Houleyemata Diawara