

THE SAHEL

(MALI, BURKINA FASO, WESTERN NIGER)



Heightening conflict has created a humanitarian, political, and security crisis across the Sahel, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso, and parts of Niger. Despite the presence of international and local security forces, population displacement has risen sharply as violent attacks continue, further reducing state authority and limiting access to services.

Country Context

Exponential spikes in displacement in the Sahel highlight the combustible mix of chronic poverty, food insecurity, and recurrent drought that drive the same vulnerable communities into crisis year after year. Violence and instability have plagued the region for nearly a decade, threatened development gains, and revealed limited state capacity to respond. Coordinated regional efforts have not yet succeeded due to a lack of capacity and resources, mutual distrust, and differing priorities among states. While Islamist violence continues to be an expansive threat, civilian deaths from intercommunal violence surpassed those from Islamist militants in 2019, further complicating humanitarian response efforts.

How is the U.S. Involved?

The U.S. provides security, humanitarian, and development assistance alongside France and a growing number of European governments in support of national and regional efforts, including the Sahel Alliance.

Key Figures



6.1 million

in need of humanitarian assistance, the majority of whom are in Mali



1.8 million

are food insecure across the region



More than 750,000

are displaced in the border areas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger



Only 47%

of the \$717 million requested in 2019 to address humanitarian needs has been funded

On-the-Ground Perspective

- Insecurity and reduced access for humanitarian development actors threaten the African Union's efforts to build a "Great Green Wall" in this semi-arid zone—the goal of which is to halt the expansion of the Sahara Desert and harness the region's agricultural potential.
- Armed assailants have directly targeted schools and forced health centers to close, further jeopardizing vulnerable populations, endangering thousands of children, and depriving communities of critical services.
- The Sahel is expected to warm at a rate 1.5 times faster than the rest of the world, with temperatures increasing by 3°C to 5°C by 2050.

Responses and Actions

- Programs throughout the region are focused on building the resilience of communities. Lutheran World Relief implements the Relief to Resilience in the Sahel program to foster long term recovery while strengthening local smallholder farmers associations to access climate-smart technologies and financing.
- In September 2019, the Economic Community of West African States pledged \$1 billion to fund a regional security response and combat violence between 2020 and 2024.

The Global Situation Report has a paper on issues of the Lake Chad Basin, which is also encompassed in the Sahel. References available at [interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport](https://www.interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport).

