



AVERTING THE UNFOLDING HISTORIC FOOD CRISIS IN THE SAHEL



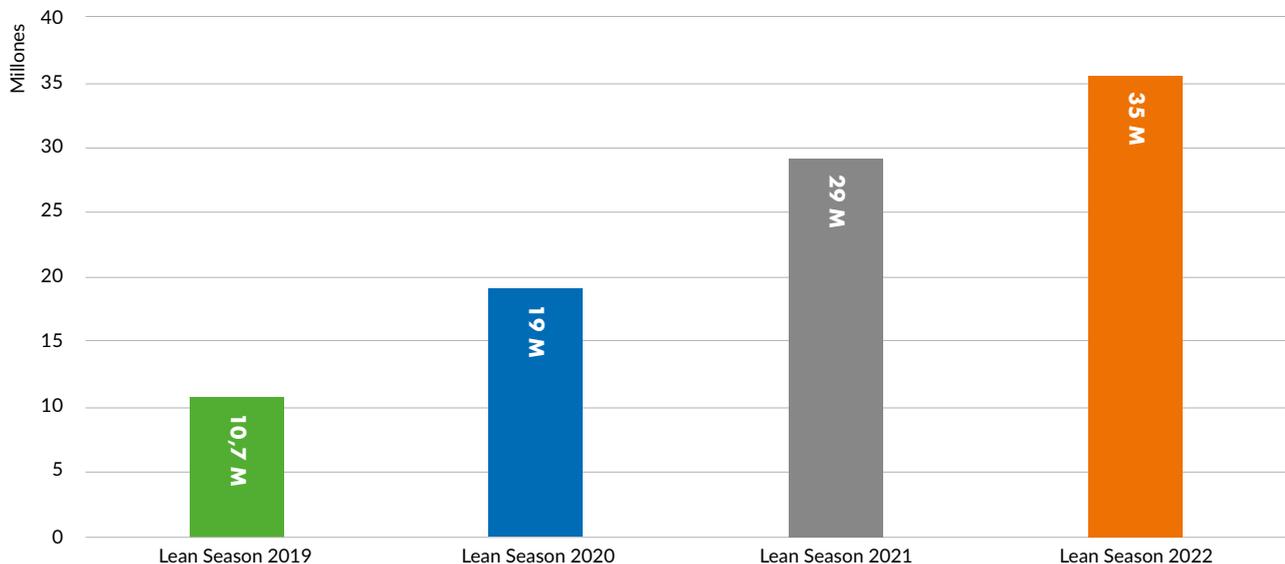
AVERTING THE UNFOLDING HISTORIC FOOD CRISIS IN THE SAHEL

The upcoming lean season in West Africa and the Sahel is set to be catastrophic, with a dramatic increase from 29 million only in 2021, to 35 million people in need of urgent food and nutrition assistance in 2022¹, tripling estimates from merely 4 years ago for people facing crisis or worse situations.

In this region characterized by chronic poverty, fragile weak access to basic social services- in particular health and water and sanitation- compounded by the effects of COVID-19 and climate change leading notably to poor harvests, pressure on resources and high food prices, is aggravating the panorama.

The expansion and intensification of armed conflict and insecurity in the Sahel - continues to provoke unprecedented levels of forced displacement and constrains movement, further disrupting access to livelihoods, transhumance, farming, trade and similar activities. It continues to hamper humanitarian access to communities, which is set to dramatically worsen for Mali in the coming months, as a result of the recently imposed ECOWAS sanctions.

The Sahel region-Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger-has newly been added to the list of hunger hotspots in 2022.² *The Cadre Harmonisé* (CH) projections estimate historic highest estimates of acutely food insecure people for the critical months of June-August for the wider West Africa and Sahel.



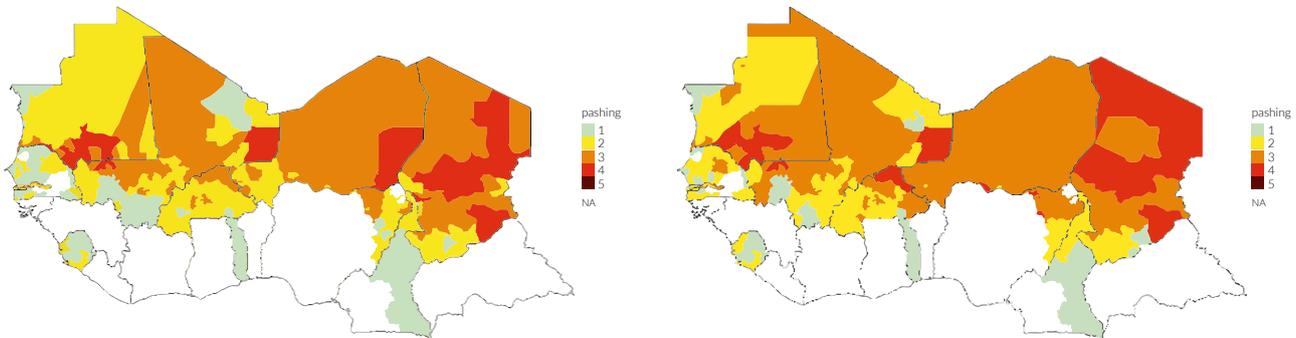
Graphic 1: CH 2022 estimates for people in phase 3 and above of food insecurity.³

¹ These figures compare estimations of lean seasons include estimation from Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal, Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo.

² The Cadre harmonisé (CH) is a tool used to analyze the vulnerability of populations to food and nutrition insecurity. Based on various information sources and a common methodology, the analysis identifies the number and areas of food insecure people. Action Against Hunger contribute always to the CH. Phase 3 represents crisis: households have food deficits that are reflected in high or above average of acute malnutrition or are marginally able to cover their minimum food needs by exhausting livelihood assets or using crisis coping strategies. Source: <https://www.food-security.net/en/visualise/>

³ https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000136243/download/?_ga=2.245755268.1680345494.1644335163-763448591.1623406258

The graphs below also highlight the gravity of the nutritional status in the region- comparing the end of 2021 figures with the lean season projections. On the other hand, the hotspots in the Liptako Gourma and Lake Chad Basin areas continues to persist over the years, showcasing the impact of violence and conflict and its devastating effects on food and nutrition security in the region.



October - December 2021 (current): nutritional status.

June - September 2022 (projected): nutritional status.

A SEVERELY DETERIORATING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN THE REGION

In Niger, 3.6 million people are estimated to be in phase 3 and above of food insecurity, facing crisis or worse levels, where households will, at a minimum, face food deficits that are reflected in high levels of acute malnutrition or are marginally able to cover their minimum food needs by exhausting livelihood assets or using crisis coping strategies or worse. This staggering amount represents 15% of the total population of Niger, representing a historic high- never before recorded in the Cadre Harmonisé estimations that resumed in 2013.

According to 2021 studies, the global acute malnutrition rate as well as that for its more severe form were already at 12.5% and 2.7%, surpassing the respective World Health Organization (WHO) emergency thresholds of 10% and 2%- in a context where Niger is already stretching thin its resources-hosting over 313,000 internally displaced persons as well as close to a quarter of a million refugees. In Niger in particular, the deterioration of food security is overwhelmingly high, with an evolution of 80% increase compared to only two years ago.

	June - August 2020	June - August 2021	June - August 2022	Evolution 2022/2020
Mali	1,340,745	1,307,075	1,841,067	37.3%
Mauritania	609,182	484,151	660,739	8.5%
Niger	2,012,365	2,309,137	3,637,983	80.8%
TOTAL	3,962,292	4,100,363	6,139,789	

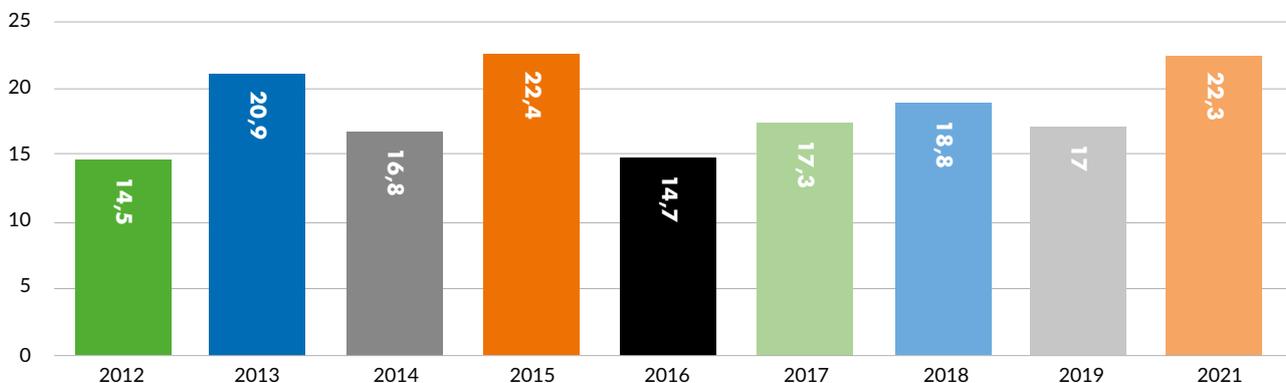
Graphic 4: Calculated from CH estimations for people in phase 3 and above of food insecurity.



Similarly in Mali, 7,5 millions people- one third of the population- need humanitarian assistance, de personnes. At the end of 2021, the number of people facing hunger had increased threefold in a year whilst the *Cadre Harmonisé* projects a 60% increase- an additional half a million - by the lean season, culminating in over 1.8 million people into food crisis which represents the highest number since the beginning of the Mali crisis in 2012.

The situation in Mauritania is similarly alarming, with an increase of those in food insecurity: from 180,000 in 2014 to 661,000 people in 2022, amounting to 15% of the population set to be food insecure during the next lean season. This rise amounts to an over 50% increase compared to last year and represents the second rate of food insecurity in the entire region- greater even than that of conflict affected countries such as Mali, Niger or Burkina Faso.

The nutritional situation is equally alarming, with figures of Global Acute Malnutrition of over 20%, doubling the WHO emergency threshold in areas like Guidimaka, and consistently maintaining unacceptably high levels t the past decade. The prevalence of severe acute malnutrition has also increased considerably from 2019 to 2021 from 2.9 to 4.1%, also more than twice the WHO emergency threshold of 2%.



Graphic 5: Evolution of Global Malnutrition rates in Guidimaka region 2012-2021.⁴

⁴ Action Against Hunger Mauritania Smart survey, January 2022.

CONFLICT, CLIMATE SHOCKS, HIGH FOOD PRICES AND COVID 19: KEY DRIVERS OF THE FOOD CRISIS

The wider region has been adversely impacted by climatic shocks, leading to drought, increased bushfire- further limiting biomass availability and affecting much dependent pastoralism. The impact of drought has been particularly relevant for Niger- that had an almost 40% reduction in agricultural production and has affected over 3 million people in Mali- in Mopti, Segou and Timbuktu.

The rising food prices on the local and international markets -resulting for instance from drops in production, retention of stocks, reduced availability on the markets, or rising transport costs,- have led to food items increasing for instance as much as over 20% in Gao or even close to 30% in the Tahoua region. The residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still felt, with more than 50% of households earning less than pre-pandemic periods- disproportionately affecting those in informal sectors, who also report a decrease in the assistance they receive, if any.

Ongoing conflict and violence continue to provoke high levels of forced displacement in the region and limit access to livelihoods -including pastoral mobility- and to basic social services. In both Niger and Mali some health centers are closed as a result of insecurity, whilst others struggle to fully function in conflict affected areas like the north and center of Mali, or Diffa, Tillabéry and Tahoua in Niger.

On the other hand, these insecure environments make humanitarian assistance difficult as a result of increased targeting of humanitarian personnel or goods or impositions such as armed escorts in Niger or national counter-terrorism measures restricting movements that continue to limit the ability of organizations to operate adequately. In North Mali, over the past 12 months, 24 security incidents affected NGOs in the Gao region, including 6 incidents since December 2021 alone- including 2 incidents of kidnapping of aid workers- making this region one of the most dangerous places in the world for humanitarian workers.

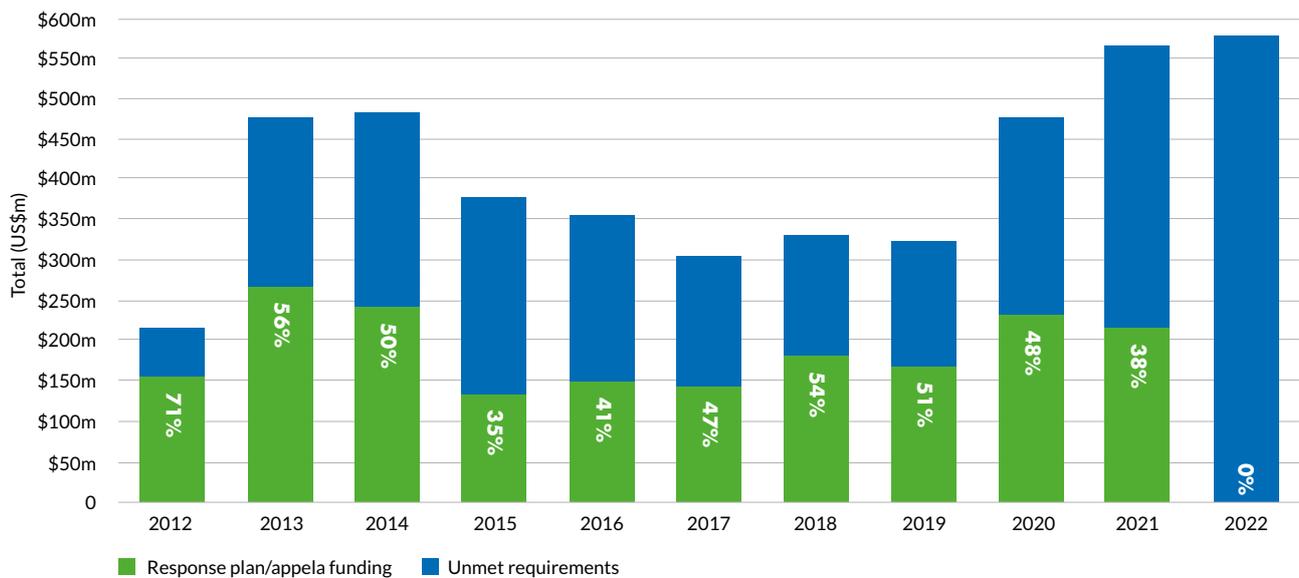
In addition to this fragile panorama, the recent imposition of economic and financial sanctions by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on Mali promises to further deteriorate the already bleak food and nutrition scenario in the country. Mali imports 70% of food items it consumes and is already highly dependent on foreign assistance for finance its basic social services. Whilst this is likely to lead to more needs for humanitarian assistance, organizations' ability to operate adequately is also set to be affected. To counter such immediate effects, the required import exemptions for food staples and medicines as well as facilitating other exemptions to continue humanitarian operations will be key- including a strict definition, application, and increased facilitation to minimize the resulting administrative requirements and delays.



CHRONIC UNDERFUNDING LIKELY TO LEAD TO INCREASED FUTURE NEEDS

Despite increasing levels of needs in the region, all countries involved end the year with barely half their humanitarian response plans funded. The 2021 Niger response plan was funded at 42% end of the year, and as can be seen from the graph, Mali's funding levels were similar, at just under 40%. Yet the more worrying fact remains that this is the normal trend that is observed over the years.

In addition to the estimates in the previous pages, an additional 16.6 million people are expected in phase 2 in the projected situation. These populations are not able to afford certain essential non-food expenses (clothing, health, education) without engaging in irreversible adaptation strategies. Affected countries and the international community's ability to swiftly and adequately to these different levels of needs is key to not only save lives in the immediate term but also prevent further needs in the coming months and years.



Graphic 6: MALI : source -UNFTS.⁵

⁵ <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1036/summary>



A CONCERTED RESPONSE TO AVERT A MAJOR HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE SAHEL

- **Affected Sahelian countries as well as the international community need to significantly and swiftly increase their funding to cover these urgent needs including for life-saving interventions by supporting the humanitarian response appeals that continue to be severely underfinanced.**

- We stress the urgency of having the necessary resources to ensure a rapid and impactful response to save lives and protect the livelihoods of the most vulnerable, encompassing food, livelihoods, and nutrition and health responses.

- **In addition to the emergency response, it is imperative that affected Sahelian countries as well as the international community strengthen their support to development efforts in order to tackle the root causes of vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity in the region.**

- This must be reflected in donors' programming as well as in their engagement in joint initiatives by prioritizing **context-specific, multi-year and multi-sectorial approach** aiming at strengthening the resilience and access to basic social services (in particular, healthcare including nutrition services, water, hygiene, sanitation and social protection). It is crucial that development programming builds on national priorities and that funding for development and security/stabilization are separate.

- Improve surveillance systems for early warning with adapted tools to anticipate the coming lean season and move from reactive to proactive lifesaving interventions through anticipatory humanitarian action.

- **Affected countries and the international community facilitate a conducive operational environment.**

- States must ensure an **unhindered, sustained and effective access to communities, and vice-versa** in conflict-affected areas by reinforcing civil and military dialogue and putting in place mechanisms to minimize the effect of security restrictions.

- States must also guarantee that their forces **refrain from military activities adversely affecting humanitarian action**, including the confusion of military and humanitarian mandates by instrumentalizing humanitarian aid.

- Facilitating the access to both humanitarian assistance and basic services and goods by setting **humanitarian exemptions to the ECOWAS sanctions** in Mali for financial transfers, humanitarian staff and cargo movements inside and within the country.

