

PROJECT 21

REGIONAL PROTECTION MONITORING



CENTRAL SAHEL : Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

BIANNUAL ANALYSIS #01

MAY - NOVEMBER 2020

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INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

For a better understanding of the humanitarian and protection crisis in the Sahel

The Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) is the epicenter of one of the most serious humanitarian and protection crises in the world. Already grappling with immense challenges, including armed conflict, extreme poverty, climate change, the scarcity of resources and the fragility of basic services, the region was hit hard in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic, adding a crisis to the already pre-existing challenges.

Although there exists an abundance of information and analysis demonstrating that a protection crisis is unfolding in the Sahel, it is crucial to analyze the root causes in a harmonized manner in order to identify an appropriate response. One of the current impediments to a coherent and comprehensive perspective of the protection situation in the Sahel is the multiplicity of data collection initiatives (many of which focus on protection incidents and conflict related rights violations) and a lack of a coordination mechanism to consolidate this information.

A multi-partner and multi-country project

To fill this gap, UNHCR and DRC initiated a consultative process in early 2020 which aimed at developing a harmonized framework and tools for regular protection monitoring in the Sahel. After consulting about twenty actors at national and regional levels, the pilot phase of the transnational protection monitoring project, called Project 21, was launched. The pilot phase established a monitoring and follow-up system to enable the collection and analysis of key protection data. Following the pilot phase, the Project 21 coordination team adapted the tools and methodology for extension of the project to other countries in West and Central Africa. Between October and December 2020, a qualitative review was conducted during which protection actors, coordinators and members of protection activities coordination groups, as well as donors, provided inputs and recommendations aimed at improving the current system.

Strategic objectives of Project 21

- ▷ Generate coherent analysis (qualitative and quantitative) of the protection situation at the regional level in order to understand and document the main needs, gaps and risks;
- ▷ Support protection actors on strategic planning and programming based on evidence and shared analysis for better operational and cross-border coordination;
- ▷ Contribute to the mobilization of resources for the protection response in the Sahel;
- ▷ Promote joint advocacy for better regional and global awareness of the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel to better take into account the protection needs of displaced populations and host communities during planning and resources allocation exercises by all stakeholders operating in the Sahel;
- ▷ Contribute to the regional inter-agency sectoral analysis.

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METHODOLOGY

Geographic coverage

The pilot phase of Project 21 focuses on the Liptako-Gourma area, a border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. In January 2020, when defining the sampling, the available data indicated that 853 localities were accessible in Mali, 437 in Burkina Faso and 1,947 in Niger.

Given the particularly precarious security situation, 377 villages in the targeted area considered to be accessible were covered in this pilot phase, between May and November 2020. The inaccessible localities were initially excluded from the collection. These 377 villages are all located in second level administrative areas (provinces in Burkina Faso, cercles in Mali and departments in Niger). The sample size was set at 5% of the number of accessible villages.

Data collection method

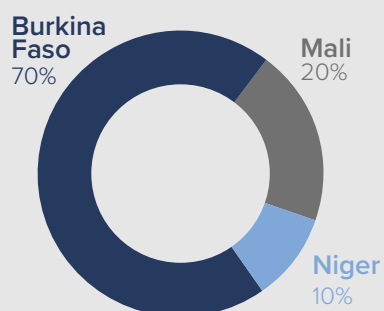
As part of the pilot phase of Project 21, data collection was carried out through a total of 3,763 interviews with 754 key informants (two per village) and 754 heads of households (two per villages) among the displaced population and host communities.

KEY FIGURES (May - November 2020)

3,763 Interviews carried out

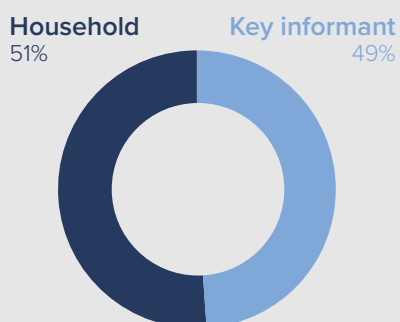
628 Interviews carried out per month (on average)

Interviews by country



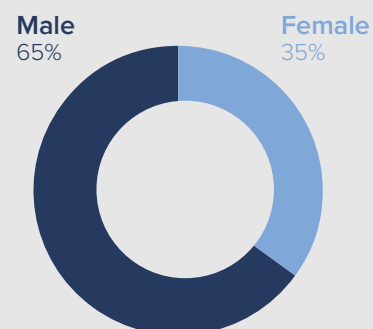
Graph 2.1

Type of interview



Graph 2.2

Gender of respondent



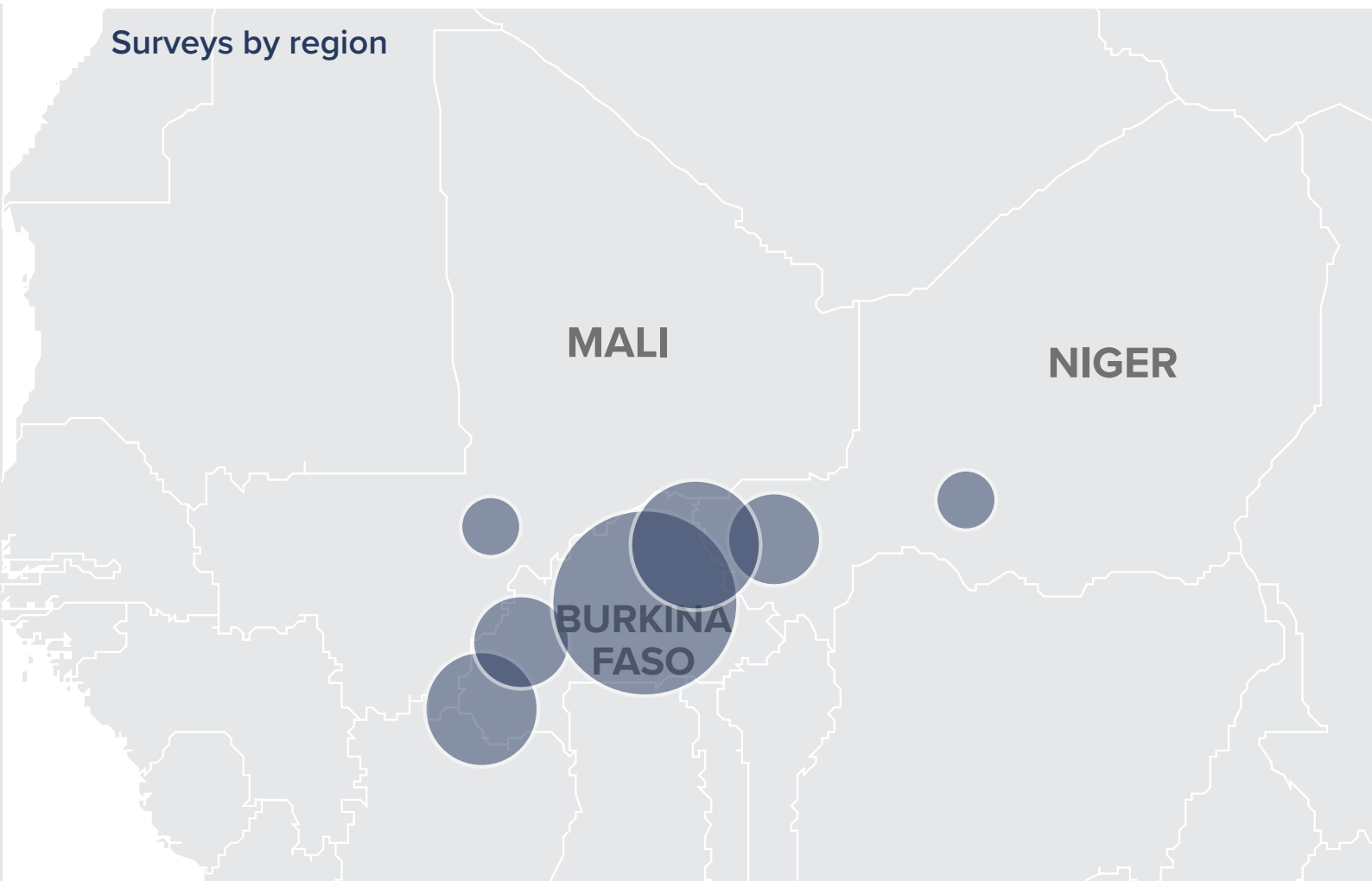
Graph 2.3

A longitudinal approach was used: participants were surveyed separately once a month using the same questionnaire on events that affected the community as a whole (incidents, violation of rights, risks, significant changes, etc.); households and key informants thus gave answers which focused on the same themes during the whole pilot phase. This approach allowed a longitudinal assessment of trends in order to measure the evolution over time of the protection situation.

This exercise aims to observe trends but also to invalidate or confirm them with analysis more contextualized to a vulnerable group or linked to particular moments or incidents. This first half-yearly analysis report presents the protection situation and its evolutions over the period from June to November 2020, based on P21 data as well as on other sources.

Country	Villages listed	Accessible villages	Accessibility rate	Pilot villages
Burkina Faso	1,242	437	35%	237
Mali	1,952	853	43%	42
Niger	2,989	1,947	65%	98
Total (Liptako-Gourma)	6,183	3,237	52%	377

Surveys by region



3

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

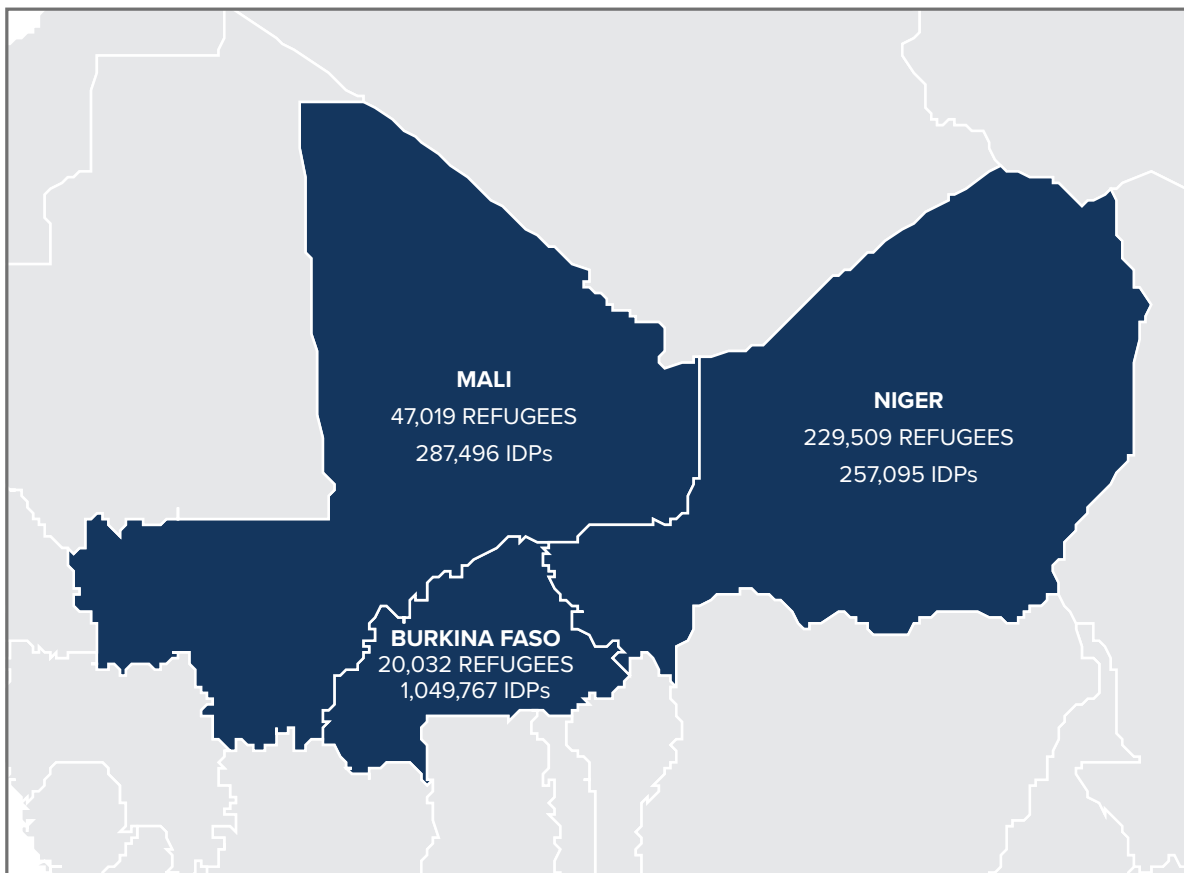
A multifaceted humanitarian and protection crisis

The Sahel faces an unprecedented humanitarian and protection crisis that continues to worsen under the combined effects of armed conflict, extreme poverty, food insecurity and climate change. These are all challenges to which have been added the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, heavily felt by the countries of the region.

- ▷ 3,570,372 displaced people in the Sahel (839,761 refugees and 1,930,482 IDPs) at the end of November 2020
- ▷ 32% increase in the number of displaced people in the Sahel during the year 2020 (November)

A crisis of forced displacement that is worsening

Violence by armed groups has continued to escalate since the beginning of 2020 as social and political tensions increase, forcing more people to flee across the region. In November 2020, in the five Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad), the number of internally displaced people almost reached the threshold of two million (1,930,482), while 839,761 refugees were in exile - 35% of them in the three central Sahel countries, namely Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.



The number of internally displaced people has reached over one million in Burkina Faso alone (or one in five people), while in Niger the number of internally displaced people has increased by 34% since the start of the year, from 191,902 in January to 257,095 at the end of November 2020. Deteriorating security caused an increase in internal displacement in Mali while conflict in neighboring countries prompted more than 6,000 Malian refugees to return to their country of origin to seek relative safety, many of whom were forced to flee several times.

Freedom of movement varies from country to country

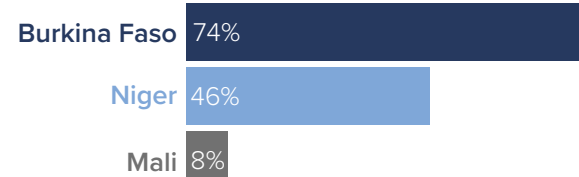
In addition to the phenomenon of mass forced displacement across the region, there were also significant internal, cross-border and multiple movements. Many people interviewed thus indicated that they had to go back and forth between their host zone and their region of origin during the year 2020. Others are often obliged to move for economic reasons, in order to look for a job or to exercise a craft or commercial activity.

While a large majority (77%) of those interviewed indicated that their freedom of movement was unhindered, significant differences exist among the three countries of the Central Sahel. While nearly three quarters of those surveyed in Burkina Faso expressed their ability to move freely, the figure was less than half in Niger and merely 8% in Mali.

When obstacles to freedom of movement arise, more than 70% are linked to insecurity and the dangers of the conflict. In particular, the activities of armed groups (40%), generalized violence (13%), the presence of mines (11%) and inter-community tensions (9%) were cited.

The curfew and movement restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were also mentioned by more than one in five (21%) as a significant barrier to free movement.

Freedom of movement as indicated by respondents



Graph 3.1

COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, aggravating factors for the humanitarian crisis

Since April 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has added a health emergency to the ongoing crisis creating an additional burden for a region already struggling with endemic poverty, chronic vulnerabilities, including fragile health systems and limited access to water, particularly in peripheral areas where displaced populations are concentrated.

In addition to the health dimension, the pandemic has had a primarily economic impact on the region. Movement restrictions, curfews and assembly bans imposed by authorities to prevent the spread of the virus have led to a significant slowdown in economic activity, particularly affecting the informal sectors in which the vast majority of displaced people work.

The protection data presented in the following pages indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic did not generate new types of protection incidents but exacerbated the precariousness of the most vulnerable, forcing them to resort to mechanisms of negative adaptations, such as child labor, survival sex or forced prostitution.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also been compounded by the effects of climate change, which are increasingly felt in the region. From July to September, the Sahel was hit by torrential rains causing devastating floods over large swathes of land. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, these floods affected more than 700,000 people, including thousands of displaced people, destroying homes, health centers and agricultural land.

700,000
people affected
by floods in the
Sahel region in 2020

GENERAL PROTECTION CONTEXT

Growing insecurity and steadily increasing violence against civilians

Feeding chronic instability, the context of economic and social fragility has facilitated the recruitment of combatants by armed groups, thus contributing to the intensification of the conflict and the increase in insecurity and violence against civilians.

The escalation of the security response and the activism of armed groups has generated an increase in protection incidents, not only in the Liptako-Gourma region but also in an increasing proportion in the territories of the countries concerned and towards the coastal countries.

The year 2020 also saw the proliferation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), used by armed groups to carry out attacks against military or administrative personnel, also affecting civilians and humanitarian actors. This context of insecurity and the extent of military operations has restricted the access of humanitarian actors in many areas of the region, thus hampering their ability to assist affected populations.

Violations of the right to life and physical integrity.

Physical violence remains at the heart of the concerns of displaced people. In more than 50% of the cases, those surveyed mentioned various forms of physical violence as the main protection-related incident of which they were victims or witnesses. Almost 20% indicated that they had been victims of assault and battery (15%) or torture and other inhuman treatment (4%).

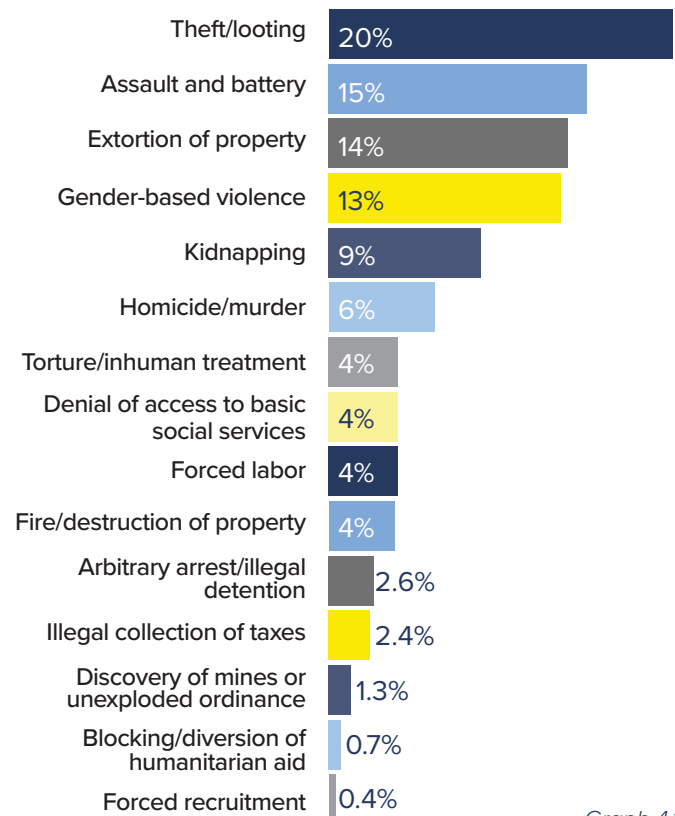
Kidnappings for the purpose of forced recruitment into armed groups (10%), forced labor (4%) and arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions (3%) are other types of violence to which displaced persons were subjected. Additionally, more than 6% declared having witnessed a homicide or murder, an extremely high figure which reveals the level of violence to which the populations of the Sahel are exposed. Finally, more than 13% highlighted gender-based violence affected their physical integrity, health, and dignity; a phenomenon greatly exacerbated by the ongoing crisis.

The activism of non-state armed groups, the intensification of the military response and the weak presence of state authorities are the main sources of insecurity for the populations of the Sahel.

Violation of right to property.

Asked about the main protection-related incidents of which they were victims during the year, nearly 40% of displaced people mentioned attacks on goods and property, in particular theft and looting (20%), extortion (14%), destruction of property (4%) or illegal taxation (2%).

Protection incidents



Graph 4.1

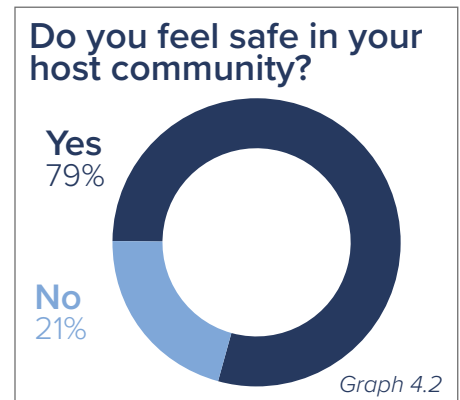
Gender-based violence, a pre-existing problem exacerbated by the crisis

Already predominant in the Sahel due to pre-existing traditional practices (notably child marriage and female genital mutilation), gender-based violence has intensified since the start of the conflict in the region. Despite the fact that women and girls represent a small proportion of respondents (35%), gender-based violence is the second most frequently cited type of incident affecting the physical integrity of civilian populations.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are among the countries in which girls face one of the highest rates of early marriage in the world. During 2020, the situation deteriorated further due to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, leading to an increase in the number of child marriages. Loss of income has resulted in increased promiscuity, cases of domestic violence, and mistreatment and exploitation of girls.

A peaceful but fragile coexistence between displaced populations and host communities

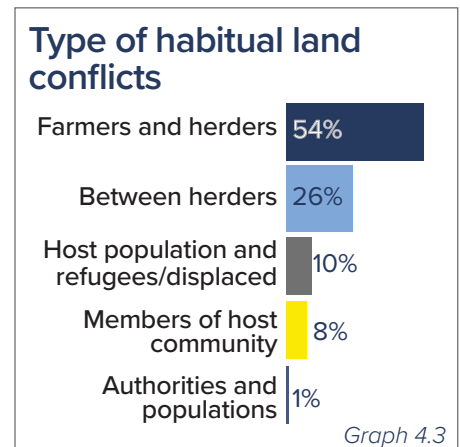
Coexistence between displaced communities and host populations remains largely peaceful. However, the intensification of the conflict, as well as the increase in the number of displaced persons, are straining hosting capacities in a fragile context of inter-community competition over access to natural resources [Graph 4.2]. Almost 79% of the displaced people surveyed say they feel safe. The vast majority of people who responded to this question are in displacement.



Competition between farmers and herders for natural and land resources at the heart of the conflict

Across the three countries, tensions between farmers and herders were identified as a primary factor fueling conflict. However, it is in Mali that inter-community tensions between herders and farmers are most clearly mentioned as the main source of conflicts (25%). In Burkina Faso and Niger, 18% of those surveyed mentioned competition for access to goods and services and the lack of sufficient economic opportunities as the main sources of tension between displaced people and host populations.

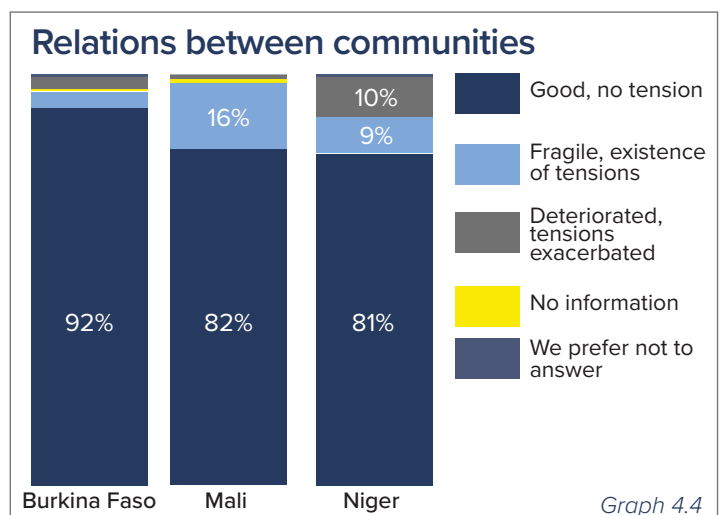
While the downward spiral of violence and the intensification of the conflict are relatively recent, the conflict is rooted in long-standing rivalries between communities, notably opposing farmers and pastoralists in competition for access to natural and land resources. This conflictual situation has exacerbated in recent years. Although the authorities are providing a response, the effects appear to be limited, as the rivalry continues to be fertile ground for the emergence of armed groups.



Community actors, privileged interlocutors for displaced people

Conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms are known and perceived as effective

Across the Central Sahel, 67% of those surveyed affirmed that they were aware of the existence of conflict prevention and resolution systems within their respective communities. Considered effective in conflict prevention by 90% of those surveyed, these local monitoring and mediation systems also make it possible to collect information on the protection situation and incidents affecting displaced populations and host communities across the main hosting areas of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.



- ▷ Tensions between farmers and herders identified as key factor of conflict
- ▷ The competition around goods and services and the lack of economic opportunities are major sources of tensions

Permanence of community protection mechanisms in situations of forced displacement

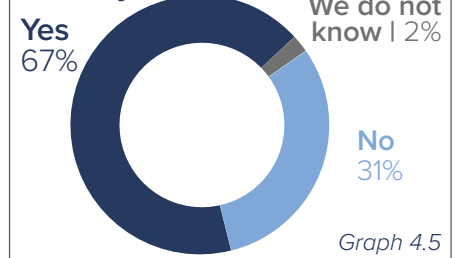
Under extremely difficult conditions, displaced populations are relying on their traditional social structures. Thus, community and religious leaders are, in almost 50% of cases, the first people to whom the displaced turn to report protection-related incidents. Humanitarian actors (NGOs and UN) are the first interlocutors in only 20% of cases, ahead of local authorities (18%) and security and defense forces (15%).

In addition to the permanence of community protection mechanisms despite the situation of forced displacement, the feelings of the populations towards the security forces are mixed because in some cases, they are perceived as the alleged perpetrators of rights violations against civilian populations. This results in the loss of trust, already precarious, between the civilian populations and the defense and security forces, the weakening of the local state authority, the fragmentation of the social fabric and, as a result, the destabilization of the social cohesion. This was also confirmed during the third conference on strengthening relations of trust between Defense and Security Forces (FDS) and populations in the G5 Sahel area, which was held on 20 January 2020 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso¹.

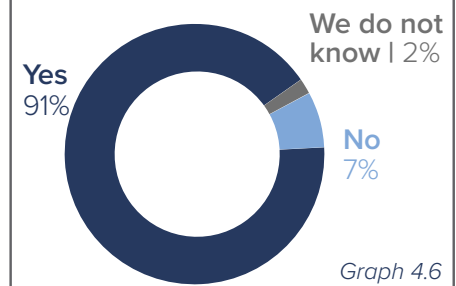
Community and religious leaders remain the main interlocutors for displaced people in the event of a protection-related incident.

¹The third conference on strengthening relations of trust between Defense and Security Forces (FDS) and populations in the G5 Sahel area entitled "Comment préserver la cohésion sociale et articuler le lien entre sécurité, développement et action humanitaire dans l'espace du G5 Sahel!" https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/declaration_finale.pdf

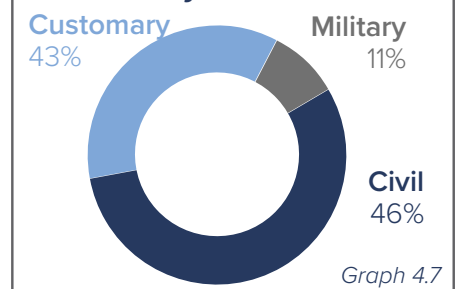
Is there an early warning system to identify tensions/conflicts in the locality?



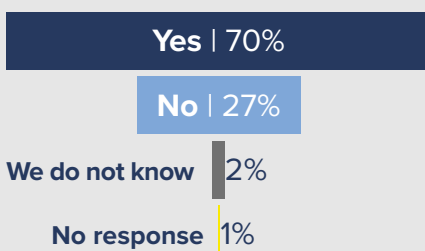
Does the early warning system effectively enable to prevent risks of tensions/conflicts?



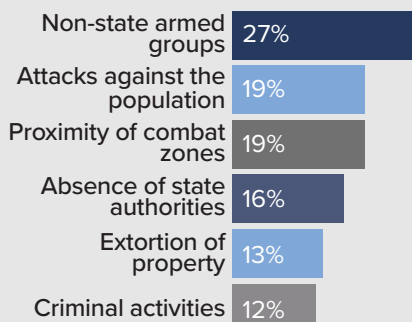
What structures are operational in your community?



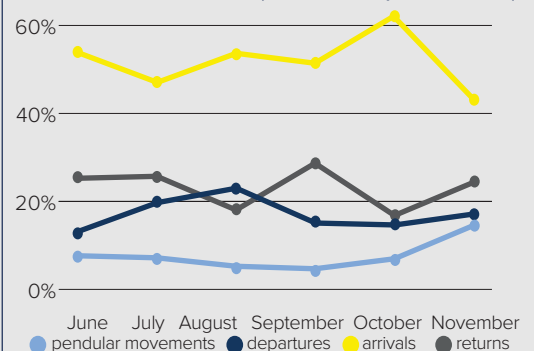
Is there a mechanism dedicated to resolve tensions?



Reasons for the feeling of insecurity



Type of population movements (Evolution per month)



Recommendations:

- ▷ Present results of surveys carried out to displaced and host communities to ensure that they understand and know about feedback mechanisms that complement community protection mechanisms.
- ▷ Strengthen the protection response by increasing cooperation between traditional/ community structures for conflict prevention and the services and mechanisms related to the response of governments and humanitarian actors.
- ▷ The complementarity between these actors must be based on a recognition of the roles and responsibilities of each with a view to achieve better collaboration in the identification and handling of protection-related incidents.
- ▷ Based on a joint analysis of the data collected from communities, identify which types of incidents currently escape protection monitoring and help strengthen it to better reflect the protection situation and plan the humanitarian response.

5

LEGAL PROTECTION AND DOCUMENTATION

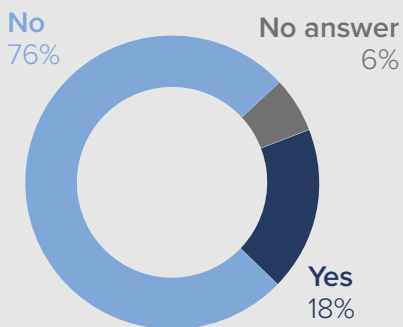
Access to territory and asylum claim

Access to territory and to asylum claim was preserved throughout 2020 despite the insecurity and movement restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the start of the conflict, the Sahel states have kept their borders open, allowing populations fleeing violence to seek asylum in neighboring countries. Prerequisites for access to protection, access to territory and to asylum procedures remained intact despite the expansion and intensification of the conflict.

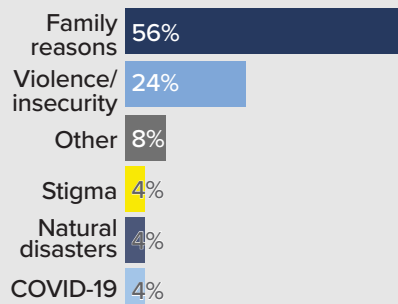
When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the Sahel in the spring of 2020, states in the region introduced measures to contain its spread, including by limiting movement within and between countries. Border restrictions affected 18% of those surveyed; however, such restrictions did not apply to asylum seekers who have been authorized to exercise their right, in compliance with the preventive health measures in force (which may include quarantine) [Graph 5.1]. Although no refoulement took place during the period of border closures, some people preferred to use unofficial entry points.

Were you prevented from crossing the border?



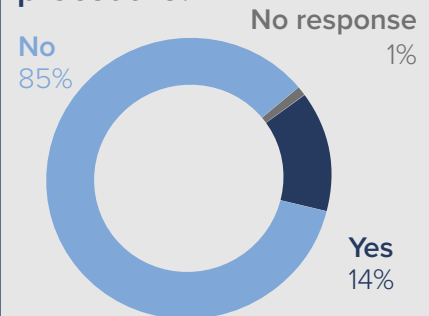
Graph 5.1

Reasons for attempting to cross the border?



Graph 5.2

If you are a foreigner in this country, do you know the asylum-seeking procedure?



Graph 5.3

Civil documentation

While access to territory and asylum has not been significantly affected by the conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic, access to civilian documentation has been made difficult because of the pandemic.

Structural weakness of civil status services in the Sahel

The Sahel has always been characterized by relatively weak public services, particularly in peripheral areas where the presence of the State has historically been reduced. Conflict and insecurity have aggravated the situation for several years, leading to a suspension of civil status services in large portions of territories across the Sahel.

While the average birth registration rates in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are respectively 77%, 87% and 64%, there are significant disparities between the regions of each country, especially between urban and rural areas, the latter being the most affected by the problem of under-documentation.

Legal documentation is a fundamental element in the protection of internally displaced persons and the risks associated with the absence of civil documents are numerous. In addition to the increased risk of statelessness, displaced persons without documentation proving their identity face difficulties in free movement and access to basic services such as health, education or possible social assistance programs. Access to financial services is impossible, as is the creation of a business or legal possession of any property. Finally, and particularly in the Sahel, freedom of movement is restricted by the difficulty of obtaining authorization to move and the increased risks of abuse, extortion or arrest in the event of control by the security forces.

Negative impact of conflict and forced displacement on documentation

The recent escalation of conflict in Liptako-Gourma, and particularly in Burkina Faso, has exacerbated pre-existing documentation problems, particularly for birth registration, thus significantly increasing the risk of statelessness. A risk clearly accentuated by forced displacement, as revealed by the fact that, among the displaced persons surveyed, 68% claim to have birth certificates of children born before the displacement against only 48% for children born during the displacement.

Familiarity with registration procedures among displaced persons

The results show that a large majority of displaced communities are aware of the procedures for issuing birth certificates. In fact, only an average of 15% of the people surveyed declared that they did not know the established procedures for obtaining birth certificates and identity cards. In Mali, 94% of those surveyed knew the procedures, compared to 80% in Niger and 78% in Burkina Faso.

It is imperative to take into account the disparities that may exist from one zone to another within a country and between different types of displaced populations. Thus, it appears that newly displaced populations generally have less understanding of the procedures for obtaining civil documentation and make less use of birth registration procedures.

The absence of an identity document perceived as an obstacle to accessing other documents

Many displaced people are forced to flee in an emergency, often leaving behind all their possessions, including any identity documents they may have. Among those surveyed who did not have an identity card, 30% said they had lost it, largely during flight. Among those seeking to obtain a new identity card, 67% said they believed that this would not be possible for them and, among them, 25% indicated the reason being the fact that they did not have administrative documents required to complete their request.

Although this prior absence of documents affects to a lesser extent the possibility of accessing the documentation service, it is not perceived as a major obstacle by a relatively large proportion of the people surveyed.

Charging fees, the main obstacle to documentation in the Sahel

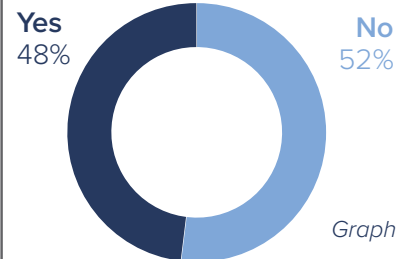
Among those surveyed who doubted whether they could get a new ID card, lack of money was most often mentioned as the main obstacle (26%). The problem of financial cost also arose for birth certificates, for which the principle of free of charge does not seem to be a reality, as indicated by nearly 48% of those surveyed in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

Do you have a birth certificate for each of your children born before displacement?



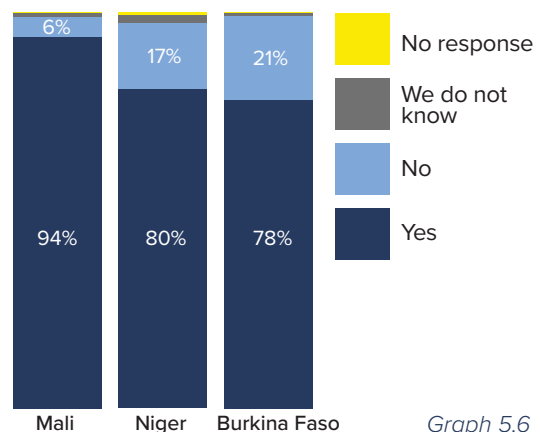
Graph 5.4

Do you have a birth certificate for each of your children born in displacement?



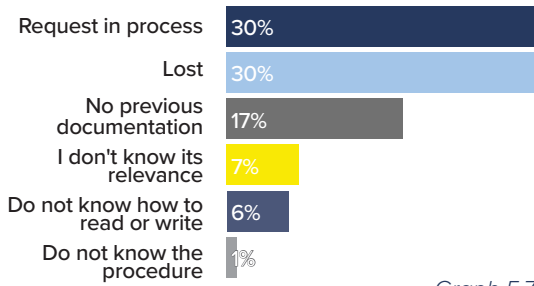
Graph 5.5

Knowledge of birth certificate issuance procedure by community members



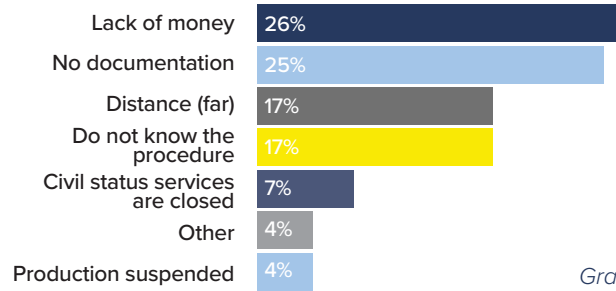
Graph 5.6

Reasons for not having a national identity card/electoral card



Graph 5.7

Reasons for not easily obtaining the national identity card/electoral card



Graph 5.8

In addition to the fact that the administrative procedure is not free, it is necessary to take into account the relatively high indirect costs (transport and accommodation for parents who live far from registration centers) for displaced people who are often in a precarious economic situation. As such, there are notable differences between countries, with certificates and documentation services being more accessible in Burkina Faso than in Mali or Niger.

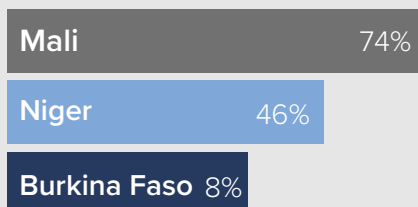
COVID-19 restrictions, a momentary break on the documentation effort

The preventive measures put in place to fight the COVID-19 pandemic have had a negative impact on the documentation effort at the regional level. Access to civil status services has been reduced, as have documentation activities for humanitarian actors with limited mobility capacities. More than a third of those surveyed noted that the issuance of identification documents had been suspended or reduced since the start of the pandemic.

Differences can be noted between countries. Thus, between June and November 2020, 94% of those surveyed in Mali indicated that the issuance of documents had continued normally, while they were only 56% in Niger and 41% in Burkina Faso.

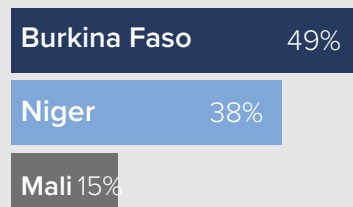
The reported impact has not only varied spatially, but also over time as restrictions have been lifted. For example, in Burkina Faso, the rate of people reporting a suspension or reduction in document issuance fell from 61% in June to 32% in November 2020.

Are the judicial institutions operational in your community?



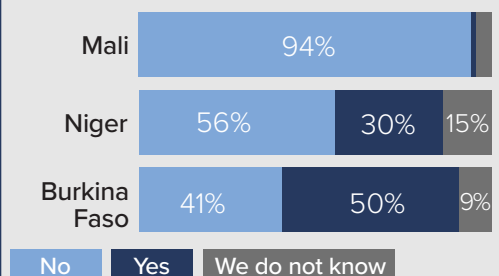
Graph 5.9

Is the issuance of birth certificates free?



Graph 5.10

Is the issuance of birth certificates suspended or reduced in your community?



Graph 5.11

Recommendations:

- ▷ In the context of Liptako-Gourma, in view of the importance of the movements of populations and obstacles to accessing civil status services, to which have been added measures related to COVID-19, it is important to ensure continued access to the registration of civil status events and more generally to identity documentation.
- ▷ Alternative measures adapted to the change of context should be prioritised to compensate for the lower efficiency of services, in order to reduce protection risks linked to the absence of documents such as the difficulty of accessing services, acquisition of goods, restriction of freedom of movement, statelessness, violence suffered by civilian populations during identity checks, etc.

6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A difficult context for community engagement

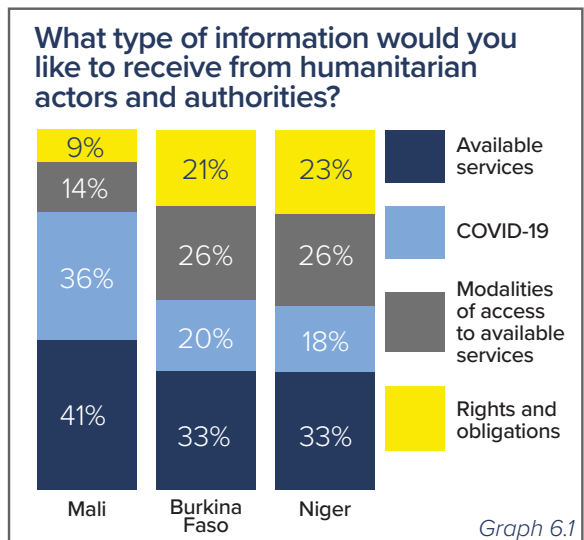
The year 2020, and in particular the period from June to November considered in this report, has been particularly difficult in terms of community engagement in the Sahel. The intensification of the conflict, the increased violence against the civilian populations and the significant forced displacements across the region, have deeply affected traditional structures and systems of community assistance and solidarity.

The introduction of preventive measures including curfews and restrictions on movement within countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic have made it more difficult for humanitarian organizations to access the affected populations. The limitation of public gatherings and the introduction of barrier measures have also made it more difficult for personal interactions and the sharing of information within communities.

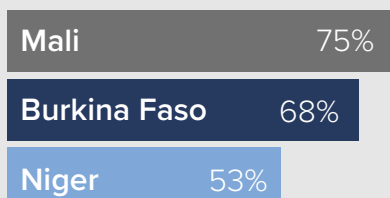
To address these access constraints, humanitarian organizations have innovated while relying on traditional community mechanisms to maintain two-way communication systems to ensure that refugees, displaced people, host communities and others affected by conflict remain informed and engaged in the most effective way.

Relevant and clear information, disseminated effectively within the communities

Despite the operational difficulties and constraints, 94% of those surveyed confirmed having received information about the COVID-19 pandemic and 98% considered it understandable. In addition to information on the pandemic, 70% of those surveyed said they had received updates on available services. More generally, a large majority of people surveyed confirmed that the information on assistance and available services disseminated at the community level corresponds to the type of information expected by the populations. These results therefore tend to demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the dissemination of information at the community level, despite the restrictive movement measures gradually relaxed during the year.

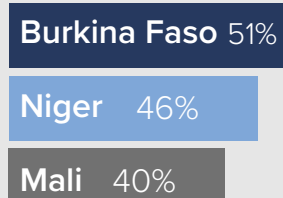


Do you receive information and updates on available services?



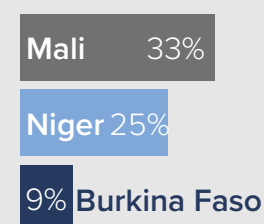
Graph 6.2
Positive response

Are there means of communicating your complaints/suggestions on humanitarian aid?



Graph 6.3
Positive response

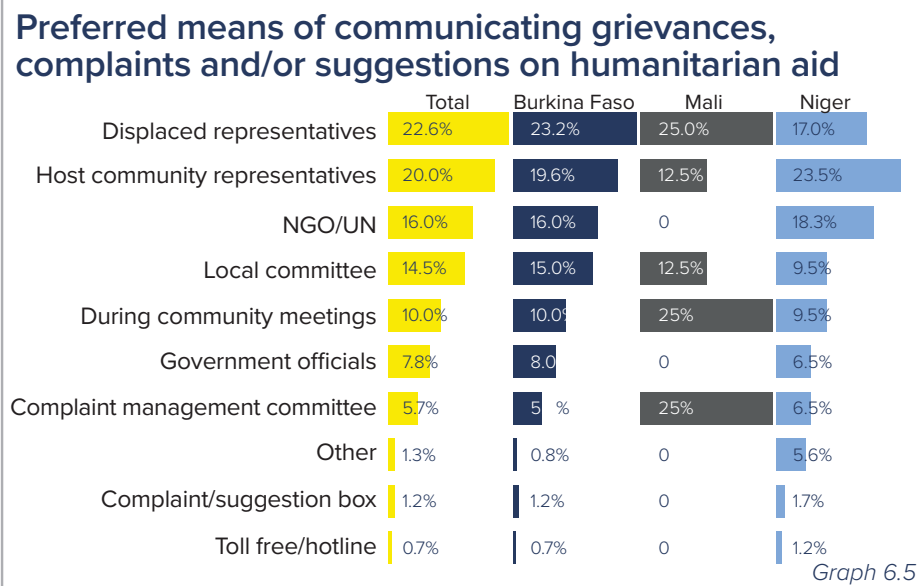
Do you use internet connected applications?



Graph 6.4
Positive response

Persistent challenges in terms of communication between communities and humanitarian actors

Even though the dissemination of information seems to have been effective despite the restrictive measures, humanitarian organizations face a challenge in terms of communication and two-way exchange with communities, especially for the expression of grievances, complaints or suggestions on humanitarian aid. Thus, 32% of the people surveyed in Burkina Faso, 20% in Mali and up to 49% of the households surveyed in Niger affirmed that they were not aware of the existence of means to communicate their



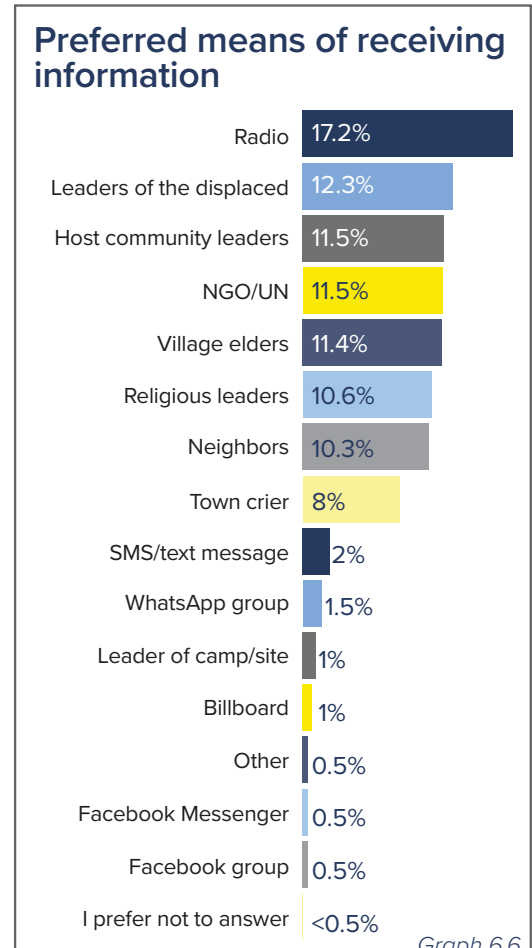
grievances, complaints and/or suggestions on humanitarian aid or that such means did not exist. In more than 50% of cases, the displaced populations turn to representatives of the displaced, representatives of the host community or government officials to express their views on humanitarian aid. More broadly, communication with humanitarian organizations is perceived as a challenge by the vast majority of those surveyed, many not knowing how to contact or communicate with them. They highlight in particular the lack of consultations and meetings with the communities, and the lack of response to their questions and needs.

Radio and community structures privileged communication vectors for displaced people

To cope with the persistent difficulties in terms of access, humanitarian actors have promoted the use of various media, in particular for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and awareness-raising activities. 46% of people surveyed indicated that they turn primarily to community and religious leaders, largely ahead of all other means of communication. Representatives of displaced communities serve as the primary source of communication for the community (12.3%), followed by representatives of host communities (11.5%), village elders (11.4%) and religious leaders (10.6%). Radio is the most widely used medium in the three countries (17% of respondents) and therefore is currently the most appropriate channel for the dissemination of mass information (and possibly in terms of complaints / suggestion mechanisms). The use of social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) for exchanges, information and communication is used to a lesser extent. The UNHCR study on digital access, communication needs and community practices in Mali, Niger and Ivory Coast, published in January 2021, explores in more detail the issue of socialization and strategies for sharing and bypassing barriers to access information and communication technologies (ICT) and information, even in rural areas¹.

Humanitarian actors (United Nations agencies and NGOs combined) are the third favoured source of information by 11.4% of those surveyed, thus reflecting the more general difficulties in this area in terms of communication and exchange with communities.

However, differences are to be noted from one country to another. In Burkina Faso for example, the three preferred channels of communication are (1) leaders / representatives of displaced persons, (2) radio and (3) NGOs and United Nations agencies



¹<https://www.cwc.westafrica.exposed/>

and leaders / representatives of the host communities who share a preference of equal importance. In Niger, on the other hand, preferences go to (1) radio, (2) NGOs / UN and (3) village elders.

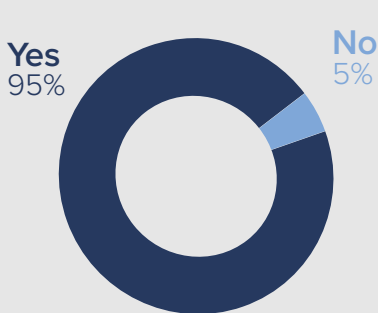
An under-representation of women in community structures

The existence of strong and effective community structures is an essential factor of protection. Across the Sahel, 95% of those surveyed indicated that their community had representatives or leaders and in 92% of cases, groups of representatives had been formed.

In their effort to strengthen community structures, humanitarian actors strive to promote greater participation of women in representative committees and other decision-making mechanisms.

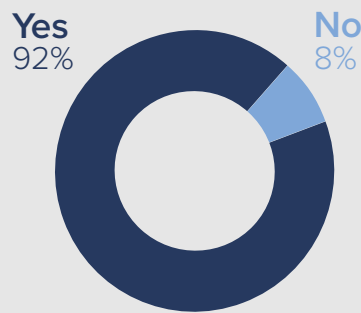
In the Sahel, although the results of protection monitoring show that between 76% and 95% of these committees/groups include women, they represent less than 25% of the members in more than two-thirds of these structures, indicating a clear under-representation of women.

Do you have community representatives or leaders?



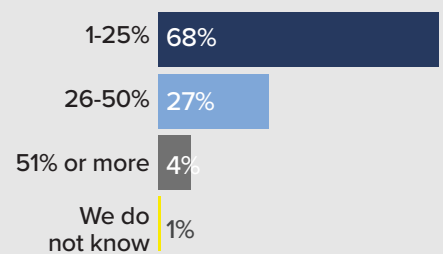
Graph 6.7

Do you have a committee/group representing the community?



Graph 6.8

Percentage of women participating in representative committees/groups



Graph 6.9

Recommendations:

- ▶ Even where community feedback mechanisms exist, the lack of communication around their existence hinders their use. Efforts should be made to facilitate access to community feedback mechanisms.
- ▶ Recognition of the privileged position of community leaders and representatives must be properly used for information and communication in the management of complaint mechanisms.
- ▶ It is important to increase representation based on age, gender and diversity so that the voices of different population groups are better heard and their needs are taken into account.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence at the heart of the protection crisis in the Sahel

Women and girls in the Central Sahel face one of the highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV) in the world. A dramatic situation exacerbated in 2020 by the intensification of the conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic and which affects not only the populations of the Sahel but also the many refugees and migrants en route to North Africa and Europe, exposed to a high risk of trafficking, kidnapping, forced labor and sexual slavery.

Stressful situations and traumatic events have a significant impact on mental health, generating a significant need for psychosocial support. The tense environment provides fertile ground for domestic violence, gender-based violence or violence against children.

Even though the majority of respondents (65%) are men, 9% nevertheless indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic was an aggravating factor in the occurrence of gender-based violence. Indeed, these respondents recognize that there has been a tendency for gender-based violence to worsen within their respective communities since the onset of the pandemic.

Forced/early marriage and female genital mutilation

Among the gender-based violence to which communities feel the most exposed, more than a third (34%) of those surveyed highlighted forced and early marriages (22%) and female genital mutilation (12%). Rooted in unequal traditions and practices, certain types of violence such as early marriage have long been pervasive in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which have some of the highest prevalence rates in the world¹. As for female genital mutilation (FGM), Mali also has one of the highest prevalence in the world².

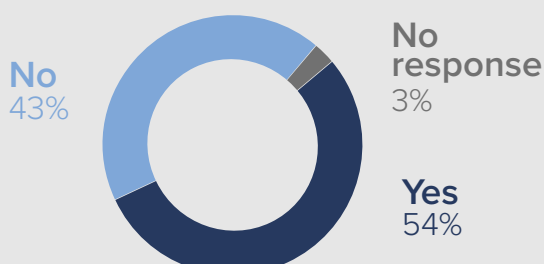
While forced and early marriages are mentioned as the main GBV, however, few are reported or lead to requests for assistance from victims or their relatives.

A paradox which underlines the significant ambivalence of the populations of the Sahel with regard to these practices which, although formally identified as GBV, are considered and perceived above all in their traditional dimension.

¹Briefing note prepared for the High-Level Meeting to End Child Marriage in West and Central Africa (23-25 October 2017 in Dakar, Senegal), <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Le-Mariage-des-Enfants-en-Afrique-de-l'Ouest-et-du-Centre.pdf>
See also the report of 'The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage titled, Education, Key to Ending Child Marriage in the Sahel https://ams3.digitaloceanspaces.com/girlsnotbrides-org/www/documents/Child-marriage-in-the-Sahel_FR.pdf

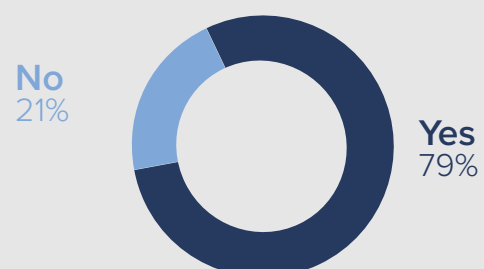
²See Mali Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2018

Are there GBV risks and/or other risks affecting women/girls?

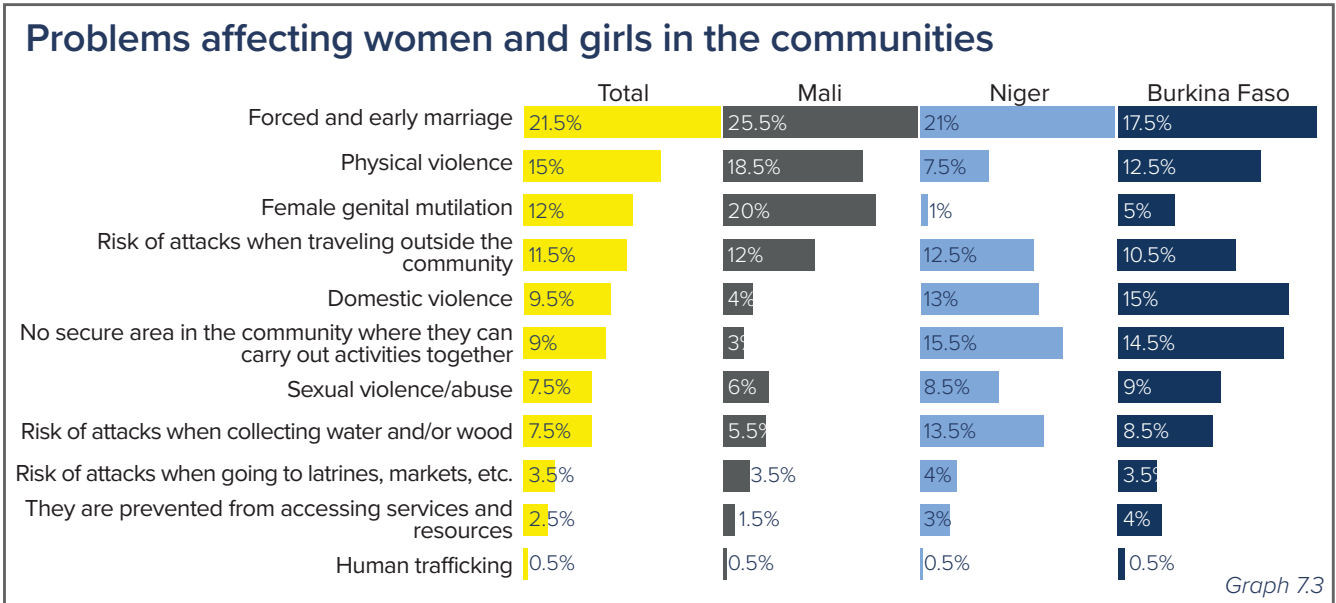


Graph 7.1

Should you need support, would you ask for assistance?



Graph 7.2



Physical and domestic violence are also frequently reported

Another third (32%) of respondents identified physical violence (15%), domestic violence (10%) and sexual violence and other abuse (8%) as another type of violence affecting women. It is physical and domestic violence that is most frequently and systematically reported and for which victims obtain assistance (83% of cases).

Women at risk because of their role in the household

Even though a majority of those surveyed said they felt safe in their areas of residence, they are regularly forced to leave these areas to perform the domestic tasks for which they are traditionally responsible, including collecting food, water and wood. A very risky situation as indicated by the fact that more than two thirds of the people surveyed mentioned the fact of moving away from the community, to go to cultivate a field or to look for wood or water, as an important source of insecurity. These statements are confirmed by the multiple security incidents recorded during this year on the outskirts of villages, camps and other sites hosting displaced people. By way of illustration, physical violence against women remains significant in 22% of cases (11.5% when traveling outside the host community, 7.5% when collecting water, 3.5% when visiting latrines, markets and other public places).

Community leaders as the first resort for survivors of GBV

More than half of those surveyed (51%) indicated that GBV survivors primarily turned to community leaders for help: community leaders or groups of community representatives (18%), followed by women leaders (16%). In 26% of cases, humanitarian actors (UN and NGOs) were called upon, followed by neighbors in 24% of cases.

According to those surveyed, almost 70% of survivors have access to necessary support services. This relatively positive perception should not hide the enormous needs that remain to be met. One-stop shops combined with mobile multisectoral survivor support teams in place in Mali, considered one of the best practices in the Central Sahel, still only cover 48% of the country's cities. For the first time since the establishment of the GBV information management system (GBVIMS) in 2012 in Mali, GBV incidents exceeded 5,000 cases in the same year.

Significant barriers to accessing services for survivors of gender-based violence

While community leaders and structures are a priority recourse for survivors of GBV, certain dimensions of community life can constitute a barrier to reporting GBV incidents and to survivors' access to services. 25% of the people surveyed indicated that they did not report the incidents of GBV of which they were victims or were aware. Among the reasons for non-access to support services by survivors of gender-based violence, fear of being stigmatized comes first (24%), followed by the effect of socio-cultural norms and pressures (16%). The lack of confidentiality (8%) and the lack of female staff in the care structures (4%) are also mentioned. Thus, it is in less than a quarter of the cases that the non-existence or the insufficiency of services (12%) or the ignorance

of the aid system (9%) represent the main obstacle to the access of the survivors of sexual violence to the right help.

These findings highlight the remaining gaps in existing services and the progress that remains to be made in adhering to the guiding principles of supporting GBV survivors.

Reasons for non-access to services by survivors of sexual violence



Graph 7.4

Recommendations:

- ▷ Community leaders, including men, are the main interlocutors for survivors of gender-based violence. Their commitment to prevention and response must therefore be supported and their knowledge of referral mechanisms reinforced.
- ▷ As recourse to the community is not always followed by a referral made to response actors, it is urgent to communicate more about the referral mechanisms and the availability of services in order to promote access to care.
- ▷ Opportunities should be created and supported to allow women's organizations to fully play their role in popularizing referral mechanisms for holistic care of survivors of gender-based violence.

8

CHILD PROTECTION

Children particularly affected by conflict and fragility in the Central Sahel

The conflict in the Sahel is having a devastating effect on children in the region, and in particular among the often most vulnerable displaced populations. At the end of 2020, UNICEF estimated that more than 2.3 million children were in need of protection and direct assistance (an increase of 80% in just one year), among whom were more than 900,000 refugee and internally displaced children.

Violence and insecurity disrupt all aspects of children's lives, exacerbating chronic vulnerabilities resulting from high levels of malnutrition, poor access to education, clean water and sanitation facilities. Among the many forms that violations of children's rights in the Sahel can take, 20% of those surveyed emphasized child labor as a priority. In Mali, persistent insecurity and deteriorating economic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a sharp increase in child trafficking, forced labor, as well as forced recruitment by armed groups across the country.

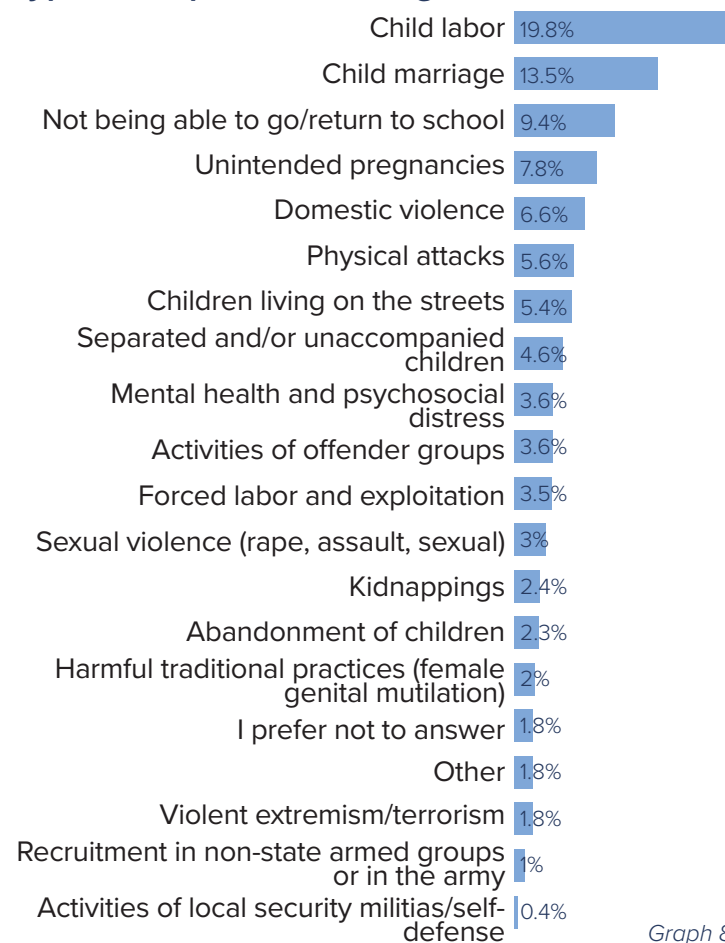
Violence against children (15%), including domestic violence, rape and other sexual assault, are also mentioned as major protection problems facing children. Gender-based violence against children, such as early marriages and pregnancies, accentuated by the lack of access to education, are also mentioned, although it is necessary to put the data collected on this subject into perspective, due to the lack of children among the respondents. It is also important to underline the risk of psychosocial distress and the mental health burden that weighs on children due to the deterioration of the security context and the multiple displacements that it induces.

Finally, the data collected also indicates the growing importance of the phenomenon of abandoned children and children in a situation of begging.

Child protection systems still insufficient, despite an effort to adapt and cope with restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic

To cope with the constraints related to COVID-19, the implementation modalities of many child protection interventions and activities have been adapted. These measures mainly concern education, medical support and the management of child-friendly spaces. Thus, the number of children in collective spaces has been reduced in order to comply with the obligation of physical distancing, while certain activities have been established within communities to prevent populations from moving so as to respect movement restrictions. In Burkina Faso,

Types of reported child rights violations



Graph 8.1

member organizations of the child protection area of responsibility (AOR) have supported the government to adapt the procedures relating to case management and the facilitation of child-friendly spaces in order to ensure the continuity of protection services of the most vulnerable children despite the pandemic.

Despite the significant efforts made to ensure continuity of service and maintain an adequate level of assistance, certain essential activities had to be suspended or reduced, in particular the distribution of dignity and hygiene kits for girls. Aid to child survivors of GBV has also been particularly impacted, even as the number of incidents has increased.

The response to the types of violations to which children are victims must include the establishment of mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS), in order to enable them to overcome traumatic experiences and to reintegrate into a society where the risk of stigma is great.

Increased trafficking and forced recruitment of children in Mali due to conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic

According to the latest report of the Global Protection Cluster, Mali saw a sharp increase in child trafficking, forced labor and forced recruitment by armed groups throughout the country in 2020. Thus, during the first semester of 2020 alone, 220 cases of child recruitment were documented, compared to 215 cases for the whole year of 2019.

The victims are disproportionately boys working at eight mine sites. These are Malian children but also children in a situation of greater vulnerability, in particular refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Young girls are more victims of gender-based violence (GBV), especially early and forced marriages. In this context, access to services remains a real challenge.

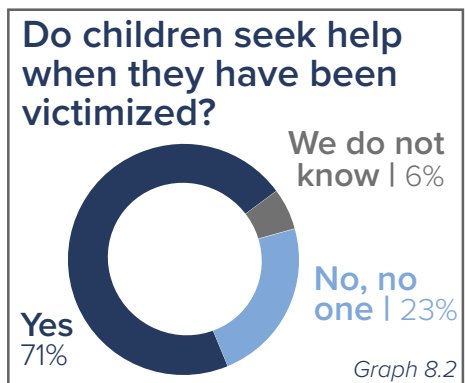
https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Global-Protection-Update_191120.pdf

Family and community at the forefront of child protection

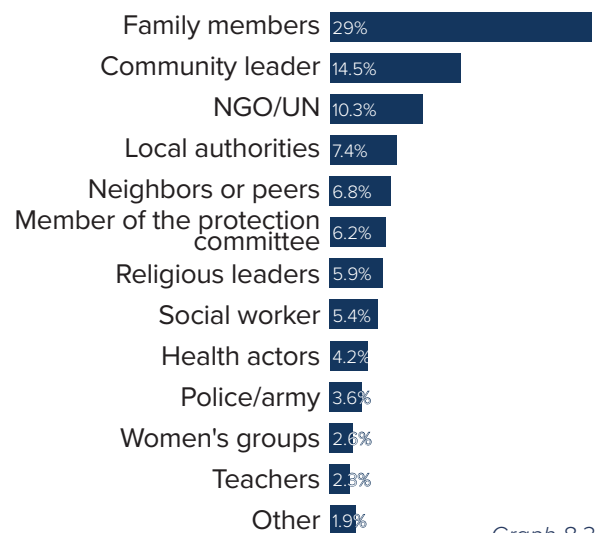
According to 71% of respondents, children seek help in cases of violence, neglect, exploitation and/or abuse, primarily from members of their family and community (community leaders or neighbors), which form the main protection environment of the child. The period of COVID-19 has accentuated the central protective role played by the social circle close to the child. Thus, 29% of those surveyed indicated that family members were the first from whom the child sought help, followed by community leaders (15%). Only 10% of those surveyed designated humanitarian actors as their first resort.

In addition, more than 22% of respondents believe that their community has separated or unaccompanied children.

Thus, in areas inaccessible due to conflicts, the training of social workers and the strengthening of community-based protection mechanisms by humanitarian and child protection actors have made it possible to maintain and strengthen support for children directly in their communities. In Niger and Mali, these same actors have also helped to strengthen and support existing community structures for child protection, which remain the first resort for children in the event of a protection-related incident.



Who do children seek help from?



Recommendations:

- ▷ In order to ensure continuity of services, a cross-cutting approach to child protection in relation to education should be strengthened. The reopening of schools can be the occasion to reinforce the access to the dignity and hygiene kits, and therefore strengthen the response to GBV.
- ▷ At the same time, the family and community-centered approach must be exercised in order to increase and foster their capacities to better meet the protection needs of children.
- ▷ Specialized services for the management of GBV adapted to children and adolescents must be strengthened.



EDUCATION

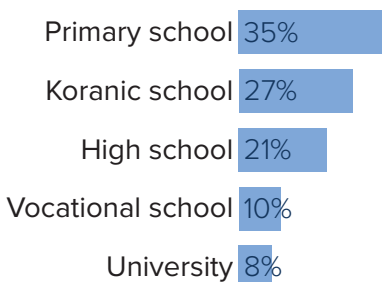
Education in the Sahel severely impacted by the double security and health crisis

Structurally weak across the Sahel, especially in peripheral regions, education has been particularly affected by the intensification of the conflict marked by a significant increase in attacks on schools and teachers since 2019. A precarious situation that had been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic which led to the closure of schools throughout the territories of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger during the year 2020.

According to the Education Clusters of the three countries, 12 million children have missed up to four months of school due to closures linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, 776,000 children were deprived of education throughout the year due to insecurity and attacks on schools, teachers and students.

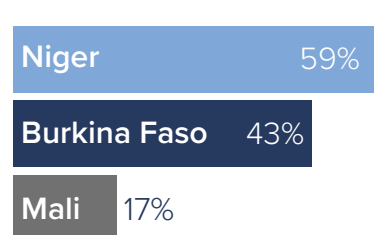
These attacks and threats have resulted in the closure of more than 4,000 schools in the three countries and a massive displacement of populations, more than half of whom are children and young people of school age. The education systems of the three countries are thus confronted with many simultaneous challenges, in particular the reopening of closed schools, the schooling of refugee and displaced children and the maintenance of the continuity of education for all learners.

Access to formal education



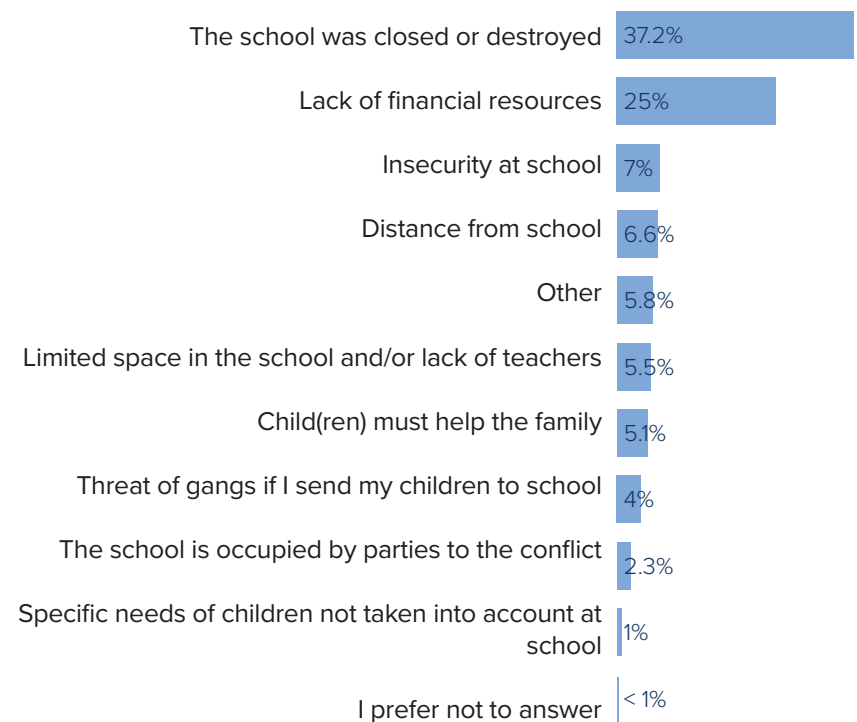
Graph 9.1

Regular school attendance



Graph 9.2

Reasons for not attending school regularly



Graph 9.3

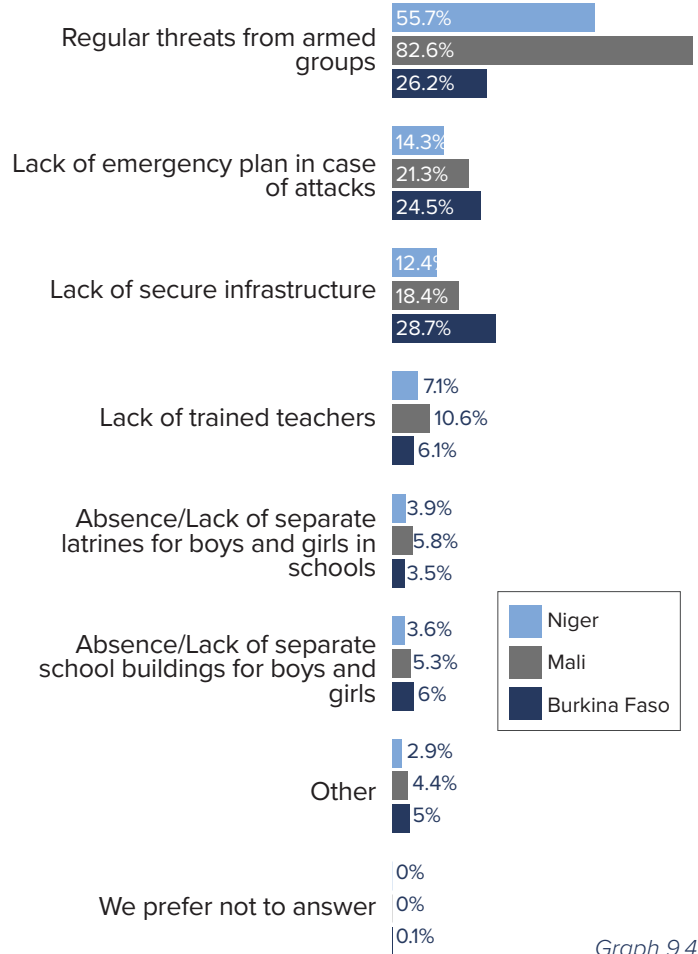
More than half of the children of the Sahel do not attend regular school

Across the three countries of the Central Sahel, 55% of children do not go to school regularly, without this being linked to the closures due to COVID-19. On average, 65% of primary-age children and only 37% of secondary-age children are enrolled in school, with notable disparities between countries.

In addition, nearly 40% of the key informants surveyed consider that the school environment for children in their community is not safe, mainly because of regular threats by armed groups, the lack of secure infrastructure and the absence of emergency protection plan in the event of an attack on the school. In addition to the prevailing insecurity which leads to the closure or destruction of local schools, 20% of families also stress that the lack of financial resources to cover school fees is a major cause of non-schooling.

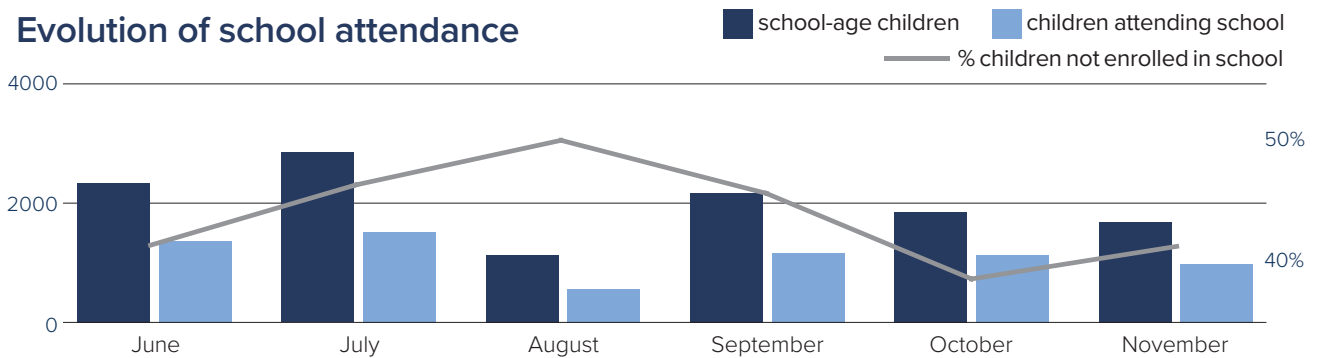
Niger is the country with the highest proportion of children attending schools (59% of families surveyed over the entire period), followed by Burkina Faso (43%), then Mali (less than 20%). In Mali, school strikes are also an unfavorable factor, further hampering the regularity of school attendance.

Reasons why the school environment is not safe



Graph 9.4

Evolution of school attendance

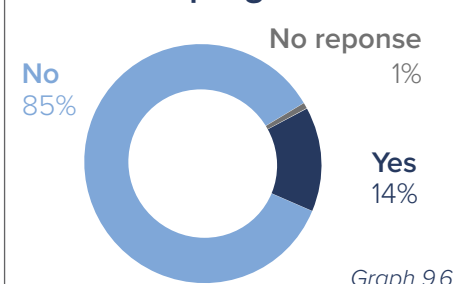


Graph 9.5

Very limited distance learning programs and alternative education opportunities

The proportion of children with access to alternative or complementary education programs is 14% over the entire period. This figure is very low considering the proportion of children who do not have access to formal education elsewhere. Among the alternative or complementary education programs available, literacy classes are the most widely used in Burkina Faso and Mali, while in Niger they are accelerated education programs, although the proportion of children having access to it is very low. Language courses, tutoring and vocational skills acquisition programs do not appear to be accessible to respondents.

Do children in your family have access to alternative education programs?



Graph 9.6

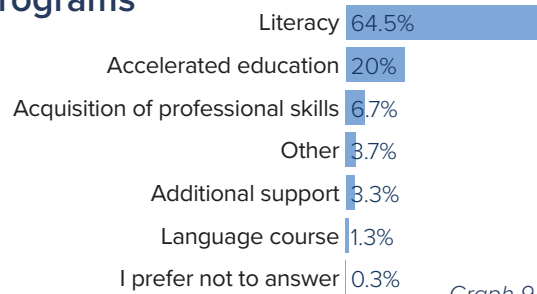
Regarding the distance education programs put in place as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, an average of 98% of households indicate awareness, while only 18% have access, with important differences depending on the country and the survey period.

A large majority of respondents (99.5%) also indicate that they do not have the necessary equipment to follow the distance education programs set up by the authorities or humanitarian actors, in particular because of difficult access to internet, television and radio.

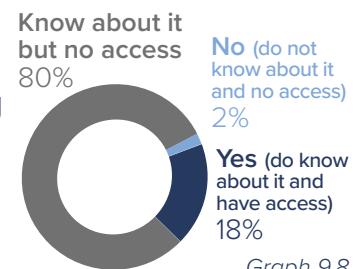
Living mainly in peripheral areas where connectivity remains limited, refugee and internally displaced students often have more difficulty in benefiting from these distance learning courses, thus increasing the risk of learning delays and dropping out of school within these populations.

While significant efforts have been made by governments and humanitarian actors in the region to help reopen schools in adequate hygiene and safety conditions, once health restrictions were relaxed, there are many cases of non-return to school and the risks of dropping out or permanently dropping out are great, especially among displaced populations, who are particularly vulnerable.

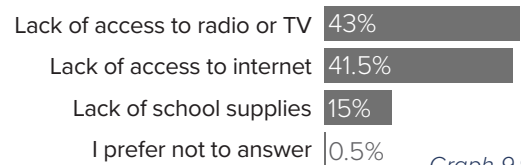
Existing alternative education programs



Do children have access to the existing distance learning programs?



Reasons for not being able to follow the existing distance learning programs?



Recommendations:

- ▷ The data collected as part of Project 21 confirms the need for a concerted approach for the safe reopening of schools and the maintenance of distance learning modalities. The safety, well-being of children and health aspects must be placed at the center of the decision-making process to reopen schools in order to guarantee a safe learning environment.
- ▷ School protection and safety must be strengthened, emergency preparedness systematically integrated into education policies, and children and teachers trained in community protection mechanisms.
- ▷ At the same time, pedagogical proposals for distance learning must be strengthened as an alternative to closing schools in order to ensure the continuity of education for all children, especially refugees and internally displaced persons.

10 DURABLE SOLUTIONS AND INTEGRATION

Insecurity and shortcomings in development, the main obstacles to sustainable solutions

More than 3.5 million refugees and internally displaced people across the five Sahelian countries are seeking a lasting solution to their situation of forced displacement.

The recent ministerial roundtable on the humanitarian crisis in the central Sahel called on various stakeholders to focus on the need for innovative solutions based on stronger social cohesion and the inclusion of affected population groups. The progress made in national legal frameworks also aims to support the search for solutions in the Sahel.

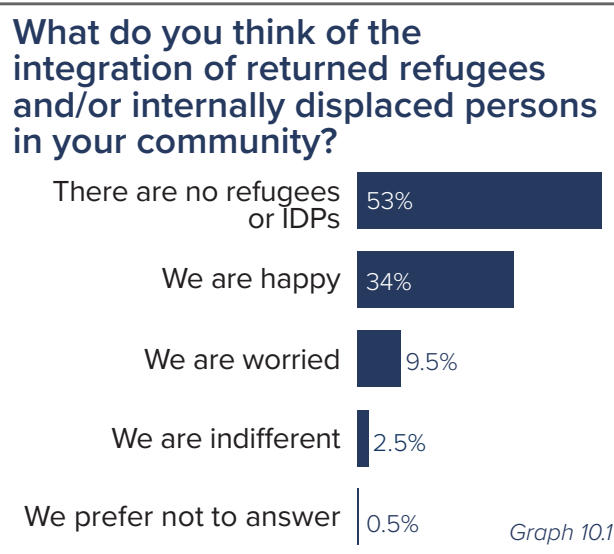
A better understanding of the current situation with regard to durable solutions, thanks to the data collected by protection monitoring, can help to inform interventions in favor of solutions.

Perceptions of returnees vary from country to country

Respondents in Mali (39%) and Burkina Faso (33%) seem to indicate a slightly more favorable attitude towards returnee refugees and internally displaced persons; however, the situation is different in Niger (15%), where the results underline a certain concern by the population due to the potential tension around resources that this situation could create.

A significant proportion of respondents in Mali (42%), Burkina Faso (35%) and Niger (28%) indicate that they are currently hosting people with whom they usually do not live.

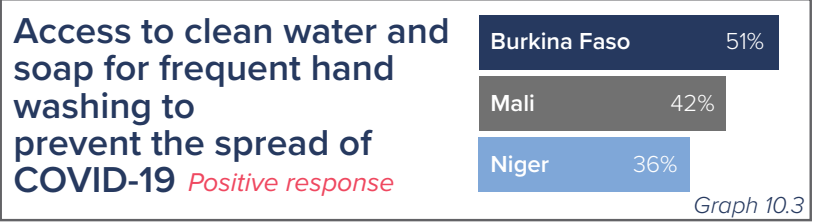
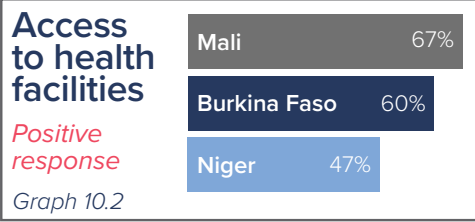
In an extremely volatile security context where new displacements continue to take place, nearly 10% of those surveyed say they are worried about the return of refugees or displaced persons to their community.



Lack of economic opportunities and inadequate social services hamper the hosting and integration of displaced people

The lack of socio-economic opportunities (27%) and the inadequacy of basic social services (27%) in the return areas are the two main reasons cited by host communities concerned about returns. Many therefore feel that their communities do not have sufficient capacity to receive and integrate returnees. Slightly under 50% of returnees interviewed in Burkina Faso and Niger also cited inadequate basic social services, followed by socio-economic conditions and security issues, as reasons for discontent in the areas of return.

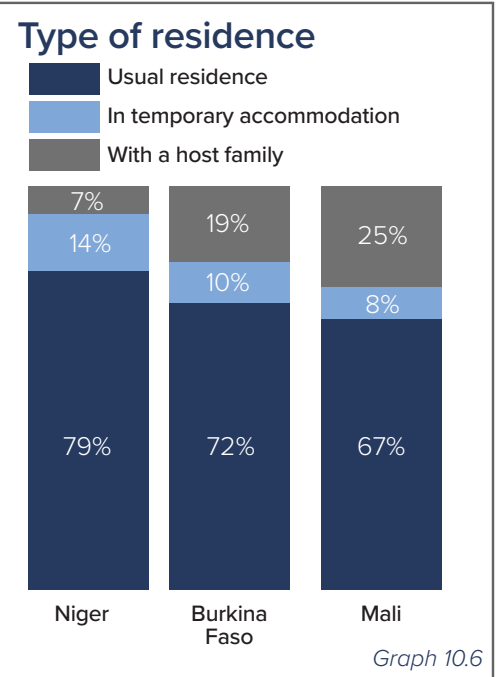
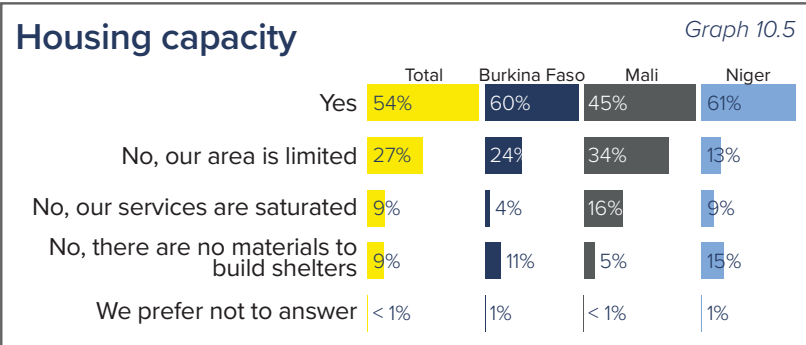
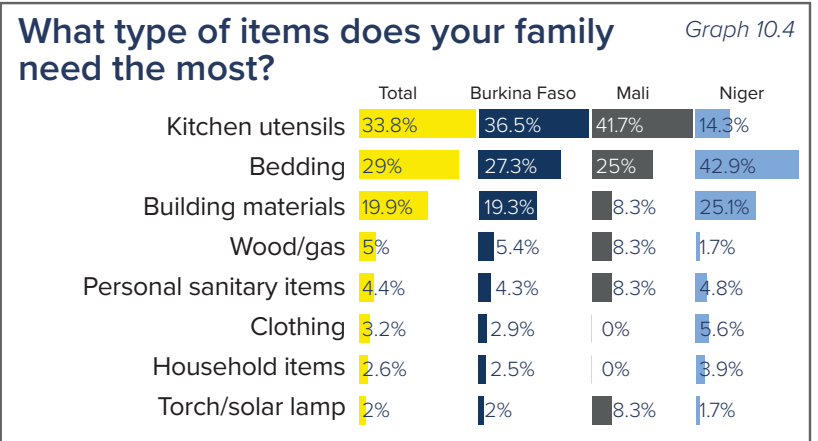
Access to health services is indeed a real challenge in all three countries. 67% of responding households in Mali in Mali, 60% in Burkina Faso, and 47% in Niger indicated that they had access during the period from June to November 2020. Almost a quarter of the women surveyed said they did not have access to hygiene items, while access to clean water and soap to wash their hands, a primary need in the context of COVID-19, was only available for 51% of respondents in Burkina Faso, 42% in Mali and only 36% in Niger. As for essential household items, kitchen utensils, sleeping materials and building materials were cited as those most needed by households.



The issue of housing at the heart of concerns, particularly in urban areas

In 14% of cases, housing was the primary concern for urban host families. A result confirmed by the fact that half of the people surveyed indicate the lack of space as the main cause of the refusal to welcome new arrivals in their homes. The results indicate that this housing issue is more sensitive in Mali. Indeed, if the question of housing is a general problem in the Sahel, Mali is the country where the housing capacity of host families is particularly low compared to the other two countries.

In this regard, it is important to note that the people surveyed in Niger are concentrated in peri-urban or urban areas, while the people surveyed in Burkina Faso and Mali are mainly in rural areas. A difference in living environment which could explain the importance given to the issue of housing in the results from Burkina Faso and Mali. This distinction thus underlines the growing problem of the housing shortage in the main cities of the Sahel, a primary consequence of the phenomenon of urbanization underway in the region.



Recommendations:

- ▷ Development programs should be implemented in the main hosting areas, in parallel and as a complement to humanitarian interventions. Weak basic services, very limited economic opportunities and lack of access to housing, land and property are the main challenges against reception and integration of displaced persons, refugees and returnees, in particular in urban and peri-urban areas.
- ▷ Emphasis should also be placed on social cohesion and the establishment of mediation mechanisms allowing populations to have their property rights respected in order to prevent and / or reduce any disputes and tensions relating to housing, land and goods within communities.
- ▷ In the context of urbanization in the Sahel, it is important to make investments necessary for integrated development, including the issue of housing, access to land, basic infrastructure and services, to ensure urban development that respects the environment and guarantees social cohesion.

The data presented in this report was collected by ANTD, CIAUD, DRC, UNHCR, AMSS, ICAHD, InterSOS, MBDHP through protection monitoring. The preparation of the regional analytical report was possible thanks to the contributions of UNHCR, Intersos, DRC, UNFPA/GBV AOR, UNICEF, Save the Children, Education Working Group and IOM.

With our thanks to the following donors:

- ▷ **Regional contributions for Project 21**
United Kingdom
- ▷ **Contributions for Project 21/protection monitoring activities (Central Sahel countries)**
Austria, Denmark, Spain, United States of America, Italy, Japan, European Union, CERF
- ▷ **Contributions non-earmarked**
Germany, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Spain, United States of America, France, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden, private donors

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