

# **The Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Governance, Peace and Security in the Sahel**

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REGIONAL BRIEF  
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# Foreword

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The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has spread rapidly around the world since it was first identified in December 2019. This pandemic represents a major crisis for countries across the African continent, not only in the risk to lives. Africa has a young population, which should decrease the numbers of severe cases, but it has large numbers of people with underlying health conditions which make them vulnerable. Perhaps most significantly, health systems have very limited capacity to treat severe cases. Importantly, the economic impacts will be severe. Measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 will inhibit economic activity and could hit the poor hardest, especially those living in cities. The World Bank's bi-annual Africa's Pulse report suggests that sub-Saharan Africa could experience its first collective recession in 25 years.

The consequences of COVID-19 pandemic could be long-lasting. Supporting countries to address the immediate and long-term impact of COVID-19 requires a regional approach. The leadership of the African Union has been crucial and commendable. It will continue to support governments to make extremely difficult choices, rather than make false compromises, to address the impact of COVID-19 across the continent. The Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 provides a clear vision for how the African Union will work with its Member States to address the multi-faceted challenges posed by the pandemic.

Whilst the focus has been on mitigating the health and socio-economic impacts, COVID-19 has the possibility of significantly impacting governance, peace and security and reversing gains made in Africa. COVID-19 could delay electoral processes and could affect accountability, service delivery and the quest for improved governance on the continent. In addition, the virus has delayed the implementation of critical peace agreements and hampered our mediation efforts at the local level. Terrorist and non-state armed groups have not ceased their attacks against innocent populations. In West Africa, Boko Haram insurgents launched an offensive against an army base claiming the lives of hundreds of peacekeepers. In the Horn of Africa, Al-Shabaab has continued to pose significant risks to civilian populations in the region, especially in Somalia and Kenya. While the spread of terrorism and extremism on the continent is worrisome, it is even more alarming to see terror groups leverage on the outbreak of coronavirus to spread misinformation as a recruitment tactic.

While COVID-19 creates clear challenges to government effectiveness and risks to peace and security, the pandemic may, in place, also present renewed opportunities for enhancing governance or achieving breakthroughs to lasting peace in parts of Africa.

It is against this backdrop that the African Union Commission and Africa CDC through its partnership with UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa launched reports to assess the impact of COVID-19 on governance, peace and security, with a focus on the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region.

This edition on the G5 Sahel region consolidates trends with a view to identifying multi-layered responses to COVID-19 in the region. It provides an overview of the epidemiological trends across the region and a reflection on how COVID-19 is impacting governance indicators as well as peace and security trends in the Sahel region. The report concludes a set of recommendations for consideration by the African Union, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolutions (RECs/RMs) and Member States. It is hoped that the information contained in this brief will enhance our collective understanding of the unfolding consequences in the G5 Sahel region and provide the foundation of relevant multidimensional interventions to address this crisis of humanity.

**H.E Ambassador Smail Chergui**

AU Commissioner for Peace and Security

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# Acknowledgements

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# Summary

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**COVID-19 cases and fatalities across the G5 Sahel nations—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—are relatively low by international standards, but the figures are uncertain because of the limited testing capacity.** As of 21 November, there were 17,891 cases and 551 deaths caused by COVID-19. The numbers peaked in June but have been significantly lower in recent months. However, it is likely that many cases and deaths go unreported given the limited testing capacity. Most governments of the G5 Sahel countries have taken measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, but they did not impose full lockdowns or severe restrictions, and some measures have been relaxed or lifted in the past two months following protests in Mali and Burkina Faso.

**COVID-19 will hinder the complex task to restore peace and security to the G5 Sahel region.** Violence and instability, driven by extremist and organized crime groups, was growing rapidly in scale, and expanding geographically in the western Sahel, even before the COVID-19 outbreak. Extremist groups have continued their activities, including killings of civilians, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and security forces have also continued operations to combat the terrorist groups. On 23 March 2020, in the Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram killed 98 Chadian soldiers in Boma. Regional and international efforts to counter terrorism have continued amidst COVID-19. The G5 Sahel Joint Force and French

forces have conducted joint operations against the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara in the Liptako-Gourma region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and the French forces killed the leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Abdelmalek Droukdel, in an operation in Mali in June. Organized crime groups remain a major source of insecurity.

**Food security is a major challenge in the region, which could be exacerbated by the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.** According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, the food security status of most households displaced by conflict will remain at the “crisis” level. COVID-19 has made the situation worse by reducing access to agricultural inputs and labour.

**The effect of COVID-19 on the state of governance has varied across the G5 Sahel nations.** Mali has undergone major political turmoil after a coup led to the President’s resignation and dissolution of the government following months of major protests. These protests started around the legislative elections in March/April, which happened despite COVID-19 and the kidnapping of the opposition leader Soumaïla Cissé and had a low voter turnout of 35%. In Burkina Faso, presidential and parliamentary elections were held as planned on 22 November 2020, while Niger is due to hold its presidential election on 27 December 2020. In Chad, however, legislative elections were postponed amid COVID-19.

**COVID-19 has increased demand for public services, and at the same time, hampered governments' ability to deliver these services,** which will further exacerbate the dire security situation in the region. COVID-19 has further heightened public discontent, which pushed some governments to lift movement restriction measures, such as the closure of markets and places of worship.

**Regional and international institutions have taken several initiatives to support the G5 Sahel nations in their COVID-19 responses.** Key initiatives include the African Union's Joint Continental Strategy on COVID-19 and the African Union COVID-19 Response Fund to strengthen the continental response to the pandemic. The Sahel Alliance pledged EUR 800 million to help build health capacity and assist G5 Sahel governments in limiting the impact of the pandemic on their economies. ECOWAS also provided funding to strengthen member countries' health systems. Finally, ECCAS set up a regional strategy to support Member States.

**There are four key elements to the current crisis, which the recommendations in this report aim to address.** (i) Enhancing security and addressing violent extremism in the region by expanding information and direct action against groups, (ii) resolving intercommunal tensions and strengthening local voices for peace, by empowering local leaders, increasing local dialogues and engagement, and supporting government capacities, (iii) supporting vulnerable populations, by increasing food security and addressing urgent needs, and by improving livelihoods and curbing the dire socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, and (iv) strengthening state presence and services to support governments in public service delivery and in delivering elections, while strengthening the social contract with their populations.



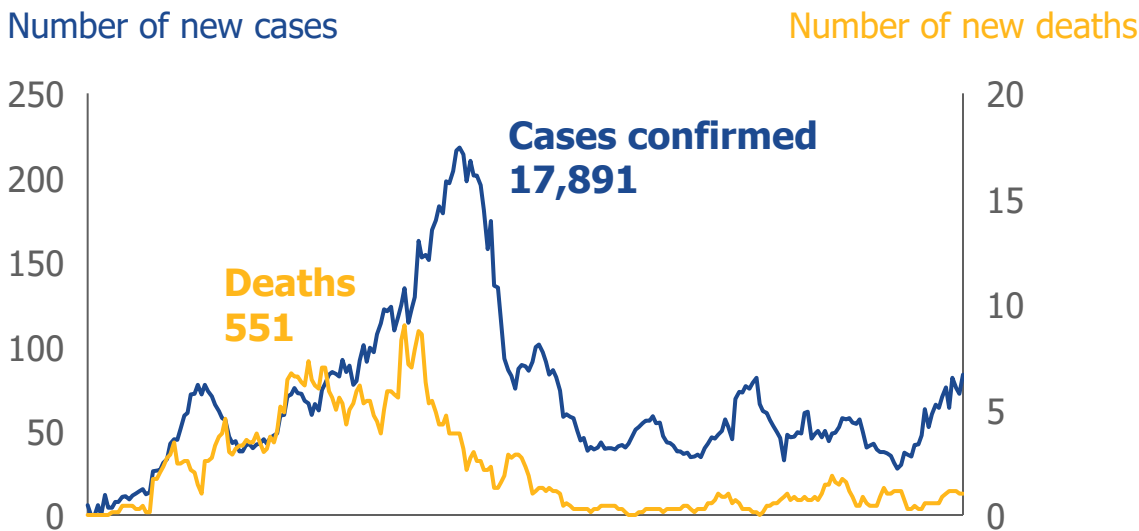
# Status of COVID-19

As of 21 November 2020, the G5 Sahel nations have confirmed 17,891 cases and 551 deaths from COVID-19, with the highest concentration being in urban centers. Mauritania accounts for the largest number of cases and deaths, probably a reflection of more extensive testing compared to other countries. Niger reports the lowest caseload, at 1,335, and Burkina Faso reports the lowest number of fatalities, at 68.<sup>1</sup> Since June, the number of confirmed daily cases and deaths from COVID-19 has drastically slowed down.

Reported case numbers are likely to be significantly understated due to limited testing capacity across all countries. By September 2020, for example, Mali had administered 39,175 tests for a population of 19 million.<sup>2</sup>

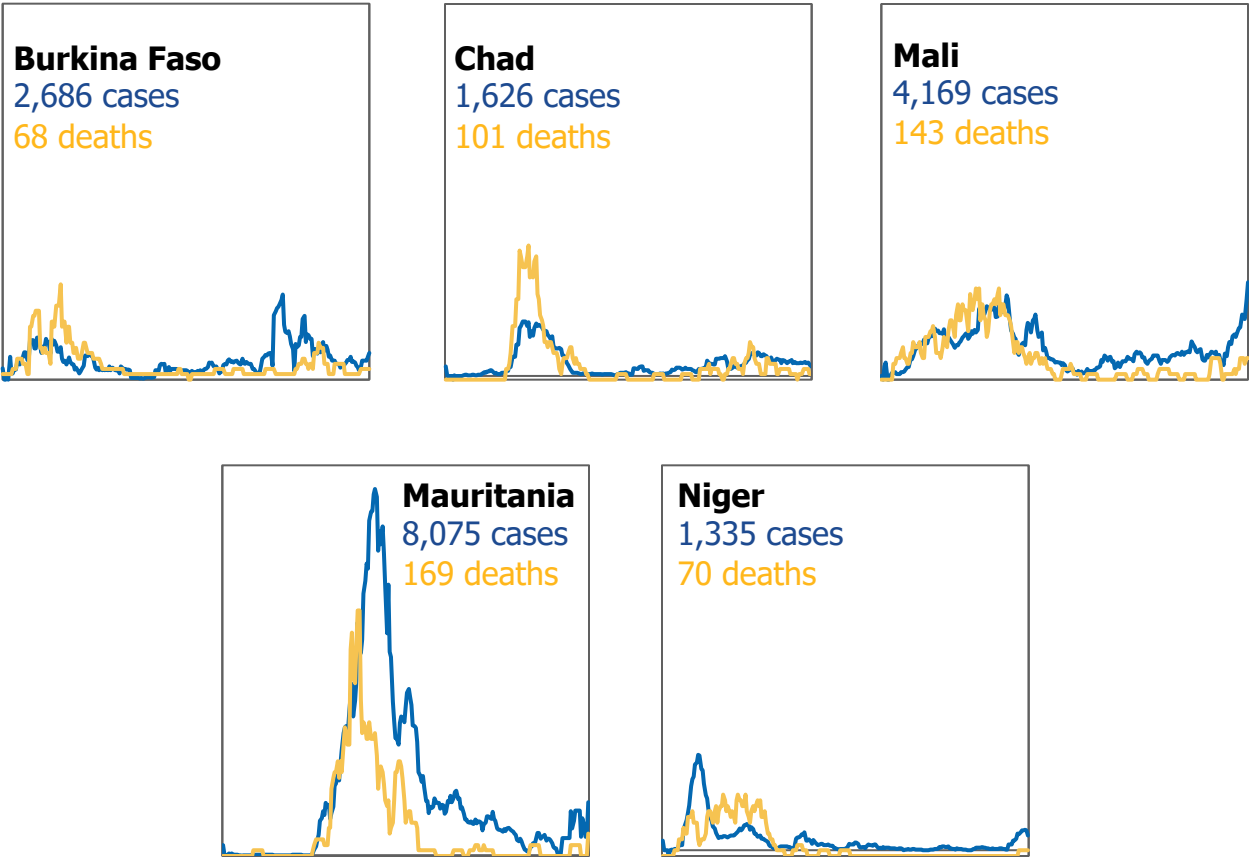
The falling rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths are perhaps surprising given that most measures were lifted starting in April and no new measures that would suggest that the virus has been contained were introduced.

Figure 1: New cases and deaths of COVID-19<sup>3</sup>  
7-day rolling average, as of 21 November 2020



Source: <sup>1,3</sup>World Health Organization; <sup>2</sup>Rapport de Situation COVID-19 Mali – September 2020

**Figure 2: Daily confirmed cases and deaths of COVID-19<sup>4</sup>**  
7-day rolling average, independent scales for cases and deaths, as of 21 November 2020



Source: <sup>4</sup>World Health Organization

# Government responses to COVID-19

G5 Sahel nations have taken a series of measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, but most governments did not impose full lockdowns or severe restrictions, and some measures have been relaxed or lifted in the past two months. The governments suspended international flights, closed their borders, shut down schools, limited public gatherings and some introduced curfews. A few social and economic measures were taken across countries, such as helping the most affected business sectors and providing economic palliatives to vulnerable population.

Some measures taken by the governments to contain the spread of the virus such as closure of markets and places of worship were met with strong opposition from the public in some countries, which resulted in lifting certain movement restriction measures. In April 2020, traders in Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso, protested the government's decision to close markets, prompting the authorities to re-open them shortly after. In Mali, the government also lifted certain movement restriction measures after violent protests erupted throughout the country.

Figure 3: Actions taken in response to COVID-19 pandemic up until end of August 2020<sup>5</sup>

| Yes<br><start>                                  | Intervention was taken and is ongoing                        | Yes<br><start><br><end>           | Intervention was taken in the past | Partial<br><start> | Intervention was partially implemented | No              | Intervention was not taken |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|--|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Category  | Intervention Category  | Burkina Faso                      | Chad                               | Mali               | Mauritania                             | Niger           |                            |
| Government Coordination and Legal Authorization | Emergency administrative structures activated or established | Yes<br>30 June                    | Yes<br>15 May                      | Yes<br>25 March    | Yes<br>18 March                        | Yes<br>27 March |                            |
|   | State of emergency declaration                               | Yes<br>26 March                   | Yes<br>25 April                    | Yes<br>26 March    | Yes<br>22 March                        | Yes<br>27 March |                            |
|   | Full lockdown of some areas                                  | Partial<br>26 March<br>End: 5 May | Yes<br>8 May                       | No                 | Yes<br>22 March                        | No              |                            |
|   | Full lockdown of whole country                               | No                                | No                                 | No                 | Yes<br>22 March                        | No              |                            |

Source: <sup>5</sup>Dalberg Dashboard (Government Actions on COVID-19 in Developing Countries)

**Figure 3: Actions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (continued)**  
 Start to end date, if known

| Category                               | Intervention Category   | Burkina Faso                  | Chad                           | Mali                          | Mauritania                    | Niger                         |
|--|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Movement Restrictions                  | Ban of entry for non-citizens/residents                             | No                            | Yes<br>18 March                | No                            | Yes<br>22 March               | Yes<br>20 March               |
|  | Ban on entry for all non-citizens (including residents)             | No                            | Yes<br>18 March                | No                            | Yes<br>22 March               | Yes<br>20 March               |
|  | Ban on entry for all persons  | Partial                       | Yes<br>18 March                | Partial                       | Yes<br>18 March               | Yes<br>20 Mar                 |
|  | Advice to citizens/residents against travel to other countries      | No                            | No                             | No                            | Yes<br>22 March               | No                            |
|  | Suspension of flights to/from affected countries                    | Yes<br>21 March               | Yes<br>18 March                | Yes<br>18 March               | Yes<br>16 March               | Yes<br>20 March               |
| Movement Restrictions - Within Country | Advice against non-essential travel between cities/provinces        | Yes<br>26 March               | No                             | Yes<br>18 March               | Yes<br>27 March               | No                            |
|  | Ban on travel to/from affected cities/provinces                     | Partial                       | Yes<br>8 May                   | No                            | Yes<br>27 March               | Yes<br>27 March               |
| Social Distancing - Closures           | Ban on mass gatherings of more than 250 people                      | Yes<br>11 March               | Yes<br>18 March                | Yes<br>18 March               | Yes<br>27 March               | Yes<br>17 March - End: 22 May |
|  | Ban on mass gatherings of more than 50 people                       | Yes<br>11 March               | Yes<br>18 March                | Yes<br>18 March               | Yes<br>27 March               | Yes<br>17 March - End: 22 May |
|  | Closure of schools and universities                                 | Yes<br>26 March - End: 11 May | Yes<br>23 March - End: 25 Jun. | Yes<br>18 March - End: 3 June | Yes<br>14 March - End: 1 July | Yes<br>17 March - End: 1 June |
|  | Closure of bars and other social venues                             | Yes<br>24 March - End: 17 May | Yes<br>23 March                | Yes<br>18 March               | Yes<br>14 March               | Yes<br>17 March               |
|  | Closure of religious buildings and sites                            | Yes<br>21 March - End: 10 May | Yes<br>20 March End: 25 June   | No                            | Yes<br>14 March - End: 10 May | Yes<br>17 March - End: 13 May |
|  | Closure of government offices                                       | Partial                       | No                             | No                            | Yes<br>27 March               | No                            |
|  | Closure of non-essential retail and other businesses serving public | Partial<br>24 March           | Yes<br>23 March                | Partial<br>18 March           | Yes<br>14 March - End: 6 May  | No                            |

**Figure 3: Actions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (continued)**

Start to end date, if known

| Category  | Interventions   | Burkina Faso                     | Chad            | Mali                            | Mauritania                        | Niger                            |
|---|---|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Social Distancing - Physical Distancing Between People</b> | Advice to stay at home and work from home   | Partial                          | No              | No                              | Yes<br>22 March                   | No                               |
|   | Requirement to stay at home except for purchasing essentials, medical care, daily exercise and work if necessary  | No                               | No              | No                              | Yes<br>27 March                   | No                               |
|   | Curfew for parts of each day  | Yes<br>21 March -<br>End: 3 June | Yes<br>2 April  | Yes<br>26 March -<br>End: 8 May | Yes<br>18 March -<br>End : 8 July | Yes<br>28 March -<br>End: 13 May |
|   | Requirement to use surgical masks in high-traffic locations   | Yes<br>27 April                  | Yes<br>13 April | Yes<br>10 April                 | Yes<br>15 June                    | Yes<br>10 April                  |
|   | Social distancing indicators and infrastructure   | No                               | No              | No                              | No                                | No                               |
|   | Special actions for prisons, military barracks or other high-density settings                                     | Yes<br>2 April                   | No              | Yes<br>8 May                    | No                                | Yes<br>27 March                  |
| <b>Strengthening the Healthcare System</b>                    | Expansion of basic supplies - PPE, masks, hand sanitizers, etc.   | Yes                              | Yes<br>14 April | Yes                             | Yes<br>28 March                   | Yes<br>27 March                  |
|   | Additional pay for healthcare workers   | No                               | Yes<br>15 May   | Yes<br>10 April                 | No                                | No                               |
|   | Accelerated graduation and deployment of healthcare students  | No                               | No              | No                              | No                                | No                               |
|   | Call for volunteers from trained healthcare workers who are retired, working in other positions or working abroad | No                               | No              | No                              | Yes<br>Mid-June                   | Yes<br>27 March                  |
|   | Psychological assistance and medical social work  | No                               | No              | No                              | No                                | No                               |
| <b>Economic and Social Measures</b>                           | Postponement of cancellation of payments of fees for public services  | Partial<br>2 April               | Yes<br>1 April  | Partial                         | Yes<br>25 March                   | Yes<br>27 March                  |
|   | Postponement of tax payment deadlines   | No                               | Yes<br>1 April  | No                              | Partial<br>25 March               | Yes<br>20 May                    |
|   | Allowances for people required to go into quarantine or self-isolate  | No                               | No              | No                              | Yes<br>25 March                   | No                               |
|   | Special payments or support for people made unemployed due to COVID-19  | No                               | No              | No                              | No                                | No                               |
|   | Partial coverage of wages by government if businesses don't lay off workers                                       | No                               | No              | No                              | No                                | Yes<br>20 May                    |
|   | Direct payments to people (either payments or tax rebates)  | Yes<br>2 April                   | No              | Partial<br>10 April             | No                                | No                               |
|   | Emergency assistance to most affected business sectors  | Yes<br>3 April                   | Yes<br>20 May   | Yes<br>10 April                 | Yes<br>25 March                   | Yes<br>20 May                    |

# State of economy, livelihoods, food security and public health

## ECONOMY

**The IMF downgraded its forecasts for the economies of the G5 Sahel nations amid COVID-19.** The IMF adjusted Mauritania’s GDP annual growth rate forecast from 6.3% to -2%, Chad from 3.2% to -0.2%, Niger from 6% to 1%, Mali from 5% to 1.5% and Burkina Faso from 5.8% to 2.0%.<sup>6</sup>

**The G5 Sahel nations are considered low-income countries and the COVID-19 outbreak could strain an already difficult macroeconomic environment in the Sahel.** Mauritania is the most heavily impacted country,

which might be due to the strict measures that the government has imposed compared to other G5 Sahel nations. Constrained by their landlocked status, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger, rely heavily on their neighboring countries’ seaports for the movement of goods and services to and from international markets. Due to COVID-19 lockdown measures and international restrictions on the movement of goods and people, landlocked countries face restraints on exports and on imports of goods, medical equipment and other basic commodities. The COVID-19 outbreak and the drop in international oil prices have had a severe economic and social impact on Chad.

Figure 4: Adjusted growth forecasts<sup>7</sup>

|                                 | Burkina Faso | Chad  | Mauritania | Mali | Niger |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------|------------|------|-------|
| Original 2020 forecast          | 5.8%         | 3.2%  | 6,3%       | 5%   | 6%    |
| COVID-19 adjusted 2020 forecast | 2%           | -0.2% | -2,0%      | 1,5% | 1%    |

Source: <sup>6</sup>, <sup>7</sup>IMF World Economic Outlook (April 2020)

POVERTY AND LIVELIHOODS

**COVID-19 risks reversing development gains of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and threatening the livelihoods of millions of people in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin.** G5 Sahel nations rank at the bottom of the Human Development Index. In the G5 Sahel region, over 10 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>8</sup> This situation is likely to worsen, partly due to the impact of COVID-19, but mostly due to increasing violence and conflict in the region.

**Most people in urban areas work in the informal sector, which was severely affected by COVID-19 measures.** Movement restrictions and health measures taken by the authorities have negatively impacted daily wage earners. In Burkina Faso, the informal economy accounts for 49.2% GDP and employs 95% the urban population.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in Mali, 73% of the population work in the informal sector.<sup>10</sup>

**In the Sahel region, 25 million people work in the agro-pastoral industry and are likely to witness a reduction in their incomes due to COVID-19.**<sup>11</sup> Movement restrictions and closures of businesses are

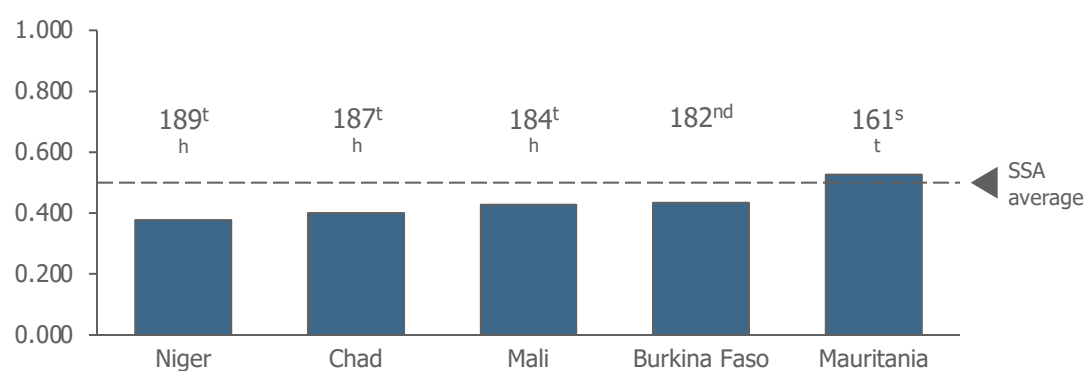
impacting the livelihoods of farmers as they cannot access markets.

**According to a survey by Réseau Billital Maroobé, a collective of West African herders, nearly half of the region's pastoralists can no longer travel with their livestock to graze or access water sources due to movement restrictions related to COVID-19.** Humanitarian aid workers reported that herders are not only in need of food assistance for themselves and their families, but they also need animal feed for their livestock.<sup>12</sup>

**Schools have been closed across the G5 Sahel region to limit the spread of COVID-19, affecting the education of approximately 12 million children who are temporarily out of school.**<sup>14</sup> According to UNICEF, prior to COVID-19, over 8 million children between the ages of 6-14 years were already out of school in the region and COVID-19 might jeopardize children's formal learning, particularly girls.

**Women in the G5 Sahel region will be disproportionately affected by the economic slowdown.** The loss of livelihoods will disproportionately affect women who make up large segments of the informal sector.

Figure 5: Human Development Index<sup>12</sup>  
Rank out of 189 countries, 2018



Source: <sup>8</sup>ACAPS; <sup>9</sup>ILO; <sup>10</sup>Agence d'Information du Burkina News; <sup>11, 13</sup> Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel; <sup>12</sup>UNDP HDI; <sup>14</sup>UNICEF

HEALTH SYSTEMS

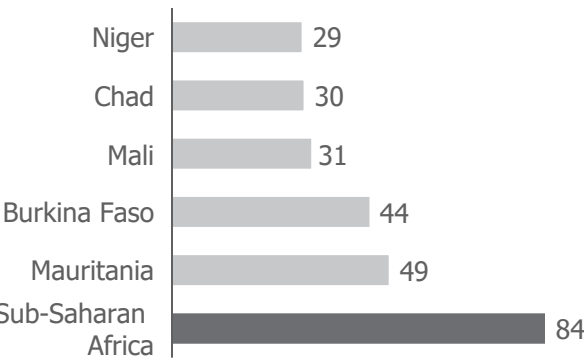
**The G5 Sahel nations have some of the weakest health systems in the world.** According to the Global Health Security Index, the G5 Sahel countries are ill-prepared for a pandemic. Niger, which ranks highest among the Sahel countries in the 2019 Global Health Security Index only ranks 132<sup>nd</sup> out of 195 countries; Burkina Faso is 145<sup>th</sup>, Mali is 147<sup>th</sup>, Chad is 150<sup>th</sup>, and Mauritania ranks the lowest at 157<sup>th</sup>.<sup>15</sup>

**Healthcare systems in the Sahel region may not be able to handle large numbers of COVID-19 cases.** Health expenditure across the G5 Sahel nations is an average of 5% of total GDP, which is below the Sub-Saharan and the world averages.<sup>16</sup> The health systems suffer from a shortage of doctors and nurses. There is a reliance on imports for medical equipment and medicines. With the disruption of global medical supply chains and the increase in global competition for PPE and other medical equipment, some countries in the Sahel are at high risk of being unable to treat people who

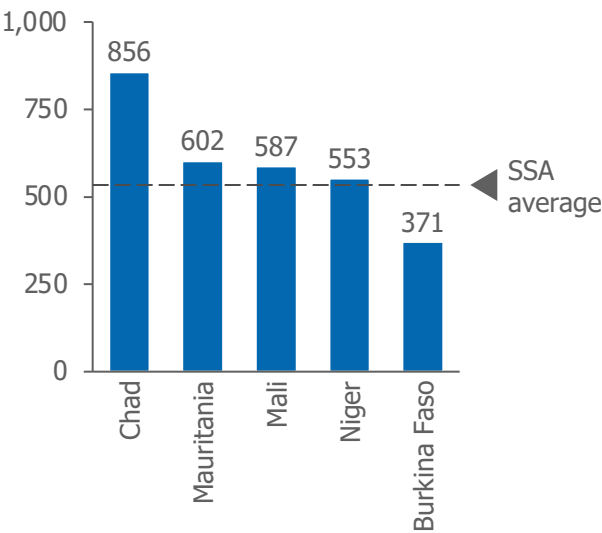
are infected with COVID-19 and in a critical condition. When the pandemic hit, Mauritania reportedly only had one ventilator for a population of over 4 million people<sup>18</sup> and Mali had 56 ventilators for 19 million people.<sup>19</sup> ICU capacity was also limited across the region. Burkina Faso had 15 ICU beds while Chad reportedly had 60 ICU beds for a population of 22 million people.<sup>20, 21</sup>

**One of the main health challenges, women in the Sahel region face is access to quality maternal health, which could worsen with movement restrictions related to COVID-19.** Chad has the highest maternal mortality rate in the Sahel region (856 per 100,000 live births).<sup>22</sup> Four out of the G5 Sahel countries have a higher maternal mortality rate than the average across Sub-Saharan Africa. Movement restrictions affected women’s access to maternal and new-born care services. In addition, the pressure that COVID-19 puts on healthcare systems could particularly undermine the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls.

**Figure 6: Current health expenditure per capita (current USD, 2017)<sup>17</sup>**



**Figure 7: Maternal mortality ratio<sup>23</sup> per 100,000 live births**



Source: <sup>15</sup>Global Health Security Index (2019); <sup>16</sup>UNDP HDR; <sup>17, 23</sup>WHO; <sup>18, 20, 21</sup>Reuters News; <sup>19</sup>Al Jazeera News; <sup>22</sup>UN Women



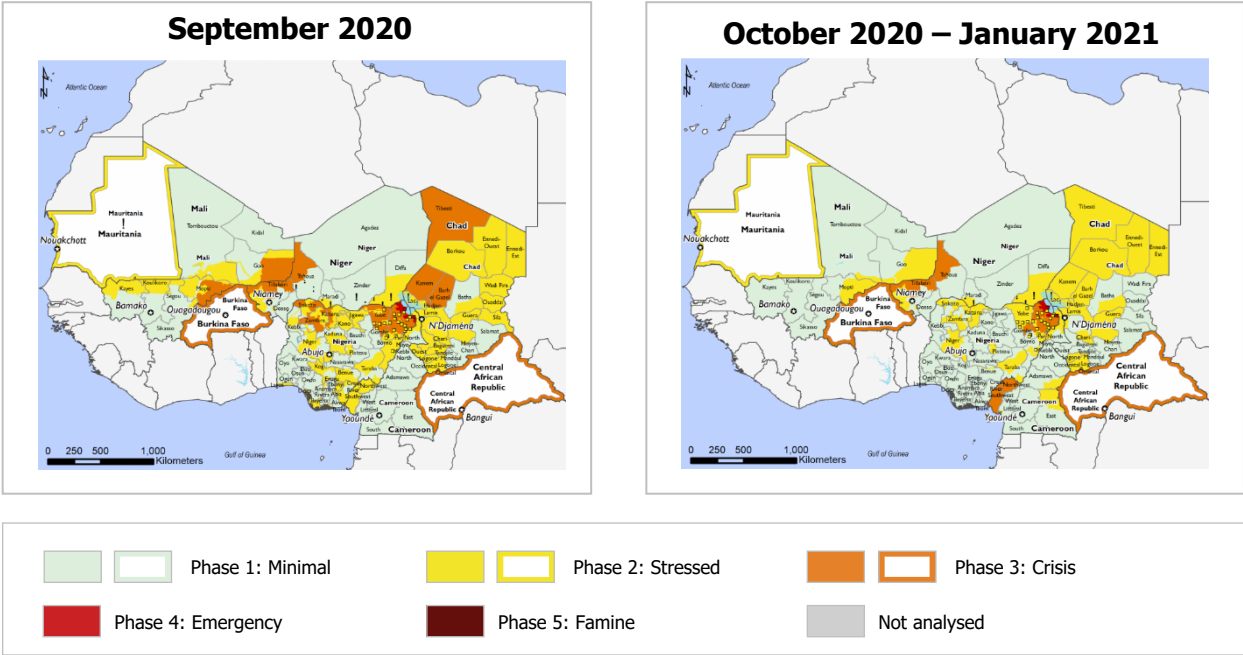
FOOD SECURITY

Despite the arrival of harvest season, significant numbers of people across the G5 Sahel are still at “crisis” or “stressed” levels of food insecurity, according to the phases used by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network.<sup>24</sup> Conflict and climate change are the primary drivers of persistent food insecurity for millions of people across the G5 Sahel region. Conflict has led to massive displacement of populations, destruction or closure of basic social services, disruption of productive activities, markets, and trade flows. Although harvests are above average in many parts of the Sahel, below-average harvests are expected in conflict zones such as the Liptako Gourma cross-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and the Lake Chas Basin.<sup>25</sup>

**COVID-19 has added to the food insecurity crisis in the G5 Sahel nations.** The Famine Early Warning Network notes that COVID-19 reduced access for farmers to inputs and agricultural labour, and that the livestock trade was disrupted by movement restrictions (as well and conflict and violence in some pastoral areas).<sup>26</sup> Many urban households had their livelihoods constrained by COVID-19 control measures, and thus likely experienced losses of income with which to purchase food.

**Roughly 2.5 million children in the Sahel region are undernourished and COVID-19 might exacerbate the malnutrition situation in the region.**<sup>27</sup> Over 500,000 children across the G5 Sahel countries lost access to WFP school meals due to school closures.<sup>28</sup>

Figure 8: Food security situation in the Sahel<sup>29</sup>  
September 2020 to January 2021



Source: <sup>24</sup>, <sup>25</sup>, <sup>26</sup>, <sup>27</sup>, <sup>29</sup> Famine Early Warning Systems Network – West Africa Food Security Outlook; <sup>28</sup>World Food Programme

# Impact of COVID-19 on governance

## SUMMARY

Since Jan 2020      Outlook

COVID-19 effects on governance across the G5 Sahel nations have been mixed, but overall COVID-19 has adversely affected government effectiveness in delivering public services. Mali's President has resigned following months of political unrest and a military coup – not specifically driven by COVID-19, although it may have contributed to low turnout in the legislative elections in March/April, which prompted the start of protests. The pandemic has slowed electoral processes in Burkina Faso and Niger and contributed to the postponement of legislative elections in Chad. No major changes have been reported in Mauritania.



### Improving or deteriorating - arrow direction

↑ Positive      → Limited change      ↓ Negative

### Impact of COVID-19 and other factors - arrow fill

◀ Primarily driven by non-COVID-19 factors      ▶ Primarily driven by COVID-19

**G5 Sahel nations rank at the bottom of the World Bank's Governance Indicators**, particularly with regard to political stability. The region includes countries that are very fragile. Mali ranks the lowest in political stability amongst the G5 Sahel nations.

## GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS

**COVID-19 has increased the need for public services, and, at the same time, decreased governments' capacity to deliver quality public services.** Prior to COVID-19, there was popular discontent with governments' poor record in delivering public services particularly in remote areas and the borderlands. COVID-19 has further exacerbated the public discontent, which pushed some governments to lift movement restriction measures, such as the closure of markets and places of worship.

ELECTIONS

**COVID-19 impacted some legislative and presidential elections in the region, but others have gone ahead or are planned.** In some countries which postponed elections to after the pandemic, or considered it, some have viewed the moves as a manifestation of governments taking advantage of the situation to stretch terms beyond their constitutional limits. However, there were also calls by citizens

and political parties for the postponement of elections to reduce and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and to avoid the disenfranchisement of citizens in areas most affected by the pandemic as well as insecurity. As always, decisions surrounding electoral processes are complex and must balance multiple elements—these should be well-informed and taken following extensive engagements with political actors and civil society to foster peace and douse tensions, anger and mistrust.

Figure 9: Parliamentary and presidential elections

| Country      | Parliamentary election         | Presidential election | COVID-19 related postponements  |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Burkina Faso | 22 November 2020               | 22 November 2020      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Elections were held as planned on 22 November 2020 – although the government had previously proposed to delay the legislative elections until 2021</li></ul>  |
| Chad         | October 2021                   | April 2021            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Legislative elections postponed (initially scheduled for December 2020)</li></ul>   |
| Mali         | 29 March 2020<br>19 April 2020 | To be determined      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Parliamentary elections were conducted amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, but results were disputed and contributed to the social unrest</li><li>Timing of presidential election to be agreed, following the coup and resignation of President Keita</li></ul> |
| Mauritania   | 2023                           | 2024                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Not applicable</li></ul>  |
| Niger        | 27 December 2020               | 27 December 2020      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>None</li></ul>  |

## Burkina Faso



**Despite an expectation that COVID-19 would contribute to a postponement of presidential and/or legislative elections in Burkina Faso to 2021, both elections took place as planned on 22 November.** Voter registration for the elections and referendum was suspended at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic but resumed in May. After initially proposing in July to delay the legislative elections until 2021, the government eventually decided to continue with the initial plan to hold the elections in November.

Despite the threat of jihadist violence, which closed some polling stations, the vote appears to have been largely successful and peaceful. Fourteen soldiers were killed in an ambush on 13 November, which led candidates to suspend campaigning for two days. Closure of polling stations meant that about 400,000 voters were unable to cast their votes. Nevertheless, these elections represent an important opportunity to calm social unrest and rebuild social cohesion in the country.

## Chad



**Legislative elections that were due to happen in December 2020 have been postponed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.** The scheduled vote has been delayed five times since 2015, reportedly due to the lack of funds and the threat posed by Boko Haram. Though postponement might worsen the democratic legitimacy of the parliament, it is unlikely to affect governance.

**COVID-19 is unlikely to impact the planned 2021 presidential elections, but there is a potential risk of an increase in public's dissatisfaction** due to the worsening socio-economic situation in the country amidst the pandemic. The absence of change in power over the past three decades raises a risk of a potential future succession crisis.

## Mali



**Mali held its legislative elections amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.** The country's first and second rounds of the legislative elections were held on 29 March and 19 April 2020, respectively, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the kidnapping of the opposition leader Soumaïla Cissé. The voter turnout for the legislative elections, which had been long-delayed, was slightly above 35% in the first round.

**The Malian President and several others resigned, and the government was dissolved, following a coup on 18 August.** From May, Mali experienced a wave of protests demanding the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The long-delayed legislative elections and allegations of corruption led thousands of Malians to take to the street demanding the President's resignation. Led by Imam Mahmoud Dicko, the movement gathers his sympathizers but also opposition parties – united under the Mouvement du 5 Juin - Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques (M5-RFP). As a result of this political stalemate, ECOWAS, with support from the UN and the AU, has launched a mediation process in Mali seeking to defuse the situation. Given Mali's position as a key regional player in the fight against terrorism, removing President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita without a clear transition plan could create a power vacuum, creating space for jihadist groups and further threatening stability in the Sahel. The COVID-19 emergency may have hindered and distracted from some preventative diplomatic efforts.

## Niger



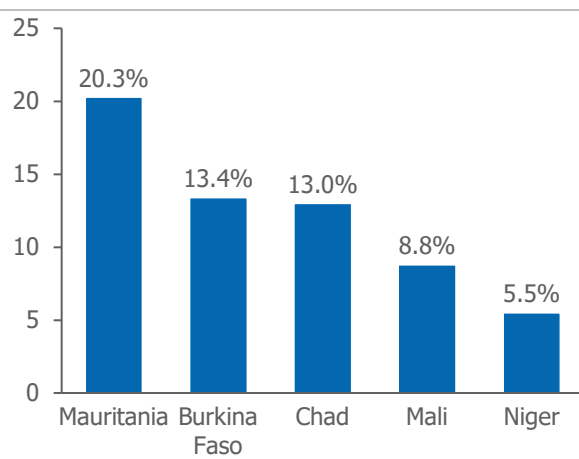
**The planned 2020 presidential elections are unlikely to be affected by COVID-19; however, there is a risk that the opposition will not participate in the elections and thus reduce their legitimacy.** President Mahamadou Issoufou stated that he is not seeking a third term in office. However, the opposition has boycotted political dialogue with the government and has rejected the new electoral code adopted in June as well as a process for renewing the electoral list. There is a risk that unless the opposition and government agree on electoral modalities, the elections might not be viewed as free and fair and the next government might not be recognized as legitimate.

WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE

**Women are underrepresented in decision-making across the G5 Sahel region and COVID-19 could delay institutional reforms to increase women's participation in political and public spheres.** Mauritania has the highest representation of women in parliament with 20.3%, followed by Burkina Faso and Chad with 13.4% and 13%. Mali and Niger have the lowest representation of women in parliament with 8.8% and 5.5% respectively.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Mauritania has the highest representation of women in cabinet, with 32%, followed by Niger with 25%, and Mali and Chad both with 21%. Burkina Faso has the lowest representation with 14% of women in cabinet. The conditions in which elections will take place and have taken place in some countries amidst COVID-19 could not allow for increased sensitization of voters towards the participation of women.

**Government responses to COVID-19 would benefit from a stronger gender lens.** The limited role for women in governance has likely contributed to limited considerations on how government actions may disproportionately harm women, e.g., increased domestic violence, and the increased burden of care at home further limiting economic opportunity.

Figure 10: Representation of women in parliament<sup>31</sup>



Source: <sup>30, 31</sup>UN Women & Inter-Parliamentary Union; <sup>32, 33, 34</sup>Amnesty International

HUMAN RIGHTS

**Allegations of human rights violations in the region have been made since the start of COVID-19, some of which were not necessarily caused by the pandemic.** Soldiers rampaging through villages in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have reportedly killed or forcibly disappeared at least 199 people between February and April 2020.<sup>32</sup> Some of the killings amount to extrajudicial executions and among the victims, are internally displaced persons. The killings have been underscored by ethnic dynamics, and the vast majority of people killed by alleged security forces are Fulani because of their perceived support of the armed extremist groups.

**In Mali, at least 23 people were killed extrajudicially and 27 others were arrested** by the Malian army in the communes of Diabaly and Dogofry between 3 February and 11 March 2020.<sup>33</sup> Regular deadly clashes between Fulani and Dogon as well as Bambara people are reported, especially in areas under limited government influence. Dogon self-defense militias, created to provide security for some communities, are regularly accused of targeting Fulani, often following terrorist attacks.

**In Burkina Faso, there are allegations of several human rights violations committed by security forces in March and April 2020.** On 29 March, Issouf Barry, a local councilor in Sollé, Hamidou Barry, the village chief of Sollé, and Oumarou Barry, a member of the princely family of Banh, were abducted in their homes in Ouahigouya.<sup>34</sup>

**COVID-19 and associated restrictions may have led to increased violations of human rights.** Movement restrictions may have led to increased domestic and sexual violence, restricted movement and access to food, and the restricted rights to vote. The loss of livelihoods along with fragile political and security contexts could lead to further violations.

**In Niger, 102 people from the south-west region of Tillabéry were arrested by the army as part of Operation Almahou between 27 March and 2 April.<sup>35</sup>** Amnesty International reported that 48 people were arrested on their way to and from a market fair in Ayorou between 27 and 29 March by Nigerien soldiers.<sup>36</sup> The 54 others were arrested by security forces in several villages on 2 April.<sup>37</sup>

**Boko Haram remains responsible for human rights violations in Chad.** Displacement linked to attacks by armed groups in the Lake Chad province is recurrent and affects around 169,000 people.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the March 2020 attack by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin has displaced thousands of people.

**There have been several cases of purported excessive use of force by defense and security forces in Chad.** Notably, in February 2019, defense and security forces reportedly opened fire on a group of women, wounding 10 of them, during a protest in Abéché.

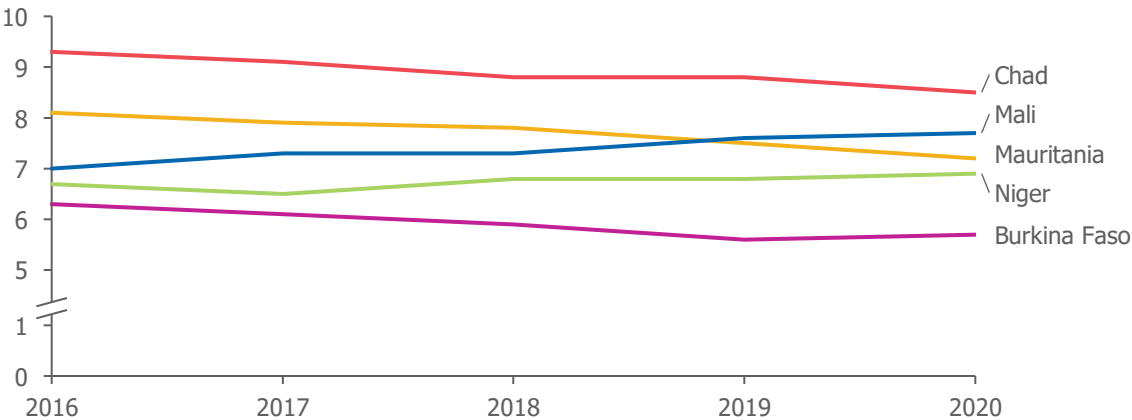
**RULE OF LAW**

**The G5 Sahel countries rank low in the Human Rights and Rule of Law sub-index of the Fragile States Index.<sup>39</sup>** Burkina Faso performs better on this sub-index than the other G5 Sahel nations.

**The effectiveness of judicial systems, already limited, could be further hindered due to COVID-19 and reduced government budgets.** The impact of COVID-19 and the expenditure on the response, coupled with other shocks, will reduce government budgets in most countries, which could hinder the effectiveness of judiciaries. Operations of courts were limited and could have reduced access to justice.

**The fairness of the judicial system has not changed due to COVID-19.** However, generally, judicial systems have been viewed as arbitrary across the region due to weak institutional capacity of legal institutions as well as the rampant corruption in judicial systems.

**Figure 11: Human Rights and the Rule of Law (2020 Fragile States Sub-Index)<sup>40</sup>**



Source: <sup>35, 36, 37, 38</sup>Amnesty International; <sup>39, 40</sup>Fragile States Index

# Impact of COVID-19 on peace and security

## SUMMARY

Since Jan 2020

Outlook

COVID-19’s impact could worsen the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the G5 Sahel, particularly in the west. Extremist groups and organized crime groups have continued their violent attacks and kidnappings for ransom amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a risk that the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 might create a window for extremist groups to expand their propaganda and recruitment. The fragile political situation in Mali could lead to increased violence and extremism as was the case in 2012. Over the past few months, regional and international leaders have continued their efforts and reaffirmed their commitment to combat violent extremism in the region, but more has to be done given the worsening situation.



### Improving or deteriorating - arrow direction

Positive

Limited change

Negative

### Impact of COVID-19 and other factors - arrow fill

Primarily driven by non-COVID-19 factors

Primarily driven by COVID-19



**Likely impact  
of COVID-19**

|  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| <p><b>Radicalization and violent extremist recruitment</b></p> <p>Extremist groups have integrated COVID-19 in their narratives and propaganda to gain more support and also providing basic services to communities in dire need. There is an increased risk that COVID-19 could solidify extremist groups with an opportunity to act as an alternative service provider, reducing the state's legitimacy. The effects of COVID-19 on livelihoods might create a situation in which individuals are more receptive to radical ideologies or might consider joining or assisting violent extremist groups for money.</p> | <p><b>Increased risk</b></p> |
| <p><b>Ability of governments to deploy security forces</b></p> <p>COVID-19 has not had an impact on national governments' willingness and ability to deploy security forces within their countries and to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. There is however a risk that as the effects of COVID-19 on the economy deepens, governments might not be able to sustain military spending.</p>  | <p><b>Limited impact</b></p> |
| <p><b>Regional and international support for counter-terrorism operations</b></p> <p>To date, COVID-19 has not affected regional and international support for counter-terrorism operations. Regional and international leaders have reaffirmed their support and provided additional funding to address the security issues in the region.</p>  | <p><b>Limited impact</b></p> |
| <p><b>International support to development needs and underlying causes of violent extremism</b></p> <p>Regional and international leaders have continued their support to peace and development efforts in the region, funding programs that address these issues and build resilience of communities in the G5 Sahel region.</p>  | <p><b>Limited impact</b></p> |

PEACE AND SECURITY CONTEXT  
PRIOR TO COVID-19

The G5 Sahel region is one of the most unstable and vulnerable regions in the world. All G5 Sahel nations are fragile according to the 2020 Fragile States Index. The region is characterized by violent events linked to militant extremist groups.

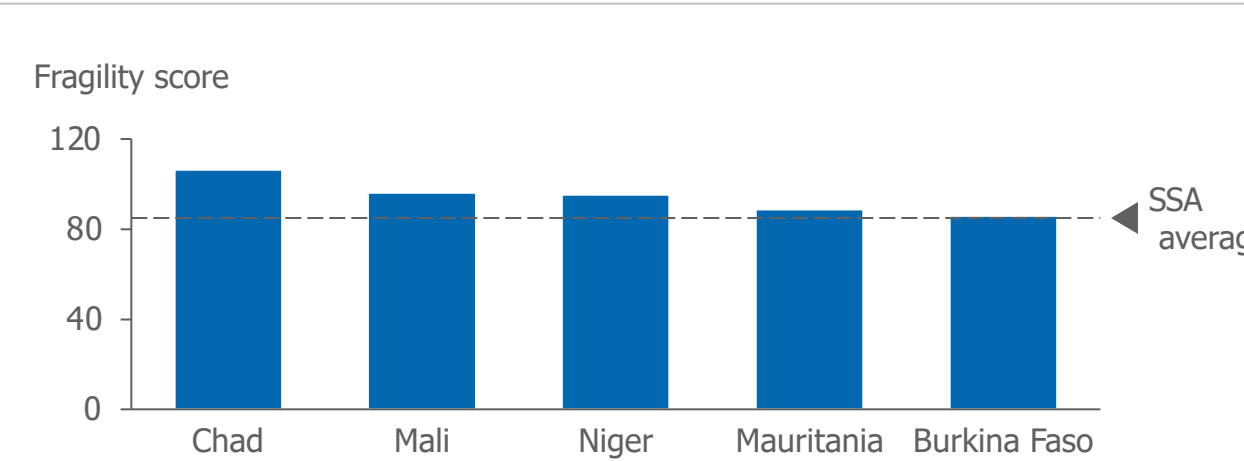
There are two distinct conflict areas (1) Mali/ Burkina Faso/ Niger and (2) the Lake Chad Basin.

The threat from extremist groups has spread from northern Mali to neighboring countries since 2012. After the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya in 2011, heavily armed Tuaregs and non-Tuaregs who had been part of Qaddafi’s army returned to Niger and northern Mali, where the latter led the 2012 rebellion against the government aimed at creating an independent state.

The rebellion rapidly developed into violent extremist insurgency with the proliferation and spread of violent extremist groups throughout the country and into neighboring countries.

**Extremist groups have exploited existing intercommunal conflicts and created recruitment narratives centered on marginalization.** Tensions between pastoralists and sedentary populations have historically always existed because of competition over land, water and forage. Extremist groups have exploited these tensions and targeted Fulani herders in the region, exploiting their resentment towards the government and communities that have marginalized them. The increase in extremist activities reinforces communities’ need for protection and endangers the social cohesion amongst communities.

Figure 12: Fragile States Index (rank out of 178 countries) <sup>41</sup>  
2020



Source: <sup>41</sup>Fragile States Index

**The main threat to peace and security in the Lake Chad Basin is the presence of Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP).** Boko Haram first developed in Nigeria in 2009. In 2014-2015, Boko Haram expanded their operations into Northern Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Prior to 2015, Boko Haram's presence on the Chadian side of the Lake Chad Basin was limited. Violence increased when Chad sent troops to Cameroon and Niger to support their efforts in combating violent extremism. Following that, two terrorist attacks were reported in N'Djamena in 2015.

**Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) have exploited**

**inter-communal conflicts over limited resources in the Lake Chad Basin Area and the shortcomings of the region's states in dealing with their peripheral areas.** Decades of depletion of the lake due to climate change and overuse of water resources and the shifts in population movements are contributing to the increase in competition over the resources of the lake. Populations in the Lake Chad Basin have been neglected by all four countries—for example, there is only one doctor for every 140,000 inhabitants.<sup>42</sup> The lack of public service delivery and the distant relationships between the populations of the Lake Chad Basin and their governments have helped extremist groups to recruit and grow.

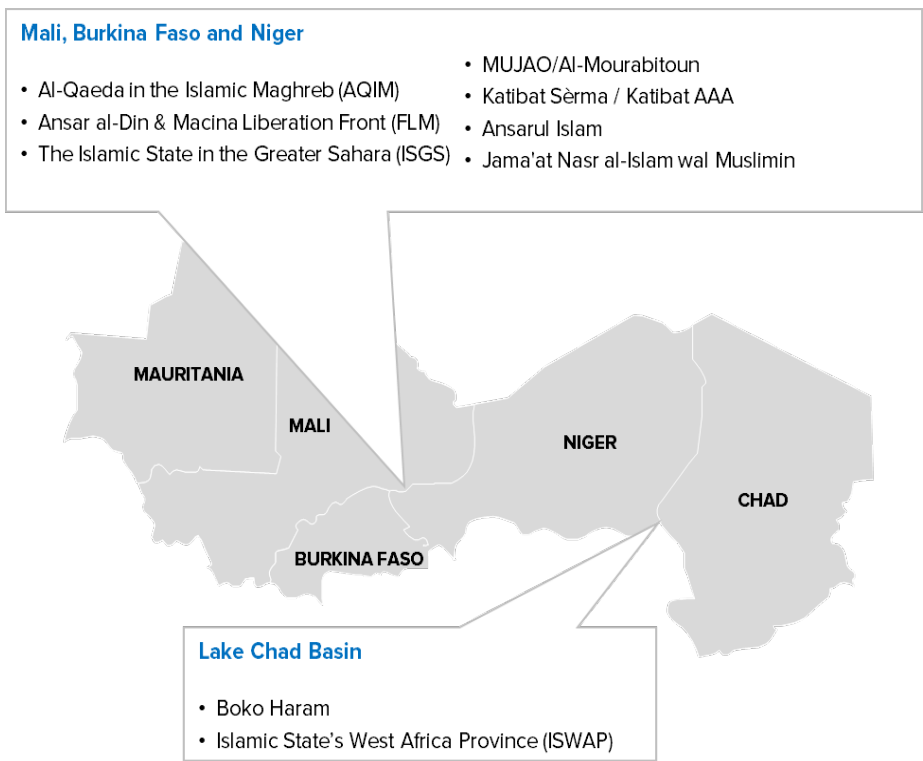
OVERVIEW OF EXTREMIST GROUPS OPERATING IN THE REGION

Over the past few years, many different extremist groups have been formed in the G5 Sahel region. Prior to 2012, only one militant Islamist group, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), operated in Mali. By 2018, more than ten different groups were active in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.<sup>43</sup> Three groups, the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) which is an affiliate of Ansar al-Din, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Ansarul Islam, are responsible for two-thirds of the extremist violence in the Mali/ Burkina Faso/ Niger region in recent years.<sup>44</sup>

In the Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram is responsible for most terrorist attacks, but ISWAP remains active in the region.

The violent activities in the G5 Sahel region are mainly driven by economic factors. Extremist groups continue using kidnapping for ransom to sustain their operations. In some cases, extremist groups have collaborated with criminal groups in kidnapping operations. They have also forged deals with traffickers to pay a “tax” for transporting their goods across the territories they control and have collaborated with criminal groups in kidnapping hostages. In agricultural areas, some communities pay “taxes” or fees in return for protection and security.

Figure 13: Active militant extremist groups in the G5 Sahel region<sup>45</sup>



Source: <sup>43</sup>, <sup>44</sup>Africa Center for Strategic Studies; <sup>45</sup>European Council on Foreign Relations

## **NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY RESPONSES**

### **The governments of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have increased their military spending to combat violent extremism.**

The budgets dedicated to the armed forces in these three countries has doubled since 2013—from 5.4% of government spending, on average, to 10.6%.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Heads of State of the region established the G5 Sahel in 2014 and the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2017 to address the development and security challenges in the region.**

The G5 Sahel, an intergovernmental cooperation framework, aims to coordinate efforts of the five Sahel countries to respond to the development and security challenges of the region. The G5 Sahel Joint Force was launched in 2017 to counter terrorism and to fight cross-border organized crimes (including arms and drug smuggling and human trafficking). The Joint Force has been endorsed by the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) and has conducted several operations focusing on the Liptako-Gourma region.

### **Chad fights Boko Haram domestically and around the Lake Chad Basin region, and also contributes to forces in the Liptako-Gourma region (the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger).**

Chad has contributed 3,000 troops to the Multi-National Joint Task Force against Boko Haram (MNJTF)<sup>47</sup>, 1,500 to the United Nations Multi-Dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)<sup>48</sup> and 1,000 to the G5 Sahel Joint Force.<sup>49</sup>

### **MINUSMA complements the efforts of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.**

MINUSMA supports the Malian government in restoring the State authority and stabilizing the country. There are ongoing efforts by the AU in collaboration with relevant RECs/RMs to deploy 3,000 troops to the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

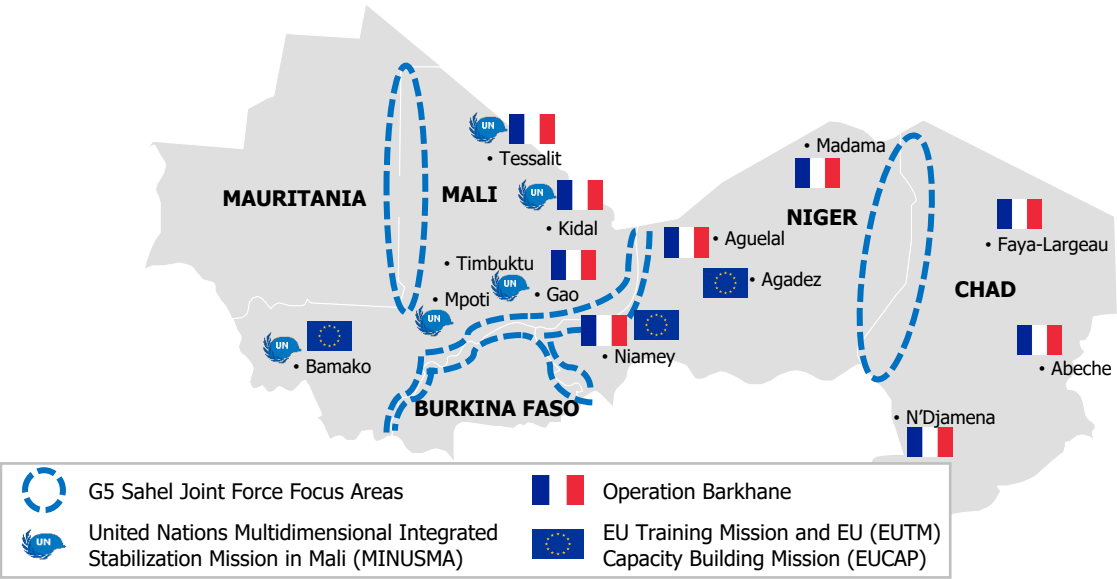
### **The European Union has developed an integrated approach to address the complex security and development challenges that the Sahel region faces.**

The EU has two Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in Mali and one in Niger, which have largely focused on providing training and advice to the armed and security forces in both countries. In 2012, the EU launched the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) in Niger to strengthen the capacity of Nigerien security institutions to counter terrorism and organized crime. In 2015, The EU established EUCAP Sahel Mali to support the Malian security forces in stabilizing the country.

### **The French-led Operation Barkhane engages in combatting patrols alongside the G5 Sahel Joint Force, gathering intelligence and capacity building of national forces.**

Operation Barkhane is France's largest overseas operation, with a budget of nearly EUR 600 million per year.<sup>50</sup> In March 2020, in addition to Operation Barkhane, France launched a new taskforce (Takuba) with its European allies to fight jihadist groups in the Liptako-Gourma region alongside the Malian and Nigerien armies.

Figure 14: Major actors in the security response in the G5 Sahel region



|                                       | United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) <sup>51</sup>   | G5 Sahel Joint Force <sup>52</sup>  |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Location                              | Mali<br>Mission HQ: Bamako   | Operate in all countries with military efforts concentrated in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region<br>HQ: Mali   |
| Mandate                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Support implementation of the Agreement on Peace &amp; Reconciliation in Mali, stabilization, and restoration of state authority in central Mali</li><li>•Protect civilians</li><li>•Promote and protect human rights</li><li>•Help create a secure environment for humanitarian assistance</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Fight terrorism, organized crime and human trafficking</li><li>•Restore state authority</li><li>•Help displaced persons to return home</li></ul> |
| Year est.                             | 2013   | 2017  |
| Personnel deployed                    | Over 15,000 soldiers and police officers   | 5,000   |
| Annual budget (USD)                   | 1.14 billion (2019-2020)   | 130 million   |
| Major developments since January 2020 | On 29 June, the Security Council extended MINUSMA's mandate for another year until 30 June 2021. In June, two MINUSMA convoys were attacked in Northern and Eastern Mali   | In January 2020, the "International Coalition for the Sahel" whose aim is to ensure coherent and holistic action at the regional level, was announced                                   |

Source: <sup>51</sup>MINUSMA; <sup>52</sup>The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

|  | <b>Operation Barkhane<sup>53</sup></b>   | <b>EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM)<sup>54</sup></b>   | <b>EU Capacity Building Mission in the Sahel (EUCAP) – Niger<sup>55</sup></b>  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Location</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.</li> <li>• HQ: N'Djamena, Chad</li> </ul>   | Present in Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania.   | Based in Niger's capital, Niamey   |
| <b>Mandate</b>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• French-led operation that:</li> <li>• Combats and patrols alongside Malian forces</li> <li>• Gathers intelligence</li> <li>• Supports local development activities</li> </ul>   | Focus on four pillars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Military education</li> <li>• Support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force</li> </ul>   | Strengthen the capacity of the Nigerien internal security forces to fight against terrorism, organized crime and irregular migration, through advice, training and delivery of equipment |
| <b>Year est.</b>                             | 2014   | 2013   | 2012   |
| <b>Personnel deployed</b>                    | 5,100 soldiers   | 745  | 200  |
| <b>Annual budget (USD)</b>                   | Over 670 million   | Mission 2018-2020: Over 67 million   | 36 million   |
| <b>Major developments since January 2020</b> | <p>France announced in early February that it was deploying 600 additional troops to reinforce Operation Barkhane.</p> <p>In April, the UK and the US confirmed their intention to maintain their support to the Operation.</p> <p>On 5 June 2020, French forces killed the leader of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Algerian Abdelmalek Droukdal, in Mali.</p> | <p>On March 2020, the European Council extended the mandate of EUTM until 18 May 2024. The Council also provided an increased indicative budget to the mission of EUR 133.7 million for a four-year period.</p> <p>Germany extended the deployment of its troops to the mission until 2021</p> | No major developments.   |

Source: <sup>53</sup>French Ministry of Defence; <sup>54</sup>EUTM Mali; <sup>55</sup>European Union

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SECURITY SITUATION

According to ACLED, 800 incidents involving militant Islamist groups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger were reported in 2019, which is near doubling every year since 2015.<sup>56</sup> Most of the attacks were in Mali and Burkina Faso. Fatalities from these attacks were estimated at around 2,600 in 2019, almost double the fatalities in 2018.<sup>57</sup>

In 2020, most of the violent incidents were reported within Mali and Burkina Faso and along the border areas between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Extremist groups continued their attacks amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

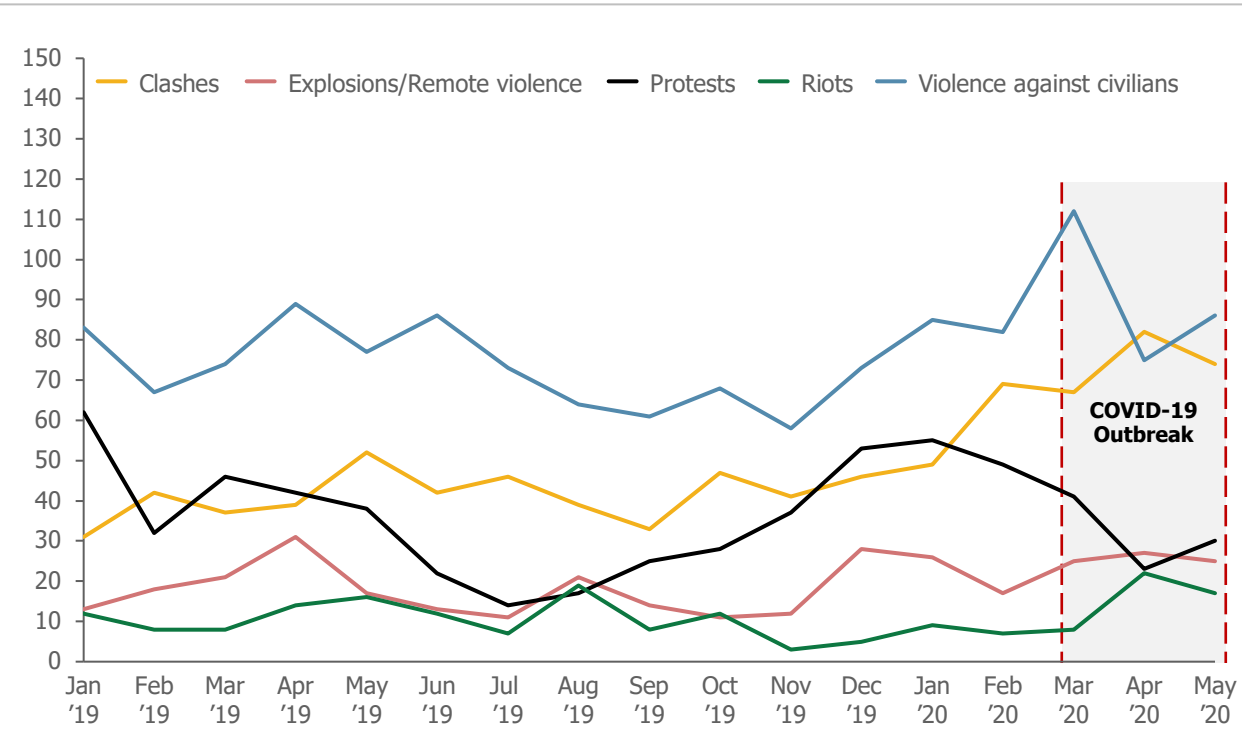
In the Lake Chad Basin, 765 violent events

were recorded in 2019—a 35% increase from the previous year.<sup>58</sup> Boko Haram is responsible for the majority of reported violent events in the region. Fatalities from these attacks were estimated at around 3,225 in 2019, which is around 4% increase from 2018.<sup>59</sup>

On 23 March 2020, Boko Haram launched a deadly attack in Boma, a town in the Lake Chad Basin, which led to a battle exchange with Chadian military forces. The military response by the Chadian military, “Operation Wrath of Boma”, was coordinated on the ground by President Idris Déby.

New commitments and actions have been made by G5 Sahel countries and the international community to support and intensify counter-terrorism efforts in 2020.

Figure 15: Conflicts, protests and violent events<sup>60</sup>



Source: <sup>56, 57, 58, 59</sup>Africa Center for Strategic Studies; <sup>60</sup>ACLED



A joint AU-ECOWAS-G5 Sahel meeting on the deployment of 3,000 African troops in the Sahel was held on 16 March in Niamey, Niger. The AU will deploy an additional 3,000 troops to reinforce G5 Sahel countries' actions. In this context and amid COVID-19, the AUC and China signed an agreement to support counter-terrorism efforts of the G5 Sahel countries with military equipment.

Earlier in June 2020, the French forces reported that they killed the leader of al-Qaeda in North Africa, Abdelmalek Droukdel, in an operation in Mali. On 30 June 2020, the G5 Sahel Heads of State, the French President Emmanuel Macron and the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, met in Nouakchott, Mauritania, to assess the peace and security situation in the Sahel and renew their commitments to combatting violent extremism in the region.

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 TO DATE AND ANTICIPATED IMPACT

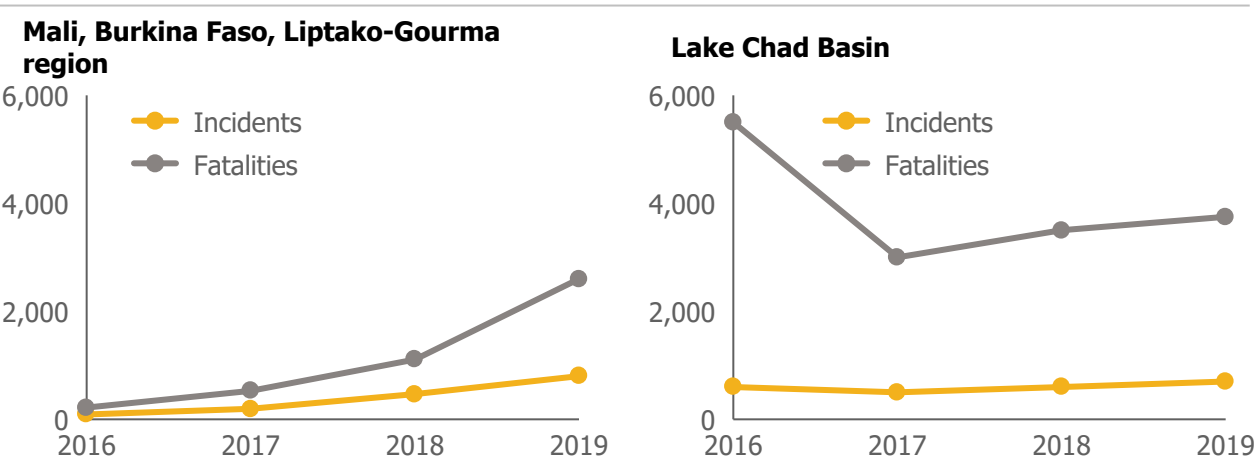
The security situation in Mali/ Burkina Faso/ Niger and the Lake Chad Basin has continued to deteriorate amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite stern calls for a global ceasefire by the UN and AU, extremist

Groups have continued violent attacks while governments sought to contain the spread of COVID-19, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad. Stigmatization of particular groups is common in the region, which COVID-19 can only worsen, especially in cross-border areas due to IDP movements and competition between farmer and herder communities. Local mediation and reconciliation efforts are likely to be negatively impacted by these dynamics.

There were no major changes to the peace and security situation in Mauritania. Since COVID-19 began, there have been no extremist or major violent incidents reported in the country.

Looking to the future, there are four different ways in which COVID-19 might affect the future evolution of the security situation in the Sahel region: (1) Environment for radicalization and recruitment by violent extremists, (2) Scale and effectiveness of G5 national security forces, (3) Extent of regional and international support for counter-terrorism operations, and (4) Extent of international financing and support for development and humanitarian responses to tackle underlying causes of violent extremism.

Figure 16: Violent extremist activity<sup>61</sup>



Source: <sup>61</sup>Africa Center for Strategic Studies

**The socio-economic effects of COVID-19 might create fertile ground for recruitment by violent extremists.** Economic crisis and loss of livelihoods might lead to tensions from competition over limited resources, and might make individuals more receptive to radical ideologies or force some people into joining or assisting violent extremist groups.

**Extremist groups have integrated COVID-19 in their narratives and propaganda to gain more support.** COVID-19 related movement restrictions and social distance measures, such as the closure of places of worship, have been seized by radical ideologues to serve as a narrative around governments’ anti-Islam sentiments.

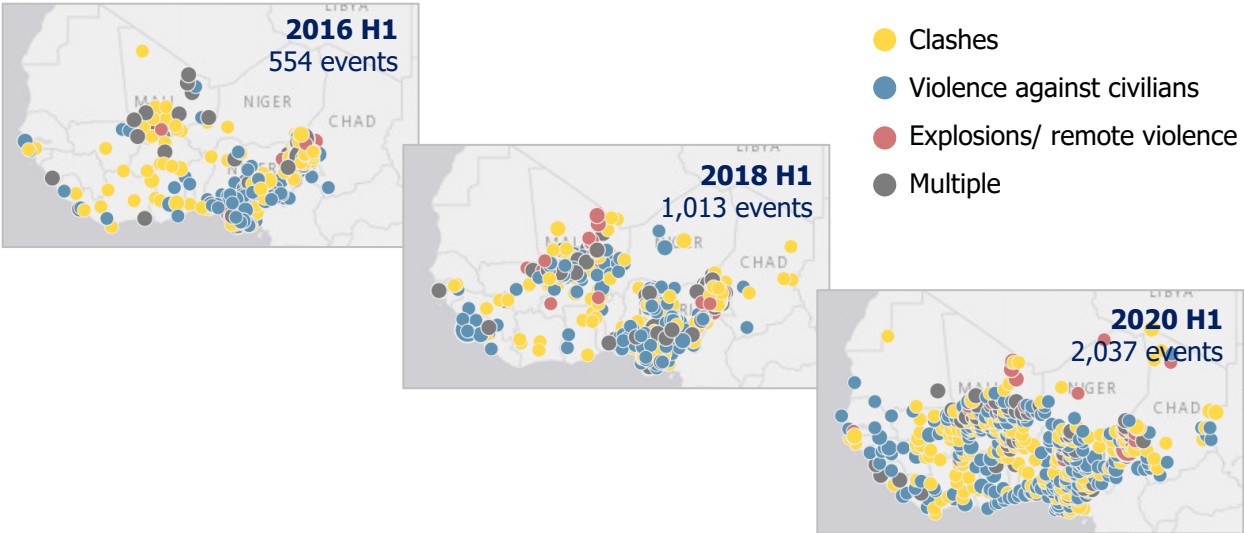
**COVID-19 could provide extremist groups with an opportunity to act as an alternative service provider, reducing the state’s legitimacy.** As the resources of the Sahelian governments are stretched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, their ability to provide services is likely to be strained, creating vacuums for extremist groups to emerge as service providers.

In some communities in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, extremist groups are collecting “taxes” and fees from communities in exchange of provision of security and services.

**COVID-19 has not affected governments’ ability to deploy security forces as the Heads of State from the five Sahel countries.** In the G5 Sahel Summit that was held in 30 June 2020 in Nouakchott, Mauritania, G5 Sahel nations and international partners have renewed their commitment to combatting violent extremism.

**Regional and international partners have continued their support for counter-terrorism operations amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.** During the June G5 Sahel Summit, regional and international leaders agreed to intensify a military campaign against Islamist militants in the region. The AU, in collaboration with relevant RECs/RMs and Stakeholders continues to mobilize support for the deployment of 3,000 troops to enhance the efforts of the G5 Sahel Force, including through the use of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) frameworks and other cooperation mechanisms to consolidate

Figure 17: Geographic spread of violent events<sup>63</sup>



Source: <sup>62</sup>European Council; <sup>63</sup>ACLED

coordination in the fight against terrorist and criminal groups in the region. In March, the European Council extended the mandate of the EUTM Mali until 18 May 2024 and provided an increased budget to the mission of EUR 133.7 million for a four-year period.<sup>62</sup> Germany has extended its troop deployment to Mali until 2021. On 29 June, the Security Council extended MINUSMA's mandate until 30 June 2021. Due to COVID-19, the troops were deployed under quarantine measures, which did not allow for immediate actions, and therefore led to delayed responses. Some troop rotations were delayed or cancelled as military and police forces were quarantined. Some forces tasked with counter-terrorism operations were redeployed to enforce government measures such as curfews.

**Regional and international initiatives to address the development challenges in the Sahel have continued during the COVID-19 outbreak.** In response to COVID-19, the Sahel Alliance, has provided EUR 800 million to help build health capacity and assist G5 Sahel governments in limiting the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on populations.<sup>64</sup> In May, the European Union launched the Coalition for the Sahel, which aims to extend the coalition to other international partners beyond European donors. The European Union announced additional support of EUR 194 million, including EUR 82 million for resilience and development programmes.<sup>65</sup>

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Since January 2020, the number of IDPs in the G5 Sahel region has increased by 15% and COVID-19 is projected to increase the need for humanitarian assistance across the region. As of 10 November 2020, the G5 Sahel region had 1,930,482 IDPs (which increased six-fold in the last four years) and 857,865 refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>66</sup> During the pandemic, camp overcrowding and difficult access to water increases the risk of contracting COVID-19 for IDPs and refugees. In Burkina Faso, from January 2019 to April 2020, the number of people displaced from their communities by the conflict increased from 87,000 to over 830,000.<sup>67</sup>

COVID-19 is a risk multiplier that is further delaying the response of the G5 Sahel nations to address immediate humanitarian needs. While local and international organizations have continued to provide crucial assistance to refugees and IDPs during this time, measures taken across all G5 Sahel countries to curb the spread of COVID-19 further limited humanitarian access. Border closures and movement restrictions will also likely translate into less humanitarian staff rotation and fewer deployments to most conflict settings. Furthermore, with several G5 countries preparing for elections, the issue around voter registration for IDP populations remains.

Figure 18: Evolution of refugee and IDP populations in the Sahel (2016-2020)<sup>68</sup>

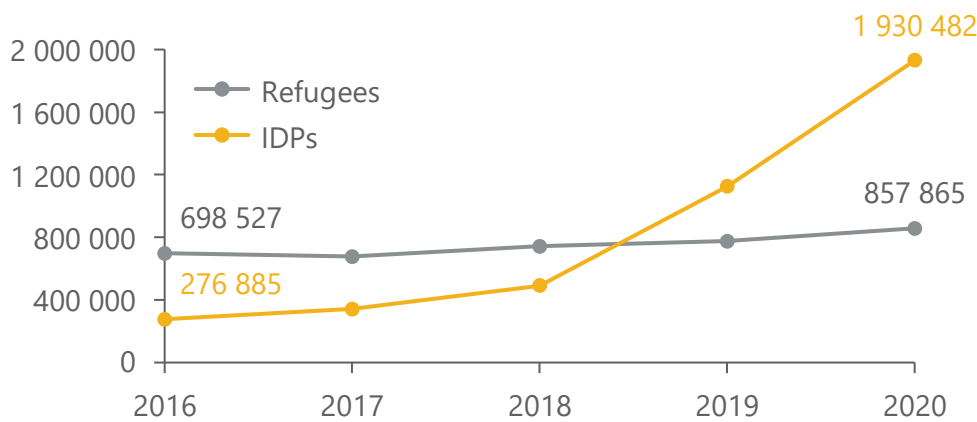
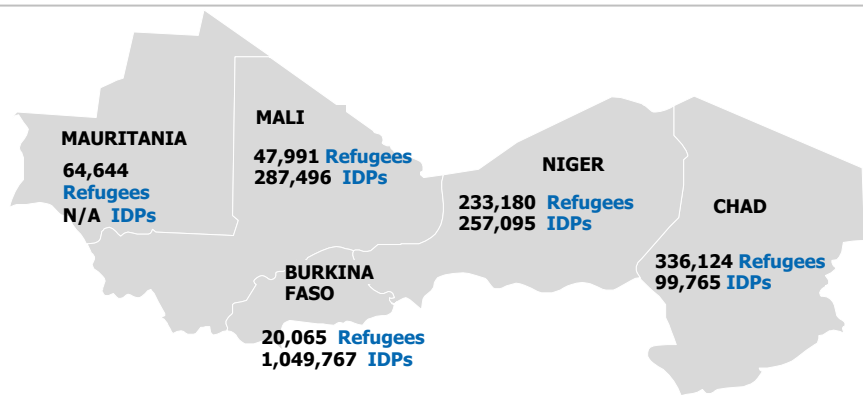


Figure 19: Refugee and IDP populations in the G5 Sahel as of 10 November 2020<sup>69</sup>



Source: <sup>66, 68, 69</sup>UNHCR; <sup>67</sup>Human Rights Watch

INTERCOMMUNAL VIOLENCE

**COVID-19 could worsen existing stresses and lead to increased intercommunal tensions.** The loss of livelihoods and economic slowdown will increase economic grievances. The uncertainty created by climate change and the presence of armed groups is reducing the number of routes herders can use to move livestock. Herders have to move livestock much earlier in the year and for extended periods of time in order to find land for grazing. Farmers are struggling to harvest enough cereals and vegetables. Competition for scant resources, poor economic prospects and ever-increasing demographic pressures are creating tensions between farmers and herders, which sometimes deteriorate into communal violence. In Liptako Gourma, the escalating violence is preventing entire communities of herders and farmers from accessing land or and pasture, threatening their main incomes.

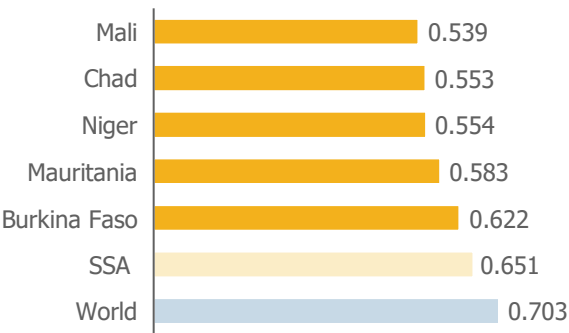
WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY

**All G5 Sahel countries score below the Sub-Saharan Africa average on the Women, Peace and Security Index.** Burkina Faso is ranked the highest in the G5 Sahel (136<sup>th</sup> out of 167 countries). Chad and Mali are the lowest scorers, ranking 156 and 159 out of 167 countries, respectively.<sup>70</sup>

**The COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate the rate of domestic and gender-based violence (GBV) in the G5 Sahel.** Movement restriction measures related to COVID-19 could increase rates of gender-based violence. Women might not be able to access protection and psychological support due to the pandemic.

**Female genital mutilation (FGM) is prevalent in the Sahel region and UNFPA has warned about an increase in female genital mutilation due to the COVID-19**

Figure 20: Women, Peace and Security Index<sup>71</sup> 2019



**pandemic.** The FGM practice is widespread in the Sahel but the prevalence rate among women and girls aged 15-49 years varies from one country to another – ranging from 2% in Niger to 91% in Mali.<sup>72</sup> As cases of COVID-19 increase, health care providers may be reassigned to COVID-19 patients, which could result in gaps in appropriate prevention, protection and care service provision related to female genital mutilation in highly affected communities. COVID-19 might also increase the number of FGM cases as with girls not attending school due to closures, an increase in child marriage is expected, which in return is expected to increase FGM.<sup>73</sup>

**Women and girls in the Lake Chad Basin are also likely to be affected by any further increases in violent extremism.** At least 7,000 girls and women have suffered from sexual violence perpetrated by Boko Haram since 2009. Women have suffered rape and sexual abuse at the hands of male members.

**The G5 Sahel Women Platform was established in 2018 to increase women engagement in peace and security in the Sahel region.** The platform is chaired by the Ministers of the promotion of women and gender equality from each of the G5 Sahel member states.

Source: <sup>70</sup>, <sup>71</sup>Women, Peace and Security Index; <sup>72</sup>, <sup>73</sup>UNFPA

# Initiatives taken by African regional institutions

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**Regional and international organizations are supporting the security response of the G5 Sahel; this section focuses on the efforts to support the health and economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the region.** As described previously, the G5 Sahel created a Joint Task Force to respond to the security challenge from extremist groups, and they have been supported by the AU and ECOWAS, which agreed on 16 March to deploy 3,000 troops to the region.

**The African Union, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms have taken initiatives to support health systems in the Sahel nations in their response to COVID-19, and the AU created a Response Fund to help protect lives and livelihoods.** The AU activated an Emergency Operations Centre and Incident Management System in late January as part of its Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC) initiative. Additionally, on 26 March, the AU established the African Union COVID-19 Response Fund to mitigate the pandemic's humanitarian and socio-economic impact. At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) procured and distributed PPE and test kits to G5 Sahel nations, including Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. CEMAC facilitated loans up to \$13.5 million from the African Development Bank for provision of PPE, testing kits, as well as healthcare and laboratory facilities in Chad and DRC.

**Several European and international donors have channeled support through the Alliance Sahel,** pledging EUR 800 million to build health capacity and assist G5 Sahel governments in limiting the economic impact of the pandemic.<sup>74</sup>

**The World Bank and IMF are also acting to support G5 Sahel economies.** The IMF Executive Board approved funding under the Rapid Credit Facility of USD 115.3 million to Burkina Faso, USD 115.1 million to Chad, USD 200 million to Mali, USD 130 million to Mauritania, and USD 114.5 million to Niger, to help them meet fiscal and balance-of-payments needs.<sup>68</sup> Sahelian countries were also among the first recipients of World Bank support through its COVID-19 Fast Track Facility. In April, the World Bank approved USD 21.2 million for Burkina Faso, USD 19.3 million for Chad, USD 29.4 million for Mali, USD 6.2 million for Mauritania and USD 14 million for Niger.<sup>75</sup>






**The African Development Bank approved USD 20 million to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the G-5 Sahel countries.** The West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) took a number of measures to lower the impact of the pandemic on the banking and financial systems, such as extensions for microfinance institutions.

**Although COVID-19 has affected ongoing regional initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the current crisis could present an opportunity to advance key initiatives.** COVID caused the launch of the AfCFTA to get postponed from 1 July 2020 to 1 Jan 2021, but regional institutions are working on continuing such initiatives, as they can contribute to countries' ability to recover faster from the crisis and for fragile states to move towards greater peace and stability. Progress made towards realizing the AfCFTA and maximizing its impact during

This period can prove to be an opportunity to increase local production and manufacturing, and to deploy digital solutions. Coordinated responses to the pandemic could strengthen regional and sub-regional solidarity, effecting new coordination mechanisms.





**The need to focus on addressing the downstream effects of the pandemic is steadily growing,** especially on political transitions, election preparations, livelihoods, and welfare of IDPs and refugees.

**Figure 21: Initiatives by regional and international organizations to support G5 Sahel countries' response to COVID-19<sup>77</sup>**

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Strengthening the healthcare system</b> |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribution of the Jack Ma Foundation donation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), test kits and medical equipment to all Member States</li> </ul>  |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USD 22.4 million granted to Mali, Niger and Gambia to purchase medical equipment, train staff and strengthen their health systems</li> </ul>   |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption by CEMAC health ministers of a plan to manage the availability of medicines and surveillance systems at points of entry</li> <li>Approved loan package of \$13.5 million from the African Development Bank (AfDB) that will target the provision of PPE, testing kits, as well as healthcare and laboratory facilities in Chad and DRC</li> </ul> |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accelerated procurement process for medical equipment</li> <li>Creation of a fund to procure test kits and other critical equipment to Member States</li> <li>Distribution of 30,500 diagnostic test kits; 10,000 PPE; and 740,000 prescription tablets (Chloroquine and Azithromycin) to its Member States of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger</li> </ul>     |
| <b>Containing the spread</b>               |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board of AfDB approved USD 20 million to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the G5 Sahel countries</li> </ul>   |

Source: <sup>77</sup>AU, BCEAO, AfDB and CEMAC official websites

**Figure 21 (continued) : Initiatives by regional and international organizations to support G5 Sahel countries' response to COVID-19**

|                               |  |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Containing the spread</b>  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaboration of Africa Joint Continental Strategy on COVID-19, aimed at coordinating response efforts of AU members, international organizations and WHO in response to COVID-19</li> <li>• Creation of the AU COVID-19 Response Fund to raise resources to strengthen the continental response to COVID-19</li> </ul> |
| <b>Protecting livelihoods</b> |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WAEMU took a number of measures to lower the impact of the pandemic on the banking and financial system within the Union, such as extensions for microfinance institutions</li> </ul>   |
|                               |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to Member States in coordinating their actions to combat COVID-19 by drawing up a plan to combat its spread and developing an economic recovery plan to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the region</li> </ul>  |
|                               |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sahel Alliance pledged EUR 800 million to help build health capacity and assist G5 Sahel governments in limiting the impact of the pandemic on their economies, as well as to provide social safety nets</li> </ul>   |



# Recommended areas for regional action

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**COVID-19 could compound an already difficult security situation in the Sahel region.** Insecurity has been escalating and spreading across porous borders throughout the G5 Sahel region, which faces food insecurity, extreme poverty, and other humanitarian and development challenges. The threats to livelihoods and existing intercommunal conflicts, which are due to competition over scarce resources, have created an environment where violent extremist groups thrive.

**Stabilizing the G5 Sahel region would require a multi-faceted approach that combines military response with development interventions and includes local communities, religious and traditional leaders.** COVID-19 reinforces the need to address the root causes of the increasing violence in the G5 Sahel region and further highlights the need for multilateral support and international cooperation to protect the gains achieved so far through security mechanisms.

## Enhancing security and addressing violent extremism

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**Maintaining security presence in marginalized areas, particularly the Liptako–Gourma region, and integrating local communities in security planning.** The G5 Sahel Joint Force capacity should be reinforced to ensure the maintenance of strong presence and increased mobility across borders to fight the extremist groups in the region. Local communities should also be engaged in security planning as they can provide information about the movement of extremist groups across borders.

**Breaking the links between extremist groups and criminal enterprises in the Sahel and their sources of funding.** International organizations could help enhance training on investigation techniques to dismantle terrorists and their sources of funding and strengthen the responses of G5 Sahel nations against illicit trade in arms and weapons, including cross—border collaboration to fight criminal groups.

**Encouraging and supporting countries to conduct the AU's Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA),** as increased information on structural gaps will allow for more effective and timely response during emergencies.

## Resolving intercommunal tensions and strengthening local voices for peace

**Protecting and strengthening the role of traditional and religious leaders to rebuild the social cohesion in communities.** The Sahelian governments should protect traditional leaders from jihadist attacks and support traditional and religious leaders who can gain the trust of communities and help in conflict prevention and resolution.

**Supporting national governments in taking a strong stance against the stigmatization and targeting of certain ethnic groups,** not only in terms of judicial consequences, but also in terms of the political discourse, which is often ambivalent.

**Promoting and sustaining dialogue at the local level and engaging women and youth in peace and security processes.** Governments with the support of regional organizations should designate mediators from civil society, religious and traditional groups to promote and deepen dialogues. The mediators can facilitate constructive discussions based on community grievances and the misrepresentations advanced by extremist groups propaganda. This would help to rebuild social cohesion and combat violent extremism.

## Supporting vulnerable populations

**Tackling food insecurity and protecting vulnerable populations from hunger.** International organizations should support G5 Sahel nations in implementing their national plans for food security and nutrition, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Addressing the issues of youth unemployment in the region to reduce the vulnerabilities of youth to exploitation and radicalization to join violent extremist groups.** More programs that aim to create jobs and provide economic opportunities for people in remote and borderland areas are needed.

**Protecting and addressing the needs of refugees and IDPs in the region.** Continue supporting organizations that are providing lifesaving protection and assistance to refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities in the G5 Sahel region, including implementing COVID-19 prevention and response measures in displacement areas.

## Strengthening state presence and services

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**Supporting government effectiveness in public service delivery, particularly in remote areas and borderlands.** Efforts in providing services to remote areas and borderlands where intercommunal and violent extremist activities prevail need to be sustained. Supporting local governments in responding to community needs can help them to stay relevant amid changing power dynamics and weaken violent extremists in these areas.

**Tackling corruption by building resilient institutions and processes.** Improve processes and increase transparency (e.g., improve government payment systems, and create web-based platforms to provide transparency of government finances), introduce stronger anti-corruption reforms and hold those who transgress accountable.

**Promoting and protecting human rights and transitional justice.** Particular attention should be paid to unemployed youth, civil participation in governance at all levels and the reform of social structures that promote violent extremism. Transitional justice that can promote dialogue and national cohesion and justice among the warring parties, including the radical and violent extremists should be prioritized.

**Supporting electoral processes in Burkina Faso and Niger and promoting dialogue and inclusive reforms in countries affected by post-electoral unrest.** In the upcoming months, efforts should focus on dialogue between the government and opposition parties around electoral processes and political reforms.

**Restoring citizens' trust in justice and the government.** International organizations should support G5 Sahel nations in responding to crimes committed during intercommunal conflicts and ensuring that those responsible for these crimes are appropriately punished under the rule of law. Additionally, addressing allegations of human rights violations by government forces would help restore accountability and the populations' trust, which would in turn facilitate their collaboration with security forces in preventing violent extremism.

**Improving the integration of public health into the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement.** Ensure that the AfCFTA takes on lessons learnt from the pandemic, both on how to mitigate cross-border spread of future contagious diseases and on the importance of sustaining the continuity of supply chains across the continent.

**Ensuring the design and implementation of more robust decentralization plans that are inclusive of different actors and responding to the needs of the local communities.** A more robust decentralized model of governance can enable the roll-out of public services and the improvement of the social contract between the state and the citizens.

