



RPCA Policy Brief

The Sahel and West Africa are facing a major food and nutrition crisis for the second consecutive year and 27.1 million people could be at risk during the 2021 lean season.

A swift and co-ordinated response is needed alongside strengthened political commitment to finding more sustainable ways of addressing recurrent crises and the growing need for food assistance across the region.

KEY MESSAGES

MESSAGE 1: Threats to food and nutrition security persist.

- ▶ The 2020-21 agro-pastoral campaign was good overall. Total cereal production reached 74.3 million tonnes, up by 0.6% compared to the previous campaign and up by 9% compared to the five-year average. However, cereal production is down by 8% in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea compared to the previous campaign. Tuber production, estimated at 194.9 million tonnes, increased by 11.6% compared to the five-year average. For pastoralists, there is enough pasture and water, but access to these resources continues to be severely limited in many conflict-affected areas. Public health measures related to COVID-19 continue to disrupt, and even block, cross-border migratory movements, affecting the livelihoods of livestock farmers and others in the pastoral economy. Nearly 57 000 livestock farmers with some 1.5 million cattle were blocked in January 2021. The persistence of aggravating factors is a source of great concern.
- ▶ **The security crisis persists in the Liptako-Gourma region, the Lake Chad Basin and northern Nigeria**, which is leading to large flows of internally displaced persons (IDPs) ; Burkina Faso and Nigeria host 1.1 and 2 million IDPs respectively. This is one of the main aggravating factors, leading to a dramatic increase in the need for food and humanitarian assistance. The situation exacerbates child malnutrition compromising their future. Between the end of 2017 and June 2019, the number of schools closed in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) increased from 512 to 3 005, depriving thousands of children of education, but also of school canteens which play an essential role for their nutrition.
- ▶ **The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to have a significant impact on local communities and economies.** They weaken the livelihoods and purchasing power of vulnerable populations, particularly those in the informal economy. The management of the security and health crises weighs heavily on government budgets, limiting the capacity of public authorities to respond to the food emergency and, above all, to address the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. The loss of jobs and household income, notably in the informal sector, creates a very high risk for millions of young people and women who could fall into poverty and insecurity.
- ▶ **Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are hit hard by inflation.** Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone recorded food price increases of over 40% compared to the five-year average due to the combined effects of inflation and the security and health crises. This socio-economic context has persisted for at least three years and is undermining vulnerable households' ability to access food.

MESSAGE 2: The region is experiencing a worrying spread of acute food and nutrition insecurity hotspots towards the Gulf of Guinea.

- ▶ **For the second consecutive year, the region is facing an unprecedented food and nutrition crisis.** 19.6 million people, including 9.2 million in Nigeria, currently require urgent food and nutrition assistance. By June-August 2021, the number of acutely-food insecure people may reach 27.1 million people, including 12.8 million in Nigeria, if appropriate measures are not taken.

The Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) and the CILSS Executive Secretariat produced this policy brief. It draws on the conclusions of the annual and restricted meetings of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA), held respectively on 3 December 2020 and 8-9 April 2021 via videoconference.



ABOUT

Created in 1984 and under the political leadership of ECOWAS and UEMOA, the RPCA's objective is to build a consensual view of the food and nutrition situation and promote dialogue and co-ordination to facilitate decision-making and the effectiveness of interventions. It is co-facilitated by CILSS and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD).

An additional 51 million people are currently “under pressure” (phase 2) and could fall into a crisis situation. This number may reach 67 million during the lean season. In 2020, more than 1.5 million malnourished children aged 6-59 months were admitted to recovery health centres. The overall nutritional situation could deteriorate further in 2021 as the security crisis persists, causing health centres and schools to close and depriving children of school meals.

- ▶ **Food insecurity hotspots are expanding to the Gulf of Guinea in an alarming manner.** In addition to recurrent hotspots in the Liptako-Gourma region, the Lake Chad Basin and northern Nigeria, the Gulf of Guinea has become a new hotspot over the past two years. This food emergency, caused by inflation, concerns Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, which could affect approximately 0.68, 0.94 and 1.8 million people respectively during the 2021 lean season. Sierra Leone has recorded more than 1 million people in a food crisis situation for the second consecutive year.

MESSAGE 3: The recurrent food and nutrition crises in the region point to structural problems that need to be addressed.

- ▶ **The roots of chronic malnutrition persist in the region.** West Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, is the only region in the world where the number of stunted children aged under five has increased between 2000-19. One in three stunted children in sub-Saharan Africa lives in West Africa. This chronic malnutrition is the result of multiple, overlapping problems with many cross-cutting effects: endemic poverty, low purchasing power, insufficient and limited access to basic social services (health, education, water-sanitation-hygiene, family planning, etc.) that are necessary for adequate food and nutrition. To date, 70% of West Africans do not have access to basic sanitation services; one-third does not have access to safe drinking water. This situation questions the capacity of public authorities to respond adequately to an ever-increasing social demand in the context of strong demographic growth. It also raises the question of their commitment to long-term investments for building resilient, local food systems.
- ▶ Absorbed by the permanent management of food emergencies, many countries are struggling to address the root causes of food and nutrition crises. Between 2019 and 2021, the number of people in need of food assistance during the lean season (June-August) increased from 11.1 million people to 27.1, an additional 16 million people. This explosion in food assistance requirements is occurring in a context of severe budgetary tensions caused by overlapping crises (food, security, health, etc.). The permanent recourse to emergency food assistance compromises the investment capacity of governments to tackle the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR ECOWAS, UEMOA AND CILSS

1. Increase political and financial mobilisation as soon as possible in order to respond rapidly to the food and nutrition emergency in a co-ordinated manner

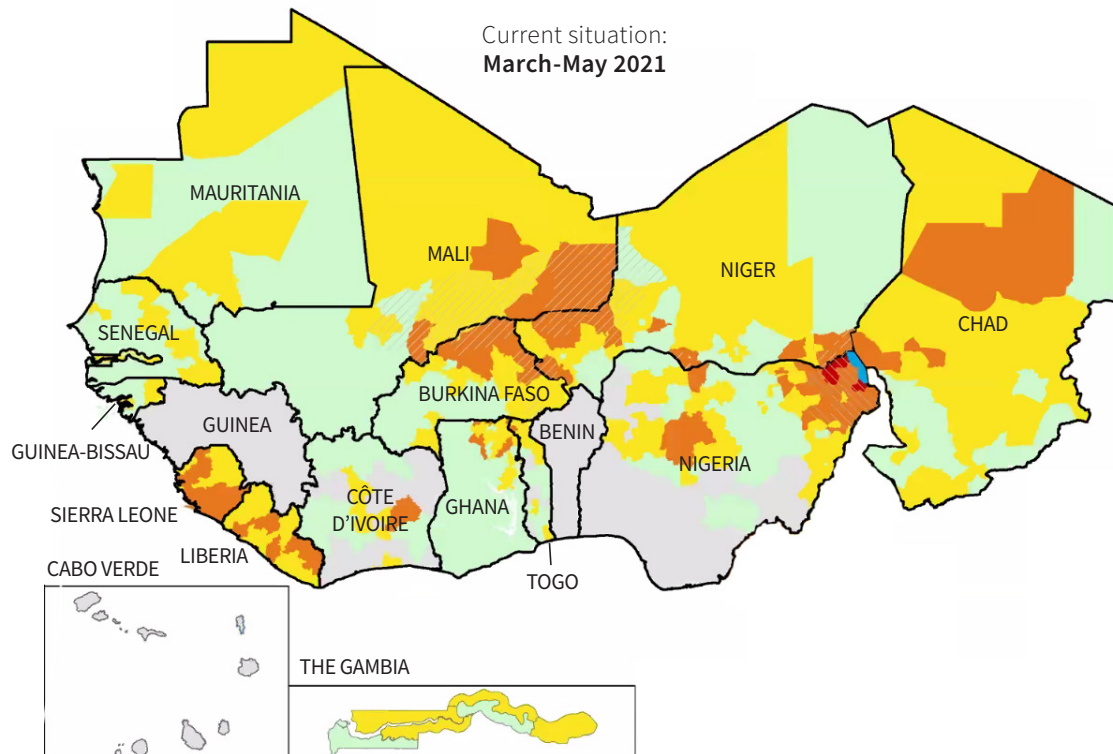
- ▶ Trigger regional solidarity mechanisms (regional food security reserve and other financial instruments) to support affected countries in the implementation of their national response plans;
- ▶ Support the countries hardest hit by inflation in defining and implementing multi-year plans to mitigate and strengthen the resilience of vulnerable households to its effects on food and nutrition;
- ▶ Support states in implementing targeted livelihoods programmes for vulnerable people, currently under pressure; their number could reach 67 million by the 2021 lean season.

2. Build political momentum for a paradigm shift in the face of recurring food and nutrition crises

- ▶ Seize opportunities during the preparatory work for the UN World Summit on Food Systems to engage in policy dialogue with governments on reprioritising investments in sustainable and resilient local food systems, and in strengthening the livelihoods and resilience of the most vulnerable;
- ▶ Engage with governments to prioritise and accelerate the implementation of the resilience pillars of National Agricultural Investment Plans - Food Security and Nutrition (NAIP-FNS) and other resilience programmes, including the scaling up of social protection schemes to gradually lift vulnerable populations out of the vicious cycle of poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA: FOOD AND NUTRITION SITUATION

19.6 million people in “Crisis” or worse (phases 3-5)

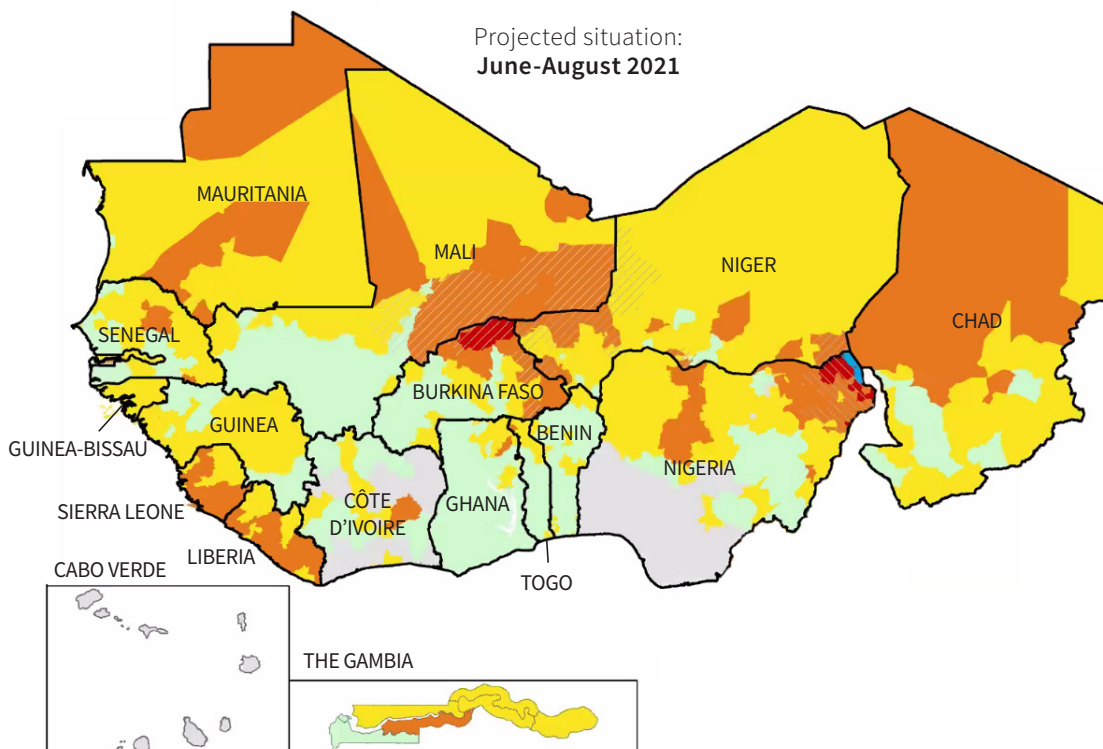


Phases of food insecurity

Partially inaccessible zones Not analysed

Phase 1: Minimal Phase 2: Stressed Phase 3: Crisis Phase 4: Emergency Phase 5: Famine

27.1 million people expected to face “Crisis” or worse (phases 3-5)



Source: Cadre harmonisé analyses, regional concertation, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, March 2021

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