Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region by the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 2021/242, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council at its 2022 session for its consideration a report on the implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan by the United Nations system, under the sub-item entitled “African countries emerging from conflict” of the item entitled “Coordination, programme and other questions”. Subsequently, in its decision 2021/243 on sustainable development in the Sahel, the Council requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its 2022 session on how the United Nations system was implementing integrated, coherent and coordinated support to achieve sustainable development in the Sahel region, within existing resources, under the sub-item entitled “Sustainable development in the Sahel” of the item entitled “Coordination, programme and other questions”. It also includes an update on the work of the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCS).
II. South Sudan

A. Context

2. Since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018, some progress towards implementation of the Agreement has been made. The formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity was achieved in March 2020. In 2021, the Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA) was reconstituted, with its speaker being a woman – an encouraging development even if the R-ARCSS goal stipulating that 35 per cent of posts should be allocated to women has not been met yet. In one of its first decisions, the TNLA members increased their salary from SSP 9,400 to SSP 800,000 per month, which created an outcry among civil society.\(^1\) By early 2022, most states’ cabinets had been formed, and members of parliament been appointed in several states, for example, in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Western Equatoria.

3. Despite progress, the implementation of the R-ARCSS has been quite slow, and some important pre-transitional tasks remain uncompleted. Critical tasks to be achieved for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections under the Agreement are the unification of forces and their redeployment; enactment of the permanent constitution; review of laws related to political parties and elections; and the reconstitution of the Political Parties Council and the National Elections Commission, among others.\(^2\) Furthermore, the shrinking of public space for civic engagement, including the arrest of journalists, is negatively impacting the ability of citizens to hold the Government accountable.\(^3\)

4. Political and institutional instability will significantly impact the relaunch of economic recovery and growth, which were already constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the second half of 2020, when oil revenue sharply decreased due to the impact of COVID-19, the government accelerated the implementation of reforms to increase efficiencies in the management of public finances. This has yielded positive results in the mobilization of non-oil revenue by the National Revenue Authority. The country’s authorities also agreed on macroeconomic policies and reforms underpinning a staff-monitored programme by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which included a key decision to reform the foreign exchange market and gradually unify the indicative and parallel market rates, which was achieved.\(^4\) The government has also been trying to attract investments to diversify its economy. Investments in the oil sector have continued.

5. The rate of inflation has moderated in the last year due to the reforms (year-on-year inflation in December 2020 was 58%). However, it does remain a concern due to supply chain disruptions, rising oil prices and COVID-19 restrictions affecting trade: in December 2021, prices grew by 12.7 percent driven by food and non-alcoholic beverages, which tend to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. As of March 2022, the price of oil stands at about USD 100 per barrel and could create significant extra revenue relative to the national budget of 2021/22 (approved in March 2022) that assumed a price of USD 63 per barrel. South Sudan’s oil production is

\(^{1}\) SSP is the abbreviation for South Sudan pound. For a benchmark, public civil servants (who are owed several months of arrears), are expected to see their remuneration doubled from about SSP 3,000 on average to about SSP 6,000.


\(^{3}\) https://www.eyерadio.org/updated-national-security-denies-detaining-journalists-at-the-parliament/

\(^{4}\) IMF, Republic of South Sudan, First Review Under the Staff-Monitored Program: Press Release; and Staff Report, November 2021. IMF Country Report, No.21/246
about 150,000 barrels per day so the extra revenue should be considerable. This should help increase South Sudan’s fiscal space.

6. Despite the country’s fertile soil, South Sudan is a significant importer of food, with limited integration into the global economy. With its poor infrastructure and landlocked status, trade is costlier and investments to address this have been rare. In March 2022, Kenyan authorities noted that South Sudan is lagging far behind in the northern corridor infrastructure development initiative that aims to boost trade among the partner states and forge regional integration (in 2013, Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia launched the Lamu Port to South Sudan to Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor Project to enable infrastructure interconnectivity with the aim of facilitating the movement of goods and services between the three countries). Food security in South Sudan is further impacted by the dramatic increase in global food prices due to the conflict in Ukraine.

7. Climate change is expected to impact the country’s prospects for economic growth: in South Sudan, climate change is particularly severe in the agricultural sector. An estimated 835,000 people were affected by severe flooding between May and December 2021, and 80 percent of those were from Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states. Many flood-displaced people, including those who were displaced by the 2020 flood, were unable to return to their homes until early 2022, if at all. For many, their area of origin remains underwater, even during the dry season. Warrap, Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Jonglei states were the most affected in terms of crop and livestock production.

8. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that in 2021 a delay in the onset of rain and then excessive rains, which caused floods in some parts of the country, affected both crops and livestock: 65,107 hectares of land planted with cereals were damaged, with an estimated loss of 37,624 tonnes of grain in the flood-affected areas, while over 10 million head of livestock were affected in eight of the ten states. The impact of the floods – through massive displacement and the disruption of livelihoods, especially in Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity states – is significant. Despite widespread flooding, the total area cultivated increased by 1 percent in 2021, which was attributed mainly to improved security that allowed for returns in some places. Returnees were able to access their farmlands, especially in the Equatoria states and in some parts of Greater Bahr el Ghazal. Despite the relative stability and slight increase in the areas cultivated in 2021, the national cereal gap remains significant at 541,000 tonnes, equivalent to 40 percent of the total needs; this gap is 16 percent higher than the last five-year average. Consequently, in 2022 an estimated 8.3 million people, including refugees and returnees, are expected to experience severe food insecurity in the depths of the lean season (May–July) as shocks appear to be intensifying (relative to 7.4 million in 2021). There are 13 counties in South Sudan with extreme levels of food insecurity in 2022, compared to 6 in 2021. In addition, an estimated 2 million people, including 1.3 million children under the age of 5 years and 676,000 pregnant and lactating women, are expected to be acutely malnourished in 2022.

9. Humanitarian needs were dire in 2020 and 2021 and are expected to be higher in 2022. Some of the key drivers of this include climatic, conflict and economic shocks, as well as other household-level stressors and protection risks, such as gender-based violence (GBV), child

protection violations, lack of access to housing, land and property, documentation and poor WASH services. This has intensified the existing vulnerability of people: higher poverty rates; limited access to basic services, including health and education; high prevalence of disease outbreaks; and widespread displacement.

10. The latest Humanitarian Needs Overview issued in February 2022 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reflected that more than two thirds of the country’s population of 8.9 million people are estimated to need humanitarian assistance in 2022, reflecting an increase of 600,000 from 2021. Limited improvements in some areas have prompted some people to spontaneously return and, in addition, the government, with the support of some humanitarian agencies, has facilitated voluntary returns to certain areas. Since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement, some 500,000 refugees have returned. However, some are unable to access their homes due to insecurity, flooding and other challenges. By December 2021, there were 2 million IDPs in the country (55 percent of whom are women and girls), an increase from 1.7 million in early 2021. There are also over 335,000 refugees in South Sudan, mainly from Sudan (92.2%). An additional 2.3 million South Sudanese remain refugees hosted in neighbouring countries.

11. Human rights remain compromised, with significant episodes of violence in Jonglei, Abyei and Akobo, among many other areas of the country, and a very dramatic surge in conflict-related sexual violence in 2022. These episodes are usually worse at the onset of the dry season when it is easier to move around, which facilitates common sources of friction such as cattle raiding and migration for grazing. From June to September 2021, at least 440 civilians were killed, 18 injured and 74 abducted during clashes between warring groups. At least 64 civilians were subjected to conflict-related sexual violence, among them a 13-year-old girl who was gang-raped to death. In addition, some 80,000 people were forced to flee their homes to escape fighting. Looting and the destruction of property, child conscription, attacks on humanitarian civilian personnel and facilities, especially against NGO and UN humanitarian organizations, hate speech and incitement to violence were among other human rights violations an investigation by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the UN Human Rights Office uncovered. All these violations (and others) are often perpetrated by armed actors with impunity and in a complex web of claims made by opposing factions that are difficult to verify.

12. Pervasive violence and human rights violations also affect humanitarian activities. Between January and December 2021, 591 humanitarian access incidents were reported and recorded. These ranged from violence against humanitarian personnel and assets to operational interference. In 2021, five aid workers lost their lives while delivering humanitarian assistance and services (besides many other types of aggressions against them). A total of 322 aid workers were relocated due to insecurity and threats against humanitarian personnel. Humanitarian 

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warehouses and facilities were targeted during the violence, and humanitarian supplies were looted in some locations. For example, on 28 February 2022, a convoy of 59 trucks, escorted by UNMISS Force Protection, carrying World Food Programme food and nutrition assistance came under attack from armed gunmen in Jonglei State. The convoy was to deliver essential commodities for 95,000 people ahead of the rainy season when access becomes heavily restricted. In another example, some humanitarian actors suspended their support to health facilities in Central Equatoria State following an incident in which armed gunmen looted medical supplies and torched two vehicles. All of these incidents hamper humanitarian support activities.

B. United Nations support for South Sudan

13. Dialogue between the United Nations and the Government of South Sudan has improved very considerably relative to years past, favored by the progress made in the peace process, together with increased institutional stability and improved access in many locations at decentralized level, where states now have functioning governorates – all of which have created conditions for more effective delivery of assistance.

14. The UN supported the strengthening of dialogue with national partners in the reporting of the UN Cooperation Framework for South Sudan 2019–2022, to ensure that international support during the transitional period is anchored in national ownership at both the country and local levels. Two tangible results illustrate this. First, the support provided by the UN towards the review of the National Development Strategy,10 and, second, that UN entities in recent years have significantly increased their results delivered within the Cooperation Framework (for example, UN agencies, funds and programmes have increased their mobilization of resources from USD 172 million in 2018 to over USD 200 million in 2021).

15. Progress in collaboration between the UN and the government has also been forged with a forward perspective, buttressed by a general recognition that national institutions’ capacity must be strengthened, to evolve from perennial humanitarian crises towards sustainable development initiatives. For example, UN entities, co-led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNMISS, have increased efforts related to the linkages between climate change and security. Another example is the completion, expected for September 2022, of the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for South Sudan, 2023–2025. Important elements of this process are the completion of a road map, a common country analysis, vision and strategic prioritization workshops, and the UN configuration exercise, among others. All of them have been undertaken in a spirit of comprehensive, inclusive consultations with all stakeholders, including government and other national partners, donors, UNMISS and civil society. Such widespread discussions have also improved coordination between donors and contributed to the reactivation of the sector working groups which foster aid coordination and collaboration between the government and stakeholders. As a result, partnerships, information-sharing and collaboration have been encouraged. For example, in January 2022, the African Development Bank signed three agreements with the government, UNDP, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and FAO for projects on

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10 Yet to be approved by the TNLA (as of March 2022).
agriculture value chain development, youth and enterprise capacity development, and private-sector development estimated at a total of USD 46.7 million. UNHCR, in collaboration with the Commission for Refugee Affairs, supported the allocation of resources by the World Bank under IDA 19 Window for Refugees and Host Communities in Upper Nile and Rweng Special Administrative Area.

16. A vital element of the UN’s work in South Sudan continues to be the need to ensure an integrated response across humanitarian, development and peace activities. This translates into increased localized dialogue to foster recovery and resilience in areas that are stable enough to allow for the inclusive convening of local stakeholders willing and able to work to achieve progress. Those dialogues receive support from the UN and other international actors, which help to organize meetings and local conferences and support follow-up actions. Additionally, the South Sudan Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF) remains a strong coordination and transparent mechanism to support the partnership and resilience agenda. The fund’s budget increased from USD 11,729,287 in 2019 to USD 32,636,446 in 2021.

17. The support undertaken jointly by a broad range of non-governmental organizations, donors and the UN, through the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience, is aimed at reducing vulnerability and building resilience at the local level, especially by fostering the provision of basic public services such as health care, education and WASH. In Juba, an additional goal to providing basic public services is the strengthening of institutions to facilitate the running of basic functions of government, such as public finances to pay civil servants in a transparent and accountable manner.

18. However, considerable challenges for the support of the UN to South Sudan remain, such as the slow progress of the peace process, floods and their associated effects hampering mobility (i.e. roads out of Juba are impassable), or the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. Of particular importance is the combination of scarce resources with competing humanitarian crises, further aggravated by violence and insecurity: an estimated 5.3 million people were reached in 2021 with some form of humanitarian assistance. To enable the response to people impacted by flooding, humanitarian organizations were compelled to re-programme in-country support, which resulted in a reduction of food assistance to IDPs, refugees and communities in acute food and livelihood crises. These unmet needs have increased the vulnerability of populations in 2022.

C. Outlook

19. A successful transition in South Sudan is fundamental for its future, including the holding of democratic elections at the end of the transition period. This requires progress in three broad areas: politics and governance; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former fighters, and security sector reform; and improvements in the humanitarian and human rights situation, with a greater focus on longer-term root causes with the 2030 Agenda serving as a guiding light.

20. With the slow progress seen so far in fundamental aspects – such as unifying the armed forces, constitution-making or defining electoral laws – elections are unlikely to be held before 2023.
It will be necessary to boost progress in this domain, in close coordination and collaboration between actors, inter alia UNMISS, the African Union (AU), the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), the UN country team.

21. It is critical to protect civilians from violence and human rights violations. A continuation and increase in subnational violence reported in many states across the country, including Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap (particularly Greater Tonj) and Western Equatoria (notably Tambura), is likely to disrupt livelihoods and trade and contribute to an increase in humanitarian needs in 2022. Access to justice and the rule of law is limited for many people who experience crimes and violations. Gender-based violence and child protection violations remain a threat; women and girls are exposed to risks when carrying out their routine activities, further exacerbated by floods which limit livelihood opportunities (for example, firewood collection and charcoal production). Feeling unsafe, some women and girls avoid areas such as water points, latrines, distribution areas, markets and firewood gathering sites. In this context, women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities will continue to be the most vulnerable. Initiatives that prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse, such as campaigns to raise public awareness, access to targeted services and psychosocial support and strengthening of accountability mechanisms and access to justice are required and must be supported further.

22. In South Sudan, 95 percent of livelihoods depend on traditional rain-fed agriculture, crop farming, pastoralism or animal husbandry. Climate shocks are likely to lead to an increase in livestock mortality and a decline in the amount and viability of land farmers’ cultivation; it will also lead to the disruption of traditional seasonal migration routes of pastoralists and to less land available for cattle to graze, which may further increase the risk of conflict in affected areas and tension between pastoralists and agriculturalists. As mentioned above, more people are likely to experience severe food insecurity in 2022. Food consumption gaps are extreme, and people have largely exhausted their emergency coping strategies. In 2022, the precarious situation is expected to be further exacerbated by the country’s increasing humanitarian caseload, the expected increase in the duration of needs in the most affected areas, and the projected reduction in humanitarian assistance across the country due to declining funding levels as well as security threats. Food assistance in 2022 is expected to decrease by 10–20 percent from the already reduced levels in 2021. The current crisis is impacting people’s ability to access markets, while conflict, flooding and seasonal effects are limiting the flow of both commercial and humanitarian goods and services. In this regard, the UN Security Council’s extension of the UNMISS mandate for one year on 15 March 2022 is welcome. The resolution decided that UNMISS’s mandate would be designed to advance the three-year strategic vision defined in resolution 2567 (2021) to prevent a return to civil war in South Sudan, to build durable peace at the local and national levels, and to support inclusive and accountable governance and free, fair, and peaceful elections in accordance with the Revitalized Agreement. The resolution is asking UNMISS to carry out tasks in four key areas: protection of civilians; creation of conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance; support for implementation R-ARCSS and the peace process; and monitoring, investigating and reporting violations of international humanitarian law and of abuses of human rights. The Security Council also called for strengthening UNMISS’s sexual violence and GBV prevention and response activities.
23. With a severe humanitarian crisis ongoing and the prospects of it being aggravated for yet another year, it will be necessary for stakeholders to contribute towards the provision of the most basic services, in line with the National Development Strategy review and the conclusions of the preliminary UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2023–25. In the current context of a global recession triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, inflationary pressures may further be exacerbated, especially for a country such as South Sudan which is heavily reliant on imports for even the most basic products. It would be useful if the country could boost trade with its neighbouring countries, including through initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which the country has signed but not ratified.

24. The Government of South Sudan must also continue providing tangible economic reforms to pursue transparency and accountability, and to be able to pay its civil servants on time and honour arrears. Hence, development partners’ efforts to improve public finances must be further nurtured. The National Development Strategy review may be an opportunity if it is approved by the TNLA and operationalized in terms of allocating resources to social sectors – along with public financial management reform efforts. The very high price of oil, while alleviating public finances could also incentivize corruption – especially in a system with very weak controls.

D. Perspectives for future work

25. To continue fostering dialogue with government, building national capacity and supporting institutions, the UN country team will further strengthen its development support. The extended UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework will help focus on the development of new initiatives that could be brought to scale; the Population Estimation Survey; the operationalization of a more integrated response through the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience coordination mechanism; and initiatives such as South Sudan’s Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund, efforts to mobilize additional resources from key pooled funds such as the Peacebuilding Fund. The country team will continue to coordinate interventions, to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure effective collaboration on peacebuilding and governance initiatives among the UN programmes and UNMISS. The ultimate goal of UN system integrated development support to South Sudan is to provide consistent and immediate support to build state capacity in economic and social transformation, including policymaking and implementation capacities for longer-term development as well as the desperately-needed provision of basic services for people to support South Sudan’s efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and build resilience. To do so, the UN country team will also continue to nurture efficient linkages with other development partners, including international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and bilateral donors, and leveraging new capacities and tools that are now in place in the context of the repositioning of the United Nations development system.

11 In January 2022, South Sudan was ranked the world’s most corrupt country by Transparency International with a score of 11 out of 100. https://www.sudanspost.com/south-sudan-ranked-worlds-most-corrupt-country-again-report/
III. Sahel region

A. Context

Sustainable development

26. The COVID-19 pandemic has had varying impact across the Sahelian countries, however in 2021 the countries registered significant recovery as reflected in GDP growth of the different country groupings. In 2021 oil-exporting countries (Cameroon, Chad, and Nigeria), which have suffered deeply from the pandemic, GDP contracted by 2% in 2020, due to steep decline in oil prices. A recovery of 3.7 percent is projected, driven by the increase in oil prices. In resource-intensive economies (Burkina-Faso, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), thanks to the rise in prices of natural resource and increase in exports supported by the recovery of the extractive industries, growth is projected to be 4.8 percent after a contraction by 0.12 percent in 2020. The non-resources intensive economies (Senegal and The Gambia), where GDP contracted by 1.55 percent in 2020, are also projected to experience growth in GDP by 4.1%.

27. The growth in Sahelian countries has been non-inclusive in 2021. Poverty rates remain very high and Sahelian countries are still poorly positioned in the latest HDI rankings (in the bottom 30 places for most of them) and on average 62.6% of the population is multidimensionally poor. Conflict and desertification in the Sahel contributed to the deterioration of the social situation and led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

28. In a context of chronic poverty and high population growth, insecurity and adverse impacts of climate change remained key drivers of the growing food insecurity in the Sahel in 2021. Repeated shocks, including droughts and floods, have greatly affected the livelihoods of the most vulnerable, including forcibly displaced people, giving rise to tensions with host communities who could also be vulnerable.

29. With regards to natural disasters and climate change, the Sahel region has been increasingly affected. Based on the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) baseline assessment data, 134,123 disaster-related IDPs were recorded as follows: Cameroon (42,912) Chad (652) and Nigeria (90,559).

30. The Sahel region is experiencing some of the most extreme weather events on earth. The degradation of ecosystems and consequent depletion of vegetation and biodiversity has undermined critical services such as the provision of water and exposed soil to further degradation. This has severely impacted both the local populations and the Sahelian agro-sylvo-

\[\text{12} \text{ OPHI/PNUD, Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021, Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste, and gender, 2021}

\[\text{13} \text{ NB: Emergency Tracking data reports on individuals' displacements by particular events. Baseline data refers to individuals displaced at a particular point in time i10.e. snapshot of displacement.} \]
pastoral landscapes, aggravating food and nutrition insecurity and compromising the sustainability of livelihoods.

31. According to the Cadre Harmonisé analysis\textsuperscript{14}, the number of people that have faced critical acute food insecurity situation (IPC/CH Phase 3 and above) during 2021 has drastically increased, with around 6.5 million people estimated to be acutely food insecure (June-August 2021) in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, of which 2.3 million are in the Liptako-Gourma region. This sharp deterioration is a result of the negative impacts of climate-related shocks, compounded by the effects of the ongoing conflicts and insecurity as well as the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19. The latest Cadre Harmonisé on food and nutritional insecurity conducted in West African countries, except Cabo Verde and Liberia, reveals that for the period from October to December 2021, nearly 23.7 million people were food insecure (Phase 3 to 4 of the CH). In addition, 1.6 million children were projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition\textsuperscript{15}.

32. The above-described situation indicates that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Sahel region remains a challenge as insecurity, violence and political crises observed in 2021 are still growing steadily. The COVID-19 pandemic had led to reversals of SDG progress in many countries, calling for increased efforts to expand social protection.

**Political and security situation**

33. Democratic progress was uneven in the region during the reporting period. In Guinea, popular and political dissent following President Condé’s re-election in 2020 persisted. In September 2021, following a coup d’état, a transition was announced, and a Prime Minister was appointed in November. In The Gambia, on 4 December 2021, President Barrow was re-elected by a large majority for a second term in office. However, constitutional reforms have failed to move forward. In Guinea-Bissau, political dialogue is yet to resume despite entreaties by the UN. This is expected to build consensus among political stakeholders ahead of the 2023 legislative elections. In Niger, Senegal and Mauritania, relations between the government and opposition remain affected by the absence of established political dialogues. In contrast, transitional justice processes in Liberia and The Gambia prompted national discussions on justice, accountability and reconciliation.

34. Unresolved issues related to governance deficits, non-respect of presidential term limits and unconstitutional changes of government, continue to polarize the political climate. Against this background, the commitment expressed by the Heads of State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to review and update Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security was encouraging.

35. The deterioration of the security environment also revealed the lasting impact of terrorist attacks on the political situation in the region, forcing governments to step up their response. A series

\textsuperscript{14} The Cadre Harmonisé food insecurity figures refer to the projected situations. During the lean season, from June to August 2022, this number could reach more than 33.4 million people, including more than 1.7 million in emergencies and 13,551 in disaster (Phase 5).

\textsuperscript{15} ibid
of attacks in Burkina Faso in early 2021 shaped public opinion and opposition criticism against the government’s counter-terrorism strategy. Demonstrations of the civilian population demanding changes in the government’s response to terrorism continued to grow. Against this background, discontent among the armed forces also emerged. Casualties inflicted on the armed forces reached a peak with the Inata attack in November 2021, with over 50 gendarmes killed. The incident shocked the public and also suggested a lack of financial and material support to the armed forces. In Nigeria, terrorist and other armed groups have benefitted from a vacuum in state authority and the proliferation of illicit arms.

36. Violent attacks on civilian settlements in the tri-border region of the Central Sahel increased compared to 2021, generating renewed displacements of the population, in particular, in Niger. The issue of civilian volunteers, whose participation in the counter-terrorism response has been institutionalized since 2018 in Burkina Faso, was adopted on an ad hoc basis in Tahoua and Tillaberi regions. This led to several ethnic-based incidents and cases of retaliation with implications for the respect of human rights. In Niger, the targeting of civilian settlements has been frequently accompanied by a destruction of crops, harvests, and animals, leaving the affected population in urgent need of assistance.

Humanitarian situation

37. In 2021, almost 29 million Sahelians needed assistance and protection, 5 million more than at the beginning of 2020. OCHA supported the regional humanitarian community to respond and deliver lifesaving assistance through reinforced coordination and advocacy efforts, sharing focused analysis and providing information management. In 2021, 12.7 million people across the region received humanitarian support.

38. As of November 2021, more than 2 million individuals were displaced by the crisis in the Liptako Gourma region. Sixty-eight percent of the displaced population (1,431,279 people) were in Burkina Faso, 20 percent in Mali (414,922), 9 percent in Niger (197,668) and 3 percent in Mauritania (-72,816); according to Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM).16 The Lake Chad Basin Crisis (in Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) has displaced over 5 million IDPs, refugees (both in- and out-of-camp), returnees (former IDPs and returnees from abroad) and Third Country Nationals (TCNs)17, according to DTM. In North-West and North-Central Nigeria, there is a multidimensional crisis that is rooted in long-standing tensions between ethnic and religious groups and involves attacks by criminal groups and banditry. The crisis has

17 The crisis currently affecting the Lake Chad Basin states results from a complex combination of factors, including conflict with Non-State Armed Groups, extreme poverty, underdevelopment, and a changing climate, which together have triggered significant displacement of populations. As of 26 November 2021, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria were hosting an estimated 5,418,236 affected individuals made up of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Refugees (both in- and out-of-camp), Returnees (Former IDPs and Returnees from abroad) and Third Country Nationals (TCNs). 76 per cent of the affected population (representing 4,100,676 individuals) were in Nigeria, while 11 per cent resided in Cameroon (607,520 individuals), 9 per cent in Chad (476,943 individuals) and 4 per cent in Niger (233,097 individuals). For more information, please see: https://displacement.iom.int/reports/west-and-central-africa-lake-chad-basin-crisis-monthly-dashboard-38-26-november-2021?
accelerated during the past years because of the intensification of attacks and has resulted in widespread displacement across the region.

B. United Nations support for the Sahel

39. In 2021, the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was implemented under constraining political, security, humanitarian, and social development contexts, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, achievements were noted on various thematic priorities as enshrined in the UN Support Plan for the Sahel. This complex landscape led entities of the UN development system to rethink and adjust their operational plans to achieve the expected results under the leadership and with the support of the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel.

Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel

40. Since the creation of the OSCS in 2021, UNISS implementation has been scaled up through renewed commitments by UN entities. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, OSCS succeeded in bringing new impetus to the UNISS and convening partnerships aimed at ensuring the UN’s impact in the Sahel is sustainable. The OSCS, counting on the support of the Joint Programme "Financing a Green, Inclusive and Sustainable Recovery", is now adding new partners, creating further momentum in scaling up of actions in the Sahel.

41. The OSCS coordinated efforts that led to a stocktaking of the UN’s work in UNISS countries. In doing so, it achieved the following results: (i) the development of an integrated communication strategy for enhanced visibility of the UN’s investments which has resulted in a change of narrative in the Sahel; and (ii) the development of UNISS Policy and Analysis frameworks to guide/inform collective programming and implementation and to trigger evidence-generation at scale. This included a ‘Rapid Assessment’ study of UN Investments in the Sahel”, a Policy Paper on Predictive Analysis, 5W Mapping (Who does What, Where, When and for Whom) of the UN’s geographic presence in the Sahel, and a UNISS White Paper on an emerging blueprint for transformational change based on a shared de-risking approach to the region, and its peoples.

42. The OSCS has also been strengthening UNISS programme development, coordination and implementation which has achieved the following results: i) the co-creation and roll-out of programmatic offers and project banks (governance, renewable energy and climate resilience and sustainable agriculture); and (ii) the domestication of UNISS at country level through quality assurance and review of UNSDCF including through sensitization for integration of UNISS in CCA-CFs and National Development Plans. Additionally, the OSCS has been promoting actions on youth and women as true pathways for triggering a change of narrative. Through these, several youth initiatives were successfully launched. These include the UN Group of Friends of Women of the Sahel, Generation Unlimited Sahel and Youth Connekt Sahel, which included platforms for dialogue, such as the month-long conversations with youth
and women within the UNISS framework. This produced a list of strategic priorities that will guide UN policy and programmatic responses in the Sahel going forward.

43. OSCS has been ensuring the strategic positioning of UNISS through expanded global, regional, and national partnerships. In 2021, OSCS carried out a series of global, regional as well as national engagements to build new partnerships around UNISS. The OSCS developed a strategic and funding partnerships framework which led to the Joint Thriving Sahel Fund pledge of US$1.6 billion as well as US$1 million raised for one of the cross-border, joint programmes in the Sahel. The presence of the Special Coordinator has likewise strengthened the UNISS governance architecture, which in 2021 ensured two effective UNISS Steering Committee meetings, two retreats of UNISS technical focal points, effective and regular UNISS working groups meetings as well as a regular functioning UNISS Advisory meeting.

**Security**

44. In terms of regional response, progress was made in various sub-regional initiatives. Notably, the third meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization in October, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development in June; and the third meeting of the Governors of the Liptako-Gourma border regions in July noted progress in cooperation to address the root causes of insecurity. Meanwhile, there was increased focus and attention on the pressure exerted by violent extremists in the Sahel on neighboring coastal countries.

45. Noting that the toll of transhumance-related incidents decreased in 2021 compared to previous years, UNOWAS and the regional working group on pastoralism and conflict prevention continued monitoring and agreed on several activities to address analytical gaps, including on gender, youth, extractive industries and climate change. Moreover, UNOWAS contributed to discussions on the prevention of farmer-herder conflicts, held by ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), UNDP and others, focusing attention on cross-border solutions. UNOWAS also facilitated the first steering committee meeting of the G5 Sahel Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre in Ouagadougou on 21 to 22 September 2021, during which recommendations were made to integrate women and tap into national research centers’ capabilities.

46. On 30 October, the Ministers of Justice of the G5-Sahel met in N’Djamena to discuss the harmonization of judicial cooperation protocols. The meeting concluded with a signed agreement between the Judicial Regional Platform of Sahel countries and the G5-Sahel to improve judicial cooperation in the region. Several capacity-building events on disarmament and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons were held in the Liptako-Gourma region, attended by security forces and civil society organizations. The events were aimed, among other things, at enhancing women’s participation in peace and security advocacy efforts.

47. Access and continuous delivery of assistance in the border areas by the UN and implementing partners remain hampered by the security threats faced by humanitarian workers. National authorities in Niger opted to avoid the creation of IDP camps and attempted to resettle the displaced population without delay, despite challenges.
Governance

48. As part of a more innovative approach to preventing violent extremism and youth radicalization, the United Nations through UNDP supported the Sahel Youth Eco-brigade for Peace Initiatives. This initiative involved 50 youth who were selected from two cross-border communities in Northwest Nigeria, and as volunteers, were trained as Youth Peace Ambassadors to plant and care for tree seedlings. This resulted in 1,000 tree seedlings being planted in both communities at selected locations to improve cross-border relations and social cohesion within communities.

49. In collaboration with the Government of Senegal, OSCDS/UNISS and Generation Unlimited, UNDP launched a regional platform for youth across the 10 UNISS countries called Youth Connekt Sahel. UNISS/OSCDS and Generation Unlimited launched the Generation Unlimited Sahel. Both forums work together towards enhancing youth capacities and facilitation of access to social, political, and economic opportunities. The Youth Connekt Sahel forum had around 1,000 young people from the Sahel in attendance at the launch. These platforms aim at creating a generation of transformational leaders in the Sahel enabled to contribute to enhancing peace and prosperity dividends in the region by continuous engagement, development and application of solutions to recurrent social, economic and development problems.

50. Within the framework of the ECOWAS Peace, Security and Stability Mandate (ECOWAS/EU PSS), additional regional initiatives have been launched by the United Nations to support ECOWAS in reducing the menace of illicit circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Specifically, the Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking (OCWART) and the Cross Border Engagement project, co-funded by UNDP under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) -Regional Indicative Programme (RIP 2014 – 2020) mandate for West Africa aims to sustain the gains of the earlier SALW initiatives in West Africa.

51. Furthermore, the United Nations provided support to various countries within the area of human rights and justice, as well as rule of law in Chad where the UN’s intervention aimed at strengthening the penal chain, including digitalization to improve efficiency; in Mali, where clean energy was provided to security and justice services; in The Gambia, joint interagency support by UNDP and OHCHR to the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) was provided which facilitated the submission of its report to the Heads of State in November 2021.

Resilience

52. The United Nations continued to provide integrated resilience support in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger in 2021. At least 2 million vulnerable people, incl. 1.7 million children, have accessed essential social services delivered through decentralized government and community services with a focus on the following sectors: Health, Nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Education, Child Protection and Social Protection. 959 communities were supported in participatory and risk-informed planning approaches, 2,735 community structures were engaged to support comprehensive social service delivery, including 335 selected communities. As part
of the programme support, 1,365 health district personnel were trained, 675 health centres received support to integrate birth registration services, 50 climate-resilient water systems with diversification of power sources for pumped water through solar panels and other renewable energies were set up. 756 schools were provided with multi-sectoral resilience services.

53. The United Nations supported the Governments of Mali, Mauritania, and Niger by providing critical social assistance to populations affected by the impact of COVID-19, while strengthening national social protection systems. Using a two track approach, cash distributions supported by the joint project reached almost 1.2 million people through government social protection programmes to deliver essential support (track 1) and direct cash transfers where national capacities are saturated, in alignment with national social protection response plans (track 2). WFP provided blanket supplementary feeding to 6,860 children and 5,281 women, and in collaboration with UNICEF, who provided social behaviour change communication messaging on nutrition to 14,600 households. Both agencies also reached 35,868 households with COVID-19 prevention messaging.

54. In 2021, the three Rome-based agencies (RBAs), WFP, FAO, and IFAD, joined forces with the G5 Sahel, its Member States and Senegal to develop and launch a joint programme for the Sahel in response to the challenges of COVID-19, conflict, and climate change (SD3C). Building on solutions and approaches already capitalized by the RBAs and their local partners, the SD3C programme aims to increase agro-sylvo-pastoral production and productivity of small-scale producers, especially women and youth through climate-smart agricultural practices, promote local and regional economic integration, as well as strengthen policy dialogue, management, and coordination. The agreements have been signed between IFAD and the respective governments during the last G5 Sahel Minister Council in February 2021, marking the start of the programme for IFAD. FAO and WFP will mainly cover the following two components: (1) increase agro-sylvo-pastoral productivity and production; and (2) national and regional economic integration.

**Coordinated framework in the Sahel**

55. The 12th UNISS Steering Committee took place from 3-4 November 2021, with objectives (i) to review and take stock of the implementation of the UNISS roadmap 2021-2022 and to agree on the main parameters to orient and shape the 2022-2023 Roadmap, and (ii) to accelerate the implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for Development in the Sahel, in the framework of the SDG Decade of Acceleration and in the spirit of the peace and security, humanitarian and development nexus. Specifically, the meeting sought to (a) reach consensus on the strategic positioning of UNISS in the geo-strategic context of the Sahel; (b) take stock of UNISS and its implementation as a Common Chapter that will frame UN policy and programmatic responses in the Sahel.

56. Regarding the Statement of Commitment in line with UNISS and UNSP as the UN Common Chapter for guiding UN various strategic frameworks, policy supports and programme activities in the Sahel region, the following were agreed by the Steering Committee members:

a. Scale-up the implementation of the UNISS, seen as a Common Chapter, to support various strategies, policies and programmes in the region.
b. Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian/Development Coordinators to ensure that UNISS is a guiding strategic platform for the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and Humanitarian Response Programmes, and in that perspective, also to ensure that those two frameworks define and inform implementation of collective outcomes, for greater coherence and collaboration between peace, development and humanitarian activities.

c. Alignment of UN policy and programmatic support with the national, sub-regional and regional strategies in the Sahel, including the programmes of the G5 Sahel, the Liptako-Gourma Authority, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the Great Green Wall Initiative.

d. Continue the UNISS work on Predictive Analytics, with a view to guiding in an integrated fashion the implementation of short-, medium- and long-term support activities and the alignment between the UNISS/UNSP and the 10 UN Cooperation Frameworks in countries covered by UNISS.

e. Apply the principle of differentiated contexts in the Sahel which must guide UN interventions. Need to use a quadruple lens to contextualize UN interventions: Prevention, Stabilization, Transformation and Sustainability.

57. Concerning the current geopolitics and security situation in the Sahel: challenges, potential policy, and programmatic implications on UNISS, it was agreed:

a. That the discussion on the geopolitical developments and its impacts on the implementation of UNISS and the preservation of peace, security and stability in the Sahel be pursued at all subsequent UNISS Steering Committee meetings and be further discussed at the next UNISS Advisory Group Meeting (Meeting of Principals).

b. UNISS programmes to conduct risk analysis and mitigation strategies considering the impact of geopolitical dynamics on development and stability of the region.

c. Principals to devise specific strategies, in close consultation with the Secretary-General to promote high-level advocacy aimed at preserving peace, security and stability in the region.

d. UN should pursue a collective and vigorous effort to dynamize the Ministerial Coordination Platform as a viable alternative for promoting coordination, improving participation and ownership by indigenous regional organizations, Member States, civil society groups, women’s organizations, and youth as a means of ensuring sustainable development and stability.

Perspectives for future work

58. The United Nations will continue to support the formulation of recommendations around mobility, aiming at: (i) building international judiciary cooperation for an efficient response and proper protection of victims of trafficking; (ii) assisting central level capacity building, including related to the legal and policy apparatus; (iii) tackling smugglers and traffickers, while
assisting victims; and (vi) supporting evidence based and holistic migration policies. Future interventions would seek to maintain community stabilization interventions in the Sahel and include labor migration and environmental concerns, and strengthening links between reintegration of returning migrants with sustainable development, leveraging the positive contributions of returning migrants on local development. Particular attention will be given to positioning culture as a factor of resilience particularly in times of crisis, through enhanced protection of the Sahel's cultural and natural heritage, and specifically ensure a more effective fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

59. In the spirit and application of a more coherent response across areas of activity, life-saving aid needs is to be accompanied by longer-term interventions focused on reducing needs. Complementary humanitarian and development efforts, based on principles of do-no-harm and community acceptance will be required to address economic and gender inequalities, lack of access to basic services, human rights violations and non-inclusive governance, the scarcity of resources and the climate emergency, and the worrying rise in hunger.

60. Emphasis will be put on the development of specific tools for UNISS/UNSP and integrate them at country-level as a guide for all phases of inter-agency projects (project development, implementation, monitoring, and reporting). Information gleaned from monitoring and evaluation will inform the support for implementation of UNISS based on evidence generation and learning.

61. Noting the current international and regional geopolitical dynamics affecting already deteriorating sustainable development trends, the United Nations will update the policy and programmatic content of its three pillars, namely governance, security, and resilience, by ensuring that they consider and reflect an adequate response to the geopolitical repercussions in the region, and the recent political and security developments in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea, and their potential repercussions. The UN will endeavour to promote a greater alignment and congruence of various regional and the increasing number of bilateral initiatives with UNISS, to leverage their complementarity and enhance impact.

C. Recommendations

62. In terms of recommendations on the way forward and with regards to the 2022-2023 UNISS Roadmap, the following will be prioritized:

a. Doubling the support to the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development for the Sahel and strengthening foundational enablers through energy, transformative agriculture and climate resilience initiatives including Resilient Social Basic Services, the Great Green Wall, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, and others.

b. Pursuing initiatives related to the change of narrative in the Sahel, which project optimism and hope, based on a revalorization of economic potentials and socio-cultural backgrounds.

c. Considering countries’ shrinking fiscal space, particularly due to resources being diverted to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and financing by promoting and supporting Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs); building on the menu of options
suggested by the Summit on Financing for Development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond.

d. Building on the successful launch of Sahel Generation Unlimited to provide an integrated framework for UN support to youth programmes, with the view to increasing empowerment in measurable ways and promoting youth agency.

e. Ensuring women and youth are empowered and put in the lead in the design, roll out and implementation of programmes on UNISS, giving credence to the aspirations of women and young people from the region.

f. Optimizing the promotion of culture and spirituality as an important aspect of peace, security, and development strategies, including support to the development of cultural industries.

g. Furthering the analysis of the UNISS commissioned report (white paper) on “an emerging blueprint for the transformational change on a shared de-risking approach to the region and its people” with a view to recalibrating the UN’s approach to risk and resilience to address more effectively the root causes of crises in the Sahel; and leveraging existing and emerging opportunities.