



# Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel

## Phase IV: Towards Addressing the Socio-Economic Impacts of Multiple Shocks

Annual Report  
August 2023 - July 2024

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# Project Summary Information

The joint project, 'Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel', is funded by BMZ through KfW and implemented by UNICEF and WFP. It has entered Phase IV of implementation, sub-titled: 'Towards Addressing the Socio-Economic Impacts of Multiple Shocks'.

<b>Countries</b>	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger
<b>Project Title</b>	Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel.
<b>Sub Title</b>	Towards Addressing the Socio-Economic Impacts of Multiple Shocks.
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<b>Type of report</b>	Annual Progress Report
<b>Reporting period</b>	1 August 2023 – 31 July 2024

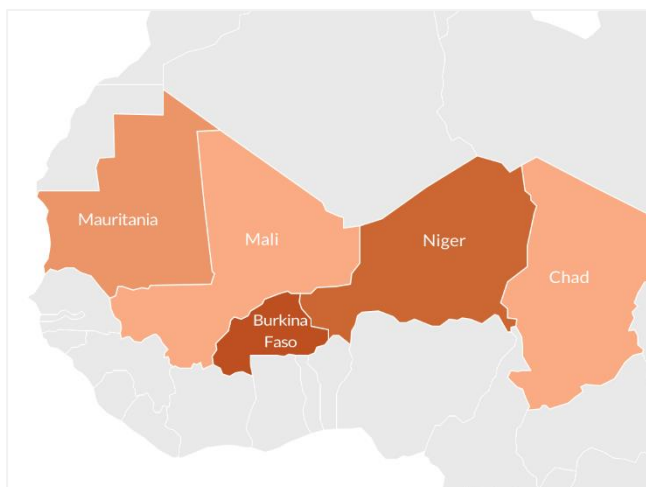
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# Executive Summary

Since August 2020, the Joint Project, implemented by UNICEF and WFP, has supported the Governments of Mali, Mauritania, and Niger in responding to shocks and strengthening national capacities to develop more shock-responsive, nutrition- and child-sensitive social protection systems. The Sahel is marked by low social protection coverage, chronic vulnerabilities and overlapping crises, social protection has the potential to contribute to addressing broader development challenges, including conflict, climate change and economic downturns. Building on this progress and growing emphasis on social protection in the region, the Joint Project was expanded to include Burkina Faso and Chad in January 2024.



This Annual Report covers 12 months of activities in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, from 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024. It also covers the first seven months of inception-phase activities in Burkina Faso and Chad (1 January to 31 July 2024).

## Delivery of Cash Transfers and Complementary Services

Cash transfers and complementary services help households in situations of vulnerability cope with the socioeconomic impacts of multiple shocks. As of 31 July 2024, the Joint Project has **provided cash assistance to over 2.95 million people (460,000 households)** through a twin-track approach aligned with national social protection plans. **During the reporting period alone, 1.16 million people (181,000 households) received cash transfers.**

### Track 1

Cash transfers are provided via government social protection programmes.

**81.5%**

160,000 households reached (1 million individuals)



**18.5%**

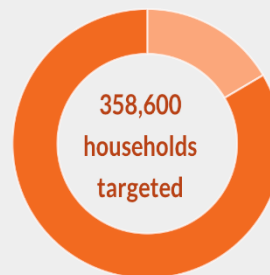
38,000 households remaining

### Track 2

Cash transfers are delivered directly where national capacities are saturated, in line with national social protection response plans.

**83%**

299,000 households reached (1.95 million individuals)



**17%**

59,400 households remaining

In **Niger**, the political context following the July 2023 coup d'état necessitated the shift of all cash transfers under the Joint Project to Track 2, allowing cash distribution to continue despite disruptions to national systems (Track 1). The Joint Project focused on Track 2 delivery of the drought response programme due to its urgent nature, while other programmes – including the productive cash and disability-inclusive cash initiatives – were postponed to late 2024 and early 2025, respectively, to accommodate the transition.

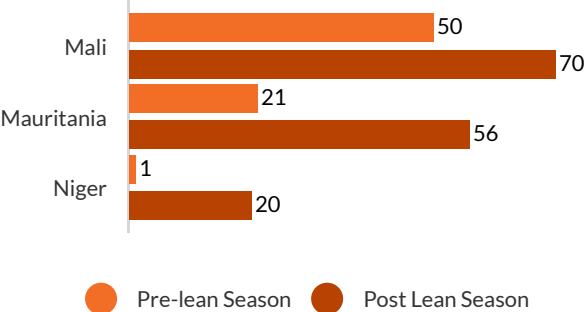
Conversely, in **Mauritania** improvements in government systems enabled a higher proportion of households to receive Track 1 transfers, with all targeted households for the 2024 lean season reached through government channels.

In 2023, the Government of **Burkina Faso** developed a new national social assistance programme, the *Programme national d'autonomisation des menages pauvres et vulnerables* (PAMPV), led by the Ministry of National Solidarity. Although the PAMPV initially planned to deliver a combination of regular cash transfers, lean season support and economic inclusion measures, a ban on cash transfers in October 2023 necessitated a revision. The Joint Project has actively engaged with the Government during the (ongoing) revision process that put economic inclusion measures at the centre of the PAMPV's design. Joint Project delivery measures are being aligned with the revised PAMPV model.

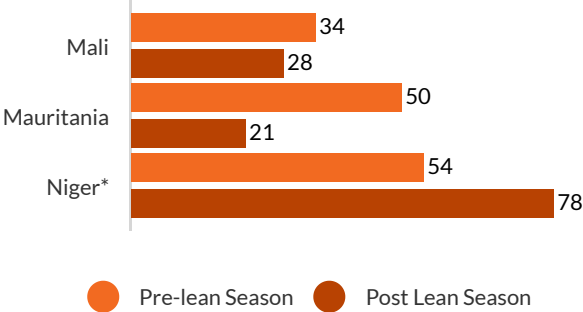
In **Chad**, the Joint Project supported the RSU to register households in the targeted departments and began identifying beneficiaries for cash transfers (which are due to commence in October 2024). These efforts support the rollout of the Refugees and Host Communities Support Project (PARCA), as the cash transfers are aligned with PARCA's social cash transfer component. The Joint Project also collaborated with the Government to begin transitioning from primarily seasonal assistance to more adaptive social protection programmes, as outlined in the National Social Protection Policy (pending political validation). This alignment with the national flagship social safety net programme will enable both agencies to support government efforts in establishing a nationally owned, regular social safety net programme.

Overall, cash transfers have been crucial in supporting food security and reducing the impact of shocks on vulnerable households. The **accompanying messages** delivered alongside the cash transfers reached **1.6 million people during the reporting period** and have contributed to improved nutrition, health, child protection and hygiene. Since the project's inception, these messages have reached **over 6.8 million people across Mali, Mauritania, and Niger**. Post-distribution monitoring in these countries shows increased food consumption levels and a reduction in negative coping strategies among recipient households (see figure below).

Percentage of households with an acceptable food consumption score before and after the 2023 cash response



Percentage of households resorting to negative coping strategies before and after the 2023 cash response



\* While the percentage of households resorting to negative coping strategies increased in Niger, given the contextual changes, the proportion of households resorting to emergency coping strategies actually decreased (from 22% to 14%).

Following the 26 July 2023 coup d'état in Niger, sanctions and the suspension of international aid and security support affected nearly half of the country's pre-coup budget. Border closures and sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on banking and trade further strained national finances. Rising inflation and liquidity challenges exacerbated the situation for families already facing high needs. In this context, an increase in households resorting to negative coping strategies was documented among recipients of the Joint Project's cash response to the 2023 drought.

The Joint Project also worked with the Governments of Mali and Mauritania to design and implement **productive and economic inclusion programmes** through Track 1, aiming to ensure the project's longer-term impact. They target specific groups, such as women (in Mali) as well as people living with disabilities (in Mauritania). Similar programmes were being developed in Niger but have been postponed due to the coup.

In **Mali**, testimonials from women indicate that cash assistance and accompanying support have **reinforced financial autonomy**, enabling them to choose whether to invest in income-generating activities or prioritise other expenses, such as education or healthcare.

In **Mauritania**, households with members living with disabilities have launched various income-generating activities, including handicrafts, trade, and small livestock breeding. With cash assistance and business coaching, 50 per cent of these households have established **sustainable income sources**.

## Systems Strengthening

The Joint Project also provides technical assistance to governments to **enhance the shock-responsiveness, nutrition-, and child-sensitivity of national social protection systems**. This includes comprehensive support to strengthen the system building blocks, enabling governments to scale up efforts to address complex crises (such as food insecurity, climate shocks or conflict).

In all five countries, UNICEF, and WFP, in collaboration with the World Bank, are **working to improve the coordination, coverage, and interoperability of social registries**, aiming to optimise their use by various programmes and actors to support the most vulnerable households. However, since July 2023, systems strengthening efforts in Niger have been scaled back, as detailed in this report.

### Snapshot of Project Achievements per Social Protection System Building Block



## Policy

**Burkina Faso:** Provided technical contributions to the new draft National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS), now in its final review stage.

**Mali:** Supported five ongoing studies to inform the upcoming revision of the National Social Protection Policy, ensuring it is evidence-based and contextually relevant. This analytical work focusses on systems assessment, expenditure review and the development and costing of projections for progressive rollout of a national safety net programme, aligned with international standards.

**Mauritania:**

- Contributed to the revision of the SNPS 2024-2034, now awaiting final validation. Support included technical inputs, organising knowledge exchange visits and ensuring inclusivity, with disability status considered in all strategic areas. The revised SNPS is also more shock-responsive, nutrition-sensitive and inclusive of refugees and host communities.
- Supported the Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development in updating its Nutrition Multi-Sectoral Strategic Plan based on a multi-sectoral analysis of the country's nutrition situation.

**Niger:** Evidence gathered by the Joint Project contributed to the National Strategy for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons, which emphasises the role of social safety nets in building long-term resilience for these people, offering a crucial framework for leveraging social protection to support displaced populations.



## Programmes

**Burkina Faso:** The Joint Project focused on supporting the revision of the PAMPV, with both agencies helping to shape its economic inclusion measures and other key components.

**Chad:** Both agencies participated in consultations on Chad's social protection landscape, contributing to the development of the new World Bank-funded social protection programme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and National Solidarity and the Refugee and Host Communities Support Project.



## Coordination

**Burkina Faso:** Advocated revitalisation of central and sub-national social protection coordination frameworks. Began working with the Government to ensure adequate multi-sector stakeholder involvement around the PAMPV, during its revision and implementation.

**Mali:** Strengthened the Social Protection Working Group and the National Technical Committee for the Strategic Orientation of Social Protection, both chaired by DNPSES. These platforms help UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank to align their support to the Government priorities, ensuring coherence and complementarity between agencies.

**Mauritania:** Continued strengthening national coordination of social protection interventions. Participated in platforms like the SNPS steering committee and, since January 2024, the new Social Protection Working Group. Adoption of the revised SNPS is expected to be accompanied by formalisation of coordination structures.



## Delivery Systems

**Chad:** Over 87,000 households in targeted departments were registered in the social registry, with Joint Project technical and data validation support and equipment provision.

**Mali:** Strengthened social registry capacities for coordination and data collection, quality and protection, and supported the addition of 40,000 households in the social registry.

**Mauritania:** Enhanced the Social Registry's use for targeting and used its payment and monitoring platform for delivery of all Joint Project supported cash transfers. Improved Social Registry interoperability with other social information systems has contributed to expanded coverage of social programmes, e.g. cash transfers, income-generating activities and health insurance. In addition, knowledge sharing missions occurred between the project countries (Mauritania-Niger and Mauritania-Mali) to learn from Mauritania's experience in expanding and using its social registry broadly across social protection and emergency response (including refugees).

**Niger:** Supported national authorities to design and deliver drought and shock responses. Implemented Track 2 cash transfers in coordination with local authorities, ensuring continued opportunities for capacity strengthening.



## Finance

**Mauritania:** Continued support for the operationalisation of the National Food and Nutritional Crisis Response Fund (FNRCAN). With technical and advocacy backing from the Joint Project and World Bank, the Government allocated \$6.5 million for food security and nutrition in 2023, aligned with the 2024 Finance Law. Joint Project support also helped broaden the donor base, with AFD pledging €12 million over three years (2023-2025) for FNRCAN, including cash transfers and lean season response.

## Knowledge, Evidence and Learning

The Joint Project's approach to systems strengthening and cash transfer delivery is enriched by **analytical work and documentation of country and region-wide experiences**, providing lessons to replicate across project countries and beyond. A key focus has been on improving national social protection information systems, particularly social registries. Several research papers and policy guidance notes were completed, guiding social protection policy dialogues across the Sahel.

During the reporting period, a regional synthesis **report on social registries and social protection information systems** was launched during a regional workshop (November 2023) and a global webinar (December 2023). Titled "The challenge of coordination and inclusion: use of social registries and broader social protection information systems for capturing multiple vulnerabilities in West Africa", it reviews digital social protection information systems across 19 countries, identifying trends and offering insights to better capture vulnerabilities. It covers institutional arrangements, data issues and programme use of social registries, with six in-depth Sahel case studies and a comparative review of Mali, Mauritania and Niger (in [English](#) and [French](#)).

To build national capacities and strengthen leadership, the Joint Project supported training for 16 new francophone [TRANSFORM](#) Master Trainers, to enable **rollout of the TRANSFORM curriculum** across the project countries in 2024. This inter-agency initiative has developed training tools and methodologies to strengthen individual and institutional capacity for the management of national social protection systems in Africa.

The Joint Project also **strengthened its partnership with the World Bank on adaptive social protection**. This included launching a joint research initiative on social protection and social cohesion in the Sahel, developing advocacy messages and convergence principles on shock-responsive social protection for the Sahel Alliance, as well as presenting jointly in key forums. A series of engagements and joint planning efforts have aligned the Joint Project more closely with the World Bank's Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP). Participation by UNICEF and WFP at the SASPP annual donor meeting in London (December 2023) and SASPP staff participation at the Joint Project retreat in Dakar (April 2024) solidified a shared strategic direction for shock-responsive social protection in the Sahel, refining the twin-track approach, setting standards for national safety net programmes, and strengthening social protection systems in fragile contexts. Additionally, the Joint Project is supporting the World Bank and BMZ with the Temporary Social Protection Working Group under the Sahel Alliance, establishing joint messages and principles to ensure aligned support to national systems.

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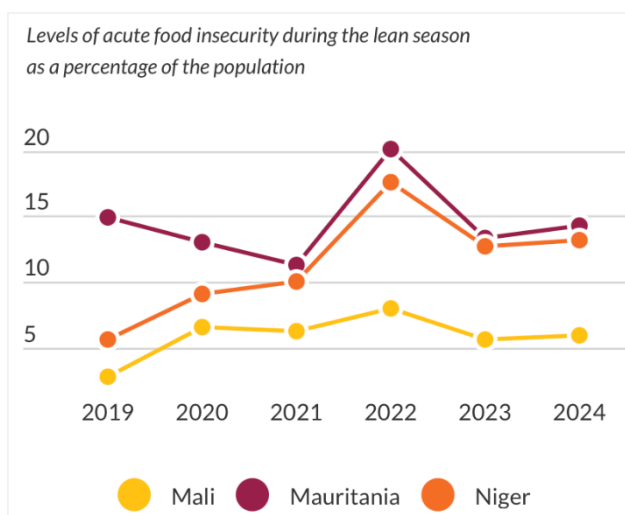
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# I. Context

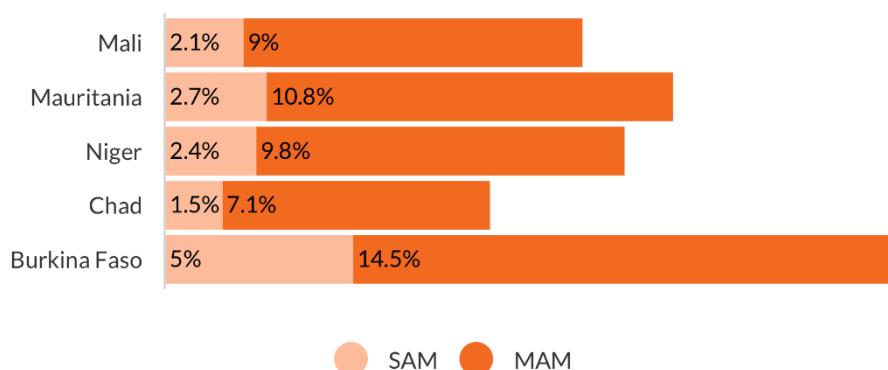
Food insecurity and malnutrition levels remained critical across the Sahel in 2023 and worsened in 2024. Global food price inflation and supply chain disruptions are among the ongoing repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. While climate shocks, such as droughts and floods, compounded by rising conflict and insecurity, have further strained agriculture, trade and markets, disrupting livelihoods and disproportionately affecting people already facing situations of high vulnerability.

In 2024, over 11.5 million people (12 per cent of the population) across the five Joint Project countries are projected to experience severe food insecurity (CH/IPC 3+) during the lean season – the highest levels since the *Cadre Harmonisé* was launched in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

Acute malnutrition rates among children under five have surpassed WHO’s “high” threshold (above 10 per cent prevalence) in all five countries,<sup>3</sup> marking the highest levels in recent years. Many families lack the means to afford sufficient and nutritious foods. According to the Fill-the-Nutrient Gap Analysis, an average of three out of five households in these countries cannot afford a nutritious diet, rising to four out of five in remote or conflict-affected areas. This situation worsens during the lean season, with households in conflict-affected areas particularly impacted by market disruptions and limited access to food supplies.



Levels of severe and moderate acute malnutrition as a percentage of the population under five



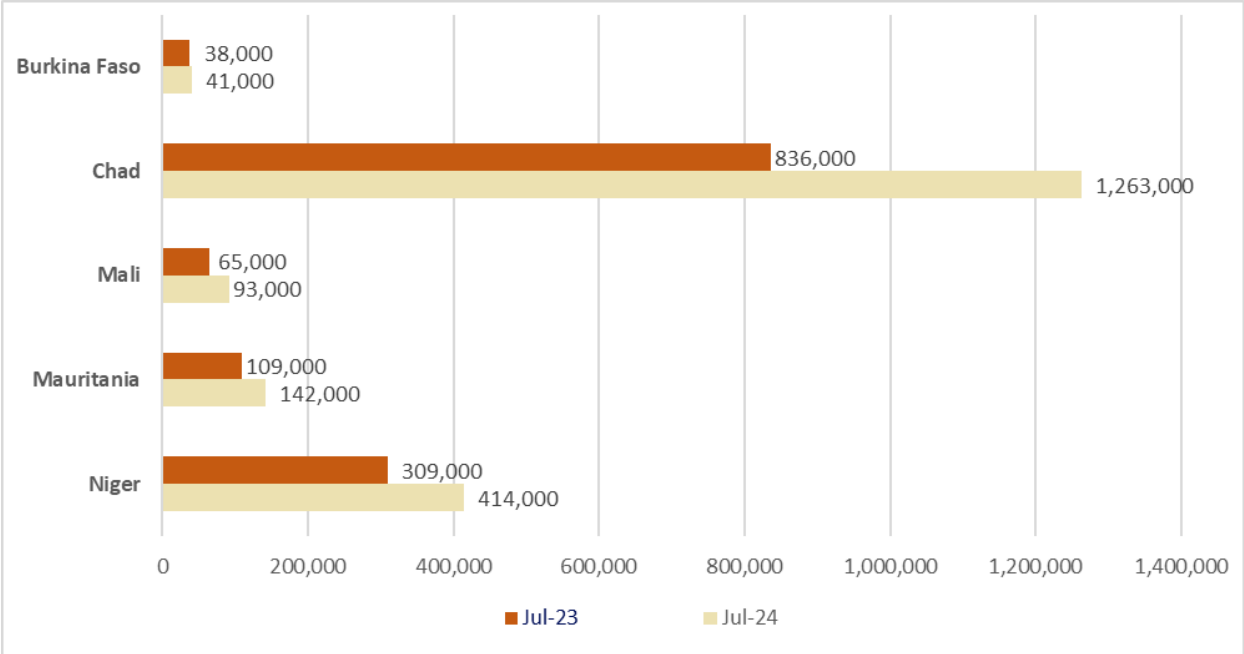
Escalating violence and displacement in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has placed additional pressure on limited resources, fuelling intra-communal tensions. During the reporting period, the

<sup>2</sup> CH/IPC. 2024. *Résultats de l'analyse de la situation actuelle et projetée de la sécurité alimentaire aigüe au Sahel, en Afrique de l'Ouest et au Cameroun.* (Mars 2024). Available: [FICHE COMMUNICATION - MARS 2024\\_VF.pdf \(ipcinfo.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> According to the latest SMART surveys (Mali 2023, Mauritania 2022 and Niger 2022)

refugee population rose significantly across the five project countries, increasing from 1.3 million in July 2023 to almost 2 million in July 2024. Notable increases were seen in Chad (51 per cent), Mali (43 per cent), Niger (34 per cent) and Mauritania (30 per cent).<sup>4</sup>

Refugee population change from July 2023 to July 2024



During the same period, overall internal displacement figures remained stable at 3.1 million. However, this masks variations across countries. In Mali, the number of internally displaced people fell by 15.6 per cent (from 392,000 to 331,000) and by 42.5 per cent in Chad (from 381,000 to 219,000). Conversely, internal displacement rose significantly in Niger, with a 51 per cent increase (from 335,000 to 507,000). In Burkina Faso, by the end of 2023, there were approximately 2.1 million internally displaced people, with updated data not yet available for 2024.<sup>5</sup>

**Mali:** The 2023 dry spell during the agricultural season severely impacted over 1.2 million people, pushing many to adopt negative coping strategies to meet basic food needs and increased acute malnutrition rates in 2024. The withdrawal of MINUSMA in mid-2023 worsened the security vacuum, leading to a surge in violence and an outflow of refugees.

**Mauritania:** Since August 2023, violence in Mali has forced over 33,000 refugees into Mauritania, a sharp rise from 12,000 in 2022. Most of these refugees (94.2 per cent) are in the Hodh El Chergui region, which already hosted over 105,000 Malian refugees from previous influxes. As of July 2024, UNHCR estimates Mauritania is home to 142,000 asylum seekers and refugees, nearly half residing in the Mbera camp (83 per cent women and children). While refugees listed in the Social Registry are entitled to social protection benefits, in practice unequal access persists, straining social cohesion with host communities.

**Niger:** A *coup d'état* on 26 July 2023 triggered sanctions and the suspension of international development aid and security support, deepening the country's insecurity and economic crisis,

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR R4Sahel Coordination Platform for Forced Displacements in the Sahel (July 2024) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sahelcrisis>  
<sup>5</sup> UNHCR R4Sahel Coordination Platform for Forced Displacements in the Sahel (July 2024) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sahelcrisis>

impacting nearly half of Niger's pre-coup budget.<sup>6</sup> ECOWAS imposed sanctions, including restrictions on banking services, trade, and border closures with certain member countries.

Although sanctions were lifted, and most borders reopened by February 2024, many international financial institutions and key donors suspended or placed restrictions on their bilateral aid, including the World Bank, which was supporting several social safety net programmes. The resulting economic slowdown, compounded by rising inflation, led to a liquidity crisis, which has eased slightly in 2024. From March 2024, international financial institutions began resuming engagement with Niger, but traditional bilateral government assistance remains suspended.

Niger, heavily reliant on imports - particularly food staples like rice - has faced shortages of essential goods, driving up prices. Following the coup, rice prices surged by 21 per cent in August 2023, and by over 50 per cent more in the following two months. Even before the coup, Niger was experiencing its food insecurity since 2014, with 3.3 million people (13.3 per cent of the population) affected in 2023. Projections for the 2024 lean season suggest this will worsen, with over 3.4 million people expected to experience crisis levels or higher (CH/IPC3+) of acute food insecurity. Sanctions have also disrupted energy supplies, as Niger typically relies on Nigeria for more than two-thirds of its electricity.

**Burkina Faso:** In 2024, the Government launched the "*Programme national d'autonomisation des menages pauvres et vulnérables*" (PAMPV), a national social assistance programme aiming to cover the poorest 20 per cent of the population with cash transfers and economic inclusion components, as well as a shock-response component for the lean season. However, the Government's ban on cash transfers since October 2023 has stalled these efforts and affected both PAMPV and Joint Project-supported cash transfers. Only productive inclusion activities are currently being considered.

**Regional Integration:** In January 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger announced their intention to withdraw from ECOWAS. Although formal decisions are pending, and the countries must observe a one-year notice period as per ECOWAS regulations, this move could significantly disrupt trade, the free movement of people and goods, and exacerbate rising food and energy prices across the region.

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<sup>6</sup> Asadu and Ahmed. 2024. *A year has passed since Niger's dramatic coup. Life has become more dangerous and desperate.* Available: [A year has passed since Niger's dramatic coup. Life has become more dangerous and desperate | AP News](#)

## II. Achievements

### BURKINA FASO

#### OUTCOME 1 - Affected populations receive cash transfers and complementary services to absorb the social and economic impacts of multiple covariant shocks.

Table 1: Summary of beneficiaries reached and implementation modalities in Burkina Faso for Outcome 1 (Phase IV)

	Transfer timing & frequency	Total Target Beneficiaries (HH)	HHs reached (Jan-Jul 2024) <sup>1</sup>	Monthly payment per HH	Total payment per HH (per year/round)	Delivery Mechanism
Track 1 (UNICEF): Regular cash transfer with lean season top-up	Quarterly for 3 years (Jan 2024-Dec 2026)	2,000	n/a	\$19 (XOF 11,400) <sup>7</sup>	\$228 (XOF 136,800) <sup>8</sup>	Electronic transfers by FSP contracted by the Government
Track 2 (WFP): Regular cash transfer with lean season top-up	Lean season top-up: 3-month period (Jun-Aug) for 3 years (Jan 2024-Dec 2026)	2,000	n/a			FSP contracted by WFP

In October 2023, after the Joint Project proposal was developed, the Government suspended all cash transfers in Burkina Faso. This has affected planned Outcome 1 activities, forcing both agencies to pivot away from cash-based interventions. Instead, pending BMZ/KfW approval, the Joint Project is proposing to implement economic inclusion measures, in line with the Government's Programme for the Empowerment of Poor and Vulnerable Households (PAMPV). This suspension has delayed implementation of the PAMPV, which is being revised to exclude cash transfers. Outcome 1 activities will begin after the adjusted PAMPV documents are adopted, due to be finalised by November 2024 following a government-led workshop where both agencies will participate as technical partners.

#### Economic Inclusion Measures

The decision to implement economic inclusion measures as an alternative to cash transfers resulted from discussions led by the General Directorate of Sectoral Studies and Statistics (DGESS) within the Ministry of National Solidarity and Humanitarian Action. Subsequently, the Joint Project developed a capacity-building action plan – which includes economic inclusion measures – with the DGESS for the PAMPV, the Technical Secretariat of the Unique Social Registry (ST-RSU) and the National Council on Social Protection (SP-CNPS).

These measures aim to boost household income and assets in the Joint Project's target regions by strengthening household financial and economic capacities.

Planned initiatives include: (i) creating village savings and loan associations; (ii) coaching and mentoring; (iii) providing GERME (*Gérer Mieux Votre Entreprise* - Manage Your Business Better) training; (iv) improving market access; and (v) offering productive grants. The Joint Project also

<sup>7</sup> This amount already includes the lean season top-up, set yearly in the national response plan.

<sup>8</sup> This amount includes the yearly lean season top-ups.

plans to align with the PAMPV's shock response component by introducing a consumer support initiative, allocating school bursaries to adolescent girls in households participating in economic inclusion activities.

### **Complementary Services**

The Joint Project aligns with the complementary measures defined by the PAMPV, covering nutrition sensitivity, child protection, social cohesion, child protection, and the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation. Planned activities include awareness raising campaigns to promote positive behaviours in health, nutrition, education, and civil registration. Additional initiatives will focus on hygiene and sanitation, child protection, and a package of child and gender-sensitive activities (encompassing protection, disability, human rights, and gender-based violence). To strengthen social cohesion, efforts will be made to reduce conflict risks during the targeting process. Complementary activities will begin once the revised PAMPV programme documents are adopted, and the economic inclusion measures are launched.

### **OUTCOME 2 – National social protection systems are strengthened to become more shock-responsive, nutrition-sensitive, and child-sensitive.**

During the reporting period, the Joint Project focused primarily on systems strengthening by supporting the Government's revision of the PAMPV to position it as an umbrella programme for social protection in the country. Both agencies also began enhancing the capacities of the national social protection system to deploy the RSU, finalise the National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS), facilitate social protection coordination, and improve monitoring, evaluation, evidence generation, and training capacities among social protection actors.

The joint capacity-building action plan establishes a collaborative framework between the Government, the Joint Project and the World Bank for a year. The plan includes the review and adoption of the revised PAMPV, the deployment of the RSU, the improvement of government-led coordination in the social protection sector, and the dissemination of the SNPS.

### **DELIVERY**

#### **Support to the Social Registry**

The Joint Project supported the creation of an operational manual for the RSU through technical workshops and meetings. Two enrolment methods were adopted: community-based enrolment of vulnerable households in rural areas and universal enrolment in urban areas.

A pilot phase (January 2023-March 2024) tested the RSU system and tools in the Centre-East and Centre-West regions, covering 7 provinces (22 rural communes and 10 urban communes). Over 215,700 poor and vulnerable households were registered in the RSU database (143,900 in rural areas and 73,800 in urban areas). The nationwide RSU rollout began in April 2024, covering 11 urban communes across 7 of the country's 13 regions.

Both agencies participated in monthly RSU Task Force and biweekly Social Protection Technical Group<sup>9</sup> meetings, which they co-coordinate since June 2024. They also contributed to brainstorming workshops of the RSU's Guidance and Monitoring Committee (COS-RSU).

### Capacity building to strengthen national leadership and ownership

The Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Solidarity has designated the Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (SP-CONASUR) as the primary liaison with the Joint Project. This facilitates regular exchange and government capacity building efforts.

## POLICY

Burkina Faso's 2013 National Social Protection Strategy expired in 2022. Since then, the country has been developing a new strategy to guide its social protection vision and strategic direction. The Joint Project, with the World Bank, participated in technical workshops to finalise and validate the new strategy, including to provide technical contributions to the draft strategy. Its technical validation is now complete, and it is undergoing administrative and technical review before government endorsement.

## COORDINATION

Leveraging the review of the PAMPV, the Joint Project plans to provide technical support to accompany the revitalization of the various social protection consultation and coordination frameworks, which have not convened since 2020, including the following:

- **Conseil National de la Protection Sociale (CNPS):** Responsible for validating SNPS interventions and reporting tools. The reactivation of the CNPS will strengthen strategic, national-level social protection decision-making.
- **Cellules Interministérielles Spécialisées (CIS):** There are two specialised inter-ministerial technical units: a unit for social safety nets, led by the Ministry of Social Action, and a unit managing social insurance, led by the Ministry of Social Security. Reactivation of these units will strengthen operational coordination of activities, enhancing the overall efficiency of social protection interventions.
- **Cellules Régionales de Protection Sociale (CRPS):** These regional units coordinate and monitor implementation of SNPS interventions at regional and local levels. Reactivation will improve local ownership and coordination of social protection programmes and strategies.

## PROGRAMMES

Joint Project support to programmes has centred on the PAMPV revision. As part of this process, both agencies participated in a workshop on consumption support and in discussions with the DGESS on the package of economic inclusion measures. Clarifications on management of the PAMPV, specifically on the Project Management Unit, will be provided by the Ministry of National Solidarity after the review and signature of a joint decree by the ministers responsible for finance and social action.

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<sup>9</sup> The official name of the Social Protection Technical Group is the Sectoral Dialogue Framework 'Work, Employment, and Social Protection' (*Cadre sectoriel de dialogue 'Travail, emploi et protection sociale'* - CSD-TEPS).

## MONITORING AND BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK

Monitoring will be coordinated between UNICEF and WFP to ensure harmonisation across data collected and facilitate common analysis and reporting, in coordination with Government counterparts. A baseline will be conducted after finalisation of the PAMPV revision, prior to the implementation of Outcome 1 activities. Ongoing discussions with the PAMPV technical implementation team aim to ensure that a monitoring and accountability mechanism is defined for the Joint Project. Specific capacity-building activities will be identified and implemented with the future PAMPV Management Unit.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The **suspension of cash transfers** has had a knock-on effect on the Joint Project in terms of:

- **Alignment with the PAMPV.** Aligning with the PAMPV during its design phase has posed significant challenges. Initially the PAMPV planned substantial cash-based activities, but their suspension led to a lengthy revision process. This impacted Outcome 1 implementation as the Joint Project awaited the final framework to clarify its role in implementation.
- **Delays in the SNPS.** The suspension of cash transfers has made some of the aims of the draft SNPS unattainable, necessitating revisions and delaying its rollout.
- **Key coordination challenges.** The PAMPV review highlighted the need for better stakeholder alignment and future coordination. The key social protection coordination bodies (the CNPS, CIS and CRPS) have not convened since 2020. To address this, the joint action plan between UNICEF, WFP and the SP-CNPS identifies actions to revitalise these coordination frameworks.

## FUTURE PLANS

### *Main priorities for outcome 1*

Both agencies will continue supporting the finalisation of PAMPV revisions. This will involve participating in a series of validation workshops from August 2024. Once the PAMPV revision is complete, both agencies will define precise activities and implementation modalities for the Joint Project, with the aim of launching economic inclusion measures by the end of 2024.

### *Main priorities for outcome 2*

#### Delivery

The Joint Project will continue supporting the nationwide RSU rollout by:

- Organising a workshop to develop a targeting methodology for hard-to-reach areas.
- Supporting the establishment of a permanent data collection and updating mechanism.
- Providing technical capacity building for the ST/RSU team.
- Using the RSU to target beneficiary households for the Joint Project.
- Conducting complementary data collection for poor and vulnerable households.
- Offering institutional support to the ST/RSU.
- Implementing a communication strategy to enhance awareness and engagement.

Additionally, technical assistance will be provided to further strengthen the RSU, including



recruiting a volunteer statistician to support the team. Discussions are also underway with the PAMPV technical team to define a monitoring and accountability mechanism. Looking ahead, the Joint Project will focus on identifying and implementing capacity-building initiatives in collaboration with the future PAMPV Management Unit.

In coordination with the World Bank, three officials from CONASUR, DGESS (PAMPV), and the Minister's Office will attend the Social Security Academy in Turin, organised by the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organisation (ITC-ILO) (September 2024). Further capacity-building is planned for the SP-CNPS to improve coordination of social protection activities, including finalizing the SNPS, enhancing the coordination of social protection bodies, generating evidence, and providing stakeholder training.

### Coordination

The Joint Project plans to provide technical support to accompany the revitalization of various social protection consultation and coordination frameworks.

A reflection workshop will be held to improve coordination and planning between emergency response and social protection actors, focusing on integrating humanitarian, development and peace efforts (humanitarian-development-peace nexus) in social protection programmes. This aims to strengthen government ownership, improve coherence of social assistance projects, and foster technical learning. Participating stakeholders will include SP-CONASUR, SE-CNSA, SONAGESS, SAP / SP-CNPS, RSU, and SPONG.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION**

The Joint Project has provided an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between UNICEF and WFP, as well as between the two agencies and key government bodies (facilitating Outcome 2 activities). This collaboration has not only enhanced coordination, but also reinforced the national leadership's commitment to strengthening the national social protection system. Close coordination with the World Bank has further enabled UNICEF and WFP to align their approaches with the Government's priorities. Additionally, the two agencies have been designated to co-lead the platform for social protection technical and financial partners, reflecting their growing influence in advancing the social protection agenda.

## **COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER GERMAN (BMZ/GIZ/KfW) CONTRIBUTIONS**

UNICEF and WFP social protection teams regularly attend meetings organized by the BMZ-funded Sahel Resilience Partnership (SRP) to identify opportunities for synergies. The teams also plan to leverage the SRP's approach and experiences to create a comprehensive database through which to map key social protection stakeholders and their areas of intervention and their roles and contributions in supporting the PAMPV.

The implementation zones of the Joint Project largely overlap with those of the SRP. This provides an opportunity to develop economic inclusion activities in the shared zones and to leverage child protection and nutrition packages under the SRP to strengthen the complementary measures of the Joint Project.

# CHAD

## OUTCOME 1 - Affected populations receive cash transfers and complementary services to absorb the social and economic impacts of multiple covariant shocks.

Table 2: Summary of beneficiaries reached and implementation modalities in Chad for Outcome 1 (Phase IV)

	Transfer timing & frequency	Total Target Beneficiaries (HH)	HHs reached (Jan-Jul 2024)	Monthly payment per HH	Total payment per HH (per year/round)	Delivery Mechanism
Track 1 (UNICEF): Regular cash transfer with lean season top-up (Bahr El Ghazal & Kleta Departments)	Quarterly for 3 years (Oct 2024-Sep 2027) <sup>10</sup>  Lean season top-up: 3-month period for 3 years (Oct 2024-Sep 2027)	2,200	n/a	\$25(XAF 15,000)	\$300 (XOF 180,000) (regular transfers)  \$75 (XOF 45,000) (lean season top-up)	Track 1 – FSP to be identified by Gov/CFS
Track 2 (WFP): Regular cash transfer with lean season top-up (Central Kanem Department)	Quarterly for 3 years (Oct 2024-Sep 2027)	1,500	n/a	\$25 (XAF 15,000)		FSP contracted by WFP

The Joint Project expanded to Chad in January 2024. During the inception phase, preparations began to deliver cash transfers to shock-affected households. However, the transfer schedule was revised for both Tracks 1 and 2 transfers due to delays related to the presidential elections and changes in government leadership in early 2024. The first round, originally set for January, is now planned for October and transfers will take place quarterly.

While mobile money options were explored for cash distributions, all Joint Project-supported transfers will initially be provided in cash by financial service providers, since mobile network coverage in rural areas is limited and local liquidity for withdrawals is insufficient. The potential for mobile transfers will be reassessed if conditions evolve in the targeted departments.

### Cash transferred to affected populations, in line with national response plans

#### Cash Transfers with lean season top-ups via Track 1 in Bahr El Ghazal and Kleta Departments

To prepare for Track 1 transfers, UNICEF supported the National Institute of Statistics (INSEED) to collect data on households in the Bahr El Ghazal Ouest and Kleta departments, in Bahr El Ghazal Province. All 25,000 households in these departments were added to the Social Registry (RSU) between May and July 2024. The harmonised RSU questionnaire was used to gather information on household composition, housing conditions, household assets and access to basic social services. Subsequently a rigorous targeting process began,<sup>11</sup> with close collaboration between the *Cellule Filets Sociaux* (CFS), INSEED and UNICEF, employing a revised proxy means test to select beneficiaries from among the most vulnerable households.

<sup>10</sup> To ensure payment regularity and foreseeability, both agencies aim to maintain transfers at a quarterly place, although this would mean that the transfers continue beyond December 2026.

<sup>11</sup> The targeting process began in early August 2024 and was completed by the end of August with a list of selected beneficiaries. Registration/verification of the selected beneficiaries is ongoing (ID verification, recipient designation, picture taking and beneficiary card issuance) and, once complete, cash will be distributed (in October 2024).

With support from the Joint Project and in collaboration with the World Bank, INSEED revised the proxy means test formula using the latest poverty data from 2022 household budget surveys. Once validated, the updated formula was applied to select 2,200 beneficiary households from those newly registered in the RSU in Bahr El Gazal Ouest department for the first phase of cash transfers. With Joint Project support, INSEED registered 68,749 households – surpassing the planned target of 62,000.

The Joint Project also ensured INSEED enumeration teams receive protection, accountability, and PSEA training. The transfers for track 1 will be distributed by a financial service provider which will be identified and contracted by the Government and the CFS.

### Cash Transfers with lean season top-ups in Central Kanem Department via Track 2

In Central Kanem Department (Kanem Province), universal household registration was completed in July 2024, following the same process with INSEED as Track 1. The first round of cash transfers for 1,500 households is scheduled for October 2024, with quarterly distributions continuing until September 2027. The first lean season top-up is planned for May 2025, ahead of the June-August 2025 lean season. The Joint Project is also advising the RSU on adding a supplementary module to its harmonized questionnaire to collect food security and nutrition indicators which, combined with proxy-means test indicators, can better reflect household vulnerabilities and reduce exclusion errors. Following assessments by WFP's Cash-based Transfer and Technology teams, cash will be distributed in-hand via the same microfinance institution used by the PARCA programme and other WFP cash-based delivery programmes.

### **Complementary services delivered in combination with cash transfers**

Complementary activities are scheduled to begin in October 2024, alongside cash transfers.

In Bahr El Ghazal Province, UNICEF has contracted a local NGO to provide basic social services at community level under the BMZ-funded SRP. This will benefit households targeted under the Joint Project (the SRP covers the same target area). Complementary activities will include assessments of children's nutritional status and training of community workers.

In Kanem Department, the Joint Project is collaborating with WFP's Training for Nutrition project (FORMANUT) to strengthen nutrition skills among decentralised technical service personnel. This support aims to mainstream nutrition across extension services related to agriculture, education and social services. The improved technical capacities at the decentralised level will directly benefit Track 2 Joint Project beneficiaries. Nutrition education services for the 1,500 targeted households in the Kanem Department are due to begin in October 2024 alongside the first round of cash transfers. The Joint Project estimates that all households in Kanem Department will indirectly benefit from these nutrition education support services (approximately 62,000 households).

Agricultural productive activities and business development training are planned as part of the Joint Project's suite of complementary measures alongside cash transfers. In preparation, the Joint Project has analysed existing community-based participatory planning carried out by the SRP in the Department of Kanem Center to map out relevant sectors for income-generating activities that could be of interest to cash transfers recipients.

## **OUTCOME 2 – National social protection systems are strengthened to become more shock-responsive, nutrition-sensitive, and child-sensitive.**

During the reporting period, the Joint Project began supporting the rollout of PARCA, aligning Joint Project-supported cash transfers with PARCA's social cash transfer component. Simultaneously, it worked with the Government to start transitioning away from predominantly seasonal assistance to more adaptive social protection programmes, as outlined in the National Social Protection Policy, which is awaiting political validation.

The Joint Project is supporting RSU household registration, community engagement, and accountability mechanisms. In collaboration with the CFS, it has facilitated government-to-person cash transfers in rural areas through microfinance institutions. The Joint Project is also fostering improved coordination between government bodies, UNICEF, WFP, and the World Bank to align goals, improve transfers, and enhance shock response mechanisms.

### **DELIVERY**

#### Support to the Social Registry

The Joint Project facilitated the universal registration of over 87,000 households in the RSU in the departments targeted for Tracks 1 and 2 transfers. This included providing technical support, data validation and necessary equipment such as tablets and smartphones. Approximately 25,000 households were registered in Bahr El Ghazal Province (covering Bahr El Ghazal Ouest to enable beneficiary selection for Phase IV, and Kleta in preparation for the next stage of the Joint Project); and 62,000 households in Kanem Department of Kanem Province.

Recognising the importance of community awareness to enable universal household registration, the Joint Project worked with the Kanem Provincial Social Work Delegation to raise community interest. As part of these efforts, the Joint Project trained Social Registry personnel in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring a sound understanding of protection and accountability principles during household data collection and for data protection. Training on the existing grievance redress mechanism (GRM) was also conducted, with radio messaging in different languages to raise community awareness on using the GRM.

To facilitate beneficiary selection from among the households registered in the RSU, the Joint Project provided technical support to revise the Proxy-Means Test model, which is used to assess the poverty level of each registered household. This revision aimed to update the previous scoring formula with more recent household data in accordance with indicators included in the current harmonized questionnaire.

Regarding the GRM, joint working sessions took place to review PARCA's existing manual for Dialogue and Complaints Management Mechanisms and identify areas for improvement, incorporating lessons learned from PARCA experiences in other provinces and insights from UNICEF and WFP. As a starting point, the existing PARCA GRM will be deployed and improved progressively to better formalise complaint registration and processing, ensuring adequate monitoring and dissemination of feedback channels within assisted communities.

### Government-to-person payments

The Joint Project collaborated with the CFS to develop mechanisms to enable government-to-person payments. It supported the CFS to extend its contract with a financial service provider to cover Bahr El Ghazal Province for the upcoming cash distribution in October 2024. The CFS has previously used three financial service providers – a microfinance institution and two mobile network operators – for its social protection projects. Due to the limited mobile coverage and the scarcity of mobile cash points in rural areas, the microfinance institution was selected for the first two cash distributions in 2024.

### **POLICY**

UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank supported the Government to revise its National Social Protection Strategy in 2023, but it has been awaiting final endorsement by the Government since December 2023. Both agencies and the World Bank have conducted multiple advocacy sessions with the Government at technical and strategic level. However, changes in government leadership between January and June 2024, combined with the focus on the Presidential election in May 2024, have affected the endorsement process.

### **COORDINATION**

In March 2024, the Ministry of Planning issued a decree to set up a coordination committee for the Joint Project, under the leadership of the General Director of Planning and Studies. It is comprised of representatives from the Ministries of Social Affairs, Women and Health, INSEED, CFS, WFP and UNICEF. Its main objective is to coordinate Joint Project implementation and facilitate political advocacy. The first meeting was held on 7 August 2024, and the committee members extended the invitation to other sector ministries, such as education, agriculture, and the Ministry of Decentralisation and Civil Society.

### **PROGRAMMES**

#### Joint support to the Ministry of Gender and National Solidarity (MGSN) and PARCA

The Joint Project participated in consultations organised by the World Bank to inform its new social protection project.

- i. **Initial Consultations:** World Bank consultants met the Joint Project team to review the social protection landscape in Chad, discussing key challenges and recent developments. The team highlighted the need for increased investment in critical areas, such as the social registry, grievance redress mechanisms and payment systems. They also stressed the importance of capacity building for national counterparts at both strategic and operational levels.
- ii. **Monthly Meetings:** Joint taskforce (UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank) discussions focused on improving collaboration and ensuring alignment between the new World Bank social protection programme and the Joint Project to maximise impact.

The World Bank fully integrated the Joint Project's inputs into the design of its three-year social protection programme, which includes three main components:

1. **Rollout of new national Productive Social Safety Net Programme (PSSNP):** Provides regular cash transfers to 62,000 households over two years in nine provinces (including

Kanem), along with services in human capital development, climate resilience, basic financial education, and productive inclusion for the final 18 months of the programme.

2. **Shock-responsive emergency cash transfers:** Delivers one-time emergency cash transfers to 65,000 households affected by climate shocks and food insecurity, using the PSSNP's delivery infrastructure.
3. **Social protection system strengthening:** Focuses on enhancing social registry, grievance and redress mechanism, payment systems and capacity building to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the social protection system.

## MONITORING AND BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK

WFP and UNICEF will coordinate their monitoring activities to ensure harmonisation of data and facilitate common analysis. Distribution and post-distribution monitoring surveys are planned once cash transfer activities begin. In preparation for outcome monitoring, a baseline assessment is scheduled for October 2024, shortly before the first cash distribution, using a common questionnaire to enable joint analysis and reporting. Given the CFS's current limited monitoring capacities, they will be closely involved in planning, implementing, monitoring and reporting for Track 1 transfers. This aims to strengthen their capacity and establish sustainable monitoring practices across their operations.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Operational delays due to presidential elections:** Presidential elections and campaigning in the first half of 2024 delayed collaboration with key government counterparts. In addition, mobility restrictions were imposed in parts of the country. This impacted the start of cash transfers supported by the Joint Project and reduced the Government's focus on social protection during this period, affecting discussions and progress.

**New government and governance structures:** Following the establishment of a new Government, social protection coordination mechanisms remain unclear, with overlapping mandates between the Ministries of Planning and Social Affairs. The Ministry of Planning leads social protection planning, while the Ministry of Social Affairs oversees its implementation, creating uncertainty over which ministry will oversee specific policies and programmes. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the Ministry of Social Affairs' plans to establish a safety nets unit due to the existence of a similar unit within the Ministry of Planning.

These institutional overlaps have delayed the adoption of the Social Protection National Strategy (finalised in late 2023) and stalled related Joint Project activities. To address this, a transitional coordination committee has been established to oversee Joint Project activities, bringing together representatives from relevant ministries to ensure closer coordination and regular communication, preventing further delays. Formal social protection coordination structures are expected to be established in the future.

## FUTURE PLANS

### *Main priorities for outcome 1*

- Track 1 and 2 cash transfers, quarterly from October 2024.
- Support the setup of learning and monitoring groups for optimal feeding practices for infants and young children (GASPA), to bring together pregnant and lactating women from cash

transfer beneficiary households to promote social and behavioral change. These community-based groups will promote good hygiene and nutritional practices, as well as other complementary services, especially those supported by the BMZ-funded SRP.

- FORMANUT Capacity strengthening for 60 public servants, including social workers on: (i) water, hygiene and sanitation; (ii) food security and safety; (iii) nutrition-sensitive social protection; (iv) infant and young child feeding and maternal nutrition; (v) integrated management of acute malnutrition; (vi) micronutrients; and (vi) education.
- Building on community-based planning supported by the SRP, potential income-generating activities will be identified with 1,500 households for economic inclusion support. A validation survey will be conducted with these households in collaboration with social workers.

### *Main priorities for outcome 2*

**Programmes and Delivery:** After launching cash transfers, the Joint Project will provide technical assistance to strengthen the Government's capacity to implement social protection programmes. This includes systematizing monitoring processes, exploring digitalisation for management of beneficiary data, payment information, and grievance redress mechanisms. The expansion of the RSU will continue, with technical assistance for continued registrations.

The Joint Project will collaborate with the Government and World Bank to explore mobile and digital payment solutions, at least for urban centres. A new World Bank adaptive social protection project will invest in building a payment system for the Government, and the Joint Project intends to complement these efforts.

**Policy:** Advocacy to secure the political adoption of the SNPS, enabling the Joint Project to focus capacity strengthening efforts on relevant coordination bodies.

**Coordination:** In October 2024, the Joint Project will organize a 5-day training workshop using the TRANSFORM<sup>3</sup> curriculum. This training will enhance knowledge on social protection programming, legal frameworks, programme design, delivery systems, coordination and financing among government counterparts and key social protection stakeholders.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION**

UNICEF and WFP maintain close collaboration to align their approach and timeline of activities. They ensure regular communication with the key government counterparts, including the CFS, INSEED, Ministry of Planning, and Ministry of Social Affairs, and conduct all official meetings jointly. The first formal project coordination committee meeting will be held in early August 2024, bringing together about 30 participants from various ministries to share information on the project and gather feedback and suggestions.

## **COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER GERMAN (BMZ/GIZ/KfW) CONTRIBUTIONS**

This social protection project is closely linked with the BMZ-funded SRP led by UNICEF, WFP and GIZ. Both projects operate in the same departments - Kanem Centre and Bahr el Ghazel Ouest - ensuring households receiving safety nets support will also have access to a wide range of complementary resilience services.

# MALI

## OUTCOME 1 - Affected populations receive cash transfers and complementary services to absorb the social and economic impacts of multiple covariant shocks.

Table 3: Summary of beneficiaries reached and implementation modalities in Mali for Outcome 1 (Phases I-IV)

	Transfer timing & frequency	HHs targeted (Aug 2020-Jul 2024)	HHs Reached (Aug 2020-Jul 2024)	Monthly payment per HH	Total payment per HH (per year/round)	Delivery Mechanism
Track 1 (UNICEF): CT to HHs with children < 2 &/or pregnant/breastfeeding women	Phases I-II: Aug 21-Feb 23 (3 rounds)	32,500	32,500	\$12.50	\$150	Jigisemejiri, DNPSES, DRDSES
	Phases III-IV: Feb 24-Jan 25 (every 2 months) <sup>12</sup>	20,000	14,713	\$25	\$300	
Track 1 (UNICEF): CT to members of WSGs	1 <sup>st</sup> group; 4 rounds (quarterly) (May 21-Mar 23)	7,563 (members of 311 WSG)	5,387 <sup>13</sup>	\$27.50	\$330	Jigisemejiri, DNPSES, DRDSES
	2 <sup>nd</sup> group: 5 rounds (quarterly) Mar 23-Nov 24 <sup>14</sup>	9,007 (members of 343 WSG)	5,336		\$425	
	3 <sup>rd</sup> group: 4 rounds (quarterly) Nov 23-Jun 24	11,072 (members of 346 WSG)	12,872		\$330	
Track 1 (UNICEF): lump-sum grants to GSAN	April 2024 (lump sum)	650 GSAN (avg. 12 members; ~7,200 HH)	40 GSAN (~480 HH)	n/a	\$550 per GSAN	FSP recruited by DNPSES and UNICEF
Track 2 (WFP): Cash transfers in hard-to access areas)	Dec 20-Nov 22 (3 rounds) Aug-Dec 22 Jan-Dec 23 July-Dec 24	87,503	78,712	\$25	\$150	FSP, NGO, national technical services (cash in hand; commodity vouchers)
Track 2 (WFP): Top-ups to HH with children < 2 & PBW (from among track 2 beneficiaries)	Dec 20-Nov 22 (3 rounds) Jul-Dec 22 Jul-Dec 23 July-Dec 24	45,781	50,605	\$20 (PBW) \$10 (children <2)	\$120 (HH with PBW) \$60 (HH with children < 2)	FSP, NGO, national technical services (cash in hand; commodity) vouchers)

During the reporting period, **688,116 people** (114,686 households) received cash transfers and complementary services with Joint Project support. Since its inception, 900,000 people (150,000 households) have been reached with transfers, and an estimated 3 million people with sensitisation messages.

<sup>12</sup> Although monthly payments were initially planned, a decision was taken to switch to bi-monthly payments to maximise cost-effectiveness (since monthly payments would have required costly monthly distribution and post-distribution monitoring processes).

<sup>13</sup> These households have received all four rounds of payments. An additional 293 households have received at least 1 round of cash distribution. Catch-up payments are ongoing.

<sup>14</sup> A randomised control trial is being conducted during the delivery of cash and complementary services for the second group of WSG. The 343 WSG have been split into three groups and will receive cash in phases.



## *Cash transferred to affected populations, in line with national response plans*

### Cash Transfers to Households in Communities via Track 1

#### *Phases I & II:*

All 32,500 target households have received the cash transfers planned under this component. By February 2023, 92 per cent of beneficiaries had received all three planned rounds, but delays in locating the remaining 8 per cent meant they could not receive payments as scheduled. To address this, UNICEF collaborated with the National Directorate of Social Protection (DNPSES) and the Technical Unit for the Management of Social Safety Nets to devise a strategy for catch-up payments. In September 2023, the remaining 2,573 households received a lump sum of \$150, covering the three missed instalments.

#### *Phases III & IV:*

In total, 20,000 households are targeted for nutrition-sensitive transfers in Phases III and IV. To optimise operational efficiency, UNICEF and the DNPSES decided to combine the targeting and monitoring processes for both phases.

Geographic targeting was based on secondary data, including the 2023 SMART survey, to identify the communities and areas with high levels of malnutrition in Koulikoro, Sikasso and Segou regions. Approximately 47,800 people are vulnerable to malnutrition in these regions, including children under two, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and families with limited access to resources or healthcare. Given the substantial needs, it was decided to focus on the 29 communes where cash transfers were made both to members of women's saving groups and to households in the community during Phases I and II. This aims to consolidate the results for communities already supported by the Joint Project. A blanket approach will cover all the children under two and pregnant and breastfeeding women within these communes.

A household survey gathered crucial data for beneficiary targeting, including a list of children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers in each household. Of the 20,000 planned households, 14,713 have been identified: 10,620 households with children under two and 4,093 with pregnant and breastfeeding women. These households received three payments rounds (in February, April and July 2024). Enrolment in Yorosso and Nara Communes, delayed due to security issues, is expected to be completed in October 2024. A catch-up plan will ensure all 20,000 targeted households receive the same level of assistance.

UNICEF and the DNPSES agreed to link the intervention with existing nutrition programmes, such as community-based growth monitoring or therapeutic feeding programmes, to cover children who are already being supported. This aims to help ensure the continuity of care, avoid duplication of effort and capitalise on the ongoing efforts of community mobilisation and consultations with local leaders and community-based organisations.

### Lump-sum grants to Nutrition Support Groups (GSAN) via Track 1

By providing training and lump-sum payments to 650 GSANs, the Joint Project aims to complement the nutrition-sensitive cash transfers and strengthen their long-term impact. It will enable the GSANs to conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to track programme implementation, including measuring its outcomes through data collection on nutritional status, enrolment rates, programme compliance and household spending on nutritious foods.

Preparations included a social mobilisation and communication phase, involving the regional directorates of health and social development in screening the GSANs to assess their existence and current levels of functionality.

The lump-sum payments were initially scheduled for April 2024, after training in February and March. However, training was delayed due to the involvement of the GSAN members and regional health actors in immunization campaigns, which also pushed back the payments. Payments have been made to 40 GSAN in Koutila district.

Trainings started in July 2024 and will run through September covering key child nutrition and growth monitoring concepts, and income-generating activities management. The Government has contracted a specialized local NGO to lead the income generating activity training. Despite progress, the delays in payments highlight the need for stronger coordination and collaboration between the GSAN, regional health actors, and the project management team to ensure timely delivery and effective implementation of business plans.

### Cash transfers to women members of micro-savings groups (WSGs) via Track 1

#### *First group of 311 women's groups (Phase I):*

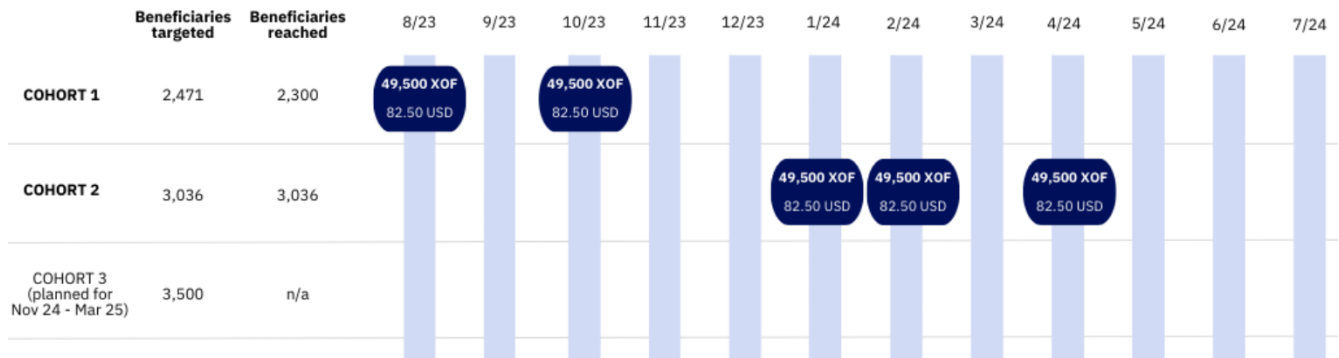
The first cash transfer programme targeted 7,563 women across 311 savings groups. By July 2023, all four rounds of transfers were successfully delivered to 5,387 beneficiaries (71 per cent). However, insecurity and access restrictions in Manfuné Commune (Segou Region) and Guire Commune (Koulikoro Region) have hindered efforts to reach the remaining beneficiaries.

UNICEF explored alternative payment methods, including using Burkina Faso's mobile network, but discussions were halted due to restrictions on cash usage in parts of Burkina Faso. As a solution, the DNPSES, with Joint Project support, is working with a financial service provider to explore the potential for establishing cash points close to the affected areas, such as in the districts of Tominia (Segou), Nara (Koulikoro) and Yorosso (Koutiala).

Additionally, the programme adopted a community-based approach to update the beneficiary list, as the original data was from early 2021. Collaboration with local stakeholders has been key to ensuring the list is accurate and relevant to current needs. The Joint Project will continue working with the community during the process to identify the safest method for delivering the outstanding catch-up payments.

*Second group of 343 women's groups (Phase II):*

The second group of 343 WSGs has been divided into three cohorts, with transfers and complementary services delivered over three phases to enable a randomised control trial (details in previous annual report). A total of 9,007 households are targeted and, to date, 5,336 (59 per cent) have received transfers, as outlined below:



- **Cohort 1** received five rounds of transfers alongside complementary services from March to October 2023, including two rounds during the reporting period (August and October 2023). In total, over 2,300 women out of the 2,471 targeted, received all five transfers.<sup>156</sup>
- **Cohort 2**, comprising 3,036 women, initially only received complementary services until Cohort 1 had received all transfers. Payments began in January 2024, with three rounds distributed by July (in January, February, and April). The Fourth round is planned for October 2024. Mid-point data collection for the randomised trial between September and November 2023, delayed the start of payments to avoid contaminating the study's results.
- **Cohort 3** (3,500 women) has not yet received any payments. The Joint Project decided to begin with key family practice modules as part of the services component before conducting the four rounds of transfers from November 2024 to March 2025. This decision was informed by lessons from earlier phases.

*Third group of 346 women's groups (Phase III):*



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From mid-2023, UNICEF collaborated with the DNPSES to enrol WSG members for Phase III cash transfers. Initially targeting 346 WSGs (11,072 households), additional groups were identified in the target areas, leading to the inclusion of the members of 400 WSGs (12,796 households), with payments starting in January 2024.

<sup>15</sup> The discrepancy between the beneficiaries reached and the target is because the initial calculation is based on the number of people who withdrew the cash from their mobile money accounts. This does not necessarily indicate that beneficiaries did not receive the payment. The precise number reached will be reported after completion of distribution and post-distribution monitoring.

Some villages had no women-only groups. Therefore, the Joint Project examined the structure of mixed groups in these locations (10 in total), these groups included men to ensure at least one literate member per group. After assessments, the group members were added as beneficiaries, bringing the total number of beneficiaries to 12,872 households.

Following phone number verifications, 12,792 households received the first payment tranche (January 2024), 12,620 the second tranche (February 2024), and 12,872 the third tranche (April 2024).

### Cash transfers in hard-to-access areas via Track 2

By July 2024, WFP had reached 78,712 out of the 87,503 targeted households (90 per cent), or 472,272 people, across 56 communes in Gao, Tombouctou, Mopti, Segou and Koulikoro regions, as follows:

**Cohort 1:** 28,852 households (173,112 people) received one round of cash transfers worth 45,000 XOF (\$75) to cover three months (August-October 2023), completing the three years of assistance planned under the Joint Project and aligned with to the modalities of Mali's ended national social safety net programme, *Jigisemejiri*.

**Cohort 2:** 16,186 households (97,116 people) across 31 additional communes in the Mopti and Segou regions, identified as facing emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC 4) in October 2022, received one round of transfers for the same period. However, due to security constraints, the April-June 2024 distribution was delayed for 1,353 households. The remaining Cohort 2 households received their payments on time, with the next distribution scheduled for the July-September 2024 period.

A WFP After-Action Review will be completed by March 2025, aiming to assess the impact of three years of cash transfer assistance on beneficiaries in hard-to-access areas delivered via Track 2 (Cohorts 1 and 2). The study will (i) assess trends in vulnerability levels of targeted households, (ii) collect information on beneficiary satisfaction with the transfer value, frequency, and duration of assistance, (iii) identify operational best practices, and (iv) formulate recommendations on household targeting and verification processes.

**Cohort 3:** In March 2023, 31,267 households (187,602 people), affected by the 2022 dry spell, were added and received two rounds of payments: an initial payment to cover April to June 2023, funded by an African Risk Capacity insurance payout, and another to cover the August-October 2023 period, funded by the Joint Project. Cohort 3 is not expected to receive cash transfer support over a three-year period, unlike Cohorts 1 and 2, in alignment with Mali's national social safety net programme, *Jigisemejiri* and its three-year support to beneficiaries.

During the previous reporting period, security issues in five of the Cohort 3 target communes delayed transfers to 3,909 households. WFP contracted local NGOs with more access to these areas than international NGOs and financial service providers with an existing presence in those areas to conduct the cash delivery. From October to December 2023, four of the five communes were reached and 2,407 households received catch-up payments. These households were designated as Cohort 4.

**Cohort 4:** The 2,407 households from Cohort 3, now designated as Cohort 4, will receive two more catch-up payments (15,000 XOF/\$25 per month) to cover the April-June 2024 and

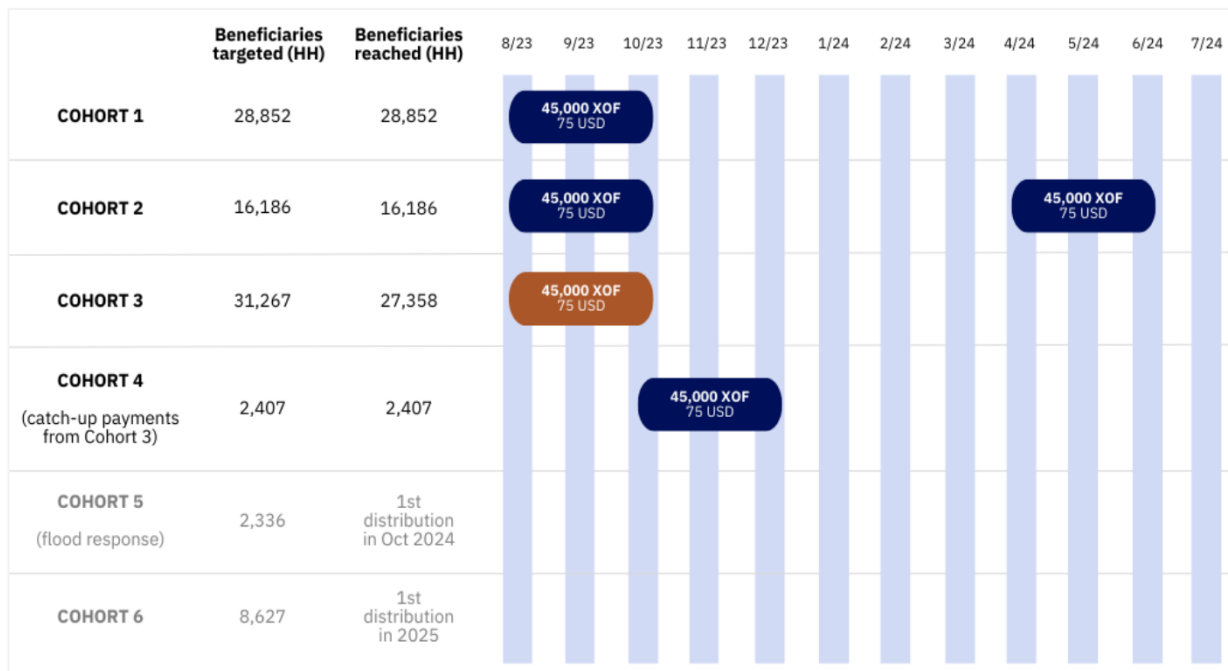
August-September 2024 periods (45,000 XOF/\$75 per quarterly period) These payments have been delayed but are expected to be fully disbursed by March 2025.

An additional cohort of 10,963 households was scheduled to begin receiving transfers in July 2024 (as cohort 5). However, delays in RSU kit/kiosk procurement to register and update household data, combined with the delays in transferring of RSU functions from *Jigisemejiri* to the DNPSES, pushed the distribution to October 2024.

**Cohort 5:** Due to floods during the 2024 rainy season,<sup>16</sup> the Joint Project prioritised cash assistance for 2,336 flood-affected households (14,217 people) in the Gao, Mopti, Tombouctou (Gourma Rharous), Timbuctou (Gossi), and Bandiagara regions. Transfers will begin in September 2024 and will cover six months until February 2025 (with two distributions worth \$75 (45,000 XOF), each covering a three-month period).

**Cohort 6:** The original Cohort 5 households not included in the flood response will become part of a new Cohort 6 (8,627 households) and will receive assistance in early to mid-2025.

Cash transfers in hard-to-access areas via Track 2 during the reporting period



### Nutrition Top-ups via Track 2

The Joint Project provided malnutrition prevention top-ups to 23,442 children aged 6-23 months and 15,248 pregnant and breastfeeding women. Targeted households received a single top-up payment of XOF 6,000 (\$10) per child and XOF 12,000 (\$20) per pregnant or breastfeeding woman, covering a six-month period from July to December 2023. In total, 38,690

<sup>16</sup> WFP’s internal Advanced Disaster Analysis and Mapping (ADAM) system points to a 2024 with significant rainfall, potentially flooding 1.6 million hectares, of which 490,554 hectares are cropland areas or roughly 10 per cent of the cropland within the country. ADAM’s flooding predications indicate that a total of 655,925 people reside in areas likely to see flooding, of whom 252,333 are in situations of vulnerability. Flood impact is likely to be the most pronounced in Segou, Mopti, Koulikoro, and Tombouctou.

beneficiaries received this benefit, surpassing the target of 33,866 people (17,610 children and 16,256 women).

Between January and July 2024, an additional 6,509 children under two years (out of 11,431 targeted) and 5,406 pregnant and breastfeeding women (out of 9,510 targeted) received the same top-up payments.

### *Complementary services delivered in combination with cash transfers*

The Joint Project continues to sensitise communities on key family practices alongside cash transfers and nutrition top-ups. Messages include the promotion of optimal nutrition and health as well as information on child protection (designed to prevent child marriage and violence in the home, while encouraging positive discipline and early childhood development).



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### Complementary Services alongside Nutrition Top-Ups

In addition to standard sensitisation messaging, nutrition top-ups are complemented by a range of support activities to maximise their impact on malnutrition prevention. During the reporting period, community culinary demonstrations have helped showcase good nutrition practices to replicate in the household for a more diverse and nutritious diet, reaching 117,893 beneficiaries. In addition, 54,873 children under-2 and pregnant and breastfeeding women were screened for malnutrition and referred for acute treatment to the health centres.

### The Mama Yeleen Initiative

The Joint Project collaborates with the Government to spread sensitisation messages through a network of *Mama Yeleen*<sup>17</sup> before, during and after the cash transfers. Between January and July 2024, the strategy intensified with 1,575 new women trained and equipped with communication and awareness-raising materials on essential family practices. This brings the total number of Joint Project supported *Mama Yeleen* to 2,853 in the Track 1 intervention areas (Koulikoro, Sikasso and Segou Regions). To ensure that the complementary activities on essential family practices were as advanced as possible, some cash transfer payments were deliberately delayed, especially for the control group of the randomized study.

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<sup>17</sup> *Mama Yeleen* (or “mothers of light”) are volunteers chosen by their own communities to act as role models and raise awareness on a range of essential family practices. Women are selected based on their leadership qualities and trust from peers. The approach fosters social cohesion and encourages women to take on leadership roles and community responsibilities, earning them respect and improving their status within their communities.

Based on the lessons learned during the Joint Project's 2021 support to 571 *Mama Yeleen*, subsequent *Mama Yeleen* were selected from among the members of the WSGs targeted by the Joint Project for cash transfers to ensure their presence at every WSG meeting and maximise the opportunities for impact. This strategy has ensured the motivation of the women selected, helping to maintain the pace of activities and ensure sustainability. These *Mama Yeleen*, who also received cash transfers, were easier to mobilize for activities within their groups and the wider community.



WFP/Myrline Sanogo-Mathieu

By increasing the number of *Mama Yeleen* trained, the network has been better able to engage the communities, achieving significant results. The activities carried out included:

- 100,000 door-to-door visits, reaching 1.6 million people
- 170,000 group discussion sessions, reaching 1.8 million people
- 704 community dialogues, reaching 23,500 people

Sustainability is a growing priority for national stakeholders and development partners. As part of this effort, the Joint Project is involved in discussions on integrating community workers into the health system, particularly at the primary level. These discussions will gradually expand to cover community work across other sectors, such as child protection and education. The multidisciplinary role of community actors is a critical point of discussion. In this regard, the *Mama Yeleen* approach, which spans multiple sectors, is a significant early achievement to which the Joint Project has contributed. Through its cash component, the Joint Project has successfully addressed the issue of motivating volunteer workers without disrupting existing community structures.

### Other sensitisation messaging

During Track 2 distributions, 54,873 beneficiaries were reached through various sensitization channels, including radio messaging and other community-based initiatives (door-to-door visits, focus group sessions, and community dialogues).

### Case management and referrals of vulnerable children

UNICEF is focusing on strengthening the social service workforce by improving its capacity in case management and provision of psychosocial support. UNICEF also continues to support

government efforts to design referral pathways for vulnerable child victims or children at risk of violence and exploitation to facilitate their access to social services.

Regional-level training took place in mid-2023 in Segou Region: 30 institutional child protection actors were trained on case management in targeted localities, while 210 community-based child protection actors (94 women) were trained in identification, documentation, and referral of children at risk or victims of violence, abuse or exploitation, including among families that benefit from cash transfers. Additional training will be carried out in other regions, after a revision of the training strategy in partnership with Mali's Psychological Association, aiming to include a psychosocial package as part of case management trainings.

Investments were made to strengthen community-level multi-sector coordination systems for the prevention of and response to violence against children, and for the identification and management of cases. UNICEF and its partners supported and reinforced community-based child protection mechanisms to detect, identify and refer cases of gender-based violence. The Joint Project contributed to this and acted as a catalyst to attract financing from other partners for case management. As a result, thanks to pooled resources, 1,553 survivors of gender-based violence (721 girls, 247 boys and 585 women) received psychosocial and medical care in local community-based health structures in Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Ségou, and Bamako districts.

## **OUTCOME 2 - National social protection systems are strengthened to become more shock-responsive, nutrition-sensitive, and child-sensitive.**

In mid-2024, the revised budget through the amended finance law cut social protection funding by 2.17 per cent, although other social sectors experienced more severe cuts, such as education (-3.7%) and health (-11.3%).

In December 2023, the second three-year phase of the Government's main cash-based social safety net programme, *Jigisemejiri*, ended. Discussions are ongoing to extend the programme into a third phase, with support from both agencies and the World Bank. At the Government's invitation, the World Bank sent a high-level mission to Mali in December 2023, and both agencies were invited to participate in discussions to shape the safety net programme moving forward.

Despite the constraints, the Government has continued to show its commitment to social protection, as evidenced by several of its other actions during the reporting period, such as the increasing leadership taken by the DNPSES to coordinate social protection activities. The DNPSES chairs the Social Protection Working Group and the National Technical Committee for the Strategic Orientation of Social Protection (CNOS-PS), which continue to meet regularly, enabling UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank to also coordinate their social protection work in the country through these platforms.<sup>18</sup> The status of the DNPSES has improved since a government decree in May 2022 formally positioned the DNPSES as the main government body responsible for the RSU (which was declared to be 'the entry point for all social protection interventions in the country'). This has led other partners to recognise the importance of the DNPSES, making it a recipient of additional capacity-building initiatives.

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<sup>18</sup> The Social Protection Working Group and the CNOS-PS were revitalised in 2020 with Joint Project support (see previous reports for details).



At the decentralised level, the Joint Project has also contributed to enhancing the capacities of local branches of the DNPSES (the “Local Development Services”) to deliver social protection programmes in their regions, through support to programme monitoring and complaints mechanisms. These local entities are now systematically leading the sensitisation and social mobilisation activities before Track 1 payments and are involved in the supervision and monitoring of the overall process, as well as the complaint mechanisms.

The Government’s recognition of the need for a shock-responsive, nutrition- and child-sensitive social protection system has led to their agreement on various studies, workshops and other capacity strengthening activities. To solidify these achievements, a joint Memorandum of Understanding between WFP, UNICEF, the World Bank and DNPSES, was finalised and signed in September 2024. This MoU outlines the importance of collaboration, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of each partner. It includes a comprehensive joint work plan to coordinate efforts and avoid duplication in reinforcing DNPSES’s institutional and technical capacities. The MoU encompasses key action areas around (i) the revision of the SNPS, (ii) the elaboration of a new social safety net programme in Mali, and (iii) the hosting of a national social protection conference.

### Studies to inform further systems strengthening activities

The Joint Project is supporting four studies to generate robust, up-to-date evidence for the revision of the National Social Protection Policy, to inform discussions on the establishment of a new national social safety programme, and to guide other systems strengthening activities. A technical committee, established by the Ministry of Health, the buy-in of national counterparts and the participation of technical experts with members from the Ministries of Finance and Health, unions, civil society and academia.

As of 31 July 2024, the status of these studies is as follows:

1. **Assessment of the national social protection system with ILO:** The inception report was validated in November 2023, and in mid-2024 in-country data collection was completed through a mixed approach using both in-country and remote consultants. The report will be finalised in October 2024.
2. **Study on the identification and adoption of a national social protection floor:** A diagnostic report of the social protection system and the draft of the floor were submitted for review by the technical committee in July 2024 and will be submitted to the steering committee for approval in September.
3. **Social protection sector public expenditure review:** Data collection and an analysis of sectoral policy were completed during the reporting period. The report is now being drafted.
4. **Study on informal social protection system:** Data collection is underway and involves a comprehensive review of community systems across all regions of Mali, rather than attempting to review of a representative sample as originally planned. The revised scope will improve the accuracy of the analysis but has delayed the schedule.

Additionally, a feasibility assessment of **family benefits** was launched to model grant eligibility, benefits and administration, while exploring potential funding and financing options through a fiscal space analysis.

## **DELIVERY**

### Support to Strengthen the Social Registry

The Government progressed in its plans to enrol the entire population in the RSU, with technical, financial and logistical support from both agencies, the World Bank and other actors. Before the Joint Project (in 2019), there were less than 400,000 households enrolled. By July 2024, this had risen to 1.5 million households (around 40 per cent of the population).

From September to December 2023, the Joint Project allocated technical assistance and financial resources to collect data and register 40,498 additional households in the RSU in 14 communes receiving Track 2 assistance, exceeding the target of enrolling 33,000 households in these regions. This brings the total number of households registered with Joint Project support to over 280,000 since 2020.

In line with the RSU action plan developed after the mission to Mali by the Mauritanian Government's Social Protection Agency, Taazour, in November 2022, efforts during the reporting period focused on improving the RSU's data collection and quality, ensuring data protection, and facilitating the smooth running of the RSU working group. The Joint Project supported the revision of the RSU questionnaire to make it shorter and more user-friendly, to alleviate the workload and reduce the cost of registration (currently XOF 5,000 per household), facilitating accelerated universal enrolment. A workshop was held in early 2024 to make the necessary adjustments. Final steering committee approval is pending.

To advance implementation of the RSU action plan, the Joint Project, together with the World Bank, leveraged additional expertise from Mauritania by supporting a mission for Malian authorities to the country in September 2023. Participants included, among others, representatives from the DNPSES, CSA, CCN and *Jigisemejiri*, as well as UNICEF and WFP in Mali. The aim was to learn from Mauritania's experience in expanding the social registry and using it for social safety net targeting. The mission explored the possibility of adapting certain components to the Malian context such as the organisational framework, data collection tools and methods, partner portals, the website, database architecture, a module for checking data validity and consistency, and grievance and redressal mechanisms. It also provided the Malian authorities with insights into mobilising stakeholders around the Social Registry, and using it for emergency responses, social protection, and resilience interventions, as well as establishing a dynamic monitoring system for service delivery and data collection.

Since early 2023, following the RSU decree that officially designated the DNPSES as the primary government body responsible for the RSU, the Joint Project has supported the Government in implementing a devolution plan to transfer the RSU from *Jigisemejiri* to the DNPSES. Politically and technically, the transfer is complete, with the RSU database now housed at the DNPSES. However, the devolution plan still requires formal endorsement from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health and Social Development. Both agencies are supporting this process as part of the RSU action plan, with the Joint Project contributing to funding servers for data transfer.

To facilitate fixed-point, on-demand household registration for RSU expansion, the Joint Project has supported the process to procure and install registration kits and kiosks at the local level. However, an energy crisis since August 2023 delayed the installation of five kiosks and two kits procured by UNICEF, partially funded by the Joint Project. After reassessing the situation, the kits and kiosks are now installed, with the Ministry of Health planning to officially launch

activities during the “Month of Solidarity” in October. Additional kits and kiosks procured through WFP are in progress, with tenders completed and the first deliveries scheduled for September 2024.

### Enhancing the Nutrition-Sensitivity of Social Protection Delivery

Since March 2022, the Joint Project has supported the operationalisation of a specific work plan to improve the nutrition-sensitivity of the national social protection system, led by the *Cellule National de Nutrition*. These efforts, which will continue until the end of 2024, involve supporting the Government in enhancing coordination between the social protection and nutrition sectors, increasing nutrition-sensitive targeting for vulnerable households and individuals, and incorporating social and behaviour change communication interventions in social protection programmes to improve the nutritional status of beneficiaries, including children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers.

In line with the work plan, the Joint Project supported nutrition bottleneck analyses, including a series of workshops to assess challenges in health facilities within Track 1 intervention areas. Using monitoring data, stakeholders identified key barriers affecting children’s nutritional status, including the following:

- **Supply-side barriers:** there is a significant shortage of essential services and nutritional inputs, along with difficulties in accessing qualified human resources. While access to information has improved, due to joint efforts by healthcare personnel, media, and community health workers, motivating this latter group remains a challenge.
- **Demand-side barriers:** communities still face financial barriers, including high service costs and transport expenses to health centres, despite efforts by the government and partners. However, community workers and grassroots actors have successfully promoted positive behaviours, such as increased acceptance of routine vaccinations, symbolised by the local term for the Expanded Programme on Immunization, “BOLOTCHI.”
- **Challenges in the enabling environment:** while progress has been made in policies and standards, concerns persist over timely and sufficient resource transfers, in the face of growing needs. The closure of some health centres due to insecurity has further hampered service delivery. In response, local health area and district plans are being developed, with systematic budgeting to support upcoming budget negotiations. Community-level bottlenecks will be addressed with locally driven solutions to maximize impact.

Three components under Outcome 1 also contribute to the nutrition work plan and provide opportunities for systems strengthening during implementation: the nutrition-sensitive cash transfers to households with children under two and/or pregnant and breastfeeding women, and the support for GSANs through cash and complementary services to prevent malnutrition, as well as the nutrition top-ups under Track 2.

During high-level policy discussions for the new national social safety net programme, both agencies emphasised the need to prioritise nutrition and food security as key outcomes and targeting criteria.

## **POLICY**

The revision process of the National Social Protection Policy, originally validated in 2015, was scheduled to begin at the end of 2023, but has been postponed to 2025. This delay allows for the completion of ongoing studies by various partners, including the five studies supported by the Joint Project, ensuring that the policy revision is evidence-based, contextually relevant and reflective of recent developments.

## COORDINATION

Coordination of social protection activities is gradually improving, with the DNPSES taking increasing leadership, though challenges persist. At the central level, support from both agencies has ensured that the Social Protection Working Group and CNOS-PS, revitalised at the start of the Joint Project and chaired by the DNPSES, remain active.

UNICEF, WFP, and the World Bank coordinate their support through the CNOS-PS. The three agencies developed a joint work plan during the reporting period to harmonise their efforts and ensure coherence, complementarity, and intersectionality. Resources from the Joint Project account for 60 per cent of UNICEF and WFP's contribution to this work plan, with the remainder leveraged from other sources.

To streamline government coordination, three national councils – Food Security, Nutrition and Social Protection (CNOS-PS) – are merging to become one National Council for Food Security, Nutrition and Social Protection. Both agencies have been supporting this process, including by organising study visits to other countries to see how such an entity operates elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> However, while the operational modalities have been determined and the structure is in place, there has yet to be an official decision on the institutional anchorage of this body. Therefore, formal establishment is pending.

## PROGRAMMES

### Improved Risk Management

During the reporting period, efforts to strengthen risk-informed programme delivery continued, building on the risk management measures and tools established with the DNPSES during the previous reporting period for Track 1 transfers. This was particularly important during the initial stages of the payment cycle, including beneficiary identification. To ensure proper oversight, the DNPSES and its field directorates led social mobilisation campaigns and awareness-raising activities on programme objectives, transfer amounts, and the number of payment rounds, while a third-party firm handled beneficiary data collection.

Like for all cash transfers supported by the Joint Project, data reconciliation sessions are routinely organised to triangulate information from the payment platform, the initial payment list and field mission findings.

In line with the RSU decree, the new national cash-based social safety net programme will use the RSU as its central information management system, embedding cash transfer payments within it. The DNPSES will be able to draw on experience gained from implementing Track 1 transfers, especially in risk management including governance, fiduciary oversight and programmatic risks.

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<sup>19</sup> The DNPSES went on a mission to learn from the Ministry of Health in Morocco (supported by both agencies, but not financed with Joint Project funding).

## MONITORING AND BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK

### Process and Output Monitoring

#### Transfers via Track 1

The accountability mechanism for Track 1 enables monitoring of beneficiary feedback at every stage of the payment cycle, including process and output monitoring, with pre- and post-distribution field missions. In addition, an electronic grievance and redressal mechanism is being established in collaboration with VIAMO, a digital assistance company also used for monitoring Track 2 transfers. This mechanism underwent testing for Track 1 transfers during the reporting period and is expected to operate at full capacity by the end of 2024. Until then, mission reports and communal and village-level grievance and redressal mechanisms are used to document compliance and gather information on beneficiaries who did not receive their payments. This data is used to determine measures to address grievances or escalate them to the central level. After rollout, the VIAMO mechanism will be transferred for management by the DNPSES for Track 1 transfers (except the PSEA component).

#### Transfers via Track 2

During and after cash transfers and nutrition top-ups, process monitoring was conducted by WFP staff in accessible areas and by third-party monitors or the VIAMO call centre in sites with limited access. WFP also maintained a community feedback mechanism in all intervention areas, which includes a toll-free confidential line and village-level community complaints committees. Information on this mechanism, along with usage instructions, was shared via communication materials (such as leaflets) and beneficiary cards.

From 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024, WFP's community feedback system received 5,627 claims from communities, including 1,145 requests for assistance, 972 requests for information, 53 complaints and 3,513 positive returns.<sup>20</sup> Almost 60 per cent of calls concerned emergency aid and social protection activities. Notably, 42 per cent of calls were made by women, marking an increase in female participation. In total, 96 per cent of the calls were processed and closed, with follow-up ongoing for the remaining cases.

Furthermore, community consultations were held in the Gao and Segou regions, engaging 180 participants (including 90 women), comprising beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. These consultations addressed protection, accountability, and gender mainstreaming concerns.

To enhance protection measures, training and awareness-raising sessions were conducted for 77 members of WFP teams, cooperating partners, traders, and transporters. These sessions helped better integrate protection aspects into front-line operations and contributed to mitigating protection risks in high-threat areas.

### Outcome Monitoring

#### Transfers via Track 1

Preliminary results from the WSG impact assessment show that the cash plus services positively impacted livestock ownership, assets, land ownership, and the well-being of women and children, particularly female ownership. Children's well-being improved due to greater parental

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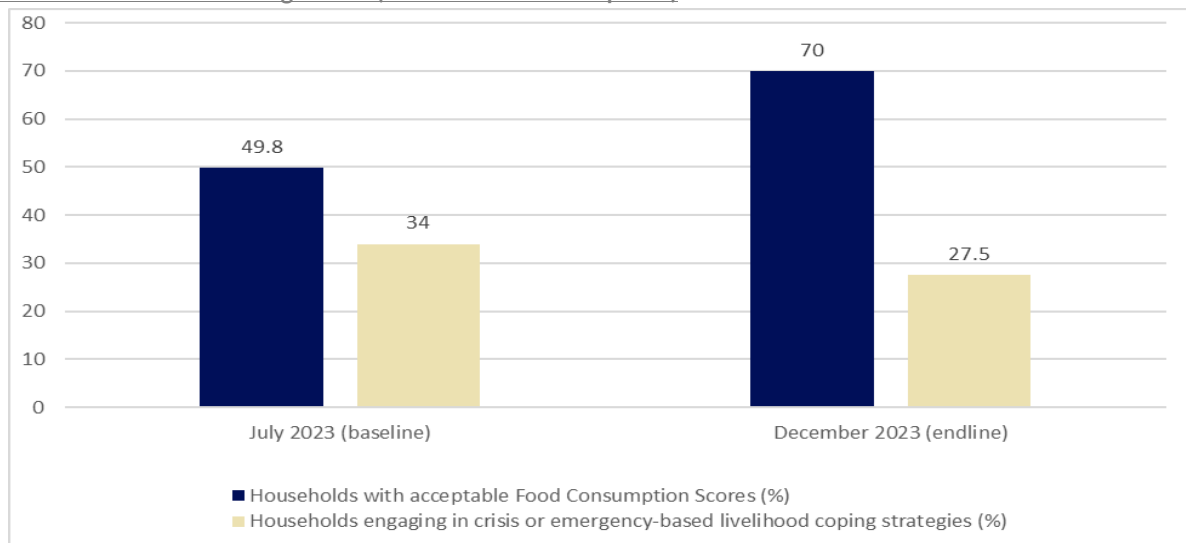
<sup>20</sup> These calls span across all WFP programmes, including calls specific to the activities of this Joint Project.

engagement and knowledge of essential family practices, while women's experienced empowerment and reduced stress. However, the programme's effects on household consumption, food security and poverty were unclear, as beneficiaries had already received three years of regular cash assistance under the *Jigisémejiri* safety net, which had already raised their consumption levels. The study underscores the need for gender-sensitive complementary services in cash programmes to promote gender equality. Supporting WSGs can boost productive impacts among a population with productive potential, but expanding the coverage of regular safety nets is a crucial prerequisite.

### Transfers via Track 2

Results from post-distribution for the 2023 lean season response are shown below.

Post-distribution monitoring results (2023 lean season response)



Most households surveyed cited food consumption as the main use of the cash transfers, which points to cash transfers helping households protect their livelihoods during the lean season while improving food security and nutrition outcomes.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- **Security Situation.** Insecurity affected access to beneficiaries in some areas during Track 1 and 2 transfers. To manage this, the project ensured agility through flexible delivery timings, zone-specific modalities, and effective communication with beneficiaries. Third-party monitoring has also been reinforced.

In Manfuné Commune in Segou Region and Guire Commune in Koulikoro Region insecurity has so far prevented Track 1 transfers to WSG members. The DNPSES, with Joint Project support, is working with a financial service provider to explore solutions, weighing security considerations to determine the safest approach for completing the remaining payments.

For track 2 transfers, local NGOs are increasingly relied upon due to their better access in and understanding of conflict-affected areas.

- **Financing for Social Protection.** The reduced social protection sector budget threatens the Government's ability to sustainably expand and strengthen its social protection system. The Joint Project will continue to advocate greater resource allocation, as well as support the

DNPSES to mobilise internal resources and ensure efficient and effective spending of available funds.

- **The Sustainability of Coordination Mechanisms.** Coordination has improved through the support of both agencies and the World Bank, including the regular convening of the Social Protection Working Group and the National Technical Committee. However, the long-term sustainability of these coordination mechanisms is at risk without the allocation of internal financial resources to support their continuity.
- **Data Collection and Management.** Delays in obtaining secure and reliable beneficiary data due to identification challenges have slowed cash transfers, emphasising the need for comprehensive and reliable data management systems for efficient service delivery. Fingerprints could be considered as a mitigating measure to overcome these challenges.
- **Frequency of cash transfers.** Security concerns and previous delays in targeting and distribution have shown that delivering Track 2 cash transfers covering multiple months at a time, rather than monthly, is more efficient since it ensures timely and predictable support to the maximum number of households.
- **Recurrent Climate Risks.** Mali continues to face recurrent climate shocks, with the 2023 agricultural season marked by a prolonged dry spell, affecting over 1.2 million people. Strengthening the links between social protection and disaster risk management is crucial. Expanding the coverage of the national social safety nets to support those most vulnerable to climate shocks and providing assistance during non-crisis periods would help build resilience and preparedness for future climate-induced crises.

## FUTURE PLANS

### *Key priorities for outcome 1*

- Complete the disbursement of unconditional and unrestricted cash transfers to WSGs over the next six months. An exit strategy, developed with the DNPSES, includes a comprehensive review of all supported groups (almost 1,000). Three microfinance institutions have been selected to assist with needs assessments, business plan development and capacity strengthening. They will also help structure the groups to enhance access to credit from microfinance or banking institutions, while facilitating access to funds by offering tailored credit products. Additionally, these institutions will provide technical support and entrepreneurial training to equip the groups with skills to establish and manage sustainable economic activities.
- Cash transfers to families with children under two and pregnant women will continue, with efforts to address bottlenecks that hinder the regularity of payments.

### *Key priorities for outcome 2*

- **Finalisation and Dissemination of Ongoing Studies:** All ongoing studies will be finalised and widely shared. The assessment of the national social protection system (with ILO) will be completed in October 2024, and the study on the national social protection floor will be a central focus at the National Social Protection Conference in the last quarter of 2024 during the “Month of Solidarity.” The findings from the social protection public expenditure review will provide insights for the 2026 budget discussions from early 2025.
- **Development of the National Social Safety Net Programme:** Building on the momentum from the National Social Protection Conference, efforts to develop the new social safety

net programme will be prioritised. Governance structures, including a steering and technical committee will be established with clear mandates to accelerate the programme's technical development, covering feasibility studies, programme design, eligibility criteria, benefit levels, and funding options.

- **National Social Protection Policy Revision:** Discussions on revising the National Social Protection Policy will enter a critical phase. A roadmap and Terms of Reference will be developed to guide the revision process, which is due to begin in January 2025.

## PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION

Both agencies collaborate with various Government agencies, the World Bank, ILO, UNHCR, and other key partners to strengthen the building blocks of the national social protection system. Coordination occurs at multiple levels:

- (i) **Internal coordination:**
  - For track 1, UNICEF established an internal coordination mechanism with focal points from each intervention zone to ensure close coordination and swift responses to issues concerning UNICEF and national actors on the ground.
  - For track 2, WFP's various units – Nutrition, Child Protection, Research Assessment and Monitoring, Cash-Based Transfers, School Feeding – collaborate closely, holding regular planning and information-sharing meetings.
- (ii) **Inter-agency coordination:** UNICEF and WFP meet regularly to discuss strategic and operational issues, address implementation challenges and find sustainable solutions.
- (iii) **External coordination:** Both agencies support the DNPSES in its role of coordinating the national social protection policy, providing operational and technical assistance, including human resources. They advocate strengthening DNPSES's central role in managing the RSU. Additionally, UNICEF and WFP support coordination mechanisms at both central level (including the Social Protection, Cash and RSU Working Groups) and local level (Local Coordination Committees), working closely with the World Bank to align efforts and consolidate joint support for the national system, in line with a joint work plan.

## COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER GERMAN (BMZ/GIZ/KfW) CONTRIBUTIONS

UNICEF and WFP in Mali are implementing two joint projects funded by Germany, with a strong focus on ensuring complementarity between the two. UNICEF's interventions are designed to ensure that nearly all regions (9 out of 10) are covered between the two projects. Both the BMZ-supported SRP and the Joint Project focus on strengthening the RSU's capacity to integrate new communities and households at risk of shocks. As part of both projects, UNICEF also ensures that all beneficiaries are enrolled in the RSU to avoid fragmentation of interventions and to enable beneficiary access to additional social protection interventions. For WFP, the two projects follow a geographically bound approach, integrating interventions to build long-term resilience among the same populations in hard-to-reach areas.



# MAURITANIA

## OUTCOME 1 - Affected populations receive cash transfers and complementary services to absorb the social and economic impacts of multiple covariant shocks.

Table 4: Summary of beneficiaries reached and implementation modalities in Mauritania for Outcome 1 (Phases I-IV)

	Transfer timing & frequency	HHs targeted (Aug 2020-Jul 2024)	HHs Reached (Aug 2020-Jul 2024)	Monthly payment per HH	Total payment per HH (per year/round)	Delivery Mechanism
Tracks 1 & 2 (WFP): Scale-up of seasonal CTs	<u>Aug-Nov 2020</u> : 2 distributions, covering 4 months <u>Jul-Oct 2021</u> : 4 monthly distributions <u>Aug-Oct 2022</u> : 2 distributions, covering 4 months	67,446	50,982	\$68.40 (2,700 MRU) <sup>21</sup>	\$273.60 (10,800 MRU) <sup>22</sup>	El Maouna Programme (Track 1); WFP delivery channels – cash-in-hand (Track 2)
	<u>Jun-Sept 2023</u> : 4 monthly distributions <u>Jun-Sept 2024</u> : 4 monthly distributions			\$76.20 (3,000 MRU) <sup>23</sup>	\$304.80 (12,000 MRU) <sup>24</sup>	
Track 2 (WFP): Cash top-up pilot for the prevention of malnutrition <sup>7</sup>	<u>Aug 2023</u> : 1 distribution covering 4 months	382 children; 453 HHs with PBWG	555 children 464 HHs with PBWG	\$5 (HHs with children) 197.6 MRU \$18 (HHs with PBWG) 711.36 MRU	\$5 (HHs with children) 197.6 MRU \$18 (HHs with PBWG) 711.36 MRU	WFP delivery channels, cash-in-hand (Track 2)
	<u>Jul 2024</u> : 1 distribution covering 4 months	564 children; 537 HHs with PBWG	549 children; 518 HHs with PBWG	\$16.45 (HHs with children and/or PBW) 650 MRU	\$16.45 (HHs with children and/or PBW) 650 MRU	
Track 2 (WFP): Shock-responsive cash transfers in urban Nouakchott	<u>Jan-May 2023</u> ; 4 distributions, monthly	21,600	18,851	\$12.70	\$50.80	WFP delivery channels, cash-in-hand (Track 2)
Track 1 (UNICEF): Top-up to vulnerable Tekavoul beneficiaries	<u>Dec 2021- Dec 2022</u> : 4 rounds covering 12 months	35,000	34,163 <sup>25</sup>	\$9.03	\$108	FSP contracted by Taazour

<sup>21</sup> WFP-supported seasonal cash transfers consider the exact number of people in the household, adjusting the individual payment accordingly. Considering that the average size of a beneficiary household is 6 people, the average monthly payment per household is \$11.40 (450 MRU) X 6 people = \$68.40 (2,700 MRU).

<sup>22</sup> Adjusted for average household size (6 people), the average total payment per household is \$68.40 X 4 distributions = \$273.60.

<sup>23</sup> Adjusted for average household size, the average monthly payment per household is \$12.70 (500 MRU) X 6 people = \$76.20 (3,000 MRU).

<sup>24</sup> Adjusted for average household size, the average total payment per household is \$76.20 X 4 distributions = \$304.80 (12,000 MRU).

<sup>25</sup> Tekavoul beneficiary lists were used for targeting and distribution for the cash top-ups. The 837 unreached households may have moved or migrated and are un-locatable at present for catch-up payments.

Track 1 (UNICEF): CTs to poor families living with disabilities	<b>NOUAKCHOTT - May 21-Jan 23:</b> 12 rounds covering 24 months	10,000	9,956	\$22.60	\$542	FSP contracted by MASEF
	<b>NOUAKCHOTT - Aug 23-Oct 25:</b> 5 round covering 15 months	12,000	9,837	\$27.7	\$415.5	
	<b>RURAL AREAS - Dec 2024-Mar 2026:</b> 5 rounds covering 15 months	3,000	n/a	\$27.7	\$415.5	
Track 1 (UNICEF): Productive cash to HHs living with disabilities <sup>6</sup>	<b>Oct 2022-Jun 2023:</b> One-off lump sum	3,300	3,134	n/a	\$250 (lump sum)	FSP contracted by MASEF
Track 1 (UNICEF) Productive Cash to CBOs	<b>Dec 2024-Feb 2025:</b> One-off lump sum	16,000 (800 CBOs; avg. 20 HH/CBO)	n/a	n/a	\$2500 (lump sum)	FSP contracted by MASEF

During the reporting period, the Joint Project reached 145,429 people (20,242 households) with cash transfers and an estimated 77,187 people with complementary services. Since its inception, 684,000 people (114,000 households) have been reached with transfers, and an estimated 800,000 people with complementary services.

### Cash transferred to affected populations, in line with national response plans

#### Delivery of targeted cash to families with persons living with disability via MASEF (Track 1)

The distribution of 15 months of assistance to households with persons living with disabilities began in August 2023, with 15,000 households to be reached in five rounds, as follows:

- 12,000 households in Nouakchott (the same 10,000 households receiving transfers from May 2021 to January 2023, and 2,000 additional households);
- 3,000 households in rural areas (in Brakna, Gorgol, and Hodh El Chargui regions).



By 31 July 2024, 9,837 households had been reached from among the original beneficiaries in Nouakchott (out of 10,000). These households received three rounds of transfers in August 2023 and February and July 2024). The political context (preparations for elections and a change in government) led the postponement the third round of transfers (planned for May) to avoid any political appropriation.

Payment was delayed to the 5,000 new beneficiaries (2,000 in Nouakchott and 3,000 in rural areas) because the Social Registry could not proceed with household targeting due to competing priorities, including the process to update the Social Registry database (see Outcome 2), the preparations for the General Population Census conducted in December 2023 and the June 2024 presidential elections. Targeting will be completed in September 2024, and transfers are scheduled to start for the new beneficiaries thereafter.

#### [Productive cash grants for families with persons living with a disability via MASEF \(Track 1\)](#)

By July 2024, 3,134 households had received productive cash grants out of the 3,300 targeted. Of those, 3,023 had received their transfer as planned by mid-2023. During the reporting period, two catch-up rounds were conducted, reaching an additional 111 households. These efforts will continue until the end of 2024 to ensure all targeted beneficiaries receive their grants. In parallel, training and follow-up coaching as part of the income generating activity package continued throughout the reporting period (see Output 2.1 for details). In July 2024, targeting was completed for an additional 2,000 households due to receive transfers in the last quarter of 2024.

#### [Productive cash grants to Community-Based Organisations \(Track 1\)](#)

Since August 2023, preparatory steps for the disbursement of productive cash grants have included central-level consultations with MASEF and *Taazour*, as well as field missions to targeted areas to engage with local authorities, cooperatives, youth associations and other groups to inform them of the programme's goals and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of previous government income-generating initiatives. This groundwork informed reflections on adjusting the model to include more community involvement for sustainable income generating activities.

As a result, the disbursement of productive cash grants to community-based organisations (CBOs) has been postponed until the end of 2024 (it was tentatively planned for September 2023 in the project proposal, depending on assessments in the target areas). This delay is intended to allow thorough groundwork that will enhance the long-term success and sustainability of the initiative. The disbursement of these grants, accompanied by training on financial inclusion, organisational management and market access, aims to empower CBOs to develop income generating activities.

These efforts led to the development of a concept note on the selection criteria for CBOs, which was validated in early 2024. Thereafter, a national NGO was hired to identify and structure the CBOs, while a specialised firm was contracted to develop training modules on financial inclusion, organisational management, and market access.

Beneficiary targeting began in July 2024 across four regions: Assaba, Hodh Al-Sherqui, Hodh Al-Gherbi and Brakna). The next phase will involve delivering a series of training courses, after which the lump sum cash grants are scheduled to be disbursed in the first quarter of 2025.

## Distribution of emergency cash transfers in rural areas (Tracks 1 and 2)

### Track 1 transfers in rural areas via the CSA's El Maouna programme (WFP)

As part of the transition from direct lean season cash delivery (Track 2) to government systems (Track 1), 38 per cent of Joint Project lean season assistance in 2023 was delivered through the CSA's El Maouna programme, up from 15 per cent in 2022. In 2024, 100 per cent of Joint Project-supported lean season transfers were delivered via El Maouna.



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For the 2023 response, all four monthly rounds of Track 1 payments were completed by mid-October, as shown below.<sup>26</sup>

#### 2023 lean season response via El Maouna (Track 1)

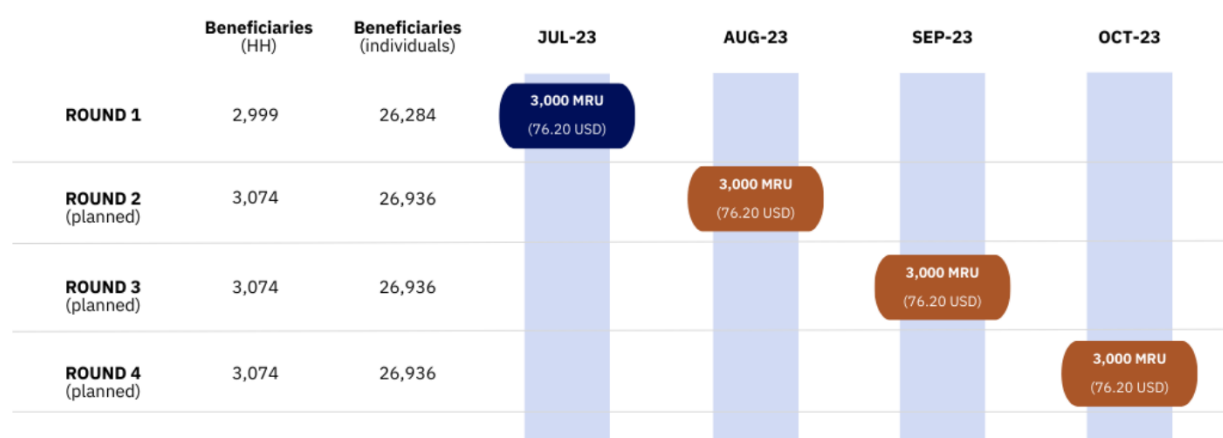
	Beneficiaries (HH)	Beneficiaries (individuals)	JUL-23	AUG-23	SEP-23	OCT-23
<b>ROUND 1</b>	2,879	30,449	3,000 MRU (76.20 USD)			
<b>ROUND 2</b>	2,909	30,777		3,000 MRU (76.20 USD)		
<b>ROUND 3</b>	2,909	30,777			3,000 MRU (76.20 USD)	
<b>ROUND 4</b>	2,909	30,777				3,000 MRU (76.20 USD)

As for the 2024 lean season response, the first monthly distribution via Track 1 in Kankossa Department (Assaba Region) initially scheduled for June, took place in July 2024. The distribution was delayed due to the presidential election and campaign period, which limited field operations in June, notably with the Government (CSA) as the cooperating partner. Therefore, the fourth and

<sup>26</sup> During the July distribution, 75 households were absent during the distribution and were therefore not reached. Catch-up payments for these 75 households will be attempted during the upcoming distribution.

final distribution is now expected for mid-October 2024, instead of September to ensure four consecutive months of lean season assistance

2024 lean season response in Kankossa Department (Assaba Region) (Track 1)

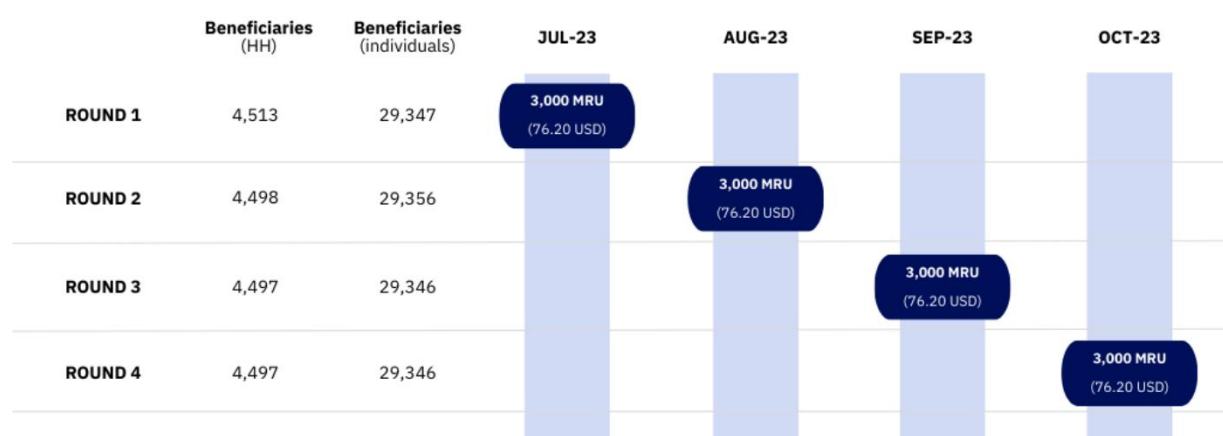


In 2024, the CSA has shown notable progress in its capacity for cash response operations, including increased rapidity and ownership. Quality targeting and verification processes reflect the success of capacity building efforts in conjunction with Track 1 and 2 cash delivery. Following recommendations from the 2022 UNICEF-WFP capitalisation workshop, WFP supported the CSA in recruiting and training qualified staff to implement lean season response field operations, improving inclusion and exclusion errors in 2023 and 2024 lean season responses.

*WFP-supported Track 2 transfers in rural areas*

The 2023 lean season response via Track 2 in the M’bout Department (Gorgol Region) was delivered as planned, as shown below.<sup>27</sup>

2023 lean season response in M’bout Department (Gorgol Region) (Track 2)



Cash top-up pilot for the prevention of acute malnutrition (Track 2)

<sup>27</sup> The lower number of households reached from August is the result of an updated beneficiary list. Distribution monitoring during the first round found that 15 households had been double counted in the original beneficiary list. Prior to the second round of payments, the beneficiary list had been amended.

WFP introduced malnutrition prevention cash top-ups via Track 2 during the 2023 lean season in the Department of Ould Yenge (Guidhimaka Region). The top-up provided an additional \$5 (MRU 197.6) for 555 children aged 6-23 months and \$18 (MRU 711.36) 464 pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls. This surpassed the original target of 382 children and 453 pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls. The pilot showed the proportion of children meeting the minimum acceptable diet increased from 1.2 per cent at the baseline assessment in July 2023 to 5.4 per cent by the end-line assessment in November 2023. For pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls, the percentage meeting minimum dietary diversity levels increased from 24 to 66 per cent over the same period.

Building on this success, a malnutrition prevention cash top-up was implemented via Track 1 during the 2024 lean season in Kankoussa Department (Assaba Region). Top-ups were delivered alongside general cash support starting in July, benefiting 549 children aged 6-23 months and 519 pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls. Unlike the 2023 response, the 2024 top-up amount was harmonised to \$16.45 (MRU 650) for all eligible households (those with children aged 6-23 months and with pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls).



### *Complementary services delivered in combination with cash transfers*

#### Sensitisation on key family practices and malnutrition screening

Key messages on nutrition, hygiene, health and access to child protection services were delivered alongside the Joint Project's lean season cash transfers. During the reporting period, covering the 2023 and the start of the 2024 lean season responses, a total of **10,186 people were reached with these messages**, including beneficiaries and community members. Additionally, sensitisation messages were broadcast on community radios for broader coverage, and communication materials containing key messages were displayed and/or shared in all sites throughout the targeting and distribution processes.



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### *2023 lean season response*

As part of the cash-based nutrition top-up pilot, 7,167 people (1,467 men and 5,720 women) were sensitised to key family practices in nutrition, health, hygiene, and disease prevention, including around dietary diversity and breastfeeding practices. The pilot was limited to about one-third of the households in the Ould Yenje Department who were already receiving lean season cash transfers, hence the lower number of people reached with messaging in 2023 compared to 2022. Home visits were conducted by community health workers to beneficiary households, carrying out nutritional monitoring and supporting households in adopting good practices for greater dietary diversity and improved nutrition outcomes. Some 976 children under 2 and 751 pregnant and breastfeeding women were screened; 49 children experiencing severe acute malnutrition (SAM) were referred to health centres.

### *2024 lean season response*

A total of 96 community liaison personnel and volunteers were trained in Kankossa Department (Assaba Region) on the delivery of community awareness and malnutrition prevention messaging. During the first distribution cycle of the 2024 lean season response in July 2024, some 2,999 social workers, health workers, nutrition officers, community leaders, volunteers and implementing partners were trained on key family practices in nutrition, health, hygiene and disease prevention. Screenings so far identified six children under two years of age experiencing moderate acute malnutrition, who were then referred to health centres.

### [Income generating package for households living with disabilities](#)

As part of the income generating package for 3,300 households living with disabilities, the Joint Project contracted three national NGOs and worked with MASEF to support beneficiaries to develop productive activities through continuous coaching. Each household received training in entrepreneurship skills prior to receiving the lump-sum grants. Where possible, the NGOs trained the family member(s) living with disability; in households with dependent persons living with disabilities, primary caregivers were trained instead.

Households have developed a range of income-generating activities. The majority (80 per cent) in trade (e.g. sale of foodstuffs, clothing, cosmetics and phone credit), with others in small-scale ruminant breeding, handicrafts, hairdressing, tire repair, amongst others. Monitoring reports

show that over half of beneficiaries have developed activities that generate a stable income, enabling households to meet education, nutrition and healthcare needs. On average, 100 one-on-one monthly coaching sessions were carried out, strengthening productive capacities of 1,675 households, during the reporting period.

To expand market access, an e-commerce platform was launched in late 2023, enabling beneficiaries to promote their locally produced or processed products. So far, 325 beneficiaries are running an online store on the platform.



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### Case management and referrals for vulnerable children

Under MASEF's supervision, and with Joint Project support, 3,800 children (including over 2,000 girls) in Nouakchott benefited from protection services between August and December 2023. Among them were approximately 150 children living with disabilities, 135 victims of sexual violence and 290 children on the move.<sup>28</sup> Among the issues identified were lack of civil registration, domestic violence, and begging and out-of-school children. Children were referred for support based on their needs, including civil registration and psychosocial support (either group counselling or individual sessions with a psychologist).

Regular household visits were conducted to monitor the most at-risk children, particularly those living with disabilities or having family members with disabilities. Local partners recommend establishing a mechanism for referring vulnerable families to cash assistance or incoming generating activities.

In addition, 415 individuals received protection assistance by contacting a toll-free hotline for victims of violence, operated through a partnership with the Mauritanian Association for Maternal and Child Health. The Joint Project's support helped enhance the hotline's operations, including training personnel in case management.

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<sup>28</sup> The figures cited in this paragraph are estimates for August-December 2023. In total in 2023, there were 7,613 children (4,078 girls) who benefited from protection services, including 293 disabled children, 269 victims of sexual violence and 574 children on the move. These figures are aggregated annually, and an update for 2024 will be provided in the next progress report.



## **OUTCOME 2: National social protection systems are strengthened to become more shock-responsive, nutrition-sensitive and child-sensitive**

Joint Project support to key government partners has improved delivery systems to the extent that both agencies are now able to use the Social Registry for targeting, and the Government's payment and monitoring platform for cash transfer delivery. These efforts, combined with contributions to the revised National Social Protection Strategy, are expected to foster the development of a more inclusive, nutrition- and child-sensitive social protection system.

### **DELIVERY**

#### Enhancing the Social Registry

Since September 2022, the Joint Project has supported the nationwide update of the Social Registry. Led by the Social Registry, by mid-2024 the update had covered almost the entire country, or 219,982 households. The northern regions (Tagant, Adrar and Tiris Zemmour) were completed during the reporting period,<sup>10</sup> while remaining areas include parts of the Brakna, Hodh El Chargui and Trarza regions.

Both agencies continued working with the World Bank to improve the Social Registry's registration, targeting, and monitoring practices. Initially conceptualised by the World Bank, the Social Registry has been strengthened by Joint Project efforts to enable it to serve as a comprehensive tool for social protection response, ensuring it is used for programme targeting and that lessons learned are captured for its continuous improvement.

#### *Interoperability of the Social Registry with other social information systems*

Following the design of a web application to enable linkages between social databases, the Joint Project facilitated the creation of a working group to coordinate interoperability efforts between technical and financial partners (including MASEF, Social Registry, GIZ, and the Commune of Dar-Naim in Nouakchott). Dar-Naim serves as a 'zone of convergence' for UNICEF and WFP and benefits from both the Joint Project and support from GIZ and other partners, making it a strategic area to test the linkages between information systems.

Recruitment is underway for a firm to provide technical assistance to develop application programming interfaces to facilitate the interoperability of the Social Registry with commune information systems and MASEF's system for people living with disabilities. The application programming interfaces will be piloted in Dar-Naim.

Feedback from working group members (primary users of interoperable information systems) highlighted that greater interoperability has helped improve coverage of social programmes offered to vulnerable households, such as social housing, income-generating activities, cash transfers, and health insurance. It has enabled the rapid identification of children whose births were not registered, particularly in isolated areas, enabling their birth registration and enrolment in social programmes. Improved linkages have contributed to fraud prevention, making Government interventions more efficient and effective.

#### *Strengthening the Social Registry for Targeting and Monitoring*

The Social Registry is now used for beneficiary targeting for all cash transfers under the Joint Project (Tracks 1 and 2). For the first time, during the 2023 lean season response, lists provided by the Social Registry were used for targeting, in line with lean season targeting criteria validated

by the Targeting Working Group organized within the CSA. In M'bout (Gorgol) and Ould Yengé (Guidimakha) departments exclusion errors were identified and addressed through door-to-door verifications (see 2023 Annual Report for details).

Based on the experience of using the Social Registry for targeting in 2023, WFP and the Social Registry Directorate held a working session to identify technical bottlenecks and improve targeting and verification practices. The ongoing exchange of best practices has allowed for an improved identification of households in need.

In preparation for the 2024 lean season, the Joint Project collaborated with the Social Registry to refine its targeting methodology. Further work is needed to align the questionnaires for lean season response targeting with those used for Social Registry enrolment. The current lack of alignment may result in overlooking some vulnerabilities faced by at-risk households during targeting.

### [\*Monitoring and Payment Platform \(Plateforme de suivi et de paiement\)\*](#)

The Monitoring and Payment Platform is an essential tool used by government actors and partners to track and monitor cash distribution operations in real time, leveraging geolocation technology. It allows users to upload new distribution information, facilitating the synchronisation of data with other social safety net programmes. This ensures improved identification of overlaps and synergies between different social protection and social service initiatives. Additionally, it can detect duplicate beneficiary records and geolocate beneficiaries, while enabling the real-time payment of agents involved in the operations.

The platform has been used for payment and monitoring of all UNICEF-supported Track 1 transfers since May 2021. Since the beginning of the 2024 lean season response, the monitoring platform has also been used for all WFP-supported Track 1 transfers.

### [\*2023 Lean Season Pilot for Monitoring\*](#)

In 2023, a small-scale pilot was conducted to test the platform's capacity to track lean season cash transfer operations. The pilot began in Gorgol Region during the third cycle of the 2023 lean season response and was extended to Guidimakha for the fourth and final cycle, covering both Track 1 and 2 transfers. Results showed that the platform performed well, with most payments successfully recorded, enabling immediate traceability.

Under Track 1, WFP has used the platform's monitoring component for tracking cash distribution operations, including 2024 lean season response. For Track 1, the government uses both the payment and monitoring components of the platform. However, improvements are still needed in the reliability of Taazour's payment platform to meet WFP's data security standards. Therefore, at the Social Registry's request, WFP has committed to supporting the redesign of the digital payment platform, both technically and financially. The platform is already being used for monitoring 2024 lean season payments.

### [\*Feedback and Enhancements for the 2024 Lean Season Response\*](#)

In February 2024, a technical working session was organised with the Social Registry to provide feedback on the platform's performance during the 2023 lean season distributions. Recommendations included:

- Increase number of users per agency for broader platform access.

- Integrate multiple levels of segregation of duties to enhance transparency.
- Enable technical analyses and data dashboards for improved monitoring and reporting.

As of January 2024, the platform has incorporated the capability to have several user roles (such as those responsible for uploading, verifying and validating information). These enhancements will improve the accuracy and accountability of cash transfer operations. Further improvements are being developed by the Social Registry and will be considered, to the extent possible during the 2024 lean season response and subsequent responses.

### Strengthening the Claims Management Mechanism

Since its launch in July 2023, the centralised Claims Management Mechanism (CMM) has seen rapid adoption, with social protection actors using a web application to enter data and track claims. From July 2023 to June 2024, over 8,500 claims had been submitted from across all MASEF and *Taazour* projects (7,227 claims during the January-June 2024 period alone). An additional 8,183 claims were submitted to the mechanism through INFOLOG, an external call centre contracted by WFP used for claims related to all WFP-supported lean season transfers.

The next phase aims to further operationalise the mechanism by establishing a joint call centre, supported by both agencies, enabling beneficiaries nationwide to use a single toll-free number for all claims related to any cash transfer programme. Although the call centre interface is in place and operating teams have been trained, full functionality has been delayed. To address malfunctions in the two existing toll-free numbers (for *Tekavoul* programmes and Social Registry registrations), the Social Registry is working with a telecommunications operator to set up a call centre with 50 toll-free lines, alleviating congestions and improving response times. Meanwhile, a procedural manual is being developed to guide the claims process.

### Strengthening Government Monitoring Systems for Cash Transfers

The Joint Project supported the elaboration of an action plan to strengthen *Tekavoul's* monitoring capacity for overseeing cash transfer and social promotion activities. Implementation is due to begin in September 2024. During the 2023 lean season response, the CSA's Food Security Observatory demonstrated greater autonomy in conducting baseline, post-distribution monitoring, and endline surveys. However, the 2023 lean season response also exposed a need for more structured monitoring and evaluation, along with better stakeholder coordination. Insufficient field monitoring missions reduced the Government's ability to track the progress and impact of its lean season response. The Joint Project and the CSA have been addressing these capacity gaps, with WFP assisting in recruiting a technical assistant to support the Response Implementation Coordination Unit (*Cellule de coordination de la mise en oeuvre de la reponse*) in overseeing the coordination, monitoring and reporting of the lean season response. A second team member also being recruited to reinforce this effort.

### MASEF's information management system on people living with disabilities

The Joint Project continues to support MASEF in systematising social protection assistance for people living with disabilities through the development of a new information management system, which is linked to the distribution of disability cards. These cards grant legal benefits and enable targeted access to social protection programmes. Since January 2023, the printing and delivery of these disability cards have progressed, increasing from 4,000 in July 2023 to over

11,000 by July 2024. Early in 2024 there was a brief slowdown in card production due to updates in the computer system to fix glitches and the training of new personnel.

Individuals who hold these cards are now connected to the national health insurance fund, giving them access to free healthcare services. To date, over 4,000 people living with disabilities have accessed these services. The Joint Project through SISTA Consult, a local company specialising in information systems, will complete the training and ensure full adoption of the system by MASEF by November 2024. Following this, UNICEF will continue to provide technical support to ensure the system's smooth operation and sustainability.

### Harmonisation of Complementary Services

From October 2022 to June 2023, *Tekavoul* piloted a new approach using community-based organisations (such as GASPAAs) to sensitise communities, in place of external *Tekavoul* staff.<sup>11</sup> A review in late 2023 showed multiple benefits of this community-based model, including greater investment by community-based organisations and better follow-up, ensuring messages are understood and adopted. Discussions with *Tekavoul* are ongoing to expand this approach to other regions alongside regular *Tekavoul* cash transfers.

### Action Plan for the enhanced operation of the National Response Mechanism for Food and Nutritional Crises (DCAN)

In November 2023, WFP organised a workshop to assess the National Response Mechanism for Food and Nutritional Crises (DCAN – *Dispositif, de reponse et prevention aux crises alimentaires et nutritionnelles*) after two years of operation. The focus was on improving the structure and work of the different technical and coordination committees, as well as establishing a dedicated institutional funding source for the DCAN through the FNRCAN. An action plan has been developed to strengthen DCAN's capacity through knowledge exchange, training, and equipment distribution. This includes improving the functionality of technical working committees and enhancing monitoring and evaluation capacities. Communication activities are also planned to raise stakeholder awareness of the DCAN.

Until April 2024, WFP provided technical assistance to help refine tracking tools, digitize key processes and, in partnership with the World Bank, for the roll out a computerized early warning and monitoring and evaluation system.

Given the DCAN's progress, from September 2023 the World Bank commissioned an international expert to review the DCAN's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to improve the Specialized Technical Committees and overall monitoring and evaluation capacity of the DCAN. A monitoring and evaluation system is in place as of June 2024, and the international expert will continue working to ensure the system's rollout.

### Working towards a child-sensitive social protection system

**Civil registration and social protection.** In 2023, with Joint Project and World Bank support, the National Agency for Civil Registration and Secure Documents issued civil status documents to 328,000 children out of the 600,000 unregistered. The Joint Project supported the agency to establish mobile teams for door-to-door registration at the community level and communication campaigns in local languages helped mobilise remote populations.

**Training of professionals and community leaders.** The Joint Project supported the training of over 900 professionals, including social workers, health workers and community leaders. The training focused on children's rights and child protection standards, psychological first aid, and the identification and care of victims of violence, including gender-based violence.

**Improving the syllabus for social work and social protection training.** Following the signing of a partnership framework with the University of Nouakchott and the National School for Social Action (*École nationale de l'action sociale*), discussions are ongoing to revise the Social Protection and Social Work syllabi to incorporate child protection and social protection themes. A training plan for teachers has been validated and in September 2024 two teachers will receive social security training at the 2024 Academy on Social Security (ITC-ILO) in Turin.

**Enhanced child-sensitive data analysis.** In July 2023, a partnership agreement was signed with the Polytechnic School to collaborate with the Higher Institute of Statistics. This partnership aims to improve the use of existing social databases for knowledge management and social data analysis, and to better orient policy makers and social protection stakeholders. So far, four trainees from the school have been granted three-month internships at the Social Registry, and the Joint Project will continue to support placements in various ministries to strengthen child-sensitive data collection and analysis. An MoU is being signed to facilitate the integration of cohorts of statistics graduates for this purpose.

#### Lean season response and lessons learned exercises

All recommendations identified following the 2022 lean season response were implemented in 2023. Challenges related to targeting modalities were resolved, helped by the update to the Social Registry. A re-evaluation of the minimum expenditure basket was also completed.

After the 2023 lean season, a CSA capitalisation and lessons-learned workshop took place in November 2023, involving all DCAN stakeholders. The following recommendations from the workshop are considered during the 2024 lean season response.

- **Reinforcing of the monitoring and evaluation unit.** A cross-functional unit was institutionalized within DCAN for lean season response in April 2024 with World Bank support, including hiring a dedicated staff member at the CSA. Further, many other actors within DCAN are progressively being associated with the M&E system to allow for an integrated approach going forward. **A more precise timeline for the National Response Plan.** A proposal to divide the response into three stages (national needs plan in December, intermediate response plan in March, and final plan in June) was validated by the CSA.
- **Harmonised baselines.** Plans to standardise baselines with government actors and agree on the tools, methodologies, and reporting mechanisms used for lean season response,
- **Improve communication at the technical service level among local elected officials.** A documentary featuring government officials, partners, and the Mauritanian population will outline the evolution of shock response modalities in Mauritania and help explain the response planning-implementation-monitoring workflow.



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## POLICY

### [Continued support to the revision of the National Social Protection Strategy \(SNPS\)](#)

The Joint Project has played a key role in the SNPS revision process, with both agencies actively participating in Steering Committee meetings, offering technical inputs on the working drafts, and organising exchange visits for committee members and other government officials. The revised strategy reflects current needs, including a focus on making social protection more shock-responsive, nutrition-sensitive, and inclusive of refugees and host communities. A final version has been submitted to the SNPS Steering Committee for finalisation and endorsement before its submission to the Interministerial Committee for approval.

To prepare the revised SNPS, the Government engaged in four thematic study trips, facilitated by the Joint Project, to learn from social protection systems in other countries. The results and recommendations from the first three study trips (to Algeria and Morocco) were presented in a workshop in September 2023, which helped review and validate the key strategies, expected results, activities, and indicators for the updated SNPS.

In November 2023, a study visit (to Senegal) focused on governance and resilience. Eight Mauritanian officials from the social protection and governance sectors learned from Senegal's successful social protection coordination, shock responsiveness and productive measures.

Following these visits, a draft implementation plan for the revised SNPS was developed with Joint Project support. A workshop in September 2024, organized by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and MASEF, will discuss the costed implementation plan and the development of a monitoring and evaluation system.

### [National Strategy for People Living with Disabilities](#)

A National Strategy for People Living with Disabilities has been developed but remains unvalidated. High level advocacy by the Joint Project is underway to encourage its approval.

The revised SNPS integrates disability considerations across all strategic areas, emphasising inclusive social protection. This includes cash transfers, health insurance and access to productive measures, including employment for people living with disabilities and caregivers. A multi-sectoral approach is required to address the various challenges involved in identifying and supporting people living with disabilities, spanning health, social and education sectors.

Both the Social Protection and Disability Strategies aim to promote the inclusion of vulnerable populations. The revised SNPS seeks to reduce inequalities, while the draft strategy for persons with disabilities focuses on integrating them in all aspects of social and economic life, with measures to ensure access to a minimum income and essential services.

### [Support to Implement the Nutrition Policy and the nutrition multi-sectoral strategic plan](#)

The Joint Project has continued to support the implementation of the nutrition policy (revised in 2023). It has also supported the Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development to update the nutrition multi-sectoral strategic plan, involving a multi-sectoral analysis on the nutrition situation and a series of workshops and technical meetings with government, UN, civil society organisations, donors, and private sector). Official validation of the plan is pending, while individual sectoral plans are being elaborated.

## **COORDINATION**

Since January 2024, the Social Protection Working Group, supported by the Joint Project, has served as a coordination hub among social protection actors, fostering more aligned and coherent initiatives. The group ensures all stakeholders work towards shared objectives, including updates to the SNPS, improving feedback mechanisms, conducting surveys, regular updates to the Social Registry, refining targeting modalities, advocacy around the FNRCAN's work, and assisting refugees and host communities, among other priorities.

The cross-sectoral contributions to the draft SNPS reflect a commitment to better serving vulnerable populations, while the study visits show a political will to build on regional successes and foster cross-border cooperation and exchange for expanded, more inclusive social protection systems in Mauritania and beyond.

The Joint Project has also been supporting the operationalization of DCAN's Specialized Technical Committees for Food Assistance and Livelihoods. This has included assistance to produce consolidated matrices of all 2024 lean season responses, ensuring coordination between food assistance and livelihoods efforts.

## **PROGRAMMES**

The World Bank and WFP collaborated with the CSA to develop a provisional national lean season response plan for 2024, enabling early budgeting. Validated in December 2023, the plan was revised to reflect evolving needs in January and March 2024. The early validation helped to ensure a timely start to the 2024 lean season response, while giving donors and partners more time to position their funding strategically in line with the response plan.

## **FINANCE**

### [Operationalisation of the National Food and Nutrition Crisis Response Fund \(FRNCAN\)](#)

The Joint Project, alongside the World Bank and AFD, helped create a National Food and Nutrition Crisis Response Fund (FRNCAN), with the Government allocating approximately \$6.5 million for food security and nutrition in 2023 (the FRNCAN's first year), within the framework of the 2024 Finance Law. AFD pledged €12 million over three years to the FRNCAN (2023-2025), with €4 million used in 2023 to support around 78,000 people with cash transfers. In 2024, AFD contributed €4 million to the El Maouna lean season safety net programme, targeting 82,000 beneficiaries. From October 2024, AFD plans to provide technical assistance to the CSA on FRNCAN operations, which the Joint Project aims to accompany.

Joint consultations by WFP and the World Bank led to finalisation of the FNRCAN Procedures Manual in June 2024, in time for the lean season response. The manual encompasses actions beyond cash transfers, including food, nutrition and livelihoods support, as well as coordination and forecasting. Synergies between WFP, the World Bank, AFD and CSA have facilitated further improvements to the FRNCAN and the operations manual toolkit.

Negotiations between the Government and the International Monetary Fund, with Joint Project support, led the government to commit to covering half of the cash transfer needs for the 2024 lean season (reaching around 213,000 people – 70 per cent via *Tekavoul* and 30 per cent via *El Maouna*). Taking these budgetary allocations into account, together with the funds already mobilized for nutrition programmes led by MASEF and food distributions led by the CSA, the FRNCAN has to date received government allocations amounting to \$16 million. The Joint Project will continue advocating for timely budgetary allocation to the FRNCAN prior to the next lean season response, and for the Ministry of Finance to facilitate fiduciary circuits during the lean season and other emergency response periods.

### Government Financing of Nutrition Inputs

The Joint Project's advocacy and technical assistance supported the transition of nutrition input financing fully to the Government, previously purchased exclusively by UNICEF. This will increase government leadership and ensure the durability of social assistance in the country. According to a tripartite agreement by 2023, all nutrition inputs were meant to be included in the Ministry's budget, but due to coordination issues between the CSA and the Ministry of Health and differing interpretations of the FNRCAN's role, this was not achieved. To address this, UNICEF facilitated working sessions with the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders.

In 2024 the Ministry of Health validated the funding of 100 per cent of the nutrition inputs, but is facing constraints relating to disbursement procedures, delaying their purchase. UNICEF has provided significant support to address the bottlenecks and, thanks to open dialogue between the Ministries of Health and Finance, the Prime Minister's Office and the FNRCAN, the 2024 inputs are likely to be purchased in accordance with the Government's commitments. UNICEF is providing procurement support to *Taazour* to ensure it can meet its commitment to procure the supplies to treat severe acute malnutrition with domestic funds.

In addition, with UNICEF support the Ministry of Health mobilised nutritional inputs from the innovative matching fund mechanism funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This action prevented stock-outs and maintained coverage of interventions for the treatment of acute and severe child malnutrition.



To facilitate the gradual transfer of supplementation activities to the Government by the close of 2028, through complementary WFP resources, the Joint Project is providing technical support to the CSA through a seconded nutritionist.

## MONITORING AND BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK

### *Track 1 and 2 emergency cash transfers in rural areas*

#### *Regular monitoring field visits*

WFP's regular field visits during cash distributions have helped ensure beneficiaries understand (i) the purpose of cash transfer support, (ii) frequency, distribution and amounts to be expected, (iii) targeting methodologies, and (iv) how to use the complaints mechanism. With increased community outreach, CSA management committees have played a greater role in the distribution process and complaint resolution.

WFP's support in setting up DCAN's monitoring and evaluation system (completed in April 2024) will reinforce capacities across programmes under this mechanism, enabling the establishment of more efficient monitoring tools and automated processes for all actors operating under the DCAN, including at the decentralised level.

#### *Community feedback mechanisms*

During the reporting period, 28,183 calls were received via the WFP toll-free support line operated by INFOLOG, an external WFP-contracted call centre. The majority (56 per cent) of calls concerned the lean season response, while 50 per cent concerned urban cash distributions in Nouakchott. In total, 66 per cent of callers were requesting to be registered in the beneficiary lists for different programmes, and 29 per cent requested information on distribution schedules. By July 2024, 90 per cent of claims had been addressed.

By comparison, in all of 2023, 47,653 calls were received by the WFP toll-free support line. Of these, 65 per cent were complaints or requests for information on beneficiary targeting; 16 per cent to request inclusion in future payment rounds; 15 per cent to request additional information on cash transfers programmes; 1.6 per cent to provide positive feedback about programme delivery; and 1.9 per cent concerned other matters.

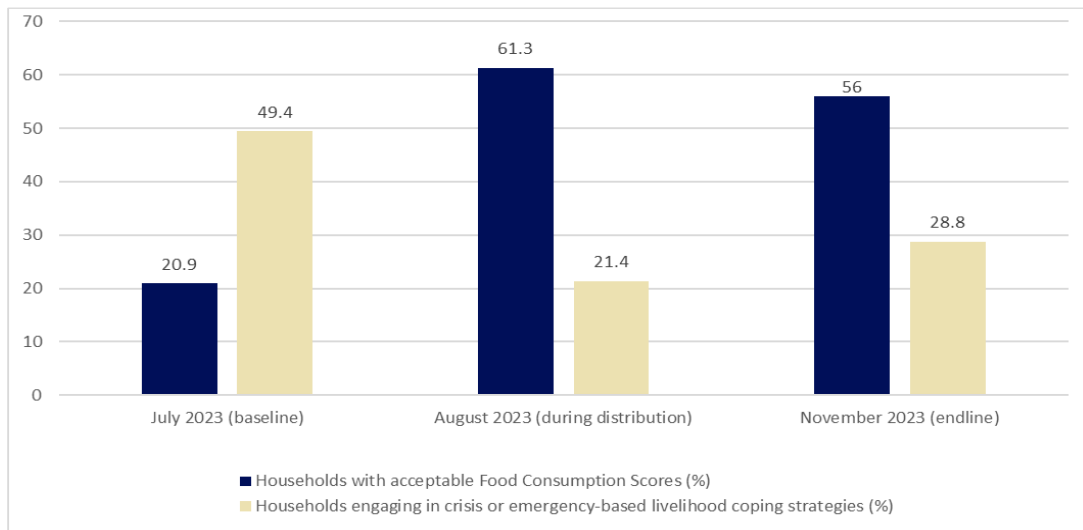
However, the figures for 2023 and 2024 include calls related specifically to WFP-supported cash transfers under the Joint Project, as well as calls about the Government's national programme or the Social Registry. Pending operationalisation of a joint call centre, INFOLOG, an external WFP-contracted call centre, was used to submit claims related to all WFP-supported lean season transfers (Tracks 1 and 2). During the reporting period, 8,183 claims were submitted through INFOLOG; these were logged and monitored as part of the CMM.

#### *Pre- and Post-Distribution Monitoring surveys*

##### *2023 lean season response*

End-line surveys for the 2023 lean season response showed 100 per cent of beneficiaries felt they had been treated with respect and dignity and that lean season support is improving household budgeting capacities. Post-distribution monitoring results are shown below.

### Post-distribution monitoring results (2023 lean season response)



The increased prevalence of negative coping strategies and the decreased prevalence of households classified as having acceptable Food Consumption Scores between August and November 2023 may be the result of a particularly long lean season, during which the October harvests were delayed compared to previous years.

Following the malnutrition prevention pilot, endline surveys revealed that households with pregnant and breastfeeding women were best able to cover all monthly nutritional needs (40 per cent of households), followed by those with both pregnant and/or breastfeeding women and children aged 6 to 23 months (31 per cent), and finally households with only children aged 6 and 23 months (22 per cent). Based on these findings, the top-up amounts were harmonised for 2024 so that all eligible households received the same amount of MRU 650 (\$16.45).

### 2024 lean season response

Cash transfers for the 2024 lean season, delayed by one month due to elections (see Outcome 1 achievements), began in July 2024. A baseline assessment was conducted in early July 2024 prior to the first distribution cycle in the Department of Kankossa, Assaba Region. A post-distribution monitoring survey as well as an endline assessment will be conducted over the reporting period.

### Track 1 cash transfers for households with disabilities

UNICEF Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) system continued to ensure transparent disbursements and timely identification and resolution of bottlenecks. During the reporting period, five programmatic visits were conducted, two with Government partners (MASEF and DGRSSI) and three with implementing NGOs. In addition, four field monitoring missions were carried out by MASEF social workers with UNICEF. These were organised before, during and after the implementation of activities. The visits highlighted the strong commitment of local actors to the social protection agenda, as well as their collaborative approach and field knowledge.

The complaints management committee was active in processing and responding to claims. In total, 1,239 claims were registered in the complaints database at MASEF's Directorate for People with Disabilities, 282 of which related to distribution of the productive cash grant. Claims primarily concerned missed payments (often due to beneficiary absence or changes in telephone numbers) or requests for inclusion in the programme. Several complaints were received from the beneficiaries of cash for families with disabilities who were not selected for the income generating package. Eligible beneficiaries were scheduled for catch-up transfers, while those deemed ineligible were provided with detailed explanations of the selection process and eligibility criteria.

Monitoring reports indicate that the productive cash package has already enabled around 50 per cent of beneficiaries to achieve economic empowerment, while contributing to their social integration, by developing activities that generate a sustainable income and contribute to the well-being of their families. Monitoring reports also show that beneficiaries are better equipped to manage their businesses, thanks to regular coaching sessions.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### Challenges

- **Community Feedback Mechanism.** There is a need for stronger procedures to ensure timely responses to complaints. Efforts are underway to operationalise a centralised community claims mechanism, including a joint call centre with a single toll-free number. The mechanism aims to centralize claims management within the Social Registry, with the Joint Project working with the complaints committee to train call centre operators on proper protocols for complaint transmission and follow-up.
  - A related challenge is the absence of a process for rapidly handling inquiries made via the WFP call centre about people missing from the updated beneficiary lists from the Social Registry. The Joint Project is investing in an automated call reception system to monitor complaints received and ensure timely resolution.
- **Targeting delays for cash transfers to households with people living with disabilities.** Competing government priorities, including preparations for the population census in December 2023 and presidential elections in June 2024, affected the availability of government counterparts and led to delays in targeting new beneficiary households in Nouakchott and rural areas.
- **Limited number of partners supporting households living with disabilities.** UNICEF is the sole technical and financial partner supporting MASEF to assist households living with disabilities. The limited number of partners presents a variety of challenges for the implementation and sustainability of planned cash transfers and complementary activities, including targeting, community sensitisation and communication with beneficiaries. UNICEF is advocating a multi-sectoral approach, including the finalisation of the National Strategy for People with Disabilities and the reactivation of the National Inter-Sectoral Commission for Disabilities. This would encourage partners to consider disability in their programmes, given the influential membership of the commission.
- **Absence of a multi-sectoral strategy for disabilities.** The lack of a comprehensive national strategy hinders access to services and rights for people living with disabilities. UNICEF is engaging in high-level advocacy to encourage validation of the National Strategy for People

with Disabilities. In addition, training on inclusive policies, supported by inclusion experts from UNICEF HQ, has been scheduled. It is aimed at government executives to ensure that disability is better considered in public policies.

- **CSA Capacity Limitations.** Limited financial and technical capabilities at the CSA impact coordination, timely implementation and institutional memory. There are low levels of political will among some decentralised technical teams, including because of competing priorities, lack of equipment, high staff turnover, and fragmented communications. That said, a significant improvement between 2023 and 2024 capacities has been observed.
- **Rising Food Costs.** Every lean season since the start of the Joint Project, the cost of the basic food basket has increased. WFP plans to update the minimum expenditure basket value for its cash transfer operations to better reflect food price inflation (last update was in March 2022) and is advocating for a harmonised cash value across partners for future lean season responses.
- **Refugee Influx.** The rising influx of Malian refugees, especially since MINUSMA's withdrawal from Mali, has prompted discussions on how to integrate refugees into the Social Registry and provide inclusive social protection coverage. There is a need to discuss linkages between emergency response for refugees and long-term social protection and economic inclusion, and different ways to finance this, as the full financial burden should not rest solely on the host country. UNHCR estimates the number of refugees and asylum seekers at over 200,000 (June 2024), with over half living in the Mbera camp in the Hodh Al Chargui region. In January 2024, Mauritania launched an initial three-month National Contingency Plan for Refugee Influx in the Hodh El-Chargui region, but more efforts are needed as refugee arrivals increase.

### *Lessons Learned and Good Practices*

#### **Leveraging the Social Registry for Targeting and Payments**

- The shift to using the Social Registry for targeting the Joint Project's lean season beneficiaries, rather than former, more community-based methods, reflects improvements in the national information and targeting systems, and is likely to strengthen government ownership of future targeting exercises. Regular feedback mechanisms enhance the registration rates of vulnerable households not previously identified. Three key lessons can be drawn from this shift:
  - Piloting the Social Registry's payment tracking platform for lean season transfers in Gorgol Region helped identify areas for improvement, which were shared with the Social Registry. The platform shows potential to improve efficiency and accountability, therefore further investment to enhance its reliability to meet UN data security standards would be valuable to enable all cash transfer actors to use the platform.
  - By using the Social Registry in cash transfer operations, the Joint Project provides a valuable opportunity to test and refine the Social Registry for beneficiary identification and monitoring. A continuous feedback loop with the Social Registry ensures swift identification of issues needing attention. This institutional support benefits Joint Project operations and encourages broader adoption of the Social Registry by social protection actors for both development and humanitarian efforts.

- Both agencies' involvement in a technical committee with the World Bank to improve the Social Registry highlights how Joint Project efforts can act as an entry point to leverage WFP and UNICEF expertise in national coordination mechanisms.

### **Strengthening Interoperability for Social Protection**

- The Social Registry's interoperability with other national information systems enables linkages with programmes for better service delivery, ensuring a more complete assistance package for the most vulnerable to respond to their basic needs, for example:
  - The existence of a dedicated **information management system for people living with disabilities**, and its interoperability with the social registry, has facilitated better inclusion of disabled persons in national social protection schemes.
  - Interoperability with **civil registration systems** has enabled data cross-referencing to identify and register children without birth certificates, ensuring they can access social services.
  - Linkages with databases from the **child protection system** have enabled the enrolment of children from detention and reintegration centres, as well as children on the move, into civil registration.
  - Integrating disability data in Social Registry has improved national-level visibility and inclusion.

### **Early Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation Support for the Lean Season Response**

Thanks to Joint Project support, the CSA was able to conduct an early proposal and validation process for the 2024 lean season national response plan. WFP's convening power brought key stakeholders together to ensure timelier design, validation, and funding of the national response plan. Tools from the new Monitoring and Evaluation system were used to build on the 2023 response.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

### **Main priorities for outcome 1**

- Complete the 2024 lean season response with three additional cash distribution cycles (August-October).
- Support the capitalization of the 2024 lean season response as well as planning for the 2025 lean season response.

### **Main priorities for outcome 2**

- Jointly implement a pilot exercise for regular household registration updates with the Social Registry in the Kankossa district.
- Support the finalization of the complete update of the Social Registry at Hodh El Chargui region.
- Support the redesign of the digital payment platform of the Social Registry.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION**

Throughout implementation, both agencies collaborate with several Government agencies, the World Bank, ILO, UNHCR, and other key partners to strengthen the building blocks of the

national social protection system. During the reporting period, partnerships and coordination was particularly focused on the following:

- **Internal coordination:** Within both UNICEF and WFP Country Offices, different units, such as Nutrition, Child Protection, Research Assessment Monitoring, Cash-Based Transfers, and School Feeding, collaborate on the project, through planning and regular information sharing meetings.
- **Inter-agency coordination:** The two agencies have established regular meetings to coordinate support for the Government's implementation of social protection and resilience programmes. UNICEF and WFP take into account their respective fields of expertise in targeting, interoperability of databases and the extension of the registry, among others. Both agencies focus on evidence generation and the sharing of lessons learned, to learn from each other's experiences in implementing cash transfers in urban and rural areas.
- **External coordination:** UNICEF and WFP provide substantial operational and technical support to the Government in its role of coordinating national social protection policy (see Outcome 2 achievements for details on efforts to strengthen coordination systems).

## COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER GERMAN (BMZ/GIZ/KfW) CONTRIBUTIONS

UNICEF and WFP are implementing two joint projects funded by Germany. Each agency is taking a carefully planned approach to ensure increasing complementarity between the two.

Through this Joint Project, WFP's lean season interventions take place within the intervention areas supported by the joint WFP-UNICEF Resilience programme (funded by BMZ), as a means of further strengthening the linkages between the two projects as well as to allow for a holistic humanitarian-development response for the most vulnerable. Similarly, the top-ups provided with UNICEF support were in areas covered by the Resilience Programme. The beneficiaries of the different cash transfer programmes (lean season and top-up beneficiaries) were integrated in micro-savings groups supported by the Resilience Programme.

In its support and technical advice to the SNPS, the Joint Project is advocating an adaptive social protection approach – ensuring that resilience linkages, such as the other the UNICEF-WFP Resilience Programme is focusing on are integrated in the strategy. Nutrition and continuity of care considerations are also emphasised by both partners in discussions.

# NIGER

## OUTCOME 1 - Affected populations receive cash transfers and complementary services to absorb the social and economic impacts of multiple covariant shocks.

Table 5: Summary of beneficiaries reached and implementation modalities in Niger for Outcome 1 (Phases I-IV)

	Transfer timing & frequency	Total Target Beneficiaries (HH)	HHs reached Aug 2020-Jul 2024	Monthly payment per HH	Total payment per HH (per year/round)	Delivery Mechanism
Track 1 & 2 (UNICEF): Shock-responsive cash transfer	COVID-19: <u>Aug-Sep 2021</u> (1 distribution to cover 3 months)	32,659	32,659	\$25 (15,000 XOF)	\$75	National PFSA
	Drought: <u>Aug 2022-May 2023</u> (quarterly to cover 12 months)	6,450	6,450	\$25 (15,000 XOF)	\$300	
	Drought: <u>Dec 2023-Jan 2025</u> (4 distributions to cover 12 months)	26,969	26,926	\$25 (15,000 XOF)	\$300	Track 2 FSP contracted by UNICEF
Track 2 (WFP): Shock-responsive cash transfer	COVID-19: <u>Aug-Sep 2021</u> (1 distribution to cover 3 months)	86,000	86,000	\$25 (15,000 XOF)	\$75	FSP & NGO contracted by WFP or PFSA
	Drought: <u>Jun 2022-Feb 2023</u>	17,067	16,964	\$25 (15,000 XOF)	\$300	
	Drought: <u>May 2023-Jan 2024</u> (quarterly to cover 12 months)	16,500 <sup>29</sup>	16,500 <sup>30</sup>	\$25 (15,000 XOF)	\$300	
	Flood: <u>Sept-Oct 2022</u> (2 distributions in 2 months)	7,422	7,422	\$64 (40,000 XOF)	\$128	
Track 2 (WFP): Cash transfers in chronically food insecure areas	Drought: <u>Jan 2024-Dec 2024</u> (quarterly distribution)	2,700	2,705	\$25 (15,000XOF)	\$300	
Track 2 (UNICEF): Productive CTs	<u>Oct-Nov 2024</u> : One-off lump sum	27,779	n/a	n/a	\$142 lump sum (100,000 XOF)	Track 2 FSP contracted by UNICEF
Track 2 (UNICEF) CTs to HHS living with disabilities	Every 2 months to cover 36 months) & a one-off productive CT; Transfer timing TBD (details below)	3,501	n/a	\$33 (20,000 XOF)	\$400 (monthly) + \$167 (100,000 XOF lump sum) TOTAL: \$567 (340,000 XOF)	Track 2 FSP contracted by UNICEF in partnership with FNPB

During the reporting period, 322,917 people (46,131 households) received cash transfers with Joint Project support and over 824,000 people were reached with sensitisation messaging. Since its inception, 1.37 million people (196,000 households) have been reached with transfers, and an estimated 2.8 million people with complementary services.

<sup>29</sup> While Phase III of the Joint Project initially also planned to cover a 4-month lean season response, the beneficiaries under this intervention were covered through complementary financing sources. Thus, the target number of beneficiaries for Phase III should include only the 12-month drought response for 2023 and can be considered 16,500 households.

<sup>30</sup> These 16,500 include the number of households after subtracting those from the 4 villages in the Tillaberi region (see section below) that had to be removed from the distributions due to security and access constraints.

### Cash transferred to affected populations, in line with national response plans

The Government of Niger develops an annual National Response Plan (PNR) to guide and coordinate responses to shocks affecting food and nutrition security. The plans now systematically integrate shock-responsive safety-net interventions, including those funded under the Joint Project, recognising the important role of adaptive social protection in addressing seasonal needs. The plans are developed by the Government and partners, with the support of the Food Security Cluster and the Joint Project.

In the 2023 plan, the Government and partners aimed to reach 3.3 million severely food insecure people during the lean season and 1.36 million people chronically vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. Political instability and financial constraints hampered its implementation, and only 2.5 million people were reached with reduced assistance.

The Government and partners developed the 2024 National Response Plan (PNR) in early 2024. It aims to assist 3.4 million people during the lean season, with the Government planning to assist 1.1 million people through in-kind assistance and other partners supporting the coverage of additional populations through cash and in-kind support. Funding constraints have hampered partners' ability to implement the planned response, affecting the number of people reached, the size of rations and the duration and type of assistance. As of 31 July 2024, 1.4 million people remained unreached with assistance under the PNR.

The Government halted safety net transfers under the *Project Filets Sociaux Adaptatif* (PFSA) after the World Bank froze funding following the July 2023 coup. However, the Government, via the *Cellule des Filets Sociaux* (CFS), continued drought-response cash transfers, using a \$4.6 million African Risk Capacity insurance payout. Two transfer cycles were completed in the first half of 2024 to 13,990 households. Over 12 months until December 2024, these households are set to receive XOF 180,000 (\$300) over four payment cycles.

### Drought response: shock-responsive cash transfers (Track 2)

The Joint Project is working alongside the Government, in coordination with the National Mechanism for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises (DNP-GCA), to determine coverage and avoid duplication in the drought response. Following the political crisis, consultations between UNICEF, WFP, KfW and BMZ led to a decision in early August 2023 to suspend payments via government systems and to shift all Track 1 cash transfers to Track 2.



In alignment with Government priorities, UNICEF and WFP, have taken over all cash delivery functions under the Joint Project, including targeting, data collection and management, payments, monitoring and complaint management. The twin-track approach has facilitated this shift, and UNICEF has leveraged WFP's experience in Track 2 delivery to smooth the transition to Track 2 and ensure continued cash transfers to beneficiaries. This demonstrates the added value of the twin-



track approach to ensure those in need are reached through Track 2 when Track 1 transfers are not possible due to overstretched or disrupted national systems. Regular coordination meetings between both agencies ensure aligned approaches, and UNICEF has been able to use WFP's long-term agreements with financial service providers and its hotline for community feedback and grievance redress.

Before the *coup*, cash assistance was planned for quarterly distributions over 12 months via both in-hand and mobile money mechanisms (which were to be tested as part of the drought response). Given the current contextual challenges, the Joint Project has opted for exclusive cash-in-hand transfers with enhanced security measures.

### *Cash transfers delivered via UNICEF channels (Track 2)*

During the reporting period, the Joint Project delivered two rounds of cash assistance to 26,926 households via UNICEF channels, aligning with the National Drought Response Plan. This assistance reached 344 villages across 17 municipalities in five regions: Tahoua, Maradi, Zinder, Dosso and Agadez. Following consultations with the CFS, the cash transfer timeline was adjusted to run from December 2023 to January 2025 (initially set for September 2023 to June 2024). The first payment round occurred from December 2023 to February 2024, and the second in July 2024. Two final payments are scheduled for October 2024 and January 2025. Under Track 2, UNICEF took responsibility for targeting, data collection, registry management, payments, monitoring, and grievance redress.

### *Programmatic Adjustments*

The first round of payments was delayed to December 2023, due to operational constraints and preparatory requirements for the shift to Track 2. Key steps included recruiting firms for targeting and registration, financial service providers and an external monitoring firm, as well as establishing a robust coordination mechanism to align service providers, implementing partners and UNICEF staff.

Financial service providers faced various operational challenges, including delays in securing authorisation and escorts for travel to insecure areas. Furthermore, after the freezing of Niger's access to the regional central bank, local banks imposed limits on cash withdrawals, complicating cash availability for transfers, while limited network coverage made mobile payments unfeasible.

Track 2 required UNICEF to put in place its own beneficiary data management system – the Humanitarian Cash Operations and Programme Ecosystem (HOPE). During direct cash delivery, this digital tool is used to manage beneficiary data and mitigate risks, such as data protection breaches and duplication. To ensure smooth deployment, 20 UNICEF staff were trained on the HOPE platform, along with 10 staff from targeting firms who received training on the protocol, including on the digitalized questionnaire and access to HOPE for data processing. UNICEF in Niger received support from its headquarters' cash team to enhance the technical and operational capacities of its staff for implementing Track 2 cash transfers.

Cash transfers were coupled with awareness-raising and social mobilisation campaigns on nutrition, children's rights and gender-based violence prevention. However, operational constraints since the *coup* meant that expanding the cash-plus approach previously piloted alongside Track 1 distributions in was not possible.

### *Community Engagement and Grievance Redress*

UNICEF supported the creation and operationalisation of a robust grievance redress and feedback mechanism to enhance accountability to affected populations. This was designed to enable two-way communication and broader feedback systems while promoting transparency, and consistent collaboration. The mechanism used existing social listening and community-based feedback platforms, including five regional steering committees, 17 communal grievance management committees, 78 village committees, a hotline and 12 radio community radio stations. The mechanism was actively promoted at regional and local levels to ensure government and community ownership while facilitating complaint resolution.

During the reporting period, UNICEF trained 102 additional members of 17 communal grievance committees, and from December 2023 to July 2024, an estimated 300,500 people were reached through local language radio broadcasts on grievance management and to encourage allocation of the cash received for the uptake of practices to realise children's rights. Since the start of cash distributions in December 2023, 251 complaints and feedback were received, and 51 coordination meetings were held with communal and village committees to report on progress and ensure that unresolved issues were addressed, ensuring a high level of accountability and responsiveness in cash transfer operations.

#### *Cash transfers delivered via WFP channels (Track 2)*

##### *2023 Drought Response (cash secheresse 2023)*

WFP completed most of the drought transfers for 2023 in January 2024. All 16,500 targeted households (112,385 people) have received four quarterly payments of 45,000 XOF (\$75) per round.<sup>31</sup> However, 5,687 households in two communes of Tahoua region experienced payment delays due to access and security concerns and instead received their final payment in March 2024. The transfers, covering a 12-month period, targeted three drought-affected regions: Maradi, Tahoua and Tillabéri.

Distributions followed a revised schedule from June 2023 (the first round was initially planned for May 2023).<sup>32</sup> with only minor delays due to political instability. Liquidity constraints arose from financial sanctions on Niger, affecting payments through banks and implementing partners. These were quickly resolved thanks to WFP's experience as a major cash transfer operator in Niger and its solid relationship with the financial sector. The entire distribution cycle was digitised (planning, management of beneficiary lists, delivery, oversight, deduplication, and reconciliation). While payments remain in cash, opportunities to advance towards other mechanisms are being explored.

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<sup>31</sup> These 16,500 include the number of households after subtracting those from the 4 villages in the Tillabéri region (see section below) that had to be removed from the distributions due to security and access constraints.

<sup>32</sup> As part of the 2023 lean season response, the targeting process and beneficiary list availability caused delays in the first round of payments (i.e., the first quarterly payment). As a result, the payment scheduled was revised, such that the first payment took place in June 2023, the second payment in August 2023, the third payment in October 2023, and the fourth and final payment in January 2024. Each distribution provided three months' worth of cash transfers (45,000 XOF / 75 USD).



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### *Security concerns in the Tillabéri Region impacting targeting and distribution*

WFP successfully expanded the reach of the Government's shock-responsive safety-net to areas that the CFS could not cover, particularly hard-to-access regions. While this approach significantly increased coverage, insecurity concerns occasionally disrupted distributions.

In Tillabéri Region, the security situation and presence of non-state armed groups impacted operations, resulting in both a reduced caseload and a slowdown in cash delivery. WFP initially aimed to reach 1,534 households across 12 villages in Tillabéri, but could only reach 886 households, due to security risks in four villages. Operations were delayed by security constraints preventing the financial service provider from reaching distribution points.

### *2024 Drought response (cash secheresse 2024)*

The first two quarterly rounds of drought transfers for 2024 were delivered via WFP channels in May and July 2024, reaching 2,705 households (exceeding the target of 2,700 households). Households received 45,000 XOF (\$75) per quarterly distribution in the Attantane, Mayahi, and Sarkin Haoussa communes (Maradi Region) and the Namaro commune (Tillabéri Region). The last two distributions are scheduled for September and December 2024.

### *Productive cash transfers (Track 2)*

Initially planned for Track 1 delivery in 2021 in coordination with the World Bank, productive cash transfers faced repeated delays due to capacity constraints within the PFSA, urgent drought response planning, and the need for enhanced fraud risk mitigation measures. Extensive preparations and capacity strengthening efforts from 2021 to 2023 helped address these challenges. During this time UNICEF also collaborated with the PFSA to prepare the complementary services needed to ensure the long-term impact of the transfers.

After the coup, productive cash transfers, like the shock-responsive transfers, were shifted to Track 2. This led to further delays as priority was given to addressing immediate drought needs. Additional delays were caused by the need for a data sharing protocol with the Government (finalised in July 2024) and the integration of the PFSA database into UNICEF's HOPE system.

Beneficiary card printing and distribution is underway, in collaboration with the CFS, with one-off payments now scheduled for November 2024, once the regional and local steering

committees are revitalized and feedback mechanisms are operational.

### Cash transfers to households living with disabilities (Track 2) - disability-inclusive safety net

Prior to the coup, the Joint Project had been supporting government efforts to design a disability-inclusive safety net pilot programme and develop a process for creating and distributing an equal opportunities card. Cash transfers to households with members living with disabilities were scheduled to begin in August 2023, following a workshop to validate the card and its underlying information system.<sup>4</sup> However, the political situation forced postponement. Preparatory steps are ongoing and a revised timeline for transfers will be devised with the Government.

Successful implementation of the safety net requires close collaboration between UNICEF, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the National Federation for Disabled People (FNPH) and the RSU management unit, which oversees beneficiary targeting. UNICEF and FNPH are finalising a partnership agreement to ensure the active involvement of key stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organisations for people living with disabilities, technical and financial partners, local authorities, the private sector and community leaders.

Disability assessment tools for children and adults are being developed with the Government, and a UNICEF-funded workshop took place in April 2024, to finalise these tools. Next steps include validation by the Ministry of Health (October 2024) and household targeting based on the RSU (from December 2024). A revised timeline and amendments to the programme will be proposed following these preparatory steps.

### **Complementary services delivered in combination with cash transfers**

#### Nutrition and child-sensitive radio messaging

The Joint Project delivered sensitisation messages on key family practices, focusing on optimal nutrition, child rights, and the use of basic social services, to maximise use of the cash received for the benefit of the entire household (particularly children). Monthly radio programmes in local languages were broadcast through community radios in all targeted communes, and project beneficiaries were invited to participate in interactive radio discussions. Social behavioural change activities were also conducted through the “*Maman Lumiere*” groups in discussion sessions, along with individual counselling and mass communication via community radios. These efforts have reached over 824,000 people.

#### Strengthening Community-Based Nutrition and Local Production of Fortified Infant Foods

In April 2024, UNICEF signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Health to enhance community-based promotion of optimal infant and young child feeding practices. The initiative aims to increase the availability of nutritious complementary foods for young children by establishing local production units for fortified infant flour in five districts. It will also support existing production units and women’s groups to boost production and marketing efforts. With the support of KfW and other funding sources, UNICEF and government teams conducted joint missions to identify sites for constructing five fortified flour production units in the regions of Dosso, Maradi, Zinder and Agadez. During these missions, departmental and communal authorities committed to facilitating the establishment of the production units, including training women’s groups, raising awareness, and helping market fortified flour.

## **OUTCOME 2 – National social protection systems are strengthened to become more shock-responsive, nutrition-sensitive, and child-sensitive.**

Since August 2020, the Joint Project has been working to strengthen the building blocks of Niger's national social protection system, including enhancing the coordination capacities of ministries and institutions in charge of social protection programmes and supporting improved programming and delivery systems.

Both agencies supported the CFS in designing and delivering drought and shock responses, drawing on lessons from the COVID-19 response and other Joint Project components. However, following the coup in July 2023, new agreements with national institutions and non-technical activities on existing agreements were put on hold, as well as all activities that entailed strategic political engagement, in line with UN guidelines. Despite this, critical operational support continued for pre-crisis agreements, with rigorous due diligence to minimise fiduciary and reputational risk. Where central level collaboration was not possible, alternative methods were employed by engaging directly with field extension services.

Since the coup d'état, the Government has been developing a new strategy for socio-economic growth and development, the Resilience Plan for the Safeguarding of the Nation (PRSP), to outline the Government's vision for Niger's development throughout the transition period. In addition, the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Protection is establishing a roadmap for its new vision on social protection. This encompasses: (i) a study on the aspirations of the population regarding inclusive and localised social protection; (ii) the revision of the National Social Protection Policy; (iii) a new model of social protection coordination in Niger with a multi-partner technical group on social protection; and (iv) completing the development of a financing mechanism for social protection in Niger in a context of a constrained fiscal space.

By July 2024 the PRSP was not yet validated and released, though the Government had outlined its overarching priorities: (i) reinforcement of governance, peace and security; (ii) inclusive human capital development; (iii) fostering economic growth and job creation; and (iv) enhancing citizen participation and social inclusion. While each line ministry has been tasked with identifying its priorities, and the Government has stressed the importance of resilience-building and systems-strengthening to reduce humanitarian needs, the institutional anchorage of social protection is under discussion at the national level. Currently, the *Dispositif National De Prévention Et Gestion des Crises Alimentaires*, the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and the Ministry for Employment, Labour and Social Protection all have mandates to implement social protection measures with different scopes. The Joint Project will continue to work closely with all actors to facilitate better coordination. Additionally, since the PRSP has not yet been validated, the allocation of national budget funds remains unknown. Both agencies will remain engaged to ensure that forthcoming changes build on the investments already made in adaptive social protection mechanisms in Niger, including through the Joint Project.

Ongoing dialogue between both agencies and the World Bank is making it possible to pave a way forward and advance the social protection roadmap of the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Protection, pinpointing opportunities for collaboration within the present context. This roadmap centres on the policy aspects of the Social Protection strategy in Niger, including plans to revise the National Social Protection Strategy.

Despite the political crisis, the Joint Project has continued to support the Government to develop an investment case for a paradigm shift away from short-term assistance towards a longer-term social safety net programme, considered as more relevant and cost-effective to address recurrent seasonal needs, and strengthen resilience and human capital. This vision is fully aligned to the Government's PRSP and core principles, notably surrounding sovereignty, as well as their vision for the sustainable reduction of humanitarian needs or assistance in Niger. These discussions are ongoing and will inform a transition from the traditional reactive lean season model to a forward-looking safety-net approach combining multi-year transfers of four years in the areas most prone to recurrent seasonal food insecurity with the existing shock-responsive and productive components.

To broaden the conversations on safety net programmes in Niger, the Joint Project had scheduled to support a National Social Safety Net Week in September 2023. The safety net week was due to take place in two stages: a day of reflection and exchange in each of Niger's eight regions, followed by an international meeting dedicated to safety nets and social protection.

The regional workshops took place in seven regions. Five workshops were held as planned in September 2023, in four regions (Agadez, Tillaberi, Dosso and Zinder) with Joint Project support and in Diffa Region with ACF support. During these workshops, participants underscored the limited involvement of local stakeholders and beneficiaries in the formulation of social protection policies and projects/programmes, as well as the failure to take local realities into account. For instance, participants from all five regions cited a need to adjust targeting. Two additional workshops – in Maradi and Tahoua – took place in April 2024, supported by the Joint Project (details of findings will be provided in the next report upon receipt of the workshop reports).

The international meeting was cancelled because of the major constraints related to border closures and security issues. Several international panellists had been invited and had accepted to participate before the contextual changes.

## COORDINATION

Clarity around the institutional anchorage of social protection (including the identification of a lead line ministry) remains critical. Improved coordination efforts also depend on the validation of the PRSP and the Government's vision for social protection. Nevertheless, throughout the political upheaval, the Joint Project has maintained strong coordination with the CFS and other line ministries (e.g., Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Humanitarian Action) ensuring dialogue across the social protection, development, and resilience building agendas.

Discussions continue to enhance the DNP-GCA's information system and improve data collection by the Food Security Cell, ensuring the Early Warning System and the CFS at regional and central levels form a single integrated information system. The Early Warning System's efforts include developing on a methodological and operational manual for identifying extremely vulnerable areas to be targeted by social assistance and resilience programmes, alongside creating a data quality assurance validation mechanism.

The Joint Project had been supporting the CFS to lead a nationwide, bottom-up conversation on safety net programmes in Niger. These efforts included developing a communication strategy

and plan, as well as a strategic framework to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system, leading to a National Social Safety Net Week in September 2023. The safety net week was due to take place in two stages: a day of reflection and exchange in each of Niger's eight regions, followed by an international meeting dedicated to safety nets and social protection.

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## **DELIVERY**

### Planning safety net operations

In 2023, both agencies participated in processes to review safety-net operations in Niger. In response to the recommendations from these dialogues, including improving coordination and harmonisation of cash transfer operations, regular consultations take place between both agencies, the World Bank and the RSU, with discussions focusing on refining targeting methodologies, enhancing data collection processes and optimising geographic prioritisation for the RSU.

In preparation for the 2024 drought response, the Joint Project aligned with the Government to identify the areas most affected by drought. An annual assessment meeting in January 2024, with the CFS and the National Early Warning System units, resulted in the collaborative identification of 20 affected communes for the 2024 drought response, based on the Water Requirement Satisfaction Index (WRSI) index. From this list of communes, geographic targeting was jointly carried out by WFP and the CFS, leading to 4 of the 20 communes being covered by WFP-supported Track 2 drought response cash transfers which began in May 2024. The CFS has been able to continue drought-response cash transfers in 2024, using financing from the insurance premium payout from the African Risk Capacity. Reciprocal communication between the Joint Project and the CFS ensured a collaborative approach, helping to refine the drought safety net programme and ensuring alignment with the Government's response.

### Strengthening the RSU

Both agencies continued to work closely with the Social Registry (*Registre Social Unifié* - RSU) to advance discussions on common identification and targeting mechanisms for the RSU and its data collection tools. Reflections particularly focused on how best to support interoperability of the Social Registry with other social information systems.

In October 2023, the technical teams from both agencies, together with government partners, participated in a regional workshop on social registries (see Outcome 3 for details). Key takeaways specific to Niger included leveraging social registries for improved programme design and coverage, ensuring data quality, and working towards a minimum beneficial level of coverage, supported by regular data updates.

To facilitate regional knowledge exchange around RSU best practices, both agencies and the World Bank supported a Niger-Mauritania government learning initiative from 29 January to 3 February 2024. Three representatives from Niger's RSU travelled to Mauritania to learn from Mauritania's experience in the design and operationalisation of a social registry. The visit was also an opportunity to discuss social registries as coordination mechanisms for wider social protection initiatives. The visiting RSU delegation participated in practical simulations that facilitated first-hand exchange of expertise. Moving forward, these lessons learned from Mauritania will help inform Niger's own RSU scale-up efforts, with additional knowledge exchanges, as needed, to be facilitated by the Joint Project.

During 2024, WFP and UNICEF worked closely with the RSU unit as well as the World Bank to finalize a shared data collection mechanism that will be used to collect data for the social registry and target for the cash transfers interventions. The first data collection intervention is planned to start in September 2024.

#### [Extending the roll-out of the Child Protection Information Management System \(CPIMS+\)](#)

In 2024, with Joint Project support, roll-out of the CPIMS+ was finalised across all regions of Niger, enhancing integrated case management to strengthen prevention and response services for women and children at risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. During the pilot and subsequent roll-out phases, over 4,970 services have been provided to 2,660 children through CPIMS+ across these regions.

Before activation in each region, UNICEF supported training in case management using the CPIMS+ system for 291 social workers, supervisors and child protection managers from the Regional Directorates for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children, as well as UN and I/NGO staff. The training reached 222 social workers, 58 supervisors, and 12 child protection managers.

To support the system's use and enhance the capacity of government and NGO actors to deliver integrated case management services, UNICEF established an inter-agency case management taskforce in May 2024, led by the Director General of the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children. To date, the taskforce has representatives from 26 UN, INGO and local NGO partners, and has led to increased requests for technical support on CPIMS+ and case management services.

Given challenges like high staff turnover, low connectivity and limited digital literacy, further technical support is anticipated to maintain the system's functionality and ensure it meets the high levels of needs of children and families at risk of violence. Additionally, continued investment in Niger's national child protection system is crucial to maintain and further strengthen the social welfare system, including the presence of trained social workers in all regions. Especially following the dissolution of the Ministry of the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children, whose child protection functions have been integrated into a reconfigured Ministry of Health, Population and Social Affairs. Without further support from development partners, there is concern social worker staffing levels will not be maintained.



## POLICY

### Support to the revision of the National Social Protection Policy

During the previous reporting period (August 2022-July 2023), the Joint Project had played a key role in preparing the process to revise the National Social Protection Policy, including efforts to broaden the political and social dialogue on social protection systems. Although the revision process was paused following the July 2023 *coup*, UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank have subsequently agreed to provide coordinated support for the policy's revision. The Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Protection has agreed to discuss and update their roadmap in September 2024 to resume progress on this initiative.

### Social safety nets in contexts of forced displacement

Evidence collected by the Joint Project contributed to the National Strategy for Durable Solutions for Internationally Displaced Populations, consolidated in June 2023. The strategy highlights social safety nets as key to building long-term resilience for internally displaced people. It is one of the few initiatives that the de facto authorities have not discontinued since the *coup d'état*. Despite this, it provides an important framework for leveraging social protection to support displaced people, considering that as of August 2024 Niger hosts over 969,000 forcibly displaced, including 507,000 internally displaced persons, 365,000 refugees and 50,000 asylum seekers.<sup>33</sup> The *Programme de Résilience pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie* (PRSP) under development also emphasizes the importance of supporting the return and long-term resilience of displaced populations, pointing towards long-term, structural resilience building initiatives to meet their needs and help reduce their reliance on humanitarian assistance.

## PROGRAMMES

### Linking early warning systems with shock-responsive safety net programmes

Discussions continue to further develop the DNP-GCA's information system and ensure that quality data is collected by the Food Security Cell such that the Early Warning System and the CFS at regional and central levels represent a single integrated information system. This support aims at ensuring enhanced coordination between the different programmes implemented by the DNP-GCA. The Early Warning System's work on a methodological and operational manual for the identification of extremely vulnerable areas targeted by social assistance and resilience programmes is ongoing, together with efforts to develop a data quality assurance validation mechanism.

### Strengthening the legal framework and social protection system to reinforce protection of street and *talibé* children

The Joint Project-supported study on street and *talibé* children in urban centres was finalised during a validation workshop in December 2023, attended by all relevant line ministries.<sup>34</sup> The study identified factors driving children into street life and parents into sending children to *talibé* schools, including socio-economic, political and security issues that contribute to the migration of children.

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<sup>33</sup> UNHCR 31 August 2024: <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-personnes-relevant-de-la-competence-du-hcr-31-aout-2024>

<sup>34</sup> The study was coordinated by the former Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children and conducted by the University of Niamey's Centre for the Study of Migration.

The study found that migration serves as a stage in the passage to street life for both autonomous children and *talibés*, and that almost half of street children are former *talibés*. Since authorities have been investigating the issue, there has been a decline in the number of *talibé* children transitioning to street life. Once on the streets or in Koranic schools, children face precarious housing conditions, protection risks and negative social practices, such as begging and theft.

The study provides a basis for further policy discussions in the areas of both social and child protection, as it highlights areas of convergence and the need for intervention in both areas. UNICEF will also use the findings to inform its child protection and social policy programming going forward.

Responding to these issues is hampered by an under-resourced child protection workforce that currently lacks the capacity to independently address the issue. Under Government leadership, UNICEF is exploring options to support the development of a roadmap to implement the key findings of the study, that takes into consideration the need to strengthen public financing for the child protection sector.

## MONITORING AND BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK

### *Process and Output Monitoring*

#### *UNICEF-supported shock-responsive cash transfers (Track 2)*

As part of the transition to Track 2 transfers, UNICEF established a phone-based grievance and feedback mechanism using WFP's existing hotline alongside in-person platforms, including five regional and 17 communal steering committees, which include local administrative authorities among their members. In addition, 344 village committees were established, building on the government-led community-based participatory approach, with gender representation integrated into their composition. In total, 1,450 village committee members (466 women and 984 men) and 85 communal committee members (70 men and 15 women) were trained on complaint resolution and on their roles and responsibilities. As of July 2024, 92 calls were made to the hotline, and 159 complaints were received through the committees.

UNICEF staff, along with regional steering committee members, conducted distribution monitoring during the first two rounds of Track 2 cash transfers.<sup>35</sup> One programmatic visit and 19 field monitoring missions were carried out to assess distribution and distribution sites, gather feedback and ensure recipients received their transfers.<sup>5</sup> Sensitisation messages were also communicated during the missions and recommendations were made to facilitate timely improvements and resolution of issues. A local NGO supported the coaching of the communal and village grievance redress committees and monitored the management of feedback. The communal committee carried out 44 monitoring missions in close collaboration with the regional steering committee to support village committees, provide support and guidance, evaluate their challenges, and support the management of the unresolved complaints.

Rapid surveys were conducted through Kobo Collect to gather community insights. This included

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<sup>35</sup> For previous distributions, private firms had been recruited to conduct third-party monitoring. However, due to the high associated costs, UNICEF recruited an NGO to conduct third-party monitoring, including the post-distribution monitoring of the first round of transfers and distribution and post-distribution monitoring of future cash transfer rounds.

knowledge of the complaints and feedback mechanisms, the level of engagement of beneficiaries with these mechanisms, and satisfaction with the targeting process were measured during the distribution period. Beneficiaries were also asked about their perceptions of the cash transfer distribution process, their safety and well-being at the point of distribution. The data collection aimed to measure beneficiaries' self-efficacy and the extent to which cash transfers increased beneficiaries' longer-term resilience to shocks.

The surveys allowed beneficiaries to express their opinions on the quality, relevance and responsiveness of the programme, the types of rumours affecting them and the use of feedback mechanisms. Feedback was used to adjust programming of the payment distributions, and information gaps were used to adjust the process of generating social and behaviour change evidence. When beneficiaries identified the village chiefs and village committees as their preferred source of information, the subsequent rounds of payments have involved them in community mobilization and communication about the cash transfer program.

Under the UNICEF Track 2 cash transfers, complaints received from the hotline and via the village and communal committees were uploaded in the HOPE system. During the reporting period, 92 calls were made to the hotline, and 159 complaints were received through the committees. The on-site distribution monitoring by UNICEF staff enabled many complaints to be settled as they arose. This explains the low number of complaints received via the hotline.

Following the transition to Track 2, 380 beneficiaries were interviewed (semi-structured individual interviews with 30 women and 10 focus group discussions with 350 women) to assess knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, stigma, discrimination, and community dynamics related to the cash transfer programme. All respondents asserted that the money would serve to buy food, showing the relevance and criticality of the drought cash transfer programme in a context of vulnerability exacerbated by the political crisis. Other key findings from the respondents include the following:

- 90% were aware of the program
- 85% were aware of the existence of feedback and complaints platforms.
- Over 90% were satisfied with the targeting process, which included the most vulnerable community members. Beneficiaries reported high levels of trust in service providers, who they found responsive to community demands and needs.
- 90% were satisfied with the amount of cash they received.
- 80% said that the cash transfer program did not cause tension in the household and did not make them feel more vulnerable to protection risks.

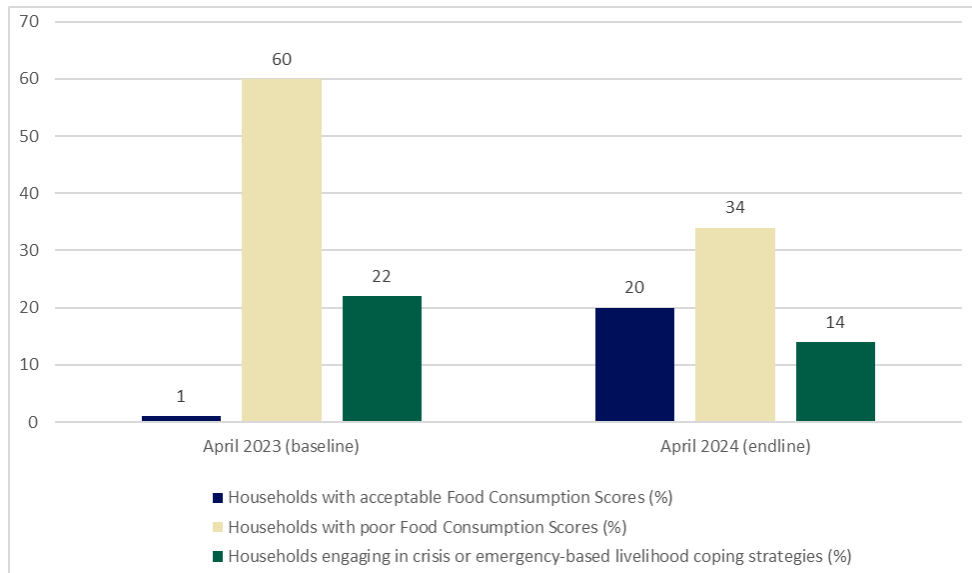
#### *WFP-supported shock-responsive cash transfers (Track 2)*

During the reporting period, a sample of nine distribution sites were monitored to ensure activities were abiding by WFP's duty of care and gender equality standards. Of the 45 beneficiary households interviewed, none of them reported having issues accessing the cash distribution point, while 98 percent of them reported having been informed about the distribution at least 1 to 2 days in advance. Ninety percent of households reported spending less than 2 hours waiting for their cash benefit, and all interviewed households reported knowing in advance of the distribution the details of the benefit to which they were entitled.

#### *WFP-supported shock-responsive cash transfers (Track 2)*

Post-distribution monitoring took place in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillaberi regions, following the end of the May 2023 – January 2024 drought response (*cash secheresse*). A representative sample of 203 households was identified at the baseline (April 2023) and 200 households at the endline (April 2024).

Post-distribution monitoring results (2023 drought response – *cash secheresse*)



## CHALLENGES

- **Delivery in high-risk areas and movement restrictions.** Insecurity has directly affected some Joint Project operations, particularly in high-risk areas. Between May 2023 and January 2024, WFP had to adjust its Track 2 targeting and cash distribution in Tillaberi region. Non-state armed groups have increasingly targeted individuals receiving cash assistance.

Although discussions on how to extend social protection programmes to high-risk zones have stalled since the coup, the National Strategy for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons remains a key entry point for the Joint Project to support the Government in developing a social safety net programme that protects and strengthens the resilience of internally displaced people.

Escalating attacks have led the Government to impose stricter movement restrictions in conflict-affected regions, particularly in the Tahoua and Tillaberi regions since June 2024. Despite these restrictions, cash-based operations, including those under the Joint Project, have not been significantly impacted, and have progressively resumed in 2024 as liquidity challenges eased.

- **Liquidity constraints delay cash delivery.** Liquidity constraints following the coup caused delays in cash transfer deliveries, since financial service providers struggled to obtain smaller denomination currency notes needed for beneficiary payments.
- **Payment mechanisms.** Due to limitations with other payment mechanisms, the Joint Project adopted cash-in-hand distributions with enhanced security measures. Both agencies use cost-effective, secure and transparent payment systems to facilitate registration, verification and efficient cash delivery to households. This includes using a range of platform or

modalities (banks, microfinance, mobile money, etc.) to adapt to frequent contextual changes and diverse local contexts. Both agencies are exploring the digitalisation of cash transfers, with plans to deliver 20 per cent of the Zinder caseload via e-money through financial service providers or other operators. UNICEF is in discussion with AIRTEL to pilot mobile money options while WFP is conducting a pilot exercise to deliver at least part of the payments of the 2025 drought response caseload via mobile money.

- **Realigning social protection visions.** The suspension of the PFSA due to the World Bank funding freeze presents a significant challenge in aligning social protection priorities among government and other stakeholders. Harmonizing visions and programmes that previously relied on the PFSA as a reference has become increasingly difficult. This temporary suspension has reignited discussions surrounding the design of cash transfer programmes, complicating efforts to establish a cohesive social protection system.
- **Social protection governance structures:** Since the coup, social protection governance has been divided among the DNP-GCA, the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and the Ministry for Employment, Labour, and Social Security each responsible for rolling out social protection responses differing in scope and delivered through distinct mechanisms. While social protection remains a cross-cutting government priority, a clear lead is needed for social protection coordination and programming. Further dialogue with the Director General of the Promotion of Women and Protection of Children is necessary to explore how to strengthen coordination between cash transfers and broader social service interventions led by the Ministry of Health, Population and Social Affairs.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Community Engagement:** Involving local communities at the village level enhanced programme implementation, particularly in the distribution of beneficiary cards, set up of payment sites, and ensuring the safety of beneficiaries traveling long distances.
- **Localised Grievance Mechanisms:** The grievance redressal mechanism was localised effectively by leveraging local partners with established expertise in community feedback and grievance management.
- **Support from Local Authorities:** Strong backing from local authorities has been vital for the successful implementation of the cash transfer programme.
- **Increased Trust:** Various committees, along with beneficiaries, their families and community members were able to communicate directly with UNICEF under Track 2, resulting in improved trust in the organization.
- **Value of Grievance and Feedback Committees:** These committees have proven instrumental in facilitating positive and negative feedback and addressing questions or concerns regarding the cash transfer programme. They were used during Track 1 transfers prior to the coup and have continued for Track 2 transfers since July 2023.
- **Adaptability of Operational Arrangements:** Joint Project-supported cash transfers have faced delays, prompting both agencies to swiftly adapt operational arrangements amid an increasingly complex environment. While implementing partners are also navigating the operational challenges, the twin-track approach has enabled both agencies to maintain the originally planned scale of cash transfers. However, the Government's social protection efforts have been severely constrained.
- **Capitalization on Rapid Response Mechanisms:** The socio-economic impact of the coup on

households necessitated a rapid response. Despite challenges, such as limited funding and security concerns, this response was largely achieved through consultations with the national authorities and collaboration among stakeholders. It is crucial to build on the mechanisms and methodologies employed during this period for future interventions.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

### ***Main priorities for outcome 1***

Until the country's institutional situation stabilises, all Joint Project funds will continue being channelled through Track 2. A gradual shift to Track 1 can occur once conditions allow and in agreement with KfW/BMZ.

#### **UNICEF-supported Track 2 transfers**

- UNICEF is preparing to launch the payment of the third round of drought response cash (with the fourth round planned for December 2024).
- The productive cash payment is planned for November 2024.
- Preparations to start phase 2 operations and the disability-inclusive cash pilot are ongoing. It was decided to bring the 2024 drought response cash operation into 2025, to align with the phase 2 start of the new multiyear cash intervention and the 2025 drought cash.

#### **WFP-supported Track 2 transfers**

- WFP will finalise the third payment for 2024 drought response in September 2024, and it is now preparing for the final payment cycles expected for 2024.
- WFP is also working on the data collection with the RSU to help register about 800,000 people; the data collection will be used to enhance existing RSU data and carry out targeting for the 2025 multi-year cash transfers.

### ***Main priorities for outcome 2***

Aligned with government priorities, the Joint Project will continue supporting the Government to develop a permanent, shock-responsive national social safety net programme that includes regular cash transfers, economic inclusion pathways, and access to training and services. Expanding the Social Registry will remain a key focus to enhance the scope and reach of the national safety net programme.

The Joint Project will continue supporting government efforts to build consensus among national leaders and partners on the need for a coherent national social protection system, addressing challenges such as low coverage and fragmented programmes and approaches. This will involve reviewing the social service workforce and working towards a shared UNICEF-WFP roadmap to strengthen social protection programme articulation through existing technical working groups and inter-ministerial steering committees. Both agencies will continue providing capacity building support to the DNP-GCA.

Revising the National Social Protection Policy will be a priority, aiming to broaden the social and political dialogue on social protection. Simultaneously, Niger is developing a new Child Protection Policy, with UNICEF's support, and efforts will be made to ensure synergy with the

revised National Social Protection Policy, especially in revitalizing the social service workforce.

The Joint Project will collaborate with the World Bank to provide technical assistance to improve the RSU's information management systems. In August 2024, with WFP support, the RSU will hire a statistician/economist, with data collection set to start in September 2024.

Given Niger's constrained fiscal space, the Joint Project will work with national leadership to set up a financial instrument for sustainable social protection.

## PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION

Both agencies collaborate with several Government agencies, the World Bank, and other key partners to strengthen the building blocks of the national social protection system. During the reporting period, partnerships and coordination was particularly focused on the following:

- **Internal coordination:** Within the UNICEF and WFP Niger Country Offices, different units – Nutrition, Child Protection, Research Assessment Monitoring, Cash Based Transfers, School Feeding – actively collaborate on the Joint Project, through planning and regular information sharing meetings. Both agencies also coordinate with the Regional Offices and other project countries to share experiences and learning. Regular coordination between WFP and UNICEF ensured harmonised methodologies during the transition from Track 1 to Track 2 cash transfers post-coup. UNICEF leveraged WFP long-term agreements with financial service providers and signed an agreement to enable use of the WFP-operated hotline. This collaboration streamlined service delivery and improved operational efficiency for both agencies.
- **Coordination with the Government and the World Bank:** Implementation of the Joint Project brought WFP, UNICEF and the World Bank together under the Government's overall coordination. Until the July 2023 coup, the CFS's ability to convene social protection actors at the national level to coordinate interventions had steadily improved. The CFS was playing a stronger role in convening platforms to identify synergies and avoid overlap between key stakeholders supporting the DNP-GCA and the CFS. The involvement of local authorities, village leadership and decentralised services was critical in establishing and maintaining a functional community feedback and grievance redress mechanism. However, broader coordination challenges have arisen during the reporting period due to the lack of consensus or clarity on the institutional anchorage of the Social Protection agenda in Niger and the continued suspension of the World Bank financing. WFP and UNICEF continue to work closely with all Government entities involved in Social Protection in Niger as well as the World Bank colleagues to navigate challenges and support the continuity of Social Protection gains made in recent years.

Additionally, the two agencies collaborated with the Nutrition Directorate and the CCA to align nutrition messaging for the lean season and drought response. Building on this success, both agencies will continue to work together to ensure the social protection response is nutrition and child sensitive and inclusive of people with special needs.

## COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER GERMAN (BMZ/GIZ/KfW) CONTRIBUTIONS

There are significant opportunities for linkages between the Joint Project and the BMZ-funded SRP implemented by UNICEF, WFP and GIZ in Maradi, Zinder and Tahoua regions. The two initiatives are highly complementary: the first focus primarily on a multi-year, community-driven

and geographically bound approach, integrating the full set of WFP and UNICEF interventions to enhance the resilience of the same populations over time, while the Joint Project aims at strengthening national social protection systems to become more shock-responsive, nutrition- and child-sensitive. The Joint Project complements the resilience programme and benefits from the foundations in place thanks to this ongoing work. Simultaneous implementation of the two programmes will contribute to resilient development and decreased humanitarian needs over time, particularly if resilience and related delivery systems and capacities expand their coverage to other communities whilst an effective shock-responsive social protection system protects and responds with early action at times of shocks.

## REGIONAL

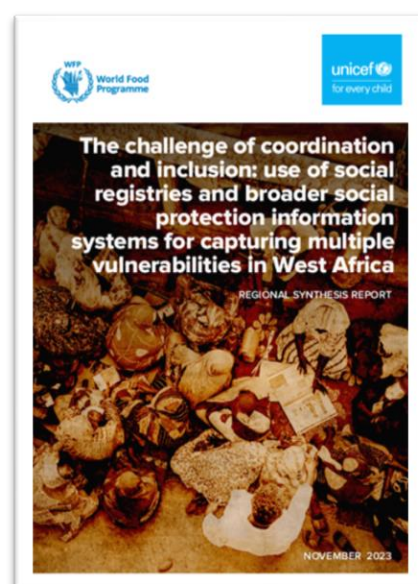
### **OUTCOME 3: Knowledge and evidence are generated from the project to inform Social Protection engagement, capacity development, and learning in the implementing countries, and in fragile contexts more generally**

#### *Evidence generation and policy dialogue: eyes on social registries and other social protection information systems*

The synthesis report "The challenge of coordination and inclusion: use of social registries and broader social protection information systems for capturing multiple vulnerabilities in West Africa" was launched during a regional workshop and global webinar. The report takes stock of the state of advancement of digital social protection information systems across 19 countries, identifies trends and provides insights to better capture vulnerabilities through these information systems. The report analyses institutional arrangements, data issues and programme use of social registries. This research project also produced six in-depth case studies from across the Sahel and conducted a comparative review for Mali, Mauritania and Niger (available in English and French).

The findings were discussed in a regional workshop, convened by WFP and the World Bank, which brought together social registry representatives from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. The four-day workshop was designed as a technical forum to promote in-depth exchanges on key aspects of social registries, including the policy objectives and institutional arrangements of registries, data collection and updating, multiple approaches for assessments of needs and conditions, coordination mechanisms with user programmes, essential data protection safeguards, costs and benefits of social registries and the technologies required to build these systems.

The workshop provided an opportunity to understand the current state of social registries in participating countries as well as the challenges multiple governments face in terms of data collection in contexts of fragility and conflict, incomplete coverage of unique IDs, low





connectivity, inclusion of nomadic or refugee populations, community feedback mechanisms, and nascent data protection regimes.

Acknowledging these challenges, a forward-looking vision was delineated around dynamic social registries, capable of registering households and updating their information on a regular basis, including on-demand, so that programs from multiple sectors can be expanded and deployed more effectively. Progressive interoperability between dynamic social registries and other delivery systems – including unique IDs, payment systems and beneficiary registries – was another critical factor identified as necessary to modernize social protection systems and make them more robust and shock-responsive.

The recommendations from this workshop informed the next steps for aligned support to social registries under the Joint Project as well as under the World Bank’s Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP). In addition to this workshop, several learning trips were facilitated for governments from Joint Project countries to learn from each other’s experiences, mainly around the support to national social registries.

The findings from this research were also discussed in a dedicated Joint Project webinar held on 7 December 2023 through the socialprotection.org platform (recording available [here](#)), which discussed the strategic direction of social registries and broader government information systems as key tools for expanding social protection systems in the region.

#### *Pathways for social cohesion: the role of social protection*

In collaboration with the World Bank, the Joint Project is developing a research initiative on social protection and social cohesion. This aims to identify pathways for change, as well as the challenges and opportunities to optimize the impact of social protection programmes - through both their design and delivery - on vertical and horizontal social cohesion. By addressing a critical knowledge gap in the region, the findings will inform future policy dialogues. A literature review on the existing evidence of social protection’s impact on social cohesion has already been completed.

#### *TRANSFORM Francophone training of trainers*

The Joint Project is rolling out national trainings on social protection systems to raise awareness and knowledge and nurture social protection champions within governments. TRANSFORM is an inter-agency initiative that has developed training tools and methodologies to strengthen individual and institutional capacity for the management of national social protection systems in Africa. Together with ILO and FAO, the Joint Project supported the training of 16 francophone social protection experts who will become TRANSFORM trainers. The Joint Project is also coordinating a TRANSFORM training for ECOWAS officials, in partnership with other UN agencies (ILO and FAO), scheduled for September 2024.

#### *The Adaptive Social Protection partnership (UNICEF-WFP-World Bank)*

The three entities strengthened cooperation in planning future ASP support in the Sahel. In December 2023, SASPP held its annual donor meeting in London, inviting UNICEF and WFP for the first time. This meeting provided an opportunity to review current SASPP support and set the groundwork for the new phase, aligning with the Joint Project. In April 2024, SASPP staff also joined the Joint Protect retreat, which was pivotal in refining the strategic direction and vision for Phase 2 of the Joint Project.



Key discussions, with World Bank colleagues, included deepening the twin-track approach, setting standards for national safety net programmes, and reinforcing social protection systems in fragile contexts. The Joint Project teams also discussed strengthening the gender- and conflict-sensitivity of social protection support.

The Joint Project also began supporting the World Bank and BMZ with the Temporary Social Protection Working Group under the Sahel Alliance. Together, they developed a set of joint messages on ASP in the Sahel, along with guiding principles to ensure aligned support to national systems.



In March 2024, during the [Partners Day](#) at the [World Bank Fragility Forum](#), WFP and UNICEF presented the [twin-track approach](#), showcasing its use in Niger to deliver timely and shock-responsive cash transfers, and providing insights for other fragile settings. Other speakers included representatives from the World Bank and BMZ. Additionally, a co-authored [blog post](#) by UNICEF, WFP and the

World Bank, was published on building partnerships for ASP in the Sahel as part of the World Bank's [Development for Peace](#) blog series, to accompany this event and highlight the cooperation modalities and achievements of the ASP partnership.

### III. DONOR VISIBILITY

Across the project countries, visibility materials including co-branded banners and other items (such as vests, t-shirts, notepads, and pens) are in use during cash distributions, data collection activities, trainings and workshops.

Activities	Mauritania	Niger	Mali
<b>Human interest stories</b>	<p><a href="#">Slama's Story (French: L'histoire de Slama)</a>  <a href="#">Mohamed: Towards Autonomy, Building the Future on Foundations of Resilience</a></p>		<p><a href="#">Strengthening the purchasing power of vulnerable households thanks to social safety net support (French)</a></p> <p><i>Story from the field</i>  Mali: Safeguarding food security and building resilience through macro-level financial protection (<a href="#">French</a>)</p>
<b>Social media and web mentions</b>	<p><i>Social Media</i>  Launch of the second phase of cash transfers to households living with disabilities in Nouakchott (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  Cash support to 10,000 households to improve their quality of life and encourage social participation (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  What is the lean season? (Arabic) (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  Prevention of malnutrition top-up pilot (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  Lean season distribution in Gorgol and Ould (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  Cash transfers in Nouakchott support income-generating activities (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  WFP-CFS joint field visit to Gorgol region (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  Lean season response in Ould Yenge (<a href="#">Facebook</a>)  German Minister for Development Cooperation visits SAFIA Centre in Dai Naim (<a href="#">X</a>)  BMZ/KfW delegation meets CT beneficiaries (<a href="#">X</a>)  Lean season response in Ould Yenge (<a href="#">X</a>)  Cash transfers in Nouakchott support income-generating activities (<a href="#">X</a>)  Appreciation to Germany-support to WFP Mauritania (<a href="#">X</a>)  Lean season response update (<a href="#">X</a>)  Prevention of malnutrition pilot in Ould Yenge (<a href="#">X</a>)</p>	<p><i>Web Mentions</i></p> <p><a href="#">Niger : à Agadez, l'Unicef procède au lancement du programme « Cash sécheresse » au profit de 288 ménages de la commune rurale d'Aderbissanat – Air Info (airinfoagadez.com)</a>  <a href="#">Filets sociaux adaptatifs II " WADATA TALAKA " : l'Unicef au chevet des populations vulnérables de Kornaka (Maradi)</a></p> <p><a href="#">JT TV Africable: Cash Distribution for Drought in Maradi</a>  <a href="#">ActuNiger: Drought response in Maradi Region</a>  <a href="#">Le Sahel: Launch of cash response to drought in Maradi Region</a></p> <p><i>Social Media:</i></p>	<p><i>On the web:</i></p> <p><a href="#">Atelier sur la Protection Sociale au Mali: Impact des Filets Sociaux Productifs sur les Ménages Vulnérables</a> ( Relief Web)  <a href="#">Actions anticipatoires sur les changements climatiques : Les capacités des acteurs renforcées.</a> ( Orbitre Info)</p> <p><i>Social Media</i>  Systems, communities and individuals strengthened to cope with shocks (<a href="#">X</a>)</p> <p>Cash support to widow in the agriculture sector (<a href="#">Facebook</a> / <a href="#">X</a>)  Culinary demonstrations for displaced families (<a href="#">X</a>)  Community-led good nutrition practices to prevent malnutrition among children 6-39 months (<a href="#">X</a>)  Nutritional sensitization practices and cash transfer support (<a href="#">Facebook</a> / <a href="#">X</a>)  Mother's testimony on community-based nutrition practices and benefits to 12-month-old child (<a href="#">Facebook</a> / <a href="#">X</a>)</p>

		<p>Launch of drought response cash transfers in Maradi Region (<a href="#">Facebook</a>) Cash transfers enabled Diouga Sanda, father of six, to invest in seeds &amp; put food on the table for his family (<a href="#">X</a> <a href="#">twitter.com</a>)</p>	<p>Prevention of malnutrition support to pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (<a href="#">Facebook</a> / <a href="#">X</a>)</p> <p>A female beneficiary shares the impact of social safety nets during challenging times ( <a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">facebook</a>) The first 1,000 days of a child's life, a Nutritional priority to save lives in Mali (<a href="#">X</a>) The impact of cash transfers in strengthening beneficiaries' resilience in Niore (<a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">Facebook</a>) Launch of the workshop on the early anticipatory action for climate shocks (<a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">Facebook</a>) Workshop on the after-action review of the climate insurance payment process for Mali for the 2022/2023 agricultural campaign (<a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">Facebook</a>) Launch of the technical working group on anticipatory actions in Mali (<a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">Facebook</a>) A human-centered story on a visually impaired and widowed woman who refuses to let disability hold her back ( <a href="#">X</a> / <a href="#">Facebook</a>)</p> <p><i>Press release</i> <a href="#">First climate risk insurance payout in Mali helps WFP provide early response to climate-affected families   World Food Programme</a> ENG <a href="#">Le premier versement d'une assurance contre les risques climatiques au Mali aide le PAM à fournir une réponse rapide aux familles touchées par le climat   World Food Programme (wfp.org)</a> FR</p>
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Since distributions have not yet started in Burkina Faso and Chad, opportunities for donor visibility have been limited, but plans are in place to ensure recognition once transfers begin. Co-branded visibility materials - such as banners, vests, t-shirts, notepads and pens - will be used during cash distributions, field activities, trainings and workshops. Human interest stories highlighting BMZ and KfW support will be produced and widely shared after the launch of cash distributions and complementary services, with regular updates posted on social media.

As part of the inception phase in Burkina Faso, both agencies have been collaborating with their partnerships, communications and advocacy teams to identify opportunities for donor visibility and raise the profile of project activities. This includes a WFP communications expert working with the ST-RSU team to assess communications needs, identify opportunities, and provide outreach and advocacy guidance.

## IV. Acronyms

ASP	Adaptive Social Protection
CCMR	<i>Comité chargé de la mise en œuvre de la reponse</i> – CCMR) (Mauritania)
CFM	Community Feedback Mechanism
CFS	<i>Cellule Filets Sociaux</i>
CSA	<i>Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire</i> – National Food Security Commission
DCAN	<i>Dispositif national de prevention et de réponse aux Crises Alimentaires et Nutritionnelles</i> – National Agency for prevention of and response to Food and Nutrition Crises (Mauritania)
DNPGCA	<i>Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Crises Alimentaires</i> – National Mechanism for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises (Niger)
DNPSES	<i>Direction Nationale de Protection Sociale</i> – National Directorate for Social Protection (Mali)
DRDSES	<i>Direction Régionale de Développement Sociale et de l'Economie solidaire</i> – Regional Directorate of Social Development and Economic Solidarity (Mali)
FORMANUT	Formation pour la nutrition – Training for Nutrition Project (Chad)
FSP	Financial Service Provider
GASPA	<i>Groupe d'apprentissage et de suivi des pratiques optimales d'alimentation</i> - Infant and Young Child Feeding Best Practice Learning and Monitoring Group
HH	Household
IGA	Income Generating Activities
INSEED	<i>Institut national de la statistique des études économiques et démographiques</i> – National Institute of Statistics (Chad)
IPC	Integrated Phase Classification
MASEF	<i>Ministère des Affaires Sociales, de l'Enfance et de la Famille</i> - Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family (Mauritania)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PARCA	<i>Project d'appui aux refugies et aux communautés d'accueil</i> - Refugees and Host Communities Support Project (Chad)
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PFSA	<i>Projet Filets Sociaux Adaptatif</i> – National Adaptive Safety Net Programme (Niger)
PLW	Pregnant and Lactating Women
RSU	<i>Registre Social Unique</i> - Single Social Registry (Mali and Niger)
SNPS	National Social Protection Strategy (Mauritania)
SRP	Sahel Resilience Partnership
ST-RSU	<i>Technical Secretariat of the Unique Social Registry (Sécretariat Technique du Registre Sociale Unique</i> (Burkina Faso)
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WSG	Women's Savings Group