



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

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'.

Countries	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger
Project Title	Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel.
Sub Title	Towards Addressing the Socio-Economic Impacts of Multiple Shocks.
Budget (EUR)	€204 million (€102m UNICEF / €102m WFP)
WFP Grant References	Grant 70001450, 70001872, 70002781 (RBD) Grant 10047842 (Burkina Faso) Grant 10047845 (Chad) Grant 10038974, 10042537, 10045085, 10045338, 10047862, 10045341 (Mali) Grant 10038946, 10042536, 10045086, 10045339, 10047847, 10045343 (Mauritania) Grant 10038957, 10042538, 10045087, 10045340, 10047849, 10045344 (Niger) Grant 70001450, 70001872, 70002781 (RBD)
UNICEF Grant Reference	Grant SC200554
Implementation Period	77 months: 1 August 2020 - 31 December 2026
Type of report	Annual Progress Report
Reporting period	1 August 2023 – 31 July 2024

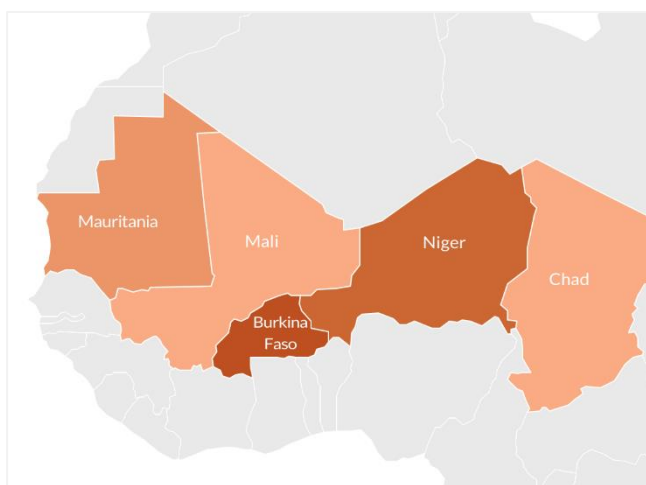
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Executive Summary

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.

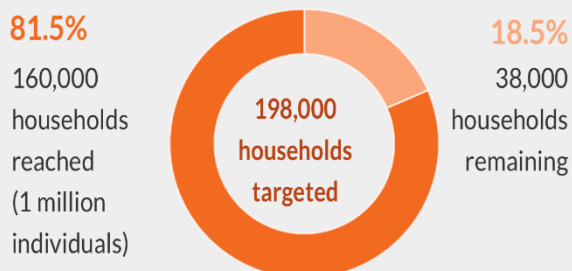
This Annual Report covers 12 months of activities in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, from 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024. It also covers the first seven months of inception-phase activities in Burkina Faso and Chad (1 January to 31 July 2024).

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.



Track 2

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



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.

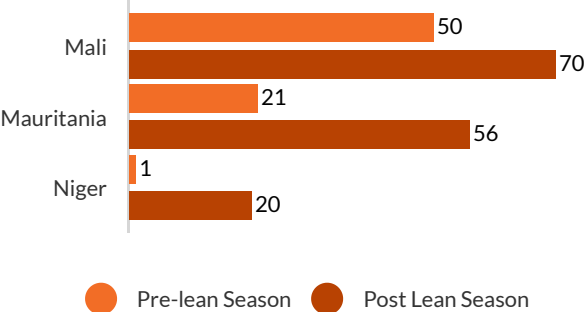
Conversely, in **Mauritania** improvements in government systems enabled a higher proportion of households to receive Track 1 transfers, with all targeted households for the 2024 lean season reached through government channels.

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.

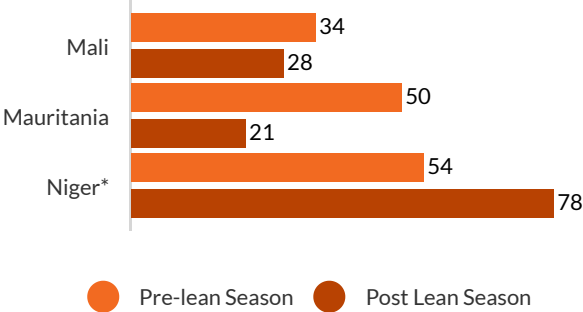
In **Chad**, the Joint Project supported the RSU to register households in the targeted departments and began identifying beneficiaries for cash transfers (which are due to commence in October 2024). These efforts support the rollout of the Refugees and Host Communities Support Project (PARCA), as the 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.