



Left Out and Left Behind

SDGs for people in crisis in the Sahel

International Rescue Committee | September 2019



Front cover: In Chad, crisis and fragility is driving rural communities further into poverty, forcing many to leave their homes. *Lysa Heslov & Andrea Kerzner/IRC.*

Inside front cover: People who have fled violence and food shortages in Mali at Abala Camp, Niger. *Kevin McNulty/IRC.*

Read more in our report 'Missing Persons: Refugees Left Out and Left Behind in the SDGs': <https://www.rescue.org/report/missing-persons-refugees-left-out-and-left-behind-sdgs>

Left Out and Left Behind

SDGs for people in crisis in the Sahel

Violent conflict and climate change are driving protracted crises in the Sahel region of Africa, forcing large scale displacement across the region and beyond, with 4.4 million people forcibly displaced¹. The Sustainable Development Goals provide a comprehensive framework for tackling many of the drivers of conflict and instability by fostering the region's social and economic development and building resilience to climate and conflict induced shocks.

International attention in the Sahel has been driven by a security agenda, focused on migration management, often at the expense of more long-term peace and development outcomes. The International Community must catalyse a more integrated and effective response to crisis in the Sahel by adopting the SDGs as the guiding principle across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions. Crucially, crisis affected populations, particularly women and girls, must be included in Agenda 2030 in order to fulfil the commitment to Leave No One Behind.

Recommendations:

- I. Drive political commitment** for the inclusion of crisis affected populations in Agenda 2030, by ensuring the SDG Summit Declaration acknowledges that refugees and IDPs are amongst those being left behind the furthest, and calling for their inclusion in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) by the High Level Political Forum in 2020.
- II. Fully fund Humanitarian Response Plans** for Sahel countries to meet acute needs and increase the availability of multi-year, flexible funding through initiatives like the Sahel Alliance and the EU's proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), to facilitate greater synergy between emergency response and long term resilience building and climate adaptation.
- III. Rebalance the focus of EU stabilisation interventions** in line with the SDG framework, through the EU Trust Fund for Africa to shape comprehensive asylum and migration policies that truly protect people on the move, strengthen accountable governance and increase access to basic services and sustainable livelihoods.
- IV. Agree collective outcomes** between humanitarian, peacebuilding and development approaches, using SDG targets and indicators to scale up the design and implementation of joint programming and data sharing, which measure outputs not inputs for crisis affected populations.
- V. Prioritise SDG 5 for women and girls in crisis** by tripling funding to GBV prevention and response, and applying a feminist lens to all SDGs, particularly SDG 8, to promote women's economic empowerment and self-reliance, and SDG 16 to support women's leadership in peacebuilding.

Stability and migration

Over recent years, the Sahel region has been prominent on the international agenda due to its strategic position for migration routes, the surge of terrorism threats, and the devastating effects of climate change. There are currently 4.4 million people who are forcibly displaced in the region, with up to 2.8 million children at risk of severe acute malnutrition who will need lifesaving treatment in 2019. The areas afflicted by armed conflicts (in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and the Lake Chad basin) will remain in a food crisis for a third consecutive year in 2019². Experts estimate that climate-related shocks and organised violence will deepen in the near future. According to the UN special adviser on the Sahel, Ibrahim Thiaw, the region is already home to the largest number of people who are disproportionately affected by global warming and presents the conditions – a high dependence on agriculture, discriminatory political institutions and a past history of conflict – for war³.

The Sahel is a strategic priority for the European Union, which is well placed to advance a coherent resilience building agenda that contributes to increased stability in the region by effectively working across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. Yet current partnerships with G5 Sahel countries (Chad, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania) overwhelmingly focus on efforts to stem migration flows and bolster security apparatus across the region. This has driven significant investment in migration management through the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF). Despite a broad mandate for the EUTF set out in the Valletta Principles⁴ the EUTF's allocation of funds in the Sahel and Lake Chad window shows the disproportionate focus on strengthening migration management (82%) over other key issues, including protection and humanitarian assistance (7%) and advancing legal migration (1%)⁵. As a result, the immediate and longer-term needs of people on the move (migrants, refugees and internally displaced populations – IDPs) are left unaddressed, impacting on the region's ambitions to translate its 'leave no one behind' commitment into action.

Despite longstanding commitments to policy coherence for development, alignment between the EU's external policies still remains insufficient, while commitments to build long term outcomes for crisis-affected populations are often de-prioritised. This narrow approach to crisis mitigation has failed to appreciate the transformative potential of the SDG agenda to build individual and institutional resilience to political, environmental and economic shocks that undermine peace and stability. Crisis and sustainable development are inextricably linked, and lasting security in the region can only be achieved through significant improvements in access to services, rights and protections for vulnerable populations in the Sahel. Establishing a shared vision and common action around the SDGs is a key commitment within the EU's Global Strategy¹, and vital for achieving its partnership aspirations with African states to build resilient societies.



Above: As new waves of violence engulf Nigeria, more than 2,000 people fled their homes into Guesseré, the Republic of Niger. *Matias Meier/IRC.*



Above: Oure Cassoni refugee camp, Chad. Cuts in humanitarian aid funding will make life in refugee camps like Oure Cassoni more precarious than it already is, says the IRC's Felix Leger. *Sophia Jones/IRC.*

Sahel and the SDGs

With almost a third of the time to 2030 already gone, countries in the Sahel are significantly falling behind on their SDG progress, scoring among the last 10 (of 162 countries) on the global ranking⁶. The current trends towards the achievement of the SDGs show that countries such as Niger, Cameroon, Mali and Chad are either moving in the wrong direction or stagnating on some key SDGs, including SDG 1 (End poverty), SDG 2 (End Hunger), SDG 8 (Safe and Decent Work) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)⁷. For example, in Chad ongoing conflict and environmental crisis has resulted in one of the highest levels of hunger in the world, with one out of four people affected by food insecurity and one out of seven suffering from malnutrition. The number of children at risk of severe acute malnutrition rose from 220,000 in 2018 to almost 350,000 in 2019, an increase of 59%⁸. This reflects the global picture, with over 80% of fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS) off track to achieve the SDGs by 2030⁹.

While progress is slow or stagnating, laws and policies designed to strengthen migration management are having a negative impact on the achievement of the SDGs. For example, in Niger, nearly three years after the entry into force of the law 2015/36 criminalizing irregular migration, local populations in Agadez have been forced to sell their assets, including houses, lands and other properties to compensate for the sudden drop in income. The numbers of meals they have a day has been reduced, as well as the number of children they send to school, affecting both their health and education. Divorces have increased, leaving many women in a more vulnerable position as they now have to be both the main care provider and the source of income for the family¹⁰.

The nomadic and mobile lifestyles of many groups in the region means migration within the Economic Organisation of West African States (ECOWAS) zone is one of the main factors of resilience in the region. This should be recognised as a distinctive contribution to SDG 8. A new approach to migration policies should acknowledge that migration happens first and foremost within African states and not towards Europe, and should be harnessed to strengthen the resilience of both displaced populations and host communities. Failure to effectively support refugees' protection and self-reliance in host countries risks creating additional push factors for refugees to return to places where their lives and safety would be at risk, thus undermining the voluntary nature of returns and further eroding durable solutions to protracted crises.

Women and Girls

Women and girls in the Sahel suffer significant barriers to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and are at grave risk of being left behind, due to patriarchal social norms, gender based violence (GBV) and limited access to sexual and reproductive health and education. Women and girls in Niger have some of the lowest education levels and highest rates of illiteracy (69% of girls aged 15 to 19 are illiterate¹¹) globally. Women and girls in crisis face the double burden of gender and displacement, which increases their vulnerability to violence and exploitation, further reduces access to lifesaving services and, for many migrants, adds the risks associated with trafficking, which further undermine the realisation of SDG 5 for women and girls in crisis.

Specific programming to support the safety and wellbeing of women and girls on the move, in line with SDG 5, must focus on improving access to sexual and reproductive health care, and providing gender segregated sanitation facilities and safe spaces for women and girls at reception points. It must also increase support for survivors of GBV by providing appropriate medical care, counselling and legal services. With GBV services accounting for just 0.12 percent of the \$41.5 billion allocated for humanitarian

funding between 2016 and 2019¹², there is an urgent need to significantly scale up investments in GBV prevention and response, in line with commitments under the Call to Action to End Gender Based Violence¹³. GBV services are not only lifesaving for women and girls, but are also vital for their pursuit of all other SDGs. Violence inhibits access to health, education, jobs and leadership roles for women and girls within their communities, which are essential for challenging social norms that continue to disempower them.



Above: Malian children in an IRC-supported school in Tabareybarey camp, Niger. *Peter Biro/IRC.*



Above: Asma Harum, Sudanese refugee from Darfur region of Sudan, talks about her ordeal of her escape at Kashune Refugee camp in Eastern Chad. *Jiro Ose/IRC.*

Gender Equality and Economic Growth

Women's economic empowerment is one pathway to escaping exploitation and abuse, but women's safety at home and in the wider community is a precondition for their control and use of resources. Sahel countries face significant challenges to meet SDG 8, to promote economic growth, full employment and decent work for all¹⁴. Women in Niger, for example, face obstacles to economic opportunities including declining labour market participation¹⁵ and low rates of financial inclusion – with only around 10% of women holding a bank account at a financial institution¹⁶.

IRC's recent labour market assessment of four sites in Niger where it is actively operating¹⁷ found women themselves highlighted a lack of essential business and accounting skills as a barrier to expansion and growth. The vast majority of shopkeepers and stakeholders interviewed cited a lack of access to capital as the major challenge to starting a business, earning an income and expanding businesses. Overall, our assessment shows the market conditions in areas where the IRC is implementing economic

programming in Niger present promising opportunities for affected populations and women in particular. In order to support vulnerable youth and women currently facing gender discriminatory practices and norms, investments in business skills training, small business grants and access to Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) must be combined with programmes that prevent early marriage and other forms of GBV and increase social and community acceptance of women's economic empowerment.

Conclusions

Leave No One Behind

In 2015 European countries championed the concept of 'Leave No One Behind' driven by the belief that the fulfilment of the SDGs by 2030 must include the most vulnerable and hardest to reach populations. Four years into the process it is clear that people 'caught in crisis' – people living in conflict, and/ or who are displaced within their own countries or across borders – are being excluded from SDG action plans and resource mobilisation.

Our 2018 report *SDG progress- Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind* found that of the 43 countries that presented their progress towards the SDGs to the UN in 2017, just 25 mentioned refugees or migrants as a left-behind group. In 2018, just 15 of the 46 countries that submitted Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) mentioned these populations¹⁸. Further analysis of VNRs in 2019 following the High Level Political Forum in July revealed that only 13 had mentioned refugees, as part of their commitment to Leave No One Behind, and none had included socioeconomic data on refugees. Among the 15 countries hosting the largest refugee populations that have submitted VNRs since 2016, 10 do not mention the needs of refugees, and only review of progress towards the SDGs. Only a small number of refugee-hosting countries, such as Uganda, Colombia and Ethiopia, have started to align their action plans to meet the longer-term needs of refugees with their national development plans¹⁹.

The next 12 months provide a crucial window for world leaders to demonstrate their commitment to the SDGs and to displaced populations. First, by calling for the inclusion of refugees and people in crisis in SDG monitoring at the SDG summit in New York. This will create momentum for countries in the Sahel to accelerate SDG progress for refugees by including them in national/ sector plans and Voluntary National Reviews at the High Level Political Forum in 2020. The Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 also represents an opportunity to call for strengthened accountability to the commitments in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), by aligning outcomes identified in the GCR framework to the SDGs²⁰. Governments must ensure that their pledges respond to refugee response gaps identified, that there is meaningful participation of refugees and host populations and that an accountability system is developed to track pledges and implementation.

Multi-year, flexible funding

The gap in the Sahel between needs on the ground and resources available for the response is alarming. As Boko Haram and other localised armed groups continue to catalyse violent conflict and displacement across the region, over 4.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Yet the national Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) remain desperately underfunded and international attention is minimal. In 2018, HRPs in Cameroon, Chad and Mali were funded below 50% of their total requirement, while Nigeria and Niger are funded at around 65% of the needs²¹. A concerted boost in humanitarian assistance is urgently needed to address the vast scale of this crisis and ensure that needs do not continue to go unmet.

The EU's commitment to multi-annual, flexible humanitarian funding is vital to support the delivery of lifesaving services and resilience building over the medium term. However, the scale of the challenge facing people in crisis cannot be tackled by the relatively small allocations given as part of HRPs. What is needed is development funding that includes crisis affected populations and is aligned with national SDG implementation plans²².

In the coming months, the EU will finalise negotiations on its Multi-Annual Financial Framework. The commitment to 'Leave No One Behind' should be a guiding principle across all its humanitarian and development financing frameworks, including the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). This instrument should rebalance EU funding allocations to allow for increased support for protection and resilience building, as part of a comprehensive approach to migration management. This means ensuring interventions to 'improve governance and conflict prevention' better integrate protection concerns and promote legal and safe migration, by drawing on evidence and analysis from organisations, such as IRC, who are delivering front line services to people in crisis across the Sahel.

Collective Outcomes

SDG plans for the Sahel focus on resilience building in the context of climate change and violent conflict, yet some of the most vulnerable populations are being excluded from those plans, because they are in parts of the country that are designated as areas of 'emergency response'. This means interventions for those groups tend to focus on short term lifesaving interventions, rather than longer term resilience building activities. There is a growing recognition that the path from emergency to recovery is non-linear, especially in protracted crises, meaning that effectively responding to crises is not as simple as providing traditional humanitarian assistance until certain milestones are reached and development programming is appropriate.

For policy coherence to be meaningful, agencies with different mandates need to establish shared metrics for prioritising and evaluating interventions that drive lasting outcomes for crisis populations, rather than simply measuring inputs. Development and humanitarian agencies continue to use different metrics to assess progress in crisis contexts, which further undermines work across the nexus. The European Commission and other members of the Sahel Alliance should agree a set of key SDG targets and indicators for people in crisis settings to better align approaches. IRC has developed a table of proposed indicators in our 2018 policy brief *SDGs in Crisis*²³. These metrics should also be aligned with both Agenda 2030 and the Global Compact for Refugees to ensure complementarity between global frameworks²⁴. Building on the commitments of the Inclusive Data Charter²⁵, and initiatives such as the World Bank and UNHCR joint data centre on forced migration, the EU should establish a shared knowledge platform between ECHO and DEVCO to track SDG progress for crisis populations.

One opportunity for greater synergy between emergency and long-term approaches is the strategy for stabilisation²⁶, recovery and resilience of the Lake Chad Basin regions, which aims to address the short, mid- and long term needs of the most vulnerable populations across the region and will be implemented through the Territorial Action Plans (TAPs). To ensure these plans meet the needs of the most vulnerable, the approach to the conception, implementation and monitoring of the TAPs must be participatory and inclusive. For example, in the Diffa region of Niger, over one third of the population is displaced (250 000 people are displaced on a total of 700 000 inhabitants²⁷), making them a crucial stakeholder to be consulted and included in the process to develop the TAPs.

Feminist Lens

Women and girls in the Sahel suffer significant barriers to achieving the SDGs and are at grave risk of being left behind. Social norms, violence and protection risks combine with vulnerabilities particularly associated with migration.

A feminist approach to humanitarian policy and practice means understanding that the additional inequalities and insecurities faced by women and girls in humanitarian settings are not just accidental by-products of the trauma inherent in such situations. They are symptoms of the inequalities of power between men and women. A feminist lens should be applied to all funding, partnerships and strategic plans to address the gender inequality that undermines the protection and empowerment of women and girls in across the Sahel. Integrated approaches across the SDG framework that prioritise GBV prevention and response are essential for promoting gender equality and ensuring women and girls are not left behind. SDGs 5 and 8 provide the framework for driving increased investment in economic and productive sectors with gender equality and women's empowerment as a principal objective.

At a political level this necessitates the inclusion of crisis affected women in national SDG planning processes, for example in Niger's Economic and Social Development Plan²⁸, and the country's first National Action Plan to End Child Marriage, as well as the Territorial Action Plans. Current funding and programme models must also be adapted to better facilitate partnerships with local women-led organisations, who are local leaders in their communities and understand the context, the challenges and the entry points for establishing life-saving GBV services and challenging patriarchal norms.

EU leadership

As a global leader on the SDGs agenda, the European Union has a key role to play in ensuring that displaced populations in fragile and conflict affected states such as in the Sahel are not left behind. This can only happen if the EU and its Member States make a dual commitment. On the one hand, it is essential to abandon policies that are hindering those countries' progress towards the achievement of Agenda 2030. On the other, there is a need to adopt a common approach across all interventions (diplomatic, financial, political) based on the SDG framework

with the aim of increasing stability and development in the Sahel. Such an approach would better reflect the true spirit of partnership between the EU and African states, who continue to prioritise Agenda 2030, but find sustainable development deprioritised in the EU's approach to migration management. In this way, the EU can support African states to include crisis populations in their national SDG strategies and reporting at the High Level Political Forum in 2020, with a view to realising the global vision championed by the EU to 'Leave No One Behind'.



Above: Children take shelter from a sandstorm under a makeshift tent at the Kashuni Camp on the Chad/Sudan border. *Jiro Ose/IRC.*

References

1. https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/sahel_en
2. Ibidem.
3. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/all-the-warning-signs-are-showing-in-the-sahel-we-must-act-now/>
4. In November 2015, leaders from the EU and Africa adopted the “Joint Valletta Action Plan” (JVAP) setting out five priority domains of cooperation: (1) addressing the root causes of irregular migration and developing the benefits of migration; (2) promoting regular migration and mobility; (3) reinforcing protection and asylum policies; (4) fighting against human trafficking and migrant smuggling; and (5) strengthening cooperation to facilitate return and reintegration of irregular migrants. In November 2018, Valletta partners reiterated that “attention should be given with an equal importance to all five domains of the JVAP” and recognised that “further concerted efforts should be made in domain two concerning legal migration and mobility”.
5. https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/money_against_migration.pdf
6. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/#/>
7. <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/2019-africa-sdg-index-and-dashboards-report/>
8. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/tcd_str_hno2019_20181222.pdf
9. <https://www.odi.org/publications/11194-sdg-progress-fragility-crisis-and-leaving-no-one-behind>
10. <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/multilateral-damage/2-effects-of-eu-policies-in-niger/>
11. <https://tradingeconomics.com/niger/barro-lee-percentage-of-female-population-age-15-19-with-no-education-wbdata.html>
12. <https://www.rescue.org/report/wheres-money-how-humanitarian-system-failing-fund-end-violenceagainst-women-and-girls>
13. <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/>
14. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/#/NER>
15. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Niger/Female_labor_force_participation
16. <https://data.em2030.org/em2030-sdg-gender-index>
17. Assessments were conducted in Abala, Balleyare, Fillingue and Ouallam – all located in western Niger in May 2019.
18. <https://www.odi.org/publications/11194-sdg-progress-fragility-crisis-and-leaving-no-one-behind>
19. IRC (2019) Missing Persons: Refugees Left Out and Left Behind in the Sustainable Development Goals
20. Ibid.
21. <https://www.unocha.org/sahel>
22. <https://www.odi.org/publications/11194-sdg-progress-fragility-crisis-and-leaving-no-one-behind>
23. https://www.rescue.org/resource/sustainable-development-goals-crisishttps://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/internationalcooperationaid-officer-post-318511-1_en
24. <https://rescue.box.com/s/u5qhb89f7ss3jihnj0a9x8oyjpiwf1vs>
25. The GPSDD – a global network bringing together governments, the private sector and civil society to improve data for SDG delivery – has launched an Inclusive Data Charter seeking to mobilise commitment to improve data to understand the needs of most marginalised groups.
26. https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2019/UNDP_Launches_Regional_Stabilization_Facility_for_Lake_Chad.html
27. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190405_acaps_start_briefing_note_displacement_in_diffa_niger_1.pdf
28. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger/overview>

**New York**

122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289
USA

Amman

Al-Shmeisani Wadi Saqra Street
Building No. 11
PO Box 850689
Amman
Jordan

Bangkok

888/210–212 Mahatun
Plaza Bldg., 2nd Floor
Ploenchit Road
Lumpini, Pathumwan
Bangkok 10330
Thailand

Berlin

Wallstraße 15A,
10179 Berlin,
Germany

Brussels

Square de Meeûs 5-6
De Meeûssquare 5-6
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Geneva

7, rue J.-A Gautier
CH-1201
Geneva
Switzerland

London

100 Wood St, Barbican,
London EC2V 7AN
United Kingdom

Nairobi

Galana Plaza, 4th Floor
Galana Road, Kilimani
Nairobi, Kenya

Washington, D.C.

1730 M Street, NW
Suite 505
Washington, DC 20036
USA

GET INVOLVED
SPREAD THE WORD
VOLUNTEER
DONATE

RESCUE-UK.ORG/EU
+32 (0) 2 511 43 00
@RESCUE_EU