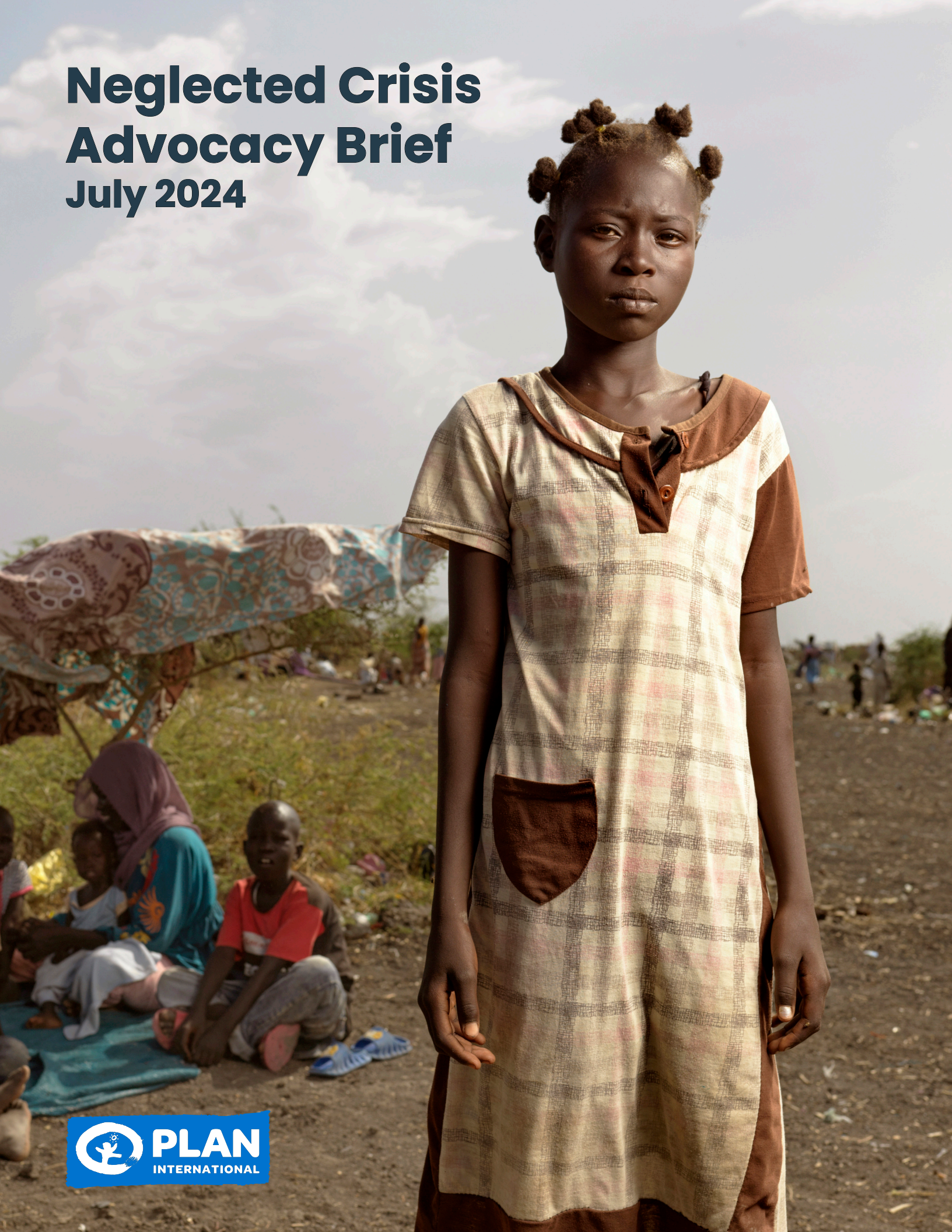


# Neglected Crisis Advocacy Brief July 2024



# Burkina Faso

This advocacy brief focuses on five crises that have long been neglected: **Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, and Sudan.**

Plan International has prepared this brief to draw attention to these neglected conflicts and to the children trying to survive them.

They are all officially recognized as Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Situations of Concern by the United Nations, and as a humanitarian organization, we are actively responding to each of these crises. We urge the UN Security Council, the Security Council's CAAC Working Group, and the international community to better protect and support children enduring these conflicts - as well as to increase meaningful efforts to achieve ceasefires and a sustainable peace.



Since 2022, the security situation in Burkina Faso has deteriorated, severely impacting the human rights situation. **The number of people killed doubled in 2023** with over 8,000 people reportedly killed.<sup>1</sup> Armed groups have escalated their attacks, leading to a surge in displacement and humanitarian needs. The ongoing insecurity in Burkina Faso continues to impede access, with many areas remaining hard to reach in recent months, posing significant challenges for humanitarian operations. In 2024, the number of individuals needing humanitarian aid has risen to 6.3 million,<sup>2</sup> up from 4.6 million the previous year, including 3.4 million children. Despite the critical need, only 16.2% of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) has been funded in 2024, highlighting a significant funding shortfall.<sup>3</sup>

The ongoing crisis has severely disrupted agricultural activities, exacerbating food insecurity. Farmers are abandoning their lands due to escalating violence, impacting a region where agriculture is the primary livelihood. As a result, malnutrition rates remain high, with 480,000

children under five and 131,500 pregnant/breastfeeding women expected to experience acute malnutrition, including 113,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition (SAM).<sup>4</sup>

Due to the humanitarian crisis and significant security incidents endangering civilians, the number of refugees in neighboring countries have nearly tripled to 200,000 according to UNHCR figures.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burkina Faso now stands at approximately 2 million as of March 2023,<sup>6</sup> with **children comprising over 58.5% of this displaced population.**

The humanitarian crisis, fueled by insecurity, political instability, and climate change, continues to reduce access to basic social services, particularly education and healthcare. In April 2024, an estimated 5,319 schools closed due to insecurity, affecting 833,818 students and 24,308 teachers.<sup>7</sup> **These closures disproportionately impact girls,** leading to higher rates of child marriage and reduced educational opportunities. The reduction in

healthcare services also remains a major concern, especially in areas where referrals and medical evacuations have become increasingly difficult due to insecurity.

Plan International is disturbed by the increasing grave violations against children in Burkina Faso, including killing, maiming, abduction, recruitment, attacks on schools and hospitals, and sexual violence, particularly against adolescent girls.<sup>8</sup>

### **Plan International's response to the crisis**

Plan International Burkina Faso started operating in 1976. To help the most vulnerable in Burkina Faso, Plan International provides cash transfers, food, shelter for IDPs, and hygiene kits. We help local and internally displaced women promote peaceful collaboration and income generation. Plan International Burkina Faso works with local actors, duty-bearers, and government entities in 12 out of the 13 regions in Burkina Faso to operationalize the humanitarian response. Plan International Burkina Faso concentrates its efforts on the six priority regions identified by the humanitarian community: Sahel, Centre-Nord, Nord, Est, Boucle du Mouhoun, and Centre-Est. Our response strategy is designed to support the most vulnerable populations, with a particular focus on girls, children, and youth, including those with disabilities, in these targeted regions.



### **Recommendations on Burkina Faso**

- Urge all parties involved in the conflict to refrain from attacking the education sector. Collaborate with humanitarian and development partners to strengthen the capacity of these parties in understanding and adhering to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Safe School Declarations principles. Non-state armed groups must cease attacks on schools, and security forces must stop using them for any purpose. The safety and well-being of children must also be central to decisions regarding school reopening.
- Call on all parties to uphold their human rights and international humanitarian law obligations by ceasing all grave violations against children: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and denial of humanitarian access. Recruited children, including girls, must be treated as victims and identified and released to child protection actors immediately.
- The international community must pay more attention to this growing crisis. We urge donors to promote greater equity in their global responses by protecting the most vulnerable populations, particularly children affected by conflicts.
- Humanitarian programming needs to ensure that child protection is included as priority actions in response plans. UN agencies, INGOs and CSOs need to support the continuity of access to quality and inclusive education that supports children's psychosocial needs, as well the timely referrals to child protection services for all school-aged children.

Mali is experiencing a multifaceted humanitarian crisis driven by severe insecurity, socio-economic challenges, and climate change impacts. The crisis is particularly characterized by persistent conflict involving non-state armed groups, resulting in widespread instability and violence. Meanwhile, the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) complicated both the security and humanitarian

situation and the response capacity of humanitarian actors. Moreover, only 31% of the funds needed to deliver humanitarian aid were mobilized in 2023.<sup>9</sup> This situation has engendered a dire humanitarian crisis where an estimated 7.1 million people in Mali will require humanitarian aid, including 23% women and 54% children.<sup>10</sup>

Due to insecurity and restrictions, humanitarian access has become increasingly restricted following clashes

between Malian Military Forces and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). **The prolonged conflict has driven forced displacement, deepened poverty, and exacerbated the adverse effects of climate shocks on food security.** Humanitarians also face life-threatening challenges in delivering aid to vulnerable, besieged communities, with no end to the violence in sight.

Restrictions on movement, imposed by armed groups to fully control the circulation of goods and people, further restrict access. This context of instability pushes civilians to repeatedly displace in search of safety across the country and elsewhere. As of May 2024, Mali had roughly 354,739 IDPs.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, an estimated 210,000 Malian refugees remain in neighboring countries.<sup>12</sup> According to multi-sectoral assessments conducted in July 2023, the needs mentioned by displaced people were mainly food (97%), shelter (50%), non-food items (37%), and clean water and sanitation (24%).<sup>13</sup>

Like many of the Sahel countries, insecurity compounded with climatic shocks has severely disrupted agricultural activities in Mali, aggravating food insecurity and malnutrition. The number of people experiencing acute food insecurity at crisis level or worse (IPC 3 to 5) has sharply increased to 1.4

million in the period of June 2023 – May 2024. **Simultaneously, the nutritional crisis remains dire, with nearly 1.1 million children under 5 suffering from acute malnutrition.**<sup>14</sup>

The humanitarian crisis in Mali has similarly affected the fundamental right of many children to access quality education. Over half a million school-aged children lack access to education due to the closure of over 1,700 schools, predominantly in northern and central Mali. This situation has deprived 522,000 children of learning opportunities and affected over 10,400 teachers as of February 2024.<sup>15</sup> This issue is particularly severe in regions like Timbuktu, where the majority of children are out of school. The lack of formal education leaves many children, especially those in displaced communities, vulnerable to exploitation and deprived of opportunities for future growth.

The United Nations has verified in Mali the killing and maiming of children; recruitment and use; sexual violence, including rape; abduction; denial of humanitarian access; and attacks against hospitals and schools.<sup>16</sup> These atrocities underscore the urgent need for concerted international efforts to protect the rights and safety of children caught in the conflict.



## Recommendations on Mali

- The international community must collaborate with Malian authorities to improve security measures that ensure safe humanitarian access and protect aid workers. Efforts should include negotiating safe passages and advocating for compliance with International Humanitarian law (IHL) by all conflict parties.
- Call on all parties to uphold their human rights and international humanitarian law obligations by ceasing all grave violations against children: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and denial of humanitarian access. Engage with authorities to ensure that Mali's children do not suffer in the shadows. Support their protection efforts and humanitarian needs by providing both political and financial backing.
- The international community must restore and enhance development aid for improving access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and food security. This should also include adaptive strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change. Increased funding should target the most vulnerable populations, in particular children, addressing the root causes of displacement and poverty.
- Urge all parties involved in armed conflict to immediately cease attacks on educational institutions and refrain from using schools and universities for military purposes. Immediate actions are required to reopen schools, provide educational resources, and recruit teachers in conflict-affected regions. Initiatives should also focus on creating alternative educational opportunities to ensure continuity of learning for displaced children.

## Plan International's response to the crisis

Plan International has been active in Mali since 1976, operating across most regions of the country, which provides us with a comprehensive perspective on the humanitarian situation nationwide. Our initiatives include education projects, child protection, early childhood

development, employability, and reproductive health and rights. We also engage in various cross-cutting themes such as food security/nutrition, health, and peacebuilding. With a presence in over 1,000 communities, we facilitate community dialogues to empower young people as active

citizens and advocate for the cessation of harmful practices. In humanitarian zones, Plan International executes multiple nexus component projects and collaborates with the Rapid Response Mechanism to aid individuals in distress.

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# Niger



Niger continues to confront a complex humanitarian emergency characterized by persistent insecurity, endemic poverty, and the impacts of climate change and political instability. Following the coup in July 2023 that shook Niger's political landscape, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed sanctions, which included the temporary closing of both land and air borders. However, these sanctions have had unintended consequences beyond political pressure. Instead, they have added to the instability, because goods and essential humanitarian supplies, including nutritional aid and medical provisions, have been held up at the border, jeopardizing the lives of the 4.5 million people in need<sup>17</sup>, including 2.4 million children. Cuts and reduction in international financial aid have also hindered the new government's capacity to deliver public services effectively.

Despite the partial lifting of sanctions in February 2024, humanitarian needs in Niger remain severe, and food prices stay elevated due to increased production and transportation costs, insecurity, and drought-keeping them significantly

above the five-year average in the Sahel Region.<sup>18</sup> More than 80% of Niger's population relies on agriculture for their food and income, but their livelihoods and food security are increasingly threatened by drought and flooding. Accordingly, food insecurity has reached unprecedented levels, increasing the demand for humanitarian assistance. According to Cadre Harmonisé projections, more than 3.4 million people across Niger are expected to face Crisis—IPC 3—or worse levels of acute food insecurity during the June-to-August lean season, when food is most scarce.<sup>19</sup> **Moreover, 47% of children under 5 years of age in Niger are chronically malnourished** and over 12.2 % are acutely malnourished.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, humanitarian access remains a significant challenge in Niger, hindered by mutual suspicion between the government and armed groups, posing a major obstacle to all humanitarian efforts.

The insecurity in Niger continues to force the closure of numerous schools and leads to significant displacement. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that a total of

181,000 conflict displacements were reported in Niger in 2023, the highest figure since data became available in 2015.<sup>21</sup> As of March 2024, approximately 937 primary and secondary schools across Niger remain closed, impacting 73,876 students, including 35,460 girls.<sup>22</sup> Of particular concern is Tillabéri region, where 94% of the closed schools are located. The persistent disruption in education has widened socio-economic disparities and deprived many children of essential learning opportunities. **Countless girls, in particular, are left without access to education**, heightening their vulnerability to negative coping mechanisms and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

Plan International remains disturbed about the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin. In 2023, the United Nations verified more than double the number of grave violations against children in armed conflict compared to 2022.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the United Nations has documented grave violations against children in Niger, including killings, maiming, recruitment by armed groups, sexual violence, abduction, and attacks on hospitals and schools.

## Recommendations on Niger

- Demand that all parties uphold their obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights Law (IHRL); allow and facilitate safe, timely, and unimpeded humanitarian access. Administrative and bureaucratic constraints on the movement of humanitarian personnel and goods within the country, coupled with border closures with Benin, have a profound impact on internal supply chains and transportation costs.
- The international community must swiftly reinstate and increase aid assistance to Niger, with emphasis on basic needs, such as health, education, clean water and sanitation, as well as resilience and livelihoods. The Niger's population access to basic services has been strongly impacted by the decision to reduce/suspend development funding. Suspensions and cuts in development aid have had significant repercussions for the population's access to basic services, notably in terms of education in Niger. This fuels cycles of poverty and vulnerability, elevating the risk of child recruitment into armed groups, child marriage, and exploitation.
- While countering violent extremism remains a critical priority, the current militarized approach to the crisis is inadvertently fueling vulnerability and insecurity. A military approach alone cannot effectively address the complex, long-term challenges posed by the crisis. Instead, a comprehensive response is needed, embracing the triple nexus approach – which must prioritize addressing the underlying drivers and root causes of the conflict to achieve lasting peace and stability.
- Non-State Armed Groups must immediately cease their attacks on schools, and security forces must discontinue the occupation and use of schools and universities for any military purposes. Without access to education, a generation of children will grow up without the skills they need to contribute to their country. Similarly, the parties must engage with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children and to urge accountability for all perpetrators.



### Plan International's response to the crisis

Plan International has been working in Niger since 1998 to promote children's rights. Plan International Niger has positioned itself as a leading organization on eradicating child marriage and promoting gender equality in the country by investing in young girls and women to become the leaders of social and economic change. We also implement programs to strengthen

resilience, provide access to quality health services and to support children, especially girls to go to school and gain skills to succeed. Plan International Niger is also implementing projects to create a resilient society in which young people from the Maradi region have access to promising economic opportunities and decision-making responsibilities.

# NWSW Cameroon

The humanitarian situation in Cameroon is characterized by the impact of three humanitarian crises. The protracted Lake Chad Basin conflict, the armed conflict in the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions, and the Central African Republic (CAR) refugee crisis have adversely affected the well-being and living conditions of the population for nearly a decade. Ongoing conflicts, organized armed group activity, recurrent climatic shocks, and internal and regional displacement have created substantial humanitarian needs in Cameroon. **Consequently, an estimated 3.4 million people across the country require humanitarian assistance in 2024,<sup>24</sup> with women and girls bearing the brunt of the hardship.** The three humanitarian emergencies have resulted in nearly a million internally displaced persons (IDPs), approximately half a million returnees, and about half a million refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>25</sup> Faced with various challenges, one of the biggest is that many IDPs lack civil documentation. Having been in Cameroon for a decade, many refugees have given birth to children who have no identity papers from either their countries of origin or Cameroon. As a result, 190,000 school aged children were reported without a birth certificate.<sup>26</sup>





The crisis in NWSW Cameroon continues to be marked by human rights violations and abuse, frequent short-term displacements, and pendular movements driven by violence, fear of attacks, and hostilities between the conflicting parties. The crisis began in 2016 with peaceful protests against marginalization by Anglophone teachers, students, and lawyers. These protests were met with force, escalating into an armed conflict as pro-independence fighters sought to establish the Anglophone state of Ambazonia. Since then, the situation on the ground has worsened due to the emergence of new armed factions, exacerbating criminal activities and forced displacement.

As of February 2024, clashes between the military and separatist forces have intensified insecurity in the NWSW regions, leaving 638,400 people internally displaced and 64,000 seeking refuge in Nigeria.<sup>27</sup> Ongoing destruction of houses and farms, along with looting of properties, severely limits access to adequate housing. Between February 16 and 26, 2024, an estimated 3,000 people were forced to flee their homes in Upper Bayang subdivision (Manyu division) in the South-West, following a wave of violence.<sup>28</sup> Unrest has become a pervasive threat, marked by sporadic outbreaks and assaults on both civilians and non-governmental organizations. According to the 2024 HRP, nearly 500,000 people are without adequate shelter.<sup>29</sup> The humanitarian response is further hampered by roadblocks and frequent ghost towns, significantly restricting access to affected areas. Numerous aid workers have been kidnapped,<sup>30</sup> and some have tragically died in captivity. **One significant consequence is that Plan International and many other international NGOs are still unable to return to many communities they previously served,** forcing them to temporarily halt numerous activities.

The NWSW crisis has particularly increased the vulnerability of girls and women to sexual and reproductive health risks, such as unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions,



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sexually transmitted infections, and gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>31</sup> A recent qualitative assessment by UNFPA, the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Family, and partners in the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) revealed that **women and girls in the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions are at risk of violence from armed men, including community members, family members, and husbands.**<sup>32</sup> The assessment also indicated that women and girls are exposed to sexual violence while engaged in agricultural activities, traveling to or from school and the market, or selling goods there. Limited access to basic resources and services leads to the use of negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and survival sex.

The education sector has been severely impacted by the NWSW crisis. Since 2017, NSAGs have banned government-administered

education. In September 2023, NSAGs enforced a two-week lockdown to oppose the reopening of schools for the 2023/2024 academic year. According to the Education Sector, **2,875 of the 6,970 schools (41%) remained non-functional in the NWSW regions during this period, leaving over 240,000 children without education.**<sup>33</sup> Although access to education improved slightly compared to the previous year, challenges persist. In 2023, at least 25 attacks affected schools, teachers, and students in the NWSW regions, including killings, kidnappings, threats, and assaults.<sup>34</sup> Plan International is disturbed by the targeting of children in this conflict, and horrific reports of grave violations against children including killing and maiming, abduction, recruitment and use, attacks against schools and hospitals, and sexual violence especially against adolescent girls, including forced marriage.<sup>35</sup>



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## Plan International's response to the crisis

Plan International Cameroon has been active in the North West region for over three decades, addressing the needs of children, particularly girls, affected by socio-political crises. Plan International has also heavily invested in sponsorship programs, particularly those centered around establishing child-friendly spaces. These initiatives have empowered thousands of vulnerable children by providing them with valuable training aimed at generating income, ultimately fostering self-sustainability. We also provide support through protective mechanisms, child protection, and gender-based violence prevention. As one

of the pioneering international INGOs in the South West region, we partner with religious and traditional leaders, local organizations, and youth groups to address the needs of children.

Plan International Cameroon has been actively involved in the Minawao Refugee Camp in the Far North since its establishment in July 2013, delivering crucial protection services. These efforts focus on assisting children, girls, and women affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, covering essential areas such as livelihoods, education, nutrition and food security, as well as child protection.

## Recommendations on NWSW Cameroon

- In line with the Safe Schools Declaration and UN Security Council Resolution 2601, non-state armed groups must cease attacks on schools, and security forces must stop using schools and universities for any purpose. Ensure that the safety and well-being of children is always put at the center of the decision-making process to reopen schools. The parties should create a conducive environment that minimizes school interruptions and closures.
- Appeal to the Government of Cameroon and NSAGs to continue to look for opportunities that facilitate an honest and inclusive dialogue involving a neutral third party to address the root causes of the ongoing socio-economic situation in the NWSW regions. This approach should focus on the underlying causes of the conflict so that the population of NWSW can live in dignity and peace, and have access to opportunities, quality education, livelihoods, and a place in the nation's future.
- Donors are urged to increase multi-year funding to scale up emergency response efforts across Cameroon. This increased support is crucial to address the urgent needs of displaced populations and protect vulnerable children, especially adolescent girls, from gender-based violence. Similarly, the international community must swiftly increase its support for legal aid to IDPs and refugees, to strengthen their access to civil documentation. This includes supporting the Government in increasing the capacity of the National Bureau of Civil Status (BUNEC) to provide birth certificates to IDPs and refugees' children born in Cameroon.
- The United Nations and INGOs must continue to promote enhanced collaboration and coordination among clusters to achieve a cohesive response, mobilize resources and align on a comprehensive strategy to effectively address the multifaceted dimensions of this humanitarian crisis.



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Before the current conflict, Sudan was already dealing with violence and displacement that began with the Darfur crisis in 2003. The country hosted over 1 million refugees primarily from South Sudan and Northern Ethiopia.<sup>36</sup> The ousting of long-time authoritarian leader Omar al-Bashir in 2019 initially raised hopes for a transition to civilian rule in Sudan. However, a military coup two years later dismantled the transitional civilian government, triggering the country into political and economic chaos and reigniting intercommunal conflicts. Sudan has also faced significant impacts from extreme weather events associated with climate change, such as floods and droughts. These events have had severe consequences for hundreds of thousands of people across the country, resulting in the destruction of crops and livestock and worsening food insecurity among families.

Since the 15th of April 2023, violent clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan's capital of Khartoum sparked a nationwide conflict that has quickly become one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. **A year into the conflict, Sudan is on the brink of a**

**humanitarian catastrophe.** Nearly 25 million people, of whom over 14 million are children, now require humanitarian assistance<sup>37</sup> and more than 15,000 people have been killed, according to ACLED.<sup>38</sup> Like most other humanitarian agencies, Plan could not continue with operations in Khartoum and in Al Jazeera State due to the fighting and insecurity.

The ongoing violence and lack of basic necessities have compelled many to abandon their homes. By April 2024, over 8.6 million people (16% of the total population) had been displaced since the conflict began<sup>39</sup> - **making Sudan the largest displacement crisis in the world.** Many have sought refuge either within Sudan or in neighboring countries. This includes over 2 million who have fled to neighboring nations.<sup>40</sup> Without a resolution to the crisis, hundreds of thousands will be forced to flee in search of refuge and basic assistance.

In April 2024, over 40% of Sudan's population— about 18 million people—are experiencing severe food insecurity, with their needs continuing to worsen over time.<sup>41</sup> Sudan is among the countries hardest hit by climate change, with direct impacts of the climate crisis severely affecting food

security and agriculture. This poses significant challenges for the 80% of Sudanese who depend on agriculture and pastoralism for their livelihoods. The latest IPC analysis on Sudan reveals that **Sudan has become the world's largest hunger crisis with over half of the country experiencing severe food insecurity.** 25.6 million people are projected to face acute food insecurity or worse (IPC 3 or above) between June and September, coinciding with the lean season. The IPC alert has also **classified 755,000 people as living in Catastrophe** (IPC Phase 5), the most severe classification on the IPC scale in 10 states including Greater Darfur (all five states), South and North Kordofan, Blue Nile, Al Jazeera, and Khartoum. Another 8.5M people (18 percent of the population) face Emergency (IPC Phase 4).<sup>42</sup> In El-Fasher, the ongoing siege has left hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped, suffering from severe hunger and thirst due to a lack of food and water.<sup>43</sup>

In Sudan, approximately 65% of the population lacks access to healthcare, with the situation worsened by ongoing conflict, leaving 70% to 80% of hospitals in conflict-affected regions non-functional and severely limiting medical service where it is needed most.<sup>44</sup> This critical healthcare collapse has led to major outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, dengue fever, measles, and malaria. Furthermore, insecurity, displacement, and limited access to essential supplies such as medicines,

medical equipment, electricity, and clean water remain significant obstacles to providing healthcare throughout Sudan. As a direct result, over 11,000 suspected cases of cholera have been reported,<sup>45</sup> while other diseases continue to proliferate due to the breakdown of basic public health services. The healthcare crisis in Sudan is escalating rapidly, underscoring the urgent need for international support and intervention to prevent further devastation.

The growing hunger crisis has strong gendered impacts, with **women and girls facing increased risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence.** The combination of displacement, insecurity, and limited healthcare infrastructure further exacerbates women and girls' vulnerability, highlighting an urgent need for comprehensive support and protection measures to address these critical issues. Reports of gender-based violence (GBV) in Sudan have drastically surged, encompassing alarming incidents such as kidnapping, forced marriage, intimate partner violence, conflict-related sexual violence, and child marriage.<sup>46</sup> According to the GBV Sub-Sector, even before December 2023, when clashes in Al Jazeera State forced multiple displacements for individuals and families, 6.7 million people within Sudan were already at risk of gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>47</sup> This crisis is exacerbated by the fact that over 1.5 million IDPs are women and girls

of reproductive age, facing severe challenges in accessing essential reproductive and maternal health services.<sup>48</sup> The GBV Sub-Sector in Sudan cautions that without a rapid increase in funding and enhanced diplomatic efforts to secure humanitarian access, millions of women and girls requiring GBV prevention and response services will continue to be deprived of their right to protection.

The conflict has concurrently affected the education sector in Sudan. After a year of the conflict, the majority of the country's schools remain closed, with **90 per cent of the 19 million school-aged children having not attended school for a full academic year.**<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the growing practice of using schools as shelters, which has reached as high as 100% in certain areas, impacts both displaced children and particularly those in host communities. In the regions

of North Darfur and South Kordofan, Plan International Sudan has recently launched a project designed to provide classrooms for informal education at a gathering point for displaced people.

Thousands of children have been killed or injured, and countless more exposed to grave protection risks including sexual violence and recruitment or use in the conflict. The United Nations has verified in Sudan the killing and maiming of children; recruitment and use; sexual violence, including rape; abduction; denial of humanitarian access; and attacks against hospitals and schools.<sup>50</sup> Plan International is concerned about the staggering increase of 480% in grave violations against children in Sudan.<sup>51</sup> The impacts will be devastating, traumatizing an entire generation, and contributing to extensive psychosocial distress.



## Plan International's response to the crisis

Plan International Sudan has been operating for more than 45 years. Since the start of the conflict, which has created the **world's largest displacement of children**, Plan International has responded by providing mobile child-friendly spaces, where we provide mental health and psychosocial support services, parenting and adolescent life skills programs, case management services for separated and unaccompanied children, including family tracing and reunification, as well as alternative care programs. Additionally, we provide programs aimed at responding to and mitigating the risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), as well as advocacy initiatives for children associated with armed

forces and armed groups (CAAFAG). Due to the ongoing crisis, Plan has scaled up its humanitarian efforts to address the increased needs across the country. Plan International Sudan operates in 5 states, including North Darfur, South and North Kordofan, Kassala, El Gedaref, and White Nile, with Port Sudan added as a coordination office. Our efforts encompass Child Protection in Emergencies, Education in Emergencies, Food Security and Livelihoods, Health & Nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and Non-Food Items, including multipurpose Cash Assistance. Additionally, we are responding to the rise in GBV cases nationwide and addressing refugee needs in neighboring countries.



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## Recommendations on Sudan

- Call on the international community to urgently increase funding for the humanitarian response in Sudan and to consider the comprehensive impact of the hunger crisis. The HRP is only funded at 16.8 % as of June 2024.<sup>52</sup> Adequate funding for food security, nutrition, WASH, sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, and protection clusters—covering child protection and GBV prevention and response—is crucial to mitigate the escalating impacts of rising food insecurity both short- and long-term. This funding must also reach national and local organizations, including women's groups and mutual aid networks.
- Urge the warring parties to urgently come to the negotiating table and agree to an immediate ceasefire and to promptly implement measures to avoid exacerbating the hunger crisis. They must fulfill their obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to protect humanitarian workers and ensure safe access for delivering aid to those in need. They must also refrain from targeting, looting, or unintentionally damaging essential sites and infrastructure crucial to food systems, such as markets, agricultural and livestock lands, as well as food storage facilities.
- Call on the international community, especially those with influence, to promptly encourage both parties to

prioritize and execute policies that safeguard children, prevent gender-based violence (GBV) risks, and assist in the implementation of national action plans and policies aimed at protecting children and preventing children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG). Additionally, increased funding and financial resources are essential for programs focusing on child protection and GBV prevention in Sudan. The GBV Sub-Sector in Sudan warns that without a rapid increase in funding and stronger diplomatic efforts to secure humanitarian access, millions of women and girls requiring GBV prevention and response services will remain underserved, despite their right to protection.

- Urge all parties to maintain an effective, efficient, and reliable communication network across Sudan, ensuring that these vital lines of communication remain operational to support humanitarian efforts. The nationwide telecommunication shutdown during February and March 2024 severely impacted the delivery of life-sustaining assistance to millions. Effective communication is vital for local NGOs and community groups that depend on the cell phone network to coordinate aid, gather information, receive funds, and manage essential services.

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**Until we are all equal**

## **About Plan International**

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

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