

APRIL 2024



POLICY BRIEF

Taking urgent action to save 49.5 million lives and build the foundations for food and nutrition resilience in the Sahel and West Africa

KEY MESSAGES

- **Message 1:** Between April 2019 and April 2024, the number of people affected by the food crisis has multiplied by seven, soaring from 5 to 35.3 million. Insecurity and inflation are exacerbating the crisis.

The agropastoral campaign for 2023-2024 was generally satisfactory, although cereal production per capita slightly declined. Cereal production for 2023-24 is estimated at over 77 million tons, a slight decrease of 0.6% compared to last year but 4% higher than the five-year average. However, per capita production in the Sahel and West Africa countries decreased by 0.7%. Root and tuber production, estimated at 206 million tons, increased by 4% compared to last year and 8% compared to the five-year average. Some cash crops such as coffee or cocoa experienced production declines ranging from 6% to 13% compared to last year.

The rapid deterioration of food insecurity and acute malnutrition remains concerning. The number of people facing food insecurity is estimated at 35.3 million in April 2024, up from 30.3 million in April 2019. Moreover, without appropriate measures, 126.5 million individuals, currently under pressure, could fall into food crisis during the 2024 lean season, especially in Nigeria (82.6 million), Niger (7.3 million), and Burkina Faso (5.2 million). Likewise, acute malnutrition persists, with approximately 16.7 million children under the age of five affected in the region.

The adverse effects of climate change continue to negatively impact the region's food systems, particularly with significant disruptions in precipitation patterns, productivity losses in certain crops, and fertility declines in certain animal species, etc.

Furthermore, these recurring food crises are exacerbated by various factors:

- **Escalating security violence**, now spreading to northern Togo and Benin, leading to the displacement of over 6.9 million people and the arrival of 1.9 million refugees in the region, including 1.1 million in Chad, with nearly 500 000 from Sudan. The majority of these displaced persons and refugees face food crises and lack access to basic social services such as water, health, and education.
- **Restrictions on the free movement** of agricultural products and transhumant livestock, imposed by 10 out of 17 countries in the region, continue to disrupt intra-regional trade and exacerbate difficulties in accessing food items.
- **The exorbitant cost of nutritious food** means that 85% of the region's population cannot afford it. Despite price decreases in international markets, inflation in the region remains concerning, with cereal price increases ranging from 42% to over 100% compared to the five-year average; trends exacerbated by significant depreciations of local currencies in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, and Liberia. Food problems increase non-communicable diseases and public health costs, also reducing productivity and life expectancy.

The Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/ OECD) and the CILSS Executive Secretariat produced this policy brief. It draws on the conclusions of the annual and restricted meetings of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA), held respectively on 5-8 December 2022 and 3-5 April 2023.



FOOD AND NUTRITION SITUATION:
SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA REGION

● **Message 2:** The persistent underfunding of responses to food crises jeopardizes the achievement of the zero-hunger goal by 2030.

Insufficient financial resources mobilised for a more effective emergency response to recurrent food crises. In 2022, six out of ten people in food crisis situations could not receive the required food assistance. Similarly, the assistance provided to the remaining 40% represented only 45% of the value distributed in previous years. Investment in emergency food response has dramatically decreased, dropping from USD 198 per person in 2014 to USD 67 in 2021.

Inadequate investment in structural measures and their weak connection to emergency response. In 2021, the average financing for structural investments in the agricultural and food sectors was only \$4 per capita. This financing, already insufficient, stagnated or even decreased in 2023 in 9 out of 17 Sahel and West Africa countries, amid limited coverage of social protection programs.

Underfunding of information systems severely hampers the region's countries' capacity to anticipate crises, develop and implement effective response strategies, including measures to reduce inflation and support purchasing power.

MAJOR IMPLICATIONS FOR ECOWAS, UEMOA, AND CILSS:

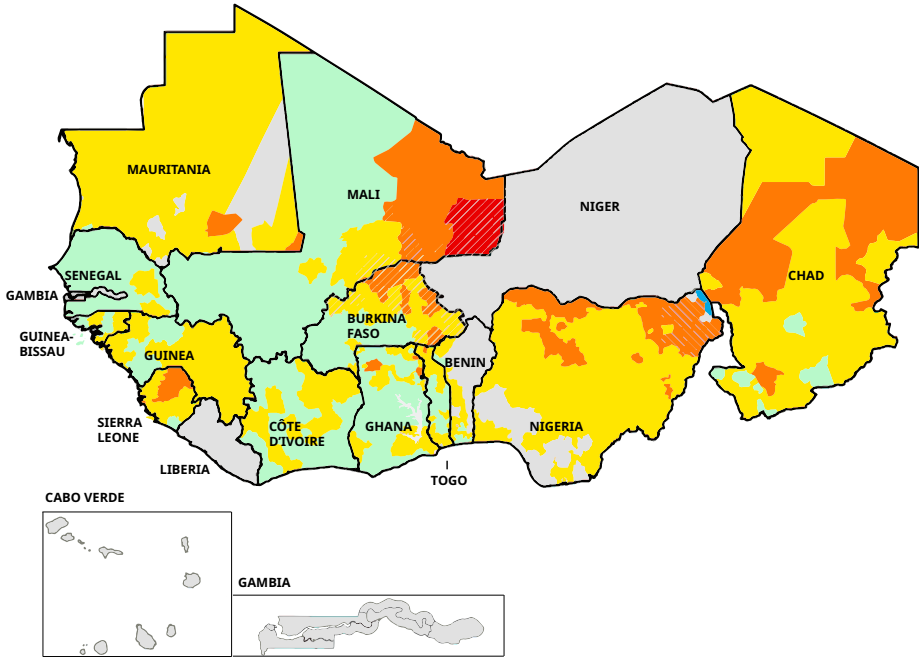
- **1 Implement concrete actions to immediately address the current food and nutrition crisis:**
 - **Support the implementation of national response plans** by mobilising regional solidarity mechanisms, such as the ECOWAS Regional Food Security Reserve and the UEMOA financial mechanism within its High-Level Committee on Food Security and Nutrition.
 - **Organise a high-level consultation to find adequate solutions to recurring obstacles** to the free movement of agropastoral and food products, strengthen regional solidarity on the issue of cross-border transhumance, and establish a mechanism for institutional and political governance accountability. This includes compliance with community regulations and policies, as well as national, continental, and international commitments to eradicating hunger and malnutrition.
- **2 Seize the opportunity of revising agricultural policies (ECOWAP and PAU) to implement appropriate measures and instruments, promoting more effective prevention of recurrent food crises:**
 - **Strengthen the contribution of agricultural policies** to food and nutrition security by creating bridges between agricultural programs and social protection and resilience initiatives to more effectively target and support vulnerable populations affected by poverty and chronic food insecurity.
 - **Assist States in establishing sustainable financing mechanisms** for food security information systems. This aims to produce evidence-based data to inform policy decisions aimed at eradicating the underlying causes of persistent food price increases, strengthening citizens' purchasing power, and ensuring better governance of food systems. It includes monitoring the livelihoods of vulnerable populations and markets.
 - **Initiate a discussion on innovative strategies for financing responses** to food crises (emergency interventions and resilience-building initiatives). This includes sovereign financing to increase the intervention capacities of solidarity instruments (ECOWAS Regional Food Security Reserve and UEMOA financial mechanism), especially those supporting agricultural structural programs and food security (ECOWAS Regional Agriculture and Food Fund - FRAA and UEMOA Regional Agricultural Development Fund - FRDA).



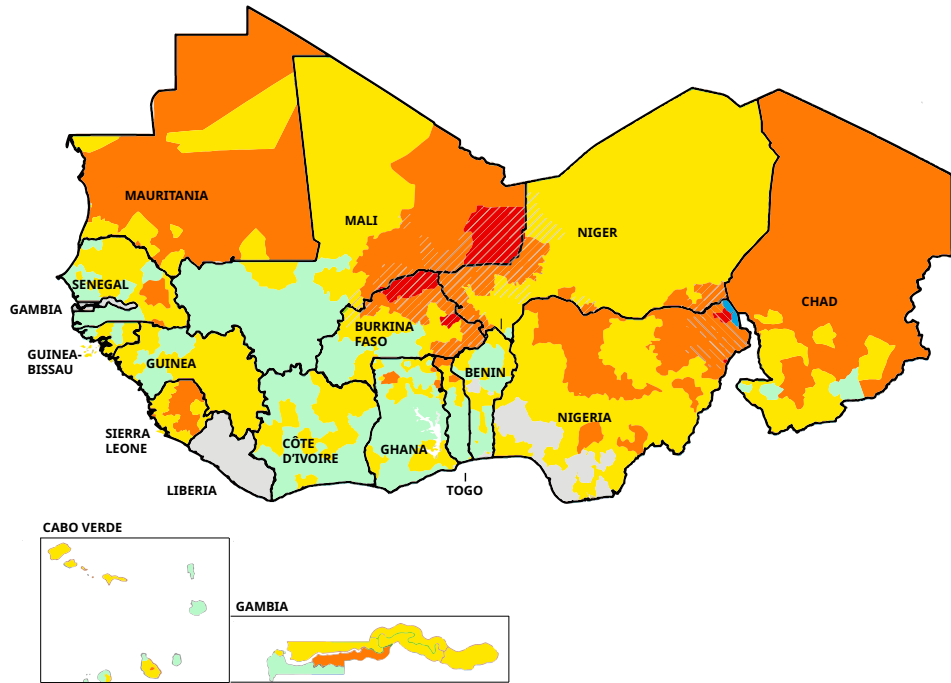
ABOUT

Created in 1984 and under the political leadership of ECOWAS and UEMOA, the RPCA's objective is to build a consensual view of the food and nutrition situation and promote dialogue and co-ordination to facilitate decision making and the effectiveness of interventions. It is co-facilitated by CILSS and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD).

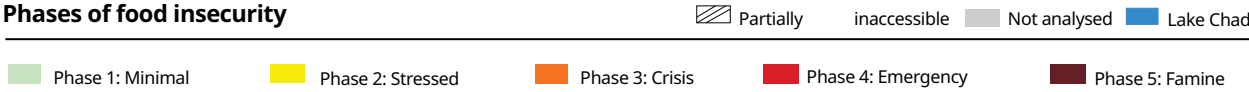
35.3 million
people in crisis or worse (phases 3-5)
Current situation: **March-May 2024**



49.5 million
people at risk of crisis or worse (phases 3-5)
Projected situation: **June-August 2024**



Phases of food insecurity



Source: Cadre harmonisé analyses, Regional concertation, Lomé, Togo, March 2024
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