BURKINA FASO, MALI AND NIGER
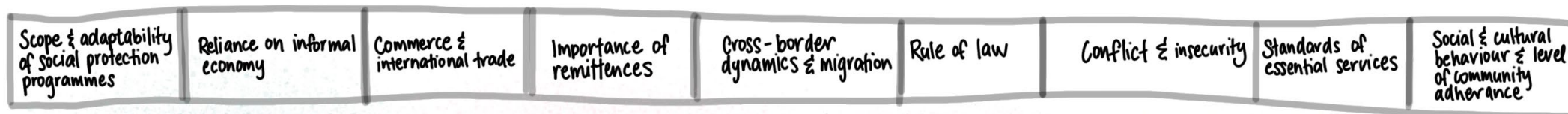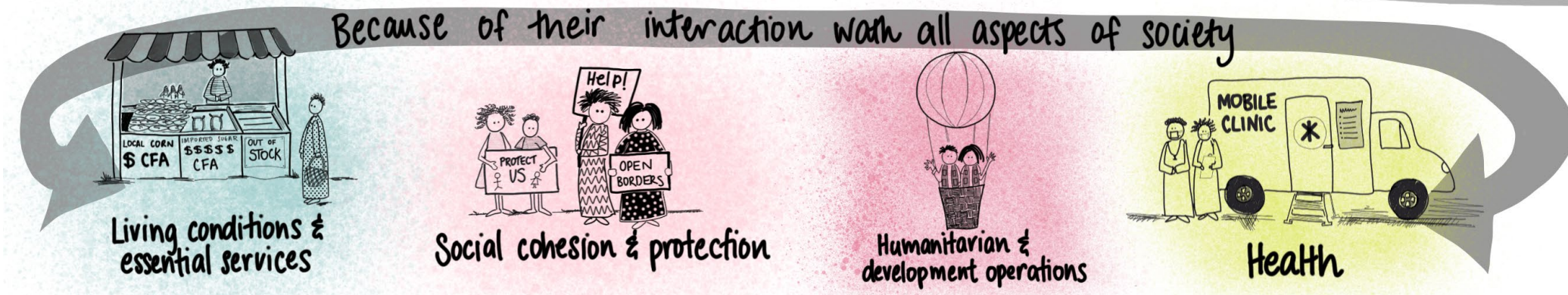
Vulnerability to COVID-19 Containment Measures

acaps

Key factors which will shape the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Burkina Faso, Mali & Niger

Scope & adaptability of social protection programmes | Reliance on informal economy | Commerce & international trade | Importance of remittances | Cross-border dynamics & migration | Rule of law | Conflict & insecurity | Standards of essential services | Social & cultural behaviour & level of community adherance

Because of their interaction with all aspects of society

Living conditions & essential services — Social cohesion & protection — Humanitarian & development operations — Health

About this report

Methodology and overall objective

This report highlights the potential impact of COVID-19 containment measures in three countries in the Sahel region: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. It is based on ACAPS' global 'Vulnerability to containment measures' analysis that highlights how eight key factors can shape the impact of COVID-19 containment measures. Additional factors relevant to the Sahel region have also been included in this report. The premise of this regional analysis is that, given these key factors, the three countries are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 containment measures.

This risk analysis does not forecast the spread of COVID-19. ACAPS does not attempt to forecast the evolution and spread of any disease. **The main objective of the report is to help understand how COVID-19 containment measures in the three countries could exacerbate current humanitarian conditions and socioeconomic vulnerabilities** (ACAPS' COVID-19 Analytical Framework).

This report is a secondary data review of available literature and datasets, including the findings of ACAPS 'Humanitarian Expert Network' analysis, ACAPS COVID-19 Government Measures Dataset.

Key factors that will shape the impact of containment measures

This analysis focuses on the following key factors:

♦ Conflict and security

♦ Scope and adaptability of social protection

♦ Reliance on informal economies

♦ Commerce

♦ Remittances

♦ Cross border dynamics and migration

♦ Rule of law

♦ Standard of essential services

♦ Social and cultural behaviour and the level of community adherence

Geographic scope of the report

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are only three countries within the wider Sahel region, which spans over 5,000 km from east to west Africa. The Sahel is a semi-arid region that lies in between the desert region of north Africa and the tropical region of the south. The Sahel is a 'bridge' between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. It is an area of interaction between African indigenous cultures, nomadic cultures, and Arab and Islamic cultures (The Conversation 28/02/2020).
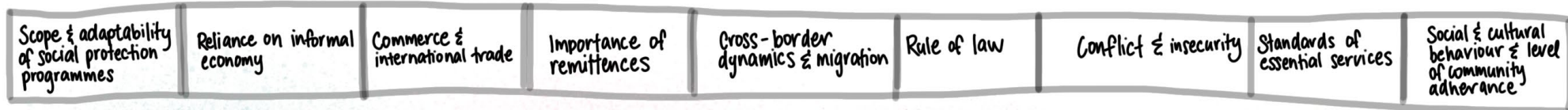
ACAPS is focusing on Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger because these three countries constitute a sensitive geographical area. The escalation of conflict in Mali in 2015 exacerbated regional instability as conflict began to spill across the borders. In 2018 regional insecurity increased exponentially as the conflict intensified in both Niger and Burkina Faso. This led to a rapid deterioration of humanitarian conditions (OCHA 24/02/2020). Over the past two years armed groups' activities intensified significantly in the border area shared by the three countries, known as Liptako Gourma. As a result of conflict, the provision of essential services including health, education, and sanitation has become incredibly challenging. The socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in the three countries is likely to further deteriorate as a result of COVID-19 containment measures.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and particularly the Liptako Gourma region, are characterised by cross-border dynamics and migration: nomadic populations, economic migrants, and people fleeing conflict regularly cross the borders in order to conduct their daily income activities or seek safety abroad. COVID-19-related movement restrictions, including border closure, are expected to have an impact on cross-border dynamics and migration across the three countries.
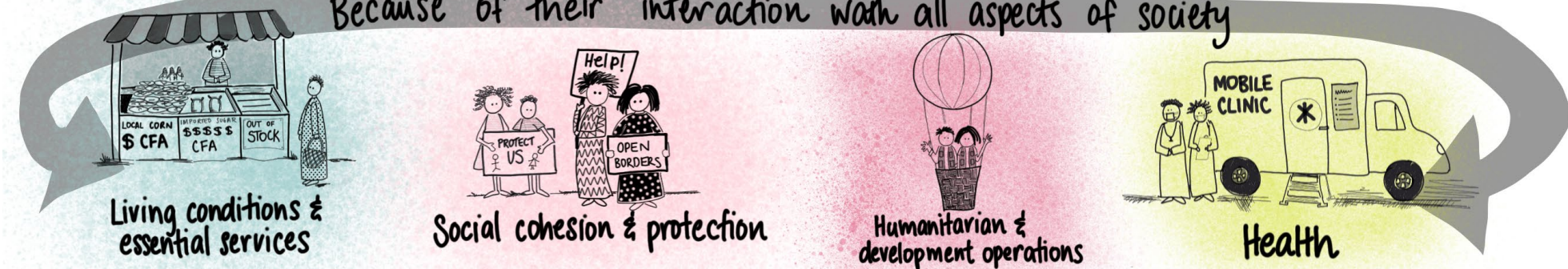
Limitations

- Clarity is lacking on the type, degree of implementation, and duration of containment measures in the three countries. This is due to both incomplete data and an ever-changing picture of the spread and impact of the pandemic across the world.

- In this report, we consider the impact of COVID-19 containment measures on an already dire humanitarian situation. School closures, movement restrictions, and states of emergency pre-date COVID-19 containment measures in the three countries because of conflict. Despite the severity of the impact of COVID-19 and its containment measures worldwide, it is expected that increasing insecurity and conflict will continue to be the main driver in the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in these three countries.

- Information on the level of community adherence to containment measures in the three countries is limited. Strict containment measures in countries with a high level of poverty and a dire food security situation are difficult to respect and implement. People will be unable to completely halt livelihood activities. Local sources report that starvation constitutes a bigger and more realistic threat for households than the virus.

Key factors which will shape the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Burkina Faso, Mali & Niger

Scope & adaptability of social protection programmes	Reliance on informal economy	Commerce & international trade	Importance of remittences	Cross-border dynamics & migration	Rule of law	Conflict & insecurity	Standards of essential services	Social & cultural behaviour & level of community adherance

Because of their interaction with all aspects of society

Living conditions & essential services

Social cohesion & protection

Humanitarian & development operations

Health

Temporary socio-economic measures have been put in place

UNDERLYING factors of POVERTY

FOOD INSECURITY remain.

The informal economy represents 89% of total employment in sub-Saharan Africa.

Closed markets + closed borders + social distancing
→ Reduced economic opportunities
→ Reduced income
→ Food insecurity
→ Inability to pay for rent & NFIs.
→ Inability to access health-care
→ Resorting to negative coping strategies.

EXPORT of mineral resources risk drying up.

IMPORT of basic goods risks reducing or stopping

PRICES of basic goods INCREASE

Containment measures in North Africa & Europe are expected to affect

REMITTENCES ↓

Borders closed to people movement =

⬆ Increased number of people stranded, unable to move onwards or return home.

Border closures risks pushing —
• Small scale traders
• Daily workers
• Livestock herders

to cross at unofficial crossings, used by smugglers and traffickers
→ INCREASED PROTECTION CONCERNS

Where state presence is limited, armed groups are likely to enforce their own versions of containment measures.

CONFLICT PERSISTS in the region.

COVID-19 will aggravate humanitarian conditions.

MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS
→ harder to flee conflict

Under containment measures —

• Peace keeping & counter terrorism missions may scale down

• Armed groups may highlight government failures, stoke grievences and position themselves as protector of the people.

HEALTH:

Risk of decreased resources to respond to other epidemics & health needs.

CHILDREN not in SCHOOL are at risk of —
• VIOLENCE
• EXPLOITATION
• ABUSE

COVID-19's economic impact may see increased

CHILD LABOUR

CHILD MARRIAGE

COMPLIANCE IS DIFFICULT

The key challenges to maintaining recommended hygiene standards are —

WATER SCARCITY
LACK OF SOAP
* especially in rural areas

Religious gatherings, particularly around Ramadan, may see less social distancing practised.

SWE 2020

Overview

COVID-19 in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

As of 28 April, 632 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in Burkina Faso and 42 related deaths. Mali recorded 408 confirmed cases and 23 related deaths, while Niger reported 701 confirmed cases and 29 related deaths (WHO 28/04/2020). Although the numbers are low, testing is limited and there is no reliable mortality data. Both the virus and containment measures pose a risk to the living conditions and wellbeing of the populations of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

Burkina Faso was the first country to notify WHO of COVID-19 cases on 9 March, followed by Niger on 18 March, and Mali on 25 March. The three countries have weak health systems and limited national capacity (in terms of both medical staff and equipment) to test and monitor the epidemic. In Burkina Faso, 1.5 million people out of a population of 10 million depend on humanitarian health assistance. In Mali, 1.5 million people are estimated in need of health assistance (out of 19 million people), and in Niger 1.2 million people (out of 22.5 million people) (OCHA 15/04/2020; OCHA 24/01/2020; OCHA 13/01/2020).

The governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have put measures in place to reduce the spread of the virus. These include measures to prevent, mitigate, and respond to the virus as well as measures to address some of the foreseen economic and social consequences of the containment measures (ACAPS 26/03/2020).

Similarities in COVID-19 containment measures

The three countries have adopted containment measures that include limiting gatherings and enforcing movement restrictions, but none have implemented full lockdown. **A nationwide full lockdown would paralyse these countries' economies and have a huge impact on populations already experiencing very high levels of poverty and food insecurity.** Over 2 million people face food insecurity in Burkina Faso, 2 million in Niger, and 1.3 million in Mali. COVID-19 containment measures are expected to affect households' livelihood conditions and aggravate the food security and nutrition situation in these countries. Burkina Faso is the only country to have implemented a partial lockdown and this only applies to areas with confirmed cases of COVID-19.

A full lockdown in all three of these countries would require additional security forces to monitor the implementation of COVID-19 containment measures. This is not possible in countries facing increased insecurity and conflict.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have all declared a state of health emergency. This means that governments are allowed to rule by decree or adopt administrative measures with the objective of reducing the spread of COVID-19. During a state of emergency or health emergency governments can adopt measures that temporarily limit individual freedoms, such as freedom of movement (DW 02/04/2020).

The three countries all announced some form of temporary social protection programmes to mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 containment measures.

COVID-19 containment measures by country

Overall, the measures introduced vary between the three countries, as does the level of adherence to measures by the public. Each country also has a different capacity to enforce measures, particularly in insecure areas where there is limited government control. National governments will have to continue to make sweeping policy changes without clear or reliable health data.

Burkina Faso

A range of measures were introduced on 21 March, including nationwide school closures, suspension of commercial flights flying into international airports, and closure of all land borders, except for transportation of goods (ACAPS Dataset 20/04/2020;Gov.UK 22/04/2020). Humanitarian, military and domestic flights were not suspended (Sidwaya 20/03/2020; France 24 19/03/2020). A national curfew from 7 pm to 5 am was also announced and a state of health emergency was declared in Burkina Faso on 26 March.

From 27 March all cities that reported at least one confirmed COVID-19 case, including the capital city Ouagadougou, were initially locked down for 14 days. Localised lockdowns remain in place in cities with COVID-19 cases. Transport of people between cities is not allowed and businesses (restaurants, bars, and markets) are closed. 36 main markets were closed in Ouagadougou, and livestock markets were closed across the country. One of Ouagadougou's main markets was soon reopened. Other markets across the country remain closed. Checkpoints have been put in place to ensure that only trucks transporting goods enter and exit the towns placed under lockdown.

Movement within cities under lockdown is allowed, although it is recommended to stay home. Public events are prohibited, while religious gatherings are allowed but subject to physical distancing requirements (Le Monde 17/03/2020). On 16 April, the government announced that from 27 April protective masks must be worn in public places (Le Faso.net 28/04/2020).

The government of Burkina Faso has implemented socioeconomic measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 containment measures on the most vulnerable groups of the population, mainly poor households and informal workers. These include free treatment for COVID-19 patients, financial support for enterprises affected by containments measures, and the establishment of solidarity funds in support of women to finance the vegetables and fruit trade business (BBC 03/04/2020).

Mali

On 19 March the government announced social distancing and movement restriction measures. These include the closure of both private and public schools nationwide, which will last until 9 May 2020, and limiting attendance at conferences, meetings, and religious gatherings to 50 people (Maliactu 09/04/2020). Religious gatherings have however continued regardless (France 24 15/04/2020; Le Monde 24/04/2020). All international flights from countries affected by COVID-19 were suspended, except for commercial cargo flights.

Despite social distancing measures, the two-round parliamentary elections were held on 29 March and 19 April. A very low turnout was recorded, amid fear of the spread of COVID-19 and the threat of attacks during the polls by Islamist armed groups (DW 30/03/2020; France 24 20/04/2020; France 24 29/03/2020).

On 26 March the government of Mali announced the state of health emergency, which adds to the state of emergency already in place due to security reasons (Xinhuanet 26/03/2020). A national curfew from 9 pm to 5 am was announced (BBC 26/03/2020).

Mali implemented socioeconomic measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 containment measures, including financial support to the national economy and support to medium and small size enterprises (ACAPS Dataset 20/04/2020).

Niger

Social distancing measures and movement restrictions have been put in place in Niger. A nationwide school closure has been enforced since 20 March. Gatherings (work or religious) of over 50 people have been banned and businesses including bars, theatres, and cinemas have been forced to close. Markets in Niger, as in Mali, remain open. International commercial flights have been suspended, while military flights, humanitarian flights, commercial cargo flights, and domestic flights are still permitted. Land borders are closed except for transportation of goods (ACAPS Dataset 20/04/2020). All these measures are being renewed every two weeks.

A national health state of emergency was declared in Niger on 27 March. Niger implemented a nationwide curfew initially from 7 pm to 6 am. The curfew was eased to 9 pm to 5 am on 22 April, following protests and riots in several cities across the country in the lead up to Ramadan and the desire to attend religious celebrations (World Aware 23/04/2020).

Niger has also implemented several socioeconomic measures to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 containment measures. COVID-19 patients would receive free treatment in hospitals and the government announced it will increase the capacity of the health systems by hiring 1,500 new health workers and ensuring they will be equipped with personal protective equipment (ACAPS Dataset 20/04/2020).

Current impact of COVID-19 containment measures

COVID-19 containment measures in the Sahel region, including movement restrictions, have already had an impact on both humanitarian and development operations in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, as well as on cross-border dynamics and migration. The international travel restrictions caused UNHCR and IOM to temporarily suspend refugee resettlement activity, and voluntary returns programmes (UNHCR 17/03/2020). As a result, in Niger, over 2,000 migrants who were part of IOM's voluntary return programme remain in transit centres in Niger (ACAPS 16/04/2020). In Burkina Faso, on 25 March 600 people were prevented from crossing the border from Burkina Faso to Cote d'Ivoire, at Yendéré border point (IOM DTM 26/03/2020).

Curfews and social distancing measure are having an impact on economic activities and livelihoods. The partial closure of markets in Burkina Faso, as well as curfews (some street venders used to sell at night) and the closure of restaurants and bars in the three countries is having a significant impact on workers, often employed in the informal sector, and their families. Almost 90% of workers in Sub-Saharan Africa, are employed in the informal sector (ISPI 09/04/2020.

In Mali, the security crisis is escalating. *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wa al-Muslimin* (JNIM), the Malian branch of al-Qaeda operating in the Sahel, announced on 14 April that COVID-19 is a 'God sent soldier' able to weaken the Malian army and foreign forces. Between 25 March and 8 April, the JNIM continued to launch a number of attacks in several villages in Mopti, Gao, and Timbuktu regions targeting the Malian army and civilians (ACLED 11/04/2020).

Vulnerability to containment measures

Conflict and insecurity

The impact of COVID-19 containment measures risks aggravating the humanitarian situation as conflict persists. Overall, conflict has largely affected the provision of basic services in the three countries, including health and education, and aggravated the food security and nutrition situation in the region.

Conflict in Mali and Niger escalated in 2015-2016, due to intercommunal violence and the insurgency of Islamist armed groups. In Mali, fighting between pastoralist farmers and nomadic herders 'self-defence' militias intensified in 2018-2019, while the attacks of Islamist armed groups such as Katiba Macina and the JNIM increased. In Niger, attacks of armed groups have been increasing since 2018 as conflict in Mali has continued to spread into the country. In Niger, the areas bordering Nigeria have also been struck by Boko Haram attacks since 2015. In Burkina Faso the security situation deteriorated

significantly in 2019 due to attacks perpetrated by both 'self-defence' and Islamist armed groups (ACAPS 22/03/2019). Due to conflict spillover, the border area shared by the three countries known as Liptako Gourma is particularly sensitive (ACAPS 2019).

COVID-19 containment measures are also increasing protection concerns among the displaced population. Over the past two years, protracted conflict and increasing insecurity resulted in the displacement of over 1.1 million people in the three countries. In late March, the Goudoubo refugee camp in Burkina Faso, which hosted 9,000 Malian refugees, was again the scene of attacks by armed groups. Following continued attacks, schools and health centres in the camp were closed and the majority of the refugees returned to Mali. Some 2,500 refugees joined Burkinabe IDPs in the town of Dori, where basic services and shelter are scarce (UNHCR 03/04/2020). Following COVID-19 containment measures, it will become increasingly difficult for refugees to return home due to border closures or seek refuge in other urban areas of Burkina Faso because of inter-urban transport restrictions.

As attacks on refugee camps became frequent in 2018-2019, UN agencies and INGOs involved in the refugee response such as UNHCR have been forced to relocate their staff to safer places. **COVID-19 measures may further limit humanitarian access to IDPs and refugees in Burkina Faso and neighbouring countries** (UNHCR 03/04/2020).

In the three countries, there is the risk that armed groups will take advantage of COVID-19 containment measures. COVID-19 risks posing a challenge to peacekeeping and international 'counter-terrorism' operations, such as the G5 Sahel operation. Restrictions on international travel means staff rotation and deployments to most conflict settings may be prevented from happening. The UN Mission in Mali had to adapt to COVID-19 containment measures by identifying non-critical staff and deciding which staff members would be location or non-location based (IPI 02/04/2020). This risks giving armed groups in the region more space to increase attacks against civilians and gain control over territories and resources, trafficking and smuggling routes, and trade routes. This would lead to growing protection concern.

On 23 March, the UN Secretary General appealed for a global ceasefire amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram in Niger and by the JNIM and 'self-defence' armed groups in Mali between end of March and beginning of April show that a ceasefire is unlikely to become a reality in the Sahel (ACLED 11/04/2020; ACLED 02/04/2020).

Scope and adaptability of social protection programmes

The three countries score very low in the Human Development Index, which considers indicators such as life expectancy at birth, education, and Global National Income (GNI) per capita (UNDP 2019). Over 30% of the total population live in extreme poverty in Mali and

Burkina Faso, and over 60% of the total population in Niger (World Poverty 2020). Social protection programmes are essential to address poverty in the region and support the most vulnerable. In the three countries, social protection programmes are often implemented with the support of development organisations and agencies, and are aimed at addressing poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition, as well as build resilience to climatic shocks (FAO; The World Bank 2017).

The governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have put in place new temporary social protection measures to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 (ACAPS 21/04/2020; Vv.Aa.17/04/2020). It is very difficult to understand who the targeted population groups are because there is no clear definition of vulnerable groups, nor information on how these groups will be identified.

Measures Burkina Faso has announced include:

- Subsidies for water bills and water points, and electricity bills for households
- Subsidies on water and electricity costs for market venders and businesses affected by the measures
- Price controls for staple food (cereals, sugar, oil), as well as gasoline and cooking gas
- In-kind transfers to market vendors who have been closed due to the outbreak
- Cash transfers to informal sector workers (e.g. fruit and vegetable sellers, particularly women). USD 10 million has been allocated for this.
- Flexible measures by the Western African Central Bank (BCEAO) to open an electronic account for mobile money and allow money transfers and digital payments in order to limit contact and movement

Measures Mali has announced include:

- The government will be taking over electricity and water bills for the months of April and May 2020 for low income households
- Free distribution of 56,000 tonnes of cereals and 16,000 tonnes of livestock food to vulnerable people affected by COVID-19
- Exemption from Value Added Tax on electricity and water bills for all consumers for the months of April, May and June 2020
- Flexible measures by the Western African Central Bank (BCEAO) to open an electronic account for mobile money and allow money transfers and digital payments in order to limit contact and movement

Measures Niger has announced include:

- Electricity and water bills will be paid by the state for the most vulnerable
- Suspension of Value Added Tax for COVID-19 related importation

- Flexible measures by the Western African Central Bank (BCEAO) to open an electronic account for mobile money and allow money transfers and digital payments in order to limit contact and movement

These temporary socioeconomic measures will probably mitigate the impact of COVID-19 containment measures for some people but only in the short-term. There is a lack of clarity as to how widespread the implementation of these measures can be and for how long the support can be sustained. Dire socioeconomic conditions in the three countries existed before the COVID-19 crisis. In order to address the root causes of poverty in the countries, stronger and longer-term social protection programmes are required.

Reliance on informal economies

Informal labour is "any economic activity that does not comply with the obligations to register, keep accounts, and pay taxes". In low income countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, a large portion of the population relies on informal labour. In Sub-Saharan Africa the informal economy represents 89% of total employment. Of the informal employment, 98% is represented by agriculture, followed by service (76%) and industry (73%) (ILO 01/2019; OECD 11/2011).

Food economy is the biggest informal sector in West Africa, as households often rely on seasonal farming and harvesting, herding, and small food trade. **COVID-19 movement restrictions could prevent households from conducting seasonal agricultural activities or from selling and buying food in the markets**, worsening the already dire food security and livelihood conditions of most vulnerable households (FAO 2020). When the harvest season in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger ends around April, many households start relying on daily labour and petty (small-scale) trade. However, communities dependent on cross-border activities might be affected by COVID-19 border closures (REACH 02/2020).

Households engaged in the informal food economy are less likely to be included in social protection programmes because there is often no record of informal workers. Only Burkina Faso has adopted socio-economic measures to support workers employed in the informal economy during the pandemic. Informal employment also means that workers are often not protected by labour laws (ACAPS 22/04/2020). The informal economy is also characterised by daily labour, and salaries or gains are received in cash, as well as by a significant "overlap between being informally employed and being poor" (ILO 01/2019). If workers employed in the informal economy lose their jobs, it is likely they will be unable to cope in the short term with the loss of income due to potential lack of financial security and job prospects. As a result, workers employed in the informal economy might be more vulnerable to fall into poverty and negative coping strategies. Informal workers in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger will potentially be unable to pay rents (eventually having to displace),

buy essential goods (food and non-food items), pay for transports or fuel to reach services and facilities.

Women are particularly vulnerable to lose employment and not to be included in social protection programmes as they represent over 92% of informal employment in Sub-Saharan Africa (the figure does not include the percentage of women involved in agricultural activities) (ILO 01/2019).

Commerce

Due to continued climatic shocks and conflict, food production in the three countries is low, despite the fact their economies largely rely on agriculture. This makes them dependent on the import of food and non-food items. The three countries are vulnerable to the overall decline in the global production of goods and trade and decrease in supply as a result of the pandemic. The consequent i**ncrease in prices of food and non-food items will hamper access to food and healthcare, which is already limited in these countries** (UN News 02/04/2020). An increase in prices of imported essential goods will possibly also raise the logistics and procurement costs for humanitarian organisations.

National and international COVID-19 containment measures will strain Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso economies also because foreign direct investment channels will be halted (WFP 01/04/2020; The World Bank 17/04/2020). Finally, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso are rich in mineral resources. As the production of manufacturing goods is declining in China and elsewhere following COVID-19 containment measures and will continue to decline due to the economic downturn, **a decline in the global demand of raw material is expected to affect Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger,** as well as other resource dependent economies in Africa.

Remittances

According to The World Bank, in 2019 remittances constituted around 3.3% of GDP in Burkina Faso, 5.9% in Mali, and 3.4% in Niger. This calculation is based on money that flows through formal channels. The total volume of remittance inflow is likely to be even higher.

Mali is also a country with high rates of emigration and in 2015 it was among the top ten recipients of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank Group 04/2020). Overall, it is very difficult to track the actual number of migrants working abroad from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as they normally use informal channels to migrate to North Africa and then Europe, and many are likely to be employed in informal economies. Lockdowns and movement restrictions have led to the closure of many businesses in Europe and North Africa, including in Spain, Italy, France, and Algeria (countries of intended destination or countries of transit for many migrants coming from the Sahel region). **Many migrants,**

asylum seekers, and refugee workers from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger living abroad **may have lost their jobs** as a result (RFI 17/04/2020).

COVID-19 has also forced money transfer operators to close. This has made it difficult to send money, especially to Sub-Saharan Africa, including in Mali, where most of the payments are still done in cash (World Bank Group 04/2020).

Cross-border dynamics and migration

Many of the region's inhabitants are nomadic pastoralists and commonly move across borders in search of pasture and water. Migration is therefore a vital component of Sahel's economy. Over the past half a century, the impact of climate change in the region has been severe (droughts and heavy rainfalls), triggering increased levels of displacement and migration. In addition, the spread of armed conflict drives high refugee flows.

Borders across the Sahel are porous, and particularly in the Liptako Gourma border area between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, where there are strong cultural and social ties and conflict is most active. While the bulk of migration remains intra-regional, Mali, Burkina Faso, and particularly Niger are also transit countries for West and Central Africans moving north with the intention to reach Libya or Algeria and in some cases Europe. Since 2016 there has also been an increasing trend of return movement to these countries including voluntary return movement, and people who have been forcibly returned from other countries in the Sahel region and from North Africa (Climate Migration, accessed 04/2020; The Guardian, 02/08/2013; MMC, 09/2019; RTE, 12/02/2020; MMC, 22/04/2020).

Refugees, returnees and asylum seekers registered in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso:

	Niger	Mali	Burkina Faso
Refugees	215,804	26,671	21,373
Returnees	29,882 (from Nigeria)	76,636	
Asylum seekers	3,373		34

(UNHCR, 31/03/2020; 29/03/2020; 25/03/2020).

People travelling across the Sahel, often with the intention to reach North Africa or Europe, are particularly vulnerable to the border closures that have been put in place, **and there will likely be an increase in the number of people stranded, unable to move onwards or return to their place of origin.** In Niger several thousand migrants remain stranded in IOM transit centres and due to the movement restrictions, they cannot be repatriated to their countries of origin in other parts of West Africa. Around 75 Nigeriens are also

reportedly stuck in a no man's land at the border between Mali and Burkina Faso. There are also incidents of migrants being violently pushed back by security forces at border crossings between Niger and Libya, Niger and Algeria and Mali and Algeria.

There is risk that containment measures and attempts to block cross-border movement will provoke anti-foreigner sentiment, leading to a potential rise in xenophobia and consequently increased protection concerns. Even amidst extensive movement restrictions and grounding of flights, there is a risk of increased deportations of migrants, overwhelming the already limited capacity of aid agencies to respond (ISPI, 12/04/2020; Al Jazeera, 09/04/2020; Africa News, 11/04/2020).

Since 2015, transit borders in the Sahel, particularly the Liptako Gourma region have seen increased security as a result of an internationally backed effort to reduce migration to Europe. This resulted in many people losing their livelihood, as they were prevented from crossing the border for daily labour activities or small-trade. It is possible that similar outcomes will be observed in other parts of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso as a result of COVID-19 containment measures. **With sections of the population unable to generate income a general sense of frustration and desperation is likely to grow, as was the case following the 2015 border securitisation agenda. There are concerns that further restrictions on mobility have the potential to contribute to a further destabilisation within the three countries and the wider Sahel region** (ISPI, 12/04/2020; RTE, 12/02/2020; MMC, 09/2019).

While a reduction in cross-border movement including for small-trade and herding purposes will occur in some areas, preventing this entirely is likely impossible and in more rural or less densely populated areas, cross-border business may continue almost uninterrupted. In other areas the trading of goods will be pushed underground and out of sight of authorities. People are more likely to resort to the use of irregular crossing points, exposing them to greater protection risks as these routes are often used by smuggling and trafficking networks. **Should irregular routes become more active some illicit trading activities, such as arms trafficking, may increase. This risks increasing insecurity in the region** (Small Arms Survey 12/2019). This was the trajectory of events following 2015 efforts to curtail migration from the Sahel. While an overall drop in migration away from the region was observed, the number of people reliant on smuggling networks increased, and people became more vulnerable to traffickers and other protection threats (University of Nottingham – Human Rights Law Centre, 10/01/2018; VOA, 03/04/2020; MMC, 09/2019).

Rule of law

Out of a total of 128 countries in the Rule of Law index, Burkina Faso ranks at 70, Mali at 106, and Niger at 103. The rule of law index measures the level of performance of countries' jurisdictions and rule of law performance based on a number of indicators, including fundamental rights, open government, or order and security (World Justice Project, 2020).

Ineffective rule of law and weak security institutions are among the root causes of conflict in Mali. When conflict escalated in 2012 the authority of the government was further undermined; up to today there are swathes of territory with little to no state presence. Since the conflict began reports of human rights abuses, orchestrated by state forces and armed groups, have been widespread, including summary executions, arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, rape, the destruction and looting of property. Amid multiple conflicts in Niger, including the spillover of the insurgency in Mali and the Boko-Haram conflict on the Nigeria border, human rights abuses are also rife. Burkina Faso maintained an historically stronger rule of law and remained relatively conflict free, until the Malian conflict spilled across the border in 2016. This led to a collapse of parts of a country previously viewed as a model for stability. Government forces have also carried out extrajudicial killings. There are accusations against government forces in all three countries that the Fulani ethnic group are being deliberately targeted due to perceived links with Islamist insurgent groups (MMC, 09/2019; Rusi, 09/04/2020; The OWP, 22/04/2020; HRW, 12/06/2019; 20/04/2020).

Enforcement of measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 risks legitimising aggressive behaviour, resulting in an increase of human rights abuses. State forces may use disproportionate force against civilians, under the guise they are enforcing adherence to containment measures. In Burkina Faso there are reports of armed police officers and soldiers enforcing a curfew and threatening people seen in the streets. In Niger, journalists and human rights defenders have reportedly been threatened by government authorities for speaking out about the state of the pandemic in the country (The Washington Post, 15/04/2020; Newsweek, 23/04/2020).

Furthermore, armed groups active in all three countries may stoke grievances among the local population by highlighting government failures to respond to COVID-19, while positioning themselves as the protectors of the community. Such a strategy risks entrenching divide between communities even further (The Washington Post, 14/04/2020).

Standard of essential services

Health

Functioning health facilities are insufficient in the three countries. In highly insecure areas health centres and hospitals have been destroyed or closed and doctors and health workers have fled the conflict. In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Western Niger over 241 health centres are currently closed or non-operational due to conflict, with 121 of these in Burkina Faso (OCHA 24/02/2020). A very limited number of health facilities in the region will be able to test and respond to COVID-19. As the number of COVID-19 positive cases increases, **the health systems in the three countries will be quickly overwhelmed, and unable to address COVID-19 or other health problems** (VOA News 03/04/2020; OCHA 15/04/2020). Respiratory and waterborne diseases are common in the three countries,

especially during the dry and rainy seasons. In 2019, Niger faced two major outbreaks of measles and polio. In Niger and Mali outbreaks of measles, meningitis, cholera, and malaria are recurrent due to environmental conditions, as well as the lack or limited availability of WASH and health facilities (OCHA 15/04/2020; OCHA 24/01/2020; OCHA 13/01/2020). Meningitis and dengue fever outbreaks are also recurrent in Burkina Faso, the latter especially during the rainy season (Vv.Aa. 11/2019). **Government and international assistance must focus on the continuation of other essential health programmes** (MSF 21/04/2020).

Maternal and neonatal healthcare, psychosocial assistance, and GBV-related services are lacking in the three countries. COVID-19 containment measures, including the allocation of funds to the pandemic response, pose a risk to certain health services. **There is a risk these services will not be seen as essential during the pandemic, as has already been the case in high-income countries.**

Education

School closures have been implemented worldwide as key measure to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, all announced nationwide temporary school closures as part of their COVID-19 containment measures. However, in conflict-affected countries, school closures are common. On 15 April, over 2,500 schools were already closed in Burkina Faso because of insecurity (OCHA 15/04/2020). In Mali and Niger respectively over 1,100 and 118 schools were non-functional at end of February 2020 (OCHA 24/02/2020). **Children out of school are at a higher risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse** (Save the Children 03/04/2020). In addition, in low-income countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the economic impact of COVID-19 might lead to families deciding not to send their children back to school after the re-opening and **adopt negative coping mechanism such as sending children to work or organising early marriages.** Girls will be particularly vulnerable to child marriage and, overall, are more at risk of dropping out of school. In low income countries, **lack of access to education also means that young boys and girls are increasingly vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition.** Often governmental and humanitarian organisations' education programmes include the distribution of meals in schools.

Social and cultural behaviours and the level of community adherence

One of the main limitations to the level of community adherence to containment measures in the three countries is related to compliance with hygiene practices, such as hand-washing. **Compliance with hygiene rules in the three countries is difficult due to water scarcity, especially in rural areas.** As a consequence, it is expected that only households with easy access to clean water will be able to strictly comply with hygiene rules (IRC 22/04/2020; Le Faso 13/04/2020).

Adherence to containment measures was reported to be a problem in Niger. On 20 April some citizens in the capital Niamey clashed with security forces when authorities prevented a religious gathering in one of the city's mosques, after the curfew. A curfew from 7 pm to 6 am was implemented in Niger, and gatherings, including religious ones, are temporarily prohibited (Le Figaro 20/04/2020). In Niger, the curfew was changed from 9 pm to 5 am on 23 April, in order to ease the measure and possibly encourage more adherence (Le Sahel 23/04/2020). In Mali, gatherings in mosques for the Friday prayer are already taking place without the limit of attendance to 50 people and compliance with physical distancing measures (Le Monde 24/04/2020). As Ramadan has started, there is the possibility that more religious gatherings, for prayers and to break the fast, will take place despite COVID-19 measures.

In Burkina Faso, it is compulsory to wear protective masks in public places. Local media sources report that the population is not adhering to the this. According to the same sources, not all of the population is complying to this measure because masks are too expensive for poor households (APA News 27/04/2020; Le Faso.net 27/04/2020).