



Advancing food security in the Sahel: Reflections and pathways forward

Side event on the margins of the first regular session of the Executive Board, 2026
Tuesday, 24 February 2026, 13:30–14:30
Auditorium, WFP headquarters

The WFP Regional Office for Western and Central Africa (WACARO), together with the permanent representations of **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, invite Executive Board delegates to a high-level panel discussion on the Central Sahel. The event aims to foster a more nuanced understanding of the evolving context, including the needs of the populations, challenges actors face and efforts being deployed to ensure assistance reaches populations despite an increasingly complex operating environment. The panel serves as an opportunity to jointly reflect on solutions and actions to safeguard humanitarian responses while advancing long-term food security solutions across the region.

Objectives of the event

1. Raise the profile of the humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities faced by populations across Central Sahel, recognizing the volatility of the sub-region's evolving context.
2. Highlight the operating challenges actors face in Central Sahel, particularly linked to safeguarding humanitarian space and access constraints. Illustrate how adaptive, pragmatic and principled strategies are being implemented to reach communities in need.
3. Reinforce the criticality for the international community to remain engaged in Central Sahel by utilizing their voices to advocate for conditions that will secure support and sufficient resources to address the totality of the needs.

Proposed run of show

Opening remarks: WFP Executive Director and permanent representative of a Central Sahel State to welcome invitees to the event and set the scene for the dialogue (5 mins)

View from the field: A short video will illustrate WFP's efforts on the ground – highlighting how teams are delivering assistance, adapting to the contextual constraints, and working with local partners and authorities to sustain operations despite challenges (3 mins)

Panel Discussion: Four panellists will respond to a series of pre-set questions to provide the audience with an overview of the evolutions of the context and needs in Central Sahel, offer the realities from the ground in terms of responses, and give their perspectives on the solutions required to move towards a region that is stable, food secure and able to prosper (20 mins)

- Facilitation of the discussion will be provided by Mr George Fominyen, Deputy Director of Communications & Media, WFP
- Confirmed panellists:
 - o WFP Country Director of Burkina Faso
 - o Permanent representative of Mali
 - o WFP Regional Director for WACARO (previously Country Director of Niger)
 - o Director, Displacement and migration; crisis prevention and management, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany

Q&A: Floor opens to Executive Board delegates and invitees (25 mins)

Closing remarks: The permanent representation of a Member State (list to be identified) to conclude the discussion and summarize the key takeaways (5 mins)

Background

The Central Sahel region – comprising Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – continues to face a complex and rapidly evolving humanitarian situation. In 2025, almost 3,7 million people were classified in acute food insecurity in Niger and Mali, driven by persistent conflict and insecurity, internal displacement, climatic shocks, economic challenges and structural vulnerabilities. Looking forward to 2026, an estimated 4 million people are projected to face acute food insecurity in the 2026 lean season (June–August) in Mali and Niger according to the [November 2025 Cadre Harmonisé](#). The Cadre Harmonisé exercise was not conducted in Burkina Faso during 2024 and 2025; however, the food and nutrition security situation remains challenging, similar to Mali and Niger.

Yet these countries do not receive the attention, funding or political engagement they urgently need. Notably, in its [June 2024 report](#), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) listed all three Central Sahel countries among the top five most neglected displacement crises in the world, with Burkina Faso ranked first for the second consecutive year. NRC's ranking is based on a combination of factors: lack of humanitarian funding, limited media coverage, and insufficient international political and diplomatic engagement relative to the scale of needs. In its [June 2025 report](#), the NRC ranked Burkina Faso as the fourth most neglected displacement crisis in the world, with neighbouring Mali in fifth place.

On the ground, insecurity has significantly limited delivery, hampering the ability of humanitarian actors to reach people in need – particularly the most vulnerable. Increased risks for the safety of humanitarian workers, and insecurity on key transport routes – including risk of ambushes and improvised explosive devices – are among the main sources of operational constraints. In hard-to-reach areas, communities are effectively cut off from both commercial supplies and life-saving humanitarian assistance, resulting in critical humanitarian conditions. Without safe and unhindered access to people in need, WFP and other humanitarian organizations cannot fulfil their life-saving mandate, resulting in unnecessary suffering. While common challenges remain, efforts to mitigate these operational constraints also vary from country to country, and these will be discussed during the panel.

Governments in Central Sahel are prioritizing investments to transform food systems, championing food sovereignty as an objective. WFP is a proven and trusted partner, at the strategic and operational levels, enabling governments to advance integrated resilient food systems in line with national priorities and the needs of communities. These efforts are fundamental to reducing vulnerabilities and reinforcing stability, going hand-in-hand with life-saving assistance as a mechanism to promote food security in Central Sahel. The United Nations system, including WFP, is committed to increasing support and collaboration for resilience-building activities and rural development priorities across Central Sahel, recognizing that they are essential to sustainably reducing vulnerabilities and promoting enhanced livelihoods in these regions.

Nevertheless, navigating operational challenges and advancing solutions necessitates a collaborative approach that WFP cannot achieve alone. It requires coordinated efforts for community engagement, national policy advocacy, and sustained international support including sufficient resourcing to keep effective responses at the scale required to address community-level needs. Strong partnerships among actors, governments, the private sector and donors are critical to delivering that safe, targeted and timely assistance while working to break the cycle of vulnerability that hinders development in the region.