



Economic and Social Council

**ADVANCE UNEDITED
VERSION**

2025 session

25 July 2024 –30 July 2025

Agenda item 13 (f) and (g)

Coordination, programme and other questions:

African countries emerging from conflict

Sustainable development in the Sahel

Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region by the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Economic and Social Council decisions 2024/344¹ and 2024/345², provides an overview of efforts within the United Nations system to implement integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

*Late submission of the draft report due to the inadequacy of the initial report submitted.

¹ <https://ecosoc.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/decision-2024344.pdf>

² <https://ecosoc.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/decision-2024345.pdf>

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council decisions 2024/344³ and 2024⁴/345. In decision 2024/344⁵, the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit at its 2025 session a report on the implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan by the United Nations system. Furthermore, in decision 2024/345⁶, the Council requested the Secretary-General to report at its 2025 session on how the United Nations system is implementing integrated, coherent and coordinated support to achieve sustainable development in the Sahel region.

2. While both contexts continue to face protracted crises and deep structural challenges—including political instability, economic shocks, conflict, and climate-related disruptions—this report highlights not only the scale and persistence of these challenges, but also the resilience of local communities and the tangible progress achieved through United Nations support. In South Sudan, despite worsening humanitarian conditions, delayed political reforms, and economic fragility, the United Nations has expanded area-based coordination models in strategic states, supported constitutional review processes and helped integrate humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts to address local needs. In the Sahel, the United Nations system has made progress through the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), including expanded access to food security, maternal health, and climate-resilient infrastructure through coordinated national and regional initiatives. These efforts have bolstered governance, peace and security, climate resilience, and inclusive development, particularly in the context of new partnerships with national authorities, regional organizations and civil society.

II. South Sudan

3. During the reporting period, South Sudan faced a convergence of humanitarian, economic, political, security, and environmental crises that have unfolded simultaneously. Since November, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, has removed and reappointed a number of government officials in key leadership positions, which was criticized by various opposition groups. Rising political tensions between the Parties to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan have progressively intensified, with heightening the conflict between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and opposition forces in many parts of the country. Ongoing regional and international efforts to mediate and keep the peace process on track stalled with the Tumaini Initiative adjourned without progress on 20 February 2025 by the President of Kenya, William Ruto, at the request of the Government of South Sudan.

4. Escalating violence and instability were evident through clashes and arrests of various key figures or leaders, notably in Upper Nile, Central Equatoria and Western Equatoria States, prompting regional and international concerns. The arrest of First Vice President Riek Machar and other high profile opposition leaders triggered widespread reactions and accusations that the peace process was under threat, with opposition groups claiming the abrogation of the peace agreement and suspension of security mechanisms until opposition leaders were released. Despite these setbacks, government officials reaffirmed commitments to avoiding a return to full-scale conflict.

5. In September 2024, the parties to R-ARCSS agreed to extend the transitional period for a fourth time from 22 February 2025 to 22 February 2027, with elections rescheduled for December 2026.⁷ Limited progress was made in 2024 to advance the activities of key technical and electoral institutions, i.e. the National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC), the Political Parties Council (PPC) and the National Election Commission (NEC).⁸ Key provisions of the R-ARCSS remain pending, including those related to permanent constitution making process, national elections, transitional security arrangements, public finance management, reconstruction, and transitional justice.

³ <https://ecosoc.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/decision-2024344.pdf>

⁴ <https://ecosoc.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/decision-2024345.pdf>

⁵ <https://ecosoc.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/decision-2024344.pdf>

⁶ <https://ecosoc.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024/decision-2024345.pdf>

⁷ Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, RJMEC Report No. 025/24

⁸ <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc15989.doc.htm> .

6. The humanitarian situation in South Sudan remains dire, with millions of people in need of urgent assistance. According to the South Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) 2025 launched in December 2024, about 9.3 million people (69 per cent the population) require some form of humanitarian assistance, including food, shelter and health care.⁹ The HNRP prioritizes 5.4 million people, including 1.23 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 680,000 refugees, and 440,000 returnees. As of 24 March 2025, 10.5 per cent of the required \$1.7 billion has been funded.¹⁰ Between September and December 2024, the IDP population increased by 8.15% from 1.84 million to 1.99 million.¹¹ In addition, there are over 548,430 refugees and 3,903 persons seeking refuge in South Sudan in 2025.¹² Of the refugee and asylum seeker population, 64,351 individuals (40,804 women and 23,547 men) are identified as persons with specific needs. Among them, 20% are persons with disabilities, with the majority residing in northern South Sudan.

7. South Sudan's economy continued to be characterized by rising inflation with overall CPI of 181.27 in March 2025¹³, weak transparency and accountability frameworks, a depreciating South Sudanese Pound, and declining government revenues resulting in 11-12 months of salary arrears for civil servants and members of the organized forces. In January 2025, the Government of South Sudan announced the resumption of oil production in Upper Nile State (which accounts for 70 per cent of oil revenue) following the lifting of force majeure by the Government of Sudan.¹⁴ Oil partners have requested the government to address gaps identified through security evaluations in operating areas, crude quantity assessment and reconciliation, and cash call issues as production resumes.

8. On 25 November 2024, President Salva Kiir Mayardit signed the fiscal year 2024/2025 budget into law. The approved budget of South Sudanese pound (SSP) 4.2 trillion (approximately \$1.651 billion) has a deficit of 46 per cent – equivalent to SSP 1.9 trillion (\$758 million). The budget for 2024/2025 is 22 per cent lower than 2023/2024 fiscal year budget. The Government plans to raise 50 per cent of total revenues through non-oil revenues, which is substantially higher than the 13 per cent planned for 2023/2024 fiscal year budget. It intends to fund the deficit through grants and external borrowing.

9. The South Sudanese pound depreciated sharply, by over 400 per cent, from 1,260 pounds per United States dollar on 2 January 2024 to 5,800 pounds per dollar on 25 March 2025 in the unofficial exchange rate market. The official exchange rate has gradually moved closer to the unofficial rate, rising from 1,092 pounds per dollar in January 2024 to 4,525 pounds per dollar in March 2025.

A. Key development issues

10. In July 2024, the United Nations country team supported the Government of South Sudan in presenting its first 2024 Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF)¹⁵. While the VNR highlighted key milestones achieved in mainstreaming the SDGs into national development plans, policy, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation systems, it also documented only limited progress toward their achievement.

11. Progress on SDG 1 has stalled. Of the estimated 12.4 million people living in South Sudan, over 8 million are estimated to be living in extreme poverty and in need of some degree of humanitarian assistance. The inaugural national Multidimensional Poverty Index¹⁶ found 82.5 per cent of the population in South Sudan to be multidimensionally poor, experiencing deprivations in 55.3 per cent of all indicators.

12. Adult literacy (the population of 15 years and older) remains the lowest in the region, rising from 27 per cent in 2008 to 34.5 per cent in 2022.¹⁷ Teacher retention and compensation, including delayed salary payments, remained a barrier to access to education. Youth literacy (population of age of 15-24 years) stands at 47.9 per cent,

⁹ OCHA (2025). South Sudan: Humanitarian Response Plan press release

¹⁰ <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1223/summary>

¹¹ <https://dtm.iom.int/south-sudan>

¹² <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/ssd>

¹³ [CPI-for-Mar-2025.pdf](#)

¹⁴ [S/2025/24](#)

¹⁵ South Sudan VNR (2024)

¹⁶ NBS, National Multidimensional Poverty Index Report, 2023

¹⁷ South Sudan, VNR (2024)

with slightly lower rates among girls and young women (47.4 per cent) compared to boys and young men (48.4 per cent).⁹ Over 2.8 million children – 53 per cent of them girls¹⁸ - are out of school.¹⁹

13. The food security situation remains severe, driven by multiple shocks, including widespread flooding, sub-national violence, the conflict in Sudan, displacement, and a worsening economic crisis. Over 7.7 million people face severe food insecurity and malnutrition, with alarming levels of stunting and wasting among children²⁰, including approximately 31,000 South Sudanese returnees at risk of catastrophe/famine-level conditions, or Integrated Food Security Phase Classification phase 5, between December 2024 and March 2025. This number is projected to increase between April and July 2025 during the lean season.

14. South Sudan is grappling with a cholera outbreak, with cases spreading across the country. As of 23 March, 42,308 cases and 759 deaths were reported across 42 counties in nine states and two administrative areas. The Ministry of Health, with support from WHO, UNICEF, and partners, has administered 3,928,962 oral cholera vaccine doses—covering 92.3 per cent of the target population. Vaccination campaigns continue in other affected areas. Separately, on 7 February, the Ministry of Health declared an mpox outbreak in Juba; as of 20 March, six laboratory-confirmed mpox cases had been reported in Juba and the Malakal protection of civilians site.

15. The national budget suffers, among others, from a narrow tax base, challenges in public financial management systems and limited gender-responsiveness with insufficient funding allocated to basic services. Each fiscal year, divergence is observed between budget allocations, execution, and actual spending. Enhanced budget oversight capacities are crucial to promoting transparency and equitable allocations.

16. For years, social services delivery remains highly dependent on donor contributions, undermining sustainability and weakening national capacities for policy design, implementation and oversight, including data generation and use. The ongoing fiscal and economic crises, coupled with recent donor funding cuts threaten to erode essential services further.

17. The energy infrastructure continues to be underdeveloped. As of 2023, it is reported that only an estimated 5.4 percent of the population had access to electricity.²¹ Access to clean cooking is also extremely limited. The proportion of population covered by mobile network technology and internet users stagnate at 30 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively in 2023.²²

18. Only 2 per cent of the 20,000 km road network in South Sudan is paved.²³ This impedes trade and market integration and the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance. Limited transport and communications infrastructure have also led to persistent marginalization and unequal access to social and economic opportunities.

19. Commitments toward security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, community violence reduction, voluntary civilian disarmament and weapons and ammunition management remain outstanding due to political mistrust between key signatories, lack of transparency and funding constraints. Access to justice, protection of human rights and rule of law is impeded by weak accountability and limited capacity of law enforcement institutions, contributing to high rates of arbitrary detention.

20. The Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity has identified SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) as an “enabler” to unlock progress across all the sustainable development goals in South Sudan. However, gains remain fragile, threatened by sub-national violence and the economic crisis that entrenches pervasive poverty.

21. The Revised National Development Strategy (R-NDS) 2021–2024 aligns with both the African Union’s Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a focus on peace,

¹⁸ Invest in education, invest in teachers, invest in the future | UNICEF South Sudan

¹⁹ <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/q-a-with-over-3-million-children-out-of-school-in-south-sudan-we-must-work-together-to-protect-children-save-the-children-boss>

²⁰ [OCHA \(2024\) South Sudan: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025](#)

²¹ IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO. 2023. Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report.

²² [South Sudan VNR \(2024\)](#)

²³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudans-road-out-hunger>

governance, accountable institutions, economic diversification, resilience, economic growth, basic social service delivery and the empowerment of women and youth. The Revised National Development Strategy expired in June 2024, and a formal communication from the Government on its extension is still pending.

B. United Nations approach and response

22. The United Nations Development System formulated the 2023–2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which articulates its collective offer in support of the country's national priorities across all dimensions of sustainable development. In agreement with the Government, the UN Cooperation Framework was extended by one year to December 2026. In August, the UNCT agreed on four priority areas to intensify efforts to deliver sustainable development and prevent any further deterioration in the country. These priorities are: (1) governance, enabling environment and institutional strengthening; (2) food security and livelihoods diversification; (3) environment, conservation, sustainability and climate change adaptation; and (4) health and education.

23. In September 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office, organized a High-Level National Consultation workshop for preparations ahead of the Summit of the Future. Participants emphasized the urgency of empowering youth and women and the creation of a conducive environment for their active participation in South Sudan's social, political, economic, and national development processes. The Government committed to working with the United Nations and partners to implement the commitments and recommendations arising from the Summit of the Future and the Pact for the Future.

24. In 2024, PBF supported the Government to develop a National Strategy on Youth, Peace, and Security and advance the enactment of laws establishing the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation, and Healing and the Compensation and Reparation Authority. PBF also provided technical and institutional capacity support to the National Constitutional Review Commission and supported the development of women and youth charters on the constitution-making process. The PBF has approved five new projects for South Sudan, worth \$11 million.

25. With support from UNDP, South Sudan participated in the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29). The government developed and operationalized a COP29 Engagement Strategy to articulate its national climate priorities. This led to a mission from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Executive Director, creating opportunities to align South Sudan's priorities with GCF funding mechanisms to accelerate climate action.

26. In 2024, UNMISS and UNCT deployed climate security experts to integrate climate, peace, and security efforts into their operations to address climate-induced conflicts. The efforts strengthened peaceful coexistence and built climate resilience through tailored response actions, capacity building for staff and partners, and gender-sensitive approaches in dialogues and civilian protection.

27. In 2024, UNICEF collaborated with the United Nations agencies to support the Government in organizing a Joint Sector Review for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), following up on the Heads of States' Initiative and the WASH compact signed by the President of South Sudan. UNICEF also collaborated with the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and WHO to support the Government in shaping a national work plan for Scaling Up Nutrition and ensuring an effective implementation of the 2024 Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis for acute malnutrition.

28. In 2024, the UNCT and the Humanitarian Country Team endorsed the Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Systemwide Implementation Strategy (2025–2029) and the transition from a PSEA Taskforce to an all-inclusive PSEA Network. The country team also adopted guidelines to institutionalize accountability for mainstreaming PSEA across programmes and a 2025 annual action plan to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

29. In 2024, FAO and UNMISS supported the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Urban Development, the South Sudan Land Commission, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, and the National Bureau of Statistics in conducting a legal assessment linked to SDG indicator 5.a.2 on proportion of countries where the legal

framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control. Subsequently, South Sudan's report on promoting women's land and property rights was submitted to the Economic Cluster for approval. Furthermore, FAO supported the review of the Draft South Sudan National Land Policy by the Standing Specialized Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure and Transitional National Legislative Assembly during the ordinary sitting No.49/2024 in November 2024.

30. In 2024, Area-Based Coordination (ABC) emerged as a key mechanism for delivering integrated responses to enhance cross-pillar coherence across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding-related activities in South Sudan. Led by Area-Based Leaders (ABLs) stationed in strategic states— Upper Nile (supported by UNHCR), Unity (supported by IOM), and Western Bahr el Ghazal (supported by UNDP)— the ABC model brings together humanitarian, development, and peace actors to conduct joint assessments, plan and implement context-specific interventions. While ABLs receive support from individual United Nations agencies, they serve as neutral facilitators under the overall coordination of the Resident Coordinator's Office, ensuring coherence and impartiality. By linking immediate humanitarian assistance with long-term development and peacebuilding efforts, ABC fosters local ownership, strengthens coordination, and lays the foundation for long term recovery, and resilience building.

31. In 2024, UN Women supported the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare and Ministry of Peacebuilding in drafting a new National Action Plan (NAP) on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Support included a gender analysis of 27 national legislations and the adoption of South Sudan's Women's Charter²⁴. The Charter empowers women and girls to engage with the Reconstituted National Constitutional Review Commission and outlines their key priorities for the Permanent Constitution.

32. In 2024, UNMISS and UNDP provided training for national officials on security sector reforms, legal drafting, and prison reform. They also supported mobile courts in remote areas and facilitated final consultations towards the completion of the Judicial Reform Committee report.

33. In 2024, the One UN approach continued to focus on implementing the R-ARCSS through the support of the Reconciliation, Stabilization, and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF) at the subnational levels. The Fund engaged diverse stakeholders including donors, civil society, government and the UN agencies to achieve sustained peace and accelerate 2030 Agenda. The Fund empowered 5,664 vulnerable individuals, including 1,894 women and 3,797 youth, by creating livelihood opportunities and a voluntary saving scheme. Additionally, 552 at-risk women and 799 at-risk youth accessed career development and employment opportunities.

C. Way forward for future United Nations work and support in South Sudan

34. The United Nations will continue supporting the implementation of the UNSDCF to advance progress on the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 by:

- (a) Developing and implementing joint programmes with the Government on food systems, health, education, and climate action, and supporting the implementation of commitments and recommendations from the South Sudan 2023 Rescue Plan, the South Sudan 2024 VNR and, outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Future.
- (b) Supporting peacebuilding efforts through PBF projects and continued engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission, with a focus on promoting inclusive development that ensures the meaningful participation and leadership of women and youth in peacebuilding and political processes.
- (c) Enhancing localization and decentralization efforts by scaling up area-based programming that integrates life-saving humanitarian assistance with the creation of durable solutions, and expanded access to basic social services.
- (d) Strengthening coordination mechanisms through operationalizing a UN system-wide portfolio approach among the UNCT, Humanitarian Country Team and UNMISS, and promoting localization with

²⁴ <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/06/south-sudan-womens-charter#:~:text=The%20Charter%20articulates%20the%20essential,ownership%20and%20inheritance%2C%20health%20and>

Government counterparts and partners at the national and state levels to leverage synergies and foster national ownership, and improve efficiency and collaboration.

(e) Prioritizing catalytic investments in community violence reduction, governance, and security sector reform in support of the (R-ARCSS).

(f) Advocacy for greater investments in data systems, infrastructure, innovation, risk management, research and technology, including digitalization and e-governance, along with enhanced public funding to strengthen service delivery and improve development outcomes.

(g) Ensuring Government full participation and leadership at every stage of the Cooperation Framework cycle - planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting - in alignment with the Revised National Development Strategy and the national development priorities.

(h) Working with national authorities and other stakeholders to help facilitate the passing of key pending policies and legislations that have stalled at Transitional Legislative Assembly, Council of Ministers and Presidency.

D. Recommendations

35. Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations to support the implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated UN support for South Sudan. There is an urgent need to reinforce gains, scale solutions that have demonstrated impact on the ground, and build on trust-building efforts to more effectively shift the country's development trajectory and reverse worsening trends:

(a) Reaffirm and support the Secretary General's call for urgent de-escalation of tensions, immediate release of political detainees, adherence to the Agreement of Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access, and encourage all parties to safeguard the Revitalized Agreement;

(b) Accelerate the implementation of the UNSDCF as a platform to scale up results and deliver strategic transformative progress toward the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and foster stability, reduce long-term vulnerabilities and decrease the risk of recurring crises by addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting trust, accountability, and equitable resource distribution;

(c) Invest in long-term sustainable development solutions that build on existing gains. Leverage the key transitions to address climate shocks, advance innovation and connectivity, improve access to sustainable energy, transform food systems, create decent jobs, enhance skills development, expand service delivery, and strengthen governance and rule of law;

(d) Support Government's efforts to expedite Public Financial Management reforms, enhance transparency and accountability, and diversify the economy to increase non-oil domestic revenues for basic services, infrastructure, and the data systems ;

(e) Support the meaningful participation of women and youth in political, social and economic life, and all decision-making processes by advocating for gender responsive budgeting, institution and capacity building as well as through reintegration programmes and support for cooperative societies;

(f) Mobilize increased and predictable financing for development in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), including through concessional finance, debt relief, and innovative financing mechanisms; and leverage global convenings, including the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, galvanize political will, and mobilize resources.

III. Sahel region

A. Context

Sustainable development

36. Progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 in the Sahel remains limited compared to other regions globally. While there have been improvements in some indicators, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding human security, governance, food insecurity, and climate resilience.²⁵ Over the past two decades, water availability across the Sahel has dropped by more than

²⁵ UNDP, Sahel Human Development report

40 per cent, driven largely by climate shocks and recurring conflict, impacting water infrastructure, access to water sources, and causing community displacement. Only 72 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, compared to 90 per cent globally - leaving an estimated 96 million people without adequate water supply.

37. The Sahel region²⁶ continued to experience distinct development trajectories, marked by modest economic growth, structural vulnerabilities, and persistent human development challenges. Country performance varied significantly. Niger is projected to achieve strong gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 6.6 per cent in 2025, driven by increased oil exports through a newly operational pipeline to Benin and the lifting of economic sanctions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Chad's growth is expected to move from 1.5 per cent in 2024 to 1.7 per cent in 2025, and further to 3.3 per cent in 2026, supported by oil production.^{27 28} Despite electoral tensions, Senegal has shown resilience, with GDP growth of 6.7 per cent in 2024 and a forecasted 8.4 per cent in 2025 due to hydrocarbon production.²⁹ Cameroon's GDP growth in 2025 is estimated to grow by 3.6 per cent, with a projected increase to 4.0 per cent in 2026. Guinea remains one of Africa's fastest-growing economies, with expected growth of 7.1 per cent in 2025 and 10.6 per cent in 2026, largely propelled by mining activities. Mauritania recorded 5.1 per cent of GDP growth in 2024, down from 6.5 per cent in 2023. GDP growth is projected to average 5.1 per cent over 2025 – 2027 driven by the launch of gas production and exports under the Grand Tortue Ahmeyim project. This growth may be partially offset by a decline in gold and iron ore production, a reduced public investment, and weaker fish exports.

38. Human development indicators across the region remain concerning. In Nigeria, despite an increase in government revenue from 5.5 per cent of GDP in 2023 to 8.7 per cent in 2024, poverty and unemployment persisted, with overall unemployment at 33.0 per cent and youth unemployment at 43.5 per cent.³⁰ In Chad, poverty increased to 36.5 per cent, with multi-dimensional poverty affecting 84.2 per cent of the population.³¹ Senegal faces significant demographic pressures due to a high population growth rate (2.5 per cent), a fertility rate of 4.9 children per woman, and predominantly youth population with over 60 per cent under the age of 25. While this youth bulge presents economic potential, it also poses major public policy issues and requires targeted resource allocation.³² In Guinea, poverty remains high at 43.7 per cent, high unemployment among youth, and social protection systems covering only 2 per cent of the population.³³ The Gambia continues to face persistent human development and social inclusion challenges, with a poverty rate of 53.4 per cent.

39. Access to education across the Sahel remained uneven, constrained largely by insecurity and resource limitations. Chad achieved slight improvements in primary education completion rates but continues to face high secondary school dropout rates and frequent school closures due to insecurity and violence. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, more than half of adult population lacks formal education. In 2024, Senegal allocated over 20 per cent of its national budget to education, but challenges persisted, including high out-of-school rates, infrastructure gaps, and skills and jobs mismatch.

Political and security situation

40. During the reporting period, national authorities in the region took steps towards dialogue initiatives. In Burkina Faso, transitional Head of State, Ibrahim Traoré, launched a platform with religious leaders to promote dialogue and peace on 16 December 2024, following the appointment of Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo as the new Prime Minister on 7 December. In Mali, on 31 December 2024, transitional President Assimi Goïta emphasized the need for greater involvement of religious leaders in addressing the terrorist threat. In the Niger, the national conference on institutional reforms was held from 15 to 20 February 2025 to define the principles, timeline and priorities for the political transition, as well as a road map for state reforms. The conclusions include a proposal for a 60-month transition period, subject to modifications depending on the security situation, reform programme, and the agenda of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

²⁶ For the purposes of the present report, the Sahel region covers the 10 Sahelian countries under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel (2013) and its support plan (2018), namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

²⁷ IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, April 2025

²⁸ IMF, *World Economic Outlook Policy Pivot Rising Threats* (October 2024)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update Staying the course: Progress amid pressing challenges* (October 2024)

³¹ ECOSIT5, *Household Living Conditions and Poverty Survey* (February 2024)

³² *Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie du Sénégal* (ANSD), *Demographic Projections 2024*

³³ Institut National de la Statistique Guinea

41. The formal withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS, in January 2025, reduced ECOWAS' membership from 15 to 12, reshaping the political and security landscape of West Africa. Guinea maintained its commitment to ECOWAS despite internal uncertainties, including constitutional disputes and limited democratic space.

42. Mauritania held presidential elections on 29 June 2024, with President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani re-elected through a process widely regarded as peaceful by observers.

43. The security situation across the Sahel deteriorated, driven by increased violent extremism, and significant humanitarian needs. Organized crime further destabilized the region, with illicit trafficking of gold, arms, drugs, medical products, and fuel intensifying competition among criminal groups and financing their activities. The economic incentives created by these illicit markets attract not only criminal networks but also vulnerable communities, entrenching organized crime within local economies and weakening state capacity to uphold the rule of law³⁴.

Humanitarian situation

44. Civilians, particularly women and children, faced increased risks of gender-based violence, recruitment of children by armed groups, and attacks on essential facilities such as schools and healthcare centers. Security threats related to Boko Haram and other extremist groups in northeastern Nigeria continued to disrupt local economies and exposed civilians to risks, including injuries and fatalities from mines and explosive devices.

45. Climate-related shocks added to the humanitarian pressures and hindered progress towards the SDGs. Floods across the region affected approximately 5.9 million people. In Chad, floods displaced significant populations and damaged homes and livelihoods. Nigeria experienced widespread flooding, displacing close to 900,000 individuals, damaging infrastructure, and causing agricultural and economic losses.³⁵ These conditions also contributed to public health challenges, including cholera outbreaks.

46. Food insecurity remained critical, affecting an estimated 12.7 million³⁶ people across the region at crisis level (IPC phase 3), due to conflict, economic challenges, and climatic disruptions. Acute child malnutrition rates remained high, especially in Nigeria, Niger, and Chad. Access to basic social services declined, with around 10,000 schools closed in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, with over 1,200 health facilities becoming non-operational across the region.

47. Chad hosts around 2 million refugees and IDPs, including 1.1 million Sudanese refugees, adding pressure to already strained resources.³⁷ Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria collectively faced displacement crises affecting millions, while humanitarian appeals remained significantly underfunded.³⁸ February 2025 data indicates that Burkina Faso had 2.1 million IDPs, Mali 378,363 IDPs, Niger 202,925 IDPs, and Nigeria 2.3 million IDPs.³⁹

B. United Nations support for the Sahel

48. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDS) continued to collaborate with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO) and other entities to advance the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) focusing on governance, resilience and peace and security.

49. The United Nations Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, in partnership with DCO and other United Nations entities, conducted several high-level missions in the region to strengthen engagement with Sahelian authorities. In mid 2024, the Special Coordinator and DCO-Africa led strategic visits to the Alliance of

³⁴ UNODC TOCTA Sahel “*impact of transnational organized crime on stability and development in the sahel*” report, 2024, pg. 13

³⁵ IOM, Global Data Institute Displacement Tracking Matrix – Nigeria Joint Post-Flood Situation Report (Nov 2024)

³⁶ Across the Sahel, 12.7 million people experienced food insecurity at phase 3 -crisis, between September and December 2024.

³⁷ OCHA (2024). Chad: Humanitarian Needs Analysis and Response Plan 2024

³⁸ The tracking of the funding allocated to HRPs is through the [Financial Tracking System](#).

³⁹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/rbwca>

Sahelian States (AES) countries, alongside United Nations regional directors and Resident Coordinators, reinforcing dialogue and trust with the transitional national authorities paving the way for an enhanced collaboration.

50. Water diplomacy efforts advanced, with the Special Coordinator, FAO and ECOWAS leading an advocacy mission to the Fouta Djallon Massif in June 2024, resulting in the Labé Declaration calling for regional cooperation and a proposal to classify the Massif as a UNESCO World Heritage site. OSCDS also convened technical workshops in May and September 2024 to develop a Sahel Regional Action Plan on Water, to be launched in June 2025, as part of the Grand Coalition on Water in the Sahel, positing water as a development accelerator in the region.

51. The OSCDS advanced efforts on youth and women's empowerment. In July 2024, the Office led sessions at the ECOWAS Youth Summit on Digital Inclusivity in Accra, Ghana and the Regional Working Group on Youth Peace and Security (YPS), co-led by UNOWAS and UNFPA leading to improved coordination of the YPS agenda and trained up to 80 young people on peace advocacy activities.

52. In October 2024, the Office organized the 2nd Edition of the Regional Consultation Series with Sahelian youth, engaging regional directors of United Nations entities for a 4-week discussion on youth and women's perspectives to inform regional policies and programmes.

Security

53. In the reporting period, the United Nations intensified efforts to promote peace, security, and stability in the Sahel, enhancing inter-agency collaboration and targeted interventions across political, security and socio-economic dimensions. The United Nations entities supported initiatives on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and addressing violent extremism.

54. UNOWAS actively pursued diplomatic engagements across the Sahel to mitigate political tensions and encourage dialogue following the withdrawal of the AES States from ECOWAS. Through high-level visits and consultations, UNOWAS facilitated regional discussions aimed at maintaining cooperation and mitigating fragmentation risks. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General held dialogues in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, advocating for inclusive governance, structured transitions, and regional stability.

55. The United Nations entities strengthened regional security frameworks. The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), through the Peacebuilding Fund's project in Mauritania and Senegal, trained 140 community representatives in conflict prevention and border security. The Operation KAFO V, led by UNODC, and the Integrated Border Stability Mechanism (IBSM), involving UNODC, IOM, the United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and INTERPOL, improved local capacities in conflict prevention and enhanced operational cooperation of security agencies across the region.

56. UN Women supported inclusive peace through empowerment efforts, supporting 103 women's organizations and training 1,700 women mediators across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, strengthening women's leadership in community reconciliation processes. Additionally, UNICEF deployed 14 youth UN Volunteers in Mali to support country programme implementation, monitoring, advocacy, and logistics. The WFP's deployment of UN Volunteers specialized in climate resilience further integrated climate adaptation into peace and security narrative.

57. Recognizing the link between climate change and security, UNOWAS advanced the 2022 Dakar Call to Action, supporting ECOWAS in formulating regional resilience strategies. Collaborative initiatives with the United Nations Office for Central Africa included comprehensive climate-security risk assessments in the Gulf of Guinea and Lake Chad Basin, aimed at mitigating climate-related conflict drivers.

Governance

58. The United Nations made substantial strides in enhancing governance across the Sahel, emphasizing institution-building, administrative capacity, civic engagement, human rights, gender equality and regional cooperation.

59. In October 2024, in The Gambia, UNDP supported initiatives including nationwide civic education, reaching over 100,000 individuals on the country's draft constitution. These initiatives fostered deeper community-government interactions, particularly through youth-driven dialogues.

60. Cross-border cooperation saw advancements through strategic regional initiatives. UNDP's Sahel Resilience Initiative supported the strengthening of the Sahel Region Climate Commission's capacity to address transnational governance challenges linked to climate security. Infrastructure enhancements, notably the introduction of the Migration Data Analysis System at border posts between Senegal and The Gambia, implemented by the IOM, improved migration management governance.

61. Additionally, five Community Prevention and Safety Committees were established in The Gambia with 100 members (50 women, 50 men) enhancing community-security collaboration. FAO established cross-border fire management committees (37 per cent women), improving transboundary resource management.

62. UN led youth governance dialogues from 3-4 December 2024 implemented by UNFPA, aimed to empower participants to champion the Cotonou Youth Action Agenda and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2025) on Youth, Peace and Security by equipping them with tools to integrate youth priorities into national and regional policy frameworks.

63. At the community level, UN entities led initiatives to reinforce governance through conflict prevention and resolution programmes in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, and Mauritania. In 2024, Over 1,300 youths received targeted training in conflict management, to support efforts in mitigating local tensions.

64. Rule of law and human rights governance saw progress, illustrated by legal assistance provided to 802 individuals in The Gambia, coordinated by UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), alongside reinforced human rights monitoring initiatives by OHCHR in Chad and Senegal. In addition, UNDP led the process for the creation of the UN Regional Working Group on Rule of Law, Justice & Human Rights for West and Central Africa, to serve as a platform for collaboration and exchanges between UN Entities working in West and Central Africa on Rule of Law, Justice and Human Rights and stimulate joint actions at regional level.

Resilience

65. The United Nations continued its efforts to strengthen resilience in the Sahel through an integrated approach, addressing health, food security, sustainable agriculture, water management, and empowerment of youth, women and vulnerable groups. Coordinated efforts by UN agencies – including WFP, FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, IOM, UNDP, and UN Women - sought to mitigate the impacts of humanitarian crises, climate shocks, and instability. Through the Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project, UNFPA and the World Bank helped enhance maternal health by training 14,050 midwives in core and specialized skills, improving contraceptive supply chains, and expanding access to reproductive health services. The project reached over 1.0 million new users of modern contraceptives and reduced contraceptive stock-outs at service delivery points to 18 per cent.

66. Food security remained a critical challenge, with over 40 million people facing acute insecurity⁴⁰. The United Nations focused on increasing agricultural productivity, enhancing food systems, and increasing market access for smallholder farmers. Interventions, such as WFP's Zero Hunger Village initiative, integrated nutritional programmes with climate-smart agriculture to achieve sustainable food systems and community resilience. This approach integrates WFP's traditional programs, such as school meals, nutrition, Food for Assets (FFA), and Smallholder Agricultural Market Support (SAMS), to create rice value chains to achieve zero hunger within two years. In this year, WFP increased the number of Zero Hunger Villages (ZHV) from 13 to 37, with total 151 intervened villages.

⁴⁰ According to December 2024 Cadre Harmonisé, over 40 million people across the region are food insecure (IPC Phase 3+), including 2 million in Emergency (IPC Phase 4)-with numbers projected to rise to 52.7 million by mid-2025. Nigeria (25.1 million), Cameroon (3.1 million) and Chad (2.9 million) account for well over half of this number.

67. In 2024, water, sanitation, and hygiene services were strengthened, particularly in flood-prone and conflict-affected areas in Nigeria. UNICEF led efforts to improve access to safe drinking water, sanitation infrastructure, and hygiene practices, including special attention to menstrual health management in schools. In The Gambia, UNFPA established a GBV Management Information System, registering 912 cases (96.6 per cent women), and sensitized 1,000 schoolgirls on menstrual health. Meanwhile, resilient water systems, often powered by renewable energy, were established, contributing significantly to the sustainability of essential services. In Mali, UNICEF supported the construction and rehabilitation of climate-resilient water systems, benefiting 66,573 people with durable water services and 218,486 people with improved sanitation access.

68. Initiatives such as the Great Green Wall and Sahel Resilience Partnership involved youth and women in climate-smart agriculture, green economy projects, and income-generating activities, enhancing community resilience and promoting gender equality. These initiatives also targeted education and protection systems, ensuring youth's, women's and vulnerable groups' active participation in resilience-building. Women-led CSOs across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal have received support, with disaster preparedness training benefiting 45 participants, including 23 women and 15 IDPs.

69. UN-Habitat and UNDP implemented urban resilience initiatives to address rapid urbanization challenges, including through urban planning, capacity-building, infrastructure development, and local capacity building. Efforts focused on climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and community-driven urban planning. In Guinea, 678 community structures were established to support conflict prevention and early warning contributing to local dispute resolution. Sustainable urban plans were also adopted for five municipalities, benefiting approximately 300,000 people.

Coordinated Framework in the Sahel

70. In response to the request of the transitional authorities of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger – and following recommendations from the Joint Regional Directors Mission, and the Deputy Secretary-General's visit to the region – the United Nations developed ten integrated Flagship Programmes. These Flagships are intended as platforms for structural transformation, designed to accelerate progress across four critical SDG transition pathways: food systems, education, youth employment, and energy. Aligned with national priorities and co-designed with sectoral ministries, the programmes seek delivery at scale. Going beyond sectoral interventions, the Flagships integrate cross-cutting areas such as climate-smart agriculture, inclusive agri-food value chains, land restoration, rural infrastructure, digital learning, youth entrepreneurship, off-grid electrification, local governance reform, and conflict-sensitive service delivery. This integrated design ensures cross-pillar coherence and supports stabilization, cross-border collaboration, and economic governance while embedding health, education, and social protection systems into broader development objectives.

71. On advocacy and women's empowerment, the OSCDS, UN Women and UNOWAS led the development of the Sahel Gender Compact. The Compact promotes gender equality as central to sustainable development, peace and security by: (i) systematic integration of gender into policies and programmes; (ii) promoting the participation of women and youth up to 50 per cent in peace and security initiatives; and (iii) leveraging the SDGs to transform socio-economic and political structures by placing women at the center of decision-making processes.

72. UN entities undertook significant efforts towards stronger engagements between the United Nations and Member States from the Sahel region, regional partners and international development actors. The advancement of the UN-Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dialogue series on cross-pillar coherence brought together United Nations leadership and representatives of major international NGOs in the Sahel region.

Perspectives for future work

73. The 17th UNISS steering committee meeting, held in Dakar on 4-5 February 2025, resulted in key conclusions and recommendations to guide future UN engagement in the Sahel:

(a) The OSCDS will continue to advocate for the need to recalibrate UNISS strategies to reflect the evolving nature of the region, including through enhanced coordination.

(b) The United Nations will maintain its presence and commitment in the Sahel region, emphasizing its critical role in supporting stability and development, including through reinforcing engagements and actions on the ground to address the socio-economic, environmental and security challenges.

(c) The OSCDS will reinforce coherence through an inclusive, integrated, and people-centered approach, engaging civil society, promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, and advocating for women and youth participation in political decision-making processes.

(d) The United Nations will leverage its convening power to engage a broad range of stakeholders, including governments, regional institutions, academia, media, and the private sector.

(e) The United Nations will strengthen peace, security, and sustainable development efforts through continued development of long-term peacebuilding strategies and enhanced regional cooperation for security including addressing evolving threats and ensure sufficient resources are allocated to support integrated efforts.

(f) The United Nations will accelerate actions on integrated programmes that can help accelerate sustainable development, as identified during previous Steering Committees, namely, water, industrialization and governance.

(g) Enhancing strategic partnerships with regional organizations like ECOWAS, the African Union, and the international financial institutions is crucial.

(h) Addressing the root causes of instability, including weak governance, corruption, and inequality, remains a priority for the United Nations in the Sahel. Strengthening institutions and promoting inclusive and good governance practices such as transparency, accountability, and social contract are essential drivers for long-term stability.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

74. Scale up integrated approaches to build on results and accelerate impact across the pillars. Strengthening cross-pillar coherence at all levels to develop and implement climate and conflict-sensitive development strategies. In multiple settings across the Sahel, coordinated action enabled through existing UN frameworks and joint planning mechanisms—has proven effective. These approaches must be expanded, supported by greater investment in data and technology to inform policy and decision-making in complex, rapidly evolving environments.

75. The United Nations will continue to strengthen the shift from short-term stabilization to long-term resilience and inclusive development. This entails unlocking the region's economic potential, reinforcing national and local institutions, and fully integrating climate-security approaches. These efforts must be reinforced and scaled—drawing from lessons learned, trust already built with national counterparts, and coordination mechanisms that are demonstrating value. Strategic partnerships, expanded private sector engagement, and innovative financing mechanisms tailored to the region should be mobilized to sustain this shift and ensure continuity of development gains.

76. Expand access to predictable, flexible, and multi-year financing to drive transformative progress on the SDGs in the Sahel. Addressing the region's intersecting challenges—including climate vulnerability, food insecurity, weak governance, and high youth unemployment—requires bold, sustained investment. The ten integrated Flagship Programmes developed for the Central Sahel demonstrate the potential of coordinated UN support to accelerate inclusive economic recovery, strengthen resilience, and reinforce social cohesion. Urgent financing is needed to operationalize the Flagship Programmes to realize their full impact, and the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development provides a pivotal moment to mobilize targeted investments for the Sahel and deliver on the SDGs in one of the world's most vulnerable regions.