

P R E S S   R E L E A S E

## Millions of out-of-school children at increased risk of violence – Save the Children

**DAKAR, 19 October 2020:** Millions of children in the central Sahel region who are out of school<sup>[1]</sup> due to conflict, recent flooding, and COVID-19, are at a higher risk of falling victim to violence, Save the Children warned today. Children in areas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger face a daily risk of kidnappings, killing, maiming and recruitment by armed groups, the charity said.

Nearly 4000<sup>[2]</sup> schools have reportedly been closed due to attacks or fear of attacks, nearby fighting, or because they were occupied by armed groups. Between 2017 and 2019, six times as many schools<sup>[3]</sup> have been closed due to violence, leaving millions of students without an education and more exposed to violence and recruitment. More than 16,000 teachers are out of work.

After a year of violence, flooding and especially the impact of COVID-19 pushing millions of children out of schools and away from the protection services that come with it, Save the Children urges governments and the international community to make the education, protection and safety of children the centre of any response to this unprecedented crisis in the Sahel region.

The organisation came with its urgent call ahead of the international donor conference on the Central Sahel crisis, which starts tomorrow.

With the average age of the population in the three countries being 17 or younger<sup>[4]</sup>, Save the Children warned that the COVID-19 pandemic is a children's crisis, having a deep impact on their learning and safety. Children who are out of school are more likely to be victim of child labour and early marriage, and run a higher risk of abuse or being caught up in the conflict or trapped in an unsafe environment.

*"They entered our village. They burned the foresters' station, the motorbikes and the houses. They went back to our school and they burnt all documents and destroyed the doors. When they came to our school we were at home,"* said 12 year-old Abdoulaye\* from Gorom-Gorom in Burkina Faso.

Save the Children reminds the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger that they have signed up to the Safe Schools Declaration<sup>[5]</sup>, committing themselves to protect and enable children to continue their education even during armed conflicts. However, as local budgets are not sufficient, the international community needs to step up to support the millions of children who are trapped by armed conflict and are seeing their right to education violated. An estimated 2.3 million<sup>[6]</sup> children urgently need protection, almost double the number of 2019.

Eric Hazard, pan-African Advocacy Director for Save the Children, said:

*"In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, eight out of ten children have experienced violence. Girls are exposed to child marriage when they don't go to school. The trend is that more and more children are victims of kidnapping, murder, recruitment and use by armed groups. In Mali alone, in 2019, more than 270 children were maimed or killed. Economic and social pressures and the need for protection pushes young people to join armed groups."*

Displaced children, who often had to leave everything behind when they fled violence, need special attention, Save the Children said. In Burkina Faso alone, more than one million<sup>[7]</sup> have fled the violence, 60 percent of whom are children.

*"This violent crisis, depriving children of their fundamental rights and putting them in situations that affect their physical and mental health, must stop,"* concluded Hazard.

Save the Children calls on governments and the international community to:

- Act now to prevent a generation of children of losing out on their education, by more, better and more flexible funding, to rebuild better and more resilient education systems.
- Ensure that children and their families are protected and their most dire needs are met, with a special focus on girls and children affected by armed conflict

- Strengthening health systems and scaling up critical humanitarian assistance for food, nutrition and livelihoods.

If not addressed now, the education and protection of an entire generation of children is at risk, with long lasting consequences for the entire West and Central Africa region, Save the Children concluded.

*\*Name changed for privacy reasons*

#### **Notes to editors:**

Save the Children is working hard to improve the daily lives of children in the Central Sahel region, by building capacity in communities aimed at keeping children safe in schools, supporting catch up courses providing psycho-social support, providing support to Ministries of Education by supporting the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and the strengthening of school safety systems and protection policies.

In Burkina Faso, the number of children in need of protection has increased more than tenfold, from 35,800 children in 2019 to 571,000 in July 2020<sup>[1]</sup>. In Mali, more than 1 million children will face protection problems this year, twice as many as last year. In Niger, more than 867,000 children will be in need of protection in 2020, 200,000 more than in 2019<sup>[9]</sup>.

[1] <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Track%201%20Basic%20Social%20Services%20EN.pdf>

2 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/burkina-faso-armed-islamists-attack-education>

3 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/08/1044821>

4 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries>

5 <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/safe-schools-declaration-training-tool>

6 <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/23-million-children-need-protection-central-sahel-region-2020-more-80-cent>

7 Burkina Faso has registered as of 17 August 2020 a total of 1,013,234 internally displaced persons due to insecurity, according to a periodic report by the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR). <http://www.conasur.gov.bf/>

8 [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/hrp\\_2020\\_revise-bfa-fr-web.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/hrp_2020_revise-bfa-fr-web.pdf) Page 40

9 <https://www.unicef.org/wca/press-releases/23-million-children-need-protection-central-sahel-region-2020-more-80-cent-increase>

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#### **Über Save the Children**

Im Nachkriegsjahr 1919 gründete die britische Sozialreformerin und Kinderrechtlerin Eglantyne Jebb Save the Children, um Kinder in Deutschland und Österreich vor dem Hungertod zu retten. Heute ist die inzwischen größte unabhängige Kinderrechtsorganisation der Welt in über 120 Ländern im Einsatz. Save the Children ist da für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen – seit 100 Jahren und darüber hinaus. Diese Kinder zu schützen, zu stärken und zu fördern ist das zentrale Anliegen der



Organisation. Die Schwerpunkte der Arbeit liegen in den Bereichen Schule und Bildung, Schutz vor Ausbeutung und Gewalt sowie Überleben und Gesundheit. Save the Children setzt sich ein für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet. Eine Welt, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben und frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen können.