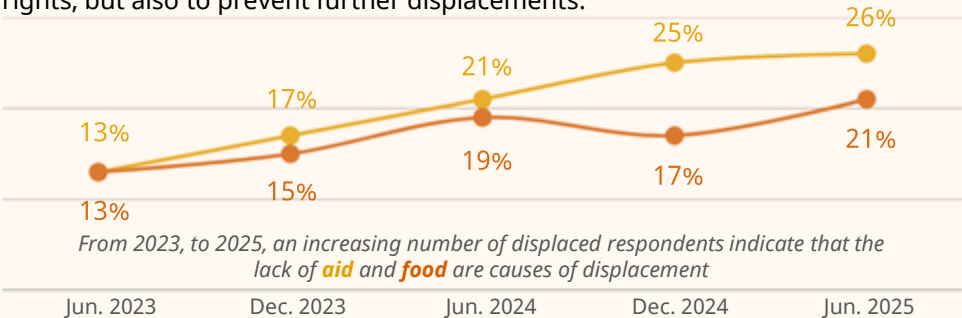


Preserving the Protection Environment in the Sahel and Lake Chad Regions

Between January 2023 and June 2025, Project 21 consulted 36,430 families and 29,316 communities across the Sahel and Lake Chad Regions. Based on testimonies from those affected by displacement and other humanitarian challenges, Project 21 wishes to deliver the following evidence-based insights and tailored messages to inform the Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM). This content positions “Protection” –defined as all actions ensuring full respect for individual rights under international law, including dignity, prevention of abuse and support for recovery– as central to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. The following messages address the 2025 SOM’s 4th thematic priority (Protection and IHL), as well as broader items: (1) Humanitarian Space; (2) Effectiveness of the Response; (3) Fragility & Nexus.

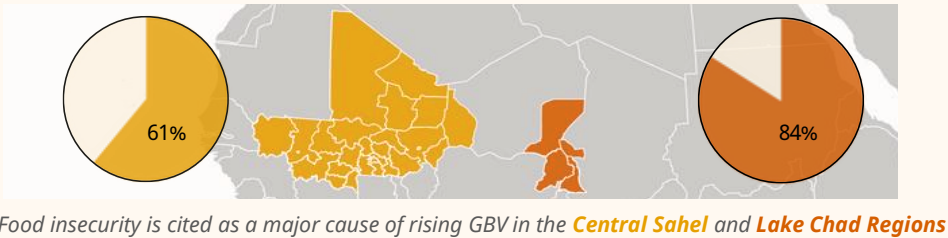
(1) Preventing further displacements

As humanitarian space shrinks, aid organizations face growing challenges to deliver life-saving assistance. Conflict-induced deprivations of freedom of movement, denial of services and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), make it harder to reach affected and vulnerable communities. Preserving the humanitarian space is essential not only to save lives and defend rights, but also to prevent further displacements.



(2) Adopting integrated approaches

Conflicts remain the primary driver of protection risks, directly threatening the safety of women and children who represent 80% of the overall displaced population in the Sahel. Beyond immediate impacts, conflicts also fuel food insecurity, which in turn exacerbates specific forms of GBV and child protection risks; notably due to the adoption of harmful coping mechanisms such as early marriage and survival sex. Fighting these forms of abuse must become a core component of all interventions across humanitarian sectors: food security, education, health, shelter, as well as water, hygiene and sanitation (WaSH).



(3) Investing in infrastructures

Both displaced and host communities report being affected by infrastructural challenges which prevent their effective access to basic services such as healthcare. These challenges include the absence, dysfunction, and/or remoteness of essential service infrastructure. As displacement becomes increasingly protracted, such challenges must be acknowledged and addressed beyond the humanitarian sphere. Operationalizing the Fragility Nexus is essential to overcome infrastructural barriers to service delivery and ensure that no one is left behind.



*Including the **absence**, **remoteness** of services, as well as the **lack of equipment**, **medicine** and **personnel**

(4) Ensuring accountability and participation

Upholding protection principles in conflict-affected areas requires the meaningful inclusion of affected communities. Only genuine participation can ensure transparency, support localized decision-making that is rooted in context-specific realities and endogenous mechanisms. Accountability to affected populations (AAP) is essential to support and restore communities’ capacities to prevent, manage, and resolve protection challenges. Strategic and financial partners should reserve portions of their allocations to incentivize and ensure the effective planning and implementation of AAP activities; building on humanitarian actors’ capacities to communicate with communities.

8 in 10 respondents declare willing to be **consulted** in aid program design, and indicate that they can **communicate effectively** with humanitarian actors, reflecting trust and accessibility



Preserving the Protection Environment in the Sahel and Lake Chad Regions

PROJECT 21



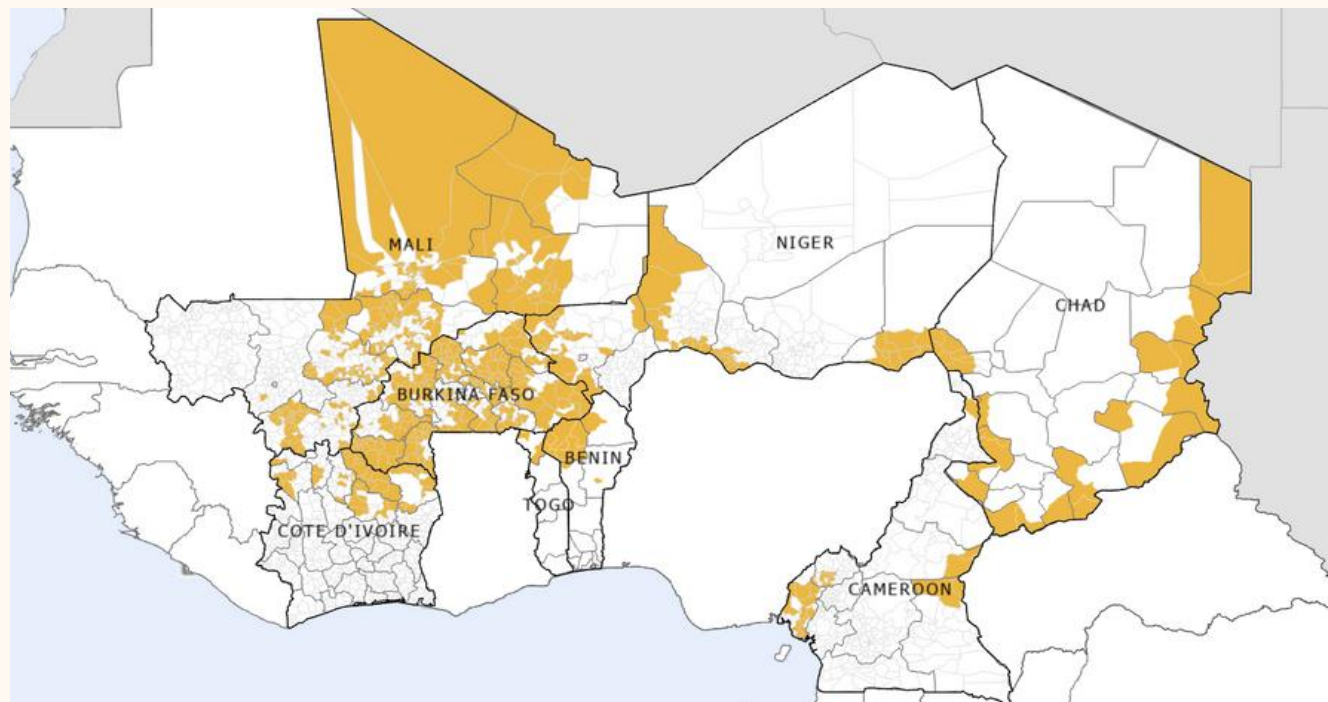
About Project 21

Project 21 is a **cross-border, inter-agency and regional protection monitoring system**. Based on a standardized methodology and harmonized tools, Project 21 continuously surveys communities affected by **forced displacement, insecurity, and conflict**. Working through existing platforms and dedicated coordination groups, we partner with **more than 30** organizations, amongst which two thirds are local and national ones, to collect, analyze, and disseminate protection data. Since 2021, Project 21 has contributed to merge **18 different protection monitoring systems** deployed in the Central Sahel and has addressed gaps in data collection and analysis.

Advancing the centrality of **protection** across the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus, Project 21 transforms affected communities' voices into informed **strategies, programs and actions**. Since 2021, Project 21 monitors have conducted **nearly 200,000 interviews** in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Togo. In 2025, Project 21 strives and succeeds to maintain its presence in **West and Central Africa's** major forced displacement situations: (i) the Central Sahel; (ii) the Lake Chad Basin; (iii) the Sudanese Emergency in Chad; (iv) the Gulf of Guinea's Coastal Countries.

Project 21 collects, analyses and disseminates data on the the situation of communities affected by forced displacement, through consultations with households and key informants. Project 21 data is analyzed by dedicated analysis groups established at the regional and national levels. The conclusions presented in this document reflect only the situations of the interviewed individuals, households and communities in the areas and the period covered.

Overview of Project 21's geographic coverage | As of 2025



Towards a regional reference framework for protection data

2020 - 2022

- Launch of Project 21 as a pilot project.
- Development of harmonized tools and methodologies.
- Deployment in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Lake Chad Province.

2022 - 2025

- Deployment of dedicated field teams.
- Extension in Benin, Chad, CAR, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo.
- Conduction of an External Mid-Term Review.

2025 - 2027

- Consolidation of Project 21 as West and Central Africa's Reference Protection Data Framework.
- Enhanced contributions to the Localization and Statistical Inclusion Agendas.

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