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■ DEMOGRAPHY
PEACE
SECURITY IN THE SAHEL

***Perspectives
for a resilient
central Sahel***

THE DEMOGRAPHY-PEACE-SECURITY TRIANGLE



THE SAHEL

Towards sustainable solutions

A pessimist outcome is not inevitable in the Sahel. It is always possible to overcome even the most complex crises and situations.

Since 2012, the Sahel has been plagued by multifaceted crises that have plunged its people into situations of distress. In the face of this emergency, states and civil society organisations are in a race against time. To change the situation and give the region lasting momentum, studies and research papers recommend that decision makers act on the structural factors that sustain fragility in the Sahel. These include the central mechanisms linking demography, security and peace.

To refine the analyses carried out so far on these areas, we, at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), commissioned a team of researchers and experts to conduct empirical work focusing on three countries of the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger).

On the ground, UNFPA is working tirelessly to promote reproductive health and human rights, especially women's rights. Our aim is to help those countries in the Sahel to capture the 'demographic dividend', or in other words to put its impressive youth at the spearhead of its progress. The research we commissioned present new problems, and more importantly, solutions.

The three studies summarised in this report mark a break from previous research, in that they respond specifically to the Sahel. To measure the region's fragility we need to look at the reality behind the numbers. The dependency ratio in the Sahel - the proportion of the population that depends on others to live - is around 85.2 per cent, with huge disparities. It is 97 per cent in Chad and Mali, and 121.2 per

cent in Niger.

This deep-dive provides unique insights and it allows decision-makers to implement tailored solutions.

The scale of the challenge shows that young people, as in the rest of the continent, aspire to a future anchored in good education and employment.

The countries we looked at face the dual challenge of providing for this young and growing population, whilst being under pressure from destabilising forces from jihadist groups. As a result, states spend between 12 and 25 per cent of their budgets on defence and security, diverting significant resources from priority social sectors such as health.

The region's leaders have a critical role to play in this process of building stability and, ultimately, resilience. We now have a greater understanding of the issues at stake and are better positioned to action the experts' recommendations.

Mabingue Ngom
Regional Director, UNFPA
for West and Central Africa

THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND AND DEVELOPMENT

A question of interdependence

Countries of the Sahel face significant social, demographic and security challenges. Understanding the link between these issues will allow us to develop an innovative approach to provide a sustainable solution.

The Sahel is the subject of great interest from researchers due to the peculiarities of the conflicts across the region. UNFPA supports efforts to highlight the quantitative, and then explanatory, elements of these conflicts. A study carried out by the National School of Statistics and Economic Analysis (ENSAE) in Dakar, Senegal, tried to model the interrelationships between peace, security and demography in order to derive a synthetic indicator, among other objectives. And, of course, to draw evidence-based conclusions for those working in the field.

Major insights can be drawn from this. We can demonstrate that countries with a high level of secondary school enrolment, a high urbanisation rate and good agricultural performance, generally also have a high level of peace and security. Conversely, countries with high youth unemployment and inequality are most affected by insecurity.

The same is true for those countries experiencing an increase in demographic dependency levels (measured by the average number of dependants for a person of working age). Unsurprisingly, the authors stress that the preservation of natural resources, and democratic advances, are important factors for peace.

In the Sahel, the lack of employment opportunities makes young people vulnerable to human trafficking. They are also easy targets, at the mercy of armed groups seeking new recruits.

It is also clear that insecurity leads to unmanageable levels of migration. Finally, although young people are educated, the lack of jobs is a factor in the Sahel's fragility.

A HIGH DEPENDENCY RATIO

Improving youth literacy is therefore not sufficient. Nevertheless, there is a positive



Nurses dispensing medicine to a young mother. The fertility rate for women in Sahelian countries is closely connected to economic growth as well as security issues

correlation between the Global Peace Index (GPI)* and the level of education, rate of urbanisation and agricultural performance. The GPI, which classifies countries according to their degree of peace, is a synthetic index that includes data such as youth unemployment, arable land area, gross domestic product (GDP) and health expenditure. What the index also does is to highlight the importance of education in development.

Conversely, the higher the fertility rate

for a country, the higher its demographic dependency ratio. The same applies to economic dependence. This is because those who are presumed to be economically active are responsible for a much higher number of dependents, mainly adolescents, children and the elderly.

The index underscores that security is weak in the countries of the Sahel, particularly those around Lake Chad. However, a major limitation of the index is that it is purely descriptive.

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The team at ENSAE and UNFPA agreed that the results should be supported and confirmed by statistical techniques. By taking a dynamic evolution approach, the panel study would provide more robust findings.

One finding that came out was the contagious effect of conflict, and peace. Who you share a border with can have a positive or damaging impact on your own security. Some countries that share common borders, such as Libya, Sudan and the Central African Republic, are all experiencing a very high state of insecurity. Of course, this is not the only factor, as demonstrated by the relative stability of Tunisia, that neighbours Libya's.

SLOW FERTILITY TRANSITION

In terms of conflict, models developed by another piece of research that was commissioned by the UNFPA and conducted by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) suggest that the risk of conflict will continue to increase in Sahelian countries such as Mali, Niger and Nigeria between now and 2050.

For many of these countries, this increased risk is in majority the result of factors related to the low level of socioeconomic development and demographic factors. It would be interesting, in the case of the Sahel, to update the models by extending the analysis to 2020, factoring in the Covid-19 situation.

In terms of demography, it is clear that the decline in child mortality in recent

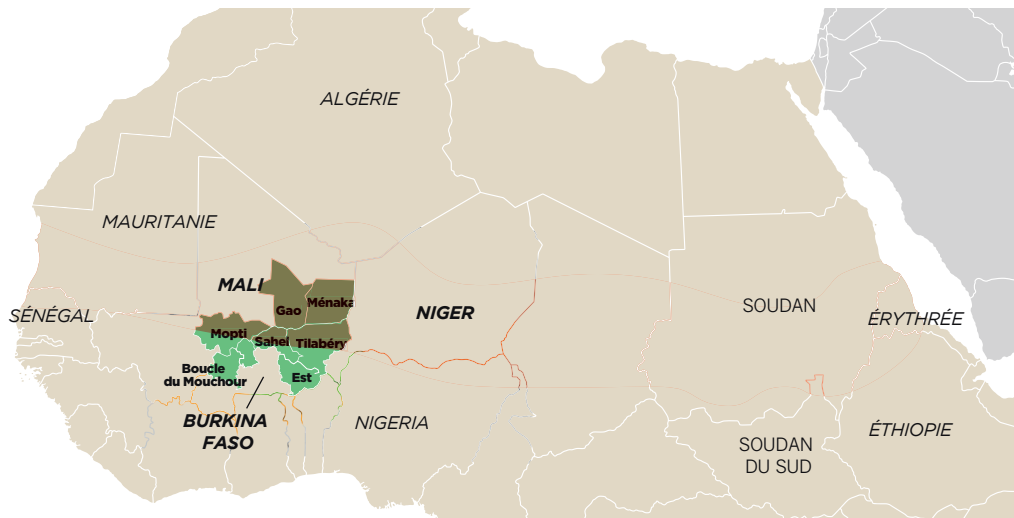
The root causes of radicalisation and violent extremism have often been associated with the growing youth population and the inability of governments to respond effectively to their various political, social and economic demands.

years (in this region as in most of the world) has not yet led to a substantial decline in fertility rates, which is what one would expect from the historical patterns of demographic transition. The average number of children per woman is still high and has not yet fallen significantly. It is close to, or over, five children per woman, and higher in Niger and Mali for example. In all the countries studied, demographic structures are dominated by young people under the age of 30 years.

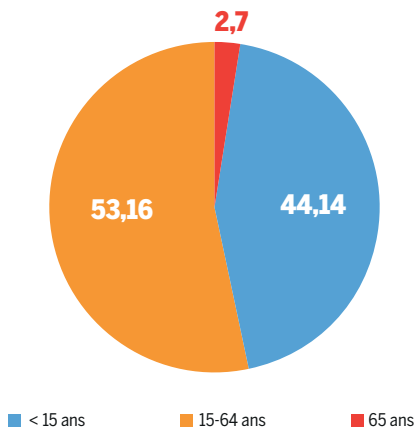
Worryingly, the PRIO study showed that countries where the population is

growing at an accelerated pace, and where populations under 30 years of age represent more than 60 per cent of the total population, are more likely to experience civil conflicts or security crises. They face pressure on education systems and social wellbeing, as well as unemployment and underemployment, along with a propensity for lawlessness.

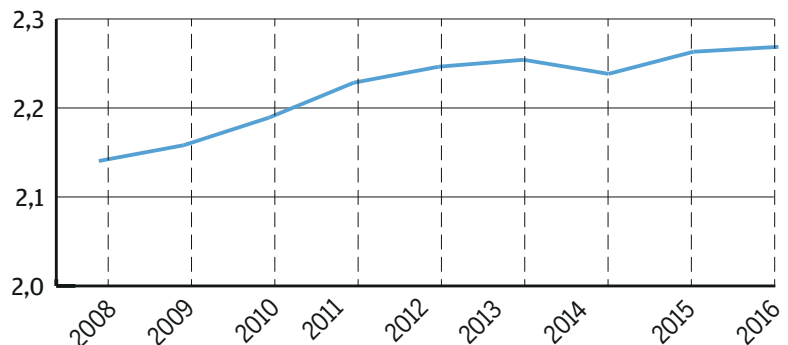
Conversely, low population pressure on resources does not necessarily mean less conflict. If good governance is not enforced and resources are not equitably distributed this can lead to social unrest.



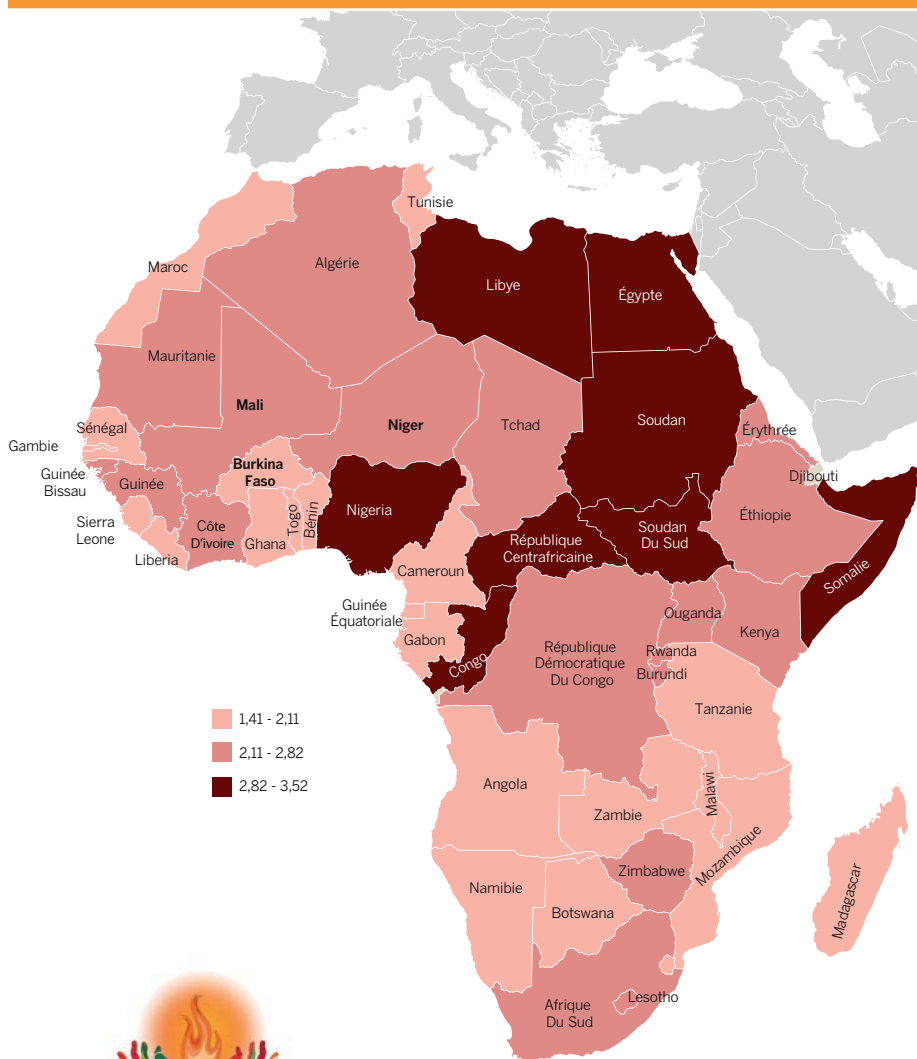
Population distribution by age in the eight Sahelian countries of West and Central Africa in 2020 (%)



Evolution of the Global Peace Index and security in Africa from 2008 to 2016



Map of the Peace and Security Index in Africa in 2016



1.41 - 2.11
2.11 - 2.82
2.82 - 3.52

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace



In a worst-case scenario, the State would become “too small for big things and too big for small things.”

Sahel, Mabingue Ngom, UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa, confirms that “a negative spiral has been set in motion” and predicts a “situation that will worsen socially, and therefore also in terms of security” if nothing is done.

Against this background, UNFPA’s white paper, ‘Understanding the Sahel through its history, geography and socio-demographic and security challenges’, sets out three scenarios.

The first scenario is simply a status-quo, in effect a continuation of the major trends of recent decades. With a government, in each country, whose situation improves, but where external security remains a threat. The result: rising birth rates and continued high population growth and inequalities. This trend scenario is clearly undesirable for all those who advocate development, but remains very plausible.

YOUTH IS NOT AN OBSTACLE

An ‘adaptation’ scenario assumes a slowdown in fertility. An approximate fertility rate of three children per woman would allow a gradual decrease in population growth and the dependency rate. As a result, more sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth becomes possible. In this scenario, social and organisational innovations also contribute to the establishment of win-win relationships between states and civil societies. If the right decisions are taken and implemented, this scenario assumes

Strictly from a numbers perspective, no correlation could be established between the growing insecurity prevailing in the Sahel and certain factors that one would expect to mitigate it, such as increases in GDP per capita, arable land areas and democracy. These links are, for the moment, purely intuitive. We cannot confirm that these factors affect insecurity

one way or another in the Sahel region. ‘Micro’ data collection (from individuals and households) seems to be indispensable for better understanding the reality on the ground.

THREE SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE

Seeing these accumulated vulnerabilities and linking them to rising insecurity in the

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that border management is resolved because seasonal migration related to the dominance of rain-fed agriculture in rural economies has decreased in intensity, among other reasons. This scenario is the most desirable, but is it the most likely?

A third scenario, of increased tensions, cannot be excluded. If Sahelian societies do not engage in changing reproductive behaviour, fertility decline will be insufficient to improve the position. The number of births in five Sahelian countries could increase from 3.4 million to 6.4 million by 2040, with detrimental implications for peace and security, the like of which we can only imagine. Community pressures would prevail and the State would become “too small for big things and too big for small things”.

According to UNFPA, the countries of the Sahel should pursue policies to control demographic dependency and provide opportunities for young people, whose level of education, combined with their use of communication technologies and social networks, contribute to their need for emancipation and a better future. The root causes of radicalisation and violent extremism have often been associated with a growing youth population and the inability of governments to respond effectively to their various political and economic demands, the PRIO study confirms.

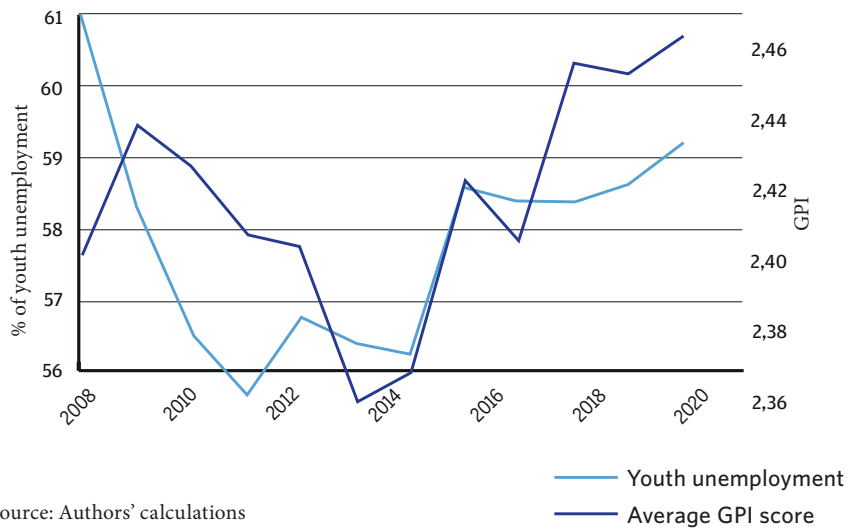
PRIO also notes that large youth populations are not, by nature, a security problem. On the contrary, they have the potential to bring greater prosperity and enhanced security to the state. In South-East Asia, countries have succeeded in significantly and effectively reducing their fertility rates while benefiting from the labour resource offered by the strong demographic growth of young people.

However, countries that are in a situation of insecurity, especially those in West Africa, need to support the process of urbanisation and initiate an education policy to keep children in the education system. Family planning efforts should also not be forgotten.

The last disaster scenario described by UNFPA is just as plausible as the previous two, although it is at the opposite end of the spectrum from development activities in the region. Avoiding it is within reach. ■

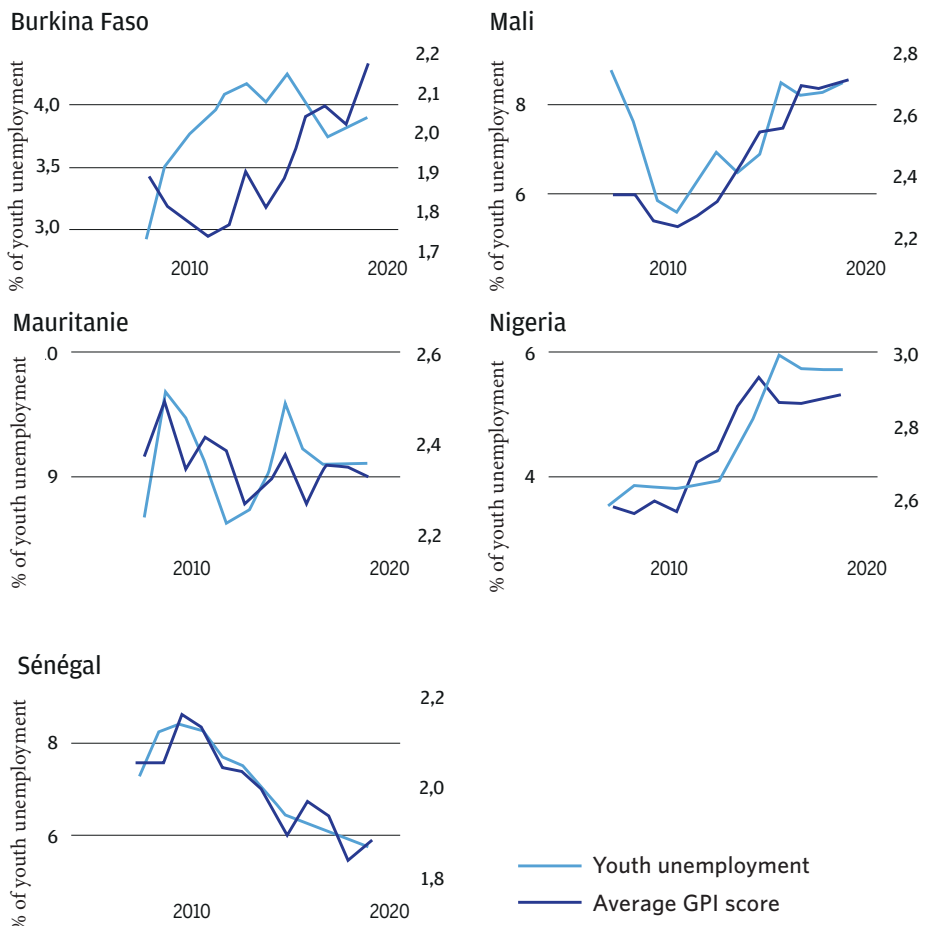
* The Global Peace Index (GPI) is compiled by *The Economist* magazine and a panel of experts from peace institutes and think-tanks, as well as the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney.

Trends in unemployment and the GPI in the Sahel from 2008 to 2019



Source: Authors' calculations

Trends in unemployment and GPI in selected Sahelian countries from 2008 to 2019



MABINGUE NGOM

We can make a real difference in the Sahel



Mabingue Ngom, UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa, presents the Demography, Peace and Security project. The objective of this initiative is to provide a new narrative for the Sahel region, and to spur a high-level political dialogue on the links between demography, peace and security.

WHAT IS THE SCALE OF THE PANDEMIC IN THE SAHEL?

Afflicted by a combination of armed conflict, terrorism, extreme weather conditions and economic instability, the region was at the centre of international political debates long before the pandemic.

In the Central Sahel zone, and in particular the Liptako-Gourma region, which borders Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, this security crisis led to the deaths of some 4,000 people in 2019 alone and has caused significant population displacements in the three affected countries.

The crisis is combined with high population growth. The population is growing at a much higher rate than in other countries. This translates into a large share of the population consisting of young people (more than 60 per cent of the population is under 15 years of age) and high social demands that become a handicap for governments and difficult to provide for in terms of national budgets, as well as for households.

More than 8 million children aged 6 to 14 years are out of school, which is almost 55 per cent of children in this age group. At the same time, governments are obliged to devote the bulk of resources to the military response, accounting for almost a third of national budgets.

That is why, very early this year, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and all the United Nations agencies working in the West and Central Africa region paid particular attention to the Sahel.

This year, we have had the additional challenge created by Covid-19, which will inevitably aggravate this pre-existing situation. It is well understood that, in such a situation, people cannot afford to remain confined to their homes.

HOW CAN A SOLUTION BE FOUND IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES?

This is a very important question. By the end of 2019, we had conducted six empirical studies. From the outset, we wanted to ensure that these studies should be based on data, solid fact and figures that constitute evidence without any ideological preconceptions.

This is a new project, which is currently in progress. Initially, this work was based on three case studies in three different countries that make up the Central Sahel: Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

We carried out strictly statistical studies to assess changes in a number of variables as the crisis emerged and developed.

AND SPECIFICALLY, WHAT DOES THIS INVOLVE?

We looked, for example, at changes in health spending, education spending, military spending and other areas of demand. We found that as this demand increases, the fiscal space shrinks because these are mainly countries that are struggling and are forced to increase military spending significantly.

It's a catch-22. The more that countries increase this expenditure, the less fiscal space they have to meet current and future

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essential needs, and so the cycle continues.

For example, in recent years, spending on security has risen sharply in the countries in question, at the expense of spending on health, despite the fact that all three governments have pledged to allocate 15 per cent of their budgets to health.

In Niger, for example, the share of expenditure financed from domestic government resources increased from 10.3 per cent in 2010 to 15.3 per cent in 2017. In the same period, youth unemployment rose significantly from 13 per cent to 17 per cent.

Domestic resource mobilisation has also stayed low since 2015. Because of the large number of young people in the general population, the government recorded a deficit of 1,880 billion CFA francs (2.87 billion euros).

This is the result of spending on dependent age groups, the 0–27 year olds and over 64 years age groups.

ARE GOVERNMENTS DOING ENOUGH?

Despite passing the 10 per cent mark in 2017, the Government of Burkina Faso is still a long way from the commitment to allocate 15 per cent of its national budget to the health sector, while the share allocated to the security sector increased significantly to nearly 14 per cent in 2019.

A similar situation can be observed in Mali, where security budgets tripled between 2010 and 2018, at the expense of health spending. This increase in military expenditure has taken place in a context where government resources have not increased much, and sometimes not at all.

Whereas in some developed countries such as Japan or in the countries of the north, the opposite trend can be seen: military or security expenditure is contained at around 4–5 per cent of GDP. We see that when social demand increases due to population growth, the resources to meet that demand are limited. This contributes to increased social tensions that can lead to security crises such as we are seeing in the Sahel.

With each terrorist attack, the governments concerned are forced to strengthen security measures by cutting funding to priority sectors such as education and health, which are already underserved. There is a resulting decline in the coverage and quality of essential services. This spiral naturally has a negative impact on the relationship of trust that should exist between national authorities and populations.

WHAT ARE THE NEW FINDINGS FROM THESE STUDIES AND THE SOLUTIONS THAT GO WITH IT?

The studies and modelling work we have carried out with these respected institutions point to a relationship between demographic dependence and the occurrence of crises in the Sahel countries.

This is an extremely interesting element. An important result of these studies, obtained by statistically classifying countries, shows that the group of Sahelian nations has a low level of security.

These countries have a higher demographic dependency (75 per cent, compared to 47 per cent for the overall average), a youth unemployment rate 10 points higher than the overall average (27.71 per cent compared to 17.86 per cent) and a secondary school enrolment level that is half the overall average (36.94 per cent compared to 72.18 per cent).

Further analysis revealed that an increase in the demographic dependency ratio of one percentage point leads to a deterioration in the peace and security index of 0.01 point for the country.

That is to say, alongside other factors, demography contributes directly and indirectly to explaining the occurrence of conflicts in the world in general, and in the Sahel region in particular.

As for the prospects for peace and security in the Sahel, we note the modelling work carried out by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) on the risk of armed conflict between now and 2050. This shows a clear increase in the risk of conflict incidence for some Sahelian countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, with a potentially significant spillover effect to their immediate neighbours. Simulations indicate that high population growth, poverty and low educational attainment are associated with an increased risk of conflict.

WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE FROM THIS?

The results of these studies should enable us to envisage more objective and sustainable solutions based on new trends and new types of partnership. Of course, they will not solve all the Sahel region's problems, but they will tackle at least one of the major problems that is at the root of the crisis.

Solutions over the last 50 years have been aimed only at treating the symptoms, the most pressing and visible problems of everyday life. Unfortunately, not enough time has been taken to explore these issues,

to better understand them and act on them in a sustainable manner to transform the lives of the people of the Sahel.

If we invested the significant resources that are allocated to military responses, we would see better results. Of course, we cannot ignore these military needs, but we must have an optimum range of tools at our disposal to change the pattern of demographic dependence in the Sahel.

HOW CAN YOU ENSURE THAT POLITICAL ACTORS HEAR YOUR CONCLUSIONS AND TRANSLATE THEM INTO ACTION?

Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou, who has shown remarkable vision, has been very committed to peace and security in the Sahel. In 2013, he made a heartfelt appeal to the international community to commit to capturing the demographic dividend.

He understood that if we did not tackle the issue of demographic dependency in order to capture this demographic dividend, it would be difficult to talk about economic development, especially when the crisis was bringing everything to a halt. Look at what is happening today in Mali, Burkina Faso or Niger.

That is why he will host and chair an international symposium, bringing together all stakeholders working on issues of demography, peace and security. Economic, political and strategic research institutes will be invited to consider these factors and the results of our statistical modelling work in detail, and to put public policy proposals on the table.

These will guide development plans and programmes for the next generation of Africans. This concerns the whole of Africa, because what happens in the Sahel affects the whole continent.

BUT ISN'T PRESIDENT MAHAMADOU ISSOUFOU AT THE END OF HIS TERM OF OFFICE...

Yet he has enormous capacity for action! I am convinced that his work on behalf of the Sahel and of Africa will not end with his term. He will continue to be committed to seeking out solutions and implementing them in a pragmatic, non-ideological, evidence-based way. These are projects that have the potential to change the lives of people in the Sahel region and all Africans.

*All the reports and studies cited in this special report can be found at: wcaro.unfpa.org/en/publications