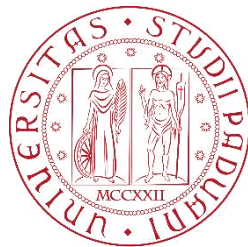


UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

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**Master's degree in
Human Rights and Multi-level Governance**



FROM COUP TO CRISIS: UNDERSTANDING
THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN MALI

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Introduction

Mali in the Sahel region

The Sahel region, located on vast territories in Africa, is an area with a rich history, characterized by many difficulties and challenges. Over the years, the region has faced a number of complex problems such as weak governance, poverty, climate change, and violent extremism that have not only determined its future path, but also attracted the attention of the international community. These challenges, along with significant crises, have attracted increased attention to the region on the world stage, prompting a deeper study of its historical problems and their long-term consequences.

The Sahel region (translated from Arabic means "coast", "border") stretches for 5,900 km (3,670 miles) from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east, forming a belt with a width of several hundred to a thousand kilometers (about 600 miles), covering an area of 3,053,200 square kilometers (1,178 850 square miles). It is a transitional ecoregion of semi-arid meadows, savannas, steppes and thorny shrubs, lying between the wooded savanna of Sudan in the south and the Sahara in the north.

Interviewee #5 noted that the term "Sahel" is not widely used in Africa, as it does not have much meaning for local residents from a political or ethnic point of view. He suggested that this word is more often used by Europeans in order to better understand the geographical location of the region. Despite this fact, the term "Sahel" will often be used in this study to define the geographical areas considered in the context of the study.

This study is based on the list of countries of the Sahel region defined by the United Nations Strategy (UNISS), which covers 10 countries (Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria)¹. It is worth to note that different sources may include different countries in this region. The sub-chapters of this study will address issues related to the impact of the situation in Mali on the countries of the Sahel region. Therefore, it is important to identify specific countries that will be considered in this context. In addition, the boundaries of the Sahel region are not precisely defined, and they overlap with other regions to some extent. However, the countries listed

¹ United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel. (2018). UN Support Plan for the Sahel. Working together for a prosperous and peaceful Sahel. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/un-support-plan-sahel-working-together-prosperous-and-peaceful-sahel> p. 5

above are generally considered part of the Sahel region. In addition, the thesis uses the term “Central Sahel countries” several times, by which I mean three countries – Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

The Sahel is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world, it has suffered from crises that have led it to instability, deterioration of living conditions, resilience of the population, displacement, violence, destroyed homes, etc. Before the turning point of the coup in Mali in 2012, the Sahel had already faced a number of serious obstacles. These problems are deeply rooted in the social, economic and environmental dynamics of the region, and require attention and resolution. Understanding the historical problems of the region provides the most important context for understanding the subsequent transformation and international interaction with the region.

Currently, the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel is one of the largest humanitarian emergencies in the world, which is aggravated by a number of problems, including problems of rapid population growth, climate change and food security. According to scientific forecasts, in 2050 the population of the region may reach 500 million people and the average temperature will rise by 3-5 °C (from 7°F to 10°F)², which is higher than today's already high temperatures. In this regard, the Sahel region is in the focus of attention of world leaders, international organizations and NGOs seeking to help the region and its population solve these and many other problems.

As for the rapid population growth in the region, in 2021 the population of the Sahel exceeded 360 million people³. The average annual population growth rate in ten countries of the region is 2.8%, with the highest rates observed in Mali (3.2%), Niger (3.7%) and Chad (3.2%). In addition, Nigeria, with a population of more than 221 million people, is also among the top 20 countries with the largest population, ranking sixth overall⁴.

² Facing the challenges of sustainable development in the Sahel. (n.d.). In *International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)*. <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/regions/wca/sahel>

³ The World Bank. (April 2023). *Data for the Sahel countries* [Dataset]. <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=BF-SN-ML-GM-MR-GN-NE-TD-CM-NG>

⁴ *Top 20 largest countries by population*. (n.d.). [Dataset]. [https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/#:~:text=World%20Population%20Clock%3A%208%20Billion,\(LIVE%2C%202023\)%20%2D%20Worldometer](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/#:~:text=World%20Population%20Clock%3A%208%20Billion,(LIVE%2C%202023)%20%2D%20Worldometer) Retrieved from April 25, 2023

In 2022, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs published a report on World Population Prospects, which stated that, according to the latest projections, the world's population could grow to about 9.7 billion people in 2050 and 10.4 billion in 2100. It is expected that more than half of the projected global population growth in the period from 2022 to 2050 will be concentrated in just eight countries, including Nigeria⁵. In addition, the Sahel countries have a predominantly young population. It is estimated that by 2050, the proportion of young people (those under the age of 20) will double, and in subsequent years Niger will have the highest dependency ratio among young people.

A key event chosen for this study is the coup d'état in Mali, which took place in 2012 and had significant consequences not only for Mali, but also for the entire Sahel region. This event was a turning point in the history of the country and its neighbours, it caused a humanitarian crisis and became a source of serious challenges and problems faced by many States of the Sahel region.

Although Mali is one of the largest countries in Africa, it has a relatively small population, which is largely centred along the Niger River. Agriculture is the dominant economic sector in the country, with cotton production, cattle and camel herding, and fishing among the major activities. According to a report by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Mali is the largest cotton producer on the African continent with a total volume of over 760,000 tons for 2021-2022⁶. At the same time, Mali remains one of the poorest countries in the world, 186th among 190 countries in the Human Development Index ranking as of the 2021/2022⁷.

Since tourism in Mali is very poorly developed, about 217,000 tourists in 2019⁸, and does not bring much income, the population is heavily dependent economically on external assistance and money transfers from workers abroad. Interviewee #1 confirms and at the

⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022. Summary of Results* (UN DESA/POP/2021/TR/NO. 3). p.5

⁶ Agence France-Presse. (2022, March 20). Mali records highest cotton production. *Africanews*. <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/20/mali-records-highest-cotton-production/>

⁷ UNDP. (n.d.). HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INSIGHTS [Dataset]. Retrieved from April, 2023 from <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>

⁸ Tourism in Mali. (n.d.). [Dataset]. In *WorldData*. <https://www.worlddata.info/africa/mali/tourism.php>

same time denies the above, saying that his / her family in Mali is doing well and is not involved in this conflict at all. In addition, he / she claims that Mali is a "family country" and if one of the family members has serious problems, there will always be someone who will help with money. Interviewee #5 confirms it saying that Malians show a strong sense of unity and that the country is a vast community where people can turn to another community in case of a problem or ask for help. In accordance with his / her words, in the usual understanding of the civil structure of the country, Mali is not divided into regions, since the borders do not correspond to this division. Instead, the structure of the country depends on the communities that predominantly live in the relevant territory.

In recent years, the humanitarian crisis in Mali has attracted considerable attention due to its complex nature and widespread humanitarian consequences. The ongoing conflict, combined with the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, has highlighted the importance of effective and comprehensive humanitarian assistance to meet their needs. Understanding the details of this crisis and evaluating the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions are crucial for both government officials, aid organizations, and researchers.

[Articulation of the thesis and its purposes](#)

As a master's student, I had the opportunity to take part in a Workshop on Mali during my first semester at UNIPD. The classes provided valuable information on the multifaceted nature of the crisis and shed light on the pressing humanitarian problems faced by the population of Mali. The seminar not only gave me a comprehensive understanding of the crisis in Mali but also increased my curiosity about the effectiveness of humanitarian action in meeting the needs of various groups of the population. I was particularly interested in the question of whether humanitarian aid really reaches all those in need and provides them with at least the most necessary things, especially in the context of such a complex emergency situation as in Mali. Guided by my experience in the Workshop and a genuine interest in humanitarian interventions, I decided to choose this topic for my graduation thesis.

This thesis examines the crisis in Mali, focusing on understanding its origins, international response and subsequent humanitarian challenges and contributions. Chapter 1 examines the impact of the 2011 Libyan crisis on the coup in Mali, highlights the role of Tuareg groups and the presence of Islamist organizations in the region. The

international reaction to the coup and subsequent interventions is analysed, including the evaluation of the effectiveness of MINUSMA, the French intervention and the subsequent withdrawal of French troops, and the intervention of the Russian Wagner group. The consequences of the coup d'etat and regional dynamics are also discussed in the end of this chapter.

Chapter 2 examines the humanitarian challenges faced by Mali. The concept of humanitarian assistance and the general need for assistance in Africa has been studied as well as the criticism of humanitarian aid to Africa. The beginning of the complex emergency situation that has arisen in Mali is considered. The chapter also explains the methodology used to analyse and evaluate key aspects of UN reports. The key areas of humanitarian assistance in response to the crisis have been identified, including food security, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) needs, protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, and access to education. In addition, the problems faced by the media and journalists in Mali are discussed.

Chapter 3 focuses on humanitarian organisations and their contributions to Mali. Expert comments and assessments of humanitarian assistance in the country are considered, with special attention being paid to the misuse of humanitarian aid. The importance of timely and fair humanitarian assistance, as well as the coverage and fulfilment of promised aid are emphasised. An assessment of the current humanitarian needs in Mali has been carried out, and the evolution of humanitarian assistance since 2012 has been analysed.

Thanks to a comprehensive study of the crisis in Mali and related humanitarian issues, this thesis provides valuable insight into the complexity of the situation and the efforts made by various actors to meet the needs of the affected population. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the crisis and offer recommendations for improving future humanitarian responses in Mali and similar contexts.

The purpose of this study is in several aspects. First, the study seeks to understand the causes of the conflict and the subsequent humanitarian crisis in Mali. Secondly, it is aimed at analysing the response of international, regional and local actors to a complex emergency situation. The main purpose of the study is to illustrate the opinions of various actors on humanitarian assistance provided in Mali and to identify possible cases of inappropriate, untimely, and unequal distribution of aid among vulnerable groups, if any.

In other words, the thesis plans to examine the delivery of humanitarian aid and humanitarian cooperation in general on the example of the crisis in Mali, as well as to assess how the promises of humanitarian actors coincide with reality.

[Interview methodology for illustrating the opinions of various actors on humanitarian assistance](#)

Several methodologies were used in this study. First, there was a review and a comparative analysis of the UN reports, namely its agency OCHA. As part of this analysis, a content analysis method was applied to determine the presence of certain words and key aspects, which were then compared. The study is mainly based on sources provided by the UN, as well as on reports of large non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in cooperation with UN agencies. In addition, I use articles from reliable sources. For example, if shocking information has been discovered in the media, I find official confirmation of this information in UN reports or in other reputable media. A detailed description of the methodology for reviewing UN reports and the rationale for choosing the reports of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will be discussed in the second chapter.

Another methodology that was chosen and used in this study is conducting interviews. The purpose of the interview was to understand and compare the different views on humanitarian aid. The respondents were divided into three groups: UN representatives, NGO staff and civilians. I contacted more than 30 people who were asked for comments on humanitarian aid, and about half of them (14 people) agreed to an interview. In order to find interviewees, I turned to former colleagues from the Red Cross, where I worked earlier, and also used my contacts in France, where I live. I have many friends who have moved from Africa, but among them and their acquaintances, I have not found a single displaced person in France due to the 2012 conflict. In addition, I used LinkedIn search to find respondents. For each interview, an information sheet was sent to the participant, containing full information about the master's research, and contact details of my supervisor and co-supervisor. In addition, the participants were notified that the interview was conducted on the condition of complete anonymity and with the possibility of withdrawing their comments within 2 weeks after the interview.

I speak three languages, and all three languages were used for master's research interviews. This made it possible to interact with respondents in their native language and provide a deeper understanding of their views and experience in the field of humanitarian assistance.

As stated above, all comments presented in this thesis were provided with a full guarantee of anonymity. Together with my supervisors, a strategy was developed to protect the identity of respondents as much as possible, indicating broadly their field of activity, but not revealing specific names. We decided to number each interviewee and use the common pronoun "he / she" in the text to preserve confidentiality and protect the respondents' personal data. In the course of the study, it was decided to divide the respondents into several groups in order to get a complete picture of their opinions and positions. It was also revealed that respondents within their group hold very similar views and positions on the same issues.

Group #1. Civilians

Interviewee #1 – Civilian of Mali

Interviewee #2 – Civilian of Mali

Interviewee #3 – Civilian of Burkina Faso

Interviewee #4 – Civilian of Burkina Faso

Group #2. NGO representatives

Interviewee #5 - NGO employee in France who maintains contacts with MINUSMA employees and the Government of Mali, Citizen of Mali

Interviewee #6 – Deputy Head of the NGO with a specific focus on inclusive education, Mali

Interviewee #7 - Deputy Head of the NGO with a specific focus on vulnerable people, especially children, the NGO operates in three countries of the Sahel region

Interviewee #8 - Junior expert of the NGO with a specific focus on food issues, Mali

Interviewee #9 – Program assistant of the NGO with a specific focus on human rights, Mali

Interviewee #10 – Head of the NGO with a specific focus on health issues, Mali

Interviewee #11 – NGO employee and the Sahel Crisis Researcher with a special focus on displacement

Group #3. United Nations employees

Interviewee #12 – MINUSMA employee at the height of the crisis in Mali

Interviewee #13 – World Food Program employee, Mali

Interviewee #14 – UN representative with a special focus on African countries

During the interview, interesting facts were discovered. For example, some respondents showed a feeling of fear when expressing their opinions. The general trend showed that civilians were more likely to agree to interviews and express their comments on various hot topics. At the same time, UN representatives were more reluctant to do this, strictly following the policy of their organisation and avoiding details. They preferred to talk about potential solutions and improving humanitarian assistance, rather than touch on controversial issues.

One case I particularly remember: during the interview, I asked a clarifying question about corruption and the illegal use of humanitarian aid, to which the UN employee showed fear and tension, saying that he / she was not hinting at specific individuals, but only denoted the situation as a whole. Of the three respondents from the UN representatives, two clarified that their comments should remain anonymous. One respondent also asked how I plan to quote his / her comments in the thesis.

As for NGO workers, their comments varied depending on their willingness to discuss different topics openly. In general, almost all of them answered frankly to all questions, provided specific cases and examples, and also expressed readiness for further discussion. However, one case attracted particular attention: one of the respondents, the head of a

non-governmental organisation specialising in healthcare, did not comment on the case of Plumpy'nuts, despite the fact that he / she works in the field of food security, and was informed in advance thanks to common acquaintances with my project and expressed a desire to share his experience and the limitations he / she faces in the role as the head of a non-governmental organisation.

Chapter 1 – Understanding the crisis in Mali

The Sahel region has faced various challenges and crises over the years, and one event, in particular, stands out as a significant turning point that amplified international focus on the region. This pivotal moment, the coup d'état in Mali in 2012, not only sparked a profound political and security crisis within the country but also affected the Sahel, setting in motion a series of events that demanded heightened global attention. By examining the intricacies of this coup d'état and its far-reaching implications, this chapter aims to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of the crisis, shedding light on its causes, consequences, and the following international response.

Before the events of 2012, the Sahel region had already been grappling with a range of complex challenges, including environmental degradation, poverty, weak governance etc. However, it was the coup d'état in Mali that served as a catalyst that drew the attention of the international community to the Sahel and emphasised the urgent need for comprehensive measures. The aftermath of the coup exposed deep-rooted political and security vulnerabilities not only in Mali but throughout the Sahel region as a whole, highlighting the interconnectedness of the challenges faced by its countries.

The coup d'état in Mali in 2012 triggered a chain of events that not only plunged the country into a protracted conflict but also provoked a significant humanitarian crisis, the consequences of which were felt throughout the region. The conflict, which continues to this day, requires a comprehensive understanding of its origins and underlying factors. Moreover, studying the world's humanitarian response to this crisis is crucial to understanding the scale and complexity of the problems facing Mali and its far-reaching consequences. By delving into the causes and consequences of this conflict, we can gain insight into the dynamics that perpetuate the ongoing unrest and the urgent need for sustained efforts to achieve peace and stability.

This chapter will analyse the coup d'état in Mali in 2012 as a critical moment in the history of the Sahel, exploring its root causes, the role of Tuaregs in this context, the emergence and growth of Islamic groups in the region and their interaction with political forces. In addition, the main points of the coup will be studied, including the chronology of events and key actors, the international reaction to the coup and intervention, including the role of regional and international organisations. Finally, the consequences of the coup

and its impact on the political, economic, and social situation in Mali and neighbouring regions will be analysed.

1.1 The impact of the 2011 Libyan crisis on the beginning of the coup in Mali

The occurrence of a coup in 2012, subsequent military intervention in the northern region, and recurring uprisings led by rebel and extremist groups across the country have rendered the nation, which had a population of 16.5 million as of 2012⁹, susceptible to various challenges and threats.

The 2012 coup in Mali was influenced by several factors, such as political instability, governance problems and socio-economic difficulties in the Sahel. The consequences of the Libyan crisis of 2011, which led to the influx of weapons and militants into the Sahel region, further aggravated the basic conditions and accelerated the coup.

In the fall of 2010, a series of anti-war protests against widespread corruption and unemployment called the Arab Spring swept most of the Arab world. According to international organisations, the authorities were brutally suppressing demonstrations. As a result of clashes in Libya, up to 2 thousand people were killed¹⁰.

In February 2011, according to Human Rights Watch, independent investigative media¹¹, during clashes between protesters and the police, one of the human rights defenders Fathi Terbil was arrested, which led to the outbreak of civil war. At the end of February, international forces intervened in the conflict between Gaddafi's supporters and the rebels. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation intervened militarily on the side of the anti-Gaddafi National Transitional Council. Gaddafi's government was overthrown, and Gaddafi himself retreated to Sirte but was captured and killed by the militants of the National Transitional Council.

⁹The World Bank. *Mali Overview*. (n.d.). [Dataset]. Retrieved from May 12, 2023, from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/mali?view=chart>

¹⁰ США передислоцируют войска вокруг Ливии. [US redeploys troops around Libya] (2011, February 28). *Internet Archive. Wayback Machine*. Retrieved May 12, 2023, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20110301160738/http://top.rbc.ru/politics/28/02/2011/551638.shtml>

¹¹ Libya: Arrests, Assaults in Advance of Planned Protests. Halt Attacks on Peaceful Demonstrators and Free Those Arrested. (2011, February 16). *HRW*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/16/libya-arrests-assaults-advance-planned-protests>

Richard Gowan, the UN director at the International Crisis Group, in its preface to the book on the Libyan war, said that this crisis « ... has been both a test of Western military might and international cooperation. There have been multiple surprises. A pundit who predicted in January 2011 that NATO was about to embark on a new war involving a Muslim country would have been dismissed.”¹²

At the moment, the third civil war is formally underway in the country – although, in reality, they actually flowed into one another and never ended. At least a dual power has been formed on the territory of Libya, although there are also a huge number of medium and small groups, detachments and gangs operating in the country, often acting independently and sometimes running from one to another.

The most important military and political consequence of the events in Libya was the transfer of the armed confrontation to the neighbouring countries of North and West Africa. Fighting on the principle of "all against all", the rapid activation of terrorist organisations throughout the region, as well as huge flows of easily accessible modern weapons, spread from Libya throughout the Sahara Desert and the Sahel region adjacent to it from the south, capturing huge areas, from Mali in the west to Chad in the south.

According to Interviewee #5, one of the reasons for the defeat and the subsequent coup in Mali was also the poor equipment of the Malian army. After Gaddafi's death, starting in 2012, weapons began to arrive in Mali and Burkina Faso. The uprising of Tuareg nomads began, thousands of whom served in Gaddafi's elite units and then returned to their homeland well-trained, armed, and organised. Soon they moved to the central part of Mali, where they fought with the Malian army.

Confirmation of his words can be found in a 2022 interview with the Former French Defense Minister Charles Mellon on the website Mondafrique dedicated to independent investigations and opinions. Opened to the public in January 2014 on the initiative of investigative journalist Nicolas Beau this media seeks to investigate the policy, economy, society, and culture of African nations while also touching on French, European, and global issues without any restrictions. In his speech, Charles Mellon listed France's

¹² O'Brien, E., Sinclair, A., & Gowan, R. (2011). *The Libyan War: A Diplomatic History* | February - August 2011. In *Reliefweb*. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY. CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/libyan-war-diplomatic-history-february-august-2011>

failures in Mali, which, according to him, started with Nicolas Sarkozy starting a conflict in Libya: “When Colonel Muammar Gaddafi fell, (Tuareg) recruits returned in The Libyan army to their country of origin is heavily armed; To form, especially in northern Mali, the hard core of terrorist groups.”¹³

Interviewee #5 said that France is responsible for the outbreak of the conflict in Mali, as he believes that the French intervention in Libya provoked the destabilisation of the situation and fueling the conflict.

In the article “Insight: Arms and men out of Libya fortify Mali rebellion” by Reuters authors David Lewis and Adama Diarra said that men “hardened by combat in Libya”¹⁴ later joined the armies of desert insurgents and attacked the northern Malian town of Aguelhoc. Being well militarily equipped, they disabled army communications equipment and local cell towers by using intense mortar fire. In addition, they strategically cut off the water supply and ambushed food convoys. A week later, they reappeared to take over the base.

A Malian government soldier involved in the conflict shared information with Reuters anonymously that “they had the advantage of being more numerous, being better armed and having better logistics, including satellite phones”.

1.1.1 Who are the Tuaregs and what role do they play in the conflict?

Tuaregs are an ethnic group inhabiting the regions of the Sahara and the Sahel belt in Africa, as well as border countries such as Algeria and Libya. They are known for their nomadic culture and historical connection with the desert territories. The Tuaregs speak the Tamashek language and have their own rich culture, including unique traditions, music, and artistic crafts.

In relation to Mali and Niger, the Tuaregs play a significant role in the history and politics of the country. For a long time, they have been fighting for recognition of their rights and cultural characteristics within the framework of the States. Conflicts between the

¹³ Former French Defense Minister: Our army’s mistakes in Mali started from Libya. (2022, February 20). *The Libya Update*. <https://libyaupdate.com/former-french-defense-minister-our-armys-mistakes-in-mali-started-from-libya/>

¹⁴ Lewis, D., & Diarra, A. (2012, February 10). Insight: Arms and men out of Libya fortify Mali rebellion. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-libya-idUSTRE8190UX20120210>

Governments and the Tuaregs have manifested themselves in various forms, including armed clashes and political disputes.

Most of the territory of the modern state of Mali has been under the rule of France since the end of the XIX century. The colonisation of Africa was not peaceful, and the Tuareg nomads resisted strongly and regularly rebelled against the French occupiers. The Tuaregs were dissatisfied with the tax policy of the metropolis, the withdrawal of camels necessary for the conduct of war and the abolition of slavery.¹⁵

At various times, the Tuaregs acted as armed groups and carried out insurgent actions. Since gaining independence from France in 1960¹⁶, Mali has faced repeated uprisings.¹⁷ In the 60s of the 20th century, the Tuaregs first staged an uprising for the recognition of their rights and socio-economic development. They demanded greater autonomy and a fair distribution of resources. Two years later, the uprising was suppressed by the Malian government.

On November 19, 1968, a peaceful military coup took place in Mali, as a result of which President Modibo Keita was removed from power. Lieutenant Moussa Traoré, an army officer who headed the Military Committee of National Liberation, organised a coup and subsequently took the post of head of State. In 1985, Moussa Traoré was re-elected without any opposition, receiving an overwhelming 98 per cent of the vote.

Thirty years later, in the 1990s, there was an uprising characterised by extensive acts of violence by various Tuareg groups in order to achieve autonomy or create their own national state. In addition, this conflict affected the neighbouring country of Niger and occurred in the period after the regional famine of the 1980s and the subsequent refugee crisis, as well as during the general political repression and crisis in both countries. Eventually, after negotiations held in Ouagadougou, the Government successfully

¹⁵ Подавленное восстание. Почему у исламистов Мали личные счеты к французам. [The suppressed uprising. Why do the Islamists of Mali have personal scores to the French] (2015, November 20). *LENTA.RU*. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/11/20/mali/>

¹⁶ Independence of the Mali Federation (20 June 1960). (n.d.). *Centre Virtuel De La Connaissance Sur L'Europe*. https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/independence_of_the_mali_federation_20_june_1960-en-7bc33107-4988-4688-ac93-f9880f12655d.html

¹⁷ A timeline of northern conflict. (2012, April 7). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/timeline-northern-conflict>

concluded peace agreements with all Tuareg rebel groups on April 15, 1995, in which a symbolic burning of weapons was carried out. Referred to as the "Ouagadougou Agreements", these crucial agreements marked the cessation of most hostilities, with the last armed group signing its signature in 1998. In accordance with the agreements concluded, the Tuaregs received autonomy and financial support.

On March 26, 1991, Traoré was overthrown, and a transitional government called the Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People was established, with military officer Amadou Toumani Touré at its helm. After a few months, Mali made efforts to establish a functioning democracy, leading to the adoption of a new constitution through a referendum with overwhelming support. In June 2002, Amadou Toumani Touré was elected as president, despite his earlier stance of not seeking a return to politics.

In addition to the political instability and governance problems that led to multiple coups, the Sahel has also experienced natural disasters, including severe droughts in the 1970s, 1980s and 2005, where pastoral communities in Mali have felt the severe effects of drought. Severe drought has had a catastrophic impact on the northern regions of the Sahel countries, which has led to significant migration flows.

Then another Tuareg uprising in 2007-2009 was caused by the murder of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, a high-ranking Tuareg military leader who was the commander of the armed group "The Tuareg Movement of Northern Mali". The murder of Ag Bahanga was a catalyst for the escalation of tensions between the Tuaregs and the Malian government. In addition, before his death, Ibrahim aroused even greater interest among several departments of the Malian government. Six months after the start of the armed uprising against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, he was suspected of collecting weapons.¹⁸ Moreover, he was also credited with an active role in recruiting Tuareg fighters from Libya.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mort du rebelle touareg Ibrahim Ag Bahanga [Death of the Tuareg rebel Ibrahim Ag Bahanga]. (2011, August 27). *FRANCE 24*. <https://www.france24.com/fr/20110827-sahel-mali-algerie-libye-touaregs-mort-rebelle-ibrahim-ag-bahanga-kidal-tamasheq-armes>

¹⁹ Mali. A timeline of northern conflict. (2012, April 5). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/timeline-northern-conflict>

In addition, it should be noted that Malians, even before the events of 2011 in Libya, attributed Gaddafi to financing Tuareg uprisings in Mali in the past. His visit to the 2006 Muslim Maouloud holiday in Timbuktu caused discontent among Malians.²⁰ The Maouloud festival is a significant Islamic event celebrated in many parts of the world that commemorates the birth and life of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

As a result of the death of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga and the continued desire for decentralisation and independence, a series of armed clashes began between Government forces and Tuareg militant groups. The last mentioned Tuareg uprising highlighted the complex socio-political and ethnic problems faced by Mali. It also paved the way for subsequent uprisings and conflicts in the region.

The next uprising occurred relatively soon after the previous one and took place in 2012. Mali has fallen into “the grip of an unprecedented political crisis, one of the most serious since the landlocked West African country gained independence from France in 1960”²¹. It led to Tuareg’s control over a significant part of the northern regions of Mali. The uprising was one of the reasons for the subsequent coup d’état and the difficult political situation in the country.

In October 2011, the Tuaregs demanded the creation of an independent state of Azawad in northern Mali. As a result, a National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) emerged, which also included fighters who took part in the Libyan civil war and the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi. After the end of the Libyan conflict, the Tuaregs were heavily armed. In August 2011, reports were received on the arrival of armed Tuaregs in Mali, who possessed solid weapons and supplies. They reached Mali by crossing the borders of Libya, Algeria, and Niger.²²

In the book "Major Issues in Islam: The Challenges Within and Without" by Harvey J. Sindima it says that “the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)

²⁰ Mali. A timeline of northern conflict. (2012, April 5). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/timeline-northern-conflict>

²¹ Mali crisis: Key players. (2013, March 12). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17582909>

²² Mali. A timeline of northern conflict. (2012, April 5). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/timeline-northern-conflict>

would like to make it clear that within the MNLA military command there are: old rebels from the uprisings of the 1990s (MFUA – Movements of the united Fronts of Azawad), of 2006 (MTNM – The Tuareg Movement of Northern Mali, which was led by the late Ibrahim Ag Bahanga), fighters who have returned from Libya but who mostly participated in the liberation of that country, volunteers from the various ethnicities of northern Mali (Tuareg, Songhai, Peul and Moor) and both soldiers and officers who have deserted from the Malian army.”²³

The rebels were able to capture all the cities of Malian Azawad, including the historical capital Timbuktu. In January 2012, government forces reported the loss of their positions, and later in 3 months, in April 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad announced the achievement of its goal and proclaimed the independent State of Azawad.

The Malian troops lacked the necessary resources and adequate weapons to confront the Tuareg rebels, who managed to oust Malian troops from several cities in the north and forced many civilians to leave the area. Most of the population was forced to flee. Some moved inside the country – to the south of Mali or to the capital Bamako. Some fled to neighbouring states. At an early stage of the conflict, by February 17, 2012, according to estimates by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, about 44,000 refugees had fled their homes and taken refuge in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania.²⁴

1.1.2 The presence of Islamist Groups in the region

Another problem in the northern region was the presence of Islamist groups that played a significant role in the conflict and had an impact on its development, both in Mali and in neighbouring countries.

The Islamist group Ansar al-Din (also known as Ansar Dine), which translates as "defenders of the faith", was founded in December 2011 to support the Tuareg uprisings and fight against the Malian authorities. However, a few months later, its founder Iyad Ag Ghali publicly stated that the Ansar Dine movement is not fighting for the

²³ Sindima, H. J. (n.d.). *Major Issues in Islam: The Challenges Within and Without*. p.123

²⁴ UNHCR stepping up aid as influx from Mali to neighbouring countries doubles. (2012, February 17). *UNHCR the UN Refugee Agency*. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-stepping-aid-influx-mali-neighbouring-countries-doubles>

independence of Azawad, as previously stated, but for the introduction of Sharia law²⁵ and for the Islamization of the region.²⁶

It is important to note that Iyad Ag Ghali is a Tuareg by origin born in Mali and was an active participant in the conflicts in Libya and Chad in the 1970s on the side of Gaddafi's troops. Then in the early 90s, he participated in the Tuareg uprisings in Mali and founded the People's Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MPLA). In the late 1990s, he converted to Islamism and became radicalised by coming into contact with Jamaat Al-Tabligh, the organisation calling on Muslims to be more religious.

Initially, Islamism is a religious and political ideology aimed at creating conditions under which any contradictions within society and the state where there is a Muslim population, as well as interstate relations with their participation, will be resolved on the basis of Sharia norms.

In the generally accepted context, jihad means a spiritual struggle for faith and conflict with non-believers. Throughout the early history of Islam, jihad was seen as a religious duty of every Muslim. Some extremist Islamists even consider it the sixth pillar of Islam. The emergence of modern Islamic fundamentalism is largely due to the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian preacher and ideologue associated with the radical Muslim Brotherhood group. Qutb's ideas served as the basis for actions carried out by such groups as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.²⁷

The ideology of Islamists encompasses the belief in the legitimacy and, in some cases, the duty of engaging in jihad against all non-believers, including both non-Muslims and Muslims who do not align with their Islamist ideology. Those Muslims who are deemed to deviate from Islamist principles may be labeled as apostates through takfir, which involves classifying them as infidels. Utilising Sharia provisions, Islamists condone and

²⁵ Mali. A timeline of northern conflict. (2012, April 5). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/timeline-northern-conflict>

²⁶ Mapping Militant Organizations. "Ansar Dine." Stanford University. Last modified July 2018. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/ansar-dine>

²⁷ Джихад: что про это надо знать. Главные вопросы и доступные ответы про «священную войну» [Jihad: what you need to know about it. The main questions and available answers about the "holy war"]. (2015, October 9). *Meduza*. <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/10/09/dzhihad-cto-pro-eto-nado-znat>

even encourage the perpetration of terrorist acts, including the deployment of suicide bombers.²⁸

Although Iyad Ag Ghali initially denied his commitment to jihadism, he became increasingly involved with the jihadists of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) group, who in 2007 joined Al-Qaeda and became Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).²⁹ Among its goals, AQIM, in addition to spreading Islamic law, also sought to liberate Malians from the French colonial heritage.³⁰

“Ansar Dine’s ideology closely mirrored that of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); it was reportedly a domestic front group and affiliate for AQIM, though it was never publicly recognized by AQIM as an official affiliate.”³¹ Moreover, the ideology of Ansar Dine included violence against civilians in the western part of the country, especially against peacekeepers stationed in Mali. According to a report of 2017 by Human Rights Watch, since the creation of the UN mission in Mali in 2013, more than 70 peacekeepers have been killed. Most of the attacks targeted convoys that delivered essential resources, such as food and water, to UN bases, as well as the bases themselves, including Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. The above-mentioned Islamic groups were claimed responsible for many of these attacks.³²

Another Islamic group involved in the attacks was the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) which separated from AQIM. Its goal was the widespread jihad beyond the Sahel and Maghreb.³³ In October 2011, a significant incident related to MUJAO occurred in Algeria. The group captured three humanitarian workers from Spain

²⁸ Игнатенко, А. (2000, October 12). От Филиппин до Косово [From the Philippines to Kosovo]. *Независимая Газета*. https://www.ng.ru/ideas/2000-10-12/8_islam.html

²⁹ *Iyad Ag Ghali*. (n.d.). https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iyad_Ag_Ghali. Last modified June 2023

³⁰ Mali crisis: Key players. (2013, March 12). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17582909>

³¹ Mapping Militant Organizations. “Ansar Dine.” Stanford University. Last modified July 2018. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/ansar-dine>

³² Human Rights Watch. (2017). *Mali Conflict and aftermath. Compendium of Human Rights Watch Reporting, 2012-2017*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/02/02/mali-conflict-and-aftermath/compendium-human-rights-watch-reporting-2012-2017-p.9>

³³ Mali crisis: Key players. (2013, March 12). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17582909>

and Italy in the city of Tindouf. After a long period of captivity, the hostages were released in July 2012, presumably after paying a ransom.

In early 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) led an uprising to come to power in northern Mali. In response to this, the Malian military led by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, who was later named as the leader of the coup, organised a coup and overthrew Amadou Toumani Touré, the President of Mali³⁴. It is important to note that the president has repeatedly been the object of criticism in connection with the redirection of supplies of funds and weapons provided by the United States to fight the MNLA, which he considered a more serious threat than Islamist groups.³⁵

Ansar Dine, MNLA, AQIM and MUJAO jointly took advantage of the security breach to invade northern Mali, defeat the Malian security forces and occupy the region. After the end of the war, they began to implement Sharia law in the territories under their control, which caused a conflict with the MNLA. In April 2012, Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO terminated their alliances with the MNLA, as the goal of the MNLA – the creation of a secular and independent state in northern Mali – clearly contradicted the aspirations of these groups to form a single Malian state based on the principles of Sharia. Moreover, MNLA formally classified Ansar Dine as a "terrorist group"³⁶ and according to some analysts "many of its fighters to defect to Ansar Dine and MUJAO"³⁷.

The influence of Islamist groups on the 2012 coup in Mali cannot be ignored, especially given their disregard for cultural heritage and compliance with Sharia law. Their actions reflected a lack of respect for Mali's culture and values. In particular, according to Ansar Dine, compliance with Sharia law required the following rules: a ban on alcohol and smoking, restrictions on visiting cemeteries on Fridays and holding football matches, as

³⁴ Mali : le président renversé par un coup d'État militaire [Mali : the president overthrown by a military coup]. (2012, March 22). *Le Figaro*. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2012/03/22/01003-20120322ARTFIG00511-mali-le-president-renverse-par-un-coup-d-etat-militaire.php>

³⁵ Mali crisis: Key players. (2013, March 12). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17582909>

³⁶ Mali peace talks: Tuareg and Islamist leaders "chatted, cracked jokes." (2012, December 5). *The Observers*. <https://observers.france24.com/en/20121205-ansar-dine-mnla-tuareg-mali-negotiations>

³⁷ Mali crisis: Key players. (2013, March 12). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17582909>

well as the mandatory wearing of the burqa by all women.³⁸ Speaking of the reaction of the population, residents of Gundam, a Timbuktu region in northern Mali, have staged an uprising against Islamists who tried to impose strict Islamic laws and committed beatings. The population reached an extreme degree of indignation after the beating of a woman who was holding her child in her arms. The school director and native of Gundam Alassane Cissé said that "the woman was at a pump to get water, her baby on her back", and "members of Ansar Dine were passing by and started to whip her because her scarf was down around her neck and not on her head". As a result of this incident, the child fell to the ground.³⁹

When discussing the destruction of cultural heritage, in early July 2012, Ansar Dine attracted national media attention when they destroyed seven mausoleums in Timbuktu, which were part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At the session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee held in St. Petersburg, Russia, a strong condemnation was expressed of the acts of destruction of mausoleums in the city of Timbuktu in Mali, and there was a call for an end to these "heinous acts". The members of the Committee decided to take measures to assist Mali in protecting these valuable objects.⁴⁰ Later the UN Security Council noted that the damage to World Heritage sites can be considered as an act of war crime.

In 2013, with the appearance of France in the arena of international politics in Mali, the situation took a new turn, introducing new factors and prospects into the further dynamics of events. France introduced a military operation that led to the removal of Ansar Dine and its supporters from power and control over the region. Despite this, Ansar Dine continued to play a significant role in the political structure of northern Mali and was a strong opponent of Western interventions.⁴¹ Even after the intervention of the French

³⁸ Mapping Militant Organizations. "Ansar Dine." Stanford University. Last modified July 2018. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/ansar-dine>

³⁹ Northern Mali residents rise up against Islamists. (2012, July 13). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/northern-mali-residents-rise-against-islamists>

⁴⁰ Комитет Всемирного наследия ЮНЕСКО требует прекратить разрушение культурного наследия Мали [UNESCO World Heritage Committee demands to stop the destruction of Mali's cultural heritage]. (2012, July 3). *The United Nations*. <https://news.un.org/ru/story/2012/07/1204941>

⁴¹ Gaffey, C. (2016, June 29). Who is Iyad Ag Ghaly, Mali's Veteran Jihadi? *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/who-iyad-ag-ghaly-malis-veteran-jihadi-475473>

troops, Ansar Dine did not stop its active offensives and, in 2015, continued to attack the United Nations forces and the French armed forces, using various types of weapons, including rockets, mortars and improvised explosive devices. “They've spent almost two years since the French intervention, conducting some attacks but [mostly] rebuilding, regrouping and since 2015, there's been a regular increase in attacks”⁴², said Andrew Lebovich, a visiting fellow at the European Council of Foreign Relations.

As of 2016, Islamic groups represented in the region carried out at least 363 attacks between 2015 and 2016, including attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Ivory Coast, according to the FDD's Long War Journal, that dedicated to the research and analysis of conflicts, jihadism and military operations. Caleb Weiss, its editor, explores the expansion of the Islamic State in the Sahel region. In his articles he says that “of the 257 attacks, 93 came as a result of improvised explosive devices. Another 27 were from mortar or rocket barrages aimed at French, Malian, or UN military bases in northern Mali. There were 11 kidnappings, with nine occurring in Mali and one each in Burkina Faso and Niger. Six were suicide bombings. The remaining 120 attacks were a variation of assaults, ambushes, or assassinations.”⁴³

It is striking that only 37 of the reported Al-Qaeda-related attacks in 2016 were directed against civilians. “Rather, Malian security forces (military, national guard, gendarmerie, and police) were the prime target for jihadists, with those security forces being the target in 84 instances. The UN’s forces were targeted 75 times, second-most frequently. Another 35 were directed at French forces. Tuareg forces were targeted at least six times.”⁴⁴ Caleb Weiss in his article, calls the MINUSMA “the deadliest UN peacekeeping force in the world”⁴⁵ due to frequent attacks and killings of humanitarian workers of the mission.

According to a report by the US State Department, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has used various sources for financing, including ransoms, arms trafficking, vehicles,

⁴² Gaffey, C. (2016, June 29). Who is Iyad Ag Ghaly, Mali’s Veteran Jihadi? *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/who-iyad-ag-ghaly-malis-veteran-jihadi-475473>

⁴³ Weiss, C. (2017, January 7). Al Qaeda linked to more than 250 West African attacks in 2016. *FDD’s Long War Journal*. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/01/over-250-al-qaeda-linked-attacks-in-west-africa-in-2016.php>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

cigarettes and human trafficking. Since 2007, when the group was officially formed, there have been 12 cases of abductions in the Sahel, including cases in Mauritania, Mali and Niger involving victims from America and Europe.⁴⁶

Speaking about threats to the European and American populations, AQIM has not claimed responsibility for any terrorist attacks committed in Europe or America. However, she expressed threats about possible terrorist attacks in France. In addition, the Islamists supported and praised the mass murder that took place in January 2015 in the office of the Paris satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, as a result of which 10 journalists and two policemen were killed. One of the witnesses said about the attackers that “they spoke perfect French” and “they said they were from al-Qaeda”. Later Al-Qaeda in Yemen claimed responsibility.⁴⁷

1.2 International reaction to the coup and intervention in Mali

The coup caused a reaction, both at the national and international levels, including condemnation from various countries and institutions, the imposition of sanctions against the leaders of the coup, the suspension of humanitarian and military aid and diplomatic efforts to restore constitutional order in Mali.

As for the reaction of the UN, its Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed deep concern about the events taking place in Mali. The official statement of March 21, 2012, stated that “he calls for calm and for grievances to be resolved peacefully and within the democratic process”, and “reaffirms United Nations support for the constitutional order in Mali”.⁴⁸

On March 26, 2012, during the 6741 meeting where peace and security in Africa were discussed, the Security Council strongly condemned the seizure of power by the National Committee for Recovering Democracy and Restoring the State (CNRDRE) and its self-

⁴⁶ Thurston, A. (2011, January 18). AQIM Kidnappings and Murders in the Sahel, 2007-Present. *Sahel Blog. Wordpress*. <https://sahelblog.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/aqim-kidnappings-and-murders-in-the-sahel-2007-present/>

⁴⁷ Draper, L., & Guiton, B. (2015, January 7). Paris Reels After Deadly Attack on Satirical Magazine Charlie Hebdo. *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/shooting-reported-paris-hq-satirical-magazine-297202>

⁴⁸ Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Mali. (2012, March 21). *The United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2012-03-21/statement-attributable-spokesperson-secretary-general-mali>

proclaimed leader Amadou Haya Sano.⁴⁹ The Security Council expressed “its serious concern about the insecurity and rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Sahel region, which is further complicated by the presence of armed groups and terrorist groups and their activities, as well as by the proliferation of weapons from within and outside the region, that threaten peace, security and stability of regional States”. In addition, the Security Council categorically condemned the violent coup against the democratically elected Government of Mali.

The Security Council called on national authorities, and international, regional and subregional organisations to take immediate action to address challenges facing the Sahel region in connection with the state coup in Mali and the spread of Islamist and rebel movements.

On April 2, 2012, the leaders of the ECOWAS regional organisation decided to join the condemnation and adopted large-scale sanctions against the military junta of Mali.⁵⁰ In this context, the President of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, who is the Chairman of the committee, confirmed that the diplomatic, economic, financial, and other measures that have entered into force will not be cancelled until the restoration of constitutional order. It is also worth noting that Algeria and Mauritania, although not members of ECOWAS, supported these measures.

In addition, in the statement of the African Union, its chief Jean Ping, “strongly condemns this act of rebellion, which seriously undermines constitutional legality and constitutes a significant setback for Mali and for the ongoing democratic processes on the continent”.⁵¹

Besides, the World Bank and the African Development Bank have announced the suspension of development assistance to Mali. It was noted that the World Bank could aid only if absolutely necessary but did not plan to approve new projects or development programs until the crisis was resolved. The representative of the World Bank expressed regret at the beginning of the crisis, which led to the postponement of planned democratic

⁴⁹ United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 6741st meeting (26 March 2012) UN Doc S/PV.6741

⁵⁰Mali. A timeline of northern conflict. (2012, April 5). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/timeline-northern-conflict>

⁵¹ International condemnation for Mali coup. (2012, March 23). *Aljazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/3/23/international-condemnation-for-mali-coup>

elections, and noted that Mali has made “steady economic and social progress and strengthened its democratic governance” in recent years.⁵²

On April 6, 2012, the Government of Burkina Faso, with the mediation of the ECOWAS, held negotiations where an agreement was reached on the resignation of the Amadou Toumani Touré and the appointment of the Interim President of the Republic of Mali, Dioncounda Traoré.

Moreover, Burkina Faso assisted in negotiations with Ansar Dine. In December 2012, the Islamist group entered into negotiations with the Government of Burkina Faso, represented by President Blaise Compaoré, and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in order to resolve the crisis and reach an agreement on the cessation of armed clashes. However, despite the negotiations, a final ceasefire agreement has not been reached, leaving the situation in Mali unresolved and continuing tensions in the region.⁵³

On January 10, 2013, the situation in Mali worsened, prompting the Interim President to seek help from France to resolve the escalating crisis urgently.

At the same time, the United Nations issued a call for the early deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali, which was tasked with assisting State forces in regaining control over the northern region. The AFISMA was established by the Economic Community of West African States in response to the aggravation of the situation in Mali at the end of 2012. It was established on January 17, 2013, on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolution 2085 of December 20, 2012.⁵⁴ The mission was organised for an initial period of one year in response to repeated appeals from the Interim Government of Mali. In a letter dated 13 July 2012, the Transitional Government expressed serious concerns about human rights violations committed by armed rebels,

⁵² The World Bank. (2012, March 22). Joint Statement of the African Development Bank Group and the World Bank Group on the Situation in Mali. *The World Bank*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2012/03/22/joint-statement-of-the-african-development-bank-group-and-the-world-bank-group-on-the-situation-in-mali>

⁵³ Mali peace talks: Tuareg and Islamist leaders “chatted, cracked jokes.” (2012, December 5). *The Observers*. <https://observers.france24.com/en/20121205-ansar-dine-mnla-tuareg-mali-negotiations>

⁵⁴ United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2085 (2012) (20 December 2012) UN Doc S/RES/2085 (2012)

terrorists, and extremist groups, including acts of violence and murder. On September 18, 2012, they applied for permission to deploy and provide support to restore control over the occupied areas in the north of the country. On October 12, 2012, the importance of supporting international efforts to bring to justice those who violated human rights and the laws of the country was emphasised.

The aim of AFISMA was to support the Malian army in ousting the Islamist groups (AQIM, MUJAO, Ansar Dine) who have taken control of Northern Mali after having driven out the Tuareg Independence rebels of the MNLA alongside whom they led an offensive launched at the beginning of 2012.⁵⁵

According to the ECOWAC plan approved by the African Union, about 3,300 armed forces were supposed to be sent to Mali with the use of logistical support from Western countries, which were subsequently increased to 7,700 due to the unexpected rebel offensive.⁵⁶

Later, on April 25, 2013, the United Nations Multidisciplinary Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by UN Security Council Resolution 2100, “condemning strongly the offensive launched on 10 January 2013 by terrorist, extremist and armed groups towards the south of Mali”, “reaffirming its strong commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Mali”, and “reaffirming the basic principles of peacekeeping, including consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force, except in self-defence and defence of the mandate”.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Lagneau, L. (2012, December 21). Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU autorise le déploiement d'une force internationale au Mali [The UN Security Council authorizes the deployment of an international force in Mali]. *Zone Militaire. Opex360*. <https://www.opex360.com/2012/12/21/le-conseil-de-securite-de-lonu-autorise-le-deploiement-dune-force-international-au-mali/>

⁵⁶ Agence France-Presse. (2013, January 26). L'Afrique de l'Ouest veut déployer environ 6.000 de ses soldats au Mali (officiel) [West Africa wants to deploy about 6,000 of its soldiers in Mali (official)]. *Abidjan.net*. <https://news.abidjan.net/articles/449988/lafrique-de-louest-veut-deployer-environ-6000-de-ses-soldats-au-mali-officiel>

⁵⁷ United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2100 (2013) (25 April 2013) UN Doc S/RES/2100 (2013)

MINUSMA was created in order “to support the transitional authorities of Mali in the stabilisation of the country and implementation of the transitional roadmap”⁵⁸ and to maintain peace in the north of the country.

On July 1, 2013, the “international assistance force for Mali transformed into a UN peacekeeping mission”, meaning that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) replaced the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).⁵⁹ The militaries who were in the previous international forces under the African leadership have officially switched to wearing blue helmets, which are a symbol of a UN peacekeeping force.

At the morning ceremony on the day of the transfer of powers from AFISMA to MINUSMA, Bert Koenders, Special Representative of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and head of MINUSMA, expressed confidence that broad partnerships play a critical role in ensuring the success of MINUSMA, given the many challenges the mission faces. These challenges include security and logistical issues, as well as problems in the political and socio-economic spheres.⁶⁰

One of the main goals of MINUSMA was to work closely with the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the French armed forces in order to effectively coordinate and cooperate.

1.2.1 Assessing the effectiveness of MINUSMA

As for MINUSMA's achievements during its more than 10-year stay in the country, they cause a lot of controversy and are often criticised, especially by local residents. Initially, it was assumed that MINUSMA would work together with the French and Malian military, focused on the fight against terrorism, while the mission itself would be working on stabilising the situation in the country and restoring state structures. According to the mission's mandate, the troops have no right to engage in offensive operations against militants, but they are obliged to “anticipate, deter and effectively respond to threats to

⁵⁸ MINUSMA Fact Sheet. (n.d.). *United Nations Peacekeeping*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusma>

⁵⁹ International assistance force for Mali transformed into UN peacekeeping mission. (2013, July 1). *The United Nations*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2013/07/443632>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the civilian population”⁶¹. As a result of “the deadliest UN mission”⁶², 174 peacekeepers lost their lives⁶³, which leads to the fact that UN staff are forced to devote more efforts to ensuring the safety of their own colleagues and facilities, to the detriment of the protection of civilians, especially in rural areas.

According to the majority of Malians, the MINUSMA is ineffective in ensuring security.⁶⁴ Interviewee #1 noted that he / she was not familiar with the results of the mission's activities, and neither he / she nor his / her family had ever received humanitarian support from MINUSMA. Interviewee #5 said that even if the blue helmets intervene, they are completely ineffective in Mali. During our conversation, he / she has repeatedly stressed this (“its efficiency is zero”; “they are [MINUSMA employees] are completely ineffective”). He / she also noted that he / she studies every MINUSMA report that is published every 6 months, but not all the data in the reports are reliable: “It contains basic information that is not always objective”. The only plus he / she called the mission's provision of jobs to local residents of Mali, which are characterised by high wages. A large number of local residents are employed on the mission. Therefore, in his / her opinion, the Malian authorities prefer to keep the mission in the country a little longer, but limiting their activities. However, Interviewee #11 said that in MINUSMA they don't have enough Malians. He/ she also added that “they [MINUSMA] do give work to Malians, they [Malians] are very well paid”, but “the number of Malians in the peacekeeping forces is rather insignificant”. Moreover, “in terms of office jobs, Malians are mostly drivers”.

Despite the discontent expressed by local residents, MINUSMA provided some stability in the areas of its deployment. With its presence, the rebels were kept from seizing cities and towns, thereby alleviating the suffering of local residents. MINUSMA also plays a significant role in supporting the Government and promoting its active presence in cities.

⁶¹ United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2640 (2022) (29 June 2022) UN Doc S/RES/2640 (2022)

⁶² Jezequel, J.-H., Nossiter, F., & Maiga, I. (2022, December 1). MINUSMA at a Crossroads. *Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/minusma-crossroads>

⁶³ Reuters. (2022, October 17). Three UN Peacekeepers Killed, Three Injured in Mali Attack. *VOA*. <https://www.voanews.com/a/three-un-peacekeepers-killed-three-injured-in-mali-attack-/6793766.html>

⁶⁴ Jezequel, J.-H., Nossiter, F., & Maiga, I. (2022, December 1). MINUSMA at a Crossroads. *Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/minusma-crossroads>

Despite the scepticism expressed by the signatories of the 2015 Bamako Agreement between the Government of Mali and armed groups of the north, the mission also contributes to its implementation. Moreover, El-Ghassim Wane, the head of MINUSMA, is one of the few authoritative personalities capable of acting as a political mediator between all parties. He interacts daily with Malian politicians, representatives of civil society and foreign diplomats.⁶⁵

However, Interviewee #11 said that the attitude of the population to the MINUSMA varies dramatically from region to region, and their perception also changes depending on which country is providing troops, in which part it is deployed. Sometimes a particular squad manages to establish mutual understanding with its community. And then there is a rotation, and the population again does not trust the new person. “For example, there are a lot of Moroccans in peacekeeping missions, and Malians see them as neighbours, and they are closer to understanding them, unlike Bangladeshis, who are like a fish pulled out of water”.

During the research, a former UN employee, Interviewee #12, who worked in the MINUSMA mission during the period of the highest tension in Mali was interviewed. He / she spoke about the content of his / her work, talked about his / her daily work, and expressed his / her opinion about how effective the mission as a whole is. He / she went to Mali in 2014 and stayed there until 2018, working in one of the most dangerous cities in Mali. He mainly worked on guiding and mentoring peacekeepers and informing the public. He / she says that the work was interesting, but there were many problems. One of them was periodic power outages, which led to the shutdown of electrical equipment and created inconveniences in the performance of tasks. In addition, there was a shortage of goods, which limited the availability of some necessary resources. The guest house where MINUSMA staff lived was next to their office, so his / her life was in an office-home-office format. He / she often felt like he / she was in prison.

From the point of view of security, life was very dangerous and difficult. In the Malian capital Bamako, there was another MINUSMA office where a security guard was killed, even though Bamako is quite calm and relaxed city with all the amenities. Their office

⁶⁵ Jezequel, J.-H., Nossiter, F., & Maiga, I. (2022, December 1). MINUSMA at a Crossroads. *Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/minusma-crossroads>

was also attacked, and he / she “had a chance [to survive]”. In general, in the city where he / she lived, there were often shelling, sirens, and rockets thrown towards the city. The noise has become something natural, and people were used to the rain of weapons. Once, he / she was also chased by a motorcycle, but he / she managed to escape. He / she repeated many times during the interview that the security situation is very complicated in the country.

Now the situation has worsened in terms of security, according to his / her colleagues and friends who still live there. Everything is limited, life is kept to a minimum. Moving from one area to another is very difficult due to security issues. Besides, during the rainy season, it is extremely difficult to move, sometimes you can spend up to 2 weeks on the road. In cases when MINUSMA cannot get to a certain locality, either air communication is used (more often from north to south) – helicopters, or cars for transporting provisions accompanied by an escort.

He / she believes that MINUSMA is more aimed at developing the region, restoring hospitals, roads, schools, helping the population and children, but not to ensure the safety of the population. Interviewee #2 added that MINUSMA also provides humanitarian assistance in the form of financial support by drilling wells in areas where access to drinking water is a problem.

According to Interviewee #12, the "blue helmets" are more focused on patrolling the streets, and then they return to the camps, just to show their presence. He / she confirmed that the peacekeepers only patrol the city and do not engage in combat.

However, Interviewee #11 stated the exact opposite information: "You know, that MINUSMA is a party to the conflict, they're actively attacking people, that they are part of the war that is happening. So to blur the line between what is humanitarian and what is an armed response makes it very dangerous for aid workers". “The issue I think with the UN is that the UN is such a big beast, and people can't necessarily tell the difference between the different UN bodies. In most cases, it complicates what is military and what is humanitarian assistance, and that line needs to be very, very separated. So in Mali to have a peacekeeping force conduct an aid delivery means that when a UN aid worker might be perceived as being a military force”.

Interviewee #12 was the only MINUSMA employee who agreed to an interview. The other two UN representatives did not say a word about MINUSMA. Interviewee #5 commented on this and confirmed that it is currently quite difficult to find people in MINUSMA who would be very open to communication and discussion. MINUSMA's employees understand that they are not very popular among the population, and there are almost no cars with UN markings in the city. He / she also suggested that MINUSMA will cease its activities from "June next year or 6 months after that during discussions at the UN".

It was difficult to get comments not only from UN representatives but also from local authorities. For example, one of the potential interviewees was the governor of the city in the central region of Mali. At the moment, this is one of the most difficult regions from the point of view of security. The governor is a friend of Interviewee #5, who, at my request, told the representative about my project and the desire to ask a few questions. Interviewee #5 said that the governor was busy with the referendum on changing the Constitution, which was scheduled for June 11-18, and also, in general, he is a military man and not very talkative, especially on coup issues.

Interviewee #5 expressed the opinion that it is currently difficult to find people with whom to discuss the coup and its consequences. He / she noted that the issue of human rights is a very sensitive topic in Mali, and at the moment, the country is also being seriously criticised by Western foreign countries and organisations that use the issue of human rights for their own purposes. According to his / her words, in Mali, there is now a strong rejection of the Western concept of human rights. Western countries use the concept of "human rights" to criticise Mali and the interim Government. They spread such approaches around the world in order to protect their own interests.

When I asked Interviewee #11 if the locals really dislike MINUSMA so much, she replied that people hate peacekeepers in every country because they don't understand why peacekeepers can't do more. In MINUSMA "they do give work to Malians and it's better paid work than other options, so people are not ungrateful for that opportunity, but definitely a little bit reluctant to fully trust them".

1.2.2 French intervention and its role in the Malian crisis

On January 10, 2013, rebels recaptured the town of Konna from the Malian army and headed to Mopti, the last checkpoint in front of the capital Bamako. Due to the deterioration of the military situation, which led, among other things, to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, the Interim President of Mali, Dioncounda Traoré, appealed to French President Francois Hollande with a request for immediate assistance. Moreover, on January 11th, President Traoré imposed a state of emergency across the entire territory of Mali, originally intended for a duration of 10 days but later extended for three months.⁶⁶

On the afternoon of January 11, the French president decided to use the French army to deploy Operation Serval, the purpose of which was to counter the offensive of Islamist groups and restore stability in the country. This military operation further brought the Sahel into the global spotlight, as it highlighted the growing threat of terrorism and the need for international efforts to address the security challenges in the region. This intervention has changed the political and military dynamics in Mali, creating new challenges for the further development of the situation.

Forces under the command of France gradually regained control over the northern territories, including Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu, which were previously under the control of militants.

A few weeks after the French military entered Mali, President Francois Hollande visited the capital Bamako, where he made several statements regarding the current situation.⁶⁷ He was welcomed as a liberator.⁶⁸ First of all, he recalled that France and Mali are fraternal and friendly republics and should help each other. "We are paying our debt", Hollande said, referring to the Malians' military aid in the past. He called on all armed forces involved in Mali to "be exemplary" and respect "human rights". "Terrorism has

⁶⁶ Mali president declares state of emergency over rebel advance. (2013, January 11). *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/mali-rebels-emergency-idUSL5E9CBCVS20130111>

⁶⁷ Agence France-Presse. (2013b, February 2). Hollande : "Nous payons notre dette" au Mali. *Le Point*. https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/hollande-nous-payons-notre-dette-au-mali-02-02-2013-1623156_24.php#11

⁶⁸ Hollande chaleureusement accueilli à Tombouctou [Holland warmly welcomed in Timbuktu]. (2013, February 2). *Franceinfo*. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/mali/video-hollande-chaleureusement-accueilli-a-tombouctou_216723.html

been repelled, it has been driven out, but it has not yet been defeated”, “the terrorist groups are weakened, but they have not disappeared,” he said afterwards, reaffirming that France would remain in Mali “for as long as it takes”. At the end of his speech, the French President said: “France is with you, France is on your side, France is proud of you”.

The operation did not last even a year and a half, and about 5,000 French soldiers took part in it. During this time, they managed to recapture several Malian cities, and together with the UN forces they help the rebels and the Interim Government come to a peace agreement on the eve of the elections.

Before the coup in 2012, Mali was an example of democratic development in Africa. A year later, the country was able to return to presidential rule, as the former Prime Minister of Mali Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was elected president in the second round.⁶⁹ According to EU observers, the elections were held with a high level of transparency.⁷⁰

On July 31, 2014, operation Serval officially ceased and was transformed into the permanent Operation Barkhane, a regional mission with a particular focus on the whole Sahel region.⁷¹ This military operation has become the largest presence of French troops on the international stage, where 4,000 people, eight fighters, 300 armored vehicles, 300 vehicles, 17 helicopters, transport planes and five unmanned aerial vehicles were involved.⁷²

In addition, France supported and acted jointly with the regional intergovernmental organisation formed in 2014, the G5 Sahel Group. The Sahel G5 consisted of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger and was aimed to strengthen cooperation

⁶⁹ Ibrahim Boubacar Keita wins Mali presidential election. (2013, August 13). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23677124>

⁷⁰ Ilsley, N. (2015, November 20). Understanding Mali’s Battle with Militants. *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/why-mali-being-targeted-396615>

⁷¹ Barluet, A. (2014, July 13). Au Sahel, l’opération «Barkhane» remplace «Serval» [In the Sahel, the “Barkhane” operation replaces “Serval”]. *Le Figaro*. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2014/07/13/01003-20140713ARTFIG00097-au-sahel-l-operation-barkhane-remplace-serval.php>

⁷² Mali : de Serval à Barkhane, on vous résume neuf ans d’engagement militaire français au Sahel en 12 dates-clés [Mali: from Serval to Barkhane, we summarize nine years of French military commitment in the Sahel in 12 key dates]. (2022, February 17). *Franceinfo*. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/mali/guerre-au-mali/mali-serval-barkhane-on-vous-resume-neuf-ans-d-engagement-militaire-francais-au-sahel-en-dix-dates-cles_4966341.html

between these countries to solve common security and development problems, including terrorism, transnational crime and poverty.

Since 2015, Islamist attacks have become more frequent in the region with the emergence of new groups. In the same year, a terrorist branch of the Islamic State was established operating in the territory of Western Sahara and called the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS), which was named enemy number one at the 2020 G5 Sahel-France summit. In March 2017, militants with ties to AQIM formed an association called Support Group for Islam and Muslims (also known as Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' or GSIM).

Between 2020 and 2021, the French military achieved significant results by eliminating three leading leaders of Islamist groups: Abdelmalek Droukdel, the leader of AQIM, Bah Ag Moussa, the military leader of GSIM, and Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui, the leader of IS-GS. French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his congratulations and called it “a major new success in the fight we are waging against terrorist groups in the Sahel”⁷³.

In March 2020, the French command decided to attract additional forces to assist the armed forces of Mali within the framework of cooperation with the G5 countries. This initiative was widely supported by the EU countries, which allocated their military. The Task Force Takuba was stationed in the immediate vicinity of Gao City. The military forces involved in the operation included elite special forces units from EU countries, working together with permanent French troops deployed in Mali since 2013 as part of Operation Barkhane. The deployment of EU troops as part of multinational units sought to strengthen EU defence cooperation in Africa.⁷⁴

Despite the attempts made, the situation in Mali remained unstable. Public discontent over governance problems, corruption and insecurity was growing. This plunged the

⁷³ Mali : de Serval à Barkhane, on vous résume neuf ans d'engagement militaire français au Sahel en 12 dates-clés [Mali: from Serval to Barkhane, we summarize nine years of French military commitment in the Sahel in 12 key dates]. (2022, February 17). *Franceinfo*. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/mali/guerre-au-mali/mali-serval-barkhane-on-vous-resume-neuf-ans-d-engagement-militaire-francais-au-sahel-en-dix-dates-cles_4966341.html

⁷⁴ Campbell, J. (2020, December 8). EU Task Force Takuba in Mali. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/eu-task-force-takuba-mali>

country into a new period of political uncertainty and social unrest, which led to a new coup in 2020.

In the summer of 2020, a second military coup took place in Mali, marked by the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and the dissolution of the government. The Malian military protesters expressed their dissatisfaction with the government's management during the ongoing insurgency, alleged corruption in the government, the growing COVID-19 pandemic and the unstable economic situation.

Less than a year later, on May 24, 2021, the third coup took place, during which the Interim President Assimi Goïta overthrew the government led by Bah Ndaw and seized control. Goïta said that Ndaw sought to "undermine" the democratization process and promised to hold elections in 2022. Goïta previously headed the National Committee for the Salvation of the People, the organisation that took control of the government and removed the former president from power. On May 28, 2021, the Constitutional Court appointed him President of Mali on an interim basis.

In January 2022, ECOWAS decided to close borders, sever diplomatic relations, and impose economic sanctions on Mali due to the delay in holding elections after the 2020 military coup.⁷⁵ At the Accra summit in Ghana's capital in the summer of 2022, the Malian military junta agreed to hold general elections by February 2024 in exchange for the lifting of sanctions.⁷⁶

1.2.3 The withdrawal of French troops and the end of the French military operation in Mali

On February 18, 2022, Mali's ruling junta asked France “without delay” to withdraw its soldiers from the country, while about 2,400 French soldiers are stationed in Mali out of 4,600 in the Sahel region.

In a statement read on national television, the official representative of the ruling junta, Colonel Abdoulaye Maïga, calls the announcement of France's withdrawal from the

⁷⁵ Akorlie, C., & Diallo, T. (2022, January 10). West African nations sever links with Mali over election delay. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mali-eyes-elections-four-years-west-african-bloc-mulls-sanctions-2022-01-09/>

⁷⁶ Mali coup: How junta got Ecowas economic sanctions lifted. (2022, July 6). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-62037317>

country a "blatant violation" of the agreements between the two countries. He also says that the results of France's nine-year involvement in Mali "have not been satisfactory", whether it is the Serval operation in 2013 or Barkhane who succeeded him. "In connection with these repeated violations (of the agreements) on defence, the government suggests that the French authorities immediately withdraw the Barkhane and Takuba troops from the national territory under the supervision of the Malian authorities," says Colonel Maïga.⁷⁷

On the next day, Macron replied that France will withdraw "in good order" and will not compromise for a second on the safety of its soldiers. On the same day Malian citizens took to the streets of the capital to celebrate the withdrawal of French soldiers from the country.

Some days later, Charles Mellon, in his interview, confirmed that France has not achieved success in Mali after nine years of military intervention to expel terrorists. According to him, the interventions of former President Nicolas Sarkozy moved the "hard core" from Libya to Bamako.⁷⁸ In his interview with the Mondafrique, the Former French Defense Minister also said that when French soldiers entered Mali in 2013, they were greeted as "liberators", but later became considered occupiers.⁷⁹

On the 17th of February 2022, during the European Union – African Union (EU-AU) summit in Brussels (Belgium), France and its European partners officially announced their withdrawal of troops from Mali after a nine-year fight against jihadists. "Due to multiple obstructions by the Malian transitional authorities, Canada and the European States operating alongside Operation Barkhane and within the Task Force Takuba deem that the political, operational and legal conditions are no longer met to effectively continue their current military engagement in the fight against terrorism in Mali and have thereof decided to commence the coordinated withdrawal of their respective military

⁷⁷ Le Mali demande à la France de retirer ses soldats "sans délai" [Mali asks France to withdraw its soldiers "without delay"]. (2022, February 18). *VOA*. <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/le-mali-demande-%C3%A0-la-france-de-retirer-ses-soldats-sans-d%C3%A9lai-/6447651.html>

⁷⁸ Former French Defense Minister: Our army's mistakes in Mali started from Libya. (2022b, February 20). *The Libya Update*. <https://libyaupdate.com/former-french-defense-minister-our-armys-mistakes-in-mali-started-from-libya/>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

resources dedicated to these operations from Malian territory. In close coordination with neighbouring states, they also expressed their willingness to remain committed in the region in accordance with their respective constitutional procedures," they emphasize in a joint statement.⁸⁰

However, ousted by the ruling junta in Bamako, France and its partners wanted to "remain committed in the [Sahel] region" and "extend their support to the neighbouring countries of the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa" in order to contain the threat of jihadists. The "terms" of this reorganisation were promised to be set out by June 2022," according to a joint statement.⁸¹

On August 15, 2022, according to the President of the French Republic and the French Joint Defense Staff, after nine years of presence, the last French soldiers from the anti-jihadist Barkhane forces left Mali.

Thierry Burkhard, the Joint Chief of Staff, published a press release in his Twitter account.⁸² ⁸³“Today, at 13:00 (Paris time), the last military unit of the Barkhane Force present on Malian territory crossed the border between Mali and Niger. It came from the Operational Desert Platform of Gao, which was handed over to the Malian armed forces this morning”, he said. Thierry Burkhard also added that the Barkhane Force was reorganised outside Mali in less than six months “in an orderly and safe and totally transparent way, in coordination with all its partners”. Moreover, he reminded that France “continue to fight terrorism in the Sahel, in close coordination with our African and international partners”.

⁸⁰ Joint declaration on the fight against the terrorist threat and the support to peace and security in the Sahel and West Africa. (2022, February 17). *Elysée*. <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2022/02/17/joint-declaration-on-the-fight-against-the-terrorist-threat>

⁸¹ La France et ses partenaires annoncent leur retrait militaire du Mali [France and its partners announce their military withdrawal from Mali]. (2022, February 17). *FRANCE 24*. <https://www.france24.com/fr/france/20220217-en-direct-fin-de-partie-pour-l-op%C3%A9ration-barkhane-au-mali>

⁸² Armée française - Opérations militaires. (2022, August 15). *Operation Barkhane. Reorganisation of the Force outside Mali*. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/EtatMajorFR/status/1559163773411332097>

⁸³ Ministry of Armed Forces of France. (2022, August 15). *Operation Barkhane. Reorganisation of the Force outside Mali* [Press release].

In his press release, President Macron thanked all the soldiers for the dedication with which they fought against terrorist armed groups that strike at the local population and threaten Europe. He also paid tribute to the fifty-nine soldiers who died. “The effectiveness of our soldiers throughout all these years and until the last few days has been demonstrated by the neutralisation of most of the top leaders in the hierarchy of the Sahel terrorist groups.”⁸⁴

In addition, in May 2022, the military junta of Mali announced her withdrawal from the G5 Sahel Group, which has significantly reduced the organisation's capabilities in the fight against terrorism.⁸⁵

“The withdrawal of foreign troops has outlined an unclear future for peace and security in Mali next year. While some locals support more local authority in securing the country, others are keen to find new ways to collaborate with foreign troops to effectively counter terrorism”, Deutsche Welle, the German state-owned international broadcaster, said.⁸⁶

During a series of interviews, the only respondent who spoke about the activities of the French troops was Interviewee #11. He / she believes that during a crisis situation there should be a clear distinction between what is humanitarian and what is military intervention. This was not the case in Mali. It is clear that in modern times the local population considers every Frenchman a representative of military force. And “That really complicates things when you have another foreigner who could be French coming into a town and saying, “I'm here to deliver aid” and people will not believe you, cause It's like, you are the French military”. Besides, this distinction between humanitarian and military aid disappeared even more when it became known that “French military was constantly delivering aid, constantly calling themselves humanitarian, constantly putting up giant billboards announcing some of their soldiers as being like humanitarian of the year”. Moreover, “Much you know about troop contributing countries, most of them don't speak French. Most of them don't speak Arabic. Most of them don't speak English.

⁸⁴ Retrait de la force Barkhane du Mali [Withdrawal of the Barkhane force from Mali]. (2022, August 15). *Elysée*. <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/08/15/retrait-de-la-force-barkhane-du-mali>

⁸⁵ Mali's military junta pulls out of regional G5 Sahel force. (2022, May 15). *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/malis-military-junta-pulls-out-regional-g5-sahel-force-2022-05-15/>

⁸⁶ Shankar, P. (2023, February 1). How will EU approach Mali's security in 2023? *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/what-kind-of-security-presence-will-the-eu-have-in-mali/a-64066828>

It's very, very complicated for them to be accepted in the community when they don't speak the languages.” So, Interviewee #11 concluded that “It needs to have a clear delineation of what is aid, what is military intervention. So that's my strong stance against it”.

1.2.4 The intervention of the Russian Wagner Group and the global response

At the end of 2021, Russia, namely the Russian Wagner group, settled in Mali, which was condemned by France, Canada and some European countries. According to the Malian government, the Russian military was there as part of a bilateral agreement between Mali and Russia. The Head of the Department of International Organisations of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Petr Ilichev, said that Russia will continue “to provide active assistance to our Malian partners in the military and military-technical spheres through state channels”.⁸⁷

The Wagner group is associated with participation in the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, and a year later, with their intervention in the Syrian conflict together with the Russian military. It is reported that the financing of the Wagner group is carried out by the Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, known as the "Kremlin cook". Prigozhin, a businessman close to Vladimir Putin, accumulated his fortune in the restaurant business and subsequently signed several contracts with the Russian military.⁸⁸

According to experts, the presence of Russian forces in the Sahel region is interpreted as an attempt by Moscow to regain its influence on the continent, after a long period of absence since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁸⁹

In April 2022, the European Union Training Mission in Mali expressed concern about the deployment of the Russian Wagner group in Mali and announced the end of military

⁸⁷ Russia to keep providing military assistance to Mali despite Western criticism. (2021, December 27). *FRANCE 24*. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20211227-russia-to-keep-providing-military-assistance-to-mali-despite-western-criticism>

⁸⁸ Mali : de Serval à Barkhane, on vous résume neuf ans d'engagement militaire français au Sahel en 12 dates-clés [Mali: from Serval to Barkhane, we summarize nine years of French military commitment in the Sahel in 12 key dates]. (2022, February 17). *Franceinfo*. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/mali/guerre-au-mali/mali-serval-barkhane-on-vous-resume-neuf-ans-d-engagement-militaire-francais-au-sahel-en-dix-dates-cles_4966341.html

⁸⁹ Russian troops deploy to Mali's Timbuktu after French exit. (2022, January 7). *Aljazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/7/russian-troops-deploy-to-malis-timbuktu-after-french-exit>

support. However, the EU policy chief Josep Borrell said that the mission will maintain a military presence in the region of 300 people and will continue “to commit even more” to the Sahel region.⁹⁰

The French government also reported that the presence of the Russian military in Mali and the junta’s “close relationship with Russian mercenaries”⁹¹ served as the basis for breaking off relations with the ruling junta and ending Operation Barkhane. “We cannot remain militarily engaged alongside de facto authorities whose strategy and hidden aims we do not share,” said French President Emmanuel Macron.

In addition, in April 2022, France and the European Community accused the Wagner group and Malian troops of killing about 300 Malian civilians in the village of Moura. They also called for the early start of “national and international investigations” to bring those responsible for the murders to justice.⁹² Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, declared that “the fight against terrorism can in no way justify massive human rights violations”.

A year later, in March 2023, when asked about the results of the withdrawal of French troops, Malian Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga accused France of not making enough efforts to combat terrorism in Mali.⁹³ In addition, he stated that the Government of Mali owns “precise information and evidence that some terrorists were in contact with France”. He added that “terrorism was not defeated, the country did not regain its full authority, and the UN decisions have not been applied” and that in Mali they “want to choose a partner that we [they] can rely on, that does not blackmail”.

Maiga confirmed that “Russia is the partner” and thanks to this partnership “in a year our [their] army managed to do what it could not do in 30 years because of the work and

⁹⁰ EU to end military training mission in Mali. (2022, April 12). *Radio France Internationale*. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20220412-eu-to-end-military-training-mission-in-mali>

⁹¹ Shankar, P. (2023, February 1). How will EU approach Mali’s security in 2023? *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/what-kind-of-security-presence-will-the-eu-have-in-mali/a-64066828>

⁹² France alarmed by Mali killings involving army and “Russian mercenaries.” (2022, April 5). *Radio France Internationale*. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20220405-france-alarmed-by-mali-killings-involving-army-and-russian-mercenaries>

⁹³ Mali’s PM Maiga: ‘We did not abandon cooperation with France.’ (2023, March 8). *Aljazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/8/qa-malis-prime-minister-kokalla-maiga-on>

cooperation with Russia”. He claims that the security situation in the country has improved significantly: “before the cooperation with Russia, there was genocide and killing of whole areas”, and today they “do not need interference of any other country”.

Interviewee #11 believes that currently, in 2023, Mali is less in the spotlight, as the government is less close to the West and has concluded a new deal with Wagner. In her opinion, now the focus has completely shifted, and this is Burkina Faso.

1.3 Aftermath of the coup d'état and regional dynamics

The coup d'état of 2012 in Mali had significant consequences that went beyond the country and affected the entire Sahel region. The coup highlighted political instability, allowing various armed groups, including Islamic militants, to take advantage of the situation and gain control over vast territories.

The deteriorating security situation in Mali has created a regional threat, prompting neighbouring countries and the international community to express concern and take measures to resolve the crisis. The involvement of the entire Sahel region was dictated by common security interests and the need to prevent the spread of extremism and instability.

For almost half a century, since gaining independence in the 60s of the 20th century, the Sahel countries have constantly resisted violent extremism. Political and economic instability, as well as climate change, were the main factors leading to the emergence of crisis situations. According to the Global Conflict Tracker, an interactive guide by the Carnegie Corporation of New York providing information about present conflicts that occur in various parts of the world, Liptako-Gourma and the Lake Chad basin are the places where violence and humanitarian catastrophe reach their peak.⁹⁴

The Liptako-Gourma subregion occurs in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The modern period of instability in that region began with the coup in Mali in 2012, which was caused by the Libyan crisis and the subsequent proliferation of weapons and armed groups. The revival of the Tuareg uprising in 2012 in northern Mali occurred as a result of an influx

⁹⁴ Center for Preventive Action. (2023, March 27). Violent Extremism in the Sahel. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>

of extremists. This phenomenon is not new, since similar Tuareg uprisings have already occurred in 1963, 1990 and 2006.

In 2015, the Malian government signed a peace agreement called the Bamako Agreement with a coalition of groups, including the MNLA, seeking Tuareg independence. However, Islamist organisations were excluded from this coalition. Taking advantage of this, they quickly expanded their control to the central part of Mali and the adjacent states of Burkina Faso and Niger. Some of the most well-known attacks by Islamist groups included attacks on hotels in Mali, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast.

As for Burkina Faso, the political crisis in 2014 in Burkina Faso arose due to President Blaise Compaoré's attempt to change the constitution in order to extend his stay in power for a fifth term. This crisis led to a coup in 2015 when the new government was not recognised by any political force in the country, the army opposed the putschists, and the UN and regional organisations condemned the coup. Since 2015, Burkina Faso has become the epicentre of terrorist activity in West Africa, where such Islamic groups as the IS-GS and Ansar ul Islam, the first local jihadist group in the country, operate.⁹⁵ Since then, violence linked to extremist groups has resulted in more than 2,000 deaths and 1.5 million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso. In addition, violence within communities is widespread in the country.⁹⁶

The last coup in 2022 took place in the context of an increasing terrorist threat. As a result, the coup was condemned by the international community, and ECOWAS, as well as the African Union, temporarily suspended Burkina Faso's membership in their organisations.

As for Niger, since the country gained independence from France in 1960, it has faced four coups in 1974, 1996, 1999 and 2010, as well as several unsuccessful attempts to seize power. The last one took place in March 2021, a few days before the inauguration of the elected president Mohamed Bazoum.

⁹⁵ Перевороты в Буркина-Фасо [Coups in Burkina Faso]. (2022, September 30). *TASS*. <https://tass.ru/info/15927957>

⁹⁶ Dieng, A. (2022, May). The Sahel: Challenges and opportunities. *International Review of the Red Cross*. <https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/editorial-the-sahel-challenges-opportunities-adama-dieng-918>

Radical Islamist groups, including Boko Haram, GSIM and IS-GS are active on the border of Niger, especially on the southern border with Nigeria. These groups seek to exploit ethnic differences and recruit local residents to expand their influence. Since 2016, the number of jihadist attacks in the area has increased fivefold. For Niamey, the capital of Niger, there is a serious threat in the form of the transfer of militants from Mali and Burkina Faso, where the military authorities have intensified the fight against jihadists.

Since 2010, under the influence of the war in Libya, cross-border banditry has significantly increased. Since 2011, various Libyan groups have established slave trade, arms, and fuel smuggling flows through Niger, extending from Nigeria. In addition, cattle theft has been added to this list.

In addition to the States of the Central Sahel, the neighbouring countries of this region also suffered. In 2022, the President of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, said that an "attack on democracy" had been launched in the country.⁹⁷ Guinea-Bissau, a former colony of Portugal, is considered one of the poorest countries in the world. Since independence in 1980, there have already been 9 coups and coup attempts. Only one president managed to stay in power for a full 5 years. The country also has significant public debt and is heavily dependent on foreign aid. In addition, Guinea-Bissau has become a transit point for drugs from Latin America, and recently it has been called the first Africa's Narco-State.⁹⁸

ECOWAS is making efforts to counter coups and limit the influence of Islamists in the region, seeking to restore the governance of countries through elected civilian leaders and respect for constitutional rule.

⁹⁷ “Слава богу, я в порядке”. Президент Гвинеи-Бисау заявил о неудавшейся попытке переворота ["Thank God I'm fine." The President of Guinea-Bissau announced a failed coup attempt]. (2022, February 1). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60200583>

⁹⁸ Africa's Narco-State: An Attempted Coup and Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. (2022, April 13). *Harvard International Review*. <https://hir.harvard.edu/narco-state-an-attempted-coup-and-drug-trafficking-in-guinea-bissau/#:~:text=Africa's%20First%20%E2%80%9CNarco%2DState%E2%80%9D,first%20%E2%80%9CNarco%2Dstate.%E2%80%9D>

Chapter 2 – Exploring humanitarian challenges and contributions in Mali

The previous chapter of this master's thesis focused on the complex crisis involving Mali and the Sahel region. The first chapter directly concerned the coup d'état of 2012, the role of Tuaregs and Islamists in this conflict, and the intervention of the French military forces and the Russian Wagner group. In addition, the international reaction and response to the threat of terrorism were investigated, as well as the consequences of the Malian coup on neighbouring countries.

The Sahel has historically faced many challenges and attracted the attention of the world community to its humanitarian situation due to political instability, conflicts, poverty, climate change, and limited access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and others. In 2012, the coup d'état in Mali caused a crisis that affected not only Mali but the entire Sahel region, which attracted even more international attention. However, the Mali crisis is not limited to political and military aspects. It also has a significant humanitarian dimension, which will be given special attention in the second chapter of this study.

The second chapter of this study will focus on the humanitarian challenges faced by Mali and the Sahel countries. Challenges such as the lack of food and water, the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as access to health and education, will be touched upon.

The main purpose of the second chapter is not only to understand who, when and what kind of assistance was provided to countries and their inhabitants but also to illustrate the opinions of various actors directly involved in providing or receiving this assistance. This will make it possible to analyse whether assistance was provided to all affected groups of the population on time and in a fair manner, as well as to find out the existence of corruption and improper use of humanitarian aid. As part of the study, several interviews were conducted with representatives of various non-governmental organisations, United Nations workers associated with this context, and civilians.

Special attention will be paid to the role of the media in order to understand better that the situation in the Sahel region is further complicated by limited access to information. Cases of attacks and murders of journalists who sought to ensure citizens' access to independent media and information will be considered. This will allow us to explore the

relationship between information work, civic participation, and the humanitarian situation in the region.

2.1 Defining humanitarian assistance and exploring Africa's need for assistance

The definition of "humanitarian activity" varies depending on the actors and organisations that formulate it, as well as on the scale and breadth of its impact. As John Borton says in his paper "Future of the Humanitarian System: Impacts of Internal Changes": "A striking feature of the humanitarian system is the continuing lack of clarity as to what the 'humanitarian system' actually consists of and where its boundaries lie"⁹⁹. Most academic circles and the humanitarian community agree on the definition and purpose of humanitarian activities. It is defined as the assistance provided to people during emergency crises or natural disasters.

The humanitarian assistance can be classified into two types: emergency and short-term assistance, as well as development and long-term assistance, which often follows the previous one if necessary. States, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local and international donors, and local populations and communities are involved in delivering humanitarian aid. These actors cooperate, coordinating their efforts and resources to assist those in crisis situations, suffering from natural disasters, wars, conflicts or other emergencies.

According to the European Council, humanitarian aid "is a fundamental expression of the universal value of solidarity between people, and a moral imperative"¹⁰⁰. Humanitarian activities are carried out in accordance with the general international approach, which is reflected in important internationally agreed documents: the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (2008), the UN resolutions 46/182 (1991) and 58/114 (2003), and the

⁹⁹ Borton, J. (2009). Future of the Humanitarian System: Impact of Internal Changes. Feinstein International Center. p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Humanitarian aid. (n.d.). European Council. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/humanitarian-aid/#:~:text=Humanitarian%20aid%20is%20a%20fundamental,not%20a%20crisis%20management%20tool>.

Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief (1994).¹⁰¹

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Global Humanitarian Review, more than 274 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2022, with more than 183 million people targeted.¹⁰² The inclusion of fifteen out of thirty African countries, including six out of ten Sahel countries in the list of the neediest, confirms that the situation on the continent and in the region as a whole is challenging and requires immediate and effective humanitarian intervention.

Humanitarian assistance on the African continent covers many areas, including food aid, medical care, water and sanitation, shelter and housing, education, human rights protection and other essential areas. Its goal is to ensure the survival, safety and recovery of the affected people, as well as to eliminate the leading causes of humanitarian crises.

2.2 Criticism of humanitarian aid to Africa

However, humanitarian aid is not always met with a positive assessment. In 2009, Dambisa Moyo, the writer and economist from Zimbabwe, published a provocative book called "Dead Aid. Why is Aid not working and how there is a better way in Africa", which attracted worldwide attention. In this book, she expresses criticism of long-term humanitarian aid, arguing that it only worsens the situation in Africa. According to the author, money from more developed countries and international organisations, instead of helping those in need, end up in the pockets of the political elite of African countries ("going into private pockets, instead of the public purse"¹⁰³). According to the writer, the humanitarian aid provided is "easy money" that contributes to the spread of corruption and distortion of the economic situation.¹⁰⁴ She argues that such assistance contributes to forming a culture of dependence and economic passivity. For example, she referred to

¹⁰¹ EUPHRA: European Universities on the Professionalisation of Humanitarian Action. (2013). The State of Art of Humanitarian Action. A Quick Guide on the current situation of Humanitarian Relief, its Origins, Stakeholders and Future. p.7

¹⁰² Global Humanitarian Overview 2022. (n.d.). UNOCHA. <https://2022.gho.unocha.org/>

¹⁰³ Moyo, D. (2009). Dead Aid. Why is aid not working and how there is a better way in Africa. p. 46

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 39

data from the 1970s, when the percentage of African poverty accounted for 10 per cent of the population, compared with 70 per cent in the 2000s.¹⁰⁵ For example, Interviewee #8 said corruption in the humanitarian sector is commonplace. He / she stated that he / she had heard about specific cases but did not give such examples. “The humanitarian sector is becoming increasingly corrupt. For example, corruption can be linked to embezzlement in the sector by being included in the list of active beneficiaries”, he added.

Besides, she deeply criticised the help collected by celebrities. One of the most striking examples is the “Live Aid” concert in 1985, organised as a “music-based fundraising initiative”¹⁰⁶. Bob Geldof and Midge Ure organised an event to raise funds to fight hunger in Ethiopia, a result of which more than 300,000 people died.¹⁰⁷ The concerts were held simultaneously in various countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union, Canada, Japan, Yugoslavia, Austria, Australia, and West Germany. It was one of the largest television broadcasts in history. Approximately 1.9 billion people from 150 countries watched the event’s live broadcast, which is about 40 per cent of the world's total population.¹⁰⁸

The result of such a large-scale event was 70 million dollars collected. Later the total amount reached 140 million dollars.¹⁰⁹ The organisers of Live Aid claimed that they directly transferred money to non-governmental organisations in Ethiopia. However, according to many experts, most of these funds went to the Ethiopian government headed by President Mengistu Haile Mariam and for armament. According to the results of the investigation conducted in 2015, it was found out that the Ethiopian dictator president, supported by the West, used the proceeds to purchase modern Russian weapons, which

¹⁰⁵ UK - Is Aid Killing Africa? (2009, March 19). ABC. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-03-19/uk---is-aid-killing-africa/1624286>

¹⁰⁶ Live Aid. (n.d.). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_Aid Modified June 2023

¹⁰⁷ Reiff, D. (2005, June 24). Cruel to be kind? The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jun/24/g8.debtrelief>

¹⁰⁸ Live Aid 1985: A day of magic. (2005, July 6). CNN. <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/SHOWBIZ/Music/07/01/liveaid.memories/index.html>

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

allowed him to brutally suppress the opposition and turn poor Ethiopia into one of the most heavily armed countries in Africa.¹¹⁰

The impact of this concert on humanitarian aid to those in need has been discussed and criticised for a long time. Despite this, according to Geldof, the “Live Aid” concert became a “profound social innovation”, “a prototype of a new style of celebrity activism” that helped draw world attention to the problem and “shaped the views of those Western politicians who shown real interest in addressing the crisis of development, above all in sub-Saharan Africa”.¹¹¹ As for Moyo, she is critical of the "celebrity aid" model, pointing out that some charities and non-governmental organisations are more interested in “perpetuating poverty in order to justify their own existence”.¹¹²

The book provoked wide discussions, was criticized among Western donors, and raised questions about the targeted use of humanitarian aid and its effectiveness.¹¹³

As for the current situation, Interviewee #11 said that “As much as we're increasing localisation, it's still an international dominated field when it shouldn't be. Aid is good and also very bad the same time.”

2.3 The beginning of a complex emergency situation in Mali and an explanation of the methodology for analysing and evaluating key aspects of UN reports

The armed conflict in Mali in 2012 caused a humanitarian crisis both in the country itself and in neighbouring countries, exacerbating problems such as mass displacement of the population, socio-political instability, climate change and limited access to food and drinking water. Since then, there has been an increasingly frequent violation of human rights and international humanitarian law in the country. According to the data of 2023,

¹¹⁰ Live Aid: The Terrible Truth. (2015, July 13). SPIN. <https://www.spin.com/2015/07/live-aid-the-terrible-truth-ethiopia-bob-geldof-feature/>

¹¹¹ Reiff, D. (2005, June 24). Cruel to be kind? The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jun/24/g8.debtrelief>

¹¹² UK - Is Aid Killing Africa? (2009, March 19). ABC. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-03-19/uk---is-aid-killing-africa/1624286>

¹¹³ Zambia: Dambisa Moyo, the economist who opposes western aid to Africa. (n.d.). Africa Women Experts. <http://africawomenexperts.com/lng/en/2020/06/tanzania-dambisa-moyo-the-economist-who-opposes-western-aid-to-africa/>

about half of the population of Mali needs humanitarian assistance, which is about 9 million people, while about 3.9 million of them need protection assistance.¹¹⁴

Returning to the origins of the conflict, in September 2012, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in collaboration with humanitarian partners, published a report on the complex emergency situation in Mali. According to the data, about 4.6 million people were in a state of vulnerability due to a possible lack of food. About 400,000 people were forced to leave their homes in the north of the country, of which about 120,000 were internally displaced, and the remaining 280,000 became refugees in countries neighbouring Mali (108,953 refugees in Mauritania, 107,929 in Burkina Faso, and 59,429 in Niger).¹¹⁵

On September 17, 2012, Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed her condemnation of the ongoing human rights violations and alleged violations of international humanitarian law in northern Mali. She said: “I strongly condemn attacks on the civilian population, sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers and forced displacement, as well as the destruction of Mali’s world heritage sites. Armed groups must abide by human rights and international humanitarian law”.¹¹⁶

She also called for urgent national and international measures aimed at ending the political instability that contributes to violence. “I am afraid the humanitarian and human rights situation in the whole of the Sahel region will dangerously deteriorate if the crisis in Northern Mali is not urgently addressed.”¹¹⁷

After the coup d’état in Mali in 2012, the United Nations took an active part in resolving the conflict and providing humanitarian assistance to the population. In its activities, the UN has collaborated with international and regional organisations, such as the European

¹¹⁴ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. (n.d.). *European Commission*. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/mali_en

¹¹⁵ OCHA. (2012a). Mali: Complex Emergency Situation Report No. 16, 26 September 2012. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-complex-emergency-situation-report-no-16-26-september-2012>

¹¹⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2012, September 17). *Pillay condemns amputations, human rights violations in Northern Mali* [Press release]. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2012/09/pillay-condemns-amputations-human-rights-violations-northern-mali>

¹¹⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2012, September 17). *Pillay condemns amputations, human rights violations in Northern Mali* [Press release].

Union, the African Union and a large number of humanitarian organisations in order to coordinate efforts and achieve sustainable peace and development in Mali.

As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, the UN intervened in Mali by sending a peacekeeping mission to the region called MINUSMA (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali), whose main goal was to ensure stability, support the process of a political peace settlement, and protect the civilian population.

In addition, the UN and its agencies also provided humanitarian assistance to the population of Mali, which suffered from the consequences of the conflict and the coup d'état. This assistance included, among other things, the provision of food, water, medical services, shelter, and other urgent needs.

Among the UN agencies that have contributed to humanitarian assistance in Mali since the events of 2012 there are:

- the World Food Programme (WFP), which provides food aid to fight hunger in Mali by distributing food products to the population suffering from malnutrition;
- the World Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which supports agriculture, food security, fisheries, and rural development;
- the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which mainly provides assistance to children in Mali, including access to drinking water, health, nutrition and education, as well as the implementation of programs for the protection and restoration of children's rights;
- the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which is engaged in education, science, culture, and protection of cultural heritage;
- the World Health Organization (WHO), which provides medical care, controls the spread of epidemics, and increases the availability of quality medical care;

- the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is engaged in the protection and assistance of refugees and internally displaced persons. providing security and shelter, carrying out their registration, as well as ensuring the protection of their rights; in addition, facilitating the search for long-term solutions, including a return to the homeland, integration in the host country or resettlement to other countries;
- the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which coordinates and promotes the humanitarian efforts of various actors, including the Government, the UN, non-governmental organisations, and other international partners.

The last mentioned OCHA plays an important role in assessing humanitarian needs, planning, and monitoring humanitarian operations in Mali, as well as ensuring effective use of resources and coherence of actions by all participants. Moreover, in response to the crisis caused by the conflict in northern Mali, OCHA has established a permanent presence in the country since 2012 with its head office in the capital Bamako, offices in Mopti, Gao and Timbuktu, as well as regular missions to Kidal and Ménaka.¹¹⁸

OCHA monitors the situation in the country, conducts needs assessments and develops strategies to respond to humanitarian crises. In order to better coordinate cooperation between humanitarian actors and ensure the effectiveness of actions, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) publishes reports regularly and with high frequency.¹¹⁹

In order to conduct a qualitative assessment of the humanitarian activities of various actors in Mali, it was decided to select OCHA reports as the main source for analysis.

The reporting activities of OCHA provide comprehensive information on various aspects of humanitarian assistance, the organisations present and their actions in the country, which allows for an extensive understanding of the activities carried out in various

¹¹⁸ A propos d'OCHA Mali [About OCHA Mali]. (n.d.). *UNOCHA*. <https://www.unocha.org/mali/propos-dochoa-mali>

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

sectors, including food security, health, education, housing, protection and water, sanitation and hygiene.

In addition, OCHA provides the most comprehensive information on the country's population and its vulnerable groups, reports on the financing of the humanitarian program in Mali, provides information on where and when funds are allocated, and develops general guidelines that serve as the basis for the management of humanitarian activities in Mali.

The choice of OCHA reports is due to their frequent publication and extensive coverage of the humanitarian situation, which allows to receive up-to-date information about the actions of actors and their impact on vulnerable groups of the population and to have updated information about the development of the humanitarian situation in the country.

Since 2012 OCHA regularly published humanitarian bulletins with updated information on key aspects. The following reports were selected for analysis: the first report for 2012, two complementary reports for 2015 and the last report published in 2023.

In general, the choice of reports for analysis is based on the desire to get a complete picture of the humanitarian situation in different periods of time and to understand the dynamics of changes, challenges, and progress in solving humanitarian problems in Mali. The first published humanitarian report in 2012 was chosen for analysis, as it provides information about the initial humanitarian situation and challenges right after the beginning of the crisis. The choice of 2015 for analysis was due to its significance as an interim stage for assessing progress. In addition, the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was signed this year, and there was an increase in Islamist attacks in the region. The most recent report in 2023 has been selected for analysis in order to assess the progress and achievements that have been made during the 11-year period under review.

In 2023, the humanitarian situation in Mali continues to cause serious concern due to a multifaceted crisis. The security problem remains the main one in the country, now extending to the southern regions. The conflict is having a negative impact on an increasing number of people, and humanitarian needs are only getting worse. According to OCHA, as of March 2023, the population of Mali reached 21,7 million people, of whom

8,8 needed humanitarian assistance. According to the Humanitarian Response Plan, in 2023, assistance will be addressed to 5,7 million people.¹²⁰

As part of the studies of the humanitarian situation in Mali, this Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 by OCHA was also included for analysis, which will complement the information provided in humanitarian bulletins.

This document provides comprehensive information on humanitarian problems in Mali over the past 11 years since the beginning of the conflict. In addition, the Plan summarises the results of humanitarian assistance and the interaction of humanitarian partners, as well as defines goals for the future. This makes it a valuable tool for analysis, allowing you to get a comprehensive picture of the situation and focus on the next steps in the humanitarian response.

2.4 The key areas of humanitarian assistance in response to the humanitarian crisis in Mali

2.4.1 Food security

The Sahel is characterised by fragile ecosystems and is prone to desertification, land degradation and droughts. These environmental problems have had a profound impact on the lives of the population for a long time, leading to food insecurity, displacement of the population and increased vulnerability. This situation has been further exacerbated by the security crisis in Mali. The population relies on livestock breeding and the cultivation of rice, millet, and sorghum as the main sources of food. These products are available in the markets of the region. However, due to limited access to markets, rising prices, and declining purchasing power, almost half a million residents of the northern part of the country in 2012 suffered from food shortages.¹²¹

¹²⁰ OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.1

¹²¹ OCHA. (2012). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (November 2012). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-november-2012> p.2

The situation was complicated by the fact that humanitarian organisations faced limited access to help vulnerable groups of the population, but still, they were "managing to intervene in the north and are providing assistance to people in need".¹²²

According to the data from 2012, about half of the population affected by food insecurity received assistance (2,5 of 4,6 million people).¹²³ In November, "32,000 tons of relief food commodities, some US\$850,000 in cash transfers, 3,460 tons of seeds and 2,480 tons of fertilizer, 2,860 tons of livestock feed and 33,000 ruminants and poultry for the reconstitution of herds"¹²⁴ were provided in the form of emergency humanitarian aid by the food security cluster.

The World Food Programme, implementing one of the largest and most comprehensive operations in Mali and the Sahel region, provided assistance to about 650,000 people in need between February and August 2012. WFP, in collaboration with Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), OXFAM and the Norwegian Church Aid, delivered food to internally displaced persons in southern Mali, as well as to people affected by drought and conflict. Interviewee #4 stated in his interview that the World Food Program is the largest organization and has always existed in the Sahel region, even before the crisis. In the post-crisis period, the program's assistance was mainly aimed at internally displaced persons and suffering families.

To help those in need, different activities were implemented by humanitarian organisations. The World Vision implemented the "cash-for-work" activities that involved more than 950 households for the first month. After the floods in the Ségou region, Plan Mali distributed 50 tons of rice to more than 3,000 people. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) distributed the relief aid to 39,000 agro-pastoral recipients. In addition, Mercy Corps provided more than 2,000 households with cash vouchers that could be exchanged at pre-selected local vendors.

¹²² OCHA. (2012). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (November 2012). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-november-2012> p.1

¹²³ Ibid. p.1

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.3

According to the report, vouchers were mainly used to purchase food items such as butter and rice.¹²⁵

According to the June 2015 OCHA's Humanitarian Bulletin, the number of people experiencing food shortages has decreased from 4.6 million to 3.1 million. The Food Security Cluster assisted 740,000 people in the form of food, money transfers, resources for agriculture and livestock breeding.¹²⁶

One year earlier, concerns were expressed, and the lack of support for livestock breeders was pointed out. In this regard, several humanitarian organisations decided to resume the work of the technical group on livestock breeding in order to prevent a crisis. In addition, about 8,000 tons of cattle feed, out of the originally stated 10,000, were provided through subsidised sales and free distribution.¹²⁷

A subsequent report in December 2015 reports that the number of people affected by food insecurity was only 2 million¹²⁸, while in June, it reports about 3.1 million. Such a reduction seems incredible since in three years the number of victims of food insecurity could have decreased by 1.5 million people, but not by more than a million in six months. Especially surprising is the fact that according to the June report, only 23 per cent of the population received assistance. In addition, the December report does not contain any information about the measures taken to support food security.

Regarding other inaccuracies, the June report notes that in August, the Food Security Commission (CSA) and its partners planned to distribute 40,400 tons of food to 700,000 people as part of a National Response Plan.¹²⁹ However, a subsequent report published in

¹²⁵ OCHA. (2012a). Mali: Complex Emergency Situation Report No. 16, 26 September 2012. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-complex-emergency-situation-report-no-16-26-september-2012> p.3

¹²⁶ OCHA. (2015). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (June - July 2015). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-june-july-2015> p.3

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.3

¹²⁸ OCHA. (2016). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (December 2015 - January 2016). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-december-2015-january-2016> p.1

¹²⁹ OCHA. (2015). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (June - July 2015). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-june-july-2015> p.3

December does not provide any information on the implementation of this humanitarian aid.

As for agriculture, in 2022, it was characterised by an unsafe situation. Because of this, in some regions of Mali, the population was forced to relocate, cattle were stolen, and crops were destroyed. In addition, acreage decreased in regions such as Goudoubozi, Kayes, Koulikoro, Mopti, Ségou, Sikasso and Timbuktu. During the agricultural season, in addition to the drought, there was a significant increase in the prices of millet and sorghum by more than 100 per cent. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, experts generally gave a positive assessment of the 2022 agricultural season.¹³⁰

In the latest OCHA humanitarian report in March 2023, it was indicated that about 2.3 million people in Mali were in a state of food insecurity. This is the only information contained in this report on the topic of food insecurity.¹³¹

The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2023 complements the information provided, specifying that among the people affected by food insecurity, 23 per cent were women, and 54 per cent were children. The report says notes that 15 per cent of people with disabilities suffered from this problem.¹³² It is important to note that information about this vulnerable group, namely people with disabilities, was almost not found in the OCHA reports selected for this analysis.

According to experts' expectations, food security needs will remain high in 2023, although they will decrease slightly compared to the previous year. It is estimated that about 1,246,406 people will require emergency food assistance, and 1,856,878 people will require livelihood support for rapid recovery. The priority area for emergency food

¹³⁰ OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.87

¹³¹ OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.1

¹³² OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.87

security assistance in 2023 was named Menaka, taking into account the fact that 1,671 people will live in this area in phase 5 (famine).¹³³

As for the response strategy, the food cluster identifies 2 main areas. First of all, the provision of food aid according to the Government-led National Response Plan, where food costs are distributed equally between the Government and humanitarian actors, in equal shares. Special attention in this context will be paid to the nutrition of children and pregnant and lactating women. Secondly, support for agriculture in the form of the provision of seeds, agricultural equipment, the arrangement of sowing sites and support for livestock breeding, such as veterinary care, distribution of animals, etc.¹³⁴

2.4.2 Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) needs

In addition to droughts, the region also often faces rainy seasons that fill ponds and provide water supply for the population. However, during periods of drought, ponds lose their water again and dry up, which creates problems with access to water resources not only for the population, but also for livestock, which plays an important role in human survival. According to 2012, OCHA reports that the “WASH situation remains critical and is affecting a large number of vulnerable people”.¹³⁵

As part of the WASH program to improve access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation, and laundry services, about 28 per cent of the population in northern Mali was assisted in 2012. As the main decision, it was decided to carry out works on the construction of sanitary facilities and wells, attracting the population for work. The Direction Générale de la Protection Civile and ACTED, which conducted the inspection found out that “at least 600 wells need to be disinfected and more than 900 latrines are now unusable”¹³⁶.

¹³³ According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, there are five stages that classify the severity of acute food shortages, where phase 1 is minimal and phase 5 is famine. The IPC defines famine as “the absolute inaccessibility of food to an entire population or sub-group of a population, potentially causing death in the short term”.

¹³⁴ OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.88

¹³⁵ OCHA. (2012). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (November 2012). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-november-2012> p.3

¹³⁶ OCHA. (2012a). Mali: Complex Emergency Situation Report No. 16, 26 September 2012. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-complex-emergency-situation-report-no-16-26-september-2012> p.4

Since 2012 the restoration of wells in the northern and central part of Mali was carried out by the International Rescue Committee (in Gao) and the Solidarités International (in Kidal, Timbuktu, and Dire).

Moreover, OCHA implemented the “WASH in Nut” principles focused not only on providing safe water and sanitation but also on improving hygiene (such as hand washing) with the further aim of improving public health. It was reported that the introduction of these principles became a challenge and required wide dissemination among the population, so it was important to continue to implement them actively everywhere. In addition, the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) and cluster partners delivered about 80,000 kits for more than 450,000 people in need.¹³⁷

The report also points to the low health care system in the country. The combination of malnutrition, limited access to safe water and to medical care has contributed to the spread of epidemic diseases such as cholera, which is also transmitted through water. Even though about 60 per cent of targeted were provided with health care (840,000 of 1,400,000), by the fall of 2012, the National Directorate of Public Health in Mali had reported about 216 cases of cholera and 17 deaths from this disease.

In response, UNICEF, together with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), engaged more than 100 employees to implement measures to prevent the spread of cholera. As well as the humanitarian organisation Solidarités International has prepared about 1,000 first aid kits in case of a cholera outbreak in the Timbuktu region.

According to the June 2015 OCHA humanitarian bulletin, water shortages have seriously affected many communities in northern Mali, especially in the Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal regions. About 7 thousand households, in which almost 55,000 people lived, faced a real threat to life due to lack of water. Dried-up lakes caused the water shortage situation, insufficient number of working water sources (boreholes, wells, and small water supply systems), as well as limited access to drinking water, which further worsened the situation. In addition, the WASH cluster report indicated that the technical equipment of several remaining water sources was unprepared for the increased population flow, which

¹³⁷ OCHA. (2012a). Mali: Complex Emergency Situation Report No. 16, 26 September 2012. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-complex-emergency-situation-report-no-16-26-september-2012> p.4

led to a lack of water for people and their livestock. As a result of the lack of water, many animals suffered and died.

Several humanitarian organisations, together with authorities, have taken measures to provide water as part of emergency humanitarian assistance, using tanker trucks. Among the actors involved there were Action against Hunger (ACF), Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Lay Volunteers International Association (LVIA), OXFAM, UNICEF, Regional Directorate of Hydraulics, and Regional Civil Protection Directorate. The actors also carried out work on the restoration of some water supply facilities, including the drinking water supply system in the Gao region, and planned the repair of other points, as well as the construction of new facilities.

The experts expressed the need for additional assistance and turned to government and humanitarian agencies to develop medium – and long-term solutions aimed at eliminating the problem of limited access to water and creating more sustainable solutions for the future.¹³⁸

Six months later, in December 2015, water shortages continued to be a serious problem, and the situation only worsened, leading to the forced displacement of the population and their livestock to urban areas and areas where water sources remained inexhaustible. Humanitarian organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Solidarites International, SOLISA, Groupe Action Recherche pour le Développement Local (GARDL), and ASSADDEC/AEN worked in the Kidal region and provided support in WASH needs, emphasising that water shortage was an extremely serious problem. Not solving this problem over the next six months could entail significant risks to people's health, such as death from thirst, diseases due to lack of hygiene and other problems. In addition, water shortages could lead to conflicts around water supply points and cause mass displacement of the population.¹³⁹

As part of the emergency humanitarian assistance, the following measures were taken: “free distributions of water to vulnerable groups, digging and over-deepening of ponds

¹³⁸ OCHA. (2015). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (June - July 2015). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-june-july-2015> p.2

¹³⁹ OCHA. (2016). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (December 2015 - January 2016). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-december-2015-january-2016> p.2

and wells, construction of micro-dams to retain rainwater and maintenance of drillings”¹⁴⁰. Humanitarian organisations expressed concern about the lack of funding to provide urgent humanitarian assistance and continued to look for sustainable solutions to the problem of water scarcity.

Moreover, in December 2015, the National Water Directorate and its partners carried out an inventory of modern water supply points, which made it possible to obtain data on access to water in all regions of Mali. In addition, water quality checks were also carried out in certain areas. Two Dutch organisations, the SNV and the Akvo, participated in the development of technologies for the inventory of water supply points, while UNICEF, the German bank KfW, and the Swedish Embassy financed the project. First, the southern regions of the country were inventoried, and then, according to the plan, the northern regions were supposed to be inventoried. However, due to a lack of funding, the start of the inventory in the northern regions was postponed, and additional funding was requested from donors.¹⁴¹

The latest humanitarian bulletin, published in March 2023, does not include detailed information on water needs. It only indicates the total number of people who needed access to water, hygiene and sanitation, and this number was about 3.2 million people.¹⁴²

In the Humanitarian Response Plan 2023, OCHA maintains its previous priorities, which include providing emergency assistance to vulnerable populations, improving sustainable access to WASH services for the population, as well as strengthening the capacities of local structures in responding to crises and managing sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene systems. The plan also contains an overview of the achievements over the past year, which reflect some improvement in the situation. For example, in 2021, 21,6 per cent of households did not have access to improved water sources, while in 2022, this number decreased to 18,56 per cent. There has been significant progress in ensuring

¹⁴⁰ OCHA. (2016). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (December 2015 - January 2016). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-december-2015-january-2016> p.3

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p.4

¹⁴² OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.4

household access to public or private restrooms: in 2021, 20 per cent of households did not have such access, and last year this figure fell to 12,30 per cent.¹⁴³

Despite some improvements in WASH, the situation has deteriorated dramatically with the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has had a significant impact on water supply, hygiene, and sanitation in Mali. One of the main aspects was the lack of clean water to comply with the necessary hygiene measures, such as regular hand washing. With limited access to water, many people found it difficult to maintain the necessary hygiene, which increased the risk of infection. In addition, due to restrictions on movement and reduced economic activity, some water supply and sanitation systems have faced maintenance problems. The lack of funding and resources has also had a negative impact on the provision of effective water supply and sanitation infrastructure.

Despite the statements in the report on the improvement of the overall post-covid situation by 2022, this information does not correspond to the facts presented. For example, the report notes that in 2021, 13.3% of households did not have enough drinking water, while in 2022, this number increased to 16.9%.¹⁴⁴

According to the conclusions drawn from the OCHA reports, humanitarian organisations, in general, have not made significant progress in this aspect. The problem of limited access to water remains urgent, and the spread of diseases such as cholera has even worsened due to the covid epidemic. Raising awareness about hygiene has also proved difficult, despite specialised training. Not all wells built are functioning, and lakes continue to dry up due to the unpredictable climate in the region. Moreover, the conflict spread to the southern territories of the country, which further worsened the situation. Therefore, it is necessary to take similar measures in the south, as was done earlier in the north.

As for the construction of wells, this topic raised a question in this research, as Interviewee #7, an NGO employee, told a story about how in one of the Sahel countries, located close to Mali, a large organisation built wells in the arid regions of the country.

¹⁴³ OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.60

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p.60

However, despite this, the water from wells did not appear. In other words, in his / her opinion, the organisation reported the completion of construction, but did not check whether the wells were working or not.

This story was told to Interviewee #11, who concluded that such actions may be related to corruption. She explained that in Mali and in the Sahel region, there are “a lot of things that get built that go nowhere”, meaning that these things are useless. He / she said that many wells are being built where there is absolutely no access to water. And while they are being built, the region continues to suffer from water shortages. In addition, he / she called it “a very, very common phenomenon” when, in conflict conditions, various communities attack water sources, damaging pipes, which completely stops the operation of the well. “And then it doesn't work, and no one is going to fix it, because there is no budget for it.”

However, a few sentences below, he / she stated that he / she was not sure if this particular case could be qualified as corruption and called it rather negligence and poor planning. He / she suggested that everything is happening in a hurry. If donors decided that they were going to build a well, they would just do it, and “then move on to the next”. In the end, he / she stressed that corruption definitely exists, and there are definitely things that are built for no reason and to please someone. So, the line between negligence, poor planning and what is corruption is often blurred, but there is definitely something to pay attention to.

2.4.3 Protection of IDPs and refugees

The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant¹⁴⁵ as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.

Migration from African countries has a long history and has existed for many centuries. Already in ancient times, African peoples migrated to other regions on the continent for various reasons, including the search for new lands for agriculture, trade, expanding

¹⁴⁵ About Migration. (n.d.). IOM. <https://www.iom.int/about-migration>

influence, or avoiding conflicts or political instability. During the slave trade period, millions of people were forced to migrate from Africa to other parts of the world. In modern times, migration from African countries continues. In the Sahel region, the purpose of migration of women, men and especially young people is, first of all, to improve their living situation and ensure wider access to basic services such as education, health, housing, information, security and so on.

It is important to note that the scale and directions of migration may vary depending on the overall political, economic, and social situation, as well as on the events and challenges faced by individual countries and regions of Africa. The coup in Mali in 2012 had a significant impact on migration. This coup led to political instability, conflicts and disruption of public security. Such conditions have exacerbated migration-related problems and led to an increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons.

According to Interviewee #5, migration is a common phenomenon in Africa and is associated not so much with conflict as with the desire for a better life. Many migrants from Mali leave for education or employment, and most of them go to Niger.

According to official IOM data, the number of internally displaced persons as of September 2012 was 118,795, about 35,300 of them in three northern regions (Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu). The TEMEDT (Association for the Consolidation of Peace, Development, and the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights), with which the assessment was carried out, stated that the results could not be completely accurate and did not cover all areas where internally displaced persons live, due to problems encountered during tracking.

In November, the UN Refugee Agency said the number of internally displaced persons had reached 203,845, about 85,000 more than previously estimated.¹⁴⁶ According to the statement of spokesman Adrian Edwards, the new data became available to the IOM commission, which was able to gain access to remote areas of northern Mali. However, according to him, new displacements continued to occur in the north of the country. The

¹⁴⁶ Lejeune-Kaba, F. (2012, November 2). New data shows 85,000 more IDPs in Mali than previously known. *UNHCR*. <https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/stories/new-data-shows-85-000-more-idps-mali-previously-known>

reasons for these displacements were general insecurity, the deteriorating human rights situation, as well as limited access to basic services.

As for the refugees, they continued to arrive in neighbouring countries. For example, about 4,000 arrived in Niger, while 1,000 arrived in Burkina Faso. Edwards also spoke about the difficulties faced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) employees trying to get to refugee camps: "The risk of abductions of aid workers means that our teams have to travel with armed escorts. Frequent security alerts are limiting access to the camps and our ability to assist the refugees".

The humanitarian bulletin of 2012 does not contain information about the humanitarian actions carried out to ensure the welfare of refugees and internally displaced persons, but only provides numerical data concerning their total number and concern about the situation.

According to a report published in the summer of 2015, three years after the start of the conflict, internally displaced persons were gradually returning home to the northern region, particularly to Mopti and Timbuktu. As of June, their number was about 90,000 people.¹⁴⁷ The main attention of humanitarian organisations was focused on providing assistance in the areas of return of displaced persons. In addition, the WFP and its partners delivered 40 tons of food to internally displaced persons, and almost 7,000 displaced persons received assistance in the form of money transfers.¹⁴⁸

For comparison, data from the report released six months later indicate that the number of displaced persons did not exceed 50,000 people.¹⁴⁹

According to a former MINUSMA employee, Interviewee #12, working in Mali at that time, there were many internally displaced persons who left their villages because of the war, they were constantly moving, and they had no permanent place of residence. He says they were not welcome anywhere, so they had to return to their villages.

¹⁴⁷ OCHA. (2015). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (June - July 2015). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-june-july-2015> p.1

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p.1

¹⁴⁹ OCHA. (2016). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (December 2015 - January 2016). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-december-2015-january-2016> p.1

As for the number of refugees, as of June 2015, their number has been reduced by more than two times compared to 2012 and amounted to 136,000 people.¹⁵⁰ However, six months later, the number of refugees increased again to 143,000 people.¹⁵¹ At the end of 2014, organisations operating in the country conducted an evaluation to understand the needs of refugees. Based on the results of this assessment, emergency assistance was provided to refugees in the form of food, non-food items, medical care, and mobile clinics by WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, and such NGOs as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Stop Sahel, Médecins du Monde – Belgique (Mdm-B) and ACTED.

In December 2015, 760 Malian refugees from Mauritania were reported to have returned to the north of the country (Timbuktu region). Their return and emergency assistance in the form of food and non-food items, medical care, and treatment of malnutrition were provided by several humanitarian organisations and authorities. Among them were Save the Children, CARE International, the health district of Niafunké, the Direction Regionale du Développement Social et de l'Economie Solidaire, and the Red Cross of Mali. In addition, their assessment identified the need to rebuild infrastructure to provide returning refugees with access to water, hygiene and sanitation, as well as education.¹⁵²

In the last published 2023 humanitarian bulletin, as of December 31, 2022, 412,000 internally displaced people were registered.¹⁵³ According to the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2023, in February, their number increased to 422,000, most of whom were children and women.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ OCHA. (2015). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (June - July 2015). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-june-july-2015> p.1

¹⁵¹ OCHA. (2016). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (December 2015 - January 2016). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-december-2015-january-2016> p.1

¹⁵² Ibid. p.5

¹⁵³ OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.5

¹⁵⁴ OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.4

During the research, it was found that the HRP report contains various figures on the number of IDPs. For example, page 4 lists 422,000 people¹⁵⁵, while pages 6 and 10 already mention the number 423,000¹⁵⁶. On page 18, a figure of 422,620 internally displaced persons appears, specifying that 54 per cent of them are women, and the remaining 63 are children¹⁵⁷. This is puzzling since it is obvious that besides these two groups of the population, there are also displaced men, elderly people and people with disabilities who should also be taken into account in this list. Also, regarding the last two identified population groups, the report indicates the insufficiency of shelters for the elderly and people with disabilities who do not meet their needs and do not have the necessary technical equipment. According to the survey, 63 per cent of IDPs stated that such groups of the population are four times more likely to be at risk of being abandoned or rejected.¹⁵⁸

As for the refugees, according to the 2023 humanitarian bulletin, about 200 thousand Malian citizens were refugees in neighbouring countries – Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger (UNHCR).¹⁵⁹ However, the OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan of the same year reports only about 175,000 Malian refugees identified in neighbouring countries.¹⁶⁰

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation as a result of the security crisis has a significant impact on the conditions of protection, leading to violations of fundamental rights and forcing people to move, exacerbating their vulnerabilities. Among the risks, the displaced population may face murders, kidnappings, recruitment, use of children by armed groups, lack of civilian documentation, limited access to basic services, and so on. One of the most vulnerable groups is women and girls, who are more likely to be at risk of sexual violence from both parties to the conflict and within their local communities. In

¹⁵⁵ OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.4

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p.6, 10

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p.18

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p.35

¹⁵⁹ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. (n.d.). *European Commission*. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/mali_en

¹⁶⁰ OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.4

addition, children are also more likely to be subjected to forced recruitment, sexual exploitation, child labour or early marriage, which, in particular, is a consequence of the closure of more than 20% of schools across the country.

The report focuses on the need to provide legal support to internally displaced persons in order to strengthen the legal and operational framework for their protection within the framework of humanitarian assistance. The intention is also expressed to reduce the vulnerability and increase the resilience of these population groups, strengthen the coordination of response measures and expand geographical coverage to ensure a comprehensive response to their protection. The cluster for the protection of displaced persons will pay special attention to the prevention and reduction of risks associated with human rights violations and forced displacement, strengthening the response to these situations, in particular by strengthening mechanisms for identifying the most vulnerable groups and guaranteeing their safety.

As potential solutions, it was suggested to focus on providing psychosocial support to various groups, such as survivors of gender-based violence (more than 1,507,591 people targeted)¹⁶¹, children associated with armed forces and groups, unaccompanied children, separated children, victims of torture and ill-treatment. Special attention is paid to education about the risks associated with explosive devices and assistance to victims, especially minors (humanitarian activities related to mine action). In 2023, 1,700,797 people¹⁶² are in need of protection from the explosive threat.¹⁶³

A former employee of MINUSMA, Interviewee #12, said that since 2013, a Mine Action Service which “has contributed significantly to the protection of the population with a marked decrease in the number of civilian ERW [explosive remnants of war] victims”¹⁶⁴. He / she said that often children can play with ammunition without knowing what it is. For example, once they had a case when two children thought they were playing with a stone, but it turned out to be a grenade that exploded.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p.78

¹⁶² Ibid. p.77

¹⁶³ Ibid. p.75

¹⁶⁴ Mine Action. (n.d.). *MINUSMA*. <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/mine-action> Modified April 2023

2.4.4 Access to education

Education is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that the United Nations announced in September 2015. The full title of SDG 4 is to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".¹⁶⁵ Providing inclusive and high-quality education unlocks educational prospects for individuals of all ages, enabling them to gain the essential knowledge and abilities required to seize opportunities and actively engage in society.

Ensuring equitable access to high-quality education is crucial for fostering a more promising and sustainable future in the long term. Education enhances job prospects and income levels, diminishes gender disparities, elevates families from poverty, and provides advantages that extend to future generations. Although there is a considerable number of children in Mali in need of education, not all of them have the opportunity to access it.

The challenge of accessing education in the whole Sahel region is closely intertwined with the issue of migration. Young people are forced to migrate in search of better economic opportunities, as education is often inaccessible or of poor quality. The limited access to education hinders the progress of the population and consequently impedes the overall development of the region, creating obstacles for individuals and communities to overcome.

Anticipating the years that the population will spend in "permanent emergencies"¹⁶⁶, back in 2007, in an essay "Beyond Any Drought. Root causes of chronic vulnerability in the Sahel", the Sahel Working Group declared that in the region "education provision is among the worst in the world, and health, literacy and education statistics reveal scandalous deprivation".

Among the problems in education in Mali, insufficient funding is noted, which has a negative impact on school infrastructure, teacher training and the availability of educational materials. There is also a lack of schools in some regions or their location at

¹⁶⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). Goals 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. *The United Nations*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

¹⁶⁶ World Food Programme. (2016). *Summary report of the evaluation of WFP's response to the crisis in Niger in 2005*. p.7

a great distance from settlements, the problem of low literacy, and conflicts and instability in the country lead to the closure of schools and disruption of the educational process.

Another problem in Mali is gender inequality in access to education, both among young people and among the elderly. In 2006, the Africa Development Indicators report was published, containing comprehensive data on Africa and covering more than four decades. According to the data, the largest gap in the level of literacy of men and women is observed in Mali (32:17 among young people, 27:12 among adults), where the percentage of the literate female population is half that of men. In addition, the report includes the student-teacher ratio, which is calculated by dividing the total number of students enrolled in a school by the number of teachers working at that institution. According to these data, this indicates a significant shortage of human resources in this sector. In 2004 there were 52 students per teacher in Mali.¹⁶⁷

The coup d'état in 2012 and the subsequent humanitarian crisis had a serious impact on the educational situation in Mali. Conflict and instability have led to the closure of many schools and the interruption of the educational process. Many students lost access to education due to the destroyed infrastructure, forced evacuation, as well as due to the unsafe situation in some areas. The conflict and lack of access to quality education have also exacerbated the low literacy of the population.

On September 24, the Ministry of Education of Mali announced the start of the 2012/2013 academic year. However, not all schools were able to open, as in some regions, there were some obstacles due to the military conflict. For example, in the Mopti region, military groups occupied 14 primary schools, in which approximately 5,000 students usually studied.¹⁶⁸ Also, in the Gao region, according to media reports, some schools were forced to close by order of MUJAO because of their intention to promote Islamic principles,

¹⁶⁷ The World Bank. (2006). *Africa Development Indicators 2006. From promises to results*. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-6537-3> p.76

¹⁶⁸ OCHA. (2012a). Mali: Complex Emergency Situation Report No. 16, 26 September 2012. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-complex-emergency-situation-report-no-16-26-september-2012> p.5

which signifies the risk of recruitment by armed groups.^{169 170} In addition, flooding in the south of the country caused damage to 201 schools, which led to limited access to education for 29,000 students.

In response, in collaboration with other humanitarian organisations, UNICEF conducted a campaign called "Back to School", which was aimed at supporting 2.5 million students, mainly among internally displaced persons and in flood-affected areas. They provided support to school canteens and purchased educational materials and other non-food items. In addition, UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Education of Mali, has developed a psychosocial module that was aimed at improving the well-being of students, as well as educational courses for more than 6,000 teachers.

In the period from March to August 2012, 28 accidents (43 victims and 3 deaths) related to unexploded ordnance were registered in the northeastern part of the country. Among the registered victims, more than half, 24 people, were children. In this regard, a working group was organised, which was engaged in informing the population on this issue.

According to the OCHA report for June 2015, the deterioration of the security situation in the north and in the centre of the country since the beginning of the year has led to the closure of more than 100 schools. Thus, the total number of closed schools in the regions affected by the conflict has reached 450, and about 20,000 children have suffered because of these events. In addition, annual school exams were not held in the regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Mopti. However, in the Timbuktu region, the rate of non-attendance decreased from 13 per cent in 2013 to 10 per cent in 2015. In response, humanitarian organisations operating in the field of education initiated work to develop alternative educational opportunities for more than 13,000 children and provide support to at least 210 teachers in the region. In addition, additional courses have been planned since October 2015 to facilitate the reintegration of out-of-school children.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ UNISEF. (2012). *UNICEF Mali Situation Report*. p.1

¹⁷⁰ Lejeune-Kaba, F. (2012, November 2). New data shows 85,000 more IDPs in Mali than previously known. *UNHCR*. <https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/stories/new-data-shows-85-000-more-idps-mali-previously-known>

¹⁷¹ OCHA. (2015). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (June - July 2015). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-june-july-2015> p.2

With regard to education for migrating children, the OCHA report draws special attention to a local NGO Delta Survie that has been implementing educational programs for the nomadic population for more than 15 years. In particular, the NGO funded the creation of more than 40 mobile schools in the regions of Mopti and Timbuktu, thereby contributing to the schooling of 1,637 migrant children.¹⁷²

As for the report in December 2015, schools continued to close due to insecurity, especially in the cities of Tenenkou (71 out of 93 schools closed) and Djenne (22 out of 100 schools closed). The total number of closed schools was 284 institutions. However, in the regions of Timbuktu and Kidal, progress continues to be made in reopening schools.

To improve access to education, the Ministry of Education, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CAM) and humanitarian organisations operated in the country conducted joint missions in various regions (Ségou, Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal) to assess the situation and developed a plan for the reopening of schools. Moreover, a year later, the Educational Cluster developed a strategy that contained recommendations on measures to ensure the safety of students and teachers. In particular, as a result, a trilateral agreement was reached between the Government, international partners such as MINUSMA and the French troops, as well as armed groups, to ban the use of schools by the military or their conversion into military facilities.¹⁷³

However, the December report does not mention the planned additional courses for students and teachers, which were supposed to start in October.

The March Humanitarian Bulletin 2023 almost does not cover the topic of education. However, from the presented data, it can be seen that despite the humanitarian assistance provided, the number of closed schools in the country has increased to 1,500, which is 15 times more than at the beginning of the humanitarian crisis.¹⁷⁴ In response, the Government expressed the need to strengthen support for the opening of new schools,

¹⁷² Ibid. p.9

¹⁷³ OCHA. (2016). Mali: Humanitarian Bulletin (December 2015 - January 2016). In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-humanitarian-bulletin-december-2015-january-2016> p.2

¹⁷⁴ OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.1

providing access to school canteens and supporting educational materials.¹⁷⁵ The closure of schools is directly related, among other things, to population movements, which creates a burden on the infrastructure and teaching staff of the host regions. The Government announced its intention to increase the capacity of educational facilities and mobilise more teachers.¹⁷⁶

As for the HRP, the figures provided in this report again do not correspond to the previous March one. In particular, the report states that 1,766 out of 8,666 schools have been closed in the country, which is 266 more schools than previously indicated. Besides, for the first time since 2012, the number of students affected by the conflict was indicated in the report. The situation with limited access to school education affected more than 529,000 children, which is 18 times more than in 2012.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, on page 65, the report contains information on 587,400 children affected by limited access to education, which is different from what was previously indicated. It is also noted that about 11,748 teachers faced the negative consequences of the conflict and lost their jobs.¹⁷⁸

The OCHA report focuses on ensuring the well-being of children aged 3 to 17 who have suffered from population displacement due to insecurity. He emphasises the importance of supporting their cognitive, physical and emotional development, as well as the need to create a peaceful upbringing, psychosocial support and social cohesion. There was also a need to improve emergency preparedness in vulnerable regions and schools exposed to threats and attacks.

With regard to possible solutions, the focus was on ensuring equal access to quality and inclusive education, which is achieved through providing access to a variety of educational programs, whether formal or informal. In order to provide high-quality

¹⁷⁵ OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.6

¹⁷⁶ OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.66

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p.4

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p.65

education to children who do not attend school, it was proposed to offer via radio or remotely.¹⁷⁹

As for funding, the OCHA report of March 2023 indicates that around 96,2 million dollars are needed to provide access to education for 3,9 million people.¹⁸⁰ The funding schedule shows that insufficient funds were received, but the exact amount is not specified. However, an inaccuracy was again found in the report. Namely, two pages below, it is indicated that the educational cluster needs 96.3 million dollars.¹⁸¹ The same number is indicated on pages 53 and 65.

In recent years, the World Bank and UN DESA have conducted new studies on education in the Sahel region. The data from these two reports confirm data from OCHA reports that the humanitarian crisis in education in Mali has had an impact on education in the Sahel region.

At the end of 2019, the World Bank, the unique global partnership that works for sustainable solutions that reduce poverty and build shared prosperity in developing countries, published a report, “Sahel Education White Paper. The wealth of today and tomorrow”, with data on progress in education. According to the data, from 2006 to 2021, net primary school enrolment rose two times and tripled in secondary education. Nevertheless, numerous children remain unenrolled in schools, and even among those who are enrolled, a considerable proportion does not regularly attend. The percentage of children who attend school and possess the ability to read and comprehend age-appropriate texts by the completion of primary school stands at a mere 12%¹⁸².

According to the report published in 2022 by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs on World Population Prospects, over the past ten years, sub-Saharan Africa has only experienced a slight increase of 3.4% in the completion rate of higher secondary education. Mali and Niger have some of the lowest completion rates for upper

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p.67

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p.8

¹⁸¹ Ibid.p.10

¹⁸² World Bank Group. (2021). *Sahel Education White Paper. The Wealth of Today and Tomorrow. Summit Edition.* p.10

secondary education¹⁸³, although they have significant proportions of young people of secondary school age. Based on the most recent data available in 2020, just around one in eight young people in Mali who are of secondary school age have completed upper secondary education, and only about 33% have finished the first stage of secondary education.

2.5 Challenges faced by the media and journalists in Mali

With a limited level of education and literacy of the population individuals face additional difficulties that hinder their access to critical information. This includes vital knowledge about regional governance, decisions that affect their lives, as well as awareness of health risks, nutrition, healthcare etc. With limited access to information, it becomes difficult to spread news and raise awareness among the population. In this sub-chapter, two cases of violation of the rights of journalists and obstacles to the existence of independent media will be considered, using the example of independent journalists in Mali.

Journalism, especially investigative journalism, plays an important role for several reasons, ensuring transparency, integrity, and good governance in the country. First of all, journalists can hold the authorities accountable for their actions by exposing corruption, abuse of power and other forms of misconduct. Secondly, investigative journalism contributes to the protection of democracy and the rule of law by drawing public attention to injustice, discrimination, and human rights violations. Thirdly, such investigations are aimed at quickly delivering information to citizens. In addition, with their investigative activity, journalists strengthen the freedom of the press, which is the main indicator of democracy in the country.

Investigative journalism does exist in the Sahel region. Journalists and media outlets in countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Chad are engaged in investigative journalism, uncovering corruption, human rights violations, and other issues of public interest. However, it is important to note that the practice of investigative journalism can be difficult due to various factors, such as limited resources, threats to press freedom and risks associated with covering sensitive topics in conflict-affected areas. Nevertheless,

¹⁸³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022. Summary of Results* (UN DESA/POP/2021/TR/NO. 3). p.41

there are dedicated journalists and organisations working to shed light on important issues in the Sahel.

The first considered case is the case of the abduction of Olivier Dubois. In the press release of August 15, 2022, on the withdrawal of the last French troops from Mali, President Emmanuel Macron hopes to achieve the early release of his compatriot Mr Olivier Dubois.¹⁸⁴ Olivier, a French journalist, became a hostage of Al-Qaeda in the Sahel and remained in captivity for 711 days until his release on March 20, 2023. Olivier, being a freelance employee of the French “Libération” and several African editions such as “Le Point Afrique” et “Jeune Afrique”, planned to interview Abdallah Ag Albakaye, the head of the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, the official branch of Al-Qaeda in Mali. Without conducting an interview, the journalist was abducted in Gao, in the north-east of Mali, in the spring of 2021.

On May 16, 2023, after the release of Dubois, four major French editions (“RFI”, “TV5 Monde”, “Libération” and “Le Monde”) published an investigation with the screaming headline “Behind the kidnapping of journalist Olivier Dubois in Mali, the manoeuvres and failures of the French authorities”.¹⁸⁵ The results of a joint one-and-a-half-year investigation indicate that the case is compromising for the French state. According to the journalists, they managed to get acquainted with 180 pages designated Top Secret of court documents between France and Mali, which contained evidence of the involvement of the French military in the abduction of Dubois. The journalists also found out that the French military had been following Olivier for several months. They tried to use Olivier to conduct the interview with the leader of the Malian Al-Qaeda, but then abandoned the operation, and, according to journalists, the military did not apply due care to ensure Olivier's safety.

¹⁸⁴ Retrait de la force Barkhane du Mali [Withdrawal of the Barkhane force from Mali]. (2022, August 15). *Elysée*. <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/08/15/retrait-de-la-force-barkhane-du-mali>

¹⁸⁵ Le Cam, M. (2023, May 16). Derrière l'enlèvement du journaliste Olivier Dubois au Mali, les manœuvres et les ratés des autorités françaises [Behind the kidnapping of journalist Olivier Dubois in Mali, the maneuvers and failures of the French authorities]. *Le Monde*. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/05/16/derriere-l-enlevement-du-journaliste-olivier-dubois-au-mali-les-man-uvres-et-les-rates-des-autorites-francaises_6173597_3212.html

In their investigation, the journalists found out that Olivier had an informant named Kader (name changed), who also provided information to the French army. Olivier completely trusted Kader, so he initiated him into all his plans.

After the abduction of Olivier Dubois, the Barkhane force interrogated Kader in the Gao for several days. Later in Mali, Kader was officially charged with “terrorist criminal association”. At the moment, within a few months, Kader has been released on parole. He believes that the French army “betrayed” and “abandoned” him.

For comments, “Libération” contacted Arnaud Froger, the Managing Director of the African branch of the NGO “Reporters without Borders”, who denounces “the inconsiderate risk that the Barkhane force took”. “In France,” he says, “you shouldn't be able to use a journalist as a Trojan horse to get information, especially if this operation risks putting his life in danger a little more. Without minimising the journalist's own responsibility for this interview project, which was inherently risky, it raises serious questions about what our services and our army are ready to do for intelligence operations. It was more than lightness. It was negligence.”¹⁸⁶

Another example of the complexity or even impossibility of investigative journalism in the Sahel and in particular in Mali, is the case of Malick Konaté. Interviewee #2 told me about this Malian journalist and invited me to contact him for a conversation, but unfortunately, Malick did not respond to any messages. Malick is a well-known journalist, blogger, and activist in Bamako, as well as the initiator of the movement “Too much means too much”, which fights for human rights and good governance in Mali.

On World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2023, Malick gave an interview to France 24 channel, where he said that he was at that moment seeking asylum in France. He was exiled to France in September 2022 from Senegal, where he fled after receiving threats and being attacked in his office in Mali in June 2022. The journalist also believes that the Malian state accuses him of being sponsored by France or the Western countries in order to destabilise the transition period and the situation in the country. According to the

¹⁸⁶ À la Une: les dessous de l'enlèvement d'Olivier Dubois [On the Front Page: the underside of the kidnapping of Olivier Dubois]. (2023, May 17). *Radio France Internationale*. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/revue-de-presse-fran%C3%A7aise/20230517-%C3%A0-la-une-les-dessous-de-l-enl%C3%A8vement-d-olivier-dubois>

authorities, Malick called on citizens to pro-Russian and anti-French movements. He states that journalists cannot be independent while staying in the country, they are obliged to comply with and support the state agenda. In addition, since the beginning of the coup, journalism in Mali has deteriorated and degraded significantly. For example, when asked by journalists to provide a communique or a clause in the contract for the purchase of equipment by the French, they are told that this is not their right. Malick believes that "a real journalist should inform, not communicate."¹⁸⁷

The NGO "Reporters Without Borders" defended Malick, condemning the government and stating that it should immediately stop death threats against the Malian journalist.¹⁸⁸ NGO employees believe that despite the threats earlier, they reached their peak after a report published on the BMFTV French news channel, where Malik talks about the presence in Mali of mercenaries working for the Russian private military company Wagner Group. Despite the fact that his activities were limited only to shooting some video materials for a report, "he has been labelled as a "prey to be gunned down," as "Mali's public enemy No. 1" and as a "traitor" to be "eliminated for the good of the people" in social media posts, some anonymous, some not", they added. Sadibou Marong, the director of RSF's sub-Saharan Africa department, believes that "Malick Konaté now fears for his life simply for doing his job as a journalist by participating in a documentary. The authorities must react and must protect journalism and the freedom to inform in a country where media professionals are barely able to work freely any more for fear of reprisals."

This case led to the following consequences. Some weeks later, Joliba TV, a Malian news channel based in Bamako, famous for its independence, was suspended by the Supreme Directorate of Public Relations for 2 months after critical statements addressed to the ruling junta.¹⁸⁹ "Foreign media that had correspondents in Mali have moved them to the

¹⁸⁷ FRANCE 24. (2023, May 3). "J'ai été menacé de mort" : un journaliste malien, exilé en France, témoigne ["I was threatened with death": a Malian journalist, exiled in France, testifies] [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmvdyPYbqk>

"un vrai journaliste doit informer au lieu de communiquer"

¹⁸⁸ Death threats against Malian journalist must stop, RSF says. (2022, November 9). *Reporters Without Borders*. <https://rsf.org/en/death-threats-against-malian-journalist-must-stop-rsf-says>

¹⁸⁹ Haute Autorité de la Communication. (2022, October 12). *Mise en demeure: la suspension de Joliba TV* [Formal notice: the suspension of Joliba TV] [Press release].

capitals of nearby countries, either Dakar (Senegal), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) or Niamey (Niger)”, RSF said. In addition, the ruling junta has restricted the activities of several local and international news channels, such as, for example, “Radio France Internationale” and “France 24”.¹⁹⁰ According to RSF, it happened “six weeks later after RFI broadcast a report about summary executions and looting by Malian soldiers and mercenaries working for Wagner Group, whose presence in Mali has been widely reported since the start of the year”.

As for the cases of local journalistic investigations of humanitarian assistance in the region, Interviewee #13 and Interviewee #14 confirm its existence. Interviewee #13 says that “there are rare cases of the local investigation by journalists since cases of the misuse of humanitarian aid are too sensitive and are therefore controlled by administrative bodies that are in direct contact with interested parties”. Interviewee #14 agreed with the previous interviewee: “In terms of local media, in general, in a given country [Mali] where international organisations are present, peace and security, humanitarian issue etc. have a space in the local media”. Interviewee #14 also states that she has seen some incredible examples of local NGOs and actors doing impressive work at the local level on conflict resolution, conflict analysis, project activities, etc. Interviewee #6 confirmed that the topic of humanitarian aid is covered in the local media, and also that the media can be a platform for NGOs to disseminate information messages or to cover certain events.

However, Interviewee #7 said that the topic is covered, but not in sufficient volume. “Speaking about Senegal, many Senegalese residents do not know that there are slums very close by, in which hundreds of people live. People do not know about albinos living in villages next to Senegal, that do not have water, work, or food”. Interviewee #9 and Interviewee #8 confirmed his / her words saying that the topic of humanitarian aid is not covered enough in the local media.

Regarding this work, despite extensive searches, not a single local investigation or article covering the problem of incorrect use of humanitarian aid in Mali and the Sahel region

¹⁹⁰ À la Une: RFI et France 24 définitivement suspendues au Mali [On the Front Page: RFI and France 24 definitively suspended in Mali]. (2022, April 28). *Radio France Internationale*. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/revue-de-presse-afrique/20220428-%C3%A0-la-une-rfi-et-france-24-d%C3%A9finitivement-suspendues-au-mali>

has been found. Interviewee #10 also said that there are regular articles on the humanitarian actions carried out. However, Interviewee #14 added that “On their [local journalists] commenting on misuse of humanitarian aid, this can be less common but also takes place from time to time”.

Interviewee #11 believes that Mali and Burkina Faso are no longer places where you can speak freely, as there are censorship and intimidation. People are increasingly being expelled, and researchers are increasingly being denied from both countries. For example, Burkina Faso has declared it illegal to criticise and demoralise the Government and national forces in a very broad sense of the word. Niger remains freer in this regard due to the lack of a clear government approach there.

Returning to the Olivier Dubois case, the non-governmental organisation Reporters Without Borders published a paper on the growing threats against journalists in the Sahel region some days after his release. The “What it is like to be a journalist in the Sahel” investigative report covers five countries of the Sahel region – Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad, and declares that “conditions for journalists in the Sahel have worsened steadily for the past decade”.¹⁹¹ The report also analyses Benin, which shares borderlands with Sahelian nations and has comparable security challenges. The influence of the ruling junta and numerous coups have negatively affected independent media in the region, which has led to compliance with the “code of silence surrounding sensitive subjects”. The bans on the work of international media, the expulsion of foreign journalists, the censorship that flows into self-censorship and concealment of facts, and the shutdown of the Internet has caused great damage to journalism and freedom of the press in the Sahel. In January 2022, the RSF introduced its "Save Journalism in the Sahel" campaign with the purpose to organise and mobilise the opposition in the Sahel to protect pluralism and freedom of the press so that it "does not become Africa's biggest news and information black hole".

Speaking in particular about the suspension of international media in the Sahel region, throughout Burkina Faso, broadcasting of Radio France Internationale was suspended in December 2022 until further notice. Four months later, broadcasting of the France 24 was

¹⁹¹ Reporters Without Borders. (2023). *What it's like to be a journalist in the Sahel*. <https://rsf.org/en/what-it-s-be-journalist-sahel-rsf-report-threats-journalism-african-region> p.3

stopped for an indefinite period. In addition, one year before, in April 2022, the High Authority of Communication in Mali eventually put an end to the broadcasting of both aforementioned TV networks.¹⁹²

Over the past decade, Mali has been identified as the country with the highest number of murders of journalists (3 journalists were killed) and the only one where a journalist was taken hostage (Olivier Dubois's case).¹⁹³ The disappearance of journalists was also reported in Mali and Chad. Besides, the number of journalists detained or imprisoned in Chad is almost twice the total number of such cases in the other countries reviewed (15 in Mauritania, 12 in Mali, 2 in Burkina Faso, 10 in Benin, and 8 in Niger in comparison with 72 in Chad). In addition, Chad is the country where the most cases of mistreatment against journalists have been recorded over the past ten years (51 cases), such as physical violence, numerous threats, searches, and suspension of activities. Sadibou Marong, the director of RSF's sub-Saharan Africa department, said about the Sahel that it is "becoming a region that is dangerously deprived of independent journalists and reliable reporting, a region where self-censorship is becoming the norm".¹⁹⁴

It is known that at the end of 2021, troops of the Russian Wagner group deployed to Mali, which was harshly condemned by America and European countries because of the risk of a threat to the security of the region and its residents. At the same time, some local media actively supported the Wagner group and approved their actions. In September 2022, two researchers of the IRSEM, the research institute of the French Ministry of Armed Forces, published a report, "Russia in Mali. A two-headed presence", where the Wagner deployment was analysed. Maxime Audinet and Emmanuel Dreyfus defined their activities as an "unofficial presence of Russia". They state that the purpose of Wagner's presence is "to approve his actions by the media and culture, to establish contacts with potential local supporters and, on a broader scale, to legitimise Russian-Malian

¹⁹² Reporters Without Borders. (2023). *What it's like to be a journalist in the Sahel*. <https://rsf.org/en/what-it-s-be-journalist-sahel-rsf-report-threats-journalism-african-region> p.13

¹⁹³ Reporters Without Borders. (2023). *What it's like to be a journalist in the Sahel*. <https://rsf.org/en/what-it-s-be-journalist-sahel-rsf-report-threats-journalism-african-region> p.4, 5

¹⁹⁴ "What it's like to be a journalist in the Sahel" – RSF report on threats to journalism in this African region. (2023, April 3). *Reporters Without Borders*. <https://rsf.org/en/what-it-s-be-journalist-sahel-rsf-report-threats-journalism-african-region>

cooperation and discredit his critics”.¹⁹⁵ According to their research, Russia today enjoys a predominantly positive image in Mali. A survey conducted worldwide by Gallup in the period from April 2021 to January 2022 showed that Mali became the country where the approval rating of the Russian leadership has grown and has become the highest in the world – 84 %.¹⁹⁶

Women's journalism in the Sahel is another and more difficult topic to discuss. Women journalists from Niger said that not every one of them is ready to go to investigate such dangerous regions of Niger as Tillabéry and Diffa. They may not only be in danger of being attacked or killed, but they may also not get permission to travel from their husbands. That is why in October 2022, the International Network of Women Journalists requested that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) create a subregional code to protect female journalists working in crisis areas.

At the end of its report, the NGO offers several recommendations and encourages the governments of Sahel countries to take the lead in enhancing their efforts and initiatives in order to improve the work and presence of journalists in such a complex and dangerous region.

Among the recommendations are:

- Ensuring the safety of journalists.
- Organizing educational training programs for journalists to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to access conflict zones safely.
- Suppression of threats against journalists, including on behalf of the government.
- Bringing to justice those who threatened the lives of journalists.
- Adoption of legislation concerning the availability of information held by the Government.
- Putting an end to the practice of departing foreign journalists.

¹⁹⁵ Maxime Audinet et Emmanuel Dreyfus, *La Russie au Mali : une présence bicéphale* [Russia in Mali. A two-headed presence], Étude 97, IRSEM, septembre 2022. p. 34

¹⁹⁶ Maxime Audinet et Emmanuel Dreyfus, *La Russie au Mali : une présence bicéphale* [Russia in Mali. A two-headed presence], Étude 97, IRSEM, septembre 2022. p.82

Chapter 3 – Humanitarian actors and their contributions

This chapter will highlight the role of the main humanitarian organizations in Mali based on the reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In order to better understand the situation and assess the evolution, comparative analyses of data from three reports were carried out. In addition, research work was carried out on humanitarian support of regional organizations, which adds an additional perspective to the consideration of the topic. Moreover, most of the chapter will be devoted to analysing comments received during a series of interviews conducted within the framework of this study to consider the contribution of humanitarian organisations in the field of humanitarian assistance in Mali.

Since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis in Mali in 2012, humanitarian organisations have been actively involved in providing emergency assistance, protection and support to the population affected by the conflict. The involvement of humanitarian organisations helps to improve living conditions and meet the basic needs of the population, ensuring mitigation of the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and providing protection to vulnerable groups. In addition, humanitarian organisations play an important role in coordinating and cooperating with local and international partners, including the Government and other structures, to ensure effective and targeted assistance.

This chapter also pays special attention to the assessment of humanitarian assistance in Mali, with an emphasis on fairness, timeliness and equal distribution of aid among the most needy groups of the population. The study concludes by analysing the current humanitarian needs in Mali and assessing the evolution of humanitarian assistance since 2012. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the opinions of the groups of respondents selected for the study, namely civilians, UN representatives and NGO staff.

In 2013, OCHA began publishing analytical documents “Qui fait Quoi Où” (also known as “Who does what where” (3W)) on the operational and programmatic presence of humanitarian organisations to support coordination on the ground. Since June 2013, reports have been issued at intervals of several months, then in recent years, they have been distributed with a breakdown of information by region of Mali. However, as part of the research, it was noticed that the frequency of publication of reports is violated without

a specific template and without a clear time frame. In addition, not all regions were analysed for a certain period of time.

As of 2013¹⁹⁷, OCHA reported on 119 organisations engaged in humanitarian activities in Mali. This number has increased to 153 in 2015¹⁹⁸, and to 170 in 2022¹⁹⁹.

As for the geographical location of humanitarian organisations in various regions of the country, in 2012, most of them were active in the central part of Mali, in the Mopti region, due to limited access to the north of the country due to the conflict situation. However, in 2015, it was noticed that many of these organisations had moved to the northeastern region of the country, the Gao. And finally, by 2022, a significant part of humanitarian factors is concentrated in the north of the country, in the Tombouctou region.

The health, food security and protection sectors have remained a priority for humanitarian organisations for many years. However, in 2015, the education sector joined them, and the number of humanitarian organisations operating in the country has increased more than fivefold – from 9 to 50 since 2012. However, in subsequent years, the number of organisations decreased by almost 3.5 times by 2022, which is puzzling.

Of great interest is the sharp increase in the number of humanitarian organisations operating in the health sector. In 2012, only 28 organisations were registered in the country, in 2015 their number grew to 35, and by 2022 it suddenly increased to 90. This is surprising, given that the problem of low level of health care for a long time remained one of the main problems in the country.

¹⁹⁷ OCHA. (2013). Mali: 3W Présence opérationnelle et programme Qui fait, Quoi, Où [Mali: 3W Operational presence and program Who does, What, Where]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/map/mali/mali-3w-pr%C3%A9sence-op%C3%A9rationnelle-et-programme-qui-fait-quoi-o%C3%B9-juin-2013>

¹⁹⁸ OCHA. (2015b). *Mali: 3W Présence opérationnelle des agences et partenaires Qui fait, Quoi, Où* [Mali: 3W Operational presence of agencies and partners Who does, What, Where]. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-3w-pr-sence-op-rationelle-des-agences-et-partenaires-qui-fait-quoi-o-d-cembre-2015>

¹⁹⁹ OCHA. (2023b, February 7). Mali : Qui Fait Quoi et Où (3W) Présence opérationnelle des acteurs humanitaires [Mali: Who Is Doing What and Where (3W) Operational presence of humanitarian actors]. *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-qui-fait-quoi-et-ou-3w-presence-operationnelle-des-acteurs-humanitaires-au-decembre-2022>

As for funding, in 2012 OCHA expressed a need for 215 million dollars and noted that coverage of only 60 per cent is considered insufficient to meet urgent needs.

According to the latest funding update, the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) of OCHA says that about 751,5 million dollars is needed for humanitarian response in Mali. According to the data, the funding gap is more than 83 per cent or 624,7 million dollars. The United States is the main donor with a large superiority, their contribution is about 40 per cent of the total budget. The European Union follows the US with 14 per cent and Germany with 8 per cent. The food security sector receives the largest funding of about 33 per cent or 42 million dollars from the total budget.²⁰⁰

However, in the course of the research, discrepancies and inaccuracies were found in the figures concerning the humanitarian financing of Mali. The latest humanitarian bulletin containing basic information and figures about Mali was published in March 2023. The report states that of the 751 million dollars needed to meet the response needs in Mali, only 16.1²⁰¹ million dollars was received, which is significantly different from the information on the FTS OCHA website (126.8 million dollars). Most likely, a mistake was made, and the percentage of funding received, namely 16.1 per cent, was meant. However, such reports should not contain such gross errors that may mislead people who want to get acquainted with the information provided.

In the HRP 2023, Alain Noudéhou, Deputy Special Representative for MINUSMA and Resident Coordinator in Mali, addresses donors who supported the humanitarian response in 2022, thanks them and invites them to continue providing assistance to Mali “by allocating more flexible funds to UN agencies, national and international NGOs working tirelessly to relieve the suffering of vulnerable populations and increase their resilience to shocks related to conflicts and natural disasters”. He also stated that “Renewed efforts by all, including those of the communities, the Government of Mali, and technical and

²⁰⁰ OCHA Financial Tracking Service. (n.d.). *Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 [Mali Humanitarian Response Plan 2023]*. Retrieved June 18, 2023, from https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1122/summary?_gl=1*8xvyb4*_ga*MTk1NjA3NzUwMy4xNjg3MDA4NDgx*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY4NzE1NTE1My43LjEuMTY4NzE1NTg4NS40Ny4wLjA

²⁰¹ OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.1

financial partners are necessary to sustain the achievements of the humanitarian response and development initiatives, and to consolidate peace”.²⁰²

Moreover, in conjunction with the United Nations and various humanitarian organisations, the European Union has been actively involved in providing humanitarian assistance in Mali, amplifying the collective response to the crisis.

The European Union being one of the main assistance providers in Mali, provides both humanitarian and development aid, which makes it possible to coordinate efforts to meet immediate humanitarian needs and simultaneously implement projects aimed at addressing the root causes of crises. Since the beginning of the crisis, the EU has allocated more than 472 million euros in humanitarian aid for Mali. The main focus of the European Union's humanitarian support in Mali is focused on meeting the needs of victims of the conflict and displaced persons. According to a report by the European Commission in 2023, about 1.5 million people have been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of the conflict, including some who have been forced to move repeatedly. Almost half of them were able to return to their homes, but they remain in an extremely vulnerable position.²⁰³

Within the framework of the Rapid Response Mechanism, the EU provides initial support in various areas, such as providing housing, basic necessities and food. In addition, if possible, assistance is provided in the form of money transfers and vouchers so that people can purchase goods and services necessary for their families.

According to the EU report, between 2011 and 2021, the EU allocated approximately 86 million euros to combat acute malnutrition throughout the country. Additional attention was paid to the problem of child malnutrition, as about 700,000 children fell into this category, including about 367,000 children under the age of 5. The EU funded the necessary medicines and special medical nutrition for children.²⁰⁴

²⁰² OCHA. (2023a). Mali : Plan de réponse humanitaire 2023 [Mali: Humanitarian response plan 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023> p.4, 5

²⁰³ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. (n.d.). *European Commission*. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/mali_en

²⁰⁴ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. (n.d.). *European Commission*. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/mali_en

With regard to humanitarian assistance from the African Union, it can be said that it usually has a political and military orientation, and any actions related to the provision of humanitarian assistance to the population are considered for a political purpose. One such example in Africa is AMISOM – African Union Mission to Somalia, replaced by AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in 2022, with mandate to create the necessary security conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.²⁰⁵ Despite the existence of the Division of Humanitarian Affairs, Refugees and Displaced Persons (HARDP) in the Department of Political Affairs, it does not have an effective mechanism or role, nor does it have the necessary capacity, funding and vision to work effectively with refugees and displaced persons.²⁰⁶

In March 2012, ECOWAS issued its first special Humanitarian Policy and Humanitarian Action Plan aimed "to standardize the practice of humanitarian action in ECOWAS Member States by fostering a balanced linkage between Humanitarian Action, Human Security and Human Development throughout the ECOWAS space based on the principle of regional solidarity."²⁰⁷ However according to the HPG Working group, in ECOWAS the "emerging humanitarian response mechanisms have severe capacity limitations; human resource deficits are glaring, tend to increase dependence on external financiers, and increase the problem of compartmentalisation of expertise and resources". In other words, the activities of ECOWAS largely depend on external partners.

Based on the analysis of the working group, it can be concluded that neither ECOWAS nor the African Union have working mechanisms to provide humanitarian assistance to the population. In addition, none of these organisations has sufficient funding to provide such assistance. They are engaged in military and political intervention, but not humanitarian activities. "Given these limitations, it is hard to see how regional

²⁰⁵ African Union. Peace and Security Council 865th meeting. (2019). Progress report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the situation in Somalia/AMISOM. p. 7

²⁰⁶ HPG Working Paper, & Haysom, S. (2014). Security and humanitarian crisis in Mali. The role of regional organisations. p.12

²⁰⁷ ECOWAS Commission. (2012). *ECOWAS Humanitarian Policy*. p.7

organisations – with their current capacity – could support humanitarian action, including protection work on behalf of people affected by violence.”²⁰⁸

However, it is necessary to mention the Kampala Convention, designed to protect and support the rights and well-being of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa. The Kampala Convention refers to the African and was adopted in June 2009 in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. The convention was ratified in most African Union States in 2012. Despite the signing of such an important treaty, the number of IDPs in Africa is still high and accounts for one third of the total number of IDPs in the world²⁰⁹. The reports of the ICRC emphasize that most of the actions taken by States since the adoption of the Convention have been aimed at prevention, establishing a framework and taking Government response measures, and to a lesser extent at data collection, enforcement and implementation of these measures. The Convention has been the subject of considerable criticism, and the Norwegian Refugee Council recommended to African Governments to take comprehensive measures to focus on meeting the needs of displaced women and girls, as well as pay special attention to providing them with housing²¹⁰.

Interviewee #11 said that Niger was one of the first to ratify and enact the Kampala Convention. “Niger is indeed a conscientious participant and partner when it comes to the international community, it does everything that the community requires on internal displacement issues.” It means that in Niger they get a lot more funding and support. “For example, they offered to be the transition site for IOM when all the migrants are coming out of Libya. That that makes them open to funding in different ways, so they've managed to play that game very well”. He / she added: “Unfortunately, the issue with Niger as often as something as much as they get more funding and they get more attention and they have they create interesting partnerships, they themselves don't have the money to

²⁰⁸ HPG Working Paper, & Haysom, S. (2014). Security and humanitarian crisis in Mali. The role of regional organisations. p.12

²⁰⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (GRID) & Norwegian Refugee Council. (2019). Global report of Internal Displacement. In *IDMC*. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2019-global-report-on-internal-displacement#:~:text=The%20Global%20Report%20on%20Internal,in%20addressing%20and%20preventing%20displacement>. p. 3

²¹⁰ Norwegian Refugee Council. (2015). The Kampala Convention: Make it work for women. In *NRC*. <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/the-kampala-convention---make-it-work-for-women/> p. 6

do better unfortunately”. Interviewee #11 believes that it is great that laws are being passed in Niger to protect internally displaced persons, but, after all, the Government itself does not have the means to provide basic services to IDPs, which is a big gap. But, unlike Burkina Faso and Mali, the Government of Niger does not deny that there is a humanitarian crisis, does not interrupt humanitarian assistance.

3.1 Comments and assessment of experts on the misuse of humanitarian aid in Mali

After analysing the humanitarian actors and their contribution to the provision of humanitarian assistance in Mali, it is necessary to consider one of the most difficult challenges, which is a common problem in the field of humanitarian response – the misuse of humanitarian aid. This sub-chapter is based on expert comments received as part of the master's thesis and is designed to shed light on the problem of misuse of humanitarian resources in this particular region.

In response to the humanitarian crisis of 2012, humanitarian actors have increased their presence in the country and neighbouring countries. However, during interviews with experts, including local residents, representatives of the UN and NGOs who are deeply immersed in the situation in Mali, it became clear that not all humanitarian resources reach those who need help the most.

Thus, based on the comments of the experts interviewed, this chapter explores and analyses the causes and consequences of the misuse of humanitarian aid in Mali in order to contribute to the development of more effective strategies and policies aimed at maximising the impact of humanitarian aid and ensuring its delivery to those most in need.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I have not found any articles or investigations devoted to the misuse of humanitarian aid. A representative of the UN agency said in an interview: "since cases of misuse of humanitarian aid are too sensitive, they are controlled by administrative bodies that are in direct contact with interested parties." Therefore, all the information presented in this sub-chapter is based on interviews conducted by me as part of my master's research.

An interview with Interviewee #3 was conducted at the very beginning of this research, and in his / her comments he / she spoke about the evidence of misuse of humanitarian

food aid. In subsequent interviews, all respondents were asked a question related to this topic. It turned out that such unfair use of aid is a common practice in the country. He / she said that non-governmental organisations often supply peanut bars to malnourished children in public schools in Mali, and teachers who are supposed to distribute them to children sell them for 150 CFA Francs²¹¹. These peanut bars are called Plumpy'nuts and are "specifically formulated for the nutritional rehabilitation of children from six months of age and adults suffering from severe acute malnutrition"²¹².

He / she has heard similar comments from his / her friends, and they all tend to believe that this is proof of the misuse of humanitarian aid. "When assistance is provided to vulnerable segments of the population, especially material assistance in the form of food, it is unfortunate that assistance does not always reach interested persons. Often those who are responsible for distribution are engaged in their resale. Thus, we can unfairly blame these organisations. However, the problem lies elsewhere in the chain", he / she said.

Interviewee #4 confirmed Interviewee #3's words and said that he / she had heard about cases with Plumpy'nuts. In addition, according to him / her, in primary schools there are also cases of resale of food intended for the preparation of lunches in the school canteen. In addition, Interviewee #4 noted that cases of illegal use of humanitarian aid arise due to the fact that NGOs provide things (food, water, clothing) instead of money, and people prefer to sell the received items to get money.

Interviewee #13 confirmed the cases when Plumpy'nuts were used by adults instead of malnourished children and added that there have been cases when humanitarian aid has been used by state leaders and influential people in society for other purposes. The second part of his / her comment aroused my interest, and I decided to clarify by asking leading questions. In response, I felt a fright and tension on his / her part. He / she reminded me that our interview is confidential, and he / she is not accusing anyone. "In my answers, I adhere to general principles so as not to affect an organisation or a person. I remind you that all the answers I have given have nothing to do with any humanitarian organization. These are my impressions of the general situation", he added. Despite the fact that my

²¹¹ approximately 0.22 euro cents at the exchange rate on July 1, 2023

²¹² *Plumpy'Nut*®. (n.d.). Nutriset-fr. <https://www.nutriset.fr/products/en/plumpy-nut#:~:text=Plumpy'Nut%C2%AE%20is%20specifically,suffering%20from%20severe%20acute%20malnutrition.>

question seemed provocative to him / her, he / she still added a few words. "I would like to talk about the cases of humanitarian aid redirection that still exist in the magnons of the aid supply chain. There is no zero risk. For example, stocks of medicines in medical institutions may be sold by state management committees, etc".

As mentioned in the introduction, Interviewee #11 is a Sahel countries researcher, so when asking about the unfair use of humanitarian aid in Mali and the Sahel region as a whole, I gave examples of three cases that I became aware of thanks to interviews conducted earlier. I gave an example of cases with Plumpy'nuts, the misuse of aid by state leaders and the construction of non-working wells. In response, he / she declared: "Yeah, there's always a misuse. There's always theft. I haven't heard of really alarming cases in the Central Sahel countries, while it happens a lot in Nigeria and in Cameroon. There's always going to be some level of corruption, always someone who's doing a bad job, and who's driving aid to the wrong people." She added that "it definitely happens in all cases" meaning the misuse of humanitarian aid. He / she also gave an example when Mali closed its borders during the COVID outbreak and NGOs tried to get into the country with food supplies because Mali is heavily dependent on food imports. As a result, all the trucks were stuck at the border and food rotted in the trucks for many days. She also added that in Burkina Faso, there is mostly not necessarily theft, but a complete blockade of humanitarian aid by the government. Thus, many problems and complications may arise that slow down the provision of assistance.

As for Plumpy'nuts, Interviewee #11 said: "People are constantly selling something. It's not something new. I do not know specifically about the cases with teachers, but if you go to any market in the place of humanitarian aid, you can find new tarps and buckets of the UNHCR and IOM. I think that compared to teachers, this is completely different and not so scary. Selling Plumpy'nuts by schoolteachers is a problem because they have to give them to children, and they obviously don't".

Interviewee #11 added that people are constantly selling things that are given to them, and he / she thinks that selling their things is normal. Because people want to be able to decide for themselves what they want. Some people don't need a tarp, some don't need food, some don't need a bucket, and some don't need coal etc.

Interviewee #11 said that the problem of reselling things caused a big push to switch only to monetary interventions. Despite the fact that the OCHA reports repeatedly talked about providing the population with cash vouchers, none of the interviewees called it a widespread activity. Some of them, like Interviewee #8, believe that money transfers are necessary in the region.

Moreover, Interviewee #11 added that he/ she thinks there are times when the line about misuse is blurred. For example, he / she talked about the case of such a situation in the example of the Central African Republic. “There were MINUSMA trucks that were illegally importing water to sell in the markets, and it was actually a huge issue because technically they shouldn't have been using MINUSMA, which is the peacekeeping force trucks to be bringing in goods, which is sort of a violation of their work and also it blurs the lines between what is military and what is not. But at the same time, there was no water, and people were in need. So, the fact that they were doing this illegally was the only thing that saved the small village.”

Interviewee #14 confirmed the words spoken by the previous respondent: “Misuse of humanitarian aid in history is of common knowledge, unfortunately. Despite none of these cases can be justified, it is also true that some of these events can happen in desperate conditions, but still no justifications. There is no perfection in such a complicated endeavour of delivering humanitarian assistance, and incidents still can happen.”

Interviewee #6 had not heard of cases of theft of humanitarian property. He / she thinks that the case with the teachers may be true. “Perhaps they just wanted to benefit from the spread of Plumpy’nuts”.

In addition, Interviewee #6 said that all NGOs have a complaint mechanism and a set of anti-fraud procedures, which can be useful in the case of misuse. “For example, a beneficiary who has become a victim of embezzlement by a humanitarian organisation employee may use an anonymous system to report fraud. This is usually a Toll-free number or a protection contact centre through which complaints can be sent, and each office also has a mailbox for such complaints. In addition, there are provisions in the employment contracts of each NGO employee regarding the sanctions provided in case

of fraud or misuse of assistance. Such provisions are even included in agreements with partners.”

Interviewee #10 confirmed that all NGOs have guidelines on procedures to minimise the risk of fraud. However, Interviewee #9 had not heard about the anti-fraud procedure in NGOs.

3.2 Timely and equitable humanitarian assistance: coverage and promised assistance

At the next stage of the interview, the question arose about the timeliness and completeness of the provision of humanitarian assistance, as well as the coverage of all vulnerable groups with this assistance.

It is difficult for Interviewee #4 to answer whether assistance is provided on an equal basis to all vulnerable groups, but he / she believes that NGOs act in accordance with their principle. Each NGO takes care of its own group of people. But he / she can't claim that because he / she doesn't work for these NGOs.

Interviewee #6 also spoke about the observance of humanitarian principles by national and international NGOs. He / she stated that help always comes on time because needs are always present. However, it is also important to point out the insufficient financing of the sector. In addition, assistance is provided on a fair basis without discrimination to all vulnerable groups of the population.

Interviewee #13 confirmed that assistance is being provided on time, but there are problems associated with insecurity due to the actions of armed groups that can disrupt humanitarian access, delaying assistance that should be provided on time. Also, according to Interviewee #13, assistance is provided on an equal basis to all vulnerable groups in compliance with humanitarian principles. “Women, children, refugees and IDPs are assisted regardless of their race, nationality, religion, ethnicity, social status, etc”, he / she added.

Interviewee #9 stated that the assistance provided in this area, in his / her opinion, is timely, but not equal. Although the stakeholders involved in these areas show a clear willingness to provide assistance on an equal and fair basis, insufficient coordination among stakeholders is an obstacle to this.

Interviewee #14 said that humanitarian assistance in Mali is delivered in a timely manner. However, it is important to consider that there are conditions to be met in order to deliver humanitarian assistance: “Broadly it is crucial to ensure that the several actors which include governments and country forces, international and national actors are brought together to provide a coordinated response. When these conditions are not met, delays can be possible in delivering humanitarian assistance. Additional delays can also be determined by the deterioration of security conditions, natural disasters, natural phenomena etc.” As for aid delivered in an equal manner, he / she said: “Assistance is provided based on needs assessment analysis conducted in the broader and more inclusive manner possible. Assessment analyses are carried on by actors involved at the national level, including governments, UN Agencies, Fund and Programmes, national and local NGOs etc. This approach aimed at ensuring that all actors and needs and vulnerable groups are considered while preparing Humanitarian Needs Overview and consequent Humanitarian Response Plans in a given country.”

However, Interviewee #7 stated that humanitarian aid is not being provided to the population in a timely manner. "A lot of people with albinism die from cancer. Because of the biased attitude towards them, they cannot go to school, and they cannot get an education, respectively, they do not have a job. Basically, medicine is paid, and they can't afford it. For example, one of those who needs the help of our NGO is a mother of children with ichthyosis. She said that she came to the local hospital with her children, and when they saw her children, they were kicked out of the hospital and told "she should not bring infected children anymore"."

Interviewee #8 agreed with the words of the previous respondent. He / she said that the humanitarian assistance provided in the Sahel region is insufficient in general and in Mali in particular. In addition, according to him, aid is not provided in a timely manner, and there is inequality in the distribution of humanitarian aid between different groups. However, he / she did not provide additional comments, but as a supporting comment, he / she said that in some communities, the male head of household has an advantage over the female head of household in determining the goal even before the distribution of aid, which already makes inequality between groups.

Speaking about the equivalence of the distribution of humanitarian aid, Interviewee #11 decided to focus on the countries of the central Sahel and stated that aid is not distributed equally. “I think that for a long time in the Sahel, the focus was only on Mali and then Niger attracted some attention. And then, when the conflict began to spread in Burkina Faso, it was really very difficult to defend the interests of Burkina Faso, because people and organisations were very focused on Mali. And I think that at some point, suddenly, everything completely changed, and now, if there is any attention, if there is any focus, if there is any money, it is much more going to Burkina Faso.”

As for the help delivered in a timely manner and equally in Mali, Interviewee #11 believes that it is neither timely nor equally accessible, and there is also a significant lack of funding, huge security obstacles that really make it difficult to provide assistance. He / she declared: “I have a permanent grievance with UNHCR because UNHCR is charged with protection and it's supposed to be protecting all people in need of humanitarian assistance, whether they're refugees or internally displaced or just people in need who have not been displaced”, but “when you want to talk about refugees versus IDP's, refugees always have more funding and there's always a lot less of them”. “That is the case in Mali”, he / she added.

“In general, the fact is that it used to be believed that there were about 100,000 IDPs for every refugee, and these figures were shockingly different. But the UNHCR is always focused on refugees, and this is a huge problem. They have a completely new internal strategy about refugees, although they have a department for internally displaced persons. For no reason at all, they started working on the Kampala Convention, and they are trying to change their focus, but old habits die hard, and this has not happened yet, so this is a huge problem.”

Moreover, he / she didn't agree with Interviewee #6 and Interviewee #4 about the observance of humanitarian principles by humanitarian actors and said that there is a huge violation of humanitarian principles that complicates a lot of things.

As for the vulnerable groups of women, girls and children, according to Interviewee #11, “that's a specific thing”. According to his / her words, women and children are always receiving aid more than men because they are predominantly the ones who are displaced,

whereas the men either fight, stay home to protect their land, or their crops or whatever their property.

Besides, sometimes there are difficulties in certain cultural aspects that can make it difficult to understand exactly how to work. Interviewee #11 gave an example: “When I worked in Chad, we had to completely shift because we counted households initially as a man in his family, and then we found out that the man has like six wives. So since that moment, the households were accounted by women and their families, so that way it's all distributed a little bit better.”

Interviewee #11 thinks that, in general, women and girls have access to the main priority aspects, such as food, shelter, water supplies and medicines. But, as always, most likely their needs are not fully met. By such needs, he / she means access to support in the fight against gender-based violence, to support in the field of reproductive health, or to other very specific needs for them. Moreover, given the fact of a significant lack of funding, such needs are not a priority.

By the way, regarding the fight against gender-based violence, only one humanitarian bulletin of OCHA contained information on this topic. In 2012, UNICEF in collaboration with UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund), IRC and other organisations conducted a series of trainings for NGO and UN employees in order to increase awareness of the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in emergency situations.²¹³

In the next question, it was asked whether the promises of humanitarian organizations were fulfilled, and whether respondents were aware of cases when the promised assistance was not provided to those in need.

Interviewee #3 said that he / she did not have clear data on whether the promises of NGOs and the UN were fulfilled, and whether their programs were effective. However, with regard to the current terrorist situation in Burkina Faso, most people believe that the UN

²¹³ OCHA. (2012a). Mali: Complex Emergency Situation Report No. 16, 26 September 2012. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-complex-emergency-situation-report-no-16-26-september-2012> p.6

has a negligible contribution, and its activities are almost invisible, since almost all assistance comes either from individuals, or from local associations, or from the state.

As for the cases of humanitarian aid that was promised but not delivered, Interviewee #4 had not heard, at least in Burkina Faso. “This can happen in areas where terrorist attacks or climate problems occur, where NGOs cannot get through. But if not, they always they reach their destination by helicopters.” However, Interviewee #6 cited insufficient resources as the reason for not receiving humanitarian aid: “There are cases when the available resources do not allow to help everyone who needs humanitarian assistance”.

Interviewee #9 had not heard of cases where people could not receive humanitarian aid, for example, in the case of abuse of humanitarian aid or its theft.

3.3 Assessment of current humanitarian needs in Mali and analysis of the evolution of humanitarian assistance since 2012

Regarding the question of whether this region still needs humanitarian assistance, all respondents answered positively. For example, Interviewee #10 said: “Given the difficulty of the situation for many regions of the Sahel, assistance is still fully needed”. Interviewee #12 declared that “Help is more than necessary. It is imperative”. He / she added: “They [humanitarian organisations] need to continue providing humanitarian assistance. Despite the large number of humanitarian organisations, people still need help. In this region, the climate is not always favourable. In addition, the region needs a lot of money, even just for food. It is very important.” Interviewee #8 confirmed that the country needs assistance, especially he / she highlighted the need to comply with humanitarian principles and conduct an assessment of the validity of needs.

Interviewee #13 considers all of the above types of humanitarian assistance to be still necessary in Mali, since armed conflicts and inter-communal conflicts, as well as climate change, negatively affect food security and nutrition of rural households. Besides, he / she is sure that when the administrative authorities are well informed about what kind of assistance is provided and to whom it is intended, and when they are calm and confident in their ability to manage the situation, there is less chance that they will try to use humanitarian resources for their own purposes or divert them from those in need.

When I asked Interviewee #11 what kind of humanitarian assistance is still needed in the region, he / she immediately replied: “Everything, every single thing”. Interviewee #11 stressed that Mali is a region that needed humanitarian assistance even before the conflict, and the needs remain constant. At each individual level, some kind of help is needed, and he / she thinks that in recent years some things have worsened. “The crisis in Ukraine has obviously reduced grain supplies to a region that used to depend heavily on it. Especially if you look at the staggering numbers in Burkina Faso, realizing how much they relied on Ukrainian and Russian grain. Although I think the same thing is happening all over the world”. “So, the problem of food security still exists, as well as the problem of financing. In recent years, funding has declined due to the fact that it is mainly aimed at overcoming crises in Ukraine, Ethiopia, and now Sudan”, said Interviewee #11.

Moreover, according to his / her observations, there is considerable fatigue in the community of donors involved in providing assistance. “It's very, very frustrating to see because if they had just properly funded it [humanitarian crisis] from the start, the situation might have been different”, he / she added. The main problem, he / she believes, is that donors always play catch-up, and then, in the end, they have to give more than they would have conceded at the beginning if they had just done a comprehensive job.

He / she continued: “So, what kind of humanitarian aid is needed depends on each individual thing, each individual level, and each individual region. In the situation with Mali and Burkina Faso, more and less affected regions are experiencing constant needs. The need for humanitarian aid is everywhere, in every corner of the country. There are displacements everywhere. Uncertainty reigns everywhere. So, this is a huge problem.”

When asked what could have prevented the misuse of humanitarian aid if it had taken place, Interviewee #14 said that it is necessary to support the already existing regional strategy, focusing efforts on simultaneously responding to regional and country challenges. “This implies that all the actors involved – countries in the regions, regional and international organizations, etc. – should coordinate their actions while ensuring a comprehensive response, always respecting the will and role of the host States”, he / she added. However, he / she did not comment on the existence or not of the misuse of humanitarian aid.

Being a UN representative, he / she declared, that “The misuse of humanitarian aid often lies, but not always since the reasons could be various, in the fact that basic needs have not been satisfied and in that case, these are lessons learned on which we need to build on doing better analysis that have their foundations on the real needs of the populations. It is also true that it is not always simple to assess needs in countries where necessities change and evolve so rapidly and match the response to these sudden changes can become a challenge. The Sahel region is a vast region united by common issues of concern such as terrorism, violent extremism, climate change-related issues, armed groups, herders-farmers conflicts etc. but is at the same time a diversified region with specific peculiarities at country level that also need to be address.”

He / she added, that in the case of the UN, an integrated strategy combining all interventions from UN Agencies, funds and programmes, peacekeeping operations and special political mission are in place in the region as in other parts of the world. “The UN try to put in place integrated analysis and strategies as critical to address in an effective manner issues pertaining to peace and security, conflicts, development, social etc.”

Interviewee #9's comment confirms the previous comments: “It is necessary to introduce a good coordination strategy between the subjects by involving state structures in the intervention zones. This could be a palliative measure [a non-exhaustive, temporary solution] against the misuse of humanitarian aid.”

As for the evolution and modernization of humanitarian aid in the region over the past 10 years, Interviewee #10 said that he / she did not see any major changes in the humanitarian aid provided in the area over the past 10 years. Interviewee #9 chose not to answer this question, and the others generally answered about the improvement of the situation in the field of humanitarian response.

According to Interviewee #11, “in terms of upgrading humanitarian aid things have happened”. The evolution in the aid sector is taking place on different fronts, and many attempts are being made to change a lot when it comes to localising the conflict. In addition, the focus on assistance needs has changed over the past 10 years. For example, thanks to the development of technology over the past years, today a lot of cash is used in humanitarian activities for work, a lot of telephone transfers and the like. “Things are

getting better but not as much as they could be and should be.” He / she added that there's a lot more work to do still.

He / she also gave an example of Burkina Faso as an interesting context, saying that this is a country where there was a strong civil society before the conflict began, and during the conflict a rich history of the development of humanitarian activities in this country was revealed. Thus, many actors were able to move from the activities of development organizations or civil society to work on the humanitarian crisis. Burkina Faso has taken on a different form, especially given that humanitarian access is extremely difficult due to insecurity, as well as due to the fact that the Government restricts access to many international aid organizations. Thus, local residents became the basis of the response measures. “Therefore, I think that this example shows the evolution in improving the ways of providing assistance using local experts, as well as funding. For further improvement, we need to support the local economy, give people jobs so that this shift is positive”.

According to Interviewee #12, after the coup d'état of 2012, the number of humanitarian aid increased, even more projects and NGOs appeared. Interviewee #4 confirmed his / her words.

Conclusion

Chapter 1

The first chapter of the thesis is devoted to the historical socio-political background. For many years the Sahel region faces many complex challenges, including weak governance, poverty, climate change and violent extremism. The coup d'état in Mali in 2012 only exacerbated the political instability, insecurity and humanitarian crisis affecting neighbouring countries. The rapid spread of Islamist groups in the region has also had a significant impact on the development of the conflict.

The international community reacted to the coup in Mali with condemnation, the imposition of sanctions against the coup leaders and the cessation of humanitarian and military assistance. Diplomatic efforts were aimed at restoring constitutional order in Mali. France, in turn, according to some respondents and the former French Security Minister, bears partial responsibility for the development of the conflict in Mali because of its intervention in Libya, which provoked destabilisation and fueled the conflict. Insufficient military equipment of the Malian army also caused the deployment of the conflict in Mali.

The presence of Islamist groups in the northern region of Mali had a significant impact on the development of the conflict and threatened security both in Mali itself and in neighbouring countries of the Sahel region. The Islamists sought to Islamize the region in accordance with the principles of Sharia, and their actions included the destruction of historical sites under UNESCO protection, intimidation, violence, and murder of the local population.

One of the main actors of the humanitarian crisis in Mali is the MINUSMA mission (UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali). The attitude of local residents to the mission varies. Many consider it ineffective in ensuring security. The assessment of MINUSMA's activities remains controversial, and it depends on the views and experiences of individuals. Despite the mandate stating the mission's peacekeeping goals and non-aggression, some argue that MINUSMA is an active party to the conflict.

There have been suggestions about the plans of the ruling forces of Mali to request the withdrawal and end of MINUSMA, but the preservation of the mission is due to the fact that many Malians work in it because of high salary rates. However, as one of the

interviewees told me, recent news indicates the adoption of a new constitution by Mali and the decision of the UN Security Council to terminate the MINUSMA mission.

As for another international intervention, as the situation in Mali deteriorated significantly at the beginning of 2013, the interim President sought help from France to urgently resolve the crisis. The presence of French troops in Mali for nine years has provoked criticism and harsh condemnation of local residents. However, in an official statement on the withdrawal of French troops, President Macron noted that Europe will continue to monitor the situation in the country and provide assistance so as not to leave Mali and its population without support.

At the end of 2021, the Russian Wagner group appeared in Mali, which caused the condemnation of France, Canada and some European countries. Despite this, local residents widely support the presence of the Wagner group, which is reflected in the comments and local articles. Restrictions on access to the media and the problems faced by international and local journalists remain relevant and will be explored in the second chapter.

The 2012 coup d'état in Mali had significant consequences that exceed the country's borders and affect the entire Sahel region. The political instability worsened by the coup contributed to the expansion of the influence of various armed groups, including Islamist militants, over vast territories. Neighbouring countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger have also been affected by this conflict. Burkina Faso is currently attracting more international attention due to the ongoing coup d'état, which is obviously having a negative impact on the country's population.

In general, the study of the first chapter of the thesis demonstrates the complexity of the situation in Mali and the Sahel region, as well as the need for international intervention to address political instability, insecurity, and humanitarian crisis. Understanding the impact of the Libyan crisis and the role of Tuareg groups and Islamist organisations is important for developing effective strategies to overcome the conflict and achieve sustainable development in the Sahel region. At the same time, the study also reveals the serious threat of Islamist groups, the limited effectiveness of the MINUSMA mission and the need for further efforts to ensure security, conflict resolution and sustainable development in Mali and the Sahel region. In addition, the coup d'état in Mali had serious

consequences that affected the entire Sahel region and caused the need for Mali to cooperate with France and Russia to solve crisis situations and support national security.

Chapter 2

This chapter of the thesis is, in general, devoted to the humanitarian problems faced by Mali. At the beginning of the chapter, the concept of humanitarian assistance was defined and the general need for such assistance in Africa was considered. However, humanitarian aid does not always receive a positive assessment, and criticism of this type of aid was presented in the book "Dead Aid. Why is Aid not working and how there is a better way in Africa" by Dambisa Moyo. This book raises the question of long-term humanitarian assistance, its effectiveness, and possible negative consequences for the development of Africa.

The chapter goes on to discuss the beginning of a complex emergency situation in Mali caused by the armed conflict in 2012. This conflict has led to a humanitarian crisis inside the country and in neighbouring territories, worsening the situation in the field of mass population displacement, socio-political stability, climate change and access to food and water. Since then, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Mali have become more widespread. At the moment, about half of the population of Mali, which is about 9 million people, needs humanitarian assistance, and about 3.9 million need protection assistance.

In addition, in the second chapter of the study, a methodology based on the analysis and evaluation of key aspects of the UN reports was applied. In order to conduct a qualitative assessment of humanitarian activities in Mali, it was decided to use OCHA reports as the main source of information. They provide comprehensive information about various aspects of humanitarian assistance, organisations present in the country, and their actions. OCHA reports also provide the most comprehensive information on the population of Mali and its vulnerable groups. They report on the financing of humanitarian programs in the country, provide information on the allocation of funds and develop general guidelines that are the basis for the management of humanitarian activities. Since 2012, OCHA has regularly published humanitarian bulletins with updated information on key aspects of the situation in Mali. Reports for 2012, two additional reports for 2015 and the last report published in 2023 were selected for analysis.

Despite the fact that OCHA provides the most complete picture of the humanitarian situation and humanitarian actors in Mali, and their reports are updated more often than others, the analysis of these reports presents certain difficulties and limitations. For example, it was revealed that at the beginning of the conflict, OCHA reports contained more specific information about the actions of humanitarian organisations, but in later reports, the information became general rather than detailed. Sometimes reports contain information without specific numbers or percentages, and OCHA reports rarely contain footnotes, which makes it difficult to identify the specific partners in question. In addition, inconsistency and ambiguity of information are also observed in the differences between OCHA reports and official websites. It is important to note that the information in humanitarian reports should be as accurate as possible and presented in a clear structure, but in some cases, it is presented in the form of news rather than detailed reports and differs in the degree of clarity. Another limitation is that some reports are only available in English or French, and not all reports have been translated into all six official languages of the UN, which limits access to information for a wide audience.

The analysis identified the main areas of humanitarian assistance that relate to the response to the crisis, including ensuring food security, meeting the needs for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protecting vulnerable groups, such as IDPs and refugees, as well as ensuring access to education. During the analysis, I found discrepancies in the OCHA reports, which were particularly commented on in each of these key aspects. One of the main limitations was that some reports provide information about important indicators, while other reports may not provide data on these indicators at all. This creates obstacles to conducting a comparative analysis with subsequent years since it is impossible to obtain comparable data for analysis.

In particular, with regard to the key aspect of food security, some reports provide contradictory information about the number of people who suffer from food insecurity. For example, in December 2015, it was reported that the number of victims decreased by 1.5 million people in six months, which seems incredible. In addition, the same report does not contain any information about the measures taken to support food security. It is important to note that information about people with disabilities and their needs is practically absent in the reports, which underlines the need for a more detailed study and consideration of the needs of this vulnerable group.

There are several problems regarding WASH (water supply, sanitation, and hygiene) needs. For example, some organisations that claim to build wells in dry regions do not check their operability after the completion of projects. In addition, there is a lack of effective training of the population in the basics of hygiene, even with the availability of specialised trainings. This means that not all people realise the importance of following hygiene rules and practices. Although some improvements have been made in this area, with the advent of the COVID-19 epidemic, the situation has worsened again. Lack of clean water and limited access to it increase the risk of infection, as people find it difficult to comply with the necessary hygiene measures, including regular hand washing.

Regarding the main inaccuracies in the key aspect of the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), there are discrepancies in the data on their numbers. The reports give different figures on different pages, which causes confusion and misunderstanding about the full scope of the problem. In addition, the reports reflect incomplete information about the types and scale of humanitarian actions aimed at ensuring the well-being of refugees and IDPs. Although numerical data on the number of people are provided, specific measures taken to help these people are not specified. It is important to note that the reports do not take into account certain groups of the population, such as the elderly and persons with disabilities, regarding their shelter needs. This can lead to the vulnerability of these groups and a lack of necessary equipment.

There are significant problems in education in Mali. A large number of children need education, but not all of them have access to it. In addition, gender inequality in access to education is a serious problem, especially among young people and the elderly. Armed conflicts and instability in the country lead to the closure of schools and the interruption of the educational process. Lack of teachers and lack of resources negatively affects the quality of education. Moreover, the need for training in conditions of conflict and population displacement creates an additional burden on the infrastructure and teaching staff in the reception regions. Regarding inaccuracies in the reports, there are significant discrepancies in the data on closed schools and affected children presented in various reports. This indicates the ambiguity and inconsistency of information about the scale of the problem and the assistance provided.

The final sub-chapter is devoted to the problems faced by the media and journalists in Mali. The fact is that the population of Mali has a limited level of education and literacy of the population, which prevents its access to critical information, including regional governance, health risks and healthcare.

The sub-chapter emphasises the importance of journalism and investigative journalism, as they play a crucial role in ensuring transparency, integrity and good governance. Independent journalism holds the authorities accountable, exposes corruption and abuse of power, protects democracy and human rights, and provides timely information to citizens. However, media in the Sahel region, including Mali, face challenges such as limited resources, threats to press freedom and risks associated with covering sensitive topics in conflict-affected areas.

The sub-chapter examines two cases of journalists highlighting challenges and proving that independent media does not exist in the country. The first is the case of Olivier Dubois, a French journalist abducted by Al-Qaeda in the Sahel and held captive for 711 days. The investigation revealed the involvement of the French military in his abduction, which raised questions about their actions and negligence. The second case is the case of Malik Konate, a Malian journalist seeking asylum in France after he received threats and was attacked in Mali. The government accused him of being sponsored by foreign countries.

Conditions for journalists in the Sahel have deteriorated over the past decade. There have been reports of murders, disappearances, and imprisonment of journalists, as well as ill-treatment and self-censorship. The region is becoming deprived of independent journalists and reliable reports. In addition, the presence of the Russian Wagner group in Mali has raised concerns about regional security. Local media supported their actions, and Russia enjoyed a positive image in Mali, as evidenced by high approval ratings.

As for female journalists, they face additional obstacles, including the danger of working in crisis zones and restrictions imposed by their husbands. Efforts are currently underway to create a sub-regional code to protect women journalists in crisis areas.

Moreover, no local investigations or articles on the misuse or even just humanitarian aid in Mali and the Sahel region were found. Consequently, the topic of humanitarian aid

receives limited coverage in the local media, which contradicts the numerous comments of respondents who said that local media cover the topic of humanitarian aid as a whole, but no example of such articles was given.

Chapter 3

The last third chapter is devoted to humanitarian actors who have been actively providing emergency assistance, protection and support to the population affected by the conflict since 2012. Their participation has been and remains aimed at improving living conditions, meeting basic needs, mitigating humanitarian consequences and ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups.

First of all, for the analysis of humanitarian organizations working in Mali, the “Qui fait Quoi Où” (also known as “Who does what where” (3W)) were selected by OCHA, which it began publishing in 2013 to assess the coordination of humanitarian organizations in Mali. The analysis of the three reports highlighted key information about the constant increase in humanitarian organizations. The number of humanitarian organizations in Mali has increased from 119 in 2013 to 153 in 2015 and to 170 in 2022. The health, food security and population protection sectors have been a priority for many years, and the education sector joined them in 2015. Of great interest is the sharp increase in the number of humanitarian organisations operating in the health sector. In 2012, only 28 organisations were registered in the country, in 2015 their number grew to 35, and by 2022 it suddenly increased to 90. This is surprising, given that the problem of low level of health care for a long time remained one of the main problems in the country. As for these reports in general, the frequency of reports and the coverage of regions have been inconsistent over the years.

In the course of the research, discrepancies and inaccuracies were found in the figures concerning the humanitarian financing of Mali. The latest humanitarian bulletin containing basic information and figures about Mali was published in March 2023. The report states that of the 751 million dollars needed to meet the response needs in Mali, only 16.1²¹⁴ million dollars was received, which is significantly different from the

²¹⁴ OCHA. (2023). MALI Bulletin humanitaire Février - Mars 2023 [MALI Humanitarian bulletin February - March 2023]. In *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-bulletin-humanitaire-fevrier-mars-2023> p.1

information on the FTS OCHA website (126.8 million dollars). Most likely, a mistake was made, and the percentage of funding received, namely 16.1 per cent, was meant. However, such reports should not contain such gross errors that may mislead people who want to get acquainted with the information provided.

As for other humanitarian actors, the EU is actively involved in providing both humanitarian and development assistance in Mali. They have allocated more than 472 million euros for humanitarian aid, focusing on meeting the needs of victims of the conflict and displaced persons. The EU supports various areas, such as providing housing, basic necessities, food and addressing malnutrition, especially among children.

The activities of regional entities are not particularly effective and successful in terms of achieving significant results. For example, the activities of the African Union are primarily focused on politics and military affairs, and its actions related to humanitarian aid are often considered for political purposes. Although the African Union has a department for humanitarian affairs, refugees and displaced persons, it lacks effective mechanisms, capacity, funding and vision to work effectively to provide humanitarian assistance to the population. However, the Kampala Convention has been implemented within the framework of the AU, which is an important treaty aimed at protecting and supporting the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa. Despite the fact that it has been ratified by many States of the African Union, the implementation and enforcement of the Convention has faced difficulties. African Governments are encouraged to focus on meeting the needs of displaced women and girls and providing them with adequate housing.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seeks to standardize humanitarian activities in its member States. However, according to the HPG Working Group, ECOWAS faces serious capacity constraints, a shortage of human resources and dependence on external financiers. It relies heavily on external partners in humanitarian activities.

This chapter also pays special attention to the assessment of humanitarian assistance in Mali, with an emphasis on fairness, timeliness and equal distribution of aid among the most needy groups of the population. The study concludes by analysing the current humanitarian needs in Mali and assessing the evolution of humanitarian assistance since

2012. To assess the situation, a series of interviews were conducted with various groups of respondents, including civilians, UN representatives and NGO staff. In order to better illustrate their opinions and understand the attitudes of various target groups to certain issues, 14 respondents were divided into three groups, respectively.

A series of interviews were conducted to assess the situation, in which various groups of respondents took part: civilians, UN representatives and NGO staff. A total of 14 interviews were conducted, and the respondents were divided into three groups.

The interviews were conducted on condition of anonymity, and respondents were given the opportunity to withdraw their comments within two weeks after the interview. Respondents were found through mutual acquaintances, former colleagues in the Red Cross, as well as through a LinkedIn search.

Interesting facts were discovered during the interview. Some respondents expressed a sense of fear when expressing their opinions. Civilians were more likely to agree to interviews and openly speak out on various topical topics. The UN representatives were very careful, adhering to the policy of their organisation and avoiding details. NGO workers, in general, were ready to openly discuss various topics, gave concrete examples and expressed readiness for further discussion. In my opinion, their comments varied depending on their willingness to openly discuss various topics.

However, one case attracted particular attention: the head of a non-governmental organisation specialising in healthcare refused to comment on the case of Plumpy'nuts, despite his/her work in the field of food security and information about the project received in advance. Although earlier, the respondent expressed willingness to share his experience and the limitations he faces as the head of a non-governmental organisation.

As part of the interview, respondents were asked questions that can be globally divided into three main aspects: the misuse of humanitarian aid, its timeliness and equality for all, as well as the evolution of humanitarian activities over the past ten years and the assessment of current humanitarian needs in Mali.

The sub-chapter on the misuse of humanitarian aid in Mali and the Sahel region presents valuable insights and observations based on interviews with various experts and stakeholders involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance. From the information

provided, it can be concluded that despite the increased presence and efforts of humanitarian organisations in response to the 2012 crisis, it became obvious that not all aid reaches the intended recipients. For example, special attention was drawn to cases of teachers selling Plumpy'nuts intended for children suffering from malnutrition.

In addition, respondents said that the sale of humanitarian goods takes place in the region, and some of them said that, in this case, it is necessary to introduce humanitarian aid in the form of money transfers. By the way, money transfers have long been part of aid in Mali, according to OCHA reports, but respondents deny this.

Moreover, the issue of the misuse of humanitarian aid is considered a sensitive topic, and administrative authorities and interested parties carefully monitor the relevant information. The lack of publicly available articles or research on this subject highlights the importance of the information obtained during interviews conducted for the master's thesis.

In general, there are mixed opinions regarding the timeliness, completeness, and equal provision of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups in Mali. Some interviewees believe that assistance is provided on time and without discrimination to all vulnerable groups, while others express concerns about delays, insufficient coordination among stakeholders, and inequalities in the distribution of aid.

Interviewee #6 and Interviewee #13 stated that assistance is provided on time and on an equal basis to all vulnerable groups in compliance with humanitarian principles. They mentioned that NGOs and humanitarian actors act according to their principles and prioritise the needs of women, children, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) regardless of their characteristics such as race, nationality, religion, or social status.

On the other hand, Interviewee #9 and Interviewee #14 pointed out challenges in the timely and equal provision of humanitarian aid. Interviewee #9 mentioned that while there is a willingness to provide assistance on an equal and fair basis, insufficient coordination among stakeholders hinders this goal. Interviewee #14 highlighted that delays in delivering assistance can occur when certain conditions, such as coordination among various actors and improved security, are not met. They also mentioned that there may be inequalities in the distribution of aid between different groups.

Regarding women, girls, and children, Interviewee #11 mentioned that they generally receive aid, especially in priority aspects such as food, shelter, water, and medicine. However, specific needs related to gender-based violence or reproductive health may not be fully met due to limited funding and priorities.

As for the fulfilment of promises by humanitarian organisations, Interviewee #3 expressed uncertainty about the effectiveness of NGO and UN programs but mentioned that local associations, individuals, and the state play a significant role in providing assistance. Interviewee #4 and Interviewee #6 mentioned that while they were not aware of specific cases where promised assistance was not provided, limitations in resources and access in areas affected by terrorism or climate problems may hinder aid delivery.

The general conclusion drawn from the chapter on current humanitarian needs is that there is a consensus among respondents that humanitarian assistance is still needed in the Sahel region, especially in Mali. All respondents confirm the continued need for assistance due to various factors, such as armed conflicts, intercommunal conflicts, climate change, food insecurity and limited resources. The respondents emphasise that the region needs constant support from humanitarian organizations and emphasize the importance of observing humanitarian principles and conducting a thorough needs assessment.

Respondents express concern about the reduction in funding for humanitarian crises in the region and the fatigue observed among donors. They suggest that if humanitarian aid had been properly funded from the very beginning, the situation might have been different. However, they recognise the difficulties in assessing and meeting rapidly changing needs in countries such as Mali.

There are different opinions on the evolution and modernization of humanitarian aid in the region over the past decade. Interviewee #10 believes that no significant changes have been observed. However, Interviewee #11 notes that there have been some changes, especially in the localization of the conflict and the use of technology for money transfers in humanitarian activities.

In order to prevent the misuse of humanitarian aid, the respondents suggest strengthening coordination between actors, involving state structures in intervention zones and

supporting existing regional strategies. They emphasise the need for comprehensive responses to both regional and country-specific challenges while respecting the will and role of host States.

In general, the respondents call for continuous humanitarian assistance, improved financing, coordination and integration of various activities to effectively address the complex problems faced by the Sahel region. They also emphasise the importance of supporting the local economy and empowering communities to ensure positive shifts in humanitarian assistance.

After a study of the humanitarian situation in Mali, it became clear that the coup d'état in 2012 seriously worsened the situation of the population, causing a humanitarian crisis that covered ten countries. This study was incredibly interesting but at the same time surprising because for the first time I came across a lot of inaccuracies and omissions in the UN reports under consideration.

However, thanks to numerous interviews with experts and representatives of the region, I managed to get a full picture of the humanitarian situation in Mali. Based on my opinion, supported by numerous comments from respondents, I am convinced of the need to continue humanitarian assistance in the region and especially in making long-term decisions. The conflict continues, and political instability is spreading throughout the region with speed and scale, requiring further humanitarian assistance. It is also important to increase funding and develop special mechanisms to ensure transparency of expenditures, as well as take additional measures to prevent the misuse of humanitarian aid.

Thus, for future research, I recommend conducting a detailed analysis of the evolution of humanitarian assistance in the region over the past 10 years, studying the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, and considering coordination strategies and mechanisms to prevent abuse of aid. These steps will help to improve the understanding and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in the Sahel region and in other similar contexts.

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