

Norway's efforts in the Sahel region, 2018–2019

Status report



Cover photo from the Sahel strategy of 2018. Photo: Johannes Zielcke, Flickr.

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Follow-up of the Sahel strategy

The [strategy](#) for Norway’s efforts in the Sahel region (2018–2020) was published in September 2018 and is currently available in Norwegian, English and French. The strategy has provided a framework for strengthening Norwegian efforts during this period.

The strategy defines three primary objectives for Norwegian efforts in the Sahel region:¹

1. to promote conflict prevention and conflict resolution;
2. to promote political stabilisation and enhance security;
3. to build resilience and lay the foundation for inclusive economic, social and political development, with a view to improving living conditions and reducing the need for humanitarian aid.

The key premise underlying the strategy is that an integrated approach is needed to deal with the complex challenges in the region and to achieve stability and development in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This will require well-coordinated efforts extending across a number of areas ranging from political dialogue, work on peace and reconciliation and measures within the security sector, to humanitarian efforts, human rights work and development aid.

There are no easy solutions or short-term fixes to these challenges. Development in the Sahel region continues to move in a negative direction despite an increase in international engagement in security and stabilisation, development cooperation and humanitarian efforts. The strategy provides a platform for long-term, integrated Norwegian involvement. Norway’s activities are part of a broader international effort to promote progress in the Sahel region in which cooperation between the states and civil societies of the region, G5 Sahel cooperation,² African regional organisations, the UN, the World Bank, the EU and other countries will be essential.

¹ The Sahel strategy defines ‘the Sahel’ as the countries ‘that lie between the Sahara and the savannah to the south: Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Chad, and Burkina Faso, and to parts of northeastern Nigeria.’

² The G5 Sahel is a regional structure for cooperation on security and development between Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad.

Norway's efforts also build on close cooperation with Norwegian NGOs and centres of expertise with extensive experience in the Sahel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs greatly appreciates the close contact with Norwegian civil society via regular meetings in the informal 'Sahel forum' and other contact channels.

In recent years, Norwegian efforts have increased along several tracks:

- Our political and diplomatic dialogue with the Sahel countries and with international partners about the Sahel has expanded significantly.
- The establishment of the Norwegian Embassy in Bamako, Mali, in autumn 2017 has provided us with better situational awareness and a far greater ability to promote Norwegian priorities in dialogue with the authorities and other key actors.
- In 2018 the Government named Mali and Niger as two of Norway's 16 partner countries in development policy, and a large proportion of the bilateral efforts are concentrated in these countries.
- Financial support for sustainable development and humanitarian efforts in the Sahel region has greatly increased and totalled roughly NOK one billion (approximately USD 100 million) in 2018 and 2019. A significant proportion of Norway's contribution to the region is channelled through multilateral organisations such as the UN (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, UN Women and UNHCR) and the World Bank.
- Humanitarian efforts in the Sahel have increased in the wake of the dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian situation.
- Norway contributes uniformed personnel and civilian aid to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We also support various capacity-building measures for the justice and security sector in the relevant countries.
- We cooperate closely with the UN and other multilateral organisations to ensure better-coordinated, more effective efforts at country level.
- Norwegian organisations are playing a key role in the efforts, not least at a grassroots level and in sectors such as education, food security and climate.
- Sahel-related work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is headed by a special representative who also represents Norway in various international forums. The Sahel team assists in coordinating activities between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries.

According to the Sahel strategy, efforts are to be reviewed after a three-year period in order to assess the extent to which the chosen direction contributes to the achievement of Norway's objectives and whether any adjustment is needed. The purpose of this status report is to give a general impression of developments in the Sahel and the overall Norwegian effort. This status report discusses elements of the Norwegian support and highlights the scope of activities and most important topics and partners.

We hope this status report will be a useful resource in the public debate and in further cooperation with civil society on the development in this region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will regularly assess the need to adjust efforts in the Sahel based on experience gained and in consultation with its partners.

Sahel team, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 April 2020



Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen Sørdeide met with the parties to the Mali peace agreement during the Oslo Forum at Losby Manor, 18 June 2019. Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

About this status report

This status report for the period 2018–2019 offers insight into how Norway is following up the Sahel strategy via various channels, without going into detail about every aspect of the activities or providing specifics about overall achievement of objectives. The purpose of the report is to give the reader insight into the main approach of Sahel-related efforts and the key priority areas. Details on the results of Norway's development aid to the Sahel are provided via the reporting processes for individual projects and programmes and in the annual budget proposal (Prop.1 S).

This status report is also an initial contribution to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' own review of the Sahel strategy for 2018–2020. A more comprehensive review of the objectives achieved is planned to be carried out at the end of the strategy period.

This status report has not been structured to correspond to the Sahel strategy's three primary objectives. Instead, we seek to give a general impression of how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has approached challenges in the region through efforts to promote enhanced security, closer political dialogue, expanded Norwegian development efforts, humanitarian aid and Norwegian contributions to peace and reconciliation.

As part of the follow-up of the Sahel strategy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has developed an internal tool that provides a consolidated overview of activities and makes it possible to adjust the course as needed. This status report is based on information from the internal activity overview and other sources of information such as the PTA³ administrative tool (a system for financial administration and follow-up of grant agreements), reports from relevant embassies and other information shared across sections and departments.

³ The statistical information compiled in the centralised *Plan Tilskudd Avtale* (PTA) grant management system is reported to the OECD/DAC as Norway's official figures for development cooperation.

Regional context: Security in the Sahel moving in a negative direction

Despite increased international attention and support to the Sahel region in recent years, the security situation continues to deteriorate and humanitarian suffering is worsening. This consumes a great amount of resources from the authorities, impedes socioeconomic progress and limits the chance of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The security situation also poses a major challenge to the ability of development actors to implement programmes and achieve lasting results.

Meanwhile the need for humanitarian aid is growing. Violence and insecurity have led to a humanitarian crisis in parts of Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger (in the Liptako-Gourma Triangle). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that over seven million people in the region are in need of humanitarian assistance. The conflict has further resulted in over one million internally displaced people – ten times more than in 2018.⁴ The humanitarian situation in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region remains difficult, and the people there live under continual threat of abuse and terrorism.

Development and humanitarian actors operate in areas with complex crises involving considerable risk, where the situation is constantly changing. This also affects the achievement of objectives under Norway's Sahel strategy.

The number of violent events rose dramatically in 2018 and 2019, particularly in central Mali and Burkina Faso, but also in Niger.⁵ A weakened government presence in the outlying districts, ineffective security forces and porous borders have made it easy for various armed groups to operate freely. Islamic extremist groups have strengthened their foothold by fuelling frustration over marginalisation, the lack of public services and investment from central government authorities as well as underlying tensions between ethnic groups. Through systematic local recruitment in central Mali and Burkina Faso, among others, local terrorist organisations with ties to al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIL) have prompted the establishment of competing militias stemming from other ethnic groups. The result has been a downward security spiral that is increasingly ethnically based.

Extremist groups systematically attack both the civilian population and representatives of the authorities and national and international security forces, including the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) in Mali. There is growing concern that the instability and conflict will spread to other countries in West Africa.

National forces lack capacity and equipment and in many cases struggle with an absence of support from the people. The security forces themselves are accused of violating human rights or cooperating with local militias responsible for serious abuses.

Regional cooperation between Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad under the G5 Sahel force has provided greater security policy cooperation in the region, which is necessary for addressing the complex, cross-border challenges these countries face. The G5 Sahel force has drawn up a joint development plan and established a joint border patrol force. The force was declared

⁴ OCHA "Humanitarian Snapshot: BURKINA FASO, MALI & WESTERN NIGER", 24 February 2020.

⁵ [Conflict overview](#) data from the organisation Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) indicate e.g. that the number of conflict-related deaths in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso in the first half of 2019 alone exceeded the total from all the years from 2012 through 2018.

operational in 2018 but has been mostly unable so far to make any major difference in stabilising the region. The force lacks equipment, capability and financial resources, and has therefore not been able to stem the violence or prevent the further spread of conflict and terror. An attack on the force's headquarters in Sévaré (Mopti region) in Mali on 29 June 2018 underscored the force's vulnerability and served to delay its deployment to areas of operation.

The Sahel countries are therefore in need of comprehensive international support to deal with these threats. The MINUSMA peacekeeping mission plays an important stabilising role in Mali and the region as a whole. MINUSMA's mandate and ability of the troops to carry out their peacekeeping mission are an ongoing topic of discussion. In light of the spread of security challenges and threat of terrorism to more and more countries in the region, the regional French counterterrorism force Barkhane has been an important supplement in the effort to curtail the extremist groups.

Norway will help to enhance security

Norway's participation in the UN MINUSMA mission is the core of our efforts in the area of security. Norway contributes uniformed personnel and support to MINUSMA's civilian activities, which among other things support compliance with the 2015 peace agreement in Mali.

Norway has taken the initiative to establish a rotation for military transport aircraft under MINUSMA, thereby helping to provide the UN with reliable access to air transport services. This is absolutely essential in a situation characterised by widespread security challenges and limited mobility for land-based transport.

Norway contributed its first transport aircraft (Norwegian Tactical Airlift Detachment (NORTAD)) to Mali for 10 months in 2016. The next Norwegian rotation began in May 2019, when a Norwegian C-130 transport aircraft was deployed to Mali for six months. The Government has decided to extend participation in the rotation scheme through 2022.

Norway has also taken responsibility for operating the Norwegian-run Camp Bifrost, a base for aircraft from all the nations participating in the rotation scheme. Norway further provides staff officers at MINUSMA headquarters in Bamako and a specialised police team for training local police in crime-scene methods and basic forensic science. Five Norwegian police observers are participating, and the team is supported by two specialists deployed from France.

Over the past year, Norway has strengthened its political and security cooperation with France and other like-minded countries on the Sahel. Norway contributes with bilateral support for capacity building of security forces in the Sahel, in cooperation with allied countries. This includes the participation of Norwegian Armed Forces in the Flintlock exercises⁶ and contributions to establishing a human rights framework for G5 Sahel security forces in cooperation with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In 2020 Norway will provide Armed Forces personnel and financial support for a regional academy for capacity building in the Ivory Coast. The Norwegian Armed Forces will also participate in a multinational programme for capacity building in Niger. We also support the G5 Sahel police component via the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Furthermore, Norway provides two civilian experts on secondment to EUCAP Sahel Mali, the EU civilian mission in Mali, through the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights (NORDEM).

Security and stability are critical to achieve sustainable development in the Sahel, and this is reflected in the Sahel strategy and the integrated approach for efforts in the region. In addition to participation in MINUSMA and capacity building of military forces in the Sahel, Norway has worked actively within other priority areas such as women, peace and security; anti-corruption; irregular migration; and combatting smuggling and the illegal economy.

⁶ Flintlock is an annual, multinational capacity-building activity initiated by the US. The exercise rotates between the various Sahel countries. Norway has previously taken part with small-scale contingents.



MINUSMA peacekeeping mission: Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Minister of Defence Frank Bakke-Jensen visited Mali in 2019. The purpose was to visit the Norwegian Tactical Airlift Detachment (NORTAD) and hold meetings with the MINUSMA leadership, Malian authorities and other partners. They were given a tour of Camp Bifrost, and are pictured here with some of the Norwegian soldiers who are part of Norway's military contribution to the MINUSMA mission. Photo: Office of the Prime Minister.

Closer political dialogue



Inauguration of the embassy in Bamako: State Secretary Marianne Hagen opened the Norwegian Embassy in Mali together with, among others, the then Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs Tieman Hubert Caulibaly and Norwegian Ambassador Ole Andreas Lindeman. Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With the Sahel strategy as a platform, Norway has intensified its political and diplomatic dialogue with the Sahel countries. The establishment of the Norwegian Embassy in Bamako considerably strengthened Norway's contact with the countries in the region. The embassy covers all the G5 Sahel countries: Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad.

There have been a number of political visits from Norway to the region. State Secretary Marianne Hagen officially opened the embassy in Bamako in 2018, with participation from the Malian Government. Norway's then Minister of International Development Nikolai Astrup visited Chad the same year. Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Minister of Defence Frank Bakke-Jensen visited Mali in spring 2019 and met the Malian Prime Minister Boubou Cissé and Minister of Defence Ibrahim Dahirou Dembelé. In autumn 2019, Minister of International Development Dag-Inge Ulstein visited Mali and had political talks in Bamako, while State Secretary Aksel Jakobsen visited Niger. State Secretary Marianne Hagen participated in the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in both 2018 and 2019 and met with a number of political leaders from the Sahel region there. These activities have provided an opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties and have productive talks on ways to work better together to find solutions to the challenges in the region.

The political and diplomatic dialogue with the Sahel countries is also conducted in international forums. In February 2018, Minister of Foreign Affairs Eriksen Søreide participated in the high-level meeting with the presidents of the five Sahel countries on support for the G5 Sahel joint military force. Foreign Minister Eriksen Søreide has also had high-level meetings with the Sahel countries in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York and other international forums such as the Africa-Nordic Meeting of Foreign Ministers, the Oslo Forum, and the annual meetings of the multilateral development banks.

The Sahel often figures on the agenda in Norway's meetings with African and Western authorities and international leaders and in various diplomatic talks. Development in the Sahel has become an increasingly important topic in meetings with European countries in light of the region's strategic

importance for Europe. Norway has strengthened its dialogue on the Sahel with key countries such as France and Germany, among others.

Prime Minister Erna Solberg has discussed the situation in the Sahel with both UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Norway further participates in regular meetings between various countries' special representatives for the Sahel, which are also attended by leaders of regional organisations such as the G5 Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the UN Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel.

Norway has been committed to ensuring that the UN and the World Bank devote adequate attention to the Sahel. Norway participated actively in the UN Peacebuilding Commission's annual meetings in both 2018 and 2019, where the Sahel was a main topic. We have also increased our financial contributions to the Sahel region via the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

Other examples of Norway's political dialogue

- Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen Sørreide co-hosted a conference in Berlin in September 2018 together with Germany, Nigeria and the UN regarding the serious developments in the Lake Chad region. This was a direct follow-up of the conference on the humanitarian situation in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region held in Oslo in 2017. The conferences were instrumental in focusing international attention on the serious humanitarian and security developments in this part of the Sahel and have helped to reduce the scope of the humanitarian disaster in the area.
- Norway has worked to encourage the UN system to strengthen its support to Burkina Faso in light of the country's particularly vulnerable position and dramatic deterioration of the security situation since 2018. Pressure from Norway and others contributed to the UN Secretary-General's decision to appoint a special crisis group to strengthen UN support to Burkina Faso at country level, in keeping with the key reform issues in the UN. Norway also significantly increased its support to the Sahel region via the UN Peacebuilding Fund.
- In December 2018, Norway participated in a major donor meeting for the G5 Sahel held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, which focused on the need to strengthen overall development efforts in the Sahel. The conference was a follow-up of the high-level meeting in Brussels in February of that year regarding support to the G5 Sahel joint military force, where Minister of Foreign Affairs Eriksen Sørreide had participated and pledged Norwegian support for human rights training. Norway took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of increased civilian efforts alongside security efforts in order to ensure long-term stability in the region. The conference led to pledges totalling more than USD 2.4 billion.

Norwegian humanitarian efforts

The humanitarian situation in the Sahel countries, particularly Mali, Burkina Faso and the border areas of Niger, has declined severely in recent years, while the humanitarian response plans remain greatly underfunded. Violence and conflict continue to force people to flee their homes and lead to closure of schools and health clinics. The spiral of violence has also affected food security. As a result, millions of people are acutely vulnerable to undernutrition and malnutrition in addition to seasonal epidemics and natural disasters. Near the end of 2019, more than six million people in the region were in need of food aid.

In response to this dramatically worse humanitarian situation, Norway has increased its humanitarian aid to the region. In 2018 Norway provided a total of NOK 46 million in humanitarian aid to the Sahel. Funding from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and support via the framework agreement with the Norwegian Refugee Council's crisis response organisation NORCAP⁷ were granted in addition to this. The Norwegian support was channelled to the Norwegian Refugee Council, NORCAP, Norwegian Church Aid, Norwegian Red Cross, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In 2019, we continued to give priority to life-saving emergency relief along with initiatives to build resilience. Efforts aimed at protection, including efforts to ensure access to education and prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), were prioritised in 2019 in keeping with the areas of action described in Norway's Humanitarian Strategy. Norway provided NOK 59 million in humanitarian aid in 2019.

It is challenging to carry out humanitarian efforts in areas of conflict. Some humanitarian actors report a highly militarised overall response to the Sahel conflicts, both from the countries themselves and from the international community. This in turn has a major impact on the humanitarian space within which these actors can operate. This underscores the importance of the Sahel strategy's integrated approach and the need to view the different priority areas and efforts in relation to each other.

An example of humanitarian efforts in the Sahel

Education in situations of crisis

Norwegian humanitarian efforts in the region give priority to ensuring education in situations of crisis. Closed schools and attacks on school buildings are a mounting problem in the Lake Chad region and the Sahel. The quality of education provided is often poor as well. In 2018 NORCAP received funding for a project aimed at helping to reverse the negative trend in the region's educational sector. Funding to NORCAP serves to strengthen the response within education and child protection. Furthermore, NORCAP advises humanitarian partners on measures to provide protection against sexual violence and harassment of children and youth. NORCAP cooperates with national authorities, civil society and the UN system in the educational system to promote integrated and better coordinated efforts for education in the Sahel.

⁷ NORCAP is the Norwegian Refugee Council's global provider of expertise to the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors.

Increased Norwegian development efforts in the Sahel



Food security and rural poverty reduction: Minister of International Development Dag-Inge Ulstein visited a project under the auspices of the Institut d'Économie Rurale (IER) in Mali focused on climate-resilient agricultural technology and methods. He was accompanied by Malian Minister of Agriculture Moulaye Ahmed Boubacar (in white). Photo: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Norway's strengthened presence in the Sahel is reflected in increased development efforts in the region. Norwegian aid⁸ to the Sahel amounted to NOK 678 million in 2018 and NOK 717 million in 2019. This support primarily targets the partner countries Mali and Niger, but a significant proportion is also channelled through joint regional programmes (see Figure 1). In addition to these bilateral engagements, substantial Norwegian support is provided to the Sahel in the form of core support to the UN, the multilateral development banks and other multilateral organisations and global funds. If we include Norwegian multilateral core support to the region, which totalled NOK 461 million in 2018, Norway's overall support to the Sahel in 2018 amounted to well over NOK 1 billion (see Figure 2).

Given the increased attention that the Sahel has received from multilateral organisations in recent years, the calculated Norwegian multilateral support to the Sahel is expected to remain high in 2019 as well.

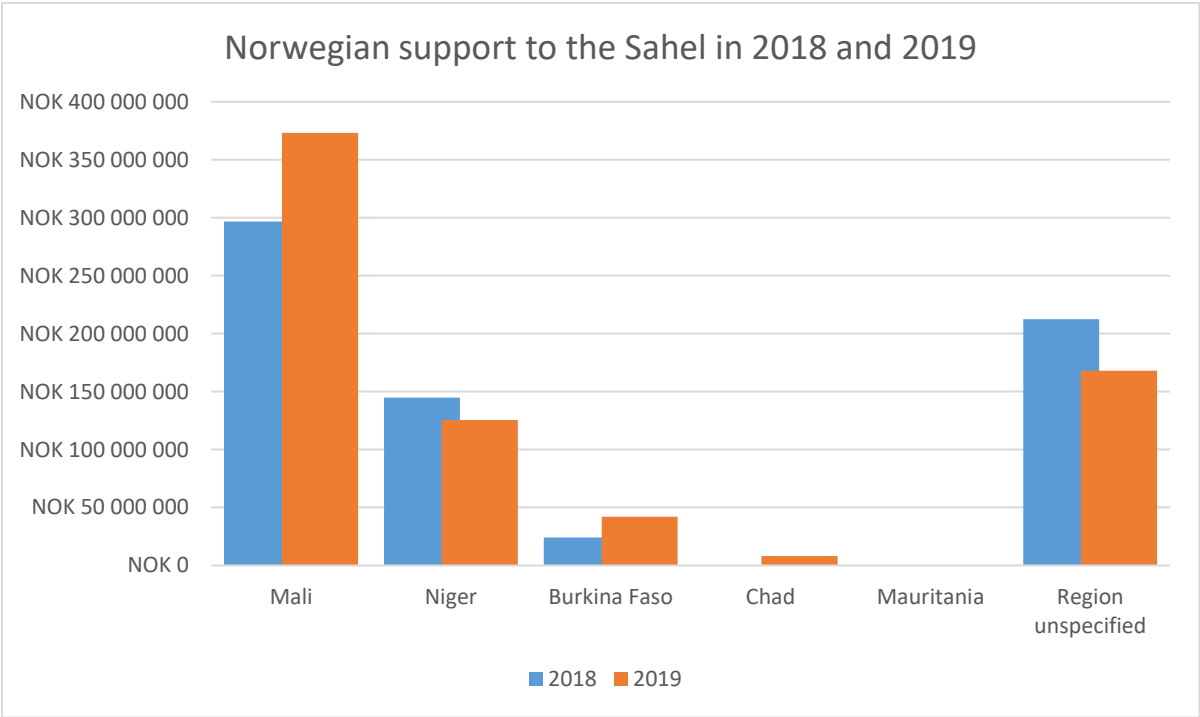
⁸ This figure includes Norway's support for MINUSMA, although not all of that contribution is considered official development assistance (ODA). The OECD/DAC has stated that member countries may report 15 % of expenses for most peacekeeping missions, including MINUSMA, as ODA. The remainder of Norway's contribution to MINUSMA is therefore not formally classified as ODA. Given the importance of engagement in MINUSMA for stability and development in Mali, however, the contribution has been included in the status report's calculations. It is important to emphasise that the sums included apply only to the missions' general operational expenses. Costs of Norwegian civilian and military participation in the missions has not been included.

Norwegian development assistance to the Sahel has increased by more than 250 % in the period from 2012 to 2019. This growth is primarily due to increased efforts in the partner countries Mali and Niger, and stronger Norwegian engagement in Burkina Faso since 2016 (see Figure 3).

In keeping with the Sahel strategy, a significant portion of Norway’s development assistance goes to education, reproductive health, food security and climate-resilient agriculture. Good governance and support for stabilisation and implementation of the peace agreement in Mali have also been given priority (see Figure 4). Important partners alongside the national authorities and regional organisations are the multilateral organisations and Norwegian and international NGOs.

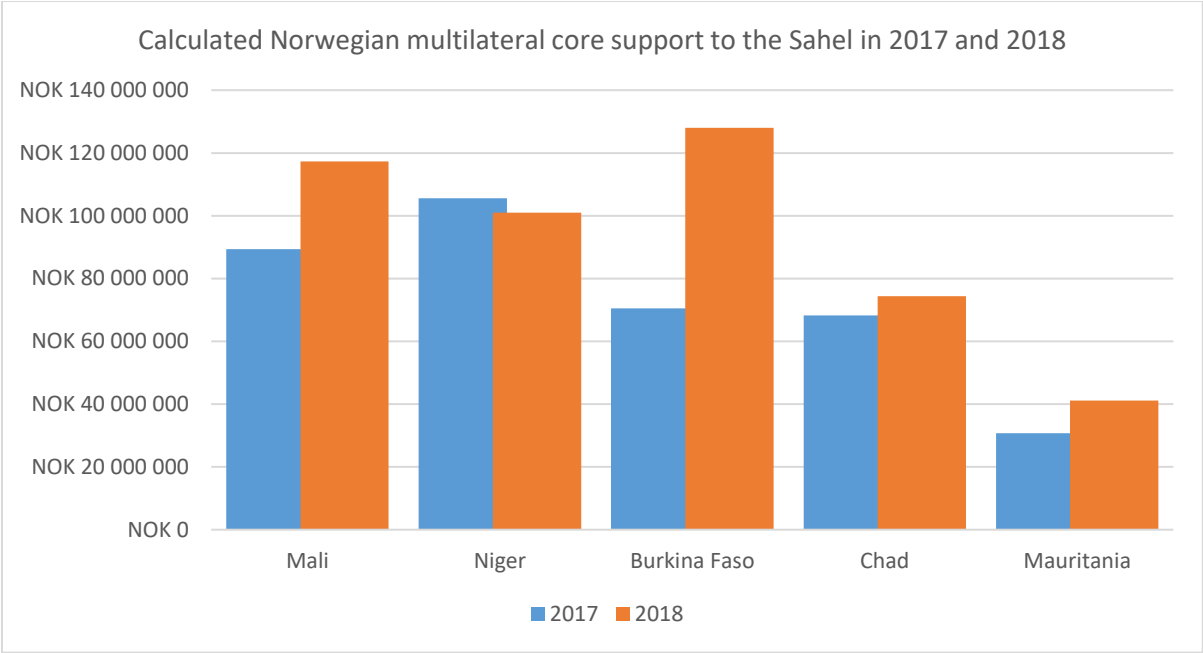
Development cooperation with the Sahel countries also involves dialogue on the UN Sustainable Development Goals and key areas of national development policy. At the conference *Education Cannot Wait* in Dakar in 2018, former Minister of International Development Astrup committed Norway to provide support to girls’ education and had talks with the region’s education ministers on the importance of such education. Burkina Faso’s President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was a keynote speaker the same year at the Global Financing Facility conference on global health in Oslo, along with Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Melinda Gates. Both Mali and Burkina Faso were represented at the political level at the international conference on sexual and gender-based violence held in Oslo in May 2019, and engaged in talks with Minister of International Development Dag-Inge Ulstein about these issues.

Figure 1. Norwegian development aid to the Sahel in 2018 and 2019.



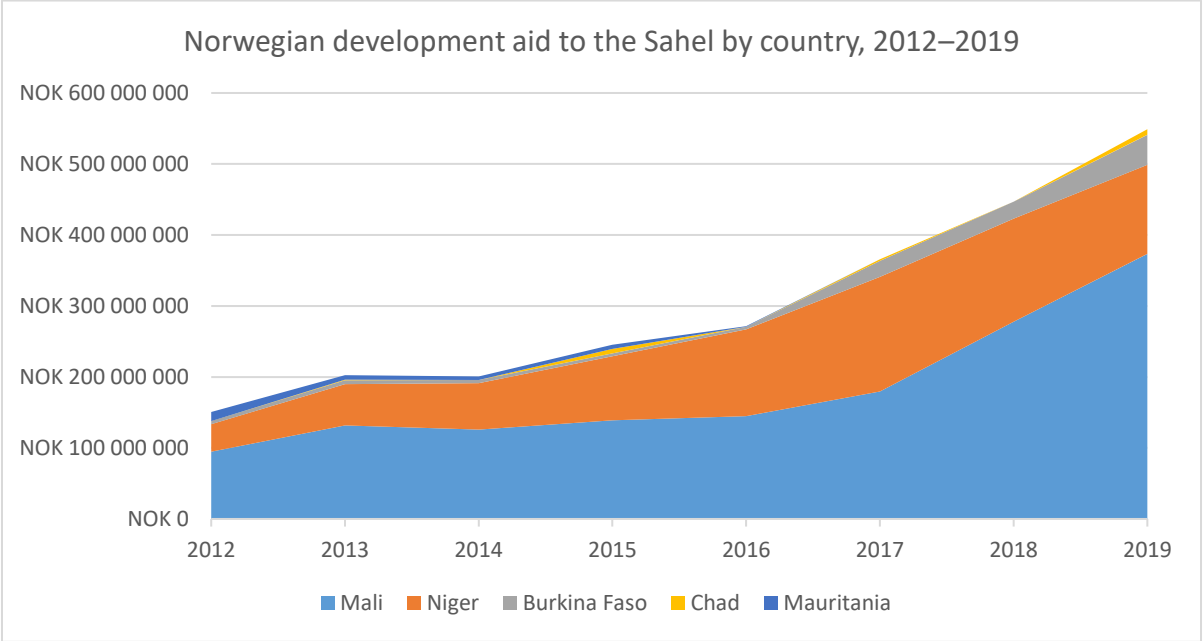
The figures for 2018 and 2019 are compiled from the centralised Plan Tilskudd Avtale (PTA) grant management system, updated as of 3 January 2020. The figures have not been independently quality-assured and may be subject to change.

Figure 2. Calculated Norwegian multilateral core support to the Sahel in 2017 and 2018



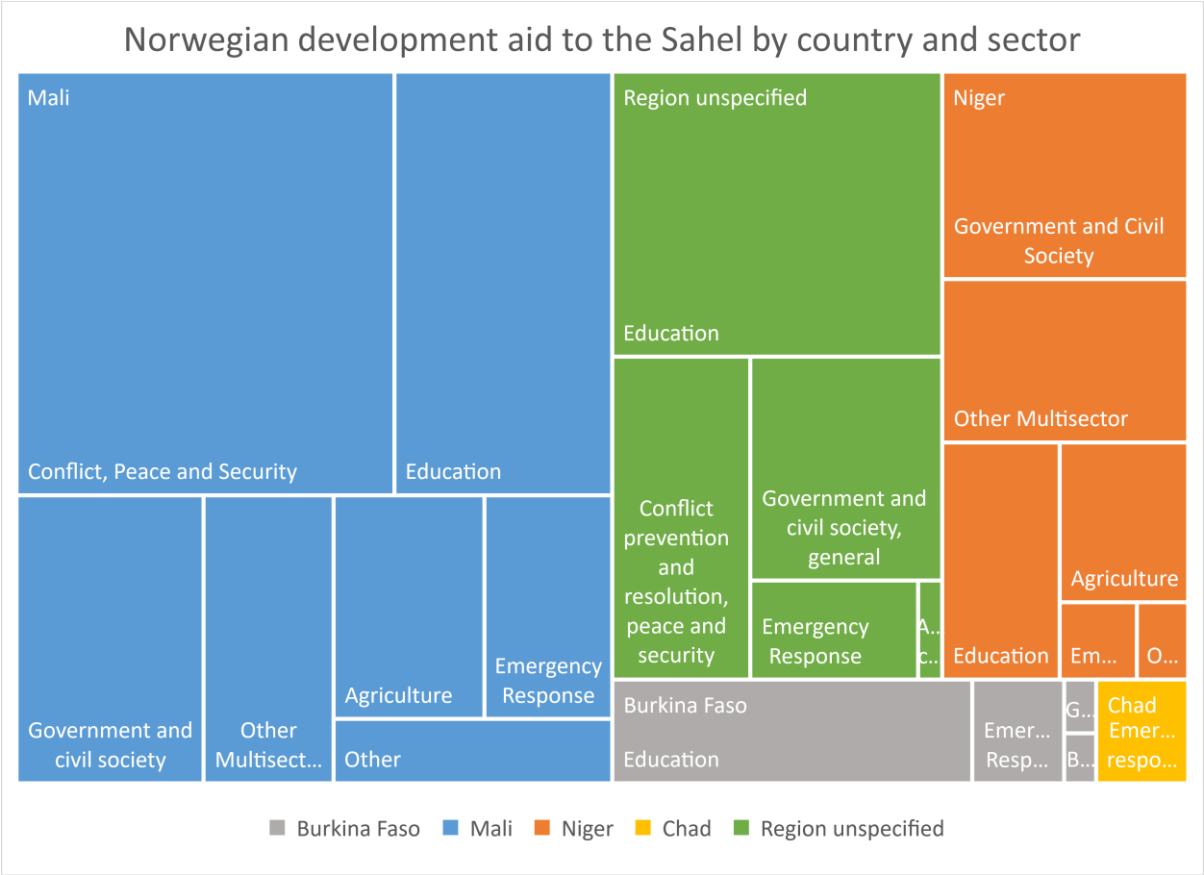
The chart shows calculated Norwegian multilateral core support to the Sahel countries in 2017 and 2018. The methodology used by the OECD/DAC secretariat for imputing multilateral aid is based on the multilateral organisations’ reported use of core support distributed by recipient country (average for 2017–2018). For a description of the calculation method, see: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/oecdmethodologyforcalculatingimputedmultilateraloda.htm> The calculated multilateral core support varies somewhat from year to year and the figures for 2019 are not yet available. However, the figures from 2017 and 2018 indicate that the figures for 2019 can be expected to remain high.

Figure 3: Norwegian development aid to the Sahel by country, 2012–2019



The figures for 2018 and 2019 are compiled from the centralised Plan Tilskudd Avtale (PTA) grant management system, updated as of 3 January 2020. Data for 2012–2017 are from Norad’s Norwegian Aid Statistics. Note that this chart does not include ‘Unspecified region’ or ‘Calculated multilateral core support’, as those categories are not available from Norwegian Aid Statistics back in time. Therefore the total amount of support to the Sahel for 2018 and 2019 shown here is significantly lower than the preceding figures. Although the amounts are significantly lower than actual support, this chart nevertheless gives an indication of the growth in support to the Sahel in the period 2012–2019.

Figure 4. Key thematic priority areas by Sahel country in 2019



This chart is a treemap, which displays hierarchical data as a set of nested rectangles. Each rectangle has an area proportionate to the value measured. The rectangles are arranged with the largest in the upper left and smallest in the lower right for each country (colour-coded). This overview does not include calculated multilateral core support since that does not include OECD/DAC sector codes, upon which this thematic distribution is based. All data are from the centralised Plan Tilskudd Avtale (PTA) grant management system, updated as of 3 January 2020.

Examples of development assistance efforts in the Sahel

Example 1: Norwegian education efforts in the Sahel

Education is a cornerstone of development cooperation in the Sahel. With Norwegian support, UNICEF is carrying out a three-year, NOK 150 million educational programme in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The objective is to increase access to and improve education for children, with a special focus on reaching the most marginalised children, such as those with disabilities. One of the measures is helping to give children who have missed many years of school a chance to catch up over a shorter time period (accelerated learning).

The Strømme Foundation and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) are also important partners for incorporating children who have been deprived of education and children with disabilities into the school system. Through various NGOs, Norway also supports vocational training and job-creating measures, such as training in agriculture and as electricians and plumbers.

Norwegian cooperation with Switzerland on enhancing primary education in Niger was completed in 2019. This cooperative effort was launched in 2014 and has helped to strengthen teacher education and boost results at a number of schools. Some 1.9 million pupils across 22 municipalities in Niger benefitted from this programme.

Example 2: Efforts to strengthen the rule of law and combat organised crime

In cooperation with Denmark, Norway is contributing NOK 60 million over three years to a programme for stabilisation and to strengthen the rule of law and the justice sector in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The funding goes to e.g. training in human rights and international humanitarian law and strengthening the authorities' efforts to fight cross-border crime and smuggling.

Example 3: Reproductive health

Niger has the world's highest birth rate (averaging approximately 7.2 children per woman) while ranking last on the UN Human Development Index (HDI). Norway supports the cooperation between the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and Niger on implementing a strategy for sustainable population growth. One of the most important elements here is the effort to reduce the prevalence of child marriage (which also has a major impact on girls' education) and the subsequent early pregnancy rates. In addition, measures are being implemented to facilitate family planning and better access to reproductive health services in the regions covered by the project. Among other things, the project has provided sexuality education for 1.5 million pupils, free distribution of contraceptives, basic instruction in reading and mathematics skills for 15 000 girls who had dropped out of school, and special instructional/motivational classes for young husbands and fathers.

Example 4: Climate-resilient agriculture and food security

In Mali, Norway supports applied research programmes through the Institut d'Economie Rurale (NOK 58.5 million over five years) and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) (NOK 80 million over five years) for development and large-scale implementation of climate-resilient agricultural technology and methods. The Norwegian University of Life Sciences is a key partner in both programmes. Norway supports similar programmes with the IITA in Niger (NOK 80 million over five years). Support is also provided to the International Fund for Agricultural Development to enhance living conditions of refugees and internally displaced people in the Diffa region of Niger. Climate change adaptation and better food security are also primary objectives for projects under the auspices of Care, Caritas and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Niger.

Adaptation to climate change is a core priority for the Mali Climate Fund, to which Norway is providing NOK 100 million over three years. Norway also contributes to improved forest management and job creation through support to the Mali-Folkecenter (NOK 28 million over three years).



Education: State Secretary Aksel Jakobsen greets a blind boy in Niger who is enrolled in an education programme run by ADRA and the Strømme Foundation. One focus of the programme is to get children with disabilities into school. Photo: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Norway contributes to peace and reconciliation in the Sahel

The situation in the Sahel requires mobilisation of a diverse set of instruments. While more effective security measures are necessary, creating lasting stability will require more resources to promote political solutions and more deep-lying reconciliation between ethnic groups. Norway has supported peace and reconciliation processes in Mali for many years, and has stepped up these efforts in the region in recent years.

Norway supports the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement in Mali. We have supported MINUSMA's civilian activities to implement the agreement as well as the efforts of the independent observer the Carter Center. We also support organisations that work with peace and reconciliation processes at local and national levels. Norwegian Church Aid has played a vital role in peace and reconciliation efforts in a number of local communities in northern Mali.

In June 2019, as part of the peace and reconciliation efforts, Norway hosted a visit from the parties to the 2015 peace agreement, i.e. Malian authorities and the coalition of former armed groups. The *Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad* (CMA) represents a number of Tuareg groups that rebelled with the authorities in 2012–13, while the *Plateforme* coalition represents more government-friendly groups. The parties themselves wished to visit Norway to learn more about Norwegian experience with decentralisation, minority rights, peaceful societal development and

Norway's role in and contributions to various peace processes. The parties met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Eriksen Søreide, State Secretary Hagen and State Secretary Olli of the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, in addition to representatives of other key Norwegian institutions in both Oslo and North Norway, including the Sámediggi (Sami parliament). After the visit, the delegation drew up a joint report with a number of follow-up points.

The Sahel strategy emphasises that Norway's peace engagement in the Sahel must focus on women's participation and the protection of women's rights, in keeping with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security. In 2019 Mali was designated a new priority country for Norway's work on women, peace and security, and we support the implementation of Mali's own action plan for this field. During the parties' visit to Norway, participation of women was an important topic, not least in the talks with Sami institutions.



A delegation from the parties to the 2015 Malian peace agreement visited Norway 17–21 June 2019. Regional policy, the interests of indigenous peoples, and natural resource management were on the programme in meetings with, among others, the Sámediggi (Sami parliament), the Norwegian Saami Association, International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry, and the Finnmark Estate. Photo: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The road ahead

So far, the Sahel strategy has proven to be a good tool for promoting an integrated Norwegian policy on the Sahel. The extremely serious security developments and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in parts of the Sahel demonstrate that there are no short-term solutions to the challenges in this region, and that long-term international engagement is critical.

Enhanced security is still only part of the equation. There will be little progress if we do not address the fundamental challenges concerning governance, inclusion of marginalised groups, and development measures that reach the people. It is vital to maintain a constructive dialogue on these issues with national authorities and regional organisations.

Norway will assess on an ongoing basis how best to contribute through development cooperation, the UN MINUSMA mission and other measures in cooperation with like-minded countries. Norway will uphold its long-term development engagement, contribute to peace and reconciliation efforts, and carry out humanitarian aid as needed.

The three primary objectives for Norwegian efforts in the Sahel region that are defined in the strategy cover these areas:

1. to promote conflict prevention and conflict resolution;
2. to promote political stabilisation and enhance security;
3. to build resilience and lay the foundation for inclusive economic, social and political development, with a view to improving living conditions and reducing the need for humanitarian aid.

2020 is the final year covered in the Sahel strategy in its current form. A review of the strategy is therefore to be carried out in the course of 2020, with the aim of drawing up an updated strategy for a new three-year period.