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Evaluation of United Nations system coordination in the Sahel (2013-2025)

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Abstract

This system-wide evaluation assesses United Nations system cross-pillar coordination in the Sahel between 2013 and 2025. Covering ten countries under the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), it examines how coordination across the peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights pillars was organized, governed, financed and implemented at headquarters, regional and country levels. The evaluation focuses on coordination arrangements rather than overall programme performance. It is theory-based and mixed-method, drawing on document review, key informant interviews, focus groups, country visits and survey data. The evaluation finds that cross-pillar coordination remained necessary and relevant in a highly complex and rapidly evolving context, but coordination arrangements were only partially effective and insufficiently institutionalized. While the United Nations system generated important added value through joint analysis, cross-border peacebuilding initiatives, and the co-development of “flagship” programmes, coordination frequently depended on individual leadership, exceptional circumstances and voluntary cooperation rather than robust accountability mechanisms. The UNISS experienced declining ownership and resonance across stakeholders, while coordination structures were constrained by unclear roles, limited incentives, weak monitoring systems and under-resourcing. The evaluation concluded that future arrangements should prioritize nationally owned, output-oriented approaches that are more outward-facing, flexible and embedded within existing United Nations system structures. The evaluation makes five recommendations to the Secretary-General and United Nations system entities and three to Member States, including resetting coordination arrangements through consultation with Sahelian stakeholders, strengthening Resident Coordinator-led coordination, establishing clearer accountability mechanisms, expanding external partnerships, and creating sustainable financing and pooled funding arrangements to better support cross-pillar and cross-border delivery.

Foreword

In 2013, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2056, the United Nations system developed and adopted the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS). As a Security Council endorsed strategy spanning the peace and security, development, humanitarian, and human rights pillars the UNISS provided a unique context for United Nations system coordination. Since 2013, escalating and intersecting insecurity, political instability, climate change, humanitarian needs and demographic pressures have underscored that cross-pillar, cross-border and sub-regional approaches are of vital importance for the United Nations system in the Sahel.



The UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Office conducted this complex, sub-regional system-wide evaluation in response to a request from the Sahel Advisory Group chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. Very few independent evaluations have examined coordination across all pillars of the United Nations system over such an extensive time period. By reviewing more than a decade of United Nations system engagement in the Sahel, this evaluation has generated significant learning to inform the future of United Nations sub-regional and cross-pillar approaches both in the Sahel and other regions.

Successful coordination across the United Nations system, in a region as challenging as the Sahel, is not an easy feat. This evaluation provides forward-looking learning on some well documented challenges for the United Nations system including: ownership of system-wide frameworks; vertical accountabilities and incentives for United Nations entities that obstruct horizontal collaboration; coordination arrangements that create new structures or add layers without clear added value; a predominance of inward-facing UN-centric processes; and the difficulty of adequately and sustainably resourcing system-wide coordination functions.

The evaluation shows that these challenges, common at country level, were further amplified at the sub-regional Sahel level. Between 2013 and 2025, the United Nations system put in place various sub-regional approaches and coordination mechanisms. Ambitions oscillated between: seamless "integrated" delivery across United Nations pillars; mobilization of resources for development in the billions of dollars; and positioning the United Nations as the preeminent multilateral convenor of Member States and other international actors. Whilst these ambitions were relevant, tangible results attributable to coordination arrangements were limited.

Nonetheless the evaluation notes that the United Nations system has found ways to clearly demonstrate its comparative advantage and unique value in the challenging and rapidly evolving context of the Sahel. Tangible achievements of the United Nations coordination arrangements and approaches in the Sahel include valued sub-regional joint analysis; cross-border peacebuilding programming; sustained presence, neutrality and legitimacy when certain international actors withdrew; and more recently the development of AES flagship programmes. The common characteristics of these achievements are instructive and should inform future approaches. They were built from the country level upwards, identifying issues and opportunities where a sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination approach was necessary and would provide clear added value, rather than being imposed top-down. They were co-owned by national governments or sub-regional organisations rather than being UN-centric. Crucially, they clearly answered the key question of "coordination - for what?" by focusing on specific issues and opportunities, with clear deliverables and specific accountabilities.

I was pleased to present the evaluation findings to United Nations entity principals in the Sahel Advisory Group and the Executive Committee in June 2026 to inform ongoing dialogue on future coordination arrangements for the United Nations system in the Sahel and the preparation of the management response to the five recommendations of the evaluation. The publication of this report allows for the evaluation to be immediately used by the forthcoming Independent Strategic Review of UNOWAS and ongoing UN80 Initiative work packages considering the regional architecture of the UN system. I also hope that this evaluation will continue to provide system-wide learning on cross-pillar coordination as a new Secretary-General of the United Nations takes office.

Andrea Cook
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Abbreviations

ACABQ	Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data
ADE	<i>Aide à la Décision Economique</i>
AES	<i>Alliance des États du Sahel</i>
AFD	<i>Agence Française de Développement</i>
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFP	Agencies, funds and programmes
AGFUND	Arab Gulf Programme for Development
AILP	<i>Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Paix</i>
ALG	Liptako-Gourma Authority
AU	African Union
BADEA	Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa
BMZ	<i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit</i>
CBPF	Country-based pooled funds
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CF	Cooperation Framework
CSO	Civil society organization
DCO	Development Coordination Office
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DSG	Deputy Secretary-General
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECWGS	Executive Committee Working Group on the Sahel
EOSG	Executive Office of the Secretary-General
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus group discussion
FONGA	<i>Forum des ONG en Afrique de l'Ouest et centrale</i>
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GDP	Gross domestic product
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GIZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HDI	Human Development Index
HDP	Humanitarian-development-peace
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans
HQ	Headquarters
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
IFI	International financial institution
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRT	Internal review team
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
ISU	Implementation Support Unit
ISWAP	Islamic State – West Africa Province
KII	Key informant interview
KPI	Key performance indicator

LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
MAF	Management and Accountability Framework
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
MPTF	Multi-partner trust fund
NFF	Nexus Funding Facility
NGO	Non-governmental organization
O-IBC	Opportunity and issue-based coalition
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OSCDs	Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel
OSES	Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
QCPR	Quadrennial comprehensive policy review
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
RCP	Regional Collaborative Platform
ROWCA	Regional Office for West and Central Africa
RRHC	Regional Humanitarian Coordinator
RS-SRR	Regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the Lake Chad Basin region
SC	Security Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SG	Secretary-General
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SWE	System-wide evaluation
SWE0	UNSDG System-wide Evaluation Office
ToC	Theory of change
TOCTA	Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment
UN ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UN-SWAP	United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCT	United Nations country team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations development system
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISS	United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNOWA	United Nations Office for West Africa
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UNSP	United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel
US\$	United States dollar
USG	Under-Secretary-General
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Note on terminology

For the purposes of this report, the following definitions have been applied:

- **United Nations pillars:** References to the United Nations pillars in this report relate to the four pillars identified in the Secretary-General's report *Shifting Paradigms* (A/80/392): peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights. Where reference is made specifically to the differing "pillars" of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) – governance, security and resilience – this is explicitly stated.
- **Cross-pillar:** United Nations system coordination that spans two or more of the United Nations pillars: peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights. Used in this report in preference to "nexus", given the contested nature of this term across the United Nations system.
- **Sub-regional coordination:** Coordination arrangements operating at the level between individual United Nations country teams and global headquarters, covering a defined geographic grouping of countries (in this case, the ten UNISS countries) rather than an entire region or continent (i.e. Africa).
- **Coordination arrangements:** The overall set of structures, mechanisms, functions, roles and instruments that collectively constitute the United Nations system coordination in the Sahel, encompassing both formal architecture and the less formal practices through which coordination takes place.
- **Coordination mechanisms:** Specific inter-entity bodies and platforms that bring together multiple United Nations system entities for the purposes of information exchange, planning and collective decision-making. In the Sahel this includes: the Sahel Advisory Group, United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) Steering Committee, the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group (R-UNSDG) and Regional Collaborative Platform, United Nations country teams (UNCTs), and humanitarian country teams, among others.
- **Coordination functions:** United Nations system entities or offices explicitly dedicated to the coordination of other actors in the United Nations system rather than to programme delivery. In the Sahel, these have included the Development Coordination Office (DCO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) and their offices, special political missions (the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)) and peacekeeping operations (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)), and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs).
- **OECD-DAC donors and others:** Refers to the members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, historically the principal providers of official development assistance (ODA) under common reporting and concessionality standards. "Other donors" or "other cooperation/development partners" denotes development or humanitarian financing providers outside this framework – including, in the Sahel context, China, Gulf states, Türkiye, and others – whose assistance is often less visible within standard official development assistance reporting systems (for example, the OECD Creditor Reporting System).

Strategies, coordination functions and coordination mechanisms mentioned frequently in the report, include:

- **United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS):** The system-wide strategic framework developed pursuant to Security Council resolution 2056 (2012) on the situation in Mali and the Sahel and presented in report S/2013/354. UNISS is structured around three pillars – governance, security and resilience – and covers ten countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. Each pillar was co-led by designated United Nations entities and corresponded to a thematic working group within the coordination arrangements.
- **United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP):** The operational framework adopted in 2018 to accelerate the United Nations system's collective implementation of UNISS. The UNSP is structured around six priority areas: cross-border cooperation; prevention and sustaining peace; inclusive growth; climate action; renewable energy; and the empowerment of women and youth.

- **UNISS Steering Committee:** A sub-regional United Nations system coordination mechanism established in 2013 to oversee and guide implementation of UNISS, providing strategic oversight, facilitating coordination among participating United Nations entities, and supporting alignment between strategic priorities and implementation efforts.
- **Sahel Advisory Group:** A headquarters-level United Nations system coordination mechanism bringing together principals from entities across all United Nations pillars, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. The Sahel Advisory Group was established under an Executive Committee (EC) decision in 2017 and became operational in 2019, replacing the previous Executive Committee Working Group on the Sahel (ECWGS).
- **Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs):** An entity of the United Nations Secretariat established as a coordination function in 2021 to strengthen collective efforts, including mobilization of financing, for the implementation of UNISS and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel, and to lift the United Nations development response within the framework of the United Nations Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Sahel region.

Annex II provides a more detailed glossary as an *aide* to the reader.



Executive Summary

Executive summary

This sub-regional, system-wide evaluation examines United Nations system cross-pillar coordination in the Sahel (2013-2025). It was conducted by the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWE0) in response to a request from the Sahel Advisory Group, at a moment of institutional transition for the United Nations system in the Sahel following the conclusion of the assignment of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (December 2025) and within the context of the "UN80 Initiative". The evaluation is intended to inform decisions on future coordination arrangements for the United Nations system in the Sahel.

The objectives of the evaluation are threefold: first, to assess how United Nations coordination across the peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights pillars has been organized, governed, financed and communicated; second, to assess the results achieved through those coordination arrangements, identifying key gaps and areas for improvement; and third, to generate forward-looking, evidence-based recommendations and options to inform post-2025 decisions. The evaluation is not a holistic assessment of results achieved against the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel¹ (UNISS), nor a narrow performance review of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs). Its focus is the United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel as a whole, at global, regional and country levels.

Context

The Sahel sub-region, as defined by the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP), covers ten countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. It is home to approximately 400 million people, projected to rise to almost 700 million by 2050, and has one of the youngest populations in the world, with more than 65 per cent of its inhabitants under 25 years of age. During the evaluated period (2013-2025), the region experienced an unprecedented convergence of crises, particularly in the central zone. The 2012 Mali crisis marked a decisive turning point, accelerating terrorist expansion, fueling long-term instability, and reshaping the context for international engagement. Escalating insecurity, the erosion of effective state presence across large areas, a series of unconstitutional changes of government, geopolitical realignment, climate stress, fragile and uneven economic growth, rapid demographic change, entrenched gender inequality, and surging humanitarian needs collectively transformed the operating environment for the United Nations system. By the latter part of the period, the Sahel accounted for a very substantial share of global terrorism-related deaths (concentrated in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), humanitarian needs had grown sharply, and relations between several Sahelian governments and major regional and international actors had been severely strained.

International engagement in the Sahel was substantial but fragmented. Official development assistance (ODA) rose significantly during much of the period before beginning to contract in certain countries as a result of unconstitutional changes of government and in line with broader ODA trends from 2024. Alongside these financial flows, the sub-region was the subject of numerous overlapping strategies and initiatives promoted by multilateral, bilateral and regional actors. United Nations coordination arrangements evolved in this context. The coordination arrangements and approaches passed through several phases: the initial Mali crisis response and development of the UNISS in 2013; the merger of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWA) and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES) that created the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in 2016; the development of the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel and associated coordination mechanisms from 2018; and the establishment of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs) in 2021, followed by its closure at the end of 2025. Across this period, coordination operated at three levels: headquarters, the sub-regional level, and the

1. Prepared pursuant to S/RES/2056 (2012) and presented to the Security Council in Secretary-General report S/2013/354.

country level through ten United Nations country teams (UNCTs) led by Resident Coordinators (RCs). These developments also unfolded within wider United Nations reform processes, notably the 2018 repositioning of the United Nations development system, which strengthened the Resident Coordinator system and reshaped expectations regarding system-wide coordination and coherence.

During the period, the United Nations system footprint in the Sahel was significant, but challenging to quantify. United Nations system expenditures across the ten UNISS countries grew from roughly US\$ 1.9 billion in 2013 to more than US\$ 5 billion in 2022-2023, before declining in 2024. Mali and Nigeria were the countries that accounted for the largest expenditure shares over most of the period. In 2024, the best available data indicated that the United Nations system's expenditure mix in the ten countries was approximately 66 per cent humanitarian and 34 per cent development. Coordination in the Sahel must therefore be understood in relation to a large, complex and unevenly financed United Nations system portfolio operating across four United Nations pillars (peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights) in one of the world's most politically and operationally difficult environments.

Evaluation features

The scope of the evaluation was coordination, not overall United Nations portfolio performance. Substantively, it examined the methods and approaches by which the United Nations system sought to coordinate and operationalize support to UNISS objectives, covering all participants in the coordination arrangements across headquarters, sub-regional and country levels, and their relationships with external partners. Geographically, the evaluation covered all ten UNISS countries, with deeper inquiry in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Dakar, with Senegal as the sub-regional hub. Temporally, it covered 2013-2025, with differentiation in emphasis across the period: 2013-2017 as background; 2018-2020 as the period of the UNSP and related changes; and 2021-2025 as the central focus, corresponding to the period of OSCDS, and intensified sub-regional coordination efforts.

The evaluation employed a theory-based, mixed methods approach. A reconstructed theory of change developed during inception phase articulated the implicit logic of United Nations system cross-pillar and sub-regional coordination efforts across the period. The evaluation questions tested the assumptions underlying that logic across four evaluation criteria:

- **Relevance:** the extent to which United Nations system coordination aligned with the needs, priorities and evolving dynamics of the Sahel context
- **Coherence:** the extent to which coordination arrangements enabled United Nations system engagement that was more coherent internally (across the pillars, entities and operational levels of country, sub-regional, regional and headquarters) and externally coherent with non-UN development partners
- **Efficiency:** the extent to which coordination arrangements were equipped with the appropriate authorities and human and financial resources to deliver on expectations and add value
- **Effectiveness:** the results to which coordination arrangements and approaches contributed, with a focus on departures from "business-as-usual", including: joint analysis, cross-border or regional approaches; joint programming; convening and partnerships with all sources of development financing (national and international, public and private); improved trust in the United Nations system; and other contributions to the long-term goals associated with the UNISS and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The evidence base combined more than 1,030 documents, 94 key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving a total of 183 participants, in-person data collection in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger (with remote data collection covering all other UNISS countries), an online survey with 146 responses, and quantitative secondary data analysis drawing on multiple United Nations and international datasets. Findings were developed by triangulation across data sources, collection methods and geographies

and by comparing perspectives from United Nations entities, Member States, partners and civil society, and across headquarters, regional and country levels. An inter-agency evaluation management group provided methodological advice and quality assurance, with representatives from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the evaluation offices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The evaluation was informed by participation of key stakeholders and users from the United Nations system, including a reference group composed of UNISS Steering Committee members (including Resident Coordinators, United Nations entity regional directors, UNOWAS, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)) and selected headquarters focal points. A participatory workshop was held with this group in Dakar on 12 May 2026, which validated the findings and informed the recommendations.

Evaluation findings

Relevance

United Nations system cross-pillar coordination in the Sahel was necessary and relevant in design but shallow in practice, with considerable variation across countries, pillars and time periods, and with overall coordination activity found to have limited consequence for operational delivery. Formal alignment between national Cooperation Frameworks and UNISS increased over the evaluated period, particularly after the adoption of the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (2018) and, by the later years, most Cooperation Frameworks in UNISS countries incorporated references to UNISS and UNSP priorities. That increase in formal alignment did not translate into a corresponding shift in programming logic or funding allocation. Cooperation Frameworks frequently treated UNISS as an external reference rather than as the backbone of strategic planning, and the available joint workplan and funding data showed little evidence that UNISS materially shaped the complex body of programming through which Cooperation Frameworks were implemented. Furthermore, there was a difference between countries where UNISS was a primary organizing framework (for example, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) and those where other architectures, including the Lake Chad Basin initiative, were more operationally relevant (for example, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon). A persistent gap therefore remained between alignment in strategic documents and alignment in operational programming. Much United Nations system work in the Sahel could be said to align broadly with UNISS pillars, but that did not mean that UNISS or its corresponding coordination arrangements were driving programming choices in a consequential way.

UNISS resonance and practical relevance were stronger in the Central Sahel, particularly in countries that remained central to the original UNISS rationale and where cross-pillar coordination around fragility and insecurity had greater salience. In several other UNISS countries, awareness was weaker; some United Nations country team members were unaware of their country's inclusion within the UNISS framework, and a number of governments and United Nations actors regarded the strategy as marginal to their actual context, especially in middle-income countries or in countries whose regional orientation pointed more strongly toward other sub-regional dynamics such as the Lake Chad Basin. Sub-regional coordination was therefore significantly more relevant to the three Central Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) than to the other seven, some of which experienced the arrangements as peripheral or second tier.

Adaptation occurred, but in a reactive rather than anticipatory manner. The coordination arrangements evolved through major inflection points associated with the 2012 Mali crisis, the 2017-2018 recalibration around the G5 Sahel and United Nations Support Plan, and the 2023-2024 rupture associated with the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and the significant weakening of prior regional relationships.² In each period,

2. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in September 2023. The three countries announced their intention to withdraw from ECOWAS in January 2024, with the withdrawal becoming effective in January 2025.

coordination arrangements helped the United Nations system catch up with events rather than get ahead of them. While several United Nations entities had preparedness tools of their own, there was limited evidence of a genuine cross-entity, cross-pillar anticipatory capacity at the sub-regional level. The establishment of OSCDS did add real value in this particularly challenging context by providing a credible development-focused interlocutor able to create new momentum for dialogue with the transitional authorities of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and reframe engagement around development opportunity rather than fragility alone. The co-design of the AES flagship programmes became one of the clearest demonstrations that a single, coherent United Nations system offer, aligned across both levels and pillars, could still be assembled under difficult political conditions.³ Those successes, however, depended heavily on individual leadership, initiative and exceptional circumstances, rather than on design features of the coordination arrangements themselves.

Women and youth were consistently reflected as priorities in UNISS documentation, but actual mainstreaming was driven mostly by global- and country-level mechanisms, including the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equity and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), the United Nations Youth Strategy, and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), rather than by Sahel-specific coordination structures. Later efforts, such as youth dialogue initiatives associated with OSCDS and the Sahel Gender Compact (endorsed in 2025), represented important exceptions, but they came later and remain only partially socialized within the wider system. Direct participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities and other constituencies in the coordination arrangements remained limited, and disability remained largely absent from Sahel-specific coordination frameworks.

Coherence

The evaluation analysed United Nations system coherence across vertical, horizontal and external dimensions. Across all three, there was a consistent gap between formally elaborate coordination design and operational realities. This gap widened further in the challenging political environment following the series of unconstitutional changes of government, as several of the external conditions on which coordination had depended began to erode.

In relation to vertical coherence, the architecture established on paper – including the Sahel Advisory Group at headquarters, sub-regional coordination functions, the UNISS Steering Committee, and country-level Resident Coordinators and UNCTs – did not operate as a coherent vertical system in practice. Prior to 2021, Resident Coordinators were under-integrated into UNISS arrangements; after 2021, their participation in the Steering Committee became more systematic, and this was one of the most important functional improvements. That change depended largely on the Under-Secretary-General (USG) level convening authority of the Special Coordinator, rather than on embedded incentives or accountabilities that made regional-country coherence routine. The Sahel Advisory Group, intended to provide strategic direction and political weight from headquarters, proved insufficiently strategic, weakly connected to regional and country levels, and unable to provide sustained political backing or address bottlenecks. These weaknesses were further exposed in the AES countries, where political crises and the declaration of Resident Coordinators as being “*personae non gratae*” disrupted the vertical chain.

On horizontal coherence, longstanding asymmetries and ambiguities across pillars and entities remained unresolved. Cross-pillar coordination was contested at the level of concepts as well as practice: UNISS retained its original three-pillar structure of governance, security and resilience, while other parts of the United Nations system worked increasingly with humanitarian-development-peace framing.⁴ The peace and security

3. In Mali, unlike Niger and Burkina Faso, the UN's three jointly developed flagship programmes were never formally endorsed by the transitional authorities, leading the United Nations to halt related resource mobilization and communications in September 2025 pending endorsement, which has not since been granted. The UNCT subsequently discontinued the “flagship programmes” framing, folding the three priority areas (food systems, renewable energy, education and health) into the Cooperation Framework aligned with Mali's National Strategy for Emergency and Sustainable Development (SNEDD 2024-2033).

4. See “Note on terminology” (pp.9-10) for explanation of how “pillars” are understood and referenced in this report.

pillar retained disproportionate institutional weight because of its links to UNOWAS, Security Council reporting and senior political attention, while development coordination lacked equivalent authority, and humanitarian coordination remained mainly country-anchored after the abolition of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator position in 2017. The regional OCHA office has continued to provide support to country-level coordination, but it does not carry the same authority as the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator. Development therefore had sub-regional institutional infrastructure through OSCDS and political engagement had stronger access to high-level attention, but humanitarian coordination had no equivalent senior sub-regional function. Overlapping mandates and ambiguous role boundaries between the development pillar and UNOWAS generated persistent friction, particularly around governance and political-development interfaces, and the lack of clarity in the institutional relationship between the Special Coordinator role and other regional leadership roles was never fully resolved.

This overarching sub-regional picture should be read alongside more encouraging country-level and cross-border coordination practice: in some contexts, including the Lake Chad Basin response, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators and UNCTs developed practical approaches to bridging pillar divides. Such efforts appear to have been driven primarily by operational necessity and individual leadership rather than by structural incentives or system-wide design, suggesting that horizontal coherence gaps were not uniform and that country-level practice at times outpaced the sub-regional architecture meant to support it. Two further important counterpoints also stood out: the later functioning of the UNISS Steering Committee (with full participation of Resident Coordinators) and the three June-July 2024 joint United Nations delegations to the AES countries. Both demonstrated that coherence across levels and pillars was possible, and both provided concrete examples of Resident Coordinators, regional directors and senior coordination actors operating together more effectively than the arrangements typically enabled. They provided demonstrations of what coherence could look like, not evidence that it has been institutionalized. In both cases, coherence has been dependent on exceptional triggers, personal authority, or explicit high-level instruction.

In terms of external coherence, the United Nations system operated within a crowded and fragmented landscape and did not succeed in positioning UNISS as the consolidating framework or the United Nations system preeminent multilateral convening function. There were at least 18 parallel sub-regional strategies, reflecting the mandates and political priorities of bilateral, multilateral and regional actors. The United Nations system therefore functioned as one participant among peers, rather than as the actor able to align or convene others. Relations with the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were substantive but fragile and held by certain parts of the United Nations system rather than the whole, not deeply institutionalized. By 2024, these relationships were severely strained in the three AES countries as a result of the political crises, announcements of ECOWAS withdrawals and African Union suspensions. Although the donor-international financial institution (IFI) Sahel Alliance operated on a parallel track without structured strategic alignment to United Nations system coordination arrangements, the United Nations system, through the UNISS coordination mechanism, was able to coordinate and integrate its work within the Sahel Alliance's various technical working groups.

Efficiency

Sub-regional coordination roles, responsibilities, arrangements and functions were not matched by the operational means required to deliver on expectations, whether in financial, human or institutional terms. Coordination functions and mechanisms were largely sustained through extrabudgetary, voluntary and ad-hoc resourcing; particularly visible in the case of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and the OSCDS (2021-2025), whose expected United Nations system cost-sharing model never materialized at the level necessary. More broadly, Development Coordination Office Africa (DCO Africa) was overstretched across the continent, Resident Coordinator offices across the ten UNISS countries faced recurring capability and staffing gaps, and specialist capacities that did prove valuable, such as peace and development advisors, gender expertise, partnership functions and international financial institution liaison roles, were financed unevenly and often

unsustainably. A persistent mismatch remained between what coordination arrangements were expected to achieve and the practical means made available to them.

The value of United Nations system coordination lay primarily in its convening advantages – legitimacy, neutrality, continuity of presence, access, and the ability to sustain political attention – rather than in technical delivery or managerial authority. At the political level, particularly in moments of crisis or in relation to high-level dialogue, the transaction costs of coordination were often justified by the value generated. At the operational level, however, the balance was much more mixed. Many formal processes imposed burdens in time, process and participation without consistently yielding corresponding operational gains, and informal coordination structures, for example, bilateral exchanges, ad-hoc groupings and more flexible working relationships often emerged as more effective substitutes or complements to the formal mechanisms.

Accountability and monitoring remained weak. There was no agreed UNISS results framework, no comprehensive cross-entity platform capable of tracking collective outcomes across pillars, and reporting mechanisms largely documented meetings, activities or references to alignment rather than demonstrating measurable coordination results. Tools such as the "5W" mapping were used in part as substitutes for a proper accountability system, but they could not serve as a full proxy for the monitoring of outcomes, learning or adaptation. Internal accountability was further weakened by ambiguous roles, voluntary participation and the lack of robust follow-through mechanisms, while external accountability to regional organizations such as the African Union and ECOWAS, remained limited to a small number of more concrete delivery contexts.

Effectiveness

United Nations system coordination in the Sahel generated genuine added value, but the scale and consistency of that added value remained below the ambition attached to the arrangements. The strongest area of contribution was joint analysis. Over the period, the United Nations system produced a number of sub-regional analytical products on issues such as transhumance, pastoralism, climate-security, displacement and organized crime, and these were among the clearest examples of coordination generating outputs that single entities could not easily have produced alone. The translation of joint analysis into collective action was uneven, however: analytical products were often stronger than the operational follow-through, and "domestication" of sub-regional analysis at the country level remained partial.

Joint programming appears to have expanded, particularly after 2021, and the Peacebuilding Fund and the later AES flagship programmes, embedded in nationally owned plans and combined elements of humanitarian, development and peace and security engagement around concrete priorities, offered the clearest examples of more meaningful cross-pillar and cross-border programming. Yet these interventions remained a relatively small share of the overall United Nations system portfolio, and the arrangements as a whole did not produce the degree of integrated programming or "single offer" logic that would have been implied by the original ambition of cross-pillar coordination. Structural constraints, including entity incentives, fragmented funding, misaligned planning cycles and uneven ownership, continued to limit the scale and durability of joint programming. Particular initiatives showed that more coherent cross-pillar delivery was possible when linked to specific issues, explicit responsibilities and government ownership. Many of these successes came late in the period, were shaped by crisis and political necessity, and had not yet resolved questions of sustainability at the time of evaluation.

On resource mobilization, partnerships and trust, the picture remained mixed. There were genuine mobilization successes for discrete initiatives and pooled instruments, but the broader mobilization rate remained limited, donor contraction reduced room for manoeuvre, and no dedicated pooled Sahel-wide mechanism was established. Partnerships with international financial institutions, regional organizations, civil society and other non-United Nations actors generated some positive examples, but remained fragmented and often weakly structured, with the United Nations more often positioned as participant or implementer rather than as a central convenor or strategic co-designer. Trust in the United Nations system moved through three broad

phases: an early period of high expectation; a period of erosion linked to political crises and fragmentation; and a partial reset in the later years associated especially with the flagship model and efforts to present a more coherent, nationally owned United Nations system offer. Overall, coordination proved better at producing instruments, processes and moments of coherence than at sustaining collective cross-pillar United Nations system delivery over time.

Conclusions

United Nations system coordination in the Sahel between 2013 and 2025 was both a legitimate and a necessary response to a genuine collective action problem. The evaluation concludes that measures to contribute to a more coordinated, coherent, sub-regional and cross-pillar approach to the United Nations system's engagement remain necessary. Tangible achievements of the United Nations coordination arrangements and approaches in the Sahel included consequential sub-regional joint analysis, the development of the AES flagship programmes, cross-border peacebuilding programming and sustained presence when certain international actors withdrew.

However, the coordination arrangements were never fully fit for purpose to deliver on: high expectations, which oscillated across time; seamless "integrated" delivery across United Nations pillars; resource mobilization in the billions of dollars; and the United Nations being the preeminent multilateral convenor of Member States and other international actors. Results were concentrated disproportionately in the later years and were achieved despite, rather than because of, many of the structural features of the coordination arrangements. The coordination arrangements suffered from an unclear value proposition, declining resonance of the UNISS, limited embedding of coordination functions in the wider United Nations system, weak management and accountability levers, insufficient agility, an inward-facing orientation, and under-resourcing. The central lesson is therefore not that coordination lacked value, but that future arrangements will need to address these limitations directly if they are to be fit for purpose.

Conclusion 1. By 2025, the resonance and ownership of the UNISS itself had decreased to such an extent, across all its key stakeholder groups, that its continuing relevance as a principal framework for United Nations system coordination in the Sahel is questionable.

The UNISS, as a Security Council solicited cross-pillar strategy, could have provided an opportunity for a coordinated and comprehensive response to a sub-regional crisis by the United Nations system and its membership. However, it faced well-documented challenges from its 2013 inception, being variously perceived as top-down, headquarters-centric, crowded with national-level objectives, and ambiguously positioned between an internal United Nations coordination instrument and a strategy for the broader international community. It lacked clear institutional ownership and was never backed by resources commensurate with its ambitions. It was never genuinely owned across the full ten-country scope, whose countries differed too sharply in context, priorities and incentives. By 2025, the resonance, ownership and continuing relevance of the UNISS as the principal framework for coordination had declined substantially across stakeholder groups. Its proximity to the Security Council, while initially a source of political weight, became increasingly alienating in the later geopolitical environment, especially in AES countries. Its original pillars also sat uneasily alongside later humanitarian-development-peace framings and increasingly diverged from the development and sovereigntist narratives of key Sahelian states. As a result, passive or declaratory alignment persisted in documents, but genuine ownership and operational consequence were weak. While the UNISS provided analytical and political value when adopted in 2013, by 2025 its continued use as the principal framework for United Nations system cross-pillar coordination was open to question and, in some respects, may have been a hindrance to more effective coordination.

Conclusion 2. The coordination approaches that generated the most tangible and potentially replicable results were those grounded in nationally owned, output-oriented programming rather than a top-down coordination logic.

United Nations system coordination arrangements produced some important tangible outcomes, which added clear value to what individual United Nations entities, individual United Nations pillars, or country-siloed coordination would have been able to achieve alone. The most tangible and replicable coordination results came from nationally owned, output-oriented programming, not from top-down initiatives. Regional joint analytical products, Peacebuilding Fund cross-pillar and cross-border programming, and especially the development of the AES flagship programmes of 2024-2025 offered the clearest examples of coordination adding value in practice. These initiatives shared common characteristics: they were built upwards from country-level realities; they were co-owned with governments and, where relevant, sub-regional institutions; they combined different United Nations pillars around specific issues; they offered clear entry points for external partners; and they were organized around time-bound deliverables, identifiable responsibilities and concrete operational problems rather than around broad and static structures. Their success was therefore not evidence that the overall architecture had functioned coherently, but that when coordination was tied to clearly defined outputs, national ownership and clear responsibilities, it could produce results that broader arrangements struggled to achieve. Future coordination arrangements should seek to replicate these features, rather than rely on general frameworks whose link to programming remains weak.

Conclusion 3. United Nations system coordination arrangements lacked the management and accountability levers necessary to meaningfully contribute to improved coherence and delivery across entities, pillars and national boundaries. Voluntary agreements and mechanisms were not embedded or institutionalized; as a result, they were often considered to be an additional layer and secondary priority by their participants.

None of the various Sahel-specific coordination arrangements during the evaluated period established effective management and accountability arrangements that could meaningfully improve cross-pillar and sub-regional coherence of the United Nations system. The functions, mechanisms, reporting lines and working methods were based on voluntary participation. Some were established outside of other existing structures that were more institutionalized and consequential. External realities of earmarked funding, bilateral donor relationships and institutional incentives for entity visibility shaped behaviour more strongly than system-wide priorities. The intended vertical chain linking the Sahel Advisory Group, the UNISS Steering Committee and UNCTs has not functioned as a coherent system. Roles and responsibilities remained ambiguous, especially across the political, development and coordination tracks represented by UNOWAS, OSCDS, UNDP and DCO. Reporting mechanisms documented activities rather than collective results, and internal reviews conducted were reactive with minimal follow-up. Where genuine alignment occurred, this was more often driven by political pressure and individual leadership than by institutionalized incentives. Future arrangements will only succeed if they establish clear lines of management and accountability, explicit role definition, and mechanisms that "close the loop" from decision to implementation to review.

Conclusion 4. United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel were largely inward-facing, lacking substantive participation or concrete "whole-of-UN" system partnerships with governments, regional organizations, donors, international financial institutions and civil society. This diluted the convening power of the United Nations system and its ability to shape the agendas of multiple parallel actors and strategies in the Sahel.

The coordination arrangements were predominantly inward-facing, which diluted the United Nations system's convening power and limited its ability to shape the broader Sahel landscape. The principal coordination mechanisms were overwhelmingly UN-centric, while structured engagement with governments, regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society, OECD-DAC donors and other cooperation

partners remained episodic rather than systematic. Dialogue with important external actors, such as the Sahel Alliance, occurred, but was largely sporadic and personality-driven rather than structured or institutionalized. Beyond the participation of the Special Coordinator in the Sahel Alliance and some technical-level engagement between UNISS pillar experts and the Alliance's technical working groups, there was no institutionalized mechanism to anchor this engagement as a consistent channel between the two coordination architectures. Relationships with the African Union, ECOWAS and other regional bodies were weakly institutionalized on a whole-of-UN system basis. This inward orientation proved especially costly as the external environment became increasingly fragmented: regional organizations weakened or withdrew, donors increasingly prioritized migration and security concerns, international financial institutions engaged instrumentally, and other partners expanded their footprint outside UN-led frameworks. The legitimacy and convening power of the United Nations continued to be recognized and potentially valuable but was under-leveraged. Positive examples in the later period, such as the financing strategy for AES flagship programmes and UN-international financial institution liaison functions, show what more outward-facing and structured engagement can achieve. Future arrangements need to place much greater emphasis on external partnerships, strategic convening and supporting Sahelian states in financing for development, rather than focusing predominantly on intra-UN process.

Conclusion 5. United Nations system coordination functions in the Sahel were chronically under-resourced relative to expectations. Resource mobilization for the United Nations system was an explicit aim of coordination arrangements and recorded notable achievements, but sustainable structures and vehicles to attract and channel funding as an incentive for cross-pillar and sub-regional programming were not established.

Coordination functions were chronically under-resourced, and the gap between ambition and means became a defining limitation. OSCDS relied on ad-hoc extrabudgetary funding and short-term secondments; cost-sharing arrangements among United Nations entities did not materialize at the required scale; staff turnover was high; institutional memory was repeatedly lost; communications and monitoring capacity remained thin; and resource mobilization for the coordination function itself consumed time and senior attention that should have been available for substantive coordination. At the country level, Resident Coordinator offices were constrained by wider systemic funding gaps, and specialized capacities that did prove valuable were often financed in ways that were not sustainable. The lesson is not simply the need for “more resources”, but the need for predictable and sustainable resourcing in which coordination is financed as a precondition rather than as an aspiration or optional extra. At the same time, pooled instruments such as the Peacebuilding Fund, the Joint SDG Fund and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) did support some degree of cross-pillar and cross-border programming, albeit with limited available resources dedicated to the Sahel. Future arrangements should therefore prioritize resource mobilization and pooled funding as core elements of coordination design.

Recommendations

The evaluation makes recommendations to the Secretary-General and United Nations entities to inform system-wide decision making on a recalibration of United Nations strategic positioning and coordination arrangements in the Sahel. It also presents a set of recommendations for the consideration of United Nations Member States to support this effort. The recommendations build upon the foundation of a previous System-wide evaluation on progress towards a “new generation of United Nations country teams” (2025) and management response in which the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) accepted all of the global, system-wide recommendations. The recommendations also intersect with ongoing work packages of the UN80 Initiative, for example, work on the Regional reset (WP6), Regional platforms for integration (WP12) and UNCT reconfiguration (WP5) will determine the means of implementation for several recommendations. The recommendations may also inform the forthcoming Independent Strategic Review of UNOWAS (initiated during the evaluation).

Future United Nations coordination arrangements in the Sahel should be guided by a small number of overarching principles, which inform the evaluation recommendations. First, arrangements should be locally led, regionally supported and connected, inverting the top-down logic that characterized the UNISS and building from country realities upwards, with the Resident Coordinator system as the foundation and regional and headquarters layers playing genuinely supportive roles. Second, the future coordination arrangements should use and strengthen existing structures rather than create new parallel entities, unless a clear gap is demonstrated. This is likely to deliver greater and more sustainable value than the creation of any new stand-alone structure, entity or special envoy role – which the evaluation discourages. Third, it should be guided by clarity of purpose: coordination should be based on a realistic level of ambition, specify responsibilities and added value, and be understood as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. Fourth, it should emphasize flexibility and adaptation, organizing around time-bound tasks and concrete deliverables, enabling rapid course correction, and embedding internal feedback and independent review.

Recommendations to the United Nations system

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 1. Design future United Nations system coordination arrangements through consultative processes that prioritize national ownership, and articulate a clearer strategic proposition.		
1a. Communicate a formal reset of United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel to re-establish and embed national and regional ownership. The credibility, legitimacy and authority of United Nations system coordination arrangements should not be derived exclusively from the Security Council mandate for the UNISS (2012/2013). Future United Nations system coordination approaches require clear steps to re-establish national and sub-regional ownership: - Communicate a recalibration of United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel and conduct a consultative process with Sahelian governments, the African Union and relevant regional organizations on priorities for the United Nations system in the Sahel to inform the future coordination arrangements. - Shift away from the use of the UNISS (2013) as the principal, fixed, organising framework and adopt a more flexible approach to the geographic and thematic scope of coordination in the Sahel and West Africa. This may include: - A wider overall definition of the sub-region, to include and address spillover to coastal countries. - Differentiated narrower coordination approaches for specific “clusters” of countries that can be established in response to evolutions in the context and with national government buy-in. - Review the continuing relevance and status of the UNISS, in consultation with the Security Council, informed by the results of the present evaluation and the Independent Strategic Review of UNOWAS (see recommendation C for consideration by Member States).	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA⁵, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q4 2026
1b. Clarify and communicate a recalibrated strategic proposition for cross-pillar and sub-regional coordination in the Sahel. - Define with precision and without ambiguity the core functions that cross-pillar coordination arrangements in the Sahel will prioritise and how they will add value. The evaluation suggests that high priority functions should include: <u>Cross-pillar/sub-regional analysis</u>: Information gathering and analytical capacities should be effectively integrated and used across the United Nations system with protocols/mechanisms to provide real time flows across all pillars and levels (headquarters, regional, country), enabling foresight, early warning and proactive cross-pillar engagement. <u>External partnerships</u>: Effective coordination arrangements play an important role in United Nations system external convening and partnership approaches to facilitate of cross-pillar, whole-of-UN system dialogue and partnership approaches with a range of stakeholders. See recommendation 4. <u>Resource mobilisation</u>: Coordination arrangements should continue to prioritise the mobilisation of quality funding for the work of United Nations system entities in particular for scaled-up joint, cross-pillar and cross-border programming. See recommendation 5c. - Once core functions and value proposition are clearly defined, develop a concise United Nations Sahel Delivery Compact to define the accountabilities of each institutional actor – to be signed by United Nations entity principals (see recommendation 3).		Q4 2026

5. The evaluation encourages consultation of and participation by OCHA in the implementation of the recommendations. It does so without prejudice to A/RES/46/182 and the established basis for engagement by OCHA in United Nations development coordination – participation in observer or member capacity to reduce risk, vulnerability and need, without seeking chairing or convening roles.

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 2. Construct coordination arrangements by utilizing and capacitating existing structures rather than creating new or parallel arrangements. Build in flexibility and subsidiarity, and adopt an implementation focus.		
2a. Country level: Further strengthen the centrality of the United Nations country team, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, to enhance cross-pillar coordination for the United Nations system at the country level, in line with General Assembly resolutions 72/279, 75/233, and 79/226. i. United Nations entities <u>in all pillars</u> should actively support cross-pillar and cross-border analysis and programming. This should include: - Engaging in Common Country Analysis processes (including annual updates) and the design of Cooperation Frameworks to identify cross pillar programming opportunities. This needs to go beyond passive participation in the UNSDG Regional Peer Support Group and include physical deployments where appropriate. - Active participation in United Nations country teams and real time information and intelligence sharing with RCs and UNCTs (as described in Recommendation 1b). - Peer review mechanisms to involve Resident Coordinators and UNCTs from bordering countries in Common Country Analyses and Cooperation Framework design, facilitating sub-regional analysis and identification of joint and cross-border programming opportunities. ii. Ensure full and early implementation of the decisions emerging from the UN80 Shared Platform Initiative (Work Package 13) in Sahel countries to support and empower RC/HCs to enhance cross-pillar collaboration.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q4 2026 and ongoing
2b. (Sub) regional level: Integrate Sahel-specific coordination arrangements within the overarching authority and structure of United Nations system regional coordination to allow for more flexible, time-bound delivery, supported by appropriate convening authority and capacity in Dakar (with a central role for DCO). i. Facilitate the integration of the current UNISS Steering Committee and subsidiary mechanisms into the Regional Platform for Integration (subject to outcomes of UN80 Initiative Work Packages 6 and 12) to provide the necessary system-wide authority, flexibility and sustainability, for Sahel coordination, while avoiding the establishment of separate and parallel structures. ii. Organize Sahel coordination activities around specific, time-bound deliverables and in response to specific issues, rather than standing, static fora for strategic discussion and “pillars”. Seek to replicate the model of the Standing Committee for the development of the AES flagships and other thematic working groups and taskforces that focus on specific issues and geographies. These configurations should be (co-)chaired or convened by entities specifically dedicated to coordination within or across pillars (in particular DCO but also DPPA/UNOWAS, OHCHR or others as appropriate) and ensure the effective participation of key entities with limited regional/country presence (e.g. DPPA, OHCHR, PBPSO and UNOCT). iii. DCO should play a central role in future coordination arrangements in the Sahel to institutionalize and strengthen connections between the country level RC system and United Nations entity regional directors. This should include appropriate human resource capacity in Dakar (see recommendation 5b) but also agreed convening authority (consistent with DCO’s existing, non-operational coordinating role and mandate to provide oversight and support to the Resident Coordinator system).	Secretary-General in consultation with USG Policy and Executive/Deputies Committee (or successor arrangement).	Q1 2027
2c. Headquarters level: Consider using existing, established executive coordination structures for headquarters-level dialogue and decisions relating to the Sahel. i. Review the terms of reference, and functioning to date, of the Sahel Advisory Group (created by 2017 Executive Committee decision) to consider whether it adds sufficient value to warrant continuation. ii. Consider using the structure of the Executive Committee and Deputies Committee (or equivalent arrangements that may be established by an incoming Secretary-General) as the primary headquarters/principal-level platform for strategic dialogue, decision making on and follow up on the Sahel and ensure use of the findings of the present evaluation in UN80 Initiative Work Package 10 on Senior management coordination forums. iii. Ensure that headquarters and principal-level discussions on the Sahel prioritise engagement with the leadership of external partners including AU, AfDB, World Bank and IMF, involving all United Nations pillars (See recommendation 4).	Secretary-General in consultation with USG Policy and Executive/Deputies Committee (or successor arrangement).	Q4 2026

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 3. Roles and responsibilities should be defined with greater clarity and precision. They should be monitored and reinforced by a shared accountability framework, collective performance assessment mechanisms, and independent oversight.		
3a. Clarify coordination roles and responsibilities, and establish robust reporting, follow-up and feedback mechanisms to strengthen accountability. Establish appropriate management and accountability arrangements to support the implementation of the United Nations Sahel Compact referred to in Recommendation 1b. This should include the following elements (and be consistent with any future revision of the Management and Accountability Framework): i. A detailed matrix of roles and responsibilities modelled on the UNISS responsibilities matrix that was developed in 2019 (but not subsequently updated to fully reflect the United Nations development system reforms at the regional level). ii. An annual reporting mechanism on the collective implementation of the United Nations Sahel Compact – focused not on entity activity mapping and aggregation, but on the specific value addition brought by coordination arrangements. iii. 360-degree performance assessment/feedback mechanisms between Compact signatories at the regional level, and, most importantly, between United Nations entity regional directors and Resident Coordinators.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q1 2027
3b. Conduct an independent review or system-wide evaluation of United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel by July 2031. Commit to a follow up independent review or system-wide evaluation of United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel after a maximum of five years. This should consider equally the perspectives of United Nations and non-United Nations stakeholders.	Secretary-General	Q3 2031
Recommendation 4. Future United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel should be: more outward facing; place a higher priority on external partnerships with all development partners and stakeholders; and seek to accompany Sahelian Member States in shaping financing for sustainable development.		
The evaluation suggests that this includes: • Strengthened strategic dialogue and collaboration between the United Nations system and existing donor/development partner coordination platforms such as the Sahel Alliance. • Continued investment in a broader convening role for the United Nations system that accompanies Sahelian countries' sovereign control and coordination of the full range of available development financing resources (ODA, IFI lending, domestic resources, foreign direct investment, natural resource extraction etc.). For example: • More structured engagement and partnerships between the United Nations system and international financial institutions at both strategic and operational levels; building on corporate/ leadership level dialogue (see recommendation 2c) and supported by dedicated liaison functions at regional and country levels (see recommendation 5b). • Increased engagement with the private sector and other cooperation and development partners to identify opportunities to maximize the sustainable development impact of investments (e.g. natural resource extraction, infrastructure investment). • Maintaining and supporting participatory coordination and consultation mechanisms between the United Nations system and civil society.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q1 2027 and ongoing

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 5. United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel must be: matched by sufficient and sustainable financial resources; staffed appropriately to add value in the wider system; and explicitly focus on the mobilization of quality funding as an incentive and enabler of cross-pillar/sub-regional delivery.		
5a. Establish a predictable and sustainable funding model for Sahel coordination functions. Ensure that United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel are adequately, predictably and sustainably resourced, wherever they are located. The evaluation recommends the allocation of assessed/core resources where possible, noting that the sums involved are comparatively small. However, a funding mix combining assessed resources, United Nations system cost-sharing (based on a formula and firm agreement to pay in full and on time) and levied resources may have a positive effect on institutional buy-in and participation.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO, UNDP, and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q1 2027
5b. Ensure that human resources for coordination provide the roles, skills and profiles to ensure maximum value for the United Nations system (including partnerships and resource mobilization expertise). i. Ensure sufficient human resource capacity at the sub-regional level (i.e., in the DCO Dakar hub or roving capacity) to provide meaningful, implementation-focused support to sub-regional coordination mechanisms (as described above) and Resident Coordinators in the Sahel, not compliance-monitoring and quality assurance alone. Dedicated expertise on partnerships and resource mobilisation is advisable. ii. Establish minimum cross-pillar staffing standards for RCOs in RC/HC contexts including dedicated functions for cross-pillar analysis and liaison within UN80 Shared Platform Initiative (Work Package 13). iii. Preserve and expand peace & development advisor positions in priority Sahel countries and at the sub-regional level to provide a critical linkage between (i) the peace & security and development pillars of the United Nations system and (ii) country-level RCOs and UNOWAS. iv. Replicate the good practice of funding IFI liaison functions in RCOs (see recommendation 4). v. Ensure gender parity in the appointment of Resident Coordinators and other senior coordination roles covering the Sahel.	DCO in consultation with DPPA (including UNOWAS and PBPSO), OHCHR, OCHA and UNDP.	Q1 2027 and ongoing
5c. Leverage pooled funding as a central enabler of cross-pillar and cross-border delivery. i. Building on the UN80 Initiative work package on Funding Mechanisms (WP18), explore how pooled funding (either existing funds at global, regional and country levels, or newly designed funds) can be best utilized as an incentive for cross-pillar and cross-border coordination, programming and delivery in the Sahel. ii. Pooled fund scope and design should be inclusive and multi-stakeholder where possible, with governance participation and grant-eligibility going beyond United Nations entities. Coordination functions should play leading roles in pooled fund management and governance. iii. Continue to prioritize - and where possible scale up – Peacebuilding Fund investments in the Sahel, using the fund as a specific instrument to incentivise coordination and collaboration across pillars and cross-border programming, and to promote national ownership and RC leadership. iv. Consider positioning the Joint SDG Fund as a catalytic enabler of joint programme design and nationally-owned development financing analysis, coordination and leverage informed by the ongoing system-wide evaluation of the Fund (see recommendation 4).	DCO in consultation with DPPA (including UNOWAS and PBPSO), OHCHR, OCHA and UNDP.	Q1 2027

Recommendations for the consideration of Member States

The effectiveness of United Nations system coordination is dependent on many internal dimensions. But effective coordination also depends upon an external environment shaped by the actions and decisions of Member States. The following recommendations are made for the consideration of Member States, in their respective roles as programme country governments in the Sahel, donors to United Nations system entities, and members of the intergovernmental legislative bodies.

Recommendation A. Sahelian Member States are encouraged to create enabling conditions for coherent, cross-pillar United Nations system engagement in support of national priorities.

To maximize the cross-pillar coherence and relevance of United Nations system engagement, Sahelian Member States are encouraged to:

- Encourage United Nations system entities to collectively support nationally owned programming approaches, and use existing resources to leverage development finance at scale from all available sources (ODA, IFI lending, domestic resources, foreign direct investment, natural resource extraction etc.)
- Provide enabling conditions for cross-border programming – freedom of movement for United Nations staff, data sharing and access, and joint government participation in cross-border initiatives.
- Engage the Resident Coordinator as the primary United Nations system interlocutor the country level, respecting the balance of the pillars in the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolutions 72/279, 75/233 and 79/226.

Recommendation B. Member States that provide funding to the United Nations system in the Sahel are encouraged to support and incentivize coherent, cross-pillar and cross-border United Nations system approaches with their funding decisions.

To improve cross-pillar coherence and coordination, Member States are encouraged to:

- Strengthen strategic dialogue and collaboration between the United Nations system and donor/development partner coordination platforms such as the Sahel Alliance.
- Allocate resources to the United Nations system pooled funding mechanisms that have contributed most to improved United Nations system coordination in the Sahel (e.g., Peacebuilding Fund, Joint SDG Fund) and any future cross-pillar pooled funding mechanisms.
- Provide small but impactful voluntary contributions to the Resident Coordinator system and other mechanisms that enhance and strengthen cross-pillar coordination (e.g., the DPPA-UNDP peace and development advisor programme).
- Shift progressively to multi-year and lightly earmarked funding portfolios for the United Nations system in the Sahel that are compatible with cross-pillar approaches.

Recommendation C. Key intergovernmental bodies are encouraged to strengthen guidance and oversight for United Nations system cross-pillar coordination in the Sahel by focusing reporting requirements, scrutiny and guidance on cross-pillar results and performance.

Security Council:

- Consider a review of the status of the UNISS (S/RES/2056, op.28) within the UNOWAS mandate (in consideration of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 80/251 on *Mandate creation, implementation and review for an efficient and effective United Nations* (2026)).
- Request that future Secretary-General reporting on the implementation of UNOWAS mandate objective 3 is de-coupled from the UNISS (2013) and covers, instead, the support provided by UNOWAS to United Nations system cross-pillar coordination (see Recommendation 1).

Economic and Social Council:

- Consider separation of the Sahel agenda item from South Sudan and a stand-alone Secretary-General report on the Sahel region.
- Request that the Secretary-General report on the Sahel region has a strengthened focus on cross-pillar coherence and collective results (rather than single entity activity aggregation against UNISS pillars).

Peacebuilding Commission:

- Consider allocating additional time to the Sahel as a sub-region within the PBC programme of work.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a village with several buildings and parked vehicles is visible on a patch of dry, brownish ground. Beyond the village, a large area of land is completely submerged in floodwater, which has a distinct blueish tint. The background shows more green fields and scattered trees under a clear sky.

Introduction

1. Introduction

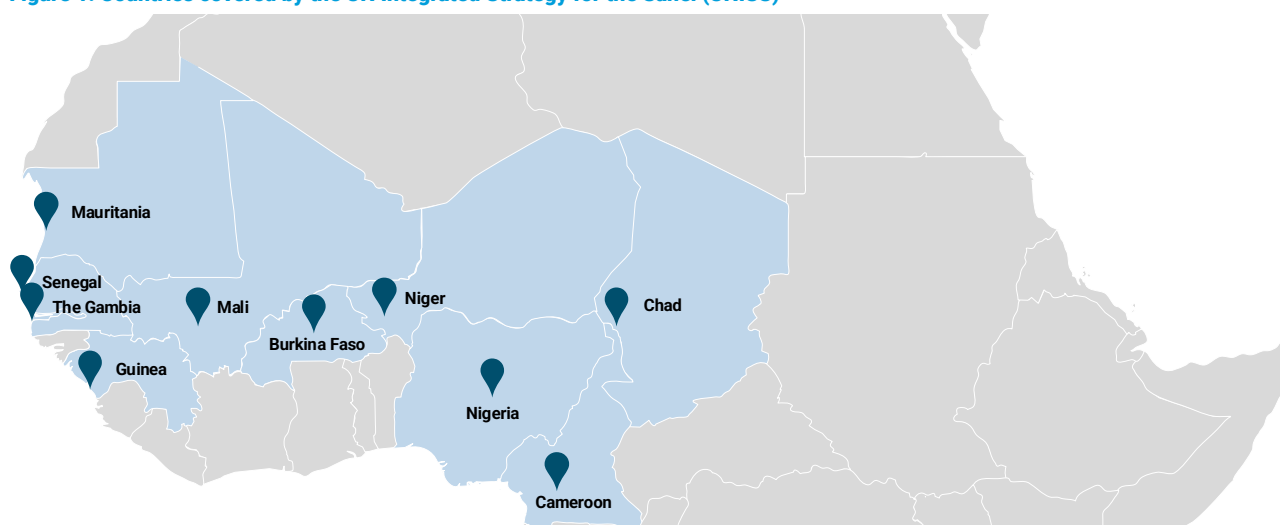
Purpose and objectives

1. The UNSDG System-wide Evaluation Office (SWE0) conducted this sub-regional, system-wide evaluation of United Nations system coordination in the Sahel (2013-2025) in response to a request from the Sahel Advisory Group. The evaluation was conducted at a moment of institutional transition for the United Nations system in the Sahel: following the conclusion of the assignment of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Development on 31 December 2025 and within the framework of the UN80 Initiative, with particular relevance to Work Package 11 ("Special envoy review") and Work Package 12 ("Regional platforms for integration"), among others. During the evaluation, a parallel Independent Strategic Review of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) was also initiated. The evaluation findings are intended to directly inform decisions about future coordination arrangements for the United Nations system in the Sahel.
2. The evaluation had three stated objectives. The first objective is to review and assess how United Nations coordination across the peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights pillars has been organized, governed, financed and communicated. The second is to assess the results achieved through coordination arrangements, identifying key gaps and potential areas for improvement. The third is to generate forward-looking, evidence-based recommendations and options to inform United Nations "reset" decisions.
3. The evaluation is not a holistic assessment of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) results, whose achievement depends on a multitude of factors beyond the UN's coordination arrangements. Nor is it a narrow performance review of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs). Its focus is on the United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel as a whole at global, regional and country levels.

Context

4. The Sahel sub-region, as defined by the UNISS and United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP),⁶ covers ten countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal (figure 1).

Figure 1. Countries covered by the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS)



Source: Evaluation team

6. UN. 2018. United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. Working together for a prosperous and peaceful Sahel. Summary.

The Sahel is inhabited by approximately 400 million people.⁷ The region hosts one of the fastest-growing populations in the world, projected to reach close to 700 million by 2050.⁸ It also has one of the youngest populations globally, with more than 65 per cent of its inhabitants under 25 years of age.⁹ Table 1 provides an overview by country. The Sahel has experienced an unprecedented convergence of interrelated and compounding crises, transforming it into one of the most fragile regions globally.

Table 1. UNISS countries overview

Country	Human Development Index 2025 (rank)	Pop. 2024 (millions)	Pop. growth rate 2024 (%)	Gross Domestic Product per capita 2024 (US\$)	Adult literacy % (year)	Global Inequality Index 2023	Poverty gap	Political violence events 2025
Burkina Faso	0.459 (186)	23.5	2.2	982	41% (2023)	0.555	12.5% (2020)	1,314
Cameroon	0.588 (155)	29.1	2.6	1,830	73% (2018)	0.558	8.2% (2020)	2,007
Chad	0.416 (190)	20.3	4.9	662	31% (2019)	0.670	12.7% (2022)	131
Guinea	0.500 (179)	14.8	2.4	1,695	40% (2018)	0.609	2.5% (2018)	81
Mali	0.419 (188)	24.5	2.9	1,095	35% (2018)	0.612	9.6% (2021)	1,520
Mauritania	0.563 (163)	5.17	2.9	2,110	60% (2020)	0.603	2.5% (2019)	15
Niger	0.419 (188)	27.6	3.3	735	36% (2022)	0.591	18.6% (2021)	523
Nigeria	0.560 (164)	232.7	2.1	1,084	70% (2024)	0.677	13% (2022)	4,539
Senegal	0.530 (169)	18.5	2.3	1,773	50% (2023)	0.490	4.2% (2021)	27
The Gambia	0.524 (170)	2.76	2.3	871	52% (2021)	0.578	5.9% (2020)	5

Sources: UNDP Human Development Index, World Bank, Gender Inequality Index, and Armed Conflict and Location Data (ACLED)

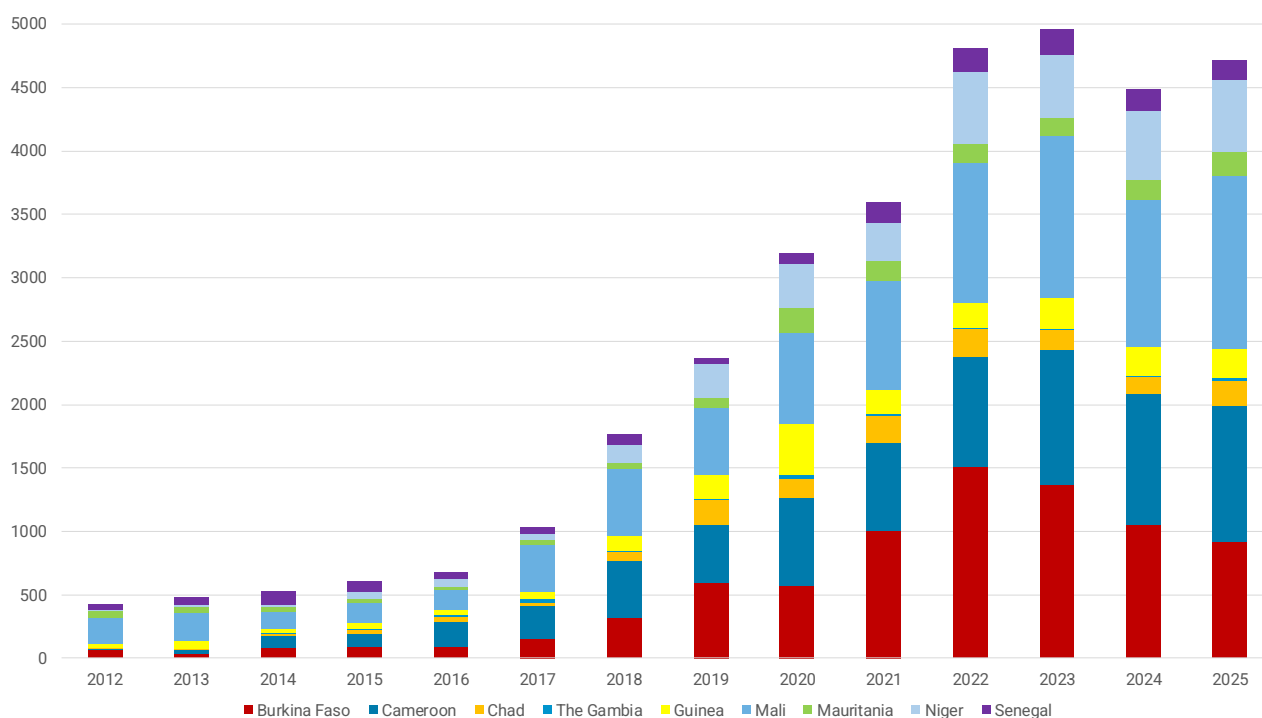
5. **Deterioration of the security situation:** While countries in the Sahel experienced relative stability during much of the 2000s, the 2012 crisis in Mali, a separatist uprising and an unconstitutional change of government that destabilized the north of the country, followed by the spread of terrorist and other armed groups, marked a critical turning point for regional stability. Since then, the region has witnessed a marked increase in violent incidents, including battles, protest and violence against civilians. In response to this deteriorating situation, a range of international peacekeeping and counterterrorism initiatives were deployed, including the French operations Serval (2013-2014) and Barkhane (2014-2022), the European Task Force Takuba (2020-2022), and the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) (2013-2023). Following the drawdown and withdrawal of these missions, insecurity has persisted across the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region and the Lake Chad Basin, while the geographical spread of violence has increasingly affected the coastal West African countries (figure 2). Notably, the Sahel accounted for approximately 51 per cent of global terrorism-related deaths in 2024, with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger among the countries most affected worldwide.¹⁰ The evolving security situation in Mali illustrates the fragility of stabilization gains achieved during the evaluated period: recurrent shifts in territorial control and continued insecurity underscore the difficulty of sustaining progress.

7. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2023. Human Development Report Sahel.

8. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) Population Division. 2024. World Population Prospects 2024.

9. UNDP. 2023. Human Development Report Sahel.

10. Institute for Economics and Peace. 2026. Global Terrorism Index 2026.

Figure 2. Number of violent events registered by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data in the Sahel (2012-2025)

Source: ACLED¹¹

6. **Erosion of state presence and territorial fragmentation:** A feature of the Sahel security crisis, insufficiently captured by event-based conflict data alone, is the progressive erosion of effective state presence across large portions of the sub-region's territory. In Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria's north-east, armed groups have established sustained control or operational dominance over rural areas and border zones well beyond what conflict event tallies suggest, leaving a substantial share of the population most in need outside the reach of state services, security forces and, critically, international actors including the United Nations system. This territorial fragmentation is not a temporary disruption but a condition of the operating environment that any coordination arrangements must contend with.

7. **Political instability:** Political instability has further compounded the region's challenges, with a series of unconstitutional changes of government since 2012. Several of these events have resulted in significant geopolitical realignments at both regional and global levels, alongside a deterioration of domestic socioeconomic conditions.¹² The events in Mali and Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022) and Niger (2023) have posed severe challenges to the existing regional Cooperation Frameworks, straining relations with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and Western partners. These developments coincided with the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in September 2023, followed by the formal withdrawal of all three AES states from ECOWAS, announced January 2024, effective January 2025.

8. **Changing regional security architecture:** In parallel, the progressive withdrawal of French forces, the European Task Force Takuba and MINUSMA by 2023, together with the expanding presence of alternative economic and security partners – including Russia, Türkiye and United Arab Emirates (UAE) among others – has fundamentally reshaped the regional security architecture, leading to major vacuums further exploited by armed groups.¹³

9. **Climate stress:** The increasing frequency and severity of extreme climatic events, including prolonged droughts and devastating floods, have significantly undermined agricultural production and exacerbated

11. ACLED. Number of political violence events by country and year: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

12. Centre for Preventative Action. 4 September 2025. Violent Extremism in the Sahel.

13. Centre for Preventative Action. 4 September 2025. Violent Extremism in the Sahel.

food insecurity and socioeconomic local structures. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), average temperatures in the Sahel are projected to rise by at least 2°C by 2040, with profound economic, social and security implications that are expected to further destabilize the region.¹⁴ For instance, in 2024, severe flooding in Niger affected approximately 1.5 million people, destroying assets nationwide, including an estimated 150,000 houses and thousands of hectares of cultivated lands.¹⁵ In the last decade, climate change increasingly undermined livelihoods, driving displacement and food crises, while humanitarian needs expanded sharply across Central Sahel.

10. **Economic conditions:** While the 2010s decade initially saw moderate economic growth, progress remained uneven and fragile. Gains in education, health and infrastructure were constrained by widespread poverty, limited institutional capacity and the rapid expansion of humanitarian needs driven by conflict-related displacement and recurrent climate shocks. By 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted economic activity, deepened fiscal pressures and exposed pre-existing vulnerabilities including debt distress. In 2021-2022, modest economic rebounds followed the pandemic-induced recession, supported by rising commodity prices and extractive industries, but growth remained largely non-inclusive. From 2023 to 2025, development trajectories remained uneven, with moderate economic growth continuing alongside deep social and environmental challenges. Although countries such as Niger, Senegal, Guinea and Mauritania recorded strong gross domestic product (GDP) growth driven by hydrocarbons, mining and infrastructure investment, poverty, unemployment and inequality remained widespread. Finally, the Sahel is experiencing rapid population growth that is outpacing governments' ability to provide basic services, contributing to rising vulnerability and displacement across the region.¹⁶ Youth face particularly severe challenges, with limited job opportunities and high unemployment undermining stability and increasing the risk of marginalization and social unrest.¹⁷ Gender inequality remains deeply entrenched, as highlighted by the World Bank and global assessments, with women and girls disproportionately affected by poverty, insecurity and restricted economic opportunities in the Sahel.¹⁸

11. **Humanitarian situation:** As a result of these intersecting crises, humanitarian needs have surged across the Sahel. At the time of this evaluation, the region hosts an estimated 5.8 million internally displaced people, while more than 31.3 million people in the region were in acute need of humanitarian assistance.¹⁹ Populations have faced large-scale displacement, acute food insecurity and climate-induced livelihood collapse, resulting in severe and multi-dimensional vulnerabilities. These dynamics have further amplified regional instability and heightened security risks across Africa.

International engagement

12. Since 2012, official development assistance (ODA) for the Sahel has been substantial, although recent years have been marked by the gradual disengagement of several major international partners. Funding levels increased steadily until 2022, with a predominant focus on development assistance rather than on humanitarian response (figures 3 to 6). The total of official development assistance channelled to UNISS countries (2012-2024) from OECD-DAC members through United Nations channels accounted for about 4 per cent of total official development assistance in the Sahel countries in 2015-2022.²⁰ Peacekeeping expenditures under MINUSMA remained relatively stable until the end of its mandate, amounting to approximately US\$ 1 to 1.2 billion annually between 2014 and 2022. While comprehensive data on the most recent trends (2025 data) are not yet available, reduction in official development assistance, combined with the political repercussions

14. Alliance Sahel. (retrieved May 2026). The Sahel and Challenges of Climate Change.

15. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2024. Niger Flash Update, 16 October.

16. UNDP. 2024. Sahel Human Development Report 2023.

17. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2022. Building resilience in the Sahel region through job creation for youth. Bridging the humanitarian, development and peace nexus in the context of fragility.

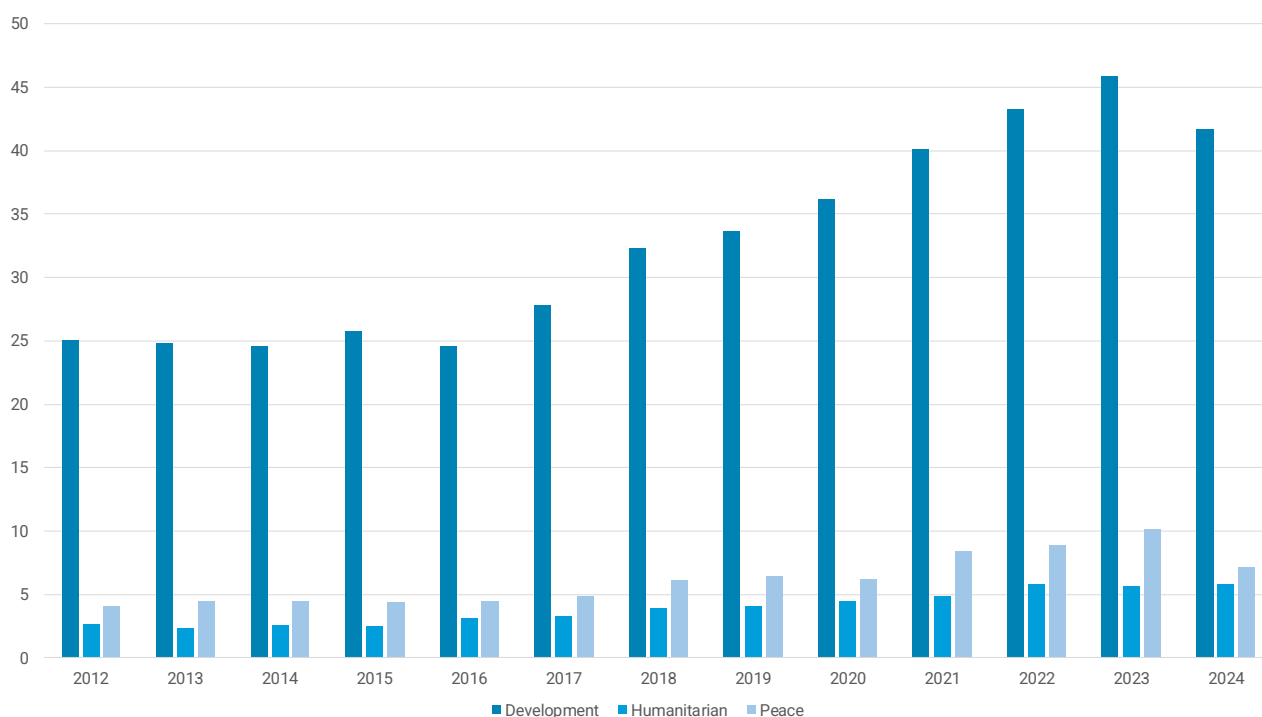
18. UN Women. 2025. Sahel Gender Compact. Gender Mainstreaming in Planning and Response in the Sahel.

19. OCHA. 2025. Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview (HNRO) 2025.

20. OSCDS. 2022. Sahel Vision Paper. Transformational change in the Sahel – managing the transitions.

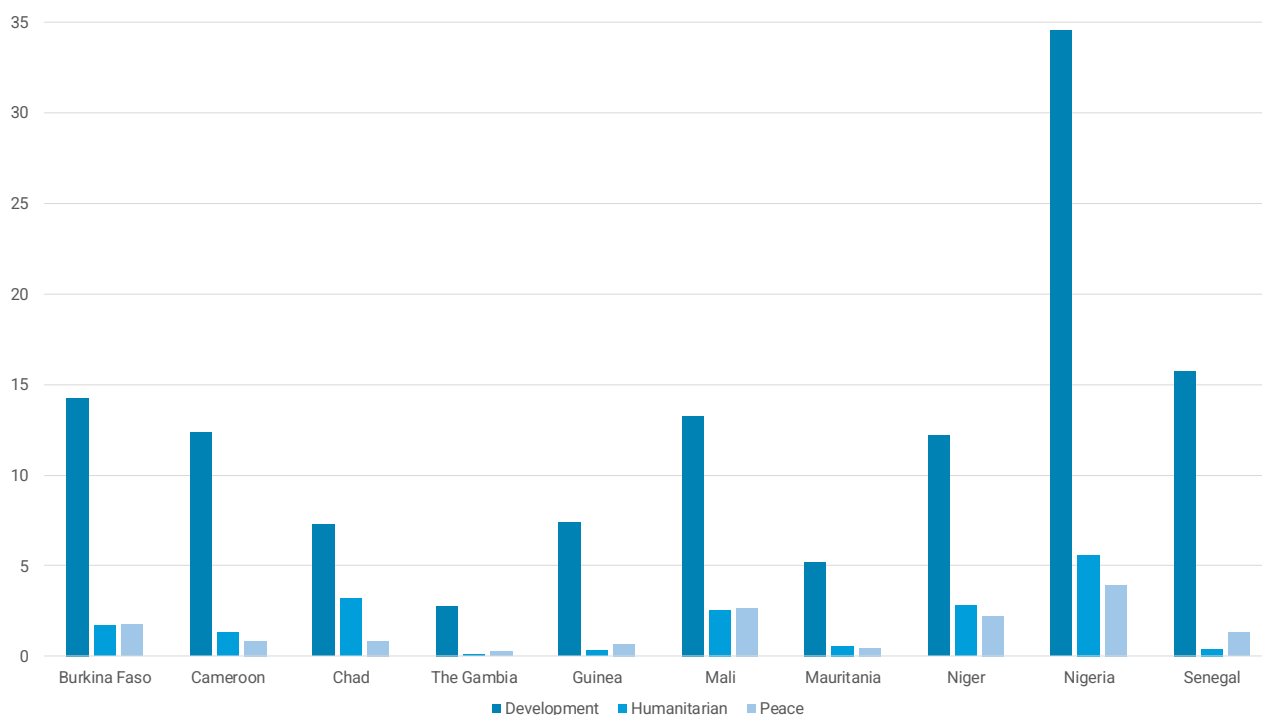
of successive unconstitutional changes of government, has led to a sharp decline in international support to Sahelian countries, although several partners have also gradually begun to re-engage in recent years.

Figure 3. Official development assistance channelled to UNISS countries (2012-2024) by total of OECD-DAC members (US\$ millions)

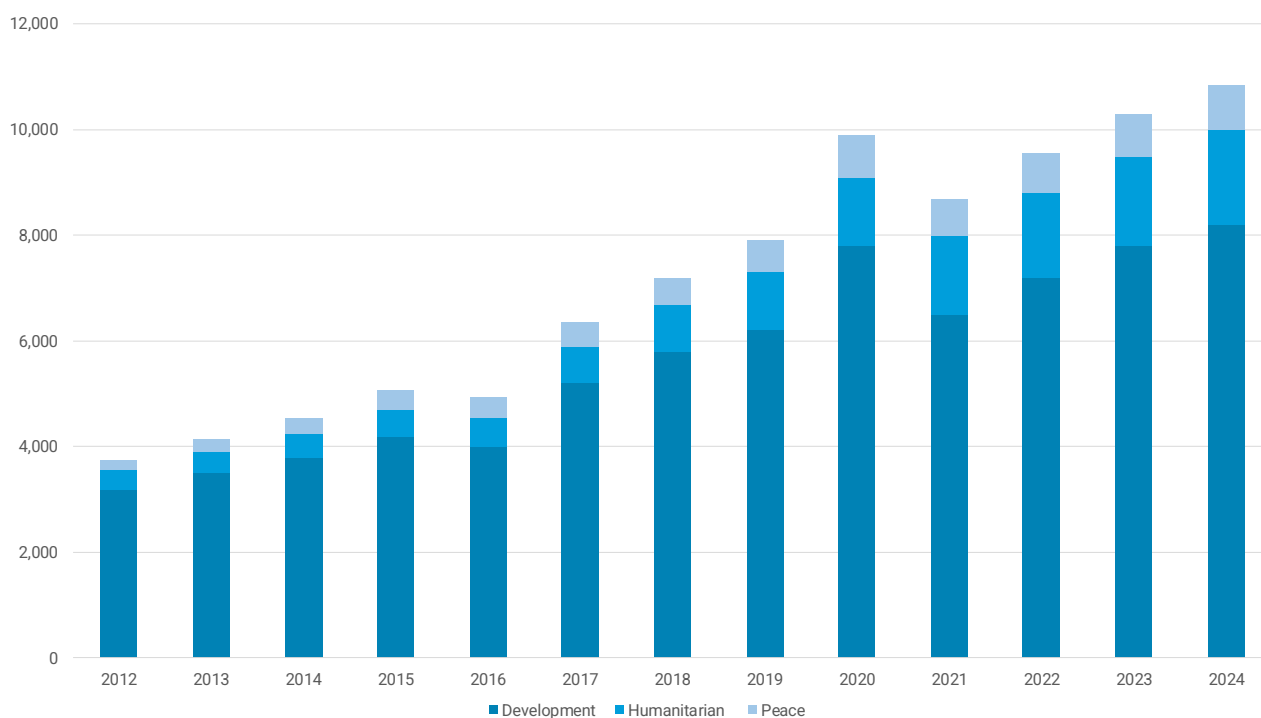


Source: Evaluation based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS Aid Activities Database)

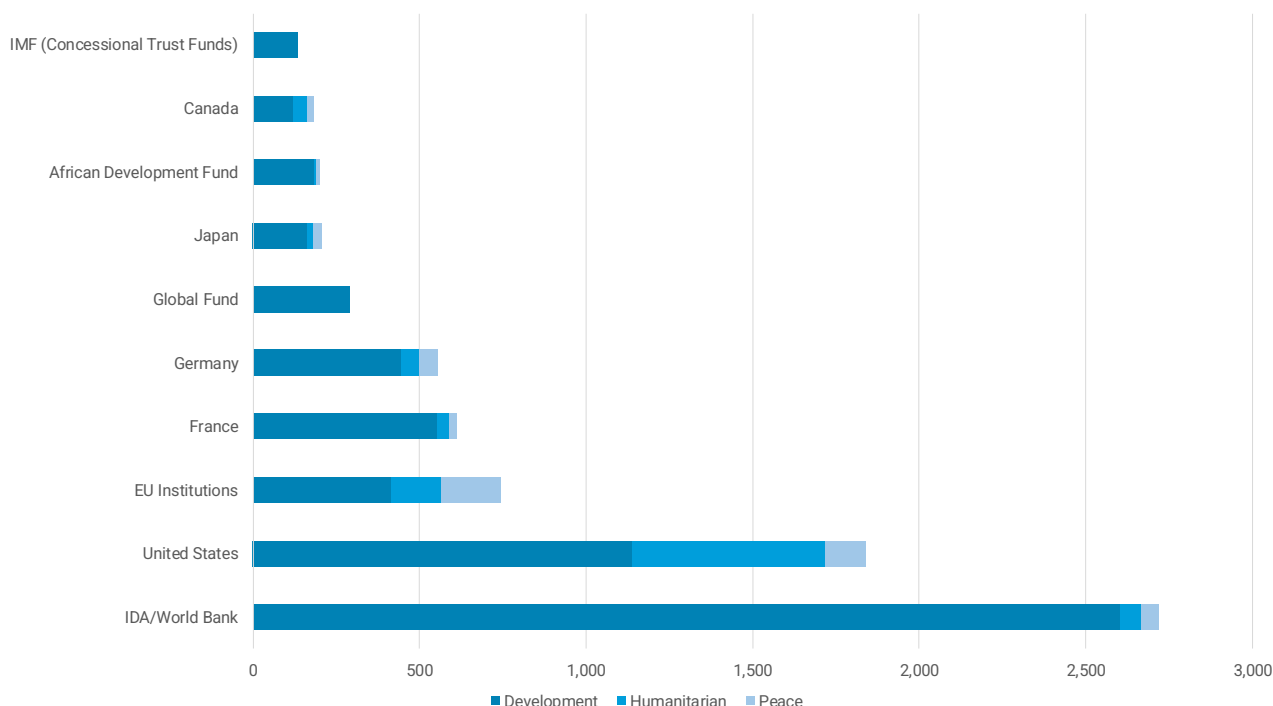
Figure 4. Official development assistance channelled to UNISS countries (2012-2024) per country (from OECD-DAC countries) (US\$ millions)



Source: Evaluation based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS Aid Activities Database)

Figure 5. Official development assistance disbursement to UNISS countries by year according to humanitarian, development or peace programmes (2012-2024) (US\$ millions)

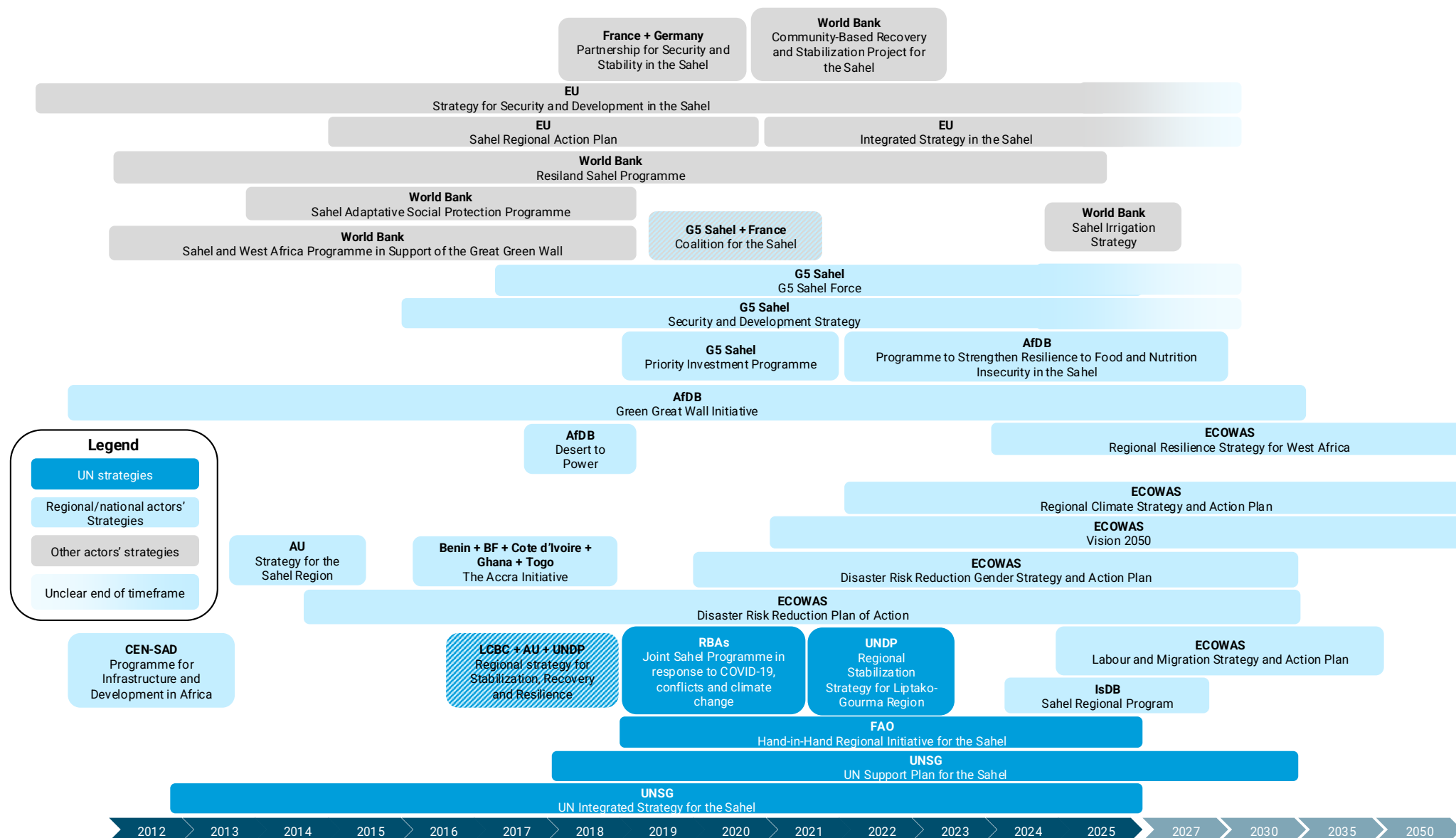
Source: Evaluation based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS Aid Activities Database)

Figure 6. Official development assistance disbursement to UNISS countries by top ten donors according to humanitarian, development or peace programmes (2012-2024) (US\$ millions)

Source: Evaluation based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS Aid Activities Database)

13. Alongside official development assistance flows, a diverse range of regional strategies from bilateral, multilateral and regional organizations shaped international engagement (figure 7).

Figure 7. Regional strategies in the Sahel



Source: Evaluation team

United Nations system coordination arrangements

14. The coordination arrangements of the United Nations system in the Sahel sub-region were built incrementally, in direct response to crises, and were overhauled at least twice before reaching the configuration that was in place at the end of 2025. The evaluated period 2013-2025 includes at least four distinct phases of coordination arrangements.

15. **Origins:** The 2012 Mali crisis prompted the first United Nations system coordination response. Two coordination instruments were established almost simultaneously. In April 2012, the Emergency Relief Coordinator appointed a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, charged with coordinating the emergency humanitarian response across nine countries²¹, mobilizing financing and bridging the gap between emergency response and longer-term development action. The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator's role was explicitly cross-pillar from the outset: not merely to manage relief but also to build resilience and engage development actors alongside the humanitarian response. In parallel, the Secretary-General appointed a Special Envoy for the Sahel in late 2012, establishing a dedicated political interlocutor at the senior-most level. The following year, Security Council resolution 2056 provided the mandate for the creation of a system-wide strategic framework, and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was presented in a Secretary-General report to the Council in 2013 (S/2013/354). Structured around three pillars — governance, security and resilience — UNISS established the political and strategic rationale for collective United Nations engagement across the ten countries. MINUSMA was deployed the same year, adding a peacekeeping presence that would shape the operating context for United Nations system coordination in Mali and the Central Sahel until its withdrawal in 2023.

16. **UNOWAS merger (2016):** The period from 2013 to 2016 was marked by institutional overlap. The United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), established in 2002 as the UN's first regional-scope special political mission, had long served as the United Nations system's primary political interlocutor with ECOWAS and the Security Council on West Africa. The Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES) operated alongside it, focused specifically on the Sahel crisis and the UNISS. In January 2016, the Security Council requested that the two offices merge into a single entity: the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). The merger was intended to generate synergies, but it was not uncontested. The G5 Sahel — Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger — opposed it, reflecting an early tension between the West Africa-wide framing of UNOWAS and the Sahel-specificity that OSES had embodied. A UNOWAS liaison office in Nouakchott was established as a partial concession. Upon merger, the UNOWAS Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) position, and the working-level functions supporting it, effectively absorbed the Sahel-specific functions of the former OSES. The consolidation coincided with a 2017 independent review of UNISS commissioned by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA),²² which highlighted several challenges in the implementation of UNISS and the coordination arrangements. The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator position, which had provided a cross-pillar humanitarian anchor for sub-regional coordination, was abolished by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 2017.

17. **The UNSP and the repositioning of the United Nations development system:** The 2017 UNISS independent review concluded that implementation had been insufficient and that a more operational instrument was needed to revive the UNISS. The result was the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP),²³ adopted in 2018, which translated the broad strategic objectives of the UNISS into six priority areas: cross-border cooperation; prevention and sustaining peace; inclusive growth; climate action; renewable energy; and women and youth empowerment. It also established a more structured sub-regional coordination apparatus. A Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the Sahel was appointed in 2018 but remained only for one year. To support UNSP delivery, a dedicated UNISS Implementation Support Unit (ISU) was

21. All of the countries covered by the UNISS with the exception of Guinea.

22. Internal review of the UNISS commissioned by United Nations DPA in 2016.

23. At the time of writing the evaluation report, the evaluation team only had access to the Summary of the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. Several interlocutors were not aware of the longer version of the report indicating that the full document of the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel was not socialized widely with the actors involved in its implementation.

established in 2019-2020, hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), providing technical backstopping and monitoring capacity to the sub-regional coordination arrangements.

18. The Sahel coordination arrangements evolved against the backdrop of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) in 2015 that established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the overarching normative framework for the United Nations development system, explicitly foregrounding national ownership and integrated, country-led development responses. The 2016, 2020 and 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy reviews (QCPRs) (A/RES/71/243, A/RES/75/233, A/RES/79/226) reinforced this normative framework, as the benchmark against which the United Nations development system would be assessed.

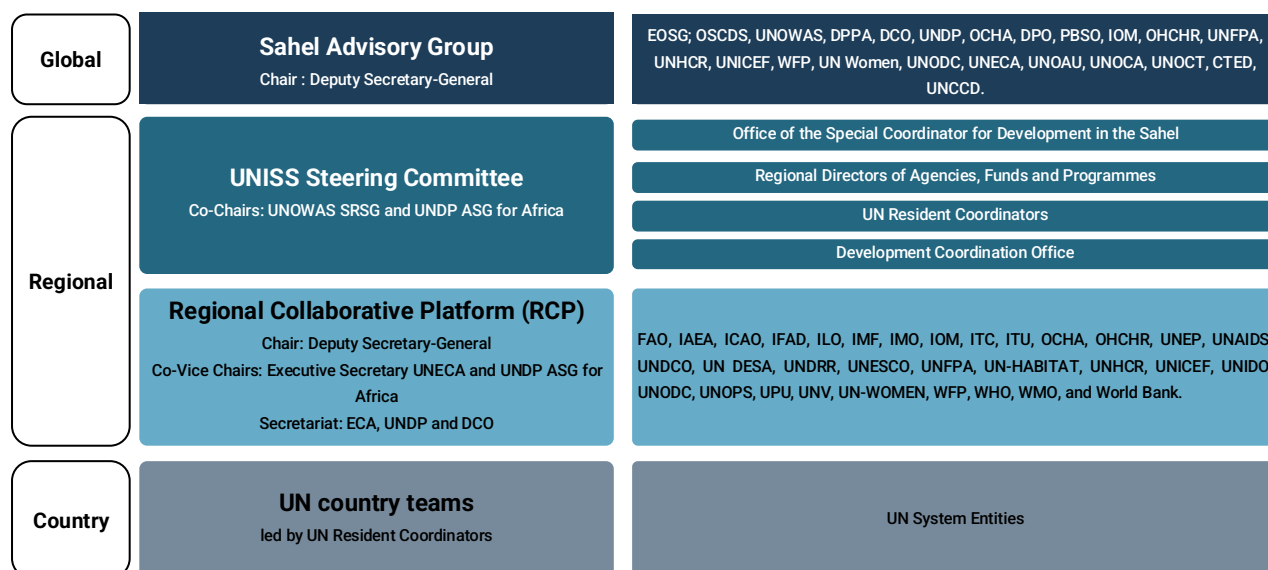
19. This further led to a United Nations system-wide institutional reform of significance. The 2018 General Assembly resolution 72/279 (June 2018), on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, “reinvigorated” the role of the Resident Coordinator system, making Resident Coordinators accountable directly to the Secretary-General rather than to a single entity. This established, for the first time, a genuinely independent United Nations system-wide coordination function at the country level. The resolution also called for a “revamped” regional approach, leading to the creation of Regional Collaborative Platforms, to optimize functions and enhance collaboration at the regional and sub-regional levels. The repositioning introduced new accountability mechanisms for United Nations country teams and embedded the expectation that United Nations system entity representatives would report both to their own entity's management structures and to the Resident Coordinator for collective Cooperation Framework delivery.

20. **OSCDs (2021-2025):** The most recent and most institutionally significant addition to the coordination arrangements was the establishment of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs) in 2021, following, but not directly mandated by, Security Council Resolution 2391 (2017) and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2020/2. The first Special Coordinator was appointed by the Secretary-General in early 2021 at the rank of Under-Secretary-General. The Special Coordinator contributed to Secretary-General reports to ECOSOC (on coherent and integrated United Nations system support to the Sahel region) and to the Security Council (on the implementation of the mandate of UNOWAS) but had no formal reporting line to either intergovernmental body. In 2025, the Secretary-General decided to end the assignment of the Special Coordinator and the associated office in the UN80 Initiative report “Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver”. The assignment of the Special Coordinator concluded on 31 December 2025. From 1 January 2026, the regional director of the Development Coordination Office (DCO) Africa is the officer-in-charge of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDs), with a planned transition period of six months to allow for an orderly handover of the functions of the office to the DCO and other entities as appropriate.

21. From 2021 to 2025, the coordination arrangements for the United Nations system in the Sahel operated across three levels. At the global, headquarters level, the Sahel Advisory Group, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and composed of principals from across the United Nations system, provided strategic oversight and high-level political direction. It was tasked with providing strategic direction for UNISS implementation, including OSCDS, and served as the apex mechanism within the UNISS coordination arrangements. At the sub-regional level, the UNISS Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) of UNOWAS and the UNDP regional director for Africa, brought together the regional directors of United Nations system entities, and all ten Resident Coordinators; the OSCDS served as its secretariat. The Africa Regional Collaborative Platform provided a wider continental coordination vehicle chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. At the country level, ten United Nations country teams, each led by a Resident Coordinator (simultaneously the Humanitarian Coordinator in six of the ten UNISS countries²⁴) constituted the primary delivery interface of the coordination arrangements. A simplified representation of the arrangements is provided in figure 8.

24. In Senegal, Guinea, Gambia, Mauritania, the RC is not double-hatted.

Figure 8. Simplified United Nations coordination arrangements in the Sahel Region (as of end 2025)



Source: Evaluation team

United Nations system portfolio in the Sahel

22. At the time of the evaluation, no single database could provide a comprehensive picture of the overall United Nations system portfolio in the Sahel across the peace and security, humanitarian, development and human rights pillars.²⁵ The most complete aggregation of United Nations system expenditure in the ten UNISS countries is provided by the Chief Executives Board (CEB) Financial Statistics database²⁶ (reported annually by United Nations system entity headquarters), with breakdown by country, year, United Nations system entity, and function (broadly analogous with “pillar” in this context²⁷). The overall trends can be summarized as follows:

- **Overall expenditures:** Expenditure of the United Nations system in the ten UNISS countries grew significantly from around US\$ 1.9bn in 2013 to more than US\$ 5bn in 2022 and 2023, before beginning to decline in 2024 (to US\$ 4.7bn). While data for 2025 are not yet available, a further decline is anticipated in line with global official development assistance trends. Throughout the evaluation period (2013-2024), expenditure shares in Mali and Nigeria were closely and consistently followed by expenditure shares in Niger and Chad.
- **Expenditure by country:** From 2013 to 2018 the country with the largest share of United Nations system expenditures was Nigeria (accounting for between 22 and 33 per cent of annual spend). From 2019 to 2024 the country with the largest share was Mali (accounting for 27-37 per cent of annual spend)²⁸
- **Expenditure by United Nations system entity:** From 2013 to 2016, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was the largest United Nations entity by expenditure in the sub-region, representing 28 to 32 per cent of the United Nations system expenditure, followed closely by WFP. From 2017 onwards WFP was generally larger, outspending UNICEF by around US\$ 400m (or 8 percentage points) in 2023. From 2019 to 2024, DPO-MINUSMA was the largest single entity with annual expenditures of

25. See EQ 3 for further analysis of this constraint to country and sub-regional level coordination.

26. United Nations System Chief Executives Board financial statistics.

27. Peace operations, development assistance, humanitarian assistance, global agenda and specialized assistance, other. However, these definitions may not be consistently applied by United Nations entities across the system. ‘Other’ refers to a combination of expenses reported under the old Technical Cooperation & Normative and Treaty-related & Knowledge creation activities expense category (function) between 2010 and 2017. As of 2018, following the new data standards, these functions do not exist as a separate category anymore.

28. It is possible that this change is explained by a change in reporting practice relating to peacekeeping operations – DPO-MINUSMA appears in the dataset only from 2019 onwards.

US\$ 1.2 bn and between 25 and 28 per cent of the United Nations system's expenditures in the sub-region. Other trends include a general decline in share of expenditure by UNDP (12 per cent annually between 2013 and 2017, declining to 7 per cent annually between 2018 and 2024) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (12 per cent annually between 2013 and 2017, declining to 5 per cent annually between 2018 and 2024). The share of United Nations system expenditure by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) remained comparatively stable throughout. During the period, the top ten entities²⁹ accounted for 96 per cent of expenditures, while the remaining 4 per cent was spent by 21 other United Nations system entities.³⁰

- **Expenditure by function or pillar:** Expenditure data by pillar are presented globally by the Chief Executives Board statistics (without regional or country breakdown). Data shared with the evaluation team by DCO provided an indication of the balance between United Nations system humanitarian and development spend in the ten UNISS countries in 2024: 66 per cent humanitarian (US\$ 2.26bn) and 34 per cent development (US\$ 1.17bn).

23. The most comprehensive system-wide source of information on United Nations programme implementation at the country level is provided by the UN-INFO database. This is in the form of Cooperation Framework joint workplans within the UN-INFO database (available from around 2020), through which UNCT entities and Cooperation Framework signatories are expected to provide information on their country-level portfolio against the outcomes and outputs of the Cooperation Framework.³¹

24. By March 2026, aggregation of Cooperation Framework joint workplan data across the ten UNISS countries in the current cycles reveals an estimated portfolio of some US\$ 7 billion, against a "required" Cooperation Framework envelope of US\$ 12.1 billion – a 58 per cent mobilization rate. Aggregation of the previous Cooperation Framework cycle data shows a mobilization rate of 72 per cent of their planned envelope, with significant limitations, including a total absence of funding data in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (table 2).

Table 2. Mobilization rate for the Cooperation Framework in the UNISS Sahel countries

Country	CF cycle (prev.)	Required (US\$m)	Available (US\$m)	Mobilization rate	CF cycle (current)	Required (US\$m)	Available (US\$m)	Mobilization rate
Burkina Faso	No data				2023–2026	1,901	1,324	70%
Cameroon	2018–2021	22	14	62%	2022–2026	784	339	43%
Chad	2017–2023	1,182	686	58%	2024–2026	1,566	603	39%
Guinea	2018–2023	403	324	80%	2024–2028	359	258	72%
Mali					2020–2026	2,469	1,417	57%

29. WFP, UNICEF, DPO, UNHCR, UNDP, WHO, United Nations Secretariat, UNFPA, IOM, FAO.

30. The remaining 4 per cent includes the combined expenditures of 21 entities including some UNISS pillar co-leads (United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UN Women, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNODC, the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United Nations University (UNU), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Institute for Teaching and learning (UNITAR), the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), United Nations Volunteers (UNV).

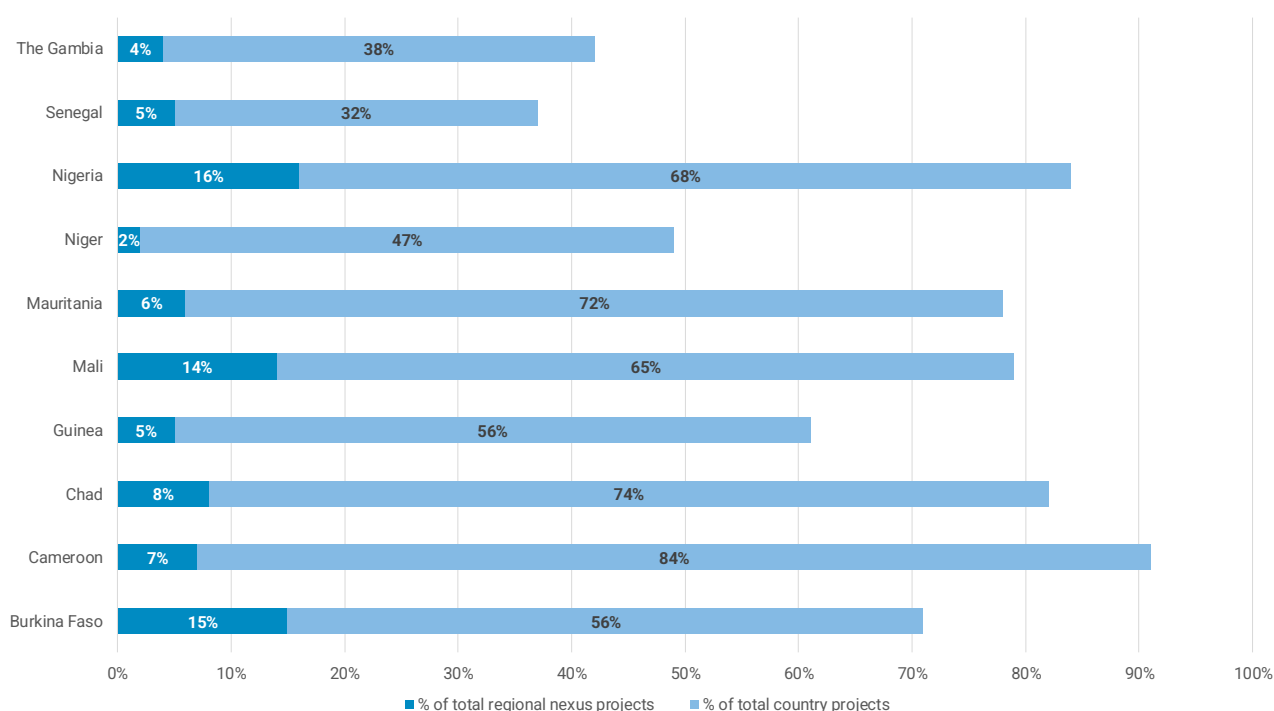
31. Joint workplan data can be assumed to capture a large majority of United Nations system country-level activities in the development pillar, with partial coverage of humanitarian, human rights and peace and security pillars. See system-wide evaluation on progress towards a "new generation of United Nations country teams" (SWE0-2025-001) for in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of cooperation framework joint workplans as a system-wide planning and reporting tool. As explained under EQ 3 findings in this evaluation, data quality and completeness continues to vary considerably across countries.

Country	CF cycle (prev.)	Required (US\$m)	Available (US\$m)	Mobilization rate	CF cycle (current)	Required (US\$m)	Available (US\$m)	Mobilization rate
Mauritania	2018-2023	355	271	76%	2024-2027	428	268	63%
Niger	No data				2023-2027	1,495	746	50%
Nigeria	2018-2022	3,931	3,008	77%	2023-2027	2,554	1,673	66%
Senegal	2019-2023	386	200	52%	2024-2028	367	263	72%
The Gambia	2017-2023	81	70	87%	2024-2028	127	93	74%
Total		6,360	4,573	72%		12,050	6,984	58%

Source: DCO analysis of UN-INFO joint workplan data, March 2026

25. In addition to the data available on the Cooperation Frameworks, a 5W mapping³² was carried out jointly by OSDCS and OCHA in 2022 that provides a snapshot of the extent to which the United Nations system's portfolio included either cross-pillar or inter-entity collaboration in each of the ten Sahelian countries (figure 9).

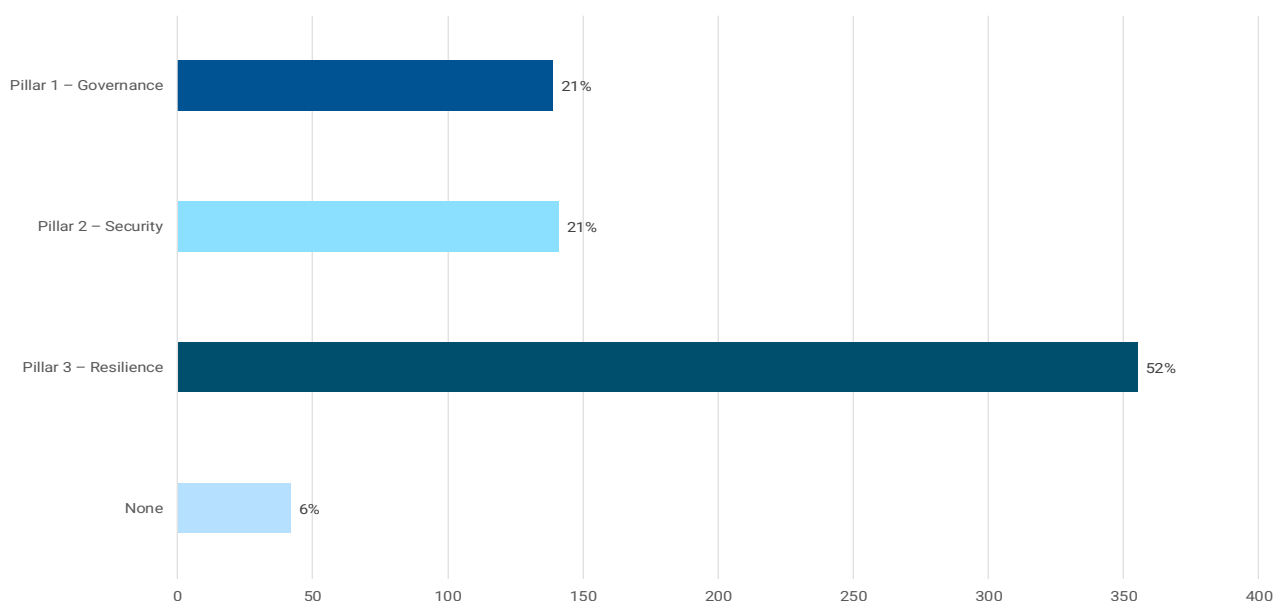
Figure 9. Percentage of cross-pillar or inter-entity collaboration in the United Nations portfolio in the Sahel region



Source: OSDCS. 2022. A Narrative of the 5W Mapping of the United Nations Geographic and Operational Presence in the UNISS Sahel Region.

26. The 5W mapping demonstrated that the UN's portfolio funding was largely focused on Pillar 3 (resilience) with 52 per cent of the portfolio in 2022 dedicated to this pillar (figure 10).

32. OSDCS. 2022. A Narrative of the 5W Mapping of the United Nations Geographic and Operational Presence in the UNISS Sahel Region.

Figure 10. Distribution of the United Nations system portfolio across the UNISS pillars (2022)

Source: OSDCS. 2022. *A Narrative of the 5W Mapping of the United Nations Geographic and Operational Presence in the UNISS Sahel Region*.

Evaluation scope

27. **Substantive scope:** The evaluation assessed the methods and approaches by which the United Nations system sought to coordinate and operationalize support for UNISS objectives, covering all participants in the coordination arrangements across headquarters, regional, sub-regional and country levels, and their relationships with external partners. It focused on cross-pillar coordination: the term deliberately adopted in place of “nexus,” given the divergent and contested interpretations of the latter term across the United Nations system. The differing conceptualizations of “nexus” were themselves treated as a line of enquiry by the evaluation. The UNISS itself is structured around three pillars: governance, security and resilience. The UNSP refers to a “humanitarian-security-development” nexus. UNCTs most commonly use “humanitarian-development-peace” framing. The four pillars of the United Nations system as set out in the context of the UN80 Initiative are: peace and security; humanitarian actions; sustainable development; and human rights.

28. **Geographic scope:** The evaluation covered all ten UNISS countries. A sample of four countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea) was selected for a more in-depth data collection and analysis. The criteria for selection included: (i) centrality to the UNISS mandate since 2013 and especially since 2020; (ii) presence of active multi or cross-pillar United Nations coordination; (iii) geographic and political diversity; and (iv) accessibility for in-person data collection. The three Central Sahel countries fulfilled these criteria. Guinea was included as a coastal state sharing some geopolitical characteristics with the Central Sahel. In-person data collection was conducted in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger. Mali was not visited in-person due to security constraints but covered remotely. Other countries were covered through the online survey, desk review and remote key informant interviews. At the sub-regional hub level, the focus of the evaluation was organizations and institutions in Dakar (in-person), with Abuja and Addis Ababa engaged through remote data collection.

29. **Temporal scope:** The evaluation covered the period from 2013 to 2025, applying a differentiated approach across three sub-periods. The 2013-2017 period is incorporated primarily as background context. The 2018-2020 period focused on the introduction of the UNSP, the UNISS Implementation Support Unit, and related coordination changes following the 2017 review of UNISS. The 2021-2025 period covered the introduction and duration of OSDCS and was the central focus of the evaluation: it was the period of most intense sub-regional coordination effort, flagship programme development and geopolitical disruption. Document availability and access to stakeholders with knowledge of the pre-2021 period was more limited, and in-depth analysis is correspondingly concentrated on the most recent period.

Approach and methodology



2. Approach and methodology

30. The evaluation was conducted between February and July 2026 and was organized in three phases: inception phase (February to March 2026), data collection and analysis phase, including in-person data collection in Senegal (Dakar Regional Hub), Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger (March to April 2026) and the synthesis and reporting phase, including a stakeholder workshop (May to July 2026). The evaluation employed a theory-based, mixed methods approach, using a modified contribution analysis framework.

Theory of change

31. The evaluation was guided by a reconstructed theory of change (ToC) developed during the inception phase through a synthesis of key strategy and policy documents including UNISS, the UNSP, successive coordination arrangements and instruments, evaluation reports and stakeholder consultations. As a reconstruction rather than an original design document, the theory of change sought to make explicit the implicit logic underlying United Nations coordination efforts since 2013. The theory of change is visualised in figure 11.

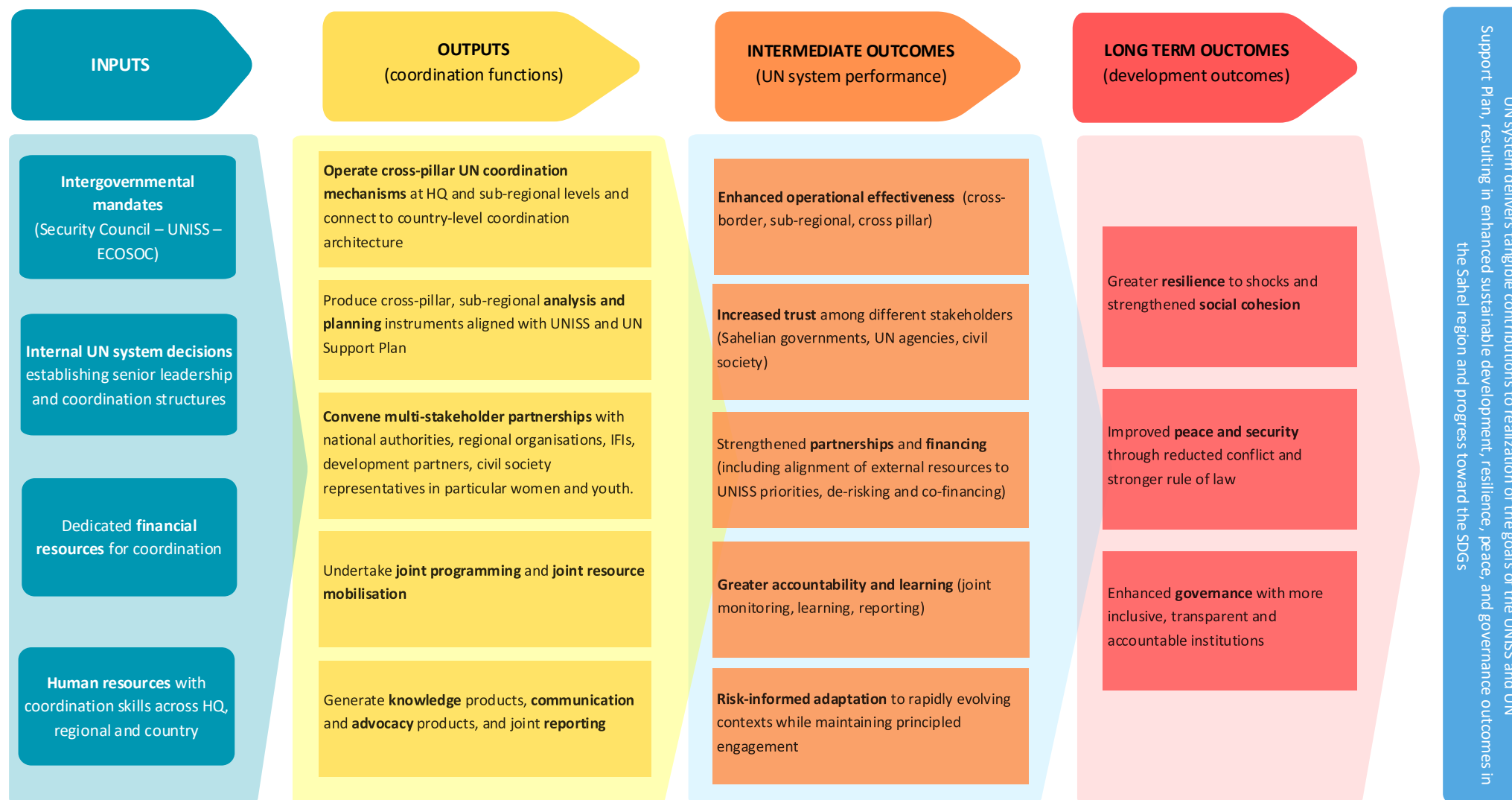
32. The theory of change posits that, given a set of inputs – intergovernmental mandates, internal United Nations decisions, dedicated financial resources and human capacity deployed across headquarters, regional, and country levels – the coordination arrangements generate five categories of outputs: cross-pillar coordination mechanisms; sub-regional analysis and planning instruments; multi-stakeholder partnership convening; joint programming and resource mobilization; and joint knowledge, communication and advocacy products. These outputs are expected to produce intermediate outcomes in the form of improved strategic coherence, enhanced operational effectiveness, increased trust, strengthened partnerships and financing, greater accountability and risk-informed adaptation. These intermediate outcomes are in turn posited to contribute to the long-term development goals of UNISS: sustainable development progress, greater resilience and social cohesion, improved peace and security, and enhanced governance.

33. The theory of change rests on six critical assumptions; each of which are tested by the evaluation questions and lines of inquiry. These are: that mandate authority and legitimacy are sufficient to influence behaviour; that the coordination arrangements are adequately resourced relative to the scope of the task; that United Nations entities are willing to subordinate institutional incentives to collective approaches; that Member State incentives and external partner behaviours support rather than undermine coordination; that sufficient operating space can be maintained amid security constraints and political volatility; that improved coordination coherence translates into better development outcomes and sub-regional coordination adds value beyond what country-level coordination alone can achieve. Where these assumptions do not hold, the causal chain from coordination inputs to development outcomes is likely to break down.

34. The word "expectations" is used throughout this report. The reconstructed theory of change provides a logical set of expectations against which sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination arrangements can be fairly and reasonably measured. However, the reconstruction of the theory of change and the subsequent data collection revealed that expectations for what sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination could and should achieve were neither uniform nor fully reconcilable across stakeholders. Expectations varied considerably among stakeholders and over time, including, non-exhaustively:

- Internal cross-pillar delivery within the United Nations system
- The United Nations system positioning itself as a convenor of the broader international community in its engagement with the Sahel
- Significant development resource mobilization for both the United Nations system and the region
- Providing platforms for the United Nations system to collectively partner with or support regional organizations or address specific cross-border issues.

Figure 11. Theory of change (reconstructed)



Source: Evaluation team

35. Where this report refers to "expectations" of coordination – whether met, unmet, or only partially met – this should be understood as shorthand for this plurality or combination of stakeholder perspectives rather than as a single, agreed standard against which performance can be objectively measured. The reconstructed theory of change presented below represents the evaluation's synthesis of the common threads across these expectations, structured around the level at which they are most clearly articulated in mandate documents, but does not imply that this synthesis was itself shared or agreed among stakeholders at the time.

Evaluation questions

36. The evaluation responds to five evaluation questions (EQs), structured around four OECD-DAC evaluation criteria – relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness – supplemented by a cross-cutting question on the factors that enabled or constrained coordination (EQ 5). Table 3 presents the evaluation questions and sub-questions. A full evaluation matrix connecting evaluation questions to lines of inquiry, data sources and analysis methods is provided in Annex IV.

Table 3. Evaluation questions

Evaluation criterion	Evaluation questions and sub-questions
Relevance	EQ 1. To what extent is United Nations system coordination aligned with the needs, priorities and evolving dynamics of the Sahel context?
	1.1. To what extent have the different United Nations system coordination arrangements been aligned with UNISS?
	1.2. To what extent has the United Nations system coordination architecture adapted to security and geopolitical shifts (including AES/ECOWAS dynamics), upheld principled engagement and protected operating space?
	1.3. To what extent are women, youth and vulnerable groups' needs integrated into United Nations system coordination?
Coherence	EQ 2. To what extent is United Nations system coordination in the Sahel internally and externally coherent?
	2.1. To what extent has United Nations system coordination improved vertical coherence (headquarters-regional-country levels)?
	2.2. To what extent has United Nations system coordination improved horizontal coherence (across different pillars and entities)?
	2.3. To what extent has United Nations system coordination been externally coherent (with non-United Nations actors in the Sahel)?
Efficiency	EQ 3. To what extent have sub-regional coordination roles and responsibilities, arrangements and functions been matched by the operational means – financial, human, institutional – required to deliver on expectations?
	3.1. To what extent have coordination roles and responsibilities, arrangements and functions been matched by financial and human resources required to deliver on expectations?
	3.2. To what extent have coordination roles and responsibilities, arrangements and functions been matched by institutional support to deliver on expectations?
	3.3. To what extent were the transaction costs of coordination perceived to be justified by the value generated through joint action?
	3.4. To what extent did accountability mechanisms and metrics exist to monitor coordination outcomes?
Effectiveness	EQ 4. To what extent has United Nations system coordination helped achieve results (versus entity business as usual)?
	4.1. To what extent has United Nations system coordination resulted in joint analysis (e.g. risk assessments, conflict analysis, climate change analysis) that informed collective action?
	4.2. To what extent has United Nations system coordination resulted in joint programming?
	4.3. To what extent has United Nations system coordination resulted in sub-regional approaches and cross-border interventions?
	4.4. To what extent has United Nations system coordination resulted in greater resource mobilization?
	4.5. To what extent has United Nations system coordination resulted in more effective partnerships with non-United Nations actors?
	4.6. To what extent has United Nations system coordination increased trust between United Nations and other actors?

Evaluation criterion	Evaluation questions and sub-questions
Effectiveness	EQ 5. What are the factors that enabled or constrained effective United Nations system coordination?
	5.1. To what extent and in which manner have the incentives of Member States, United Nations agencies and international financial institutions shaped cross-pillar coordination outcomes (e.g. access to funding, access to information, sovereignty, national interest, time-use, etc.)?
	5.2. To what extent did accountability mechanisms enable or constrain United Nations system coordination?

Note: In this report, findings related to EQ 5 have been merged with findings under EQs 2, 3 and 4, to reduce duplication and improve readability.

Data collection and analysis

37. Data collection combined six complementary methods applied across global, regional and country levels and all ten UNISS countries. These consisted of: a desk review of more than 1,030 documents covering strategic frameworks, joint workplans, annual reports and evaluations, including country programme evaluations (CPEs), from key United Nations entities operating in the sub-region (UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, FAO, and others where available) and academic literature; 94 key informant interviews and focus group discussions involving 183 participants; field missions to four countries as described above; an online survey with 146 responses from United Nations entities and other stakeholders across all ten UNISS countries; quantitative secondary data analysis drawing on multiple United Nations and international datasets; and a participatory workshop held in Dakar on 12 May 2026.

38. Analytical processes included context analysis with a political economy lens, content analysis, gap analysis and quantitative analysis of secondary data, including content analysis of the 1000+ documents with support of MAXQDA and artificial intelligence. A foresight methodology, drawing on Futures Wheel and Scenario Stress-Testing exercises, informed development of options and recommendations. A more detailed description of the methodology is available in Annex IV.

39. For each evaluation question, findings are supported by a balance of evidence assessment, which maps the strength, consistency and source diversity of the evidence against each evaluation question and its sub-questions and provides an indication of the confidence level that can be attached to each finding. These assessments are presented alongside the findings in Section 3.

Limitations

40. The evaluation was subject to several methodological and contextual constraints. Table 8 in Annex IV provides a detailed inventory of limitations. Some of the limitations include: a short timeline – four-month inception-to-report timeline, which constrained the depth of fieldwork across the ten UNISS countries; in-person data collection was only feasible in four countries, while the remaining assessments were conducted remotely; evidence from the 2013-2020 period was comparatively limited, compounded by the unavailability of several stakeholders involved during the earlier years and the risk of recall bias shaped by subsequent events. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement was uneven, including a 68 per cent response rate to interview requests (lower for national authorities with the exception of Guinea and Mali), limited participation in regional focus group discussions, a relatively low survey response rate (though with a total of 146 responses), and restricted non-governmental organization (NGO) involvement in most in-depth country studies. Fragmented documentation systems, the use of proxy indicators not originally designed for the evaluation, and the politically sensitive nature of the subject matter, may have contributed to an overrepresentation of United Nations perspectives in the data collected.

41. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned limitations, the evaluation team is confident regarding the findings and conclusions presented in this report because it was able to triangulate the information through the following methods:

- **Source triangulation:** Comparing information from different sources, for example, United Nations entities, Member States, partners and civil society
- **Method triangulation:** Comparing information collected by different methods, for example, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, document reviews and surveys
- **Geographic triangulation:** Comparing information collected from the ten UNISS countries as well as from the three different levels (headquarters, region and country).

42. A more detailed overview of the approach followed for each evaluation question, including an assessment of the strength of evidence for each sub-question, is provided in Annex IV.



Evaluation findings

3. Evaluation findings

43. This section covers the evaluation’s findings, comprising EQ 1 (relevance and adaptability); EQ 2 (coherence); EQ 3 (efficiency); EQ 4 (effectiveness), with evidence and findings on EQ 5 (factors) presented within the other evaluation questions.

EQ 1: To what extent is United Nations system coordination aligned with the needs, priorities and evolving dynamics of the Sahel context?

44. The evaluation assesses the relevance of United Nations system cross-pillar coordination for the Sahel across three interrelated dimensions: alignment with UNISS (the extent to which the coordination arrangements and United Nations entities were strategically and operationally aligned with the objectives of the framework); adaptation (the capacity of the coordination arrangements to respond to the rapidly evolving security, political and geopolitical context of the evaluated period); and gender, youth and vulnerable groups (the degree to which the coordination arrangements supported integration of the needs of these population groups).

Summary of findings - relevance
Throughout the evaluated period there was a demonstrable need for sub-regional and cross-pillar United Nations system coordination. The United Nations system cross-pillar coordination arrangements put in place were relevant in design but shallow in practice. There were significant variations across countries, pillars and time periods, but overall coordination activities and arrangements were of limited consequence to operational delivery. Formal alignment of country-specific Cooperation Frameworks with the sub-regional scope of the UNISS increased over the evaluated period, but a gap between alignment in strategic planning documents and subsequent programming was persistent. Cooperation Frameworks treated the UNISS as an external reference rather than an organizing logic. UNISS alignment was significantly weaker in countries outside of the Central Sahel, several of which felt marginal to the coordination arrangements. The coordination arrangements supported United Nations system adaptations to major geopolitical shifts, but these were reactive rather than anticipatory, helping the United Nations system to catch up with major events rather than get ahead of them. Successful adaptations were associated with individual leadership, initiative and decisions, rather than being directly enabled by the Sahel coordination arrangements themselves. The existence of OSCDS delivered genuine added value in AES contexts, supporting development-framed re-engagement with national authorities. The co-design of the AES flagship programmes was a clear demonstration of the enduring relevance of the United Nations system, and that a single United Nations system offer of genuine partnership, coherent across pillars and country, regional and headquarters levels, can be brought forward even in the most challenging political environment. The challenge for future coordination arrangements is to institutionalize those conditions rather than depend on their periodic emergence. Gender and youth featured as explicit priorities across UNISS documentation. However, coordination, mainstreaming of gender equality, youth empowerment, and disability by the United Nations system in the Sahel was largely driven by other global- and country-level mainstreaming and reporting mechanisms (SWAP, UNDIS etc.), with minimal contribution from the Sahel-specific, sub-regional coordination arrangements. Late exceptions to this overall picture included dedicated efforts on dialogue with youth by OSCDS and the Sahel Gender Compact (2025).
Strength of evidence: See Annex IV for a summary of key evidence sources by evaluation question

EQ 1.1: Alignment with UNISS	Strong	EQ 1.2: Adaptation	Moderate ³³
EQ 1.3: Gender, youth, vulnerable groups	Moderate ³⁴		

EQ 1.1: Alignment with United Nations Integrated Strategy in the Sahel

Finding 1.1.1: Cooperation Framework alignment with the UNISS increased over the period. However, the UNISS was largely treated as an external reference, rather than a strategic guide with consequences for programming.

45. The UNISS was consistently cited as a guiding framework across key corporate documents. Cooperation Frameworks, steering committee minutes, progress reports, and OSCDS documents all reference UNISS objectives. UNOWAS and OSCDS objectives also clearly aligned with the UNISS strategic goals, with UNOWAS focused particularly on “governance” and “security”, and OSCDS especially focused on “resilience”. Of the United Nations respondents to the evaluation survey, 92 per cent reported familiarity with the UNISS, and 65 per cent reported familiarity with the UNSP.

46. Mainstreaming of the regional UNISS into the national scope Cooperation Frameworks (also referred to as “domestication” by OSCDS and UNISS Steering Committee documents) increased over time, with a visible step-change following the adoption of the UNSP. However, uptake remained uneven: Cooperation Frameworks in Mauritania, Niger and Senegal showed substantive mainstreaming, while Nigeria showed none (table 4). By 2024, most Cooperation Frameworks in UNISS countries had been formally aligned to the UNISS or UNSP; a result corroborated by several survey respondents who cited it as a concrete output of coordination that individual agencies could not have achieved alone. Critically, however, most Cooperation Frameworks treated the UNISS as an external reference rather than as the backbone of their strategic planning.

Table 4. Reference counts and mainstreaming levels of UNISS in Cooperation Framework documents

Country	Earlier CF	Refs	Later CF	Refs	Trend
Burkina Faso	2018-2020	3	2023-2025	1	Decline in count
Cameroon	2018-2020	0	2022-2026	3	Increase from zero
Chad	2017-2021	4	2024-2026	1	Decline
Guinea	2018-2024	0	2024-2028	6	Strong increase
Mali	2020-2024	1	—	—	—
Mauritania	2018-2022	10	2024-2027	3	Decline
Niger	2014-2018	0	2023-2027	6	Strong increase
Nigeria	2018-2022	0	2023-2027	0	Absent throughout
Senegal	2019-2023	2	2024-2028	8	Strong increase
The Gambia	2017-2021	0	2024-2028	4	Increase from zero

Source: Evaluation team analysis of Cooperation Framework documents

47. Analysis of Cooperation Framework and joint workplan data across the ten UNISS countries (available only for the latter part of the period), showed that UNISS references in Cooperation Framework documents did not have major consequences for the body of programming and funding that make up Cooperation Framework

33. Evidence supporting findings on adaptation is generally strong. However, the question of the extent to which United Nations upheld principled engagement was challenging for the evaluation to answer given diverging viewpoints and perspectives.

34. Evidence strength on gender, youth and disability mainstreaming exists, but attribution to United Nations system coordination arrangements was more difficult to identify.

implementation. While very much of the United Nations system's work in the Sahel can "align" with the broad UNISS pillars, the data provide little indication that the existence of the strategy shaped programming logic and choices.

48. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions provided context for this picture. Interlocutors with the necessary institutional memory described the 2013 UNISS as a top-down, headquarters-drafted strategy that arrived with limited consultation of UNCTs, which limited ownership and genuine alignment from the outset. As a result, the UNISS was not "socialized" at the country level and was perceived as a Security Council instrument rather than a cross-pillar strategy for sustainable development. In addition, the absence of a shared theory of change connecting the three UNISS pillars meant that there was no common understanding of what "cross-pillar" coordination meant among the different stakeholders and the value that it would bring at the sub-regional level. This lack of clarity on what the primary purpose of the UNISS had been, as described in Section 2 of this report in relation to the reconstructed theory of change for United Nations system coordination, is an important part of the context. These issues were also well documented in internal reviews of the UNISS commissioned by the Department of Political Affairs in 2016 and an inter-entity internal review team in 2019.

49. In the AES countries, familiarity with the UNISS remains considerable among United Nations system respondents, who generally considered that it still had some relevance, but external partners – international financial institutions and bilateral donors – had little familiarity with the strategy. The UNISS was not a primary driver of programming decisions for any stakeholder group – national governments, United Nations system entities or development partners – it was an external reference among many others. When programming did align more closely with UNISS priorities, this was due to a convergence of entity priorities with particular crises or opportunities, rather than strategic alignment with the regional strategy.

50. In other countries, awareness of the UNISS was often weak: several UNCT members were unaware their country was one of the ten countries covered, and some felt its priorities were irrelevant to their context. Four of the ten UNISS countries – Guinea, Cameroon, Senegal and Nigeria – are middle-income countries, for which the crisis and fragility-focused framework held limited operational relevance. The concept of sub-regional coordination was significantly more relevant to the three Central Sahel countries than to the remaining seven, several of which reported feeling like "second tier" members of the UNISS coordination arrangements. Cameroon and Nigeria each considered only part of their territory to be Sahelian; Chad's strategic orientation pointed more towards Sudan and the Lake Chad Basin than the broader Sahelian sub-region; and both United Nations entities and governments in these countries consistently noted that regional coordination paid insufficient attention to the Lake Chad Basin.

EQ 1.2: Adaptation to security and geopolitical shifts

Finding 1.2.1: The United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel underwent significant adaptations in response to geopolitical shifts, but adaptation was largely reactive rather than anticipatory and remained dependent on individual leadership and initiative.

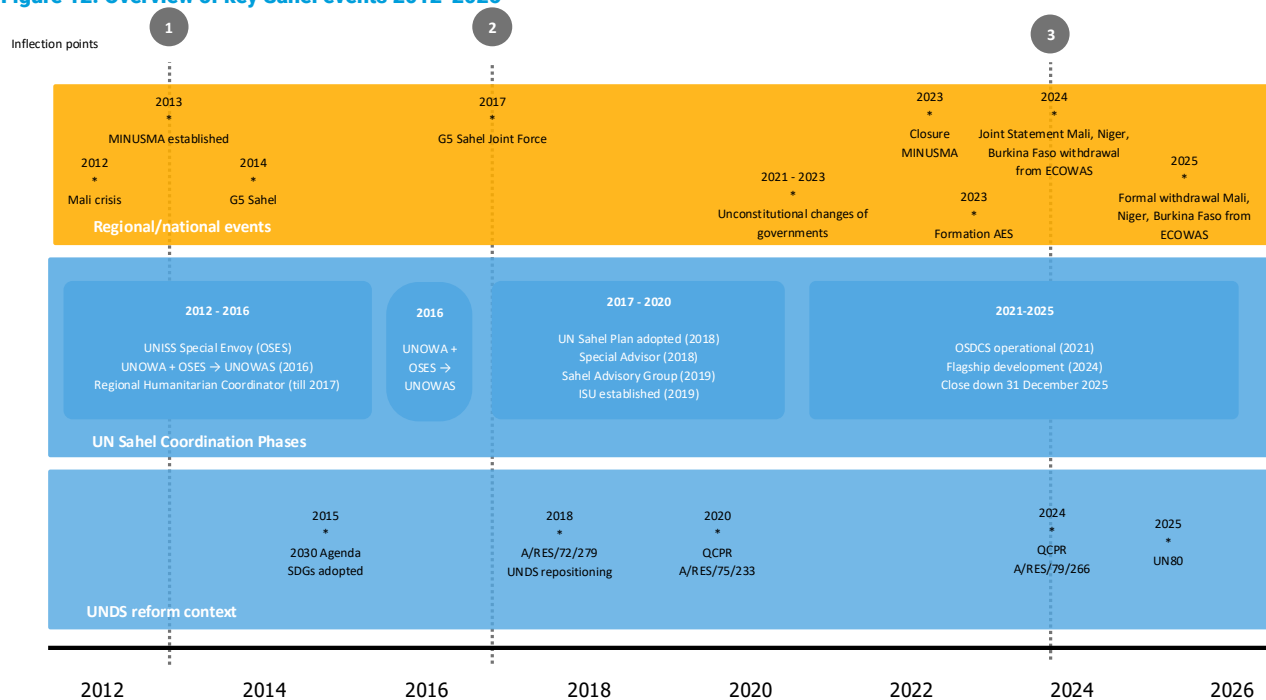
51. United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel evolved through three distinct inflection points (figure 12), each triggered by external shocks. The first came in 2013, when the UNISS was developed in response to the Mali crisis, coinciding with the deployment of MINUSMA, and included the appointment of a Special Envoy and the merger of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), established in 2002 to promote regional political stability, with the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES) to form UNOWAS in 2016, providing a dedicated sub-regional coordination platform for the strategy.

52. The second inflection point followed the establishment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2017, which prompted the creation of the Executive Committee Working Group on the Sahel (ECWGS), the development

of the United Nations Support Plan, and the establishment of the Special Advisor for the Sahel in 2018. Both the engagement and direction of headquarters were adjusted in 2019 with the creation of the Sahel Advisory Group³⁵ – which followed the assessment by an internal review team. In 2020-2021 the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSDCS) was established alongside a more dedicated focus on the Sahel under the Joint SDG Fund.

53. The third inflection point came in 2024, in direct response to the AES countries' exit from ECOWAS (announced January 2024, effective January 2025) and the withdrawal of Niger from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).³⁶ Critically, the declaration of Resident Coordinators as “personae non grata” in two Central Sahel countries, severely disrupted United Nations continuity and operating spaces. Following an Executive Committee recommendation for a high-level visit to Central Sahel countries, the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and the DCO regional director for Africa co-led a joint regional directors' mission to Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso between 9 June and 5 July 2024. The mission paved the way for a subsequent visit of the Deputy Secretary-General, accompanied by the SRSG for West Africa and the Sahel, to the three countries in July 2024. These missions helped to reframe engagement, shifting the emphasis to concrete joint programming, resulting in the formal launch of the flagship programmes and renewed engagement with AES governments. In Mali, unlike Niger and Burkina Faso, the UN's three jointly developed flagship programmes were never formally endorsed by the transitional authorities, leading the United Nations to halt related resource mobilization and communications in September 2025 pending endorsement, which has not since been granted. The UNCT subsequently discontinued the “flagship programmes” framing, folding the three priority areas (food systems, renewable energy, education and health) into the Cooperation Framework aligned with Mali's National Strategy for Emergency and Sustainable Development (SNEDD 2024-2033).

Figure 12. Overview of key Sahel events 2012-2026



Source: Evaluation team

54. In each of the three periods examined, adaptations were reactive rather than anticipatory, helping the United Nations system to catch up with major events rather than get ahead of them. While several United Nations agencies have put in place preparedness strategies and scenario planning, there is limited

35. Internal memo on new arrangements for the reinforced coordination and implementation of the recalibrated United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (2019).

36. A regional military coalition tasked to combat Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and composed of forces from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

evidence of similar analyses across entities, pillars or at the sub-regional coordination level. Several key informants, reflecting on the series of political crises in Mali (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023), considered in retrospect that political warning signs had been visible in advance. While individual entities may have acted on these signals within their own mandates, key informants noted that this did not translate into pre-emptive action coordinated at the system-wide or cross-pillar levels. One notable exception was the integrated contingency planning for strategic United Nations system responses to scenarios of Central Sahel countries withdrawing from ECOWAS, West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) or the CFA franc coordinated by UNOWAS following a 2024 Executive Committee decision.

55. The creation of OSCDS brought clear added value in the AES context, providing a high-level development interlocutor with deep knowledge of the Sahel region, able to engage with military-led governments on development, distinct from the peace-security framing of UNOWAS. Key informant interviews confirmed that the appointment of the Special Coordinator opened doors that had been closed to other United Nations actors and, together with the deliberate shift in narrative from fragility to opportunity, was widely acknowledged as having used a “development flag” to navigate politically sensitive dynamics and reset engagement with AES governments.

56. OSCDS also adapted its communication to focus on the region's development potential rather than its crisis dynamics. Findings from the three AES countries show that United Nations system coordination at the sub-regional level, and across pillars, made a major contribution to maintaining dialogue with national authorities in a challenging geopolitical context, ultimately helping the United Nations system to remain present and relevant. However, such adaptations were associated with individual leadership and initiative, rather than necessarily being directly enabled by the Sahel coordination arrangements themselves.

Finding 1.2.2: The extent to which the United Nations system upheld principled engagement and protected operating space in the AES countries from 2020 onwards is a complex question upon which views within the United Nations system diverge.

57. Several internal and external stakeholders noted that the ability of the United Nations system to uphold principled engagement and protect operating space in a coordinated manner, across all pillars, came under considerable and sustained pressure in the AES countries after 2020, due to security dynamics and interrelated political and geopolitical fallout. The coordination arrangements operated amid constraints that significantly limited options, and managing those constraints consumed substantial institutional bandwidth during this period. For example, principled engagement was directly constrained by declarations of Resident Coordinators being “personae non grata” in two countries. These decisions reflected a political posture by AES governments towards external actors more broadly, not exclusively towards the UN. Whether the United Nations system upheld principled engagement and protected operating space optimally in this challenging environment is contested; views diverge considerably across institutions and individuals.

58. Regarding the Resident Coordinator function specifically, several interlocutors noted that, since 2019, Resident Coordinators – while more independent within the United Nations system – have faced additional challenges as a result of their delinking from a large programmatic entity. With less direct control over a development portfolio and budget, Resident Coordinators were seen by some as having reduced leverage and convening power vis-a-vis host governments. Several informants asserted that the ability of the Resident Coordinator to convey difficult messages to governments had been weakened by the repositioning, and that this was further exacerbated by a “self-censorship dynamic” following the “persona non grata” declarations. Others contested this and described the posture of Resident Coordinators as a rational adaptation to severe political constraints.

59. For sub-regional- and headquarters-level coordination functions and decisions, views on the extent to which they supported or undermined principled engagement and protection of operating space also varied, often in line with mandate and institutional perspective. Some humanitarian actors raised concerns about the

absence of a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator since 2017, viewing this as a gap that, if filled, could have served as a counterweight to in-country Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators who faced the political constraints described above. Other United Nations system interlocutors – including from humanitarian and other pillar backgrounds – contested this characterization.

60. In the development pillar, the existence of a very senior-level sub-regional development-focused interlocutor was welcomed as a complement or balance to United Nations peace and security pillar leaders whose reputation in the Central Sahel was understood by several key interlocutors to have been challenged by perceived proximity to the United Nations Security Council, ECOWAS and the withdrawing MINUSMA. Concretely, the 2024 decision of the Executive Committee to affirm the United Nations system's continued engagement with the AES countries to preserve development gains on behalf of populations regardless of national political leadership, and when other development partners were withdrawing support, is regarded by many as principled. Indeed, the evaluation found that this decision shaped the strategic rationale for sustained engagement, including the 2024 Deputy Secretary-General mission and eventual co-design of the flagship programmes. At the same time, some United Nations system interlocutors regard the collective decision of the system to pragmatically adapt its development cooperation approach to align with the sovereigntist positioning of the AES countries as being in tension with fundamentally important normative frameworks.

61. This divergence in perceptions across the United Nations pillars reflects, in part, different operational realities and mandates rather than an unambiguous finding about principled engagement. The debate is not unique to the Sahel but may have been amplified by the context.

Finding 1.2.3: UNCTs demonstrated a degree of adaptive capacity in navigating the post-2020 context, only some of which was supported by the sub-regional coordination arrangements.

62. In 2020, the regional UNSDG was called upon to incorporate the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19 into its cross-border and regional response planning, with the framework guiding Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in supporting national governments to prepare and implement their socioeconomic response plans. Ongoing weekly global-level meetings with Resident Coordinators on country-level developments, particularly in relation to COVID-19 impacts and responses, were identified as a mechanism to inform the framing of national response support strategies. Beyond immediate COVID-19 adaptation, the regional UNSDG was urged to urgently scale up implementation of the UNSP by capitalizing on three convergent opportunities: post-COVID-19 national stimulus packages, United Nations socioeconomic recovery plans and existing loans and grants made available by international financial institutions to Sahel countries. In parallel, humanitarian response was coordinated through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which provided system-wide support scale-up protocols adapted to the specific response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including covering the Sahel region. Together, these programmatic adaptations reflected a deliberate effort to align the UNISS coordination with shifting financing and recovery landscapes, although their translation into sustained cross-pillar programming remained constrained by the broader structural and political challenges described above.

63. UNCTs also demonstrated a degree of adaptive capacity in navigating the post-2020 context in the AES countries, but this was largely disconnected from sub-regional coordination. Key informant interviews indicated that UNCTs in AES countries adjusted working methods, including their communication strategies with governments, their programme modalities to maintain operational access, and their prioritization of activities in response to funding constraints. However, no structured guidance from the (sub)regional coordination layer was identified, and interviews with UNCT stakeholders did not reveal a clear linkage between these adaptations and directives from the (sub)regional level. Stakeholders in AES countries have also confirmed that operational constraints – including insecurity, a reduced field presence, funding constraints and a lack of technical expertise – had severely limited the depth, responsiveness and sustainability of coordinated adaptation efforts. Overall, it appears that adaptive responses had been driven primarily by operational

necessity, individual Resident Coordinator initiatives and regional-country office dialogues within single agencies, rather than by a coordinated design within the UNISS framework.

EQ 1.3: Gender, youth and vulnerable groups

Finding 1.3.1: Gender equality and youth engagement featured prominently across UNISS-related documentation and in some coordination activities (mostly later in the evaluated period). Direct participation of key constituencies, including women, youth, persons with disabilities and other groups, in UNISS coordination arrangements was very limited.

64. At the sub-regional level of coordination, women and youth featured prominently across UNISS documentation. The 2022 5W mapping data confirm that women and youth are the top two stated target groups across United Nations system operations in the region. UNISS Steering Committee minutes also contain consistent references to women and youth throughout the evaluated period. UNSP Priority 6 is “address bottlenecks militating against women and youth attaining their full potential and empowering them as custodians of peace and development in the Sahel”.

65. The evaluation noted several concrete examples of sub-regional and Sahel-specific coordination arrangements supporting gender equality and youth engagement objectives. However, these are concentrated in the latter years of the period evaluated.

66. The Sahel Gender Compact³⁷ was endorsed at the 17th UNISS Steering Committee meeting in 2025, co-led by UN Women, UNOWAS and OSCDS. It established clear time-bound targets: 47-53 per cent gender parity in coordination leadership by 2030; at least 30 per cent of coordination mechanism partners with gender equality at the core of their mandate; gender working groups in humanitarian-development-peace programmes; and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation. Given that most targets are set for 2030, it remains premature to assess its implementation. The endorsement of the compact marked a relatively late recognition that gender equality had not been a high priority within UNISS coordination arrangements prior to 2025. The process leading to adoption was lengthy, with key informant interviewees reporting significant delays due to resistance or disengagement from some entities at the regional level. Awareness of the compact also remained limited, with fewer than 40 per cent of the United Nations survey respondents (30 per cent at UNCT level, 45 per cent in regional offices) reporting familiarity.

67. In terms of youth engagement and participation, in 2021, “The Voices from the Sahel: Conversation, Visions and Solutions” – a consultation platform – was jointly launched by UNOWAS, OSCDS, UNDP and UNICEF to encourage the participation of youth in UN’s decision-making and implementation processes; however, there is no evidence as to whether this participation was operationalized. In 2024-2025, one of the flagship programmes designed in Burkina Faso specifically addressed youth.

68. Disability was virtually absent from the coordination arrangements throughout the evaluation period. Only one instance of a specific disability inclusion action was identified by the evaluation: the mobilization of six United Nations volunteers with disabilities in 2023 across the United Nations system.³⁸ Cooperation Frameworks consistently flagged disability as a systematically unaddressed vulnerability. Disability was not reflected in UNISS reporting frameworks, pillar workplans, or the Sahel Gender Compact.

69. Overall, evaluation survey results (in 2026) reflected mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of mainstreaming gender, youth and other vulnerability inclusion within the system coordination arrangements,

37. UN. 2025. Sahel Gender Compact.

38. OSCDS. 2023. Progress Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and support plan (UNSP). January 2023-December 2023.

with mainstreaming considered as a gap by 11 per cent of respondents, but also as a success by 22 per cent of respondents.

70. There is very limited evidence of formal participation mechanisms for Sahelian constituencies, including women, youth, persons with disabilities and other groups,³⁹ in any of the UNISS coordination arrangements. Participation of non-United Nations actors, or community representatives, was not a design feature of the coordination arrangements.

Finding 1.3.2: Mainstreaming of gender equality, disability inclusion and youth engagement in United Nations system activities in the Sahel was mostly driven by global frameworks and UNCT reporting rather than Sahel-specific arrangements.

71. Multiple global system-wide strategies, such as the UN-SWAP, UNDIS and the United Nations Youth Strategy have provided strategic frameworks to country-level operations in the Sahel. UNCTs in the region reported consistently against targets and indicators in the areas of disability inclusion and gender equality.

72. All ten UNISS country UNCTs submitted annual self-reporting against the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) accountability scorecard on disability inclusion (table 5).⁴⁰ Scores varied greatly by country, with Nigeria (average score: 1.30) the best and Mauritania (average score: 0.29) the worst. As a sub-region, the ten UNISS countries (0.94) perform slightly below the rest of Africa (0.97) and the global average (1.10).

Table 5. Sahel country team scorecard reporting against the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

UNCT	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Average
Burkina Faso	0.14	0.14	0	1	1	0.46
Cameroon	1	1.31	0.69	1.29	1.21	1.1
Chad	1.11	1.5	1.15	1.64	0.62	1.2
Guinea	0.54	0.43	0.14	1.07	1.31	0.7
Mali	1.57	1.62	0.57	1.07	1.21	1.21
Mauritania	0.07	0.07	N/A	N/A	0.71	0.29
Niger	0.57	1	0.86	1.8	0.69	0.98
Nigeria	1.43	1.15	1.15	1.21	1.57	1.3
Senegal	0.54	0.43	0.85	0.93	1.14	0.78
The Gambia	1	1.07	0.71	1.14	1.57	1.1
Sahel	0.8	0.87	0.68	1.24	1.1	0.94
Rest of Africa	0.85	0.93	0.83	1.09	1.19	0.98
Rest of the world	0.86	1.02	0.98	1.28	1.35	1.1

Source: Evaluation team analysis of UNCT UNDIS scorecard data

39. Progress report 2022 mentions consultations of women and youth representatives as part of the United Nations regional working groups on climate change, environment, security and development in West Africa.

40. As part of the 2019 United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, all 132 United Nations country teams conduct self-reporting against the UNDIS United Nations country team accountability scorecard on disability inclusion. The scorecard consists of 14 core areas of assessment: leadership, strategic planning, cooperation framework, UNCT set-up and coordination, consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities, accessibility of United Nations premises and accommodation, inclusive procurement of goods and services, joint programmes, data, monitoring and evaluation, humanitarian, employment, capacity development for United Nations staff and communication. United Nations country teams reported by selecting either "missing requirements", "approaches requirements", "meets requirements" or "exceeds requirements" against all 14 core areas. The self-reporting was converted by SWE0 to a corresponding scale of 0 to 3 and averaged for ease of comparison.

73. All ten UNISS country UNCTs submitted annual self-reporting against UN-SWAP in 2025 (table 6).⁴¹ Submissions and scores varied greatly by country. Only three countries (Cameroon, The Gambia and Niger) have submitted reports every year since 2020. The Gambia has the highest average score of all ten UNISS countries by a large extent at 2.15, while Nigeria has the lowest average score at 1.43. As a sub-region, the Sahel countries (1.70) are slightly higher in score compared to the rest of Africa (1.66) and lower compared to the rest of the world (1.77). Notably, UN-SWAP scores for the rest of the world have been increasing consistently since 2020 (from 1.65 in 2020 to 1.84 in 2025), while UN-SWAP scores for the Sahel countries have remained stagnant.

Table 6. Sahel country team reporting against the UNSWAP scorecard

UNCT	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Average
Burkina Faso	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.53	1.53
Cameroon	1.13	1.67	2.13	1.67	1.6	1.27	1.58
Chad	N/A	N/A	2.4	N/A	N/A	1.13	1.77
Guinea	N/A	1.8	1.87	N/A	2	1.8	1.87
Mali	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.27	1.47	1.53	1.42
Mauritania	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.47	1.8	1.63
Niger	1.8	1.8	1.73	1.87	1.78	2.2	1.86
Nigeria	N/A	1.33	1.53	1.4	1.33	1.53	1.43
Senegal	N/A	1.4	1.67	1.93	1	1.18	1.44
The Gambia	2.07	1.73	2	2.13	2.4	2.54	2.15
Sahel	1.67	1.62	1.9	1.71	1.63	1.65	1.7
Rest of Africa	1.73	1.67	1.68	1.67	1.58	1.67	1.66
Rest of the world	1.65	1.7	1.75	1.78	1.81	1.84	1.77

Source: Evaluation team analysis of UN-SWAP gender equality scorecard data

74. The United Nations System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP) was launched in 2024 as a flagship initiative to accelerate gender equality across the United Nations system. UNCT-level commitments include the development of country gender equality profiles (CGEPs) as a joint product and country biennial gender equality reviews of United Nations activities. In 2025, Mali was one of the first 11 UNCTs (globally) to develop a CGEP, while UNCTs in Burkina Faso and Nigeria reported that CGEP development was in progress. Mali and Mauritania were among a group of seven UNCTs that conducted a biennial review in 2025.⁴²

41. In 2012, the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) endorsed UN-SWAP, the first unified accountability framework for accelerating gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system. United Nations country teams conduct self-reporting against a set of 15 indicators to benchmark performance and measure progress. There are 15 indicators on: common country analysis, UNSDCF outcomes, UNSDCF indicators, joint programmes, communication and advocacy, monitoring/evaluation/learning, government partnerships, civil society, leadership commitment, organizational culture, gender parity in staff, gender coordination mechanisms, UNCT capacities, resourcing and country contributions to gender equality. United Nations country teams reported by selecting either "missing requirements", "approaches requirements", "meets requirements" or "exceeds requirements" against all 15 indicators. The self-reporting was converted by SWE0 to a corresponding scale of 0 to 3 and averaged for ease of comparison.

42. UN Women. 2026. Gender equality acceleration plan progress report 2026 (and additional granular country data shared with SWE0 by the GEAP Secretariat, UN Women).

EQ 2: To what extent is United Nations system coordination in the Sahel internally and externally coherent?

75. The extent to which United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel contributed to system-wide coherence is assessed across three interrelated dimensions: vertical coherence (between actors at the headquarters, regional and country levels); horizontal coherence (between peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights within the United Nations system); and external coherence (between the United Nations system and strategies, structures and actors outside it).

Summary of findings - coherence			
Across vertical, horizontal and external coherence dimensions, the evaluation found a consistent and widening gap between formally sound coordination design and operational reality, compounded after 2020 by a political environment that ultimately dismantled some of the external conditions upon which United Nations system coordination had depended. Elaborate arrangements were established on paper to provide vertical coherence but this has not functioned as a coherent system: the Sahel Advisory Group was insufficiently strategic; Resident Coordinator integration improved after 2021 through the Special Coordinator's authority rather than through structural incentives; formal alignment of Cooperation Frameworks with the UNISS concealed an operational gap; and the AES political crises and "persona non grata" declarations disrupted the vertical coordination chain in several of the countries for which the UNISS had been originally designed. The challenge of horizontal coherence across pillars and United Nations entities was also unresolved by the coordination arrangements. Coordination across pillars demonstrated asymmetries, gaps and overlaps: the political-security track commanded disproportionate institutional bandwidth; overlapping UNOWAS-OSCDs responsibilities generated persistent friction without resolution; the dissolution of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator in 2017 left a gap; and cross-pillar coordination remained definitionally contested across levels of the system. The UNISS Steering Committee and the June 2024 AES mission co-led by the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and the DCO regional director for Africa with regional directors to Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso – demonstrated that coherence across levels and pillars was achievable but the conditions enabling both were exceptional, rather than embedded. In terms of external coherence, United Nations system coordination mechanisms functioned as a participant among peers rather than as a convening framework: it could not consolidate a landscape of at least 18 parallel strategies; relationships with the African Union and ECOWAS were formally cooperative but fragile and severely strained in the three AES countries by 2024; and the donor-led Sahel Alliance operated on a parallel track with no strategic alignment throughout the evaluated period. The political ruptures of 2021-2024 upended the regional integration and cooperation architecture – leaving the United Nations system's UNISS-framed coordination arrangements as, paradoxically, the most continuous multilateral framework still operating across the ten countries, not because its design problems had been resolved, but because the regional and sub-regional institutions built alongside it were disrupted or weakened first, including through withdrawals, suspensions and the discontinuation of key cooperation mechanisms.			
Strength of evidence: See Annex IV for a summary of key evidence sources by evaluation question			
EQ 2.1: Vertical coherence	Strong	EQ 2.2: Horizontal coherence	Strong
EQ 2.3: External coherence	Moderate ⁴³		

43. Evidence strength on the question of external coherence was limited only by the comparatively smaller number of non-United Nations system informants that responded to interview requests and the online survey.

EQ 2.1: Vertical coherence

Finding 2.1.1: Elaborate and complex vertical coordination arrangements were established but failed to function as a coherent system in practice, particularly in the critical link between headquarters and the (sub-)regional level.

76. Prior to 2019, the UNISS coordination arrangements operated without a consolidated roles matrix: the ECWGS provided headquarters-level coordination direction, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator positioned humanitarian work at the sub-regional level, and the Resident Coordinator function was linked to that of the UNDP Resident Representative (with support from the Development Operations Coordination Office located in UNDP). The 2017-2018 recalibration, including the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel, the discontinuation of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, and the global 2018 United Nations development system repositioning, set the stage for a more formalized post-2019 architecture.

77. The 2019 matrix of roles and responsibilities established a formal division of responsibilities across the UNISS coordination arrangements, from the Deputy Secretary-General-chaired Sahel Advisory Group and United Nations principals at headquarters, through UNOWAS, the UNDP-hosted Implementation Support Unit (ISU), United Nations entity regional directors, and the regional UNSDG, to Resident Coordinators and UNCTs at the country level. On paper, this was comprehensive: regional focal points were designated as UNISS pillar leaders at the strategic level; the ISU was to provide coordination and coherence support across the three UNISS pillars; DCO was to facilitate regular information-sharing with Resident Coordinators who were expected to mainstream the UNISS into national planning. The terms of reference for the Special Coordinator (2020) further established a formal, yet indirect and seemingly never applied, reporting line of Resident Coordinators to the Special Coordinator on UNISS implementation matters, while DCO retained day-to-day management responsibility for the Resident Coordinator system. The regional UNSDG ceased to exist after 2021 and was replaced through the Regional Collaborative Platform.⁴⁴ However, the evaluation did not find evidence that the 2019 matrix of roles was updated following the repositioning of the United Nations development system in which some structures were abolished and replaced with new structures.

78. In practice, vertical linkage across headquarters, regional and country levels proved weak and largely ineffective. Interviewees consistently reported a profound disconnect, with headquarters primarily focused on high-level political processes, while the regional level concentrated on developing project proposals and delivering on implementation. Overall, key informant interviews highlighted that headquarters could have provided critical political weight and helped remove bottlenecks at the regional level but failed to do so. At the country level, United Nations staff reported the poor flow of information between the regional and national levels, contributing to the perception that regional coordination was more procedural than operational. The overall arrangements were characterized by one key informant as producing “too many frameworks, processes, strategies, and too little clarity”.

79. The Sahel Advisory Group – replacing the ECWGS in 2019 – was designed to serve as the apex coordination mechanism for UNISS implementation at the headquarters level, bringing together senior United Nations officials to provide strategic direction and political weight. In practice, it was considered by multiple interviewees as insufficiently strategic, poorly organized, and not fit for purpose, with no clear evidence that decisions taken in the Sahel Advisory Group were communicated to the regional or country levels. In contrast, principal-level coordination bodies were generally found to be more effective when focused on specific countries or trans-boundary issues. For example, the Emergency Task Force for Chad was considered more effective by interviewees, illustrating that Deputy Secretary-General-level engagement with United Nations entity principals can produce traction in other circumstances.

44. Before 2019 (and the repositioning of the United Nations development system), DCO was referred to as DOCO. Regional UNSDG ceased to exist after 2021 and was replaced through the Regional Collaborative Platform.

80. Critically, these structures, including membership of the Sahel Advisory Group, were limited to United Nations internal actors and did not include the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the African Union or the European Union, thereby missing the opportunity to anchor critical partnerships in coordination arrangements mirroring the joint principals' visit to the sub-region in November 2013. Recognizing gaps, the Secretary-General in his report to the ECOSOC 2024 session⁴⁵ recommended the creation of an ad hoc advisory group that would bring in the private sector, civil society, international financial institutions,⁴⁶ young people and the United Nations system. The Sahel Advisory Group agreed to extend an invitation to the World Bank in 2024⁴⁷ to join this group, however, this evaluation was not provided with evidence that an invitation was extended or how it was received.

81. Several interviewees questioned the need for a separate headquarters mechanism at all, given that the Executive Committee had in multiple instances taken decisions on the Sahel: most notably the recommendation of the Executive Committee in 2024 prompting the joint mission to the three AES countries and directly assigning tasks to United Nations entities. Key informant interview evidence and review of Executive Committee summaries (2017-2025) indicate, however, that Executive Committee engagement on the Sahel was episodic and predominantly triggered by crises. Routine UNISS implementation was not systematically surfaced at Executive Committee level, leaving a strategic oversight gap that the Sahel Advisory Group was not able to fill.

Finding 2.1.3: Before 2021, the Resident Coordinator system was insufficiently integrated into the UNISS coordination arrangements; the subsequent engagement of DCO and OSCDS facilitated the formal integration of the UNISS into Cooperation Frameworks, although barriers to delivery persisted.

82. Prior to 2021, the role of Resident Coordinators in UNISS coordination was under-recognized and under-utilized, with engagement being largely consultative. The establishment of the Special Coordinator position changed this dynamic: by 2021-2022, Resident Coordinators were systematically invited to the UNISS Steering Committee, facilitating regular engagement with regional directors, the Special Coordinator, and DCO Africa. OSCDS sought Resident Coordinator office input to technical and progress reports. Although there was initial difficulty in securing Resident Coordinator participation in the UNISS Steering Committee, this engagement was credited as the key mechanism through which the UNISS arrangements were eventually operationalized at the country level. Multiple interviewees independently attributed this achievement to the Under-Secretary-General-level convening authority of the Special Coordinator.

83. From 2021, DCO chaired the regional peer support group and developed guidance in collaboration with OSCDS to facilitate the integration of UNISS and UNSP in the Common Country Analyses and the Cooperation Frameworks. However, the cascade from UNISS to Cooperation Framework to joint workplans to joint programmes was not necessarily operational (see EQ 1.1).

84. Internal DCO-OSCDS analysis⁴⁸ from October-November 2021 identified four structural barriers: a) limited UNCT ownership and incentives; b) misaligned planning cycles; c) the multiplicity of competing frameworks; and d) the absence of monitoring instruments. These barriers are not unique to the Sahel: they are well-documented system-wide challenges that the 2018 United Nations development system repositioning reform explicitly sought to address, including through updated Cooperation Framework guidance and the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF). The System-wide evaluation on progress towards a "new

45. ECOSOC. E/2024/63. Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region by the United Nations system. Report of the Secretary-General.

46. For additional information on IFIs, see EQ 4.

47. Internal Sahel Advisory Group meeting notes (2024).

48. Internal analysis of UNISS/UNSP integration in United Nations programme documents (2021).

generation of United Nations country teams"⁴⁹ concluded that these barriers remained largely unresolved across the system in 2025.

85. The additional Sahel-specific constraint is the sub-regional layer: a single cross-border strategy to be realized through ten separate, government-owned national planning cycles over which the sub-regional layer held no authority. Coherence therefore depended on voluntary alignment across ten autonomous timetables, with no mechanism to synchronize or direct them. A second, distinct constraint operated vertically: the office to backstop this effort, DCO Africa, spanned the whole continent, leaving limited bandwidth for the depth of Sahel-specific support required (see EQ 3 on resourcing).

Finding 2.1.4: Political instability in the AES countries and “persona non grata” declarations disrupted the vertical coordination chain precisely in the contexts for which the UNISS had been designed.

86. A further challenge to country-level coherence was the diplomatic exposure of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, who, as the UN’s most visible in-country representatives, faced the risk of being declared “persona non grata” if perceived to be politically intrusive, particularly in the AES countries. This imposed a level of caution on country-level coordination in precisely the countries where UNISS priorities were most urgently needed.

87. Internal OSCDS transition and handover materials (late 2025), shared with the evaluation team, record the “*persona non grata*” declarations against the Resident Coordinators in Niger and Burkina Faso as being direct disruptions to the vertical coordination chain, noting the urgent need for timely deployment of new Resident Coordinators and heads of entities to avoid a long power vacuum. They also observed that most AES governments preferred to engage heads of entities rather than their acting representatives or Resident Coordinators, meaning that the formal vertical hierarchy was systematically bypassed in the countries of greatest strategic concern. In 2024, Resident Coordinators at a regional consultation called on headquarters leadership to change the language of “do not engage” used during AES country political crises, arguing that this language “cost the United Nations dearly” by preventing proactive engagement at a moment when presence and dialogue were most valuable. The same consultation also noted that “the political analysis dimension is lacking” and that high-level regional visits were “helpful but should be more proactive, not reactive”.⁵⁰ These observations confirm that vertical coherence, if understood not only as information flow but also as the capacity for timely, calibrated and politically informed joint action, remained incomplete even at the end of the evaluated period.

88. Against this backdrop of disruption, one adaptive mechanism is worth noting. A bi-weekly standing committee, including regional directors and Resident Coordinators, dedicated to the development of flagship programmes with the three AES countries was established in 2024 and assessed by interviewees as functioning comparatively well. Its comparative effectiveness was analytically instructive: unlike most of the broader coordination arrangements, it carries a clear and bounded deliverable resulting in sustained operational engagement even in politically challenging contexts.

49. UNSDG SWE0. 2025. System-wide evaluation on progress towards a “new generation of United Nations country teams”.

50. OSCDS internal documentation (2024).

EQ 2.2: Horizontal coherence

Finding 2.2.1: Inconsistency in how cross-pillar coordination was understood across the United Nations system created coordination gaps in practice.

89. The inconsistency in understanding cross-pillar coordination concepts is not incidental. The UNISS operates within a Sahel-specific three-pillar structure established under the Security Council resolution in 2013: resilience, security and governance. This predates the emergence of the "humanitarian-development-peace nexus" as the dominant cross-pillar vocabulary used across the United Nations system. Cooperation Frameworks follow quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) language on "cooperation, collaboration and coordination" between the United Nations development system and humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts⁵¹ with accountability to ECOSOC and the General Assembly. The United Nations system is therefore formally accountable to two parallel intergovernmental mandates with no bridging mechanism (see EQ 3.4). At the country level, the nexus concept was frequently cited but rarely operationalized.

90. Review of internal United Nations documentation illustrates this inconsistency. The 11th Steering Committee report (2021)⁵² records that the nexus "has been applied incoherently, creating contestation between different pillars," and calls for "a common understanding... so that it is not a zero-sum game of competition for resources." The OSCDS 2023 paper⁵³ on operationalizing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus went further, recommending establishment of a coordination mechanism connecting humanitarian, peace and development planning at the UNISS level and therefore acknowledging, a decade after UNISS adoption, that no such mechanism had ever existed. The 15th Steering Committee report (2023)⁵⁴ confirms the downstream consequence: the DCO representative noted that "the peace and security pillar is not as well expounded or reflected in the Cooperation Frameworks of eight countries," with only Niger and Nigeria as partial exceptions.

91. The consequences of this definitional inconsistency ran in both directions. In conflict-affected contexts, associating United Nations humanitarian operations with a coordination framework anchored in part in UNOWAS' peace and security mandate – and given that UNOWAS was perceived by AES governments as institutionally aligned with ECOWAS – potentially risked undermining humanitarian actors' neutrality and access in AES countries (after 2020) particularly given AES governments' broader wariness of ECOWAS-linked institutions following their withdrawal from the regional bloc (announced January 2024, effective January 2025 - see EQ 1.2). In the opposite direction, operational activities for development had no formal place within the security-anchored pillar structure in eight of ten UNISS countries, the coordination mechanism through which development programming was recognized within, or linked to, the peace and security pillar. That an OSCDS-organized nexus academy training in 2023 was required, more than a decade after UNISS adoption, to train United Nations staff and partners on cross-pillar operationalization is among the clearest markers of how far the system had remained from functional common understanding.

Finding 2.2.2. Coordination across pillars demonstrated asymmetries, gaps and overlaps: the political-security pillar consistently commanded disproportionate institutional bandwidth, the development pillar operated without equivalent political weight, and humanitarian coordination remained country-anchored without a sub-regional layer.

92. The UNISS articulated three interdependent pillars without specifying a causal sequence or theory of change that captured the dependencies and synergies across them. However, the coordination arrangements

51. A/RES/79/226, o.p. 26.

52. UNISS Steering Committee. 2021. 11th Virtual Steering Committee, 8-9 February 2021.

53. OSCDS. 2023. Operationalizing the HDP nexus in the Sahel and UNISS.

54. UNISS Steering Committee. 2023. United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. Report of the 15th Steering Committee Meeting. 14 December, 2023. Dakar, Senegal.

and reporting and accountability were not pillar-neutral. UNOWAS held the peace and security mandate and the Security Council reporting channel, giving this pillar an advantage in accessing headquarters-level and Member State visibility and attention that the development and humanitarian pillars did not possess with their equivalent mechanisms anchored in the General Assembly and ECOSOC systems. This resulted in an imbalance; political engagement consistently absorbed more senior bandwidth in Steering Committee agendas, in New York reporting, and in high-level mission design, crowding out focus on development and humanitarian issues.

93. Parts of the United Nations system adapted pragmatically to this asymmetry. The retrenchment of bilateral partners, notably France,⁵⁵ from the three Central Sahel states from 2022 onwards coincided with the contraction of the UN's own political and security footprint – most visibly MINUSMA's government-mandated withdrawal from Mali in 2023. What persisted was predominantly development and humanitarian presence, and it was this residual footprint that acquired diplomatic salience, preserving operational access and a working channel to national authorities when few external actors retained either. That salience was real but qualified: it was recognized chiefly by the transitional authorities themselves, rather than reflecting broader legitimacy among the population, civil society, or the wider international community, and the United Nations was one among several remaining actors rather than the last.

94. Key informant interviews at both sub-regional and country levels described this as a deliberate "development as diplomacy" posture. The 2017 Independent Review⁵⁶ and the 2019 Internal Review team paper⁵⁷ had each identified the same dynamic: that the operational credibility of development actors was an under-utilized political asset. But neither review prompted a rebalancing of the pillars.

95. The humanitarian dimension intensified progressively across the evaluated period. OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS)⁵⁸ data show humanitarian funding across the ten UNISS countries growing from under US\$ 1 billion in 2013 to approximately US\$ 2 billion in 2024, reflecting escalating conflict-related needs rather than successful prevention. As humanitarian needs surged, the coordination framework did not adapt: development programming had regional infrastructure through OSCDS, while humanitarian coordination remained entirely country-anchored, meaning cross-border crises that the UNISS was designed to address could be tracked developmentally at the sub-regional level but not planned for humanitarily at the same level. This asymmetry became acute after 2021, when political crises foreclosed development programming in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger precisely as the AES formation removed the regional political framework, compressing operating space at both national and sub-regional levels simultaneously.

Finding 2.2.3: The overlapping roles of OSCDS and UNOWAS for UNISS implementation, and the ambiguous relationship between the Special Coordinator and the DSRSG, created tensions between the political and development coordination tracks that limited coherence in practice.

96. A United Nations Special Adviser for the Sahel had been appointed in 2018 as a precursor role, but the tenure was short and the role under-resourced. The creation of OSCDS in 2020-2021 formalized the development coordination function but, without clear delineation of responsibilities relative to UNOWAS, it generated tensions that persisted across the evaluated period.

97. Both UNOWAS and OSCDS held formal responsibilities for UNISS implementation without a division of labour between them. The UNOWAS Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) terms

55. France withdrew its military forces from the three Central Sahel states in sequence: from Mali by August 2022 (the formal Barkhane withdrawal announced 17 February 2022), from Burkina Faso by February 2023 (following Ouagadougou's January 2023 termination of the 2018 defence accord), and from Niger by December 2023 (following the July 2023 coup, with the French embassy in Niamey also closing). See Petrini, Benjamin. 2022. Security in the Sahel and the end of Operation Barkhane. IISS. Al Jazeera. 2023. Au revoir, Sahel: Did 2023 crush France's influence in Africa? Global Security. 2023. Operation Sabre.

56. Internal review of the UNISS commissioned by United Nations DPA in 2016.

57. Internal review team paper on UNISS and UNSP (2019).

58. Evaluation team analysis.

of reference⁵⁹ explicitly references supporting UNISS implementation and coordinating UN, international and regional engagements in the Sahel; the OSCDS terms of reference (2020) designated the Special Coordinator as responsible for leading UNISS-UNSP implementation and coordinating with UNOWAS. No document established primacy on specific UNISS functions, and no inter-entity protocol delineated the boundary between political and development coordination tracks. In the governance pillar in particular – counter-terrorism prevention, women, peace and security, governance reform – both entities were operating on the same programmatic terrain with no agreed division of responsibilities.

98. In practice, the ambiguity produced persistent friction at the level of the principal roles. Successive holders of the Special Adviser and Special Coordinator positions were perceived by UNOWAS, and specifically by DSRSGs, as encroaching on its UNISS responsibilities; this produced active pushback in some cases and near-complete absence of collaboration in others. A donor representative described UNOWAS as failing to create space for the new role, at the cost of months of operational efficiency; a senior United Nations official described the DSRSG as having felt that their position was being undermined by the Special Coordinator. Member States and donors received overlapping messages and competing requests from both entities on the same agenda. Several interviewees observed that designating two Under-Secretary-General-level officials with overlapping Sahel roles and responsibilities compounded rather than resolved the coherence problem. Some complementarity was nonetheless recognized: foresight and analytical work was co-developed across the two offices, and UNOWAS fulfilled a specific political coordination function OSCDS could not replicate: convening Member States ahead of Security Council briefings, providing structured fora for Sahelian governments to align messaging, and conducting ad hoc debriefs following high-level missions. More recent joint initiatives – including the inaugural Sahel Governance Forum (Banjul, July 2025), co-convened with OSCDS, and the accompanying report "The Future of Governance in the Sahel", jointly produced by UNOWAS, OSCDS and UNDP – illustrate that substantive cross-pillar cooperation has continued at the programmatic level, even as the underlying structural ambiguity in roles and reporting lines persisted.

99. The Peacebuilding Fund's cross-pillar approach gave it a footprint at precisely the UNOWAS-OSCDS interface, and in AES contexts where other financing had contracted. EQ 4.2 explores the effectiveness of its role.

Finding 2.2.4: Development coordination faced the United Nations system's familiar structural challenges of fragmentation, inter-entity competition and limited operational visibility compounded at the sub-regional level by a challenging political environment, coordination without real authority and a geographic scope that exceeded available instruments.

100. The recurrent tension documented throughout this finding reflects a system-level constraint not specific to the Sahel: in a federated United Nations system of independent entities with distinct intergovernmental mandates, coordination can only ever be coordination, it cannot command authority. The 2025 system-wide evaluation on progress towards a "new generation of United Nations country teams"⁶⁰ identified numerous determinants of coherence, including: accountabilities (whether entities are answerable for collective results, not only mandate delivery); incentives (whether institutional benefits are structured to reward collaboration or competition); and enabling and constraining factors (political context, resource environment, operating space). Against each dimension, the Sahel coordination arrangements were poorly positioned and the operating environment after 2021 constrained even the adaptive workarounds that function in more permissive contexts.⁶¹

59. The same reference in the ToR of the DSRSG UNOWAS was found in the 2024 and 2020 ToR.

60. UNSDG SWE0. 2025. System-wide evaluation on progress towards a "new generation of United Nations country teams."

61. 2026 Secretary-General's report on the Implementation of General Assembly resolution 79/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. Report of the Secretary-General (A/81/75-E/2026/61) reaffirms these constraints at the system level.

101. Where conditions were met, most clearly when the Special Coordinator collaborated with regional directors and Resident Coordinators at Steering Committee level, coordination produced more observable results. Below that level, at the operational interface between sub-regional functions and country programming, the authority equivalence condition was not met. The Special Coordinator held no formal authority over entity programming, budgets, or staffing; coordination was dependent on voluntary compliance, which proved insufficient when entity incentives, tied to distinct donor relationships, reporting lines, and mandate definitions, diverged from system-wide priorities. The 2021 Management and Accountability Framework's⁶² dual accountability structure was formally applicable but operationally imperfect: it did not in practice override the primary pull of entity-specific relationships when these diverged from collective priorities. Resident Coordinators were recognized for facilitation and mediation but lacked formal powers to arbitrate; non-resident agencies were not systematically informing Resident Coordinators of country-level interventions, meaning a common operational picture, the most basic prerequisite for horizontal coherence, remained incomplete. Resident Coordinators directly flagged that inter-entity competition for resources "is fanning a narrative of the United Nations being too scattered and doing very little", with governments and international financial institutions "complaining and wanting a one-UN engagement".

102. One official offered a succinct architectural diagnosis: "the cross-pillar coordination comes from a strategic aspiration, but is far from being operational", observing that even when fortnightly regional director meetings with the Special Coordinator and DCO generated useful strategic discussion, "when people go back to operational work, everyone returns to business as usual in silos". This assessment requires qualification: the Special Coordinator navigated an exceptionally challenging political environment in which development coordination was not merely technically complex but actively contested. Some of what appears as coordination failure was in part a product of an operating environment that would have tested any institutional arrangement, and credit for what cross-pillar coordination was achieved should be read against that baseline.

Finding 2.2.5: The dissolution of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator function in 2017 created an asymmetry in cross-pillar coordination at the sub-regional level.

103. Up to 2017, the Sahel had a dedicated Regional Humanitarian Coordinator. Following discontinuation of that function, OCHA in Dakar remained as a bureau providing technical support and surge capacity with only technical convening authority over United Nations entities at the regional level or OCHA country-level offices. This created a significant gap in horizontal coherence: while Under-Secretary-General-level roles existed for development and political coordination, no equivalent senior humanitarian interlocutor remained at the sub-regional level. The gap was one of function rather than rank. A dedicated humanitarian coordination capacity with convening authority and direct operational linkages to pooled financing need not have been placed at the Under-Secretary-General level to fulfil its purpose. A compounding asymmetry shaped this dynamic: the Humanitarian Coordinator function, held concurrently by the Resident Coordinator in most UNISS countries, came with more formalized coordination tools than the development role provided: direct access to country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) and Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocations, a cluster system establishing formal lead-entity accountability, and the Humanitarian (Needs and) Response Plan as a collective prioritization instrument. These tools gave the humanitarian pillar a more structured coordination infrastructure at the country level, but they remained dependent on entity compliance and did not resolve the absence of any sub-regional humanitarian coordination function.

104. Evidence from Mali and Burkina Faso confirms that humanitarian coordination mechanisms were generally assessed as more structured and operationally functional than development, peace and security, and international financial institution coordination arrangements, reflecting the greater institutional maturity of an IASC model that predates the UNISS. OCHA in Dakar was assessed as willing to collaborate and share data and analysis, but without appetite for integration into a broader coordinated structure, and with no institutional

62. UNSDG. 2021. UNSDG Management and Accountability Framework (September 2021). See also Finding 2.1.3 for the application of the MAF in the RC/UNCT system context.

interlocutor between humanitarian actors and the political and development coordination arrangements. When political sensitivities made the term "humanitarian" difficult to deploy in certain country contexts, OSCDS resorted to the language of "fragility" - a pragmatic but analytically problematic reframing.

105. Survey data reinforced the significance of this gap: concern about the humanitarian dimension being chronically under-served was concentrated among respondents closest to field realities – international financial institution, civil society and non-governmental organization and Resident Coordinator office respondents – and entirely absent among headquarters-level respondents. One international financial institution respondent argued that "humanitarians are the collateral victims of the triple nexus coordination scheme: not represented, not supported", calling explicitly for a senior regional humanitarian coordinator. A donor with regional responsibilities in Dakar offered a direct corrective to the institutional "no appetite" assessment: "if now there would be a request to have a regional humanitarian coordinator, we would easily fund this". The absence of this function after 2017 therefore reflected institutional choices within the United Nations system, not a lack of potential donor support.

Finding 2.2.6: The cross-pillar working group arrangements aligned to UNISS pillars achieved mixed results, the Regional Collaborative Platform was ineffective as a Sahel-specific vehicle; and regional directors developed informal coordination outside formal mechanisms.

106. Cross-pillar coordination at the regional level was organized around three UNISS pillars, governance (UNDP/UNCDF), resilience (UNICEF/WFP/FAO), and peace and security (UNOWAS/UNODC), with working groups below covering resource mobilization, communications, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, water and a non-governmental organization (NGO) forum. Performance varied substantially: the resource mobilization group was assessed as dynamic in co-developing proposals; the UN-NGO forum, co-led with the NGO Forum in West and Central Africa (FONGA) and supported for a time by an OCHA secondment to OSCDS, functioned well. The peace and security working group, however, met irregularly, with discussions remaining theoretical rather than operational. More recently, the group has been reactivated, meeting at least twice in 2025 and generating two joint funding proposals stemming directly from its discussions – one with UNOWAS to the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and another with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), IOM and UNOWAS to the Peacebuilding Fund. A mismatch compounded these performance gaps: working groups had been configured around the three UNISS pillars and were not reconfigured when the United Nations Support Plan introduced six priority areas, leaving the coordination arrangements misaligned with operational priorities.

107. The Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP), chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, was established in the context of the United Nations development system's repositioning to "unite all United Nations entities working on sustainable development to ensure full coordination of United Nations regional assets in addressing key challenges that transcend country borders and effectively pool expertise at the service of the specific needs of each country in the region".⁶³ Successive RCP annual reports (2020-2025), including documented support to COP27, point to DCO playing a central role in interfacing with Resident Coordinators, identifying needs and brokering platform support. Feedback gathered from Resident Coordinators and regional directors for this evaluation likewise pointed to DCO's leadership in driving Joint Secretariat functions in Africa. However, in the Sahel context this was perceived as either ineffective or unknown. Regional directors instead coordinated through an informal Dakar platform convened outside the RCP structure, often by DCO; an instance of the adaptive workaround behaviour identified by previous evaluations⁶⁴ as generic to the regional reform architecture when formal mechanisms are insufficiently responsive. A limitation of the RCP as a Sahel-specific vehicle was its inability to protect Sahel priorities against competing demands: put simply, a platform serving all of Africa cannot guarantee the sustained attention required for a sub-regional crisis of the Sahel's complexity.

63. UNSDG. n.d. United Nations in action. Regional level.

64. UNSDG SWE0. 2024. United Nations.

108. The limitations of the RCP are not primarily Sahel-specific. A 2024 evaluation evidence summary on the United Nations Development System regional architecture⁶⁵ documents that RCPs across regions have not yet fully met expectations, that DCO's role within the platform remained unclear to Resident Coordinators and regional staff and that DCO lacked the resources to adequately perform its platform secretariat function, including articulating Resident Coordinator needs and connecting them to platform discussions.

109. What distinguished the Sahel was a compound of specific factors: a parallel, more operationally focused coordination mechanism (the UNISS Steering Committee) that competed for the same regional director bandwidth; the severity and pace of challenging political developments after 2021, which foreclosed the strategic regional discussion the RCP was designed to enable; and the simultaneous pressure of multiple other sub-regional crises that further diluted Sahel attention within the continental platform. One senior interviewee attributed the informal Dakar platform to explicit delegation of convening authority by RCP co-chairs to the DCO regional director for Africa rather than a deviation from RCP structure, but this attribution was not corroborated by the other participants in that platform.

Finding 2.2.7: The UNISS Steering Committee and the June 2024 joint United Nations system delegation to the AES countries demonstrated that cross-pillar coherence was achievable but never institutionalized: both depended on exceptional conditions.

110. The UNISS Steering Committee represented the strongest institutional design for cross-pillar coherence in the evaluated period. By bringing together regional directors of United Nations entities alongside Resident Coordinators from all ten UNISS countries — co-chaired by the UNOWAS SRSG and the UNDP Africa regional director — the arrangements directly addressed the gap between the regional tier, where strategic direction is set, and the country tier, where implementation occurs. From 2021-2022, Resident Coordinators were systematically invited to the Steering Committee, creating a direct institutional channel through which country-level realities could inform regional decisions and sub-regional guidance could flow back to national implementation. Multiple interviewees independently attributed this achievement to the Special Coordinator's Under-Secretary-General-level convening authority. The Steering Committee met 18 times over the evaluated period, with its last session held in Guinea in October 2025.

111. The effectiveness of the Steering Committee was contingent rather than structural. Securing Resident Coordinator participation required the Special Coordinator to apply direct personal pressure, and the integration of the UNISS into Cooperation Frameworks depended on sustained engagement by individual officeholders rather than self-sustaining institutional incentives. This conditionality is itself an analytical finding: the Steering Committee demonstrated that the design was right while also demonstrating that design alone was insufficient as elaborated further in EQ 3.3.2.

112. The June-July 2024 joint delegation to AES countries provided the clearest instance of horizontal coherence translating into concrete operational posture. Following an Executive Committee decision, the Special Coordinator and DCO's regional director for Africa co-led a mission to Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, bringing together pillar co-lead regional directors alongside core coordination, humanitarian and human rights entities, presenting a single coherent United Nations presence to national interlocutors. The mission paved the way for the subsequent Deputy Secretary-General visit. Its significance lies not in what it achieved but in what the conditions enabling it reveal: it required a direct Executive Committee-level political instruction as trigger, sustained personal engagement by two senior officials and exceptional post-crisis circumstances to secure participation from United Nations entities, whose standard mode was pillar-by-pillar engagement.

113. The Steering Committee and the June 2024 mission are evidence that cross-pillar coherence was achievable, but only under conditions that functioning institutional arrangements should not require as prerequisites: extraordinary political pressure, Under-Secretary-General-level personal authority, or a direct

65. Ibid.

Executive Committee instruction. Coherence that depends on exceptional individuals and exceptional triggers is not institutionalized coherence; it is a demonstration of what institutionalized coherence would need to look like. The task for any future coordination arrangements is to take the Steering Committee's integrated regional-country model as the template and embed it with incentives, accountability mechanisms and enabling conditions that allow it to function. How the external environment constrains even correctly designed arrangements is addressed in EQ 2.3.

EQ 2.3: External coherence

114. External coherence of the United Nations system in the Sahel operated across two distinct but interconnected dimensions: the United Nations system's capacity to present a coherent, legible face to external actors and the UN's ability to align its coordination arrangements within the evolving political and funding landscape. The external landscape was not static: it was built progressively from 2013, reached its greatest institutional density in the 2017-2021 period, and then underwent rapid fragmentation from 2021 onwards. This reflected the political ruptures associated with unconstitutional changes of government in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and culminated in the formation of the AES, whose Member States withdrew from the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS – the principal intergovernmental bodies through which donor and regional coordination arrangements, via the UNISS, had originally been conceived. Findings on external coherence must therefore be read against a moving baseline, not a fixed one.

Finding 2.3.1: Member States could not consistently identify their primary United Nations interlocutor at the sub-regional level, reinforcing bilateral fragmentation and generating inefficiencies that the arrangements were intended to prevent.

115. The internal role confusion documented in EQ 2.1 and EQ 2.2 translated directly into a coordination challenge with external stakeholders. Bilateral interviewees noted that the coexistence of OSCDS, UNOWAS, UNDP, and DCO Africa as overlapping regional presences meant that actors arriving in Dakar were uncertain which entity spoke for the United Nations on any given dimension of the Sahel agenda. Four communication gaps were identified consistently: the UNISS was perceived as primarily internal to the United Nations system, with limited external visibility; the roles of different entities within it were unclear to partners; the UN's strategic objectives in the Sahel were not adequately conveyed; and the absence of a results framework left external audiences without a structured understanding of what the UNISS was intended to achieve – a gap that directly impaired resource mobilization. This opacity reinforced incentives to develop separate bilateral coordination structures, contributing to the broader fragmentation of the financing and programming landscape.

116. This was compounded in an increasingly competitive funding environment with consequences that are significant. A bilateral donor described "intense competition between United Nations agencies, and often open animosity between entity leads, which has often made United Nations coordination dysfunctional". A headquarters-level respondent identified the United Nations system's ability to present a unified voice to Member States and the public as a distinct and largely unmet coordination function. Even where joint resource mobilization initiatives were attempted under the UNISS, it appears they were not sufficient to moderate donor perceptions of internal United Nations competition for resources, with the UNISS adding a further layer of coordination complexity rather than resolving the underlying dynamic. Such dynamics were also found to be a persistent global challenge to United Nations development system coherence by the 2025 system-wide evaluation on progress towards a "new generation of United Nations country teams", among other independent evaluations and studies.

117. A further challenge was the UN's institutional inability to engage newer development partners on their own terms. Russia, China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Türkiye assumed the space vacated by OECD-DAC partners, offering partnership on different terms, operating through large infrastructure investments and direct government-to-government transfers that had limited intersection with OSCDS, Steering Committee

processes, or cross-pillar coordination frameworks. Their expanding footprint was unmatched by integration into the coordination arrangements, deepening the perception among some Member States that the United Nations was an instrument of OECD-DAC donors (associated with conditionalities related to governance, human rights and condition) rather than a genuinely multilateral broker. A key informant interviewee from within the United Nations identified the consequence directly: the United Nations had lost credibility and with it leverage, perceived as too closely aligned with OECD-DAC donors whose political and financial footprint was simultaneously contracting. This undermined the UN's positioning as an honest broker at precisely the moment when alternative partnerships were most actively displacing its influence.

Finding 2.3.2: The Sahel coordination landscape included at least 18 parallel sub-regional strategies, each reflecting distinct institutional mandates and political positioning by Member States and regional organizations; the UNISS was one among these rather than a framework capable of governing or consolidating them.

118. The proliferation of parallel Sahel strategies — at least 18 by the evaluation's count, spanning the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Plan, and bilateral frameworks from the European Union, France, Germany and others — reflects a feature of the Sahel as a region of intense and overlapping international interest. Each strategy represented the political priorities, constituency relationships and mandate logic of its sponsoring body. What this created for the United Nations system was a positioning challenge: how to establish itself as coherent and providing added value within a field already crowded by better-resourced actors. The 2017 independent review⁶⁶ identified this as a significant challenge; the UNISS was conceived primarily as an internal United Nations coordination instrument but was simultaneously positioned by some actors as a broader international framework, and this ambiguity complicated its relationship to the wider landscape.

119. The composition and political significance of this landscape shifted substantially across the evaluated period. In the early years (2013-2017), G5 Sahel governments sought greater ownership through national and regional mechanisms, creating tension with UN-led frameworks and a specific concern that international resources would flow through an UN-defined architecture rather than their own structures. The 2018 recalibration and the United Nations Support Plan partially addressed this by repositioning the UNISS as a complement to, rather than a competitor with, regional ownership frameworks. Between 2018 and 2021, the multi-strategy landscape was politically complex but navigable. After 2021 it transformed: the G5 Sahel dissolved, France withdrew, and the Central Sahel governments adjusted their partnership approaches and, at times, adopted an anti-multilateral posture. The UNISS's Security Council mandate, which may have been an asset in 2013, when the Security Council backing conferred legitimacy — became a liability, associating it with an international order that AES governments were criticising and providing no institutional incentive for engagement with a framework whose authority derived from the same source.

120. The differential performance of two sub-regional initiatives offers a relevant analytical comparison. The Lake Chad Basin Commission operated with comparatively stronger institutional capacity, partly attributable to Nigeria's anchoring role and sustained German development financing and achieved operational traction through a bottom-up model involving subnational governors. The Liptako-Gourma Authority, by contrast, had a weaker secretariat and Germany's withdrawal of funding during the evaluated period further constrained its capacity (table 7). The implication is not that external body engagement is inherently productive, but that its value is conditioned by the institutional capacity and financial sustainability of the bodies in question. This was a factor the UNISS coordination arrangements did not systematically assess before investing engagement resources.

66. Internal review of the UNISS commissioned by United Nations DPA in 2016.

Table 7. A comparison: Liptako-Gourma versus the Lake Chad Basin Initiative

	Liptako-Gourma	Lake Chad Basin Initiative
Context	Three-border area (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) under acute insecurity; formal governance receded under three military juntas (2020-2023); AES political crises strained ties with OECD-DAC partners.	Four-country basin (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria) with the protracted Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) crisis; mixed governance including a large, stable democracy (Nigeria) with sustained institutional engagement.
Regional institution	Liptako-Gourma Authority (ALG) – politically weakened after the AES government changes; transformed in 2024 into an execution agency of the AES confederation, shifting from development to security mandate.	Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) – established 1964; continuously functional; Nigeria as a leading member providing political anchor and active donor contribution alongside 13 other partners.
Donor support	- Germany suspended aid to Niger after July 2023; BMZ expressed dissatisfaction with democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso. - France, US, EU all scaled back or suspended cooperation with AES states. - OECD-DAC donor withdrawal reduced the financing base for Liptako-Gourma corridor programming.	- UNDP/Regional Stabilization Facility backed by 14 donors including Nigeria, AfDB, EU, Germany, France, UK, Sweden, Japan, Netherlands, Norway. - AfDB named LCBC's "Champion Lead Partner" for resource mobilization; signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2024. - Nigeria's consistent co-financing gave the LCBC political legitimacy and budgetary continuity.
Government cooperation	Transitional authorities in all three countries rejected Western frameworks; AES withdrawal from ECOWAS (announced January 2024, effective January 2025) and alignment with Russia further narrowed multilateral cooperation space for cross-border United Nations programming.	Four governments, including Nigeria, maintained cooperation with LCBC and United Nations partners throughout. The Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery, and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas in the Lake Chad Basin Region (RS SRR) was endorsed by the African Union in 2018 and revised in 2024, sustaining a legitimate multilateral mandate.

Source: Evaluation team analysis

121. The proliferation was compounded by the limited update of the UNISS since 2013, which required partners to fill the strategic vacuum with their own instruments, and by the UN-centric composition of the coordination arrangements: the NGO-UN forum functioned at a working group level but never informed strategic deliberation. Individual Resident Coordinators and regional directors continued to speak to their own mandates and programmes rather than achieving genuine cross-pillar coordination, reinforcing a silo dynamic at the very level designed to overcome it. A bilateral respondent questioned the premise of a dedicated mechanism altogether, arguing for "a strategy that gives orientation and direction" rather than a United Nations coordination structure, with any Sahel approach being "very light touch".

Finding 2.3.3: Relationships with the African Union and ECOWAS were substantive but fragile, dependent on leadership rather than institutional design, and severely strained in the three AES countries by 2024.

122. Despite formal alignment at the level of institutional positioning, both the African Union and ECOWAS engaged with the UNISS through participation in coordination meetings and high-level exchanges rather than through integration into the UNISS coordination arrangements. The African Union confirmed that "the concrete cooperation expected with the United Nations has not always yielded the desired results" and that joint action depended heavily on leadership to translate exchanges into results. At the ECOWAS level, institutional awareness of the UNISS was low despite significant overlap in Member State composition, with interviewees noting that "few people in ECOWAS would understand what UNISS really is". The body designed to operationalize this relationship, the Ministerial Coordination Platform, co-chaired by UNOWAS and the African Union Commission, initially functioned as a place for Member States engagement but was

assessed as ineffective as early as 2017 and, despite two successive calls for revitalization, remained so across the evaluated period. The primary formal bridge between the UNISS and the continent's two principal intergovernmental bodies never functioned, leaving the relationship dependent on bilateral outreach and individual relationships rather than institutional mechanisms with standing convening authority.

123. Both the African Union and ECOWAS held their own Sahel mandates, strategies and political constituencies, and regarded the UNISS as one input among several rather than as the coordinating framework. The African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative and ECOWAS's counterterrorism and conflict prevention frameworks gave both organizations independent programmatic identities that did not require alignment with the UNISS to maintain institutional legitimacy. Where engagement occurred – primarily through high-level exchanges and ad hoc coordination meetings – it was additive rather than integrative: it did not translate into joint programming, shared accountability, or agreed division of responsibilities. The evaluation found no evidence of a formal complementarity framework, agreed thematic division of labour, or joint monitoring arrangement with either organization at any point in the evaluated period: the institutional expression of the broader dynamic, documented in EQ 2.3, showed that the UNISS lacked the authority, resources and political positioning to function as a governing framework; instead, it functioned more as a participant among peers.

124. From 2021 onwards, the AES political crises and ECOWAS sanctions' response significantly constrained, though did not eliminate, both organizations' engagement in the three Central Sahel countries. ECOWAS's sanctions on Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and its threatened military intervention following the July 2023 unconstitutional change of government in Niger, placed it in direct political confrontation with AES governments, complicating engagement in precisely the countries where UNISS coordination needs were most acute. The African Union's formal suspension of Member States following unconstitutional government changes similarly curtailed, though did not remove, continental political engagement: the African Union and its Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) retained a presence in Bamako, and exchanges with both the African Union and ECOWAS continued through the period. The AES formation in September 2023 and ECOWAS formal withdrawal, effective January 2025, formalized a deeper rupture in the regional architecture, even as channels of engagement with the UNISS's two principal African intergovernmental partners in the Central Sahel were not entirely closed. This was not because those relationships had been poorly managed, but because the political rupture UNISS was designed to help prevent had materialized, reshaping the institutional landscape on which it depended. An important nuance qualifies this picture: AES governments did not reject United Nations engagement wholesale but recalibrated it. Flagship programmes,⁶⁷ co-designed with sectoral ministries and explicitly framed around national sovereignty, survived the political rupture and cooperation in the political and human rights fields, while contested and at times restricted, also continued in various forms. What was most acutely contested was the cross-pillar coordination space the UNISS was designed to integrate: in this domain, governments at times used humanitarian access restrictions as instruments of control, expelled some heads of mission, and realigned aspects of their engagement toward partners whose model required no normative conditionality. As one senior official noted, the message to the United Nations was unambiguous: "accompany us, otherwise we go with non-traditional emerging partners". Transactional recalibration rather than wholesale rejection is the more precise characterization of AES-UN relations at the close of the evaluated period, with direct implications for future coordination arrangements.

67. In Mali, unlike Niger and Burkina Faso, the UN's three jointly developed flagship programmes were never formally endorsed by the transitional authorities, leading the United Nations to halt related resource mobilization and communications in September 2025 pending endorsement, which has not since been granted. The UNCT subsequently discontinued the "flagship programmes" framing, folding the three priority areas (food systems, renewable energy, education and health) into the Cooperation Framework aligned with Mali's National Strategy for Emergency and Sustainable Development (SNEDD 2024-2033).

Finding 2.3.4: The UN's engagement with the G5 Sahel was substantive during its operational phase, but the G5 dissolution and the formation of the AES fundamentally dismantled the external architecture built over a decade.

125. Established at the Nouakchott Summit in February 2014, the Group of Five for the Sahel — Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger — was founded with a dual mandate: coordinating responses to cross-border security threats and promoting development cooperation among its five Member States, formalized through a Sustainable Development Strategy (2016), a Joint Force (authorized in 2017 under UNSC resolution 2391), a Priority Investment Plan (2019-2021) and the Cadre d'Actions Prioritaires Integre (CAPI or Integrated Operational Framework). For the United Nations system, the G5 was the primary sub-regional intergovernmental partner for the Central Sahel. However, its five-country membership explicitly excluded other UNISS countries, creating a permanent geographic mismatch that constrained alignment throughout the period.

126. During its operational phase (broadly 2017-2021), the G5 framework produced measurable institutional outputs: the Joint Force conducted cross-border counter-terrorism operations across the three-border zone, the Priority Investment Plan structured development programming across Member States, and high-level diplomatic engagement, including the 2020 Pau Summit, sustained international political attention on the Central Sahel. UNOWAS and OSCDS pursued active engagement with the G5 Secretariat through joint workshops, technical missions, a joint collaboration plan, and UNOWAS attendance at G5 ministers of interior meetings. Pre-existing tensions, however, complicated the relationship throughout: G5 Sahel countries expressed reservations regarding the UNOWA and OSES merger, preferring relocation of OSES to Nouakchott and raising concerns⁶⁸ that the merger might dilute attention to Sahel-specific priorities; the G5's five-country composition generated resentment among non-member UNISS countries; and the G5's founding dual mandate placed it in partial competition with the UNISS on development while depending on Security Council resolutions for the Joint Force's United Nations recognition and operational support.

127. The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the G5 and ECOWAS (announced January 2024, effective January 2025), together with the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States, "decimated"⁶⁹ the regional structures UNISS had invested years in building. The G5 Sahel dissolved and Niger rolled back its Multinational Joint Task Force participation. The Liptako-Gourma Authority, by contrast, has continued to operate and is currently undergoing a transformation process to become an AES executing agency — illustrating that regional institutional retrenchment in the Central Sahel has been uneven rather than total. The G5's dual-mandate phase from roughly 2017 to 2021 may in retrospect represent a missed opportunity: a tripartite accountability platform linking the G5, the Sahel Alliance of Donors, and the United Nations system in a shared results framework with mutual commitments could have aligned incentives across the three principal actors and provided the external accountability for United Nations coordination that the UNISS never secured at the regional level. That opportunity was not seized, and the subsequent collapse of both structures has eliminated any prospect of reconstructing it in the near term. Future United Nations system coordination arrangements will need to build external accountability from a more fragmented baseline: the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS no longer provide a regional intergovernmental counterpart in the Central Sahel, although the Liptako-Gourma Authority's continued — and evolving — institutional presence represents a partial, AES-anchored alternative, alongside a substantially reduced bilateral donor landscape.

68. UN. 2016. Letter dated 22 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Chad to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/66).

69. UN. 2025. United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. 18th Steering Committee Meeting. 30-31 October 2025 – Conakry, Guinea. Final Report.

Finding 2.3.5: The Sahel Alliance and the United Nations coordination arrangements operated in parallel throughout the evaluated period, with no structured alignment at strategic or working levels, generating fragmentation, inflated transaction costs and an incoherent external-facing posture toward the United Nations system's OECD-DAC donors and development partners.

128. Established in 2017 as the principal framework for European bilateral donor coordination in the Sahel, the Sahel Alliance brought together 18 full member governments and institutions — including Germany, France, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank — alongside nine observers.⁷⁰ It operated on a distinct institutional logic: donor-driven, project-oriented and structured around bilateral financing commitments rather than collective programme design. The United Nations system joined as a full member, represented by OSCDS and UNDP at the regional level, but membership and attendance were not equivalents of coordination. The two principal Sahel frameworks never invested in alignment, and the UN's participation remained operational rather than strategic throughout the evaluated period.

129. The non-alignment was notable at two levels, neither addressed during the evaluated period. At the strategic level, the Sahel Advisory Group and the Sahel Alliance's apex oversight bodies held no structured dialogue and developed no shared results framework, common theory of change, or agreed division of responsibilities. At the working level, the UNISS Steering Committee and the Sahel Alliance's thematic clusters operated without systematic linkage, leaving programme priorities and financing decisions within each framework invisible to the other. By 2019, the consequence had become visible at the highest institutional level: an internal Deputies Committee⁷¹ assessment concluded that the Sahel Alliance had outperformed the UN's own external coherence architecture: an explicit admission that the donor framework had achieved more practical coordination traction than the UN-led system designed to anchor it.

130. The practical consequences were concrete and cumulative. The Special Coordinator's assessment at the 2025 Sahel Advisory Group⁷² captures the systemic cost: that the UNISS had been "undercut by a proliferation of parallel, donor-branded Sahel strategies that diluted coherence, drove up transaction costs, and depressed absorption capacity". The incentive structure driving this outcome was straightforward: earmarking gave bilateral donors visibility and control that multilateral joint programming could not provide and bilateral implementing agencies, such as Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and Enabel, offered faster and cheaper alternatives to working through the coordination arrangements. United Nations agencies maintained separate bilateral donor relationships that reinforced rather than consolidated the funding structure. The post-2022 financing shock illustrated the absence of any buffering mechanism: Germany suspended official development assistance to Niger days after the unconstitutional government change in July 2023; France followed with Burkina Faso; and UNHCR's West Africa envelope, 60 per cent US-funded, fell from US\$ 32 million to a projected US\$ 2 million in Burkina Faso within two years, with no redistribution mechanism in the coordination arrangements to absorb the contraction.⁷³

131. The Sahel Alliance itself underwent significant contraction after 2021. France's military withdrawal and broader European reorientation of financing away from the Central Sahel substantially reduced the Alliance's operational footprint in the three countries where UNISS coordination pressures were highest. The mechanism that had outperformed UNISS on external coherence was retreating from the space where UNISS most needed external partnership. That no response to the non-alignment had been developed across the

70. Germany, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, Canada, Denmark, the European Investment Bank, the European Union, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, the United States, and the West African Development Bank have joined the initiative as full members.

Nine countries or organizations have joined the Sahel Alliance as observer members: Japan, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, the International Finance Corporation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Ireland and the Organization Internationale de la Francophonie.

71. Internal Deputies Committee notes (2019).

72. Internal Sahel Advisory Group meeting notes (2025).

73. UNISS Steering Committee. 2025. United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. 18th Steering Committee Meeting. 30-31 October 2025 – Conakry, Guinea. Final report.

entire evaluated period, and that this was acknowledged only at the final Sahel Advisory Group before OSCDS was discontinued, indicates how persistently the question had been deferred. Future United Nations system coordination arrangements will need to resolve from the outset the question the UNISS left open for 12 years: whether the United Nations is a participant in the donor coordination landscape, or the framework through which that landscape is organized.

EQ 3: To what extent have sub-regional coordination roles and responsibilities, arrangements and functions been matched by the operational means – financial, human, institutional – required to deliver on expectations?

132. This section assesses the efficiency of the United Nations Sahel coordination arrangements across four interrelated dimensions: financial and human resource adequacy (EQ 3.1); institutional support and role clarity (EQ 3.2); the balance between transaction costs and coordination value (EQ 3.3); and accountability mechanisms and monitoring (EQ 3.4). Across all four dimensions, the evaluation found a mismatch between the ambition of the coordination mechanisms and the means provided to achieve coordination.

Summary of findings - efficiency			
Across all four dimensions assessed, the coordination arrangements faced a persistent mismatch between the ambition of its design and the means of delivery and resources. Most recently the establishment of the OSCDS was sustained for five years solely on extrabudgetary resources to implement mandates rooted in Security Council resolution 2391 (2017) and ECOSOC resolution 2020/2, however the office resources and staffing were not commensurate with the scope of the mandate. The collective agencies, funds and programmes (AFP) burden-sharing model that was endorsed at the principal level never materialized in practice. Instead, the operational and financial weight was borne by DCO and UNDP working in partnership. At the country level, the capacities of Resident Coordinator offices were stretched, with persistent staffing gaps related directly to persistent shortfalls in funding for the Resident Coordinator system since 2019. The distinctive value of United Nations coordination – country-level presence, convening and perceived neutrality – was found to be insufficiently leveraged. This was partly because perceived high transaction costs were not considered to bring proportionate operational value to country-level actors, and partly because the absence of agreed results indicators made it challenging to assess and communicate the value of coordination. While formal accountability mechanisms existed, they were largely unable to demonstrate the added value of coordination. Distinct reporting streams sought to document activity at scale, but these did not constitute a coherent accountability system for joint outcomes. Internal accountability instruments, including: a roles and responsibilities matrix; Resident Coordinator performance appraisal embedding; and vertical reporting lines, were absent, or non-operational, or were introduced in recent years.			
Strength of evidence: See Annex IV for a summary of key evidence sources by evaluation question			
EQ 3.1: Financial & HR	Strong	EQ 3.2: Institutional	Strong
EQ 3.3: Transaction costs/ value	Moderate ⁷⁴	EQ 3.4: Accountability/ monitoring	Strong

EQ 3.1: Financial and human resources

Finding 3.1.1: The decision to finance OSCDS through extrabudgetary funding and voluntary contributions made the office financially dependent on a narrow bilateral donor base and subordinated coordination functions to continuous resource mobilization.

133. Following the short tenure of the Special Advisor (2018-2019), who struggled to procure the minimum resources, such as office space, OSCDS was established and sustained for five years without access to assessed resources. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), concurrent to the establishment of the Special Coordinator post in 2020, noted that the Under-Secretary-General post was funded from extrabudgetary resources, and, with justification, that the UNISS itself was not financed from assessed contributions. This decision, while pragmatic and administrative, imposed a significant constraint. Operating costs, salaries and office functions depended instead on a narrow base of voluntary contributions, primarily from Italy, Spain and UNDP. A 2024 ACABQ memo also concurred with

74. Analysis of coordination value vs. its transaction costs was limited by absence of clear value proposition for coordination and results measurement approaches. Therefore, it relied heavily on perception data.

requests for an extension of the post of Special Coordinator for Development and the establishment of the post of Director of Partnerships and Resource Mobilization, at the "D-1" level, up to 31 December 2026, to be funded from extrabudgetary resources.⁷⁵

134. Following the development of the UNSP and the departure of the Special Advisor in 2019, the Implementation Support Unit was identified as urgently needing to be established and was strengthened to full capacity in December 2019 by the Executive Committee and Deputies Committee. However, it took until mid-2021 to become more operational: an 18-month gap attributable to failed D-1-level recruitment, late fund arrivals, administrative bottlenecks requiring UNDP approval for procurement, and COVID-19 disruptions. The failed D-1-level recruitment was itself a resource-architecture finding: the profile required needed to be an individual senior enough to convene entity heads across the region, and this was inconsistent with the extrabudgetary employment terms on offer. The dual-funding structure of OSCDS (predominantly Italy-funded) and the Implementation Support Unit (UNDP-funded) created operational friction that persisted beyond the initial setup phase, with ambiguities about shared procurement, different email addresses (@undp.org versus @un.org), and joint versus separate budget lines.

135. The cost-sharing model discussed in the Sahel Advisory Group in 2020, whereby UNDP would provide US\$ 450,000 and each United Nations entity would contribute US\$ 50,000 annually, never fully materialized. By 2023, the Deputy Secretary-General sought to secure entity contributions at principals' meetings, receiving modest pledges. UNDP provided US\$ 1.7 million for the four-year period (2022-2025), but the total contributions from other United Nations agencies were much more limited: WFP contributed US\$ 150,000, FAO US\$ 121,000, UNHCR US\$ 100,000 and WHO and UNFPA each allocated US\$ 50,000. During the same period UNHCR, OCHA, and UNOPS seconded staff (see Annex V). By 2024, the office was still conducting individual "soft diplomacy" meetings with each AFP to solicit contributions. The 2024-2025 Sahel Advisory Group meetings provided the most candid institutional self-assessment: the Deputy Secretary-General acknowledged at the 2025 Sahel Advisory Group that OSCDS "has never been resourced commensurate with the role envisioned".⁷⁶

Finding 3.1.2: OSCDS was understaffed relative to its scope with gaps in operations management, communications and monitoring and evaluation capacity, resulting in institutional memory loss, visibility deficits and limited accountability.

136. The OSCDS constituted a skeleton team whose effective size remained approximately four to six funded positions from 2021 to 2025 – and this was for an Under-Secretary-General-level coordination function covering ten countries, three thematic pillars, multiple regional bodies, and a US\$ 6.9 billion flagship programme portfolio. Three critical staffing gaps were never adequately filled. First, an operations manager: identified as urgently needed as early as 2021, the absence of whom was noted by the Sahel Advisory Group in 2023⁷⁷ as "impeding OSCDS smooth functioning." Second, communications capacity was lacking: a communications officer, identified by the Special Coordinator as a "blind spot," provided communications capacity for only six months across the evaluated period, limiting the office's ability to articulate its value to donors and Member States and resources for communication activities were also under-resourced and ultimately discontinued. Le Griot,⁷⁸ a valued external visibility product, was suspended in 2025 due to resource constraints. Third, monitoring and evaluation capacity was similarly available for only a short period. High staff turnover, short tenures and dependence on secondments resulted in regular institutional memory loss and incomplete activities.

137. Several stakeholders noted that the Special Coordinator's focus was primarily political rather than management and resource mobilization oriented, notwithstanding the several missions he undertook to

75. Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (2024).

76. Internal Sahel Advisory Group meeting notes (2025).

77. Internal OSCDS background note for Sahel Advisory Group meeting (2023).

78. OSCDS. 2021. Bulletin le Griot UNISS April-June 2021.

different countries to promote the UNISS portfolio (see EQ 4.4). This was an asset for high-level engagement but a constraint for the operational demands of running a small extrabudgetary entity.

Finding 3.1.3: The capacities of Resident Coordinator offices across the ten UNISS countries were constrained by difficulties filling core positions and the challenge of supplementing core positions with more specialized and context-adapted expertise.

138. Resident Coordinator office (RCO) capacities across the ten UNISS countries were uneven and depended on mobilizing additional resources beyond the standard staff configuration provided for in the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system. The core profiles for all RCOs globally are: a head of office and strategic planner; a partnerships and development finance officer; an economist; a data and results management officer; and a communication officer. Since 2019, the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF) for the Resident Coordinator system has faced an annual funding gap of approximately 15-20 per cent worldwide. RCOs in the ten UNISS countries dealt with the consequences of this funding gap, just as all other RCOs globally have done. RCOs can also fund temporary positions outside of the SPTF allocations, with “locally mobilized resources”. All RCOs in the ten UNISS countries did so to some extent during the period.

139. According to a DCO analysis (March 2026), RCO staffing levels in the Sahel have varied considerably. For example, RCOs in Chad and Cameroon were the most resourced with 22 and 17 posts respectively but sustained on fragile locally mobilized resources; while Guinea (9) and The Gambia (7) operated with smaller teams. Across the region, RCOs faced persistent challenges in filling approved posts in a timely manner, with lengthy administrative recruitment procedures limiting operational capacity; a pattern documented precisely at the country level by the Mauritania United Nations Development Assistance Framework evaluation.⁷⁹ Where positions remained vacant for extended periods, the practical effect was that existing staff carried multiple concurrent responsibilities — Common Country Analysis development, Cooperation Framework preparation, UNISS reporting, UNCT coordination and government liaison — as a consequence of unfilled posts rather than by design.

140. Specialist capacity was unevenly distributed across the region. In March 2026, Mali and The Gambia RCOs lacked advisory positions; economist posts were vacant in both The Gambia and Guinea; and partnerships and development finance officer posts were vacant in Mali and Mauritania, weakening resource mobilization and evidence-based planning capacity in precisely the contexts where these functions are most consequential. In contrast, seven of ten countries had peace and development advisors, who were consistently and highly appreciated. Three countries had dedicated gender expertise (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad). Niger had disability and inclusion capacity. Cameroon had a dedicated expert on the humanitarian-development nexus.

141. The delinking of the Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative functions removed access to the discretionary operational resources that had previously enabled Resident Coordinators to facilitate coordination processes, for example, retreats, joint programme development, consultant support. Since 2019, Resident Coordinators have been required to solicit such resources from United Nations entities, a dependency that one government interlocutor identified as visibly undermining Resident Coordinator authority. The practical effect is that the Resident Coordinator’s coordination capacity becomes contingent, to some extent, on the goodwill of the very entities the Resident Coordinator is expected to coordinate.

142. At the country level, Resident Coordinator appointments were made without prior consultation with the Special Coordinator or the SRSG UNOWAS, however, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) at headquarters is part of the recruitment panels of new Resident Coordinators. This was found by the evaluation to be a missed opportunity with reputational and functional consequences in certain UNISS

79. United Nations Mauritania. 2022. Evaluation du cadre de partenariat pour le développement durable (CPDD 2019-2022). Rapport Final.

countries. Notwithstanding the efforts made to ensure that political, cultural and linguistic competencies adapted to the complex Sahelian contexts were considered when appointing Resident Coordinators, both United Nations and non-United Nations stakeholders noted that not all Resident Coordinators had the appropriate political skills and cultural sensitivities to optimally navigate Sahelian contexts. Resident Coordinators were declared “personae non grata” in two countries during the evaluated period and, in at least one case, inadequate political and cultural sensitivities contributed to deteriorating relationships, with some stakeholders suggesting that inter-entity competition by some United Nations entities compounded the problem.

Finding 3.1.4: Senior sub-regional coordination leadership was exclusively male throughout the evaluated period, while Resident Coordinator appointments achieved partial but not full gender parity; African representation was consistently strong at the political and development coordination tiers but not in regional humanitarian coordination leadership.

143. The staffing data point to a persistent and notable gender gap at the most senior levels of the UN's Sahel coordination arrangements and fall short of the ambitions set in the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP).⁸⁰ With one exception – a Special Envoy under OSES⁸¹ – every SRSG, Special Advisor or Coordinator, regional humanitarian coordinator and DCO Africa director appointed over a 12-year period was male; a significant finding, particularly given the UN's stated institutional commitments to gender parity in leadership. While the 41 per cent female representation among Resident Coordinators reflects a more balanced picture, it still falls short of parity and carries less weight when the most visible and authoritative roles remained exclusively male throughout the period (table 8 and figure 13).

144. On geographic representation, the data tell a more encouraging story. Consistent African representation at the political and development coordination tier, across both UNOWAS SRSGs and Special Coordinators and advisors - although not in humanitarian coordination leadership - suggests a degree of intentionality in aligning leadership profiles with regional context and legitimacy. This is a meaningful pattern, and contrasts with the absence of both gender and geographic diversity in humanitarian coordination leadership from 2013 to 2017.

145. Taken together, the data suggest that progress on diversity has been uneven and insufficiently institutionalized. Advances in one dimension (regional representation) have not been accompanied by equivalent progress in another (gender balance), and neither has been applied consistently across coordination tiers. This raises questions about whether diversity commitments have been embedded in appointment processes or remain subject to ad-hoc decision-making.

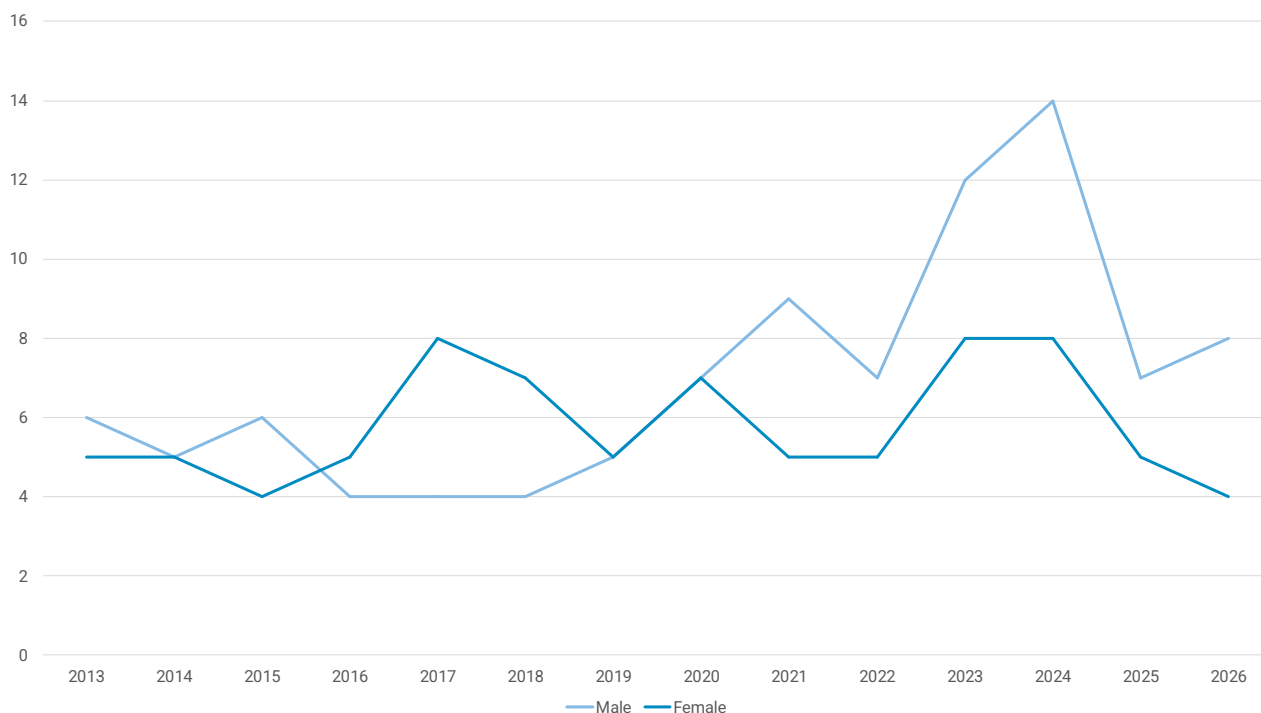
Table 8. Coordination leadership in the Sahel (sex, number, nationality)

Role	Men	Women	Total	# Africans
OSES (2012-2016)	1	1	2	1
UNOWAS SRSGs (2013-2025)	4	0	4	4
DCO Africa	1	0	1	1
Regional Humanitarian Coordinators	3	0	3	0
Special Coordinator/Advisor	2	0	2	2
Resident Coordinators (all)*	38	27	65	33

Source: Evaluation team analysis and DCO HR data, March 2026 N.b. Total of RCs and RCs a.i. from 2013-2025

80. Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP).

81. The Special Envoy became the DSRSG of UNOWAS following the merger. Since then, the DSRSG position at UNOWAS has been held by women.

Figure 13. Number of Resident Coordinators and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators per year (sex-disaggregated)

Source: Evaluation team analysis, March 2026

Note: Fluctuation in numbers is due to the fact that there could have been more than one Resident Coordinator per year. In some years, there were up to three or four Resident Coordinators (most were acting in (a.i.)). The numbers represent the number of Resident Coordinators that were working that year, not appointed.

EQ 3.2: Institutional support and role clarity

Finding 3.2.1: Institutional support for the United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel fell systematically short of the expectations implied by their design. The arrangements relied on DCO and increasingly upon the support of UNDP, with implications for perceived neutrality.

146. Throughout the evaluated period, the institutional backing provided by United Nations system entities to coordination arrangements in the Sahel fell short of the high expectations and ambitions that were set by the UNISS itself. This was true at all levels from headquarters, to regional, to country.

147. At the highest level, the Secretary-General and the Executive Committee, engagement and decisions on Sahel coordination arrangements were episodic, in response to acute developments in the region. Nonetheless, a review of Executive Committee summaries shows that the Secretary-General took a number of steps to revive and reorient the UNISS between 2017 and 2025. This included tasking the Deputy Secretary-General with reviews of the strategy and regional coordination arrangements, convening an international forum with the African Union on the G5 Sahel in 2021, and ultimately appointing (with the African Union, ECOWAS and G5 Sahel) the High-Level Panel on the Sahel (2022). However, the Secretary-General's reflections on the United Nations system in the Sahel appeared, at times, to question the relevance of a single overarching and public strategy with preference for a refined division of labour to deal with the MINUSMA drawdown (completed in early 2024).⁸² The Deputy Secretary-General's engagement was committed and necessary; however, this was insufficient to resolve the chronic resourcing gap for the coordination function (OSCDS), and was dependent on personal political intervention rather than institutional mechanisms. Finally, the Executive Office of the

82. SWE0 review of Executive Committee summaries where agenda items included "Sahel" or individual Sahel countries (2017-2025).

Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Unit provided valued operational and technical backstopping to the regional level.

148. The engagement and support of United Nations entity principals collectively presented the coordination arrangement's most significant institutional support gap. Verbal commitment and operational follow-through remained persistently misaligned throughout the evaluated period. Across every Sahel Advisory Group meeting from 2021 to 2025, entity principals, including those from UNODC, UNDP, UNHCR, OCHA, and OHCHR, affirmed the value of OSCDS's work, endorsed the coordination arrangements, and committed to more integrated approaches. Yet, beyond UNDP, actual financial contributions remained minimal and required the active engagement of the Deputy Secretary-General to produce even modest results.

149. For the remaining entities, the pattern was one of appreciation without investment. The outreach of the Deputy Secretary-General at the 2023 Sahel Advisory Group meeting produced a UNOPS P5 commitment, an FAO pledge of US\$ 150,000, and a WHO memorandum of understanding (MoU). These results were meaningful precisely because they were exceptional, underscoring how much the system depended on periodic high-level pressure rather than durable institutional commitments. The 2024 Technical Retreat records UNDP's regional director observing that OSCDS "will be able to produce more impact, if it had more" institutional support from across the system, indicating that the collective United Nations entity commitment had not translated into collective United Nations entity responsibility. The Deputy Secretary-General's own assessment in 2025, that the office "has never been resourced commensurate with the role envisioned", stands as the retrospective verdict on United Nations entity institutional support as a whole. UNDP stands apart from this pattern and warrants recognition for its sustained institutional commitment.

150. At the regional level, the operational weight of coordination arrangements was carried by the DCO-UNDP partnership that developed into the actual backbone of the system. UNDP played a central role: at the strategic level, co-chairing the UNISS Steering Committee and the Regional Collaborative Platform; at the operational level, establishing and funding the Implementation Support Unit; at the technical level, co-chairing the governance pillar; and supporting OSCDS through seconded staff and providing administrative, procurement and physical workspace in its West and Central Africa regional office. The concentration of institutional support from a single entity generated a perception that OSCDS favoured UNDP, an assessment that undermined the neutrality of the coordination function in the eyes of some other entities and its ability to act as a neutral convener (see also EQ 4.6 on the trust consequences of this dynamic).

151. UNOWAS co-chaired the Steering Committee and provided political legitimacy but without providing the dedicated operational capacity that an internal review team in 2019⁸³ identified as necessary for coordination, and included within the terms of reference of the DSRSG (as noted in EQ 2.2). UN ECA provided valuable technical support for flagship programme development, one of the clearest instances of an entity delivering institutional support commensurate with its role. Nonetheless, it remained a marginal player: its institutional profile and its analytical and normative functions were misaligned with the operational and political demands required. DCO chaired the regional peer support group and, through this role, contributed to quality assurance, peer learning, integrated planning and strategic coherence within and across countries. At the country level the RCO leadership of the Cooperation Framework process made the Resident Coordinator system an effective conduit through which UNISS priorities were integrated into country-level planning frameworks.

83. Internal review team paper on UNISS and UNSP (2019).

EQ 3.3: Transaction costs and coordination value

Finding 3.3.1: The United Nations system's overall coordination value in the Sahel derived primarily from its sustained legitimate presence in difficult political contexts, and the ability to hold international attention on the region. Specifically, the UNISS Steering Committee delivered genuine coordination value but, because that value rested on perception rather than demonstrated evidence, fatigue tended to be attributed to the architecture rather than to the wider proliferation of parallel mechanisms.

152. During several key informant interviews, external stakeholders and Resident Coordinators consistently identified the UN's coordination value as deriving from its neutrality, its convening power, its sustained country presence and its ability to hold the political attention of the international community on the Sahel, not primarily from its technical expertise or programmatic delivery. The value addition most consistently cited across external stakeholders, bilateral partners and Resident Coordinators was the UN's positional advantage: the ability to remain engaged in difficult political contexts where other actors had reduced or suspended their presence. Bilateral partners noted that in the fragility and crisis context of the Central Sahel, there was an added value to having a United Nations footprint that other organizations could not sustain and that was not contingent on programmatic achievement but on sustained legitimate presence. United Nations neutrality was cited by several external global and regional stakeholders as the primary basis for valuing United Nations coordination. Technical assistance and thematic expertise were also cited, particularly OSCDS's and DCO's ability to bring high-calibre experts on thematic topics to UNCTs.; but these were secondary to the positional and convening advantages. The SRSG-UNOWAS function was valued for keeping Sahel security and governance on the Security Council agenda; and OSCDS for maintaining the focus on development in the Sahel through ECOSOC reporting. The added value of coordination under UNISS arrangements rested ultimately on perception and self-assessment rather than demonstrated evidence — a limitation that made it very difficult to make a compelling, objective case for the investment in coordination over time. OSCDS sought to estimate the financial value of itself.⁸⁴ Its self-reporting, which was not independently verified, noted that for every dollar invested in OSCDS, US\$ 34 was mobilized for United Nations entity programming between 2022 and 2025, with potential to increase the ratio further in 2026 through the potential Islamic Development Bank-Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (IsDB/BADEA) pipeline of projects (see EQ 4.4)

153. The UNISS Steering Committee generated genuine value as a platform for peer learning and a mechanism for creating common understanding among United Nations leadership. Over time, it became also a decision-making body, valued precisely because regional directors participated alongside Resident Coordinators, enabling commitments rather than mere reporting (see EQ 2.2). It was credited for information-sharing, joint analysis and flagship co-creation with DCO, particularly in the three AES countries, and for providing a rapid collective response platform when the AES crises unfolded. One regional director noted that it forced agencies to think beyond individual mandates; a cultural value transcending specific decisions. It was significant that the UNISS was characterized as a "light coordination platform" in the 2025 Adapting UNISS to Rising Uncertainty report⁸⁵ explicitly positioned as a model that "may be emulated in other regions" under the UN80 Initiative.

154. Nonetheless, "too many envoys, too many meetings, and too many venues" was a refrain that captured the cumulative coordination burden experienced by all actors in the Sahel landscape. While the UNISS architecture itself was not the primary source of this fatigue, it was one layer within it. The inability to demonstrate measurable UNISS-specific value through agreed indicators meant that coordination fatigue tended to be attributed to the architecture as a whole rather than to the proliferation problem that actually drove it. Governments themselves provided the most direct transaction cost assessment: too much time was

84. In 2024, the year OSCDS mobilized funds from the AfDB, this ratio reached 1:150.

85. Internal OSCDS background note for Sahel Advisory Group meeting (2025).

spent in meetings, frequent consultations and reporting requirements, with returns not commensurate with the financial assistance received.

Finding 3.3.2: Technical working groups and informal coordination structures outperformed formal standing forums in cost-value terms, generating inter-entity programme design, international financial institution-ready project pipelines and issue-specific dialogue. The emergence of informal structures represented a rational adaptation by practitioners to a formal architecture, whose transaction costs were not consistently returning proportionate value.

155. Several United Nations regional staff assessed UNISS working groups more positively than formal coordination meetings, as the working groups generated information-sharing, inter-entity programme design, cross-fertilization between coordination mechanisms, and the preparation of flagship bankable projects. Specific value included: co-organizing the COP28 Dubai water event that resulted in the Water Accelerator, facilitating UNISS integration into Cooperation Frameworks, and preparing regional directors ahead of Steering Committee meetings. Working groups also supported the development of bankable projects for submission to international financial institutions such as the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

156. At the technical level, United Nations entities were noted as less competitive than at the regional director tier, lowering inter-entity tensions. However, the development of sectoral “offers” – thematic programmatic packages intended to translate UNISS priorities into investable proposals – was described as extremely time-consuming, requiring endorsement from multiple agencies, and ultimately failing to generate the concrete funding they were designed to attract. Thematic meetings were consistently rated more valuable than generic coordination meetings, pointing toward a model where issue-specific coordination around concrete deliverables justifies its transaction costs more readily than standing forums.

157. Informal coordination structures emerged as a rational response to the cost-value calculation: when the formal coordination did not generate the sufficient or needed return, stakeholders invested in lower-cost informal mechanisms delivering the specific value they needed (for example, information exchange, peer support, issue-specific dialogue). For example, the World Bank and WFP country directors of AES countries established informal bilateral exchanges on food insecurity outside the UNISS arrangements. Female Resident Coordinators, finding the Africa-wide Resident Coordinator group insufficiently responsive to their needs, created a dedicated WhatsApp group providing peer support on human resource (HR) issues, senior management visits, and mutual support following the “persona non grata” status of Resident Coordinators, particularly relevant since all of the Resident Coordinators who were declared “personae non grata” were women. The coexistence of formal and informal structures is both a symptom of the coordination arrangements limitations and evidence of the genuine underlying demand for coordination among United Nations practitioners in the Sahel.

Finding 3.3.3: The transaction cost-value balance was considered positive at the political tier and for hotspot-specific cross-pillar mechanisms but considered mixed to negative at the operational tier.

158. The transaction cost-value balance was experienced differently across tiers of the coordination arrangements. The OIOS evaluation of UNOWAS⁸⁶ documented that over 75 per cent of Resident Coordinators agreed that UNOWAS effectively supported their needs. This gap reflects a broader proximity paradox: respondents at the sub-regional and regional levels were the most likely to acknowledge positive contributions from the coordination arrangements, while those closest to country-level implementation were the most sceptical. Several Resident Coordinator office staff reported in the survey that mechanisms such as the Sahel

86. United Nations OIOS. 2024. Evaluation of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

Advisory Group, the Implementation Support Unit and the Regional Collaborative Platform were unfamiliar to them, and that sub-regional coordination had no visible impact on their operational work. The regional coordination layer was generating outputs, frameworks, meetings and strategies that did not always translate into operational inputs at the country level.

159. A geographic skew compounded this dynamic. With OSCDS based in Dakar and the coordination agenda driven predominantly by the AES crisis countries, non-AES Resident Coordinators participating in Steering Committees, found the substance of discussions focused on Central Sahel dynamics with limited relevance to their contexts. For non-AES country Resident Coordinators, the greatest coordination value came not from UNISS Steering Committees but from mechanisms organized around specific cross-border hotspots, particularly the Lake Chad Basin Initiative and the Liptako-Gourma platform, where peace and security, humanitarian and development funding streams converged around concrete geographic realities. The specificity of purpose (a defined hotspot, a defined set of actors, a defined cross-pillar challenge) generated value more efficiently than the broader UNISS arrangements could for actors whose country contexts differed from the Central Sahel crisis.

160. The most significant exogenous driver of transaction costs was the proliferation of parallel donor-branded Sahel strategies, which eroded the cost-value balance of arrangements that were justified in design but could not prevent external fragmentation. The Special Coordinator's 2025 handover note⁸⁷ was unambiguous on this point (see EQ 2.3): the external proliferation of parallel donor-branded strategies was itself the most significant exogenous driver of coordination overhead, and the arrangements had no mechanism to prevent or absorb it.

161. Taken together, the transaction cost verdict is mixed but not uniformly negative: the political coordination tier generated commensurate value for those who engaged with it, hotspot-specific cross-pillar mechanisms outperformed generic coordination for non-AES actors, and the "light platform" comparative advantage was real. The failure lay in the inability to translate political-tier value into operational-tier returns. Survey data corroborate this assessment: among the 106 respondents with sufficient direct experience to answer, only 27 per cent agreed that the transaction costs of coordination (for example, meetings, reporting requirements and process demands) were worthwhile given the joint action produced, while 21 per cent disagreed, and the remainder were neutral or unable to assess. This signals that the overhead of the architecture was not consistently perceived as returning proportionate value.

EQ 3.4: Accountability mechanisms and monitoring

Finding 3.4.1: The absence of agreed UNISS results indicators meant limited programmatic accountability throughout the evaluated period. UNISS reporting streams were characterized by activity aggregation rather than outcome attribution.

162. The United Nations system in the Sahel did not establish a comprehensive monitoring system to track UNISS delivery from 2013 to 2025. The 2017 UNISS review⁸⁸ explicitly recommended the establishment of such a mechanism. The summary of the United Nations Support Plan (2018)⁸⁹ included a section entitled "implementation and accountability for results framework" that provided only an overview of key actors rather than a results framework. The 2019 internal review team confirmed that "the absence of agreed-upon benchmarks, an investment plan and a monitoring and evaluation framework has affected the implementation of the Support Plan".⁹⁰ A UNISS monitoring and evaluation officer was mobilized to work in the OSCDS and Implementation Support Unit in 2021, but the position was sustained for only a limited period.

87. Internal OSCDS documentation.

88. Internal review of the UNISS commissioned by United Nations DPA in 2016.

89. UN. 2018. United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. Working together for a prosperous and peaceful Sahel. Summary.

90. Internal review team paper on UNISS and UNSP (2019).

163. However, the evaluation does not necessarily consider that the establishment of such a system would have been desirable given the limitations of the UNISS itself (as discussed under EQ 1). A formal UNISS monitoring and evaluation system may have only provided aggregations of existing activities, rather than acting as an accountability tool to demonstrate the results and value addition of cross-pillar coordination.

164. Accountability and oversight were limited. The two independent reviews of UNISS— commissioned by the Department of Political Affairs in 2017 and an internal review team in 2019 — were substantively useful, producing relevant recommendations, but lacked follow-up mechanisms. Many recommendations from these reviews were not implemented. In terms of audit, UNOWAS was last audited in 2023, however OSCDS was not audited by OIOS across its five-year assignment. OIOS has conducted five audits of DCO since its creation, none covering the Sahel specifically.

165. The lack of a sub-regional evaluation mechanism was recognized at the 15th UNISS Steering Committee meeting in December 2023,⁹¹ which proposed an independent evaluation. The eventual commissioning of this independent system-wide evaluation came from the request of the Sahel Advisory Group in 2025, following the decision to end the Special Coordinator's assignment had been made. Several interviewees noted that it was unusual to conduct an evaluation after, rather than before, taking such a decision.

Finding 3.4.2: Reporting streams at all levels individually served their primary audiences but did not constitute a coherent reporting and accountability system. None were able to distinguish UNISS coordination results from individual entity results.

166. The United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel operated within a broader intergovernmental accountability frame. Since 2020, the Secretary-General has reported annually to ECOSOC on the “implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region by the United Nations system”; de-facto an invitation and opportunity to report, on an intergovernmental basis, on UNISS coordination and implementation. In parallel, the Secretary-General reports several times a year to the Security Council on the implementation of the UNOWAS mandate, including a chapter dedicated to UNISS coordination. However, neither organ exercises formal oversight of coordination functions, mechanisms and arrangements. As such, the transmission of information on the challenges or successes of United Nations system coordination in the Sahel have been very limited. In practice, both reporting streams served visibility more than accountability functions.

167. The Security Council's original request for the development of the UNISS had the potential to provide a unique accountability platform for collective United Nations system results across the Sahel, spanning peace and security, development, humanitarian action and human rights pillars. In practice, it did not serve as a meaningful accountability lever. As of 2026, UNOWAS is mandated to report twice per year to the Security Council (previously three times per year), and its reports offered rigorous political and security analysis, but left development and resilience outcomes peripheral, partly due to word limitations. As the security situation deteriorated post-2020, humanitarian framing progressively crowded out development reporting. The Secretariat has attempted in recent years to improve alignment between the UNOWAS and ECOSOC reports and to create more space for development and root-cause content in Security Council reporting, but with limited success.⁹²

168. Beyond the content of the reports themselves, Security Council members placed progressively lower priority on United Nations system coordination: the UNISS received very limited attention in the most recent

91. UNISS Steering Committee. 2023. United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. Report of the 15th Steering Committee Meeting. 14 December, 2023. Dakar, Senegal.

92. It is notable that both intergovernmental reports are constrained by word count restrictions. The ECOSOC report is combined with an unrelated report on South Sudan, while the Security Council report must dedicate significant space to developments in the region and implementation of the other chapters of the UNOWAS mandate.

UNOWAS mandate renewals, and the overall share of Security Council time dedicated to the Sahel decreased significantly following MINUSMA's drawdown, with only the two mandated reports expected in 2026 compared to more than ten at the peak. The Special Coordinator had no formal reporting line to the Security Council and was never invited to brief a formal session. By 2026, some Security Council-focused delegates were unaware of OSCDS and unable to name the Special Coordinator. The appropriateness of a Security Council-mandated development strategy was itself contested: proximity to the Security Council may have begun to dilute United Nations system accountability in the context of sovereigntist narratives among some Sahelian states, which made some humanitarian and development actors reluctant to expose their work to Security Council dynamics.

169. ECOSOC resolution 2020/2 created a new Secretary-General reporting line on the "implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support" by the United Nations system, providing an annual platform for the Special Coordinator to brief Member States. While this reflected better the coordination function's development focus, its consequences for collective accountability were limited. ECOSOC progress reports functioned as inventories of Sahel-relevant activities rather than structured accounts of jointly achieved outcomes, with no systematic distinction between UNISS-driven programming and existing entity activities subsequently aligned to a UNISS pillar. They provided a high-level visibility platform but did not require a demonstration of improved coordination. Structural features further diluted their accountability value: Sahel reporting was combined with South Sudan in a single agenda item, reducing Sahel-specific scrutiny, and the item competed for attention within a crowded ECOSOC programme. The coherence implications of this intergovernmental accountability gap are examined in EQ 2.

170. The UNISS annual progress reports were informal reports produced by OSCDS at the sub-regional level from 2020 and based on a road map⁹³ rather than a results framework. They reproduced the same limitation: programmatic sections aggregated regional, national and multi-country initiatives without establishing a hierarchy based on UNISS attribution, coordination added value, or the specific role of OSCDS. Resource mobilization claims were unverifiable, a limitation the Special Coordinator acknowledged at the 2023 ECOSOC segment,⁹⁴ noting that donors routinely financed United Nations entities in silos while calling for integrated programmes. For example, significant funding flows from the European Union, Italy, and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) were regularly cited in these reports, yet it was impossible to determine whether they were mobilized through the UNISS framework, structured around it, or merely coincidentally compatible with its objectives.

171. At the country level, UNCT annual results reports were not designed to show what difference coordination made, in-country or sub-regionally, as distinct from what individual agencies delivered. By 2024, eight of the ten UNISS countries had formally aligned their Cooperation Frameworks to the UNISS and the United Nations Support Plan (see EQ 1), but this did not translate into indicators to track UNISS implementation. Reports of country-level results thus remained useful for bilateral accountability to national governments but produced no regional synthesis, no cross-country comparison, and no basis for demonstrating what ten UNCTs collectively contributed to UNISS priorities.

172. The different reporting streams faced three key constraints that undermined reporting on collective United Nations system results. In New York, United Nations system reporting on improvements in coordination, coherence and collective results - never explicitly mandated – was crowded out by the crisis context, Security Council dynamics and limited bandwidth. At the sub-regional level, UNISS reporting against a road map rather than a results framework provided flexibility and agility but precluded systematic collective results measurement. At the country and UNCT level, incentive and accountability structures treated collective, UNISS, or sub-regional results as a secondary alignment exercise, to primary and vertical entity-specific, country-specific or donor-specific accountability lines. These challenges, in combination, made United

93. The UNISS road map was a document produced annually and reviewed by the Steering Committee and was a combined workplan with indicative results/targets.

94. ECOSOC. 2023. 2023 Operational Activities for Development Segment.

Nations system collective outcome measurement and visibility across the ten UNISS countries unrealistic and unachievable.

Finding 3.4.3: The United Nations system was unable to generate a transparent, reliable, and complete picture of its portfolio across United Nations or UNISS pillars in the Sahel. This constrained coordination – coordination functions operated without the information required to steer collective delivery. It also made the intended outcomes of coordination effectively untraceable.

173. As has been well documented in other evaluations and reviews, the United Nations system lacks a comprehensive cross-entity or cross-pillar data platform, both to track planned activities on an ex-ante basis and to provide an ex-post picture of expenditure and delivery.⁹⁵ The situation in the Sahel is no different but further challenged by the context of significant humanitarian, and peace and security portfolios, cross-border programming, and a sub-regional strategy (UNISS).

174. The experience of the present evaluation is illustrative: reconstructing a quantitative picture of the UN's collective footprint required drawing simultaneously on UN-INFO joint workplan data, OCHA FTS data, OECD ODA disbursement data, Chief Executives Board (CEB) financial statistics and UN-MPTFO Gateway, amongst others. All are separate, non-interoperable systems, each capturing a partial and distinct slice of the portfolio and often using different definitions.

175. As explained in the introduction, UN-INFO provides the most comprehensive available ex-post – picture of the United Nations system portfolio in the Sahel for the years covered by Cooperation Framework cycles (beginning from 2020 onwards). However, the limitations of the data are very considerable, to the extent that DCO headquarters considers it unreliable and exercises considerable caution in its use. Limitations, both in the Sahel countries and globally, include: uneven completeness across entities; outdated entries; backlogs and bunching of data around UNCT annual report drafting rather than continuous monitoring; inconsistent definitions for outputs and activities or commitment and disbursement; aspirational rather than realistic “required resources”; very large results chain gaps between extremely high-level and broad Cooperation Framework outcomes and entity-specific sub-outputs, among others.

176. A structural limitation for sub-regional coordination or cross-border programming, which would persist even in a situation of complete and accurate data, is the exclusively national scope of data collection against Cooperation Frameworks. The evaluation noted that joint programmes were not traceable in the then UNISS countries. The joint programme marker in UN-INFO was unused, and annual information management system data on joint programmes was incomplete and inaccurate.⁹⁶

177. These limitations are corroborated and compounded, globally, by trends in reported information sharing between Resident Coordinators and UNCT entities. In annual QCPR monitoring surveys, 80 per cent of UNCT respondents reported always or usually sharing funding outreach information with the Resident Coordinator, while 76 per cent of Resident Coordinators reported that only a few or no UNCT members shared this information – a direct contradiction. The 2025 system-wide evaluation recommended establishing and implementing clearer ex-ante transparency standards among UNCT members and Resident Coordinators to address this limitation to coordination and coherence.

95. For example, the 2025 System-wide evaluation on progress towards a “new generation of United Nations country teams” (SWE0-2025-001), focusing primarily on the United Nations development system and Cooperation Framework cycles, identified that ex-post reporting is constrained by incentives, perceptions of duplication, inconsistent results chain definitions, lack of ERP system interoperability etc., while ex-ante transparency on entity programming, work plans, resource mobilization efforts is a major constraint for the exercise of coordination.

96. For example, many ongoing “joint programmes” listed only one implementing United Nations entity and financial data / expenditure by year was not available.

178. In the Sahel, OSCDS – supported by OCHA – sought to address this information gap by applying a 5W mapping methodology to map the United Nations system presence across the ten UNISS countries. This provided a partial aggregate view but remained an improvised snapshot rather than a continuous system for information management, coordination and accountability for collective results (box 1).

Box 1. The 5W mapping as a substitute to an accountability mechanism at the sub-regional level

In 2021-2022, OSCDS and OCHA's regional office for West and Central Africa conducted a system-wide 5W mapping of United Nations operational presence across the ten UNISS countries. Twenty-three agencies submitted data, yielding 514 discrete project entries with an aggregate indicative budget of approximately US\$ 8.3 billion. Niger accounted for the largest project share (32 per cent), followed by Burkina Faso (21 per cent), Nigeria (18 per cent), and Mali (17 per cent). Entity concentration was pronounced: UNDP alone contributed 20 per cent of projects and 56 per cent of the aggregate budget; WFP and FAO together accounted for a further quarter of submissions.

Against the UNISS pillars, the resilience pillar attracted the largest share of cross-pillar projects (52 per cent), with governance and security at parity (21 per cent each). Inclusive economic growth and climate action received the highest investment shares across the six UNSP priorities. Cross-border or regional projects accounted for 44 per cent of entries, although strictly cross-border projects involving joint implementation across national boundaries numbered only 26, pointing to a persistent gap between regional framing and operationally integrated delivery. Sixty-two per cent of projects were self-reported as nexus projects, with inter-entity collaboration reported in 53 per cent of the total.⁹⁷

179. There are two major consequences of this situation for cross-pillar and multi-country coordination in the Sahel. Firstly, coordination functions and mechanisms could not operate with a consolidated view of who is doing what, where, for whom, and with what resources. This limits the ability of any Resident Coordinator or sub-regional coordinator to address gaps or duplication, identify joint programming opportunities, and promote synergies and complementarities across the whole United Nations portfolio. Secondly, as experienced directly by the present evaluation, there is no single and reliable platform on which coordination results – for example, joint programming, joint programmes, cross-border interventions, joint resource mobilization etc. – can be tracked and measured over time (see EQ 4 for further details). Overall, this tilts accountability for delivery towards individual agencies and away from collective United Nations system results.

Finding 3.4.4: Internal accountability was undermined by insufficiently clear and updated roles and the absence of reporting lines and feedback mechanisms between key actors in the system. The evolution of the UNISS Steering Committee toward outcome-linked individual accountability represented a late improvement.

180. Within the United Nations system, accountability mechanisms for coordination and collective results at the sub-regional level either had critical gaps or failed to generate the behavioural adjustments needed to contribute to results.

181. As mentioned in EQ 2, vertical accountability was challenged: there was an absence of any reporting line between Resident Coordinators and the Special Coordinator even although the organigram accompanying the terms of reference for the Special Coordinator (2020) established a formal – yet indirect – reporting line of Resident Coordinators to the Special Coordinator on UNISS implementation matters, this seemingly was never applied.⁹⁸ Equally, there were no reporting lines between UNISS coordination mechanisms and the wider Resident Coordinator system, where DCO retained day-to-day management responsibility.

182. Substitute practices that might have partially compensated for the absence of formal reporting lines, for example, systematic consultation with OSCDS and UNOWAS on Resident Coordinator appointments or

97. OSCDS & OCHA ROWCA. 2022. 5W Mapping of United Nations Presence in the UNISS Sahel Region.

98. Terms of Reference for Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (internal).

embedding of UNISS accountability in Resident Coordinator performance appraisals, were discussed but not consistently implemented.

183. At the country level, QCPR survey data⁹⁹ confirms that Resident Coordinator-UNCT accountability dynamics in the ten UNISS countries were not meaningfully different from global averages: across 2021-2024, 62 per cent of Resident Coordinators in the Sahel reported providing performance appraisal input for less than one third of UNCT members or none at all. This confirms that entity-specific reporting lines continued to override horizontal accountabilities at the country level in precisely the context where cross-pillar integration was most urgently required.

184. The UNISS coordination arrangements produced their clearest internal accountability instrument six years after UNISS adoption in 2019 in the form of the matrix of roles and responsibilities. This was the only document to systematically assign accountability for UNISS delivery across the full range of actors. Critically, it was never updated to reflect the structural changes brought about by the global repositioning of the United Nations development system. The Steering Committee, however, did begin to function as an increasingly effective accountability mechanism in its later years: from the 11th (2021) through the 18th (2025) meeting, each session closed with commitments tracked in subsequent cycles, and the 18th Steering Committee advanced further by assigning named Resident Coordinator leads to defined deliverables with explicit tracking requirements.

Finding 3.4.5: Amid the shifting institutional landscape, the United Nations system never secured a primary regional partner with whom to share mutual accountability for collective, cross-pillar, UNISS results. Co-created flagship programmes and the Lake Chad Basin joint programming demonstrated that external accountability is achievable in bounded contexts.

185. One consequence of the external coherence failures documented in EQ 2 is that the United Nations system lacked a primary regional-level partner organization with which to share mutual accountability for delivering on UNISS priorities. As the 2025 system-wide evaluation on progress towards a "new generation of United Nations country teams" identifies, one of the most consequential factors for improved United Nations system coherence at the country level is clear demand and enforcement of United Nations coherence by the national government.¹⁰⁰ Multiple interviewees noted that the UNISS coordination arrangements never found the equivalent at the regional level, perhaps because such an equivalent never existed. The high point of the G5 Sahel (regional configuration) and the Sahel Alliance (donor coordination platform) may have represented a missed opportunity to establish a tripartite accountability dynamic with the United Nations system. But the dissolution of the G5 removed this possibility. The UNISS's resonance with ECOWAS was peripheral from the outset and, with the withdrawal of the AES countries, the Central Sahel is now situated even further from the ECOWAS centre of gravity.

186. More positively, recent examples of strengthened external accountability for United Nations coherence have emerged at the national level. In Burkina Faso and Niger, the co-created flagship programmes have generated accountability relationships with sectoral ministries. Governments are signatories to specific deliverables, and progress is traceable in ways that the broader UNISS arrangements never achieved. In cross-border areas such as the Lake Chad Basin, joint programming with the Lake Chad Basin Commission created a comparable external accountability dynamic at subnational levels in adjacent countries. These examples are both models and exceptions: they demonstrate that external accountability for United Nations coordination is achievable in the Sahel context, but they depend on a specificity of purpose and a bilateral government commitment that the broader UNISS arrangements, by design, could not replicate at scale across ten countries and three pillars.

99. SWE0 analysis of QCPR monitoring survey data – 2021, 2022, 2023, 2025 survey of RCs in ten UNISS countries vs global averages.

100. UNSDG SWE0. 2025. System-wide evaluation on progress towards a "new generation of United Nations country teams."

EQ4: To what extent has United Nations system coordination helped achieve results (versus entity business as usual)?

187. This section assesses whether United Nations system coordination in the Sahel generated results that would not have been achieved through entity business as usual across six dimensions: joint analysis; joint programming; cross-border interventions; resource mobilization; partnerships with non-United Nations actors; and trust. The objectives and expectations of the UNISS provide a framing for the assessment of results achieved, but are not the sole focus of the analysis, which encompasses cross-pillar United Nations system delivery more broadly.

Summary of findings - effectiveness

United Nations system coordination in the Sahel, framed by the UNISS, generated genuine added value across all six dimensions assessed: joint analysis, joint programming, cross-border interventions, resource mobilization, external partnerships and trust – but this value was consistently below the levels of ambition set.

The clearest results were produced at the sub-regional level, specifically: analytical products that no single United Nations entity or UNCT could have generated alone; cross-border programming that survived deteriorating diplomatic relations in the region; and flagship programmes that for the first time firmly embed United Nations delivery within government-owned national plans in Burkina Faso and Niger.

At the country level, added value in coordination was real but uneven across countries and over time. This was most visible where individual leadership from coordination functions and entity directors was strong but constrained by entity incentive structures that tended to prioritize entity-specific delivery over collective accountability and by a financing architecture that was not consistently aligned with UNISS strategic priorities.

Two features cut across all six dimensions. First, the coordination arrangements were consistently better at producing instruments (analytical frameworks, programming vehicles, partnership agreements) than at converting those instruments into sustained operational delivery. Second, the geopolitical upheavals that particularly marked the years since 2020 – the political crises and emergence of the AES, the dissolution of the G5 Sahel and the contraction of OECD-DAC donor funding – have exposed vulnerabilities in arrangements built on assumptions of operating space, government cooperation, and donor funding volumes and modalities that no longer hold.

Strength of evidence: See Annex IV for a summary of key evidence sources by evaluation question

EQ 4.1: Joint analysis	Strong	EQ 4.2: Joint programming	Moderate ¹⁰¹
EQ 4.3: Sub-regional/ cross-border	Strong	EQ 4.4: Resource mobilization	Strong
EQ 4.5: Partnerships	Moderate ¹⁰²	EQ 4.6: Trust	Moderate ¹⁰³

101. Analysis of the extent to which coordination arrangements resulted in more joint programming and joint programmes was limited by the absence of comprehensive and comparable United Nations system-wide portfolio data (see EQ 3.4).

102. Analysis on the contribution of coordination arrangements to external partnerships was limited by balance between United Nations system and external stakeholders to requests for interviews and survey response.

103. "Trust" was identified as an important line of enquiry for this evaluation but is an inherently challenging concept to objectively measure.

EQ 4.1: Joint analysis

Finding 4.1.1: Sub-regional joint analysis delivered unique analytical value that no single country process could replicate, directly shaping United Nations system-wide responses and international financial institution engagement.

188. Regional joint analysis within the UNISS framework provided perspectives unavailable from any single country process, mapping cross-border dynamics — transhumance, climate-security interactions, migration and transnational organized crime — in ways that fundamentally reframed issues otherwise treated as purely national.

189. Internal stakeholders noted many examples. The UNOWAS Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel (2018)¹⁰⁴ demonstrated that tensions in Nigeria could not be understood without a Sahelian regional lens, directly triggering an Executive Committee decision establishing an UN-wide framework for joint analysis and information exchange. In addition, an analysis was conducted at the regional level to assess the implication of COVID-19 on youth and gender-based violence in the region.¹⁰⁵ Scenario analysis coordinated by UNOWAS following an Executive Committee decision in 2024 provided regional insights and directly guided regional directors' missions to the Central Sahel.¹⁰⁶ The UNODC Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment (TOCTA) series (2023)¹⁰⁷ on trafficking and smuggling similarly offered intelligence no individual UNCT could have generated alone, as did the regional socioeconomic analysis conducted by UN ECA in 2019 (Sahel 2043: Towards a Resilient, Inclusive and Prosperous Sahel Region).¹⁰⁸

190. External stakeholders consistently valued this perspective. International financial institutions increased engagement with the United Nations system on the strength of its UNISS-related analytical products and The Voices from the Sahel initiative, co-led by OSCDS, UNDP, UNOWAS and UNICEF, was valued by Resident Coordinators for surfacing youth perspectives absent from conventional data products.

191. Nonetheless, the 2013 foundational commitment to joint, cross-pillar, analysis across the United Nations system remained aspirational: in 2019 the Deputies Committee was still calling for the political economy analysis the strategy had committed to six years earlier and, in 2025, the proposal to establish a task force to carry out joint analysis is an acknowledgement that no such mechanism had ever been put in place.¹⁰⁹ The most ambitious attempt to fill this gap was the joint UN-African Union Independent High-Level Panel chaired by the former President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou. It was the clearest example of strategic joint analysis produced at the highest political level during the evaluated period despite never having been released publicly (box 2).

104. UNOWAS. 2018. Pastoralisme et Sécurité en Afrique de l'Ouest et au Sahel. Vers une coexistence pacifique : étude du bureau des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest et le Sahel (UNOWAS) Aout 2018.

105. OSCDS. 2020. Progress report. On the implementation of the United Nations Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS). January 2019-December 2020.

106. Internal analysis of possible implications of AES withdrawals from ECOWAS and WAEMU coordinated by UNOWAS following decision of the Executive Committee in 2024.

107. UNODC. 2021. Impact of Transnational Organized Crime on Stability and Development in the Sahel - Sahel series.

108. UNECA. 2021. Sahel 2043: towards a resilient, inclusive and prosperous Sahel region.

109. Internal OSCDS background note for Sahel Advisory Group meeting (2025).

Box 2. The High-Level Independent Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel: joint UN-African Union strategic analysis

The Independent High-Level Panel on Security, Governance and Development in the Sahel, chaired by former Nigerian President, Mahamadou Issoufou, was launched in September 2022 jointly by the United Nations Secretary-General, the African Union Commission, ECOWAS, and the G5 Sahel. Tasked with assessing the underlying drivers of crises and fragility in the Sahel, it represents one of the most substantive examples of joint UN-African Union strategic analysis produced during the evaluated period. Its finalization was significantly complicated by the unconstitutional change of government in July 2023 in Niger and the dissolution of the G5 Sahel. The final report was presented to the African Union-United Nations Annual Conference in Addis Ababa in October 2024, with both organizations committing to advance its recommendations jointly. However, the report was not widely shared across the United Nations system, or with Security Council members, limiting its potential to provide an authoritative vision for coherent national, regional and international action to address the root causes of crises in the Sahel.¹¹⁰

Finding 4.1.2: “Domestication” of regional analysis at the country level was partial, achievable when analysis was concrete and operationally relevant, but not consistent across the sub-region.

192. The gap between sub-regional analytical production and country-level uptake, termed “domestication” by OSCDS in 2021, was never fully closed. Different country-level assessments from Nigeria,¹¹¹ Chad,¹¹² Cameroon¹¹³ and across the WFP portfolio¹¹⁴ documented a recurring pattern: conflict analysis siloed within United Nations entities; joint context analysis that had limited influence on programming; and the sub-regional framing not informing UNCT work. In addition, stakeholders in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger noted that although joint analysis and planning exercises were in place across several sectors, practices relating to joint analysis and collective planning remained inconsistent and depended on the context, the sector and the leadership arrangements, rather than on institutionalized processes at the system-wide level. The UNDP Nigeria Independent Country Programme Evaluation (2022) illustrates this clearly: despite UNOWAS analysis linking Nigeria’s farmer-herder tensions to broader Sahelian transhumance dynamics, and UNDP drawing on this to design related programmes, uptake at the UNCT level remained partial.

193. Integration of gender analysis was documented but uneven. UNOWAS collaborated with UNICRI to develop a gender-sensitive methodology explicitly integrating climate security and violent extremism risk analysis for the Sahel, which launched in May 2024 with German funding. The methodology was developed through participatory consultations, a regional design workshop in Dakar (July 2024) and a national validation workshop in Nouakchott. It resulted in a published practical guide for Mauritania and the wider region.¹¹⁵ A capacity enhancement programme on conflict analysis was specifically designed for women practitioners. However, gender disaggregation was absent from the 5W mapping and predictive analytics, the two most widely used knowledge products, and the 2025 Sahel Gender Compact’s key performance indicators for gender-integrated analysis remained aspirational rather than reported as achieved. The in-depth document review conducted by the evaluation team found that gender mainstreaming was more consistent in climate-security streams than in operational mapping and resource mobilization products.

194. The 2023 UNISS non-paper on Water as an Accelerator for Development¹¹⁶ demonstrates domestication was achievable when analysis was concrete, operationally relevant and actively brokered between levels. Presented at a UNISS Steering Committee meeting, this was taken up by the Resident

110. African Union. 2024. Communique of the Eighth African Union-United Nations Annual Conference : Addis Ababa, 21 October 2024.

111. UNDP. 2021. Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Nigeria.

112. PBF. 2023. Evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) Project Portfolio in Chad 2017 to 2023.

113. Lake Chad Basin Commission. African Union Commission. 2018. Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region.

114. WFP. 2023. Evaluation of the Policy on WFP’s Role in Peacebuilding in Transition Settings.

115. UNICRI. 2024. Strengthen National and Regional Approaches to Address Climate-Related Security and Violent Extremism Risks (project page); see also UNICRI. 2025. Analysis of Interconnected Climate Security and Violent Extremism Risks: A Practical Guide for Mauritania; UNICRI-UNOWAS. 2025. Resilience in the Sahel: Addressing the Nexus of Climate Change and Violent Extremism in Mauritania.

116. OSCDS. 2023. Water as an Accelerator for Development. Sahel Action Plan 2023-2030.

Coordinator in Guinea and directly informed World Bank programme design in several Sahelian countries. Another example of an initiative conceived at the regional level and implemented at the country level is the Sahel Joint Programme in Response to the Challenges of COVID-19, Conflict and Climate Change (SD3C). This is an initiative that brought together three different United Nations entities (FAO, IFAD, and WFP) to address both development and humanitarian aspects under UNISS pillar 2 on resilience.

Finding 4.1.3: Common Country Analyses and humanitarian needs and response plans strengthened joint analysis within countries but remained disconnected from regional products.

195. The United Nations development repositioning of 2018 sought to strengthen joint country-level analysis in a more systematic manner through Common Country Analyses, producing substantive shared analytical work in each country, including in all UNISS countries. Common Country Analyses resulted in structural changes, including on how they have informed – through the Cooperation Framework – the Chad¹¹⁷ and Guinea¹¹⁸ UNCT configurations. In Burkina Faso¹¹⁹ the Common Country Analysis was used as a shared analytical tool that demonstrably shifted government resources to provincial and local levels. The Niger¹²⁰ 2022 Common Country Analysis introduced horizon scanning methodology, the only documented use of strategic foresight in a Common Country Analysis in the sub-region, yet this remained unconnected to the sub-regional predictive analytics work being developed in parallel under OSCDS.

196. Cameroon's taskforce-led humanitarian-development peace nexus model, built on joint analysis, vulnerability-based targeting, coherent joint strategic planning and a single collective outcome, was presented at the 2021 UNISS¹²¹ induction meeting as a lesson learned in joint analysis, programming, and implementation. It was an operationally concrete example of joint analysis informing collective action in a country context, although by 2025, the Peacebuilding Fund evaluation found it had not translated into genuine synergy with the Peacebuilding Fund portfolio.¹²² OCHA's humanitarian needs and response plans (HNRPs) contributed to cross-pillar analysis, particularly in Burkina Faso, where joint analysis informed the integration of conflict analysis into the national development plan, although linkages to peacebuilding actors remained weak.¹²³ Similarly, stakeholders in Mali confirmed that the most visible outcomes of coordination were often linked to humanitarian and resilience frameworks developed jointly with national authorities, particularly in sectors where coordination structures were already well established.

197. Dedicated spillover analysis designed to reframe UNCT engagement in adjacent coastal countries was not produced until very late in the evaluated period, despite a 2019 Deputies Committee¹²⁴ recommendation to broaden the geographic lens to the Sahel's neighbours. In practice, spillover dynamics entered country-level analysis descriptively: the Guinea 2022 Common Country Analysis acknowledged sub-regional fragility as context without using regional products to reshape UNCT programming. Towards the end of the period, DCO Africa sought to address this gap, producing analysis on United Nations cross-border engagement between Central Sahel and coastal states¹²⁵ and co-chairing quarterly UNOWAS-UNCT corridor briefings on cross-border early warning and security dynamics. A November 2025 consultation led by the Special Coordinator with Resident Coordinators for Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin and Togo recorded strong appetite for operational clarity and pragmatic cross-border mechanisms.¹²⁶

117. United Nations Chad. 2021. L'Analyse commune de pays Tchad.

118. United Nations Guinea. 2021. Analyse Commune Pays République Guinée.

119. United Nations Burkina Faso. 2022. Analyse Commune Pays Burkina Faso.

120. United Nations Niger. 2022. Analyse commune de pays (CCA) du Système des Nations Unies au Niger.

121. OSCDS internal documentation (2021).

122. PBF Cameroon evaluation (2025).

123. Internal analysis on United Nations cross-border engagement between Central Sahel and coastal states (2025).

124. Internal Deputies Committee notes (2019).

125. Internal analysis on United Nations cross-border engagement between Central Sahel and coastal states (2025).

126. Internal OSCDS background note for Sahel Advisory Group meeting (2025).

198. The critical limitation was the absence of sufficient vertical connections between these country-level processes and sub-regional UNISS analytical products. Common Country Analyses were conducted as country-specific exercises, without a clear trace of regional UNISS joint analysis systematically shaping the country-level lens.

EQ 4.2: Joint programmes and joint programming

Finding 4.2.1: The nine “flagship” projects¹²⁷ developed under UNISS (2013-2016) were an aggregation of existing United Nations entity programmes rather than jointly designed interventions: a communication exercise rather than a substantive advance in joint programming.

199. In 2015-2016, United Nations entities collectively identified nine “flagship” projects spanning three UNISS pillars – governance (border management, access to justice and violent extremism studies), security (combating illicit trafficking, small arms stockpile management and monitoring radicalization), and resilience (pastoralism, mobile populations and rural women's economic empowerment) – developed and implemented across nine Sahelian countries by UNDP, UNODC, FAO, IOM, and UN Women, with a combined funding request of approximately US\$ 187 million (see Annex VI). Several projects were already underway with secured funding from donors including Japan, the European Union and Germany; while the majority faced significant financing gaps. The 2016-2017 review of the UNISS noted very limited operationalization or implementation of these flagships. Excluding a few examples, such as the counter terrorism and pastoralism flagships, which were jointly designed in 2017 through close collaboration among different United Nations entities, in analytical terms, the “flagship” designation obscured the absence of genuine joint design. It applied a coordination label to a pre-existing portfolio of entity specific programmes rather than describing a genuinely integrated joint programming exercise.

Finding 4.2.2: The UNISS “project bank” developed in the 2022-2023 period represented a more systematic attempt at joint programme design and joint resource mobilization, but did not generate sustained, collective cross-pillar delivery.

200. In response to the new UNSP, a project bank was developed containing 12 multi-country, multi-entity projects with a combined budget of approximately US\$ 370 million, spanning all ten UNISS countries (see Annex VIII). The portfolio ranged from a US\$ 7 million cross-border tourism and security initiative in The Gambia to a US\$ 180 million Great Green Wall programme covering six countries. It was predominantly cross-border and multi-country in scope, with women and youth as the primary target groups.

201. Despite the ambition and scale of these instruments, the project bank was set aside when work on the development of the AES flagship programmes began. According to various United Nations system sub-regional staff, it had functioned as a resource mobilization catalogue and quality assurance mechanism rather than as an operational coordination vehicle. Programming remained driven by donor interests. Donors then approached United Nations entities directly, and United Nations entities in turn approached donors bilaterally, bypassing collective mechanisms like the project bank. An example of a multi-entity, cross-country implemented programme developed outside the UNISS coordination arrangements was the German-funded resilience programme, as well as social protection programmes, co-implemented by UNICEF and WFP, which demonstrated that inter-entity implementation at scale was operationally viable.¹²⁸

127. The 2013-2016 UNISS “flagships” should not be confused or conflated in any way with the AES flagships (2024 and ongoing) referred to more frequently in this report.

128. GIZ. 2023. Strengthening Resilience in the Sahel Region. Sahel Resilience Strengthening (SARES); BMZ. 2023. Establishing social protection systems with an effective crisis response.

Finding 4.2.3: The AES flagship programmes developed in 2024-2025 constitute the most significant advance in joint programming, moving from activity alignment to government-owned, jointly designed programmes at scale, and representing the clearest demonstration of cross-pillar coordination.

202. The ten AES flagship programmes articulated in 2024-2025, jointly developed with the national governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and embedding the 2030 Agenda and United Nations development system reform commitments, represent a qualitative break from the activity-aggregation logic of previous instruments. Unlike their predecessors, they established defined programmatic vehicles in areas such as food systems, stabilization, education, youth employment and governance, with named United Nations entity leads and explicit government co-ownership. They were officially endorsed by the governments of Burkina Faso and Niger¹²⁹ and quickly enabled the mobilization of around US\$ 84 million from the Global Partnership for Education for Niger.¹³⁰ The Burkina Faso stabilization and cross-border cooperation flagship, the proposed Mali education, health and social protection programme, and the Niger governance and food systems flagships each combined humanitarian, development and peace dimensions that no single United Nations entity or pillar could deliver alone. The AES flagship programmes approach inspired the Resident Coordinator and UNCT in Guinea to replicate the experience and to develop their own flagships, but without the same level of government demand, participation and ownership.

203. The 2024 UNISS Progress Report (OSCDs) described the flagship approach as “not fundamentally different from what the United Nations system would collectively have spent in these countries anyway”,¹³¹ but rather a way that forces the United Nations system to plan, align and communicate that envelope coherently, under national leadership, rather than as unconnected projects. UNCT members acknowledged the critical importance of leadership from the regional level, observing that Resident Coordinators could not direct United Nations entities beyond their entity mandates: only regional directors held the institutional leverage to ensure the alignment of programming across entities. However, the flagship development approach presents risks. Although presented as an endeavour to collectively align and plan programming, governments nevertheless expected that the United Nations would at least partially fund the flagships it co-designed, rather than treat them purely as joint UN-government fundraising vehicles. Stakeholders in the three countries consistently noted that joint programming and planning remained insufficiently institutionalized, with variation across sectors and contexts, and reiterated that this is heavily dependent on leadership dynamics and funding opportunities with implications for both scalability and sustainability.

Finding 4.2.4: United Nations entity budget rigidity was the principal operational constraint on joint programming throughout the period, presenting a barrier that reputational risk pressure and Resident Coordinator leadership were insufficient to overcome.

204. The 2024 UNISS Progress Report identifies the most direct incentive barrier: despite Resident Coordinator advocacy, United Nations entities had not sufficiently realigned their resources to kick-start the flagship programmes. This was described as posing “a significant reputational risk for the United Nations vis-à-vis governments and partners”.¹³² United Nations entity resources are, predominantly, earmarked by governing bodies and donors for specific purposes; regional and country directors generally cannot realign funds without headquarters approval. In a financially constrained environment, the institutional incentive is to protect existing funded programmes rather than commit to an updated set of collective obligations. Reputational risk related

129. In Mali, unlike Niger and Burkina Faso, the UN's three jointly developed flagship programmes were never formally endorsed by the transitional authorities, leading the United Nations to halt related resource mobilization and communications in September 2025 pending endorsement, which has not since been granted. The UNCT subsequently discontinued the “flagship programmes” framing, folding the three priority areas (food systems, renewable energy, education and health) into the Cooperation Framework aligned with Mali's National Strategy for Emergency and Sustainable Development (SNEDD 2024-2033).

130. Global Partnership for Education (website).

131. OSCDS. 2024. Progress Report. On the Implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and its support plan (UNSP).

132. Ibid.

to failure to mobilize resources and meet government expectations was insufficient to override United Nations entities' institutional resistance to pool their funds. To mitigate this identified risk, OSCDS and DCO developed a multi-track financing strategy built around five complementary pillars: (1) national financing, framed around the principle of sovereignty; (2) the realignment of existing United Nations entity programme budgets to support flagship priorities; (3) the leveraging of United Nations pooled funds, including the Peacebuilding Fund, the Joint SDG Fund, and the CERF; (4) engagement with the private sector; and (5) innovative financing instruments such as diaspora bonds, drawing on a model developed in Ethiopia. The strategy also included targeted outreach to the Saudi Development Fund. In practice, however, the strategy remained largely aspirational: United Nations entities at the country level did not significantly realign their budgets toward the flagships, and several of the more innovative financing tracks had not yet been operationalized before the closure of OSCDS in December 2025.

Finding 4.2.5: Pooled funding mechanisms, including the Peacebuilding Fund, the Joint SDG Fund and the CERF, provided the most reliable mechanisms for joint programming but operated at volumes insufficient to drive system-wide change.

205. Despite significant resource mobilization challenges across the evaluated period, the three main pooled funding mechanisms: the Joint SDG Fund, the Peacebuilding Fund and the CERF, each played a distinct and partially complementary role in financing United Nations collective action, with 70 per cent of UNCTs in Sahel countries reporting having received entity-specific guidance to access global pooled funding mechanisms under Resident Coordinator leadership.¹³³

Table 9. Comparative analysis of the Joint SDG Fund, the Peacebuilding Fund and the Central Emergency Response Fund

	Joint SDG Fund	Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)	Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)
Established	2018 (successor to the SGD Fund and MDG Achievement Fund)	2006	2006 (as grant fund; pre-cursor revolving fund since 1991)
Primary pillar	Development	Peace and security	Humanitarian
Purpose	Catalytic, inter-entity pooled fund to accelerate SDG progress and incentivize United Nations coherence through integrated policy support and strategic SDG financing at the country level.	Flexible, risk-tolerant fund to sustain peace by bridging development, political and security actors around joint peacebuilding objectives; addresses market failure by providing timely catalytic finance where other donors do not.	Global pooled fund providing rapid, predictable humanitarian financing to kick-start life-saving operations in new or rapidly escalating emergencies and to sustain underfunded crises.
Funding windows	Integrated policy; SDG financing; development emergency modality; small island developing states; thematic/regional windows.	Immediate response facility (IRF): up to US\$ 5m, 24 months, all countries eligible. Peacebuilding and recovery facility (PRF): longer-term support, up to 36 months, requires Secretary-General eligibility declaration.	Rapid response (RR): immediate life-saving response, approvable within 48 hours. Underfunded emergencies (UFE): sustained support to neglected crises.
Eligibility	United Nations country teams under RC leadership; joint programmes involving two or more United Nations entities; must be anchored in the Cooperation Framework.	All countries eligible for IRF; PRF requires government request and Secretary-General declaration following conflict analysis. United Nations agencies, governments, NGOs and international organizations can receive funds.	United Nations agencies only (WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR are top recipients). Applications submitted by RC/HC based on in-country prioritization; must meet life-saving criteria.

133. SWE0 analysis. DESA QCPR surveys.

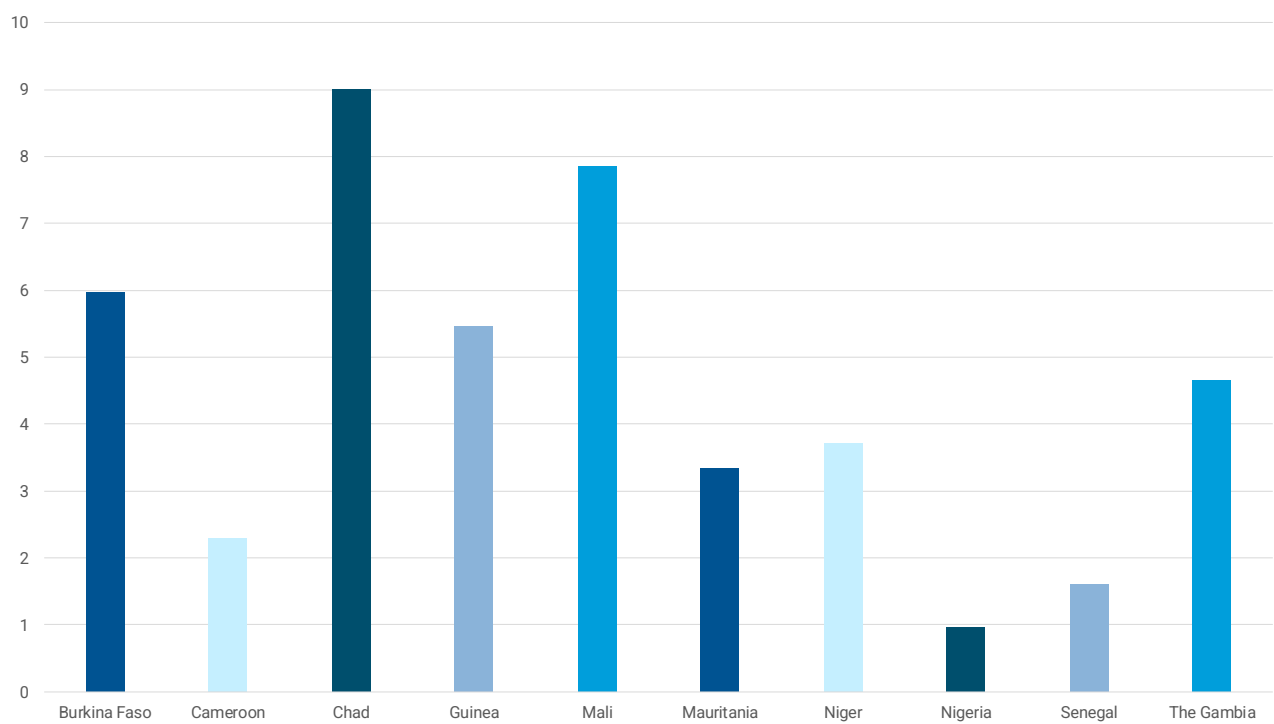
	Joint SDG Fund	Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)	Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)
Cross-pillar capacity	Limited by development; development emergency modality provides some bridge to humanitarian contexts but not designed for peace/security.	Explicitly designed to bridge development, humanitarian and peace pillars; primary systematic vehicle for cross-pillar joint programming in the Sahel.	Humanitarian only; no development or peacebuilding function. Complementary to, not a substitute for, longer-term instruments.
Sahel investment (2013-2026)	~US\$ 20m total to Sahel countries (2019-2026), of which US\$ 6.5m structured as catalytic seed investment targeting the three AES countries for flagship programme design and early operationalization.	~US\$ 36m (2012-2026); approximately 80 per cent directed to cross-border programming; significant acceleration post-2020.	~US\$ 1.1bn (average US\$ 84m/year); by far the largest pooled fund presence in the Sahel, focused on humanitarian response to drought, food insecurity and conflict-driven displacement.
Cross-border orientation	Primarily country-focused by design, but the Sahel context produced adaptations that stretched that country logic, making it one of the few places where the Fund was used with explicit cross-border intent.	Strongest cross-border track record of the three funds; ~80 per cent of Sahel portfolio directed to cross-border joint programming.	Primarily country-by-country; cross-border programming effectively invisible in standard CERF reporting systems.

Source: Evaluation team analysis based on Joint SDG Fund, Peacebuilding Fund, and Central Emergency Response Fund websites

206. Between 2019 and 2026, the Joint SDG Fund provided over US\$ 20 million to the Sahel countries; of which US\$ 6.5 million was structured as a catalytic seed investment rather than a full financing vehicle to support the design of flagship programmes across the three AES countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger).¹³⁴ Designed primarily as a country-level instrument to incentivize joint United Nations programming through national Cooperation Frameworks, the Joint SDG Fund was nevertheless applied in the Sahel context in ways that partially bridged national boundaries: several approved programmes included explicit cross-border components spanning border areas such as Liptako-Gourma, reflecting the transboundary nature of displacement, pastoralism and conflict dynamics in the sub-region. The Joint SDG Fund represented one of the few pooled financing instruments accessible to UNCTs that could partially support multi-country joint programming. But it was at a scale that remained modest relative to the volume of bilateral and humanitarian financing flows in the region (figure 14).

134. Joint SDG Fund. Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) | Joint SDG Fund. Retrieved in May 2026.

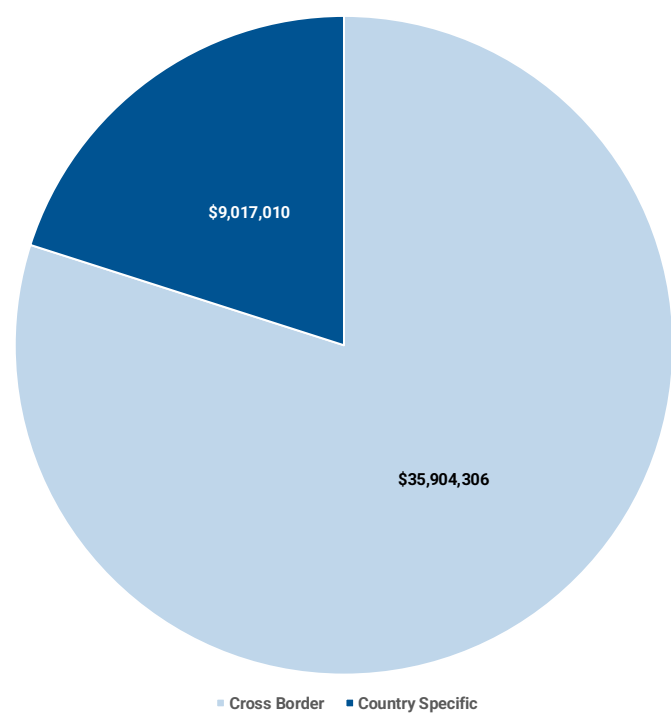
Figure 14. Peacebuilding Fund transfers by country (2019-2026)



Sources: Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. PBF Funding data: West Africa region [dataset]. United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

207. The Peacebuilding Fund functioned as the primary systematic vehicle for cross-border and cross-pillar joint programming, accounting for approximately 80 per cent of total Sahel Peacebuilding Fund investment (approximately US\$ 36 million between 2012 and 2026; see figure 15), with measurable acceleration post-2020 (see EQ 4.3).

Figure 15. Peacebuilding Fund cross-border versus country-specific allocations for the ten Sahel countries (2012-2026) (US\$)



Source: Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. PBF Funding data: West Africa region [dataset]. United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

208. The CERF performed a parallel function in the humanitarian space. With around US\$ 1.1 billion – an average of US\$ 84 million/year – allocated to the Sahel countries between 2013 and 2026, it dwarfed the Joint SDG Fund and Peacebuilding Fund.¹³⁵ The funds were used to address humanitarian crises and to scale up relief efforts, responding to droughts, combined with exceptionally high food prices and worsening insecurity, which escalated humanitarian needs in the region.

209. One of the most significant weaknesses was the absence of coordinated operation between these three instruments. Coordination between the Joint SDG Fund, Peacebuilding Fund and CERF amounted to ad hoc and informal dialogue between offices; no structured mechanism existed to seek complementarity, sequence investments, or generate a consolidated picture of the pooled fund footprint in the Sahel. For the three funds, organized disbursements and data are available on a per-country basis, with cross-border programming effectively invisible in standard reporting systems.

210. While several discussions took place on establishing a dedicated Sahel multi-partner trust fund (MPTF) or a dedicated window under the Joint SDG Fund,¹³⁶ a multi-partner trust fund (or funds) specifically designed for implementation of UNISS priorities was never established. Concrete opportunities to anchor such an instrument, including potential donor resources identified for this purpose, were not seized. Resource mobilization expectations therefore relied on bilateral channels at the country level; the sub-regional coordination arrangements had no dedicated financing instrument commensurate with its ambition.

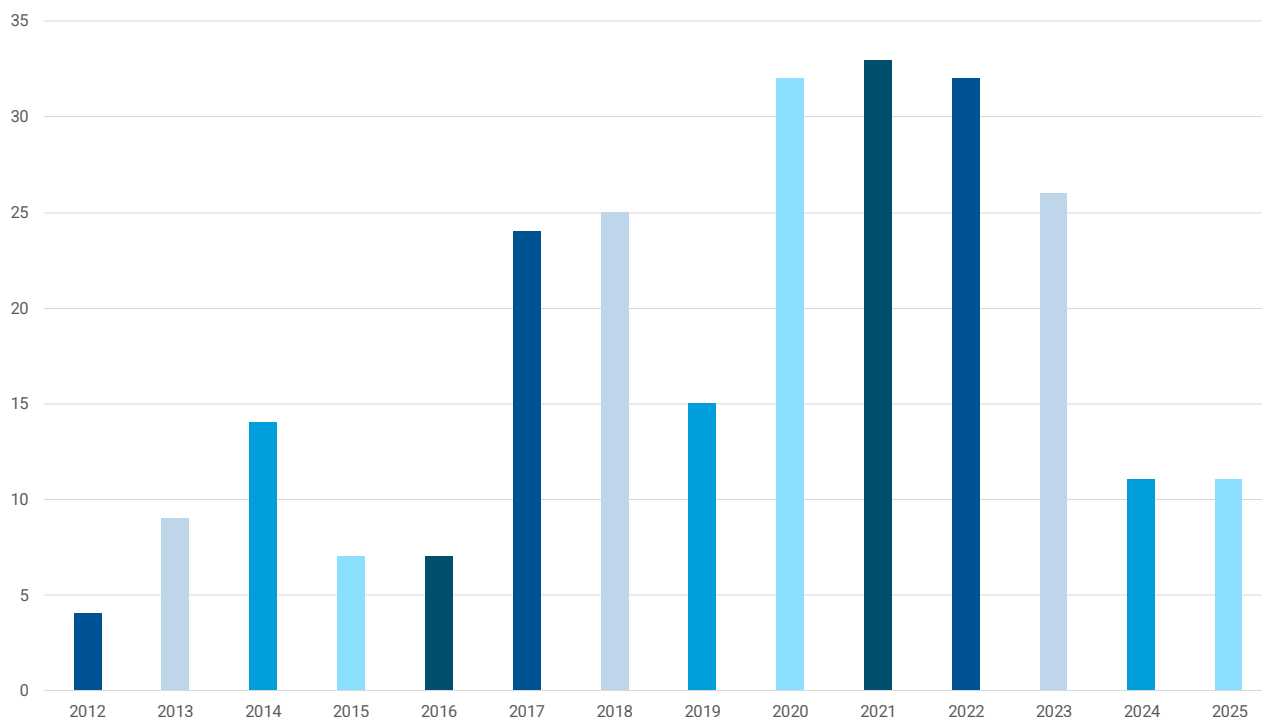
EQ 4.3: Sub-regional approaches and cross-border interventions

Finding 4.3.1: The Peacebuilding Fund was the United Nations system's main instrument with the mandate and flexibility to implement cross-pillar initiatives and operate across national boundaries regardless of the state of bilateral government relations, producing qualitatively different results from single-country delivery.

211. Across the 40 projects reviewed, the Peacebuilding Fund functioned as a vehicle for cross-border programming in the Sahel, bringing together peacebuilding and development initiatives. Of every five dollars the Peacebuilding Fund invested in the region, four were committed to cross-border or border-adjacent initiatives. Key informants independently described the Peacebuilding Fund as "one of the few things that allowed us to work together cross-border and on the HDP nexus" and as essential to demonstrating "what countries can do even when governments are not talking to each other". Cross-border programming accelerated markedly from 2017 onwards, with 54 per cent of 250 projects initiated in the 2020-2025 period, reflecting both the growing demand for sub-regional approaches and the Peacebuilding Fund's expanded footprint in the most politically constrained settings (figure 16).

135. United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund. n.d. Recently approved allocations.

136. Internal Sahel Advisory Group notes (2019).

Figure 16. Number of Peacebuilding Fund programmes approved per year

Source: Evaluation team analysis of PBF data

212. The evidence shows that United Nations coordination through this instrument produced qualitatively different results from single-country delivery. In the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, the Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Paix (AILP initiative) (PBF #00130614) brought together Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger under a shared framework that enabled 12 pairs of border communes to sign formal joint agreements on wells, markets and transhumance routes – an outcome requiring simultaneous United Nations coordination on both sides of each frontier.¹³⁷ The Transhumance Pacifique programme linked local herder committees in three countries to the same regional bodies and deployed a single Transhumance Tracking Tool, creating interoperable early-warning data that national programmes operating independently could not have generated. The most significant contribution was in contexts where state authority had receded: in the Liptako-Gourma region, where formal governance had largely collapsed across stretches of the tri-border area, UN-coordinated peace committees, alert networks and shared databases gave local authorities a functional early-warning and response architecture where none existed. In Niger's Diffa region, joint coordination between IOM and UNFPA re-established civil documentation, health and water services in three communes, restoring a basic social contract that no single entity had the mandate or reach to deliver alone.

213. Despite these gains, the coordination arrangements supporting cross-border programming remained fragile. Mirrored interventions in paired communes were rarely formalized through joint workplans or shared indicators, and cross-border coherence emerged organically rather than by design. The Peacebuilding Fund's approach was to frame cross-border investments explicitly as cross-border rather than regional, reflecting the national ownership logic that conditions all Peacebuilding Fund approvals, requiring parallel consent from at least two governments and two UNCTs before the analytical consensus underpinning a proposal could be agreed.¹³⁸ This complexity partly explains why cross-border programming remained concentrated in a small number of operational corridors rather than spanning the coordination geography, as evidenced by Mali and Niger recording below-average shares of cross-border Peacebuilding Fund investment despite being the corridor's highest-risk countries. The concentration of cross-border programming within the Peacebuilding Fund instrument, rather than across the full coordination arrangements, meant that these gains remained

137. Internal analysis on United Nations cross border engagement between Central Sahel and coastal states (2025).

138. United Nations PBSO. 2023. Synthesis Review of United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) 2021-2022 Evaluations and Evaluative Exercises.

dependent on continued Peacebuilding Fund funding cycles rather than institutionalized as a durable sub-regional programming modality.

214. The broader pooled fund landscape compounded this fragility: the absence of structured coordination between the Peacebuilding Fund, the Joint SDG Fund, and the CERF (see EQ 4.2) meant that cross-border gains secured through the Peacebuilding Fund were not reinforced by complementary development or humanitarian financing and could not be consolidated into a system-wide sub-regional programming approach.¹³⁹

EQ 4.4: Resource mobilization

Finding 4.4.1: Regional-level resource mobilization was more opportunistic than strategic, with the AfDB partnership producing the strongest documented results and the AGFUND-BADEA commitment representing the largest single mobilization pledge that did not come to fruition.

215. With the appointment of the Special Coordinator in 2021 and the recruitment of a senior resource mobilization and partnership officer within OSCDS, attempts to mobilize resources from bilateral and multilateral donors became more systematic. The OSCDS-AfDB memorandum of understanding (2022) was the most structured regional resource mobilization instrument across the evaluated period. Through the AfDB Transition Support Facility's prevention and climate windows, OSCDS and DCO jointly mobilized US\$ 189.3 million in 14 multi-country, multi-entity projects, and the exercise was presented to the UN-international financial institution working group as a system-wide proof of concept. However, the mobilization was more opportunistic than strategic: only approximately 25 per cent of AfDB resources went to Sahelian countries (around US\$ 47 million of US\$ 189.3 million), with the remainder allocated to other African countries. At least one Resident Coordinator was unaware that projects in their country had been funded through this mechanism: a signal of the disconnect between regional resource mobilization efforts and country-level coordination.

216. OSCDS mobilized approximately EUR 3.1 million from Italy across two programmatic initiatives for Burkina Faso, Niger and the Liptako-Gourma area. In July 2021, the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) announced a landmark US\$ 1.6 billion commitment over 2022-2027, the largest single mobilization outcome associated with the UNISS period, although the funding did not materialize as expected due to conditionalities that were misaligned with UNISS objectives.

217. More recently, a perception among AES governments has emerged that the United Nations entities were competing with their own bilateral relationships with Gulf Cooperation Council partners. A pipeline of approximately 70 IsDB-BADEA projects (separate from the 2022-2027 commitment) was under development at the time of OSCDS's closure in December 2025, leaving its financing potential unrealized.

Finding 4.4.2: The donor base for the United Nations system in the Sahel was narrow, creating systemic vulnerabilities that were realized from 2020 onwards. International financial institutions accounted for only 3 per cent of available United Nations system resources despite representing the most realistic scaling opportunity.

218. For reasons explained in the Introduction and under EQ 3.4, it is challenging to generate a comprehensive and accurate picture of the United Nations system portfolio across the ten UNISS countries for the evaluated period. DCO shared data from Cooperation Framework funding frameworks covering 2020

139. Internal analysis on United Nations cross-border engagement between Central Sahel and coastal states (2025).

to 2026 with the evaluation team. While the completeness, reliability and comparability of these data are questionable, they do provide a picture of the overall donor base for the United Nations system in the Sahel.

219. The analysis shows that USAID was the largest single bilateral contributor, followed by Germany, UK, Japan, Norway and Canada. Domestic government contributions accounted for 17 per cent. International financial institutions accounted for only 3 per cent: the World Bank, AfDB, IFAD and the Islamic Development Bank combined contributing an estimated US\$ 163 million against a total available resource base of US\$ 7 billion. United Nations and non-United Nations pooled and vertical funds - Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Global Fund, the Global Environment Facility, the Green Climate Fund, the CERF, the Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint SDG Fund – accounted for 8 per cent in the analysis.

220. Reliance on a relatively small number of OECD-DAC donors created systemic vulnerability to shifts in their policies. These risks have since materialized. First, the financial impacts of the AES political crises were significant. For example, Germany suspended aid to Niger immediately following July 2023; and France suspended development programmes and budgetary support to Burkina Faso in August 2023. The United States of America scaled back cooperation with the AES countries initially, and then almost completely with the global shutdown of USAID in 2025. OECD-DAC funding flows contracted precisely at a point where the sub-region's needs were greatest.

221. The 3 per cent US\$ international financial institution share is simultaneously the most significant gap in the United Nations funding mix and the most significant future opportunity. This reflects not only limited international financial institution appetite but also a failure to align Cooperation Framework design with international financial institution priorities and modalities. The United Nations succeeded in mobilizing funding from the AfDB that went beyond the Sahelian countries, precisely because it was able to position itself as a strategic partner (see EQ 4.4).

Finding 4.4.3: Contextual factors, including geographic breadth, geopolitical disruption, and donor earmarking, imposed constraints on resource mobilization that the coordination arrangements were not designed to overcome.

222. Mobilizing resources across a sub-region as large, diverse and politically fractured as the ten UNISS countries posed significant challenges that the United Nations system coordination arrangements were ill-equipped to address. This made it difficult to present a coherent single "offer" to donors spanning the sub-region. Donor earmarking, predominantly channelled at the country level, undermined cross-pillar resource alignment. Four of the ten UNISS countries are middle-income countries where official development assistance mobilization is more difficult.

223. The Nexus Funding Facility,¹⁴⁰ launched for the Lake Chad Basin in October 2025, represents a promising financing innovation to emerge adjacent to the UNISS arrangements. Governed through a Regional Secretariat of UNDP, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, UNHCR, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, and funded by Germany, the Nexus Funding Facility operates through national task forces that validate priorities from the ground up across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Its design directly addresses the weaknesses of the UNISS financing model: pooled rather than bilaterally earmarked, nexus-oriented rather than pillar-siloed, locally driven, and anchored in a regional institutional partnership.

140. Call for Proposals (Stage 1) – Nexus Funding Facility | United Nations Development Programme.

EQ 4.5: Partnerships with non-United Nations actors

Finding 4.5.1: United Nations system coordination arrangements had very limited effect on partnerships with bilateral donors, which existed and evolved outside and beyond their control.

224. As elaborated in EQ 2, OECD-DAC bilateral engagement in the Sahel was driven principally by security and migration containment objectives, producing short-term, earmarked spending patterns in contrast to the UNISS ambition for multi-year cross-pillar programming. Tied aid, earmarking and the availability of faster bilateral channels through the likes of Enabel, AFD, and GIZ systematically rewarded fragmentation and undermined joint programming. Leaders of the UNISS pillars engaged in the Sahel Alliance's technical working groups, resulting in joint thematic and sectoral presentations, joint participation in side-events and contributions to the preparation of Sahel Alliance General Assemblies, but these engagements remained largely technical. At the strategic level, European Union Member States engaged United Nations agencies bilaterally rather than through the coordination arrangements, while the Sahel Alliance itself, in which the United Nations participated only as an observer, further diluted United Nations convening authority. Within this constrained landscape, OSCDS attempted to position itself as the donor entry point to the whole of the United Nations system in the sub-region and achieved some documented results: Italy emerged as the most consistent bilateral partner, combining direct funding, a memorandum of understanding and operational support, while structured outreach missions reached donors including Denmark, Norway, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and others.¹⁴¹ In the later years of the period evaluated, the legal and political constraints on development financing in countries with military-led transitional authorities produced a sharp donor exit from AES countries that the United Nations system could not buffer (as set out in EQ 4.4).

225. The space vacated by OECD-DAC partners was filled to some, unquantifiable, extent by other partners, including Russia, China, the UAE, Türkiye, the Gulf states and Morocco, operating on a fundamentally different logic: large infrastructure investments, direct government-to-government transfers, and a "trade not aid" approach with no normative and governance conditionalities and no intersection with OSCDS, UNISS Steering Committee processes, or United Nations cross-pillar coordination frameworks.

226. The United Nations system coordination arrangements did not produce or facilitate a collective United Nations response to this expanding footprint. According to some interviewees, this deepened the perception among some Member States that the United Nations was a Western instrument rather than a genuinely multilateral broker. This was a perception that, as one Resident Coordinator noted, cost the United Nations both credibility and leverage at precisely the moment its traditional resource base was contracting.

Finding 4.5.2: International financial institution partnerships delivered the strongest documented outcomes of any non-United Nations partnership category, but the United Nations was consistently positioned as an implementing rather than a strategic co-designing partner.

227. The OSCDS-AfDB memorandum of understanding represented the clearest realization of the UN-as-convenor model and was presented to the UN-IFI working group as a system-wide proof of concept; the IsDB-BADEA Dakar workshop of June 2024 operationalized a second international financial institution stream. The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD), a World Bank-financed regional initiative with UNFPA as Regional Technical Secretariat, operating across nine UNISS countries, stands as the single largest documented example of UN-World Bank collaboration at scale in the Sahel, producing substantive results on girls' education, adolescent fertility and family planning. It is, however, a partnership between one entity and one international financial institution developed independently of any United Nations system coordination arrangements.

141. Internal OSCDS documentation.

228. As mentioned in EQ 2, the World Bank was formally invited to join the Sahel Advisory Group only in 2024; the AfDB Sahel Action Fund, proposed alongside the UNISS in 2013 to fill the cross-border financing gap, never materialized across a decade. Following the unconstitutional changes in the Central Sahel, the European Union's approach progressively converted partnerships into predominantly humanitarian collaboration in the AES countries. At the country level, the United Nations was generally absent from the upstream conversations where international financial institution priorities are set and programmes designed, with high-level engagement occurring episodically rather than systematically. The Chad RCO offers the most positive exception: a PBF-funded IFI liaison function with structured quarterly World Bank dialogue resulted in an estimated 70 per cent of international financial institution funding in Chad being channelled through the United Nations system.

229. According to several United Nations officials at headquarters, regional and country levels, international financial institutions' primary incentive for engaging the United Nations was operational rather than strategic, including access to field presence, political analysis and support for increasing disbursement rates. This produced a degree of genuine collaboration but did not translate into cross-pillar strategic alignment or consistent integration into the UNISS arrangements. Although international financial institutions became increasingly more involved in coordination discussions in the three AES countries, their direct financing of United Nations entities was very limited. Several stakeholders noted that the perceived high administrative costs of United Nations entities and differences in operational procedures were limiting closer operational collaboration with the international financial institutions. International financial institution engagement was further constrained by reputational caution: several interviewees noted that international financial institutions grew wary of close association with the United Nations at the time of the "persona non grata" declarations of senior United Nations officials, introducing institutional distance precisely when coordination proximity would have been most valuable. Nonetheless, the pressure on international financial institutions to increase disbursements in the Sahel represents an incentive alignment that future coordination arrangements could more deliberately exploit. However, Cooperation Frameworks would need to be more compatible with international financial institution priorities and the United Nations positioned more as a facilitation partner rather than a funding competitor.

Finding 4.5.3: NGO partnership architecture was innovative through the creation of the UN-NGO Dialogue Platform. But overall, the United Nations system coordination arrangements made limited progress in addressing constraints in UN-NGO partnerships.

230. The 2020 UNISS Progress Report identified limited civil society involvement as a deficit; the 11th Steering Committee (2021) framed it as a "lost opportunity". The most significant response was the quarterly UN-NGO Dialogue Platform, co-facilitated with FONGA, which secured NGO representation at the UNISS Steering Committee for the first time in 2023 and was formalized as one of four UNISS thematic working groups by 2024. Peacebuilding Fund cross-border programming produced eight jointly implemented UN-NGO projects worth US\$ 29.5 million, and all four Niger flagship programmes designated NGOs as required partner categories at the design stage.

231. Against these gains, three critical constraints are also identified. The operational context is the most acute constraint, directly threatening the partnerships that coordination is trying to build, including NGO expulsions, suspensions and arrests in Central Sahel. The local-international NGO divide is a persistent constraint: the UN-NGO coordination architecture privileges large international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) at the expense of local civil society organizations (CSOs) with genuine community legitimacy. The third critical constraint is the fragmentation of NGO coordination, with greater coordination with humanitarian NGOs than development ones.

Finding 4.5.4: The United Nations system, through OSCDS, proposed a new framework for private sector partnership and engagement in the form of a de-risking model. But this produced no scaled investment and the United Nations system's own internal processes were identified as a principal barrier.

232. The United Nations Support Plan (2018) and OSCDS's terms of reference (2020) envisaged private sector engagement, and a dedicated partnerships and private sector officer position was established within OSCDS. The Sahel Vision Paper (2022) developed a three-phase de-risking model, under which United Nations coordination would attract grant financing and progressively enable substitution with private investment.¹⁴² The 2024 Pillars Technical Retreat¹⁴³ recorded that discussions had not yet translated into significant actions or funding, and OSCDS's own partnerships adviser acknowledged at the 17th Steering Committee¹⁴⁴ that the United Nations system is not structured to efficiently absorb and utilize private funds, citing internal due diligence fragmentation across agencies as a principal barrier. Guinea's decade-long engagement with the Chambre des Mines, anchored in a 2013 Letter of Mutual Commitments and a 2021 OHCHR Human Rights and Mining Cooperation Framework, represents the most developed country-level private sector partnership architecture in the sub-region, but even this case illustrates the persistent gap between framework design and field delivery, compounded by Resident Coordinator turnover, which disrupted institutional continuity. The 15th Steering Committee (2023) recommended establishing a dedicated UN-private sector dialogue platform; no further information on the establishment of the platform was available to the evaluation.

EQ 4.6: Trust in the United Nations system

Finding 4.6.1: Trust between the United Nations system and Sahelian Member States followed a three-phase arc across the evaluated period, from high expectations at launch, through progressive erosion during political crises in the Central Sahel, to a partial reset through the flagship model and high-level missions to the three AES countries. It remains fragile and contingent on implementation.

233. **Phase 1:** The UNISS was launched with political ambition that created expectations the coordination arrangements were never resourced to meet. The United Nations Security Council's endorsement in 2013, backed by the World Bank, AfDB, and the African Union, generated expectations of transformative financing in the billions among Sahelian Member States. The gap between this framing and the reality of a voluntarily funded, extrabudgetary framework was never resolved: the absence of a results framework, parallel donor-branded strategies and persistent communication failures left Member States and donors unable to identify the UN's distinct contribution and, by 2021, the UNISS remained largely unknown even at United Nations headquarters level (see EQ 3 for details).

234. **Phase 2:** According to senior United Nations officials at the headquarters, regional, sub-regional and country levels, the trust relationship deteriorated most acutely through the political crises in the AES countries, which removed three of the UNISS core Member States from the coordination arrangements at a critical moment. Mali (2021), Burkina Faso (2022) and Niger (2023) were central to UNISS objectives and United Nations system coordination arrangements and their transformation into transitional authorities scrutinizing and diversifying partnerships severely strained the bilateral donor relationships on which UNISS financing depended. While UNOWAS continuously engaged in good offices with transitional authorities, advocated for the gradual lowering of tensions, supported Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in this regard, and promoted the positioning of the United Nations as an impartial international organization, its proximity to DPPA and the Security Council continued to be a source of mistrust for some. Germany suspended aid to Niger after July 2023, France suspended support to Burkina Faso and USAID contracted across the sub-region. In other

142. OSCDS. 2022. Sahel Vision Paper. Transformational change in the Sahel – managing the transitions.

143. Internal UNISS retreat report (2024)

144. OSCDS. 2025. 17th Steering Committee Meeting. 04-05 February 2025. Dakar, Senegal. Final Report.

countries – Nigeria, Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea – trust was maintained but not meaningfully enhanced by United Nations system coordination, remaining dependent on individual Resident Coordinator leadership, respect for sovereignty and ongoing bilateral dialogue rather than on the coordination arrangements themselves.

235. **Phase 3:** The Deputy Secretary-General's 2024 mission to the Sahel, building on earlier missions co-led by the DCO Africa and the Special Coordinator, reflected a deliberate choice: pairing the Special Coordinator focus on development with DCO and the Resident Coordinator system to address the sovereignty sensitivities of AES governments and the UN's internal coordination gaps. The development of flagship programmes for the first time embedded UNISS delivery within government-owned national plans in Burkina Faso and Niger and represents the most significant trust-building achievement of the coordination arrangements in the evaluated period. Trust between the United Nations and Sahelian governments has been partially rebuilt but remains fragile, resting more on individual relationships than on institutional foundations, and therefore vulnerable to personnel changes and political disruptions. In the three AES countries, partnerships with national authorities were broadly perceived to have strengthened, supported by sustained dialogue, greater coherence of interventions and respect for national sovereignty. Notably, technical collaboration with line ministries in health, nutrition, social protection and humanitarian response remained constructive throughout, suggesting that operational trust at the technical level proved more durable than the broader geopolitical relationship.

Table 10. Phases of trust between United Nations system and Sahelian Member States

Phase 1 (2013-2020): High expectations	Phase 2 (2021-2023): Progressive erosion	Phase 3 (2024-2025): Partial reset
- Secretary-General's 2013 visit to the region with the World Bank, AfDB, and African Union, raised expectations of financing in the billions. - The gap between political ambition and a voluntarily funded architecture was present from day one and never resolved. - UNISS remained largely unknown even at United Nations headquarters level by 2021.	- Political crises in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger transformed co-owners of UNISS into governments unfavourable to Western-aligned frameworks. - Donor suspensions followed. Communication failures left UNISS invisible to partners. - Trust eroded most acutely in the countries where it mattered most.	- DSG acknowledged chronic under resourcing and personally converted AFP pledges. - Flagship programmes embedded UNISS in government-owned national plans. - Trust gains remain contingent: if resource mobilization fails, the flagships will deepen, not repair, the credibility deficit.

Source: Evaluation team

Finding 4.6.2: Trust deficits were also observed with NGO partners, among United Nations entities themselves, and with other partners. Each pointed to coordination arrangements perceived as insufficiently neutral or not genuinely multilateral.

236. The UN's trust deficit in the Sahel was not limited to Member States. Some NGO and civil society partners reported that United Nations entities appropriated their programme concepts for fundraising without attribution, transforming coordination relationships into competitive ones and reducing partners' willingness to share the field intelligence. Some humanitarian actors perceived that the United Nations system was failing in maintaining principled engagement; one of the reasons that they strongly suggested the re-establishment of the regional humanitarian coordinator as a senior-level advocate for humanitarian principles.

237. Within the United Nations system, the dependence on UNDP documented in EQ 3.2 translated directly into a trust deficit: coordination was widely perceived as serving UNDP's institutional interests rather than the collective, with resource allocation decisions seen as driven by inter-entity politics rather than programme merit.

238. With non-DAC partners, the damage was geopolitical: they viewed the United Nations as accommodating “Western” interests, and one Resident Coordinator observed that the United Nations had lost its credibility and, with it, its leverage. While the good offices of UNOWAS provided a political response to the crises in the AES countries, and MINUSMA did not initially mirror the withdrawal posture of France, Germany and the United States, the perception in AES countries was that the UN’s development response reflected its donor base, which was dominated by the USA and Europe. It was only in 2024 that the United Nations started to pivot towards the approach that developed the AES flagships and gradually enhanced its credibility.

239. Together, these three trust deficits point to a United Nations system perceived as insufficiently neutral. This was a missed opportunity given that the United Nations remains, by any comparative measure, the most universal and neutral multilateral actor in the Sahel. Yet this unique advantage has not translated into effective partnership, and the widely acknowledged convening role of the United Nations can only be capitalized upon if future coordination arrangements meaningfully reset the terms of engagement, anchoring coordination in national priorities and addressing all three dimensions.

Conclusions



4. Conclusions

240. The conclusions of the evaluation are drawn from the most important and recurrent themes underpinning the findings, across all the evaluation questions. They provide an overarching and holistic assessment of United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel between 2013 and 2025, with an emphasis on factors associated with achievements and success on one hand and shortcomings and limitations on the other. The conclusions are forward-looking in orientation: summarizing the key limitations of the coordination arrangements and mechanisms from 2013 to 2025 as a framing for recommendations (set out in Section 5).

241. In reading the conclusions, it is important to recall the scope of the evaluation. The evaluation considers the coordination arrangements of the United Nations system in the Sahel from 2013 to 2025. It is focused on the relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of those arrangements and the value that can be attributed to them. It does not assess the overall collective performance and results of the United Nations system “portfolio” in the Sahel. Rather, it considers the extent to which coordination arrangements have added value to the system and contributed to results that would not have been achieved otherwise.

Overarching conclusion

242. The successive sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination arrangements for the United Nations system in the Sahel from 2013 to 2025 were a legitimate and necessary response to a genuine collective action problem. During the period, the context and operating environment in the Sahel continued to present challenges and opportunities, which required collective action across the peace and security, humanitarian, development and human rights pillars of the United Nations system and approaches and responses that were multi-country, cross-border or sub-regional in scope. The evaluation concludes that measures to contribute to a more coordinated, coherent, sub-regional and cross-pillar approach to the United Nations system’s engagement in the Sahel remain necessary.

243. The sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination achievements of the United Nations system in the Sahel were concentrated into the later years of the period evaluated. During this time, the United Nations system found ways to engage in an extremely challenging context, by demonstrating its core value, which was positional and convening rather than directive. The United Nations system’s neutrality, sustained presence, and ability to hold political attention on a region that bilateral partners repeatedly deprioritized were consistently valued by external partners and Member States. Tangible achievements of the United Nations coordination arrangements and approaches in the Sahel included consequential sub-regional joint analysis, the development of the AES flagship programmes, cross-border peacebuilding programming and sustained presence when certain international actors withdrew.

244. However, the evaluation concludes that the United Nations system’s coordination arrangements in the Sahel between 2013 and 2025 were never fully fit for purpose to deliver on high expectations; whether the expectation was for seamless “integrated” delivery across United Nations pillars, resource mobilization in the billions of dollars, or to be the preeminent multilateral convenor of Member States and other international actors across the region, and recalling that these expectations lacked consensus and oscillated through the evaluated period.

245. The purpose and specific value proposition for sub-regional coordination mechanisms and functions was not sufficiently clarified and communicated and was increasingly challenged by the diminishing perceived relevance of the UNISS itself among United Nations system and external stakeholders. The various mechanisms were insufficiently embedded within the existing structures of the United Nations system, lacked the necessary management and accountability levers to contribute to more coherent and collective cross-pillar responses, and were often considered as an additional layer or secondary priority for their participants.

The approach to United Nations system coordination was inward-facing, not adequately connected with governments, regional organizations and international actors in the region to maximize the potential of the United Nations convening role. While adaptations did occur, the coordination arrangements were insufficiently agile to the rapidly shifting context in the Sahel; they did not help the United Nations system to collectively “get ahead” of the rapidly evolving context. Critically, coordination functions were under-financed and not equipped with the necessary human resources to deliver on ambitions. When coordination delivered results, it did so in spite of these contextual and structural limitations.

246. The question for the United Nations system now is how these limitations can be addressed to ensure that sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination arrangements are fit for purpose in the future.

Conclusion 1. By 2025, the resonance and ownership of the UNISS itself had decreased to such an extent, across all its key stakeholder groups, that its continuing relevance as a principal framework for United Nations system coordination in the Sahel is questionable.

247. While the scope of the evaluation is United Nations system coordination, rather than the UNISS itself, the strategy has framed United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel since 2013. The UNISS, as a Security Council-solicited cross-pillar strategy, could have provided an opportunity for a coordinated and comprehensive response to a sub-regional crisis by the United Nations system and its membership. However, from the outset, the UNISS faced challenges relating to ownership, political-backing and financing that constrained practical operationalization. These challenges have been previously documented. UNISS was variously perceived as top-down, United Nations headquarters-centric or imposed and crowded with objectives that were more suited to national-level planning instruments. There was a persistent lack of clarity over whether the UNISS constituted an internal United Nations system tool for coordination or a strategy for the international community, imbued with Security Council legitimacy, around which the United Nations would convene others. It was ambitious, but unaccompanied by institutional ownership or allocation of financial resources.

248. By 2025, the UNISS was 13 years old, and the context in the Sahel had shifted markedly. The strategy had never truly been owned by the arbitrarily defined ten countries in its scope and the context of the Central Sahel versus other countries increasingly diverged during the period. Further, with these major geopolitical changes in the region from 2020 onwards, the Security Council proximity that may have once conferred legitimacy upon the UNISS was an increasingly alienating factor. The UNISS pillars of resilience, security and governance were never clearly aligned with the humanitarian-development-peace pillar structure of the United Nations system. Now those pillars stand in contrast to the more sovereigntist and development-focused aspirations of many Sahelian states. Interest, understanding and ownership of the strategy as demonstrated by Security Council business, current donor Sahel strategies, and recall in interviews for this evaluation, has become almost negligible. Within the United Nations system, the UNISS had no formally mandated lead entity and has been passively “aligned to” in many instruments but actively owned and delivered by few. There is even confusion not to mention divergence within the United Nations system as to whether the UNISS constitutes a “mandate” at all.

249. The UNISS provided a robust analysis of root causes of instability in the Sahel and a legitimate ambition for a United Nations cross-pillar response in 2013. However, by 2025, the use of the UNISS as the principal, overarching framework and mandate for a more coordinated cross-pillar and sub-regional United Nations system response in the Sahel was no longer the most appropriate and had arguably become a hindrance (see recommendations 1 and C).

Conclusion 2. The coordination approaches that generated the most tangible and potentially replicable results were those grounded in nationally owned, output-oriented programming rather than a top-down coordination logic.

250. During the evaluated period, the United Nations system coordination arrangements produced some important tangible outcomes, which added clear value to what individual United Nations entities, individual United Nations pillars or country-siloed coordination would have been able to achieve alone.

251. Regional joint analyses on, for example, water resources, cross-border transhumance, climate-security interactions, organized crime and displacement all provided perspectives no single-country process could have generated, and directly shaped responses by international financial institutions and bilateral partners. The Peacebuilding Fund was one of the few instruments with both the mandate and the flexibility to operate across the United Nations peace and security and development pillars and across national boundaries, producing programming results that were qualitatively different from single-country and single-pillar approaches. The AES flagship programmes – co-designed with the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali¹⁴⁵, and Niger in 2024 and 2025, embedding United Nations system delivery within government-owned national plans and combining humanitarian, development, and peace and security dimensions across entities – represent the most significant United Nations joint programming and coherence with a range of external (non-UN) partners, but arrived late in the period and as a reaction to events.

252. These were examples of the United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel producing real results. However, as summarized in the overarching conclusion, the overall achievements did not match the high expectations for inter-alia fully integrated cross-pillar responses, grand sub-regional programming, and major United Nations resource mobilization and development finance leverage.

253. Sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination successes had the following common features:

- They were built from the country-level upwards, identifying issues and opportunities where a sub-regional and cross-pillar coordination approach was necessary and would add value, rather than pursuing a top-down logic of UNISS “domestication” within national scope planning. At the same time support, buy-in and direction from United Nations system leadership at regional and headquarters levels were critical and consequential.
- In line with the principles of the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations development system repositioning, they were co-owned by national governments (for example, in the AES) and sub-regional organizations (for example, the Lake Chad Basin Commission) and were connected to external non-United Nations development partners by a clear, single entry point that those partners could easily identify, rather than being perceived as UN-centric and externally imposed upon the context.
- Rather than periodically convening the United Nations system within broad and fixed structures, they were organized around specific issues and opportunities, (subsets of countries, border areas etc.) and involved specific deliverables and named responsibilities and accountabilities. In other words, the answer to the question “coordination, for what?” was easily and unanimously understood among the participants.

254. Looking forward, these common features provide important learning to inform the purpose, scope and design of future coordination arrangements (see recommendation 2).

145. In Mali, unlike Niger and Burkina Faso, the UN's three jointly developed flagship programmes were never formally endorsed by the transitional authorities, leading the United Nations to halt related resource mobilization and communications in September 2025 pending endorsement, which has not since been granted. The UNCT subsequently discontinued the “flagship programmes” framing, folding the three priority areas (food systems, renewable energy, education and health) into the Cooperation Framework aligned with Mali's National Strategy for Emergency and Sustainable Development (SNEDD 2024-2033).

Conclusion 3. United Nations system coordination arrangements lacked the management and accountability levers necessary to meaningfully contribute to improved coherence and delivery across entities, pillars and national boundaries. Voluntary agreements and mechanisms were not embedded or institutionalized; as a result, they were often considered to be an additional layer and secondary priority by their participants.

255. None of the various Sahel-specific coordination arrangements during the evaluated period established management and accountability arrangements that could meaningfully improve cross-pillar and sub-regional coherence of the United Nations system. The functions, mechanisms, reporting lines and working methods were based on voluntary participation. Some were established outside of other existing structures that were more institutionalized and consequential. As a result, the arrangements were unable to effectively address and counter the well-documented external realities that drive fragmentation in the United Nations system globally – earmarked funding flows to United Nations entities, bilateral donor relationships and agency visibility incentives consistently prevailed over system-wide priorities.

256. The vertical coordination chain established in the later years of the period, from the Deputy Secretary-General-chaired Sahel Advisory Group through the UNISS Steering Committee, Regional Collaborative Platform, and country-level UNCTs, failed to function as a coherent system in practice. Decisions taken at the headquarters level were not systematically communicated to regional or country levels. Mutual accountability arrangements between the regional and country levels (for example, Resident Coordinators and regional directors), as in other regions, were not fully institutionalized.

257. Roles and responsibilities for UNISS coordination and implementation lacked clarity, with particular ambiguity and occasional tension between the development system and the peace and security pillar (UNOWAS, OSCDS, UNDP and DCO). Participation in UNISS coordination mechanisms was broad and regular, and alignment with the UNISS was often declared, but coordination activities rarely led to consequential decisions. The system lacked tools to ensure follow-through on collective commitments. Multiple parallel reporting mechanisms documented what the United Nations did in the Sahel at considerable effort, but none was designed to demonstrate collective results that coordination had enabled. Independent reviews of UNISS and its coordination arrangements were reactive, episodic and without structured follow-up, commissioned in response to crises and known shortcomings. The moments of genuine coordination alignment were exceptions driven by political pressure, individual leadership or the action of mechanisms not specific to UNISS and the Sahel (including the Executive Committee and the Resident Coordinator system), not by an institutional incentive structure designed to reward cross-pillar and sub-regional collaboration.

258. Looking forward, future coordination arrangements will succeed only if they can establish unambiguous management and accountability lines, explicitly define roles and responsibilities and apply mechanisms that "close the loop" on implementation (see recommendation 3).

Conclusion 4. United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel were largely inward-facing, lacking substantive participation or concrete "whole-of-UN" system partnerships with governments, regional organizations, donors, international financial institutions and civil society. This diluted the convening power of the United Nations system and its ability to shape the agendas of multiple parallel actors and strategies in the Sahel.

259. With some exceptions, United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel were inward-facing. Membership of the core mechanisms – the Sahel Advisory Group and UNISS Steering Committee – included only United Nations system entities. While outreach to international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and regional organizations became a focus of the coordination efforts episodically during the period, it was not an embedded or integral feature. The internal United Nations system coordination mechanisms operated in parallel with the primary donor and international financial institution coordination mechanism. While interaction between the United Nations system and the Sahel Alliance did

occur, it was fragmented and insufficiently institutionalized to facilitate more strategic alignment between the United Nations system and the international donor community. Similarly, partnership and coordination arrangements between the United Nations system and regional organizations (for example, ECOWAS, G5 Sahel, the African Union) were entity- and pillar-specific, rather than cross-pillar and whole-of-UN-based. Many external interlocutors consulted by the evaluation found it difficult to identify a single entry point to the United Nations system on a given topic or issue.

260. It needs to be noted that the external environment was, itself, highly and increasingly fragmented. Sahelian national governments engaged pragmatically with the United Nations system, valuing its technical expertise, potential for resource mobilization and multilateral legitimacy, but political crises in Central Sahel strained key relationships on which sub-regional cross-pillar coherence depended. The availability of regional organizations with whom the United Nations system could partner and share ownership and responsibility for collective results declined with the dissolution of the G5 Sahel and the ongoing transformation of the Liptako-Gourma authority, the fracturing of ECOWAS and suspensions from the African Union. OECD-DAC bilateral donors were driven primarily by security and migration containment objectives incompatible with the UNISS multi-year cross-pillar rationale. International financial institutions engaged instrumentally; accessing the UN's ground presence and analysis rather than as strategic co-designers. Non-DAC partners operated entirely outside the United Nations system or international community coordination arrangements.

261. The unique, universal and neutral convening power of the United Nations system was recognized but infrequently leveraged to its full potential during the period. The United Nations system was unable to provide a compelling case to prevent the proliferation of parallel and competing Sahel strategies. The convening and accompanying role that the United Nations system can play in financing for development – which had damaged the United Nations reputationally in the early UNISS period when expectations of billions of dollars of investment from the World Bank and the AfDB were raised by the visit of their principals to the Sahel with the United Nations Secretary-General but not delivered upon – was demonstrated later in the evaluated period.

262. The financing strategy for the AES flagships and the relative successes recorded by Peacebuilding Fund-funded UN-IFI liaison capacities (for example, in Chad) illustrate what structured, sustained United Nations engagement can achieve when resourced and institutionalized.

263. Looking forward, future United Nations system coordination arrangements will add greater value if they leverage the UN's convening power, include structured engagement with international financial institutions, civil society and non-DAC partners, and accompany Sahelian Member States in shaping financing for development (see recommendation 4).

Conclusion 5. United Nations system coordination functions in the Sahel were chronically under-resourced relative to expectations. The gap between the level of ambition and the means made available was a critical factor that determined what the coordination arrangements could realistically achieve. Resource mobilization efforts for OSCDS itself diverted attention from its core mission. Resource mobilization for the United Nations system was an explicit aim of coordination arrangements and recorded notable achievements, but sustainable structures and vehicles to attract and channel funding as an incentive for cross-pillar and sub-regional programming were not established.

264. This conclusion addresses two related but distinct dimensions: the resourcing of the coordination functions themselves, and their role in mobilizing and channelling quality funding to United Nations system entities.

265. On the first dimension of resourcing coordination itself, decisions to finance cross-pillar coordination arrangements covering multiple pillars and the ten countries covered by the UNISS exclusively through extrabudgetary resources and with reliance on ad-hoc, voluntary contributions had major consequences for

their efficiency and effectiveness. In the case of OSCDS, cost-sharing arrangements endorsed at principals' level did not fully materialize, leaving the function dependent on a narrow base of donors and short-term secondments that were not sufficient or sustainable. The consequences were operational, reputational and strategic, including: high staff turnover; institutional memory loss; and limited communications capacity. Efforts to secure resources for OSCDS itself consumed considerable bandwidth in Dakar and New York, diverting attention from the core coordination and United Nations system resource mobilization mission. At the country level, RCOs in the Sahel region were constrained by the global Resident Coordinator system funding gap, which meant that core positions were not always filled. Specialized capacities, including peace and development advisors and gender specialists, were very valuable, but their extrabudgetary and locally mobilized funding arrangements meant that they lacked sustainability.

266. The lesson for future coordination arrangements is not necessarily that significantly more resources are needed, but that the logic underpinning resourcing decisions must change. Cross-pillar coordination arrangements with broad geographic scope and genuine convening responsibilities cannot function effectively in the absence of adequate, predictable and sustainable funding to enable the retention of high-quality human resources capable of delivering the core coordination functions. Resourcing needs to be a precondition for coordination, not an aspiration.

267. On the second dimension of resource mobilization by coordination functions for the United Nations system, it was notable throughout the period that collective, cross-pillar and cross-border programming was often enabled and incentivized by the availability of pooled funding. While OSCDS dedicated significant energy to resource mobilization for the United Nations system with the project bank and from international financial institutions and achieved ad-hoc successes, dedicated structures to receive and channel flexible and pooled funding were not established. The most commonly utilized pooled funds in the region were the global-level Peacebuilding Fund, the Joint SDG Fund and the CERF. The lesson for future coordination arrangements is that they should lean further into resource mobilization as a core coordination function, building on successes in international financial institution partnerships but also use pooled funds as a central tool and incentive for cross-pillar and cross-border programming (see recommendation 5).

Recommendations



5. Recommendations

268. The evaluation makes recommendations to the Secretary-General and United Nations entities to inform system-wide decision making on a recalibration of United Nations strategic positioning and coordination arrangements in the Sahel. It also presents a set of recommendations for the consideration of United Nations Member States to support this effort. The recommendations apply to coordination across the four pillars of the United Nations system (peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights) and respond directly to the strategic areas in which the evaluation has reached clear conclusions. The recommendations are also made in recognition of the wider context of the United Nations development system repositioning, the UN80 Initiative, and an Independent Strategic Review of UNOWAS that was initiated during the evaluation.

269. In 2025, the *System-wide evaluation on progress towards a “new generation of United Nations country teams”* (SWE0-2025-001) made seven strategic recommendations to the United Nations development system and Member States designed to strengthen the centrality of the Cooperation Framework as the most important planning and implementation instrument for the United Nations system at the country level and the basis for optimized UNCT configuration.¹⁴⁶ In the management response¹⁴⁷ the UNSDG accepted all of the system-level recommendations. The recommendations are not repeated in full here, however, the Sahel-specific recommendations of the present evaluation will be most feasible and effective if the global recommendations of the 2025 evaluation are fully implemented.

270. The evaluation was undertaken alongside the UN80 Initiative. It informs and provides learning to UN80 Initiative work packages, as follows:

- Regional reset (WP6), Regional platforms for integration (WP12) and UNCT reconfiguration (WP5): the outcomes of these work packages will determine the means of implementation for several of the recommendations of this evaluation. At the time of issuance of this report certain key decisions are yet to be taken. In particular, the specific institutional architecture for overall coordination at the regional level remains under active consideration. The evaluation addresses system-wide recommendations at the sub-regional level to the Secretary-General, with the expectation that responsibilities for implementation will be defined in the management response.
- Special envoy review (WP11): the evaluation makes recommendations on the way forwards following the decision of the Secretary-General to end the assignment of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel in September 2025.
- In other areas, such as Senior management coordination forums (WP10) and the Shared platform initiative (WP13), the evaluation may provide relevant and timely learning to inform decision making.

271. The recommendations were also informed by a system-wide workshop held in Dakar with the membership of the UNISS Steering Committee in May 2026 (see Annex IV). The workshop considered future coordination arrangements, including by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of hypothetical institutional options to surface and validate the key principles that should inform the design and implementation of future coordination arrangements. The key overarching principles that inform the development of the recommendations:

- **Country-led, regionally supported and connected:** Future United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel should take clear steps to invert the perceived coordination logic associated with the UNISS – that it was a top-down and United Nations headquarters-centric instrument. The coordination logic should be built from the country-level upwards, according to the national ownership principles of the 2030 Agenda and the logic of the United Nations development

146. UNSDG SWE0. 2025. *System-wide evaluation on progress towards a “new generation of United Nations country teams”*.

147. The UNSDG management response is available [here](#).

system repositioning, with the Resident Coordinator system as the critical foundation. Regional and headquarters layers should fill the gaps and provide support.

- **Institutional design:** The precise configuration of future arrangement(s) is appropriately a matter for United Nations principals and Member States to determine, including in the context of the ongoing UN80 Initiative and its work on regional coordination. However, the evaluation considers that building on, strengthening and addressing, challenges inherent within existing coordination arrangements are likely to deliver greater and more sustainable value than creating any new stand-alone structure, entity or special envoy role, which the evaluation discourages.
- **Clarity of purpose:** Coordination arrangements should be designed with realistic ambition: calibrated to what cross-pillar coordination can realistically deliver in the current Sahelian context. Any future coordination arrangements must specify, with precision and without ambiguity, what coordination is responsible for, what it is not responsible for, and how it adds value relative to what individual pillars, entities and Resident Coordinators or UNCTs can achieve alone. Coordination must be a means to an end, not coordination for its own sake.
- **Flexibility and adaptation:** Coordination arrangements should be flexible, adaptive and proactive, not rigid, repetitive and reactive. Arrangements should help the system to get ahead of contextual developments and to focus on clear time-bound tasks and concrete deliverables. They should build in internal feedback as well as independent review mechanisms that allow for the adaptation and course correction needed to remain relevant over time.

272. These overarching principles should be considered within all the efforts to the recalibrate United Nations strategic positioning and regional architecture for the Sahel that result from this system-wide evaluation, the Strategic Review of UNOWAS, and the UN80 Initiative.

Recommendations to the United Nations system

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 1. Design future United Nations system coordination arrangements through consultative processes that prioritize national ownership, and articulate a clearer strategic proposition.		
1a. Communicate a formal reset of United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel to re-establish and embed national and regional ownership. The credibility, legitimacy and authority of United Nations system coordination arrangements should not be derived exclusively from the Security Council mandate for the UNISS (2012/2013). Future United Nations system coordination approaches require clear steps to re-establish national and sub-regional ownership: v. Communicate a recalibration of United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel and conduct a consultative process with Sahelian governments, the African Union and relevant regional organizations on priorities for the United Nations system in the Sahel to inform the future coordination arrangements. vi. Shift away from the use of the UNISS (2013) as the principal, fixed, organising framework and adopt a more flexible approach to the geographic and thematic scope of coordination in the Sahel and West Africa. This may include: • A wider overall definition of the sub-region, to include and address spillover to coastal countries. • Differentiated narrower coordination approaches for specific “clusters” of countries that can be established in response to evolutions in the context and with national government buy-in. vii. Review the continuing relevance and status of the UNISS, in consultation with the Security Council, informed by the results of the present evaluation and the Independent Strategic Review of UNOWAS (see recommendation C for consideration by Member States).	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA¹⁴⁸, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q4 2026
1b. Clarify and communicate a recalibrated strategic proposition for cross-pillar and sub-regional coordination in the Sahel. i. Define with precision and without ambiguity the core functions that cross-pillar coordination arrangements in the Sahel will prioritise and how they will add value. The evaluation suggests that high priority functions should include: • <u>Cross-pillar/sub-regional analysis</u>: Information gathering and analytical capacities should be effectively integrated and used across the United Nations system with protocols/mechanisms to provide real time flows across all pillars and levels (headquarters, regional, country), enabling foresight, early warning and proactive cross-pillar engagement. • <u>External partnerships</u>: Effective coordination arrangements play an important role in United Nations system external convening and partnership approaches to facilitate of cross-pillar, whole-of-UN system dialogue and partnership approaches with a range of stakeholders. See recommendation 4. • <u>Resource mobilisation</u>: Coordination arrangements should continue to prioritise the mobilisation of quality funding for the work of United Nations system entities in particular for scaled-up joint, cross-pillar and cross-border programming. See recommendation 5c. ii. Once core functions and value proposition are clearly defined, develop a concise United Nations Sahel Delivery Compact to define the accountabilities of each institutional actor – to be signed by United Nations entity principals (see recommendation 3).		Q4 2026

148. The evaluation encourages consultation of and participation by OCHA in the implementation of the recommendations. It does so without prejudice to A/RES/46/182 and the established basis for engagement by OCHA in United Nations development coordination – participation in observer or member capacity to reduce risk, vulnerability and need, without seeking chairing or convening roles.

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 2. Construct coordination arrangements by utilizing and capacitating existing structures rather than creating new or parallel arrangements. Build in flexibility and subsidiarity, and adopt an implementation focus.		
2a. Country level: Further strengthen the centrality of the United Nations country team, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, to enhance cross-pillar coordination for the United Nations system at the country level, in line with General Assembly resolutions 72/279, 75/233, and 79/226. i. United Nations entities <u>in all pillars</u> should actively support cross-pillar and cross-border analysis and programming. This should include: - Engaging in Common Country Analysis processes (including annual updates) and the design of Cooperation Frameworks to identify cross pillar programming opportunities. This needs to go beyond passive participation in the UNSDG Regional Peer Support Group and include physical deployments where appropriate. - Active participation in United Nations country teams and real time information and intelligence sharing with RCs and UNCTs (as described in Recommendation 1b). - Peer review mechanisms to involve Resident Coordinators and UNCTs from bordering countries in Common Country Analyses and Cooperation Framework design, facilitating sub-regional analysis and identification of joint and cross-border programming opportunities. ii. Ensure full and early implementation of the decisions emerging from the UN80 Shared Platform Initiative (Work Package 13) in Sahel countries to support and empower RC/HCs to enhance cross-pillar collaboration.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q4 2026 and ongoing
2b. (Sub) regional level: Integrate Sahel-specific coordination arrangements within the overarching authority and structure of United Nations system regional coordination to allow for more flexible, time-bound delivery, supported by appropriate convening authority and capacity in Dakar (with a central role for DCO). i. Facilitate the integration of the current UNISS Steering Committee and subsidiary mechanisms into the Regional Platform for Integration (subject to outcomes of UN80 Initiative Work Packages 6 and 12) to provide the necessary system-wide authority, flexibility and sustainability, for Sahel coordination, while avoiding the establishment of separate and parallel structures. ii. Organize Sahel coordination activities around specific, time-bound deliverables and in response to specific issues, rather than standing, static fora for strategic discussion and “pillars”. Seek to replicate the model of the Standing Committee for the AES flagships and other thematic working groups and taskforces that focus on specific issues and geographies. These configurations should be (co-)chaired or convened by entities specifically dedicated to coordination within or across pillars (in particular DCO but also DPPA/UNOWAS, OHCHR or others as appropriate) and ensure the effective participation of key entities with limited regional/country presence (e.g. DPPA, OHCHR, PBPSO and UNOCT). iii. DCO should play a central role in future coordination arrangements in the Sahel to institutionalize and strengthen connections between the country level RC system and United Nations entity regional directors. This should include appropriate human resource capacity in Dakar (see recommendation 5b) but also agreed convening authority (consistent with DCO’s existing, non-operational coordinating role and mandate to provide oversight and support to the Resident Coordinator system).	Secretary-General in consultation with USG Policy and Executive/Deputies Committee (or successor arrangement).	Q1 2027
2c. Headquarters level: Consider using existing, established executive coordination structures for headquarters-level dialogue and decisions relating to the Sahel. i. Review the terms of reference, and functioning to date, of the Sahel Advisory Group (created by 2017 Executive Committee decision) to consider whether it adds sufficient value to warrant continuation. ii. Consider using the structure of the Executive Committee and Deputies Committee (or equivalent arrangements that may be established by an incoming Secretary-General) as the primary headquarters/principal-level platform for strategic dialogue, decision making on and follow up on the Sahel and ensure use of the findings of the present evaluation in UN80 Initiative Work Package 10 on Senior management coordination forums. iii. Ensure that headquarters and principal-level discussions on the Sahel prioritise engagement with the leadership of external partners including AU, AfDB, World Bank and IMF, involving all United Nations pillars (See recommendation 4).	Secretary-General in consultation with USG Policy and Executive/Deputies Committee (or successor arrangement).	Q4 2026

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 3. Roles and responsibilities should be defined with greater clarity and precision. They should be monitored and reinforced by a shared accountability framework, collective performance assessment mechanisms, and independent oversight.		
3a. Clarify coordination roles and responsibilities, and establish robust reporting, follow-up and feedback mechanisms to strengthen accountability. Establish appropriate management and accountability arrangements to support the implementation of the United Nations Sahel Compact referred to in Recommendation 1b. This should include the following elements (and be consistent with any future revision of the Management and Accountability Framework): i. A detailed matrix of roles and responsibilities modelled on the UNISS responsibilities matrix that was developed in 2019 (but not subsequently updated to fully reflect the United Nations development system reforms at the regional level). ii. An annual reporting mechanism on the collective implementation of the United Nations Sahel Compact – focused not on entity activity mapping and aggregation, but on the specific value addition brought by coordination arrangements. iii. 360-degree performance assessment/feedback mechanisms between Compact signatories at the regional level, and, most importantly, between United Nations entity regional directors and Resident Coordinators.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q1 2027
3b. Conduct an independent review or system-wide evaluation of United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel by July 2031. Commit to a follow up independent review or system-wide evaluation of United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel after a maximum of five years. This should consider equally the perspectives of United Nations and non-United Nations stakeholders.	Secretary-General	Q3 2031
Recommendation 4. Future United Nations system coordination arrangements in the Sahel should be: more outward facing; place a higher priority on external partnerships with all development partners and stakeholders; and seek to accompany Sahelian Member States in shaping financing for sustainable development.		
The evaluation suggests that this includes: • Strengthened strategic dialogue and collaboration between the United Nations system and existing donor/development partner coordination platforms such as the Sahel Alliance. • Continued investment in a broader convening role for the United Nations system that accompanies Sahelian countries' sovereign control and coordination of the full range of available development financing resources (ODA, IFI lending, domestic resources, foreign direct investment, natural resource extraction etc.). For example: • More structured engagement and partnerships between the United Nations system and international financial institutions at both strategic and operational levels; building on corporate/ leadership level dialogue (see recommendation 2c) and supported by dedicated liaison functions at regional and country levels (see recommendation 5b). • Increased engagement with the private sector and other cooperation and development partners to identify opportunities to maximize the sustainable development impact of investments (e.g. natural resource extraction, infrastructure investment). • Maintaining and supporting participatory coordination and consultation mechanisms between the United Nations system and civil society.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q1 2027 and ongoing

Recommendation	Lead/responsible entity(s)	Timeframe for implementation
Recommendation 5. United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel must be: matched by sufficient and sustainable financial resources; staffed appropriately to add value in the wider system; and explicitly focus on the mobilization of quality funding as an incentive and enabler of cross-pillar/sub-regional delivery.		
5a. Establish a predictable and sustainable funding model for Sahel coordination functions. Ensure that United Nations system coordination arrangements for the Sahel are adequately, predictably and sustainably resourced, wherever they are located. The evaluation recommends the allocation of assessed/core resources where possible, noting that the sums involved are comparatively small. However, a funding mix combining assessed resources, United Nations system cost-sharing (based on a formula and firm agreement to pay in full and on time) and levied resources may have a positive effect on institutional buy-in and participation.	Secretary-General, in consultation with DSG, DPPA, OHCHR, OCHA, DCO, UNDP, and UN ECA (and other entities as appropriate).	Q1 2027
5b. Ensure that human resources for coordination provide the roles, skills and profiles to ensure maximum value for the United Nations system (including partnerships and resource mobilization expertise). i. Ensure sufficient human resource capacity at the sub-regional level (i.e., in the DCO Dakar hub or roving capacity) to provide meaningful, implementation-focused support to sub-regional coordination mechanisms (as described above) and Resident Coordinators in the Sahel, not compliance-monitoring and quality assurance alone. Dedicated expertise on partnerships and resource mobilisation is advisable. ii. Establish minimum cross-pillar staffing standards for RCOs in RC/HC contexts including dedicated functions for cross-pillar analysis and liaison within UN80 Shared Platform Initiative (Work Package 13). iii. Preserve and expand peace & development advisor positions in priority Sahel countries and at the sub-regional level to provide a critical linkage between (i) the peace & security and development pillars of the United Nations system and (ii) country-level RCOs and UNOWAS. iv. Replicate the good practice of funding IFI liaison functions in RCOs (see recommendation 4). v. Ensure gender parity in the appointment of Resident Coordinators and other senior coordination roles covering the Sahel.	DCO in consultation with DPPA (including UNOWAS and PBPSO), OHCHR, OCHA and UNDP.	Q1 2027 and ongoing
5c. Leverage pooled funding as a central enabler of cross-pillar and cross-border delivery. i. Building on the UN80 Initiative work package on Funding Mechanisms (WP18), explore how pooled funding (either existing funds at global, regional and country levels, or newly designed funds) can be best utilized as an incentive for cross-pillar and cross-border coordination, programming and delivery in the Sahel. ii. Pooled fund scope and design should be inclusive and multi-stakeholder where possible, with governance participation and grant-eligibility going beyond United Nations entities. Coordination functions should play leading roles in pooled fund management and governance. iii. Continue to prioritize - and where possible scale up - Peacebuilding Fund investments in the Sahel, using the fund as a specific instrument to incentivise coordination and collaboration across pillars and cross-border programming, and to promote national ownership and RC leadership. iv. Consider positioning the Joint SDG Fund as a catalytic enabler of joint programme design and nationally-owned development financing analysis, coordination and leverage informed by the ongoing system-wide evaluation of the Fund (see recommendation 4).	DCO in consultation with DPPA (including UNOWAS and PBPSO), OHCHR, OCHA and UNDP.	Q1 2027

Recommendations for the consideration of Member States

The effectiveness of United Nations system coordination is dependent on many internal dimensions. But effective coordination also depends upon an external environment shaped by the actions and decisions of Member States. The following recommendations are made for the consideration of Member States, in their respective roles as programme country governments in the Sahel, donors to United Nations system entities, and members of the intergovernmental legislative bodies.

Recommendation A. Sahelian Member States are encouraged to create enabling conditions for coherent, cross-pillar United Nations system engagement in support of national priorities.

To maximize the cross-pillar coherence and relevance of United Nations system engagement, Sahelian Member States are encouraged to:

- Encourage United Nations system entities to collectively support nationally owned programming approaches, and use existing resources to leverage development finance at scale from all available sources (ODA, IFI lending, domestic resources, foreign direct investment, natural resource extraction etc.)
- Provide enabling conditions for cross-border programming – freedom of movement for United Nations staff, data sharing and access, and joint government participation in cross-border initiatives.
- Engage the Resident Coordinator as the primary United Nations system interlocutor the country level, respecting the balance of the pillars in the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolutions 72/279, 75/233 and 79/226.

Recommendation B. Member States that provide funding to the United Nations system in the Sahel are encouraged to support and incentivize coherent, cross-pillar and cross-border United Nations system approaches with their funding decisions.

To improve cross-pillar coherence and coordination, Member States are encouraged to:

- Strengthen strategic dialogue and collaboration between the United Nations system and donor/development partner coordination platforms such as the Sahel Alliance.
- Allocate resources to the United Nations system pooled funding mechanisms that have contributed most to improved United Nations system coordination in the Sahel (e.g., Peacebuilding Fund, Joint SDG Fund) and any future cross-pillar pooled funding mechanisms.
- Provide small but impactful voluntary contributions to the Resident Coordinator system and other mechanisms that enhance and strengthen cross-pillar coordination (e.g., the DPPA-UNDP peace and development advisor programme).
- Shift progressively to multi-year and lightly earmarked funding portfolios for the United Nations system in the Sahel that are compatible with cross-pillar approaches.

Recommendation C. Key intergovernmental bodies are encouraged to strengthen guidance and oversight for United Nations system cross-pillar coordination in the Sahel by focusing reporting requirements, scrutiny and guidance on cross-pillar results and performance.

Security Council:

- Consider a review of the status of the UNISS (S/RES/2056, op.28) within the UNOWAS mandate (in consideration of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 80/251 on *Mandate creation, implementation and review for an efficient and effective United Nations* (2026)).
- Request that future Secretary-General reporting on the implementation of UNOWAS mandate objective 3 is de-coupled from the UNISS (2013) and covers, instead, the support provided by UNOWAS to United Nations system cross-pillar coordination (see Recommendation 1).

Economic and Social Council:

- Consider separation of the Sahel agenda item from South Sudan and a stand-alone Secretary-General report on the Sahel region.
- Request that the Secretary-General report on the Sahel region has a strengthened focus on cross-pillar coherence and collective results (rather than single entity activity aggregation against UNISS pillars).

Peacebuilding Commission:

- Consider allocating additional time to the Sahel as a sub-region within the PBC programme of work.

Evaluation of United Nations system coordination in the Sahel (2013-2025)

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