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# Food Security in WAEMU: Current Challenges and a Way Forward

Ljubica Dordevic (IMF) and Ollo Sib (WFP)

SIP/2025/072

IMF Selected Issues Papers are prepared by IMF staff as background documentation for periodic consultations with member countries. It is based on the information available at the time it was completed on April 17, 2025. This paper is also published separately as IMF Country Report No 25/111.

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**Food Security in WAEMU: Current Challenges and a Way Forward**  
Prepared by Ljubica Dordevic (IMF) and Ollo Sib (WFP)

Authorized for distribution by Luca A Ricci  
June 2025

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**ABSTRACT:** Food insecurity in WAEMU has worsened over the last few years—mainly due to conflicts, climate, and affordability issues—with the Sahel zone being in a particularly difficult situation. The security environment is complex, while the region is also highly vulnerable to climate change and dependent on food imports. If left unaddressed, food insecurity could have a lasting adverse impact on economic growth and development. Addressing food insecurity in a durable way requires solidarity, as well as well-targeted and coordinated efforts by national and regional authorities, in collaboration with partners.

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## SELECTED ISSUES PAPERS

# **Food Security in WAEMU: Current Challenges and a way Forward**

West African Economic and Monetary Union

Prepared by Ljubica Dordevic (IMF) and Olo Sib (WFP)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Ljubica Dordevic (IMF African Department) and Olo Sib (World Food Programme), with research support by Fiona Hesse-Triballi, Aliou Badara Samake, Mina Suzuki and Liman Harou Issoufou. The paper is part of IMF-WFP pilot collaboration. We would like to thank Luca Antonio Ricci, Jean-Martin Bauer and the authorities for their suggestions and comments.



# WEST AFRICAN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

April 17, 2025

## SELECTED ISSUES

Approved By  
**Luca A. Ricci**  
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# FOOD SECURITY IN WAEMU: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND A WAY FORWARD<sup>1</sup>

Food insecurity in WAEMU has worsened over the last few years—mainly due to conflicts, climate, and affordability issues—with the Sahel zone being in a particularly difficult situation. The security environment is complex, while the region is also highly vulnerable to climate change and dependent on food imports. Further increases in food insecurity risk exacerbating social tensions and fueling further conflicts. If left unaddressed, food insecurity could have a lasting adverse impact on economic growth and development. Addressing food insecurity in a durable way requires solidarity, as well as well-targeted and coordinated efforts by national and regional authorities, in collaboration with partners.

## A. Context

**1. Food insecurity refers to the lack of reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food.** It thus depends on: the availability of sufficient quantities and quality of food; access by households to sufficient quantities and quality of food; utilization of food (knowledge, access to water, health services); and stability over time across these three dimensions. Food insecurity can be chronic, due to structural factors (poverty, climate change), and/or acute, resulting from or compounded by transitory factors (e.g., conflict, natural disasters, displacement). The text figure describes the various levels of intensity of food insecurity.

Household Classification				
In IPC 3,4, and 5 humanitarian assistance is urgently required				
IPC 1 – NONE	IPC 2 – STRESSED	IPC 3 – CRISIS	IPC 4 – EMERGENCY	IPC 5 – CATASTROPHE
People are able to meet their basic food and other needs without major changes to their daily lives.	People are eating minimally adequate diets but must make significant changes to their lifestyles to support other non-food needs.	Some households are not consuming enough food and have high levels of malnutrition, while others are adopting irreversible coping strategies—such as selling assets that support their livelihoods—to support a limited diet.	People are facing extreme food shortages, acute malnutrition and disease levels are excessively high, and the risk of hunger-related death is rapidly increasing.	Even when using all of their coping strategies, people have almost no food and cannot support their basic needs. Starvation, death, destitution, and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident.

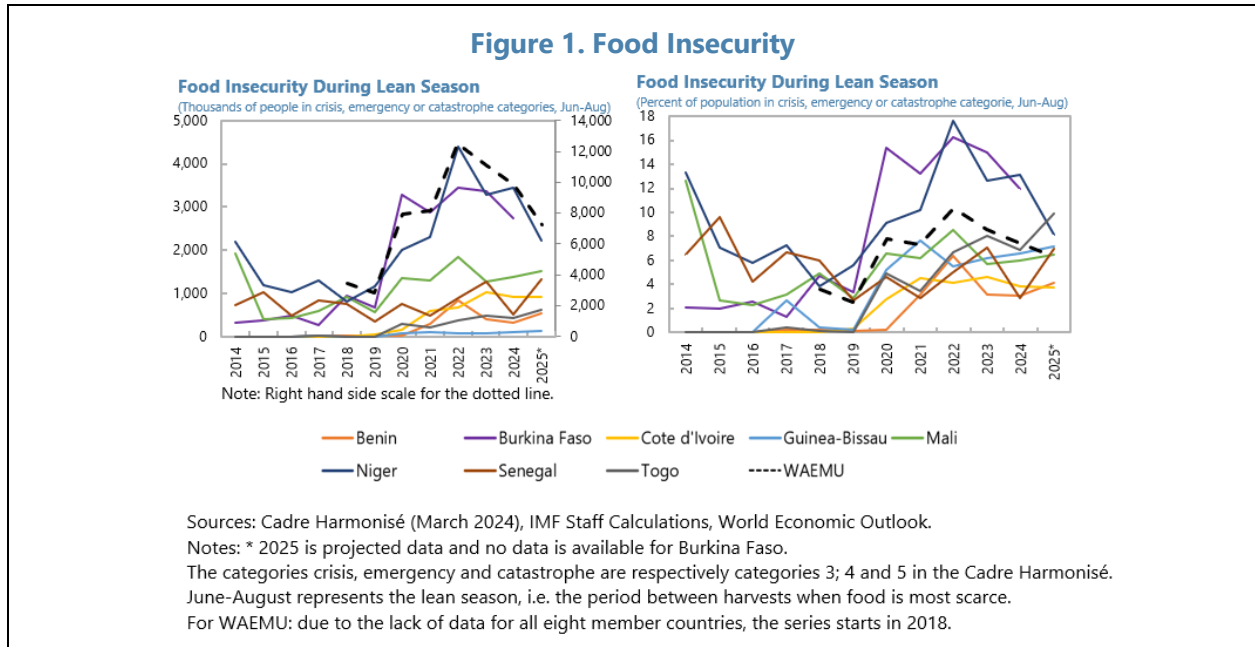
Produced by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, January 2023

**2. Since 2019, food insecurity has significantly increased in WAEMU, being especially severe in the Sahel zone (Figure 1 and Table 1).** During the 2022 lean season<sup>2</sup>—the worst year on record using the *Cadre Harmonisé* framework for acute food security—more than 12.5 million people in the WAEMU region were in food insecurity, experiencing a situation of crisis, emergency,

<sup>1</sup>Prepared by Ljubica Dordevic (AFR) and Ollo Sib (WFP), with research support by Fiona Hesse-Triballi. The paper is part of IMF-WFP pilot collaboration. We would like to thank Luca Antonio Ricci and the authorities for their suggestions and comments.

<sup>2</sup>Lean season represents the period between harvests when food is most scarce, being from June to August in the WAEMU region.

or catastrophe (categories 3, 4 and 5, respectively, on the aforementioned 1-5 IPC scale).<sup>3</sup> This corresponded to more than 10 percent of the total WAEMU population analyzed, up from 2.8 million people in 2019 or 3 percent of the population analyzed. In 2024, 9.8 million people faced food insecurity accounting for 7 percent of the population analyzed. There is substantial heterogeneity across countries. For example, in 2024, the share of population experiencing food insecurity was as high as 13 percent of the population in Niger and 12 percent in Burkina Faso (both for more than 10 percent of the population analyzed for the fourth consecutive year). In the same year, Senegal and Benin had the lowest share of the population in food insecurity, at 3 percent.



**3. The food security trends over the last 5 years in WAEMU countries reflect a dual narrative of progress and persisting vulnerabilities.** One key problem is that a strong increase in production is contrasted by high population growth. On one hand, the region has shown a commendable rise in agricultural production for the 2023/24 crop season, with cereal outputs reaching 32.6 million tons—a 2 percent year-on-year and a 6.8 percent increase over the five-year average, according to PREGEC (March 2024).<sup>4</sup> Staples like rice, maize, and sorghum underpin these gains, bolstered by favorable climatic conditions and strategic agricultural policies. Tubers, particularly cassava and yam, further enhance the region's agricultural diversity, contributing to food security and economic stability. However, these achievements mask underlying challenges. Seasonal and transitory food insecurity affect several areas—mainly the Sahel—driven by conflict, climatic shocks, and economic pressures, while coastal nations (Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire) demonstrate greater stability, albeit not being immune to seasonal fluctuations. Indeed, protracted food insecurity remains a significant concern in countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. On the

<sup>3</sup> The subregion is currently discussing the implementation of chronic food security analysis through the *Cadre Harmonisé*. Once rolled out, it will offer a precise estimate of the population experiencing chronic food insecurity.

<sup>4</sup> PREGEC presentation on Agricultural production for 2023-2024 agricultural season (March 2024)

other hand, the significant population growth strains the positive contribution of larger production. Overall, per capita cereal availability at 221 kg in the 2023/24 season in WAEMU has declined (1 percent year on year, 2 percent over the five-year average). Based on *Cadre Harmonisé* projections from November 2024, food insecurity will remain high in 2025.

**Table 1. WAEMU: Food Insecurity During the Lean Season (June to August), 2014-25**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025*
<i>(June to August, in thousands of people)</i>												
Benin	-	-	-	18.6	30.8	19.5	14.6	281.6	830.1	412.1	309.4	531.6
Burkina Faso	333.5	371.0	478.7	257.2	954.3	687.5	3,280.8	2,867.1	3,453.5	3,351.0	2,734.2	-
Cote d'Ivoire	-	-	-	-	-	59.0	168.4	580.6	662.0	1,017.8	922.5	928.8
Guinea-Bissau	-	-	-	32.5	4.8	2.5	67.8	100.6	73.1	78.9	117.3	129.6
Mali	1,920.1	409.9	423.2	600.8	932.7	553.8	1,340.7	1,307.1	1,841.1	1,262.1	1,370.3	1,518.0
Niger	2,204.7	1,178.1	1,020.5	1,312.8	802.9	1,171.6	2,012.4	2,309.1	4,402.4	3,280.4	3,436.9	2,220.9
Senegal	738.7	1,039.6	484.5	829.2	751.1	341.3	766.7	490.5	881.3	1,263.3	518.5	1,334.1
Togo	-	-	-	21.8	8.5	-	281.5	204.1	389.0	487.3	423.2	624.6
<b>WAEMU</b>					<b>3,485.1</b>	<b>2,835.1</b>	<b>7,932.9</b>	<b>8,140.8</b>	<b>12,532.5</b>	<b>11,152.9</b>	<b>9,832.2</b>	<b>7,287.7</b>
<i>(June to August, in percent of total population analyzed)</i>												
Benin				0	0	0	0	3	6	3	3	4
Burkina Faso	2	2	3	1	5	3	15	13	16	15	12	
Cote d'Ivoire					-	0	3	5	4	5	4	4
Guinea-Bissau				3	0	0	5	8	6	6	7	7
Mali	13	3	2	3	5	3	7	6	8	6	6	6
Niger	13	7	6	7	4	6	9	10	18	13	13	8
Senegal	6	10	4	7	6	3	5	3	5	7	3	7
Togo				0	0	-	5	3	7	8	7	10
<b>WAEMU</b>					<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>(June to August, year-on-year evolution in percent)</i>												
Benin	-	-	-	-	66	-37	-25	-1,832	195	-50	-25	72
Burkina Faso	-	11	29	-46	271	-28	377	-13	20	-3	-18	
Cote d'Ivoire	-	-	-	-	-	-	185	245	14	54	-9	1
Guinea-Bissau	-	-	-	-	-85	-49	2,622	48	-27	8	49	11
Mali	-	-79	3	42	55	-41	142	-3	41	-31	9	11
Niger	-	-47	-13	29	-39	46	72	15	91	-25	5	-35
Senegal	-	41	-53	71	-9	-55	125	-36	80	43	-59	157
Togo	-	-	-	-	-61	-100	-	-27	91	25	-13	48
<b>WAEMU</b>						<b>-19</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>-12</b>	<b>-26</b>

Sources: Cadre Harmonisé (March 2024), IMF Staff Calculations, World Economic Outlook Database

Notes: \* 2025 is projected data. The data reflects the people in crisis, emergency or catastrophe categories, or respectively categories 3; 4 and 5 of the Cadre Harmonisé.

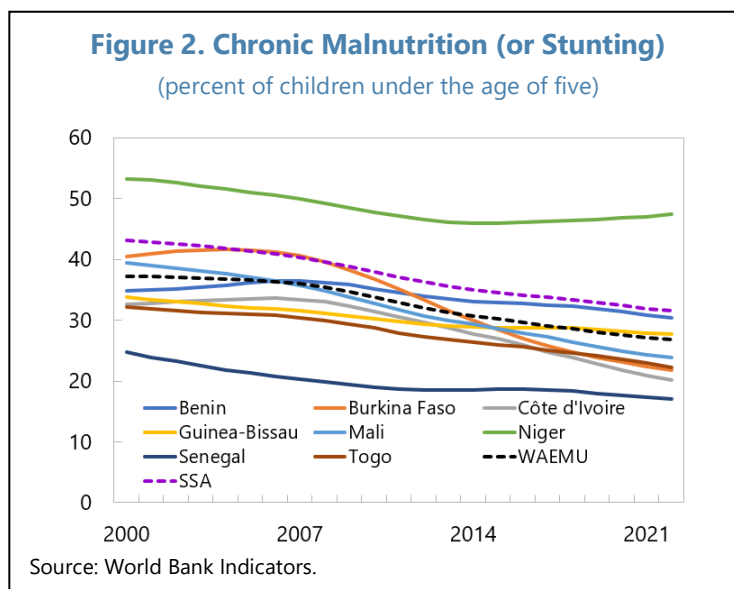
June-August represents the lean season, i.e. the period between harvests when food is most scarce.

For WAEMU: due to the lack of data for all eight member countries, the series starts in 2018.

Large jumps in food insecurity in some cases are due to improvement in food security data between two years. This is, e.g. the case with Guinea-Bissau in 2020 and Benin in 2021.

**4. Nutrition is still a major concern in WAEMU, despite significant progress made over recent decades (Figure 2 and Table 2).**

Acute malnutrition affects an estimated 16.7 million children under 5 years of age, particularly in the Sahel tri-border area (Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger)<sup>5</sup>. Chronic malnutrition (stunting)<sup>6</sup> affected over 25 percent of children under five in 2022, with nearly half of the children in Niger.<sup>7</sup> In 2024, 63 million people (41 percent of the total population) had insufficient food consumption in WAEMU, ranging from 14 percent in



Côte d'Ivoire to 76 percent in Niger. These alarming figures underscore persistent challenges (including food insecurity) and the need for targeted interventions. Coordinated efforts are essential to address both immediate nutritional needs and underlying vulnerabilities among at-risk populations.

**Table 2. WAEMU: People with Insufficient Food Consumption, 2024**

	Benin	Burkina Faso	Côte d'Ivoire	Guinea-Bissau	Mali	Niger	Senegal	Togo	WAEMU
Number of people (in million)	5	11	5	1	13	21	5	2	63
As a percentage of the population	35	47	14	35	55	76	26	20	41

Source: World Food Program (WFP), HungerMap.

<sup>5</sup> Acute malnutrition among children under 5 years old is also known as “global acute malnutrition”, being the common measure of malnutrition in a given population.

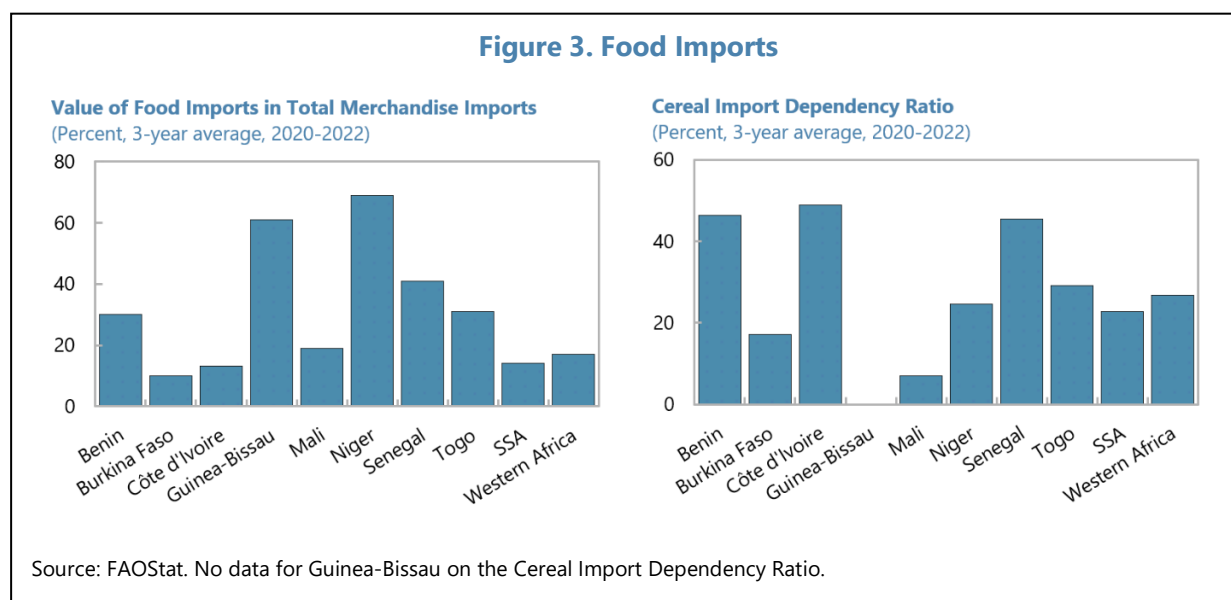
<sup>6</sup> Child growth is an internationally accepted outcome reflecting child nutritional status. Child stunting refers to a child who is too short for his or her age, as a result of chronic or recurrent malnutrition. Stunting is a contributing risk factor to child mortality and is also a marker of inequalities in human development. Stunted children fail to reach their physical and cognitive potential.

<sup>7</sup> Rapport de la réunion des Experts chargés de l’Agriculture, de l’Elevage et de l’Environnement -- 13ème Reunion du Comite de Haut Niveau sur la Securite Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle (Ouagadougou, du 14 au 16 mai 2024).



## B. Drivers of Food Insecurity in WAEMU

**5. The performance of food systems in WAEMU has been suboptimal due to conflicts, climate shocks, and affordability issues, and the region remains largely dependent on food imports (Figure 3).**<sup>8</sup> Key factors challenging the food systems in this region include: (1) conflicts that disrupt food supply systems; (2) climate shocks (desertification, droughts, and floods) that reduce production capacity; and (3) economic and trade factors that make a nutritious diet inaccessible. The increasing frequencies and magnitudes of conflict and climate hazards, limited food production, barriers to regional trade, and soaring food prices constitute significant drivers of the food insecurity crisis in Western Africa.



**6. The first key driver of food insecurity in the region is the combination of conflict, insecurity, and population displacement, which negatively impacts livelihoods and puts pressure on resources.** Fatalities due to security incidents are on the rise in WAEMU, reaching close to 14,000 people in 2024 (Figure 4). In 2023–2024, conflict and insecurity were the primary drivers of acute food insecurity across several countries in the WAEMU region, including Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and northern parts of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo, while also hindering humanitarian operations:

- In 2023, Burkina Faso and Mali experienced significant increases in instability, with escalating insecurity pushing affected populations in both countries into food security Catastrophe (CH Phase 5). These communities faced extreme challenges accessing markets, sustaining livelihoods, and receiving humanitarian aid. The inability to reach conflict-affected populations has left many

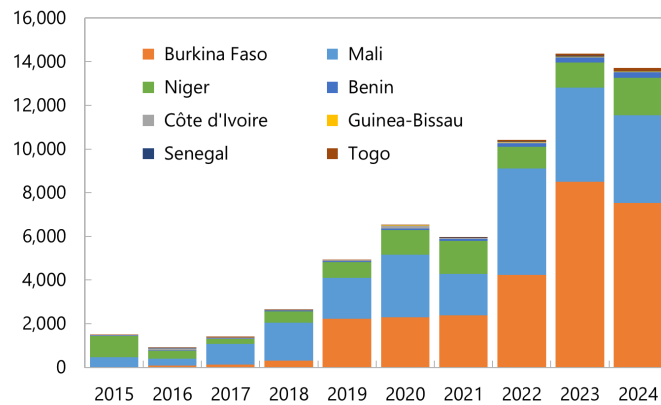
<sup>8</sup> Food systems refer to the range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution (storage, wholesale, retail, and transportation), consumption and disposal of food products.

communities vulnerable to worsening conditions, underscoring the need for coordinated humanitarian efforts. The insecurity remained high in 2024 in both countries.

- Insecurity in the Central Sahel continued to spread into northern regions of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo, intensifying food insecurity due to cross-border displacement and disruptions to local economic activities. Extensive population movements—including the influx of internally displaced persons and refugees—disrupt agricultural and pastoral activities, as well as trade.

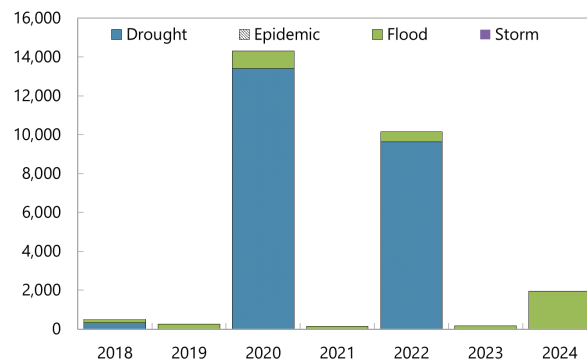
**7. The second key driver is climate—as reflected in rising temperatures and frequent climate disasters (Figure 5)—which is adversely affecting agricultural production, limiting availability of food and basic services – especially in Sahel.** Localized erratic rains, floods, and cumulative rainfall deficits pose significant risks to livelihoods in the region, which are heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture and livestock. Box 1 discusses rainfall trends in main river basins in WAEMU.

**Figure 4. Fatalities Linked to Security Incidents**  
(number of fatalities)



Source: ACLED, IMF Staff Calculations. Security incidents include battles, explosions, protests, riots, strategic developments and violence against civilians.

**Figure 5. Climate Disasters**  
(number of people affected, thousands)

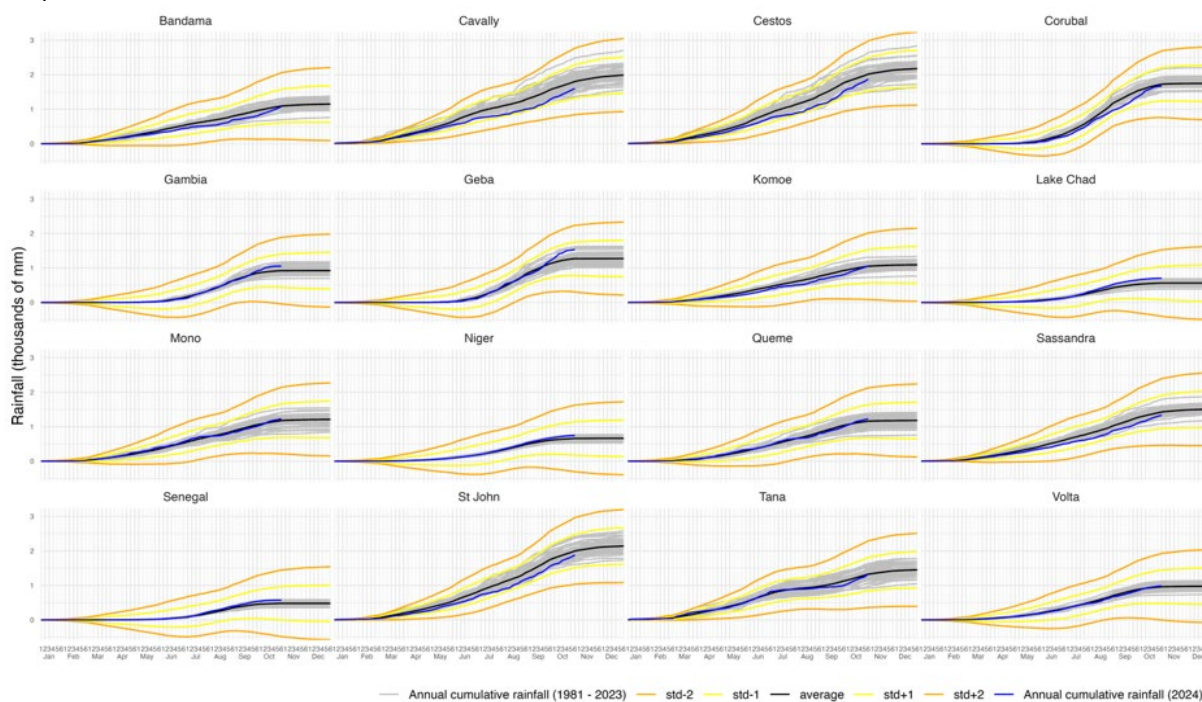


Sources: EMDAT, IMF Staff Calculations.

### Box 1. Floods in WAEMU in 2024

**The year 2024 was marked by the flooding that caused unprecedented losses of lives and livelihoods.**

As of August 2024, floods affected 3.5 million people across 14 countries in West and Central Africa.<sup>1</sup> This is mainly due to the increase in rainfall events, intensity, and amount, causing massive runoff which led to breakdowns of water retention infrastructures. The major 9 river basins (i.e., Gambia, Geba, Lake Chad, Mono, Niger, Queme, Senegal, Tana and Volta) of the 16 basins crossing the WAEMU region recorded higher rainfall than the historical average. The Government of Mali has declared a national emergency in response to devastating floods that have caused widespread destruction of property and loss of life across the country, with over 1.6 million hectares of land (including nearly 500,000 hectares of cultivated land) reported as flooded. In Niger, the situation was equally dire, with 222 reported deaths, 200 people injured, 44,600 houses destroyed, more than 350,000 people turned homeless, 86 schools in urgent need of repair in the worst-hit regions of Maradi, Zinder, and Tahoua, and the destruction of over 5,500 hectares of farmland and significant crop losses.



Source: Cumulative rainfall estimates over WAEMU portions of major river basins. These estimates are derived from CHIRPS Pentad data (<https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2015.66>).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/publications/regional-bureau-western-africa-flood-drought-response-september-2024>

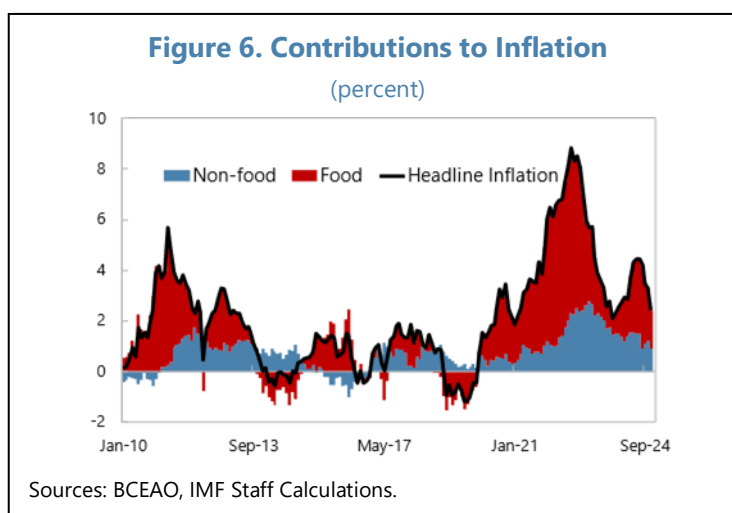
**8. The compounded effects of conflict and climate change exacerbate food security.** The Liptako-Gourma region, encompassing parts of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, suffers from the combined effects of conflict and climate stress, with persistent droughts, erratic rainfall, and intensifying conflicts disrupting agricultural production and limiting food access. In Burkina Faso's Centre-Nord region, 30 percent of households have been displaced due to resource competition, further destabilizing livelihoods. This fragile environment exacerbates tensions between

communities, as non-state armed groups exploit resource disputes and climate shocks to fuel instability.

### 9. The third key set of drivers relates to food affordability and access.

Food affordability is a major concern, with continued increases in food prices (Figure 6). Food inflation reached 4.8 percent in WAEMU in 2024 on average—being the main contributor to headline inflation—with food prices 36 percent higher in 2024 compared to 2015. Food prices have surged across the subregion, with increases ranging from 10 percent to over 100 percent in certain areas, driven by input

inflation, supply deficits, and trade restrictions. Livestock prices remain high, except in Niger, where export difficulties have depressed prices. The Cost of Diet analysis (CoD) for Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo—conducted jointly by the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (*Comité Permanent Inter-État de Lutte Contre la Sécheresse au Sahel – CILSS*) and WFP—shows that the cost of calorie intake between January and July 2024 increased by 8 to 10 percent in Benin and Niger, 20 percent in Burkina Faso, and up to 50 percent in Togo, due to the rise in the price of basic cereals.<sup>9</sup> Nutritious food is on average 60 percent more expensive than energy-rich food. This situation considerably reduces access to healthy, nutritious food, especially for the most vulnerable households in the region. Some countries in the region have food subsidies, which are not an efficient instrument to make food affordable.



**10. With respect to access, trade barriers on agricultural products potentially exacerbate food insecurity in WAEMU, while revealing a lack of a unified strategy.** Box 2 outlines these restrictions in WAEMU countries as of November 2024, largely a legacy of protectionist measures taken during the COVID pandemic. They vary from outright bans to conditional export requirements, creating significant barriers to regional trade and potentially exacerbating food insecurity in the region. WAEMU's overarching goal of promoting free trade within the union is undermined by these restrictions, which also go against the spirit of the Union—being the one of regional solidarity. While

<sup>9</sup> The Cost of the Diet (CoD) methodology estimates the minimum cost of a nutritionally adequate diet by selecting the least expensive combination of locally available foods that meet an individual's energy, macronutrient, and micronutrient needs. The calorie intake calculation in CoD analysis ensures that the minimum cost diet meets daily energy needs, while also considering overall nutritional adequacy. This methodology is widely used in food security assessments, policy-making, and program design to address affordability and accessibility of healthy diets ([Cost of the Diet: A practitioner's guide](#)).

exceptions (such as Niger permitting limited cereal exports to Burkina Faso and Mali) signal attempts at cooperation, they fall short of addressing broader regional needs.

### Box 2. Trade Barriers to Food Security in WAEMU

Text Table. Trade Restrictions on Agricultural Products in WAEMU (November 2024, WFP Tracker)

Country	Trade Restrictions
Benin	Restrictions on the export of agricultural products (a payment of an export levy is needed), ban on the export of maize, and border closure with Niger
Burkina Faso	Ban on the export of cereals and cowpeas; ban on the export of live cattle
Mali	Ban on the export of cereals
Niger	Ban on the export of cereals (except Burkina Faso and Mali), and border closure with Benin
Togo	Restrictions on the export of agricultural products (a one-time export authorization needed and a payment of tax for each authorization)

**Prevalence of Export Bans:** Cereal exports are heavily restricted or outright banned in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, significantly limiting access to staple foods within the region. Benin, in addition to banning maize exports, imposes levies on other agricultural products, creating financial burdens for exporters. These measures disrupt regional supply chains, exacerbating food shortages, and driving up prices in already vulnerable neighboring countries.

**Conditional Exports in Togo and Benin:** Togo mandates a one-time export authorization and taxes for each authorization, while Benin enforces export levies. These administrative and financial hurdles discourage trade, particularly for small-scale exporters. The additional costs and complexities of compliance diminish incentives to engage in regional agricultural trade, further reducing the flow of essential food products.

**Border Closures:** The closure of borders between Benin and Niger has created significant disruptions to both formal and informal trade. These closures hinder the availability of food in border regions that rely heavily on cross-border exchanges, leaving local populations particularly vulnerable to food shortages.

## C. Policy Recommendations

**11. The overarching goal is to achieve sustainable food security in WAEMU (and the broader West African region), while fostering a unified regional framework for addressing food security, aligned with ECOWAS and WAEMU priorities, by:**

- Achieving food sovereignty through reliable and affordable sources of healthy, nutritious food, which would be locally grown (instead of relying on imported cereals);
- Strengthening governance and policy coherence to create a unified response to food crises;
- Increasing the resilience of food systems to shocks through sustainable agricultural practices and robust response mechanisms;
- Addressing chronic vulnerabilities by integrating social protection and agriculture programs;

- Building strong data systems to ensure that policies are evidence-based, targeted, and coordinated.

**12. To ensure a focused and actionable approach, the policy recommendations are grouped into categories based on their priority and potential impact and presented as an Action Plan, guided by the food security targets in the short, medium, and long run (Box 3).**

Within each of the five categories, the actions are presented in order of priority, beginning with interventions most likely to have a significant and immediate impact on food security while remaining implementable. The Action Plan has been targeted to the National and Regional authorities, in collaboration with partners (Annex describes the landscape of institutional stakeholders for food security in the region), especially in the following areas: coordinating and unifying food policies in the region, among ECOWAS, WAEMU, and CILSS; developing effective instruments for food policy implementation; and leveraging on partners' operational capability.

### Box 3. Intermediate Targets for Food Security

- **Short-Term**
  - Fully operationalize and fund National Response Plans (NRPs) in all member states
  - Remove trade barriers to facilitate regional food availability
  - Replenish and scale up the ECOWAS Regional Food Security Reserve to address immediate crises
- **Medium-Term**
  - Establish functional and sustainable [Market Functionality Index](#) across the region
  - Promote adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices in at least 50 percent of vulnerable farming communities
  - Increase national budget allocations to food security initiatives by 20 percent region-wide
- **Long-Term**
  - Achieve a 30 percent reduction in food insecurity prevalence in WAEMU by 2030
  - Align agricultural production growth with population growth rates to ensure stable food availability

## Policy and Governance Reform

**Objective:** To establish a robust policy framework that ensures the long-term sustainability of food systems and effective response mechanisms to crises.

Key actions:

- **Enhance Governance and Coordination:** Harmonize policies and strategies with ECOWAS and CILSS to facilitate a unified regional response to food security challenges, which would improve governance and accountability.
- **Accelerate Development and Implementation of NRPs:** Develop and operationalize National Response Plans (NRPs) to address immediate crises, including mechanisms for stockpiling

essential food supplies and ensuring rapid distribution during emergencies. WAEMU could leverage its financial capacity for addressing food insecurity to call for an effective coordination and monitoring of the NRPs implementation.

- **Align Agriculture and Social Protection Programs:** Foster better integration of agricultural programs with social safety nets to target vulnerable populations and address chronic food insecurity effectively.
- **Promote Free Movement of Food Products:** Remove trade barriers and restrictions to facilitate regional trade, ensuring that agricultural products reach areas of need.

### Data and Evidence-Based Planning

**Objective:** To provide accurate, timely, and actionable data to guide policy decisions and prioritize interventions effectively.

Key actions:

- **Enhance Data Collection and Analysis:** Strengthen systems for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating food security and nutrition data to improve monitoring, research, and evidence-based policy development. In this context, it is important to improve accessibility and awareness of Systeme D'information Agricole Regional (SIAR) database (to ensure it is effectively utilized by stakeholders), and leverage on existing food security databases. To strengthen social safety nets, disseminate best practices and mobilize resources for improving social registries in member countries. It would be also useful to develop a comprehensive targeting approach for expansion of the geographic coverage of social registries, and to develop a comprehensive research, monitoring and evaluation plan to produce robust evidence on the impact of social protection program.
- **Promote Regional Food Security Research:** Partner with stakeholders to study the impact of trade restrictions, climate variability, and demographic trends on food security, and use findings to inform targeted interventions.

### Financing and Resource Mobilization

**Objective:** To ensure sustainable and adequate funding for both emergency responses and long-term resilience-building efforts.

Key actions:

- **Increase National Budget Allocations:** Boost funding for NRPs to enhance readiness and response capacity during crises.
- **Explore Innovative Financing Strategies:** Facilitate sustainable financing solutions, such as leveraging sovereign funds, scaling up regional solidarity mechanisms, and engaging private sector partnerships.
- **Optimize Resource Utilization:** Expedite the use of financial and technical resources provided by institutions like BOAD to strengthen national food security initiatives.

## Resilient Food Systems and Agricultural Practices

**Objective:** To build sustainable and climate-resilient food systems capable of meeting the growing needs of the region.

Key actions:

- **Invest in Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** Promote techniques like crop rotation, agroforestry, and climate-smart farming to enhance productivity and ensure environmental sustainability.
- **Strengthen Regional Food Reserves:** Enhance the operational capacity of the ECOWAS Regional Food Security Reserve and ensure timely replenishment to improve crisis response.
- **Integrate Agricultural Development with Market Functionality:** Develop tools like a customized Market Functionality Index to address systemic market inefficiencies and improve access to food.

## Community Engagement and Local Capacities

**Objective:** To ensure interventions are culturally relevant, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of communities.

Key actions:

- **Engage Communities in Policy Implementation:** Mobilize local leaders to advocate for gender-sensitive policies, promote girls' education, and address harmful practices like child marriage.
- **Promote Awareness of Trade Regulations:** Strengthen efforts to popularize community regulations on the free movement of agricultural products to facilitate compliance and support regional trade.



## Annex I. Institutional Stakeholders for Food Security

There are various institutional stakeholders in WAEMU at the national and regional levels with a mandate to support food security in the region.

### A. National Bodies

- The **national early warning systems** (French: *Système d'Alerte Précoce* – **SAP**) play a critical role in coordinating food security analysis, collecting information on the food situation, and aiming to provide essential data for optimal management of the national food security stock and mitigation actions. The SAP's recommendations, based on expert meetings and other surveys, make it possible to develop the National Response Plan (NRP) to cope with food and nutritional difficulties, with possible adjustments depending on the evolution of the food situation. As a multi-stakeholder coordination platform, SAPs work closely with key national institutions, including meteorological services, national statistics bureaus, and market information systems.
  - The institutional anchor for early warning systems varies from country to country and has evolved over time, with the Ministry of Agriculture typically serving as the host institution. Its role and importance in food crisis prevention and early warning systems are central.
  - In Sahelian countries, SAPs are relatively well-organized and functional, whereas in coastal countries they are still in their early stages of development. Across all countries, however, SAPs are currently facing significant budget cuts and are being deprioritized.
- In recent years, **National Food Security Councils (SE-CNSA)** have been established. While SAPs focus on situational analysis and early warning, these councils serve as interministerial mechanisms for coordinating food security efforts.
- In line with the ECOWAS food reserve's defense lines,<sup>1</sup> **national food reserves** play a pivotal role in ensuring a *timely and effective response* to food crises, particularly during the lean season.
  - These reserves serve multiple critical functions:
    - **Meeting Humanitarian Needs:** Governments draw on reserves to provide immediate assistance to vulnerable populations during periods of acute food insecurity.
    - **Stabilizing Food Prices:** By releasing stocks into the market during shortages, reserves help control price volatility and ensure affordability for consumers.

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<sup>1</sup> The West African storage system combines physical stocks and financial reserves. It is organized around four complementary lines of defense: 1) The first line of defense: local stocks, set up and managed by producer organizations (POs) or decentralized authorities; 2) The second line of defense: national security stocks, managed by states or co-managed by states and a pool of financial partners; 3) The third line of defense: the Regional Food Security Reserve (RFSR), set up and managed by the ECOWAS Commission, as well as national pooled stocks; 4) The fourth line of defense: mechanisms for solidarity and international assistance (UN humanitarian agencies, development partners, international NGOs), when no solution could be found in the first three lines of defense.

- **Solidarity Instrument:** National food reserves act as a form of solidarity, enabling support to neighboring countries or regions facing food crises.
- Despite their importance, **national food reserves face significant challenges** that hinder their ability to respond effectively to crises:
- **Inadequate Stock Levels:** In WAEMU, the volume of national food reserves varies significantly by country but is generally insufficient to meet the growing needs. For instance, while the recommended volume is 5 percent of national annual cereal consumption, many reserves fall well below this threshold, limiting their capacity to cover food needs during crises.
- **Storage Issues:** The absence or poor management of adequate storage facilities leads to significant post-harvest losses, reducing the availability and quality of stored food. In some countries, losses can exceed 20 percent of total reserves annually due to poor infrastructure.
- **Management Inefficiencies:** Weak governance, insufficient technical capacity, and lack of transparency in the management of reserves limit their operational effectiveness.
- **Financial Constraints:** Limited funding hampers the ability of governments to procure and maintain sufficient stocks, modernize storage facilities, and manage reserves efficiently.

## B. Regional Institutions

- As a regional body for food security analysis and early warning, **the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel** (French: *Comité Permanent Inter-État de Lutte Contre la Sécheresse au Sahel – CILSS*) maintains a systemic and functional link with the SAPs. Food security data and information produced by SAPs at the national level are aggregated by CILSS at the regional level through the *Cadre Harmonisé*. This consolidated information is utilized by the High-Level Committee on Food Security of WAEMU to develop and implement NRPs for the lean season.
- The **Regional Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA)** serves as a regional coordination platform, ensuring a collective effort among all key regional organizations, notably ECOWAS, CILSS, and WAEMU. Within the RPCA, the WAEMU Commissioner of Agriculture represents WAEMU and co-chairs alongside ECOWAS and CILSS, fostering collaborative action to address food security challenges.

## C. Partners

- The **Food Security Cluster (FSC)**—jointly led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP)—serves as a key platform for coordinating food security responses. The FSC brings together a network of partners, including governments, UN agencies, and international and local NGOs, to address critical aspects of food

security—availability, access, utilization, and stability—during and after humanitarian crises. Its collaborative approach ensures a comprehensive and effective response to food security challenges in affected areas.

- **The IMF has also increased its focus on food insecurity, by including elements in the conditionality of several current IMF-supported programs in WAEMU (Table below).** The IMF provides policy advice, capacity development, and financial support to help member countries tackle the food crisis. Under its lending facilities, it helps countries meet balance of payments needs associated with the global food shock. More specifically, a new facility, the “Food Shock Window” has been created, aiming to provide increased access under emergency financing instruments for countries that have urgent balance of payments needs associated with acute food insecurity, the rising costs of food and fertilizer imports, or substantial cereal export shortfalls. In WAEMU, some current IMF-supported programs include a food security-related conditionality. For example, in the ECF to Burkina Faso approved in September 2023, a structural benchmark requires the authorities to publish the audits of the implementation of cash transfer programs and all emergency food expenditure.

**Table 1. WAEMU: Member Countries – Active IMF Supported Programs**

Country	Type	Date Of Commitment	Food-related Conditionality	Detail
Benin	EFF ECF	8-Jul-22	Structural benchmark (1st review, met end-April 2023)	Submit to parliament a draft law to improve the organization and governance of the school feeding program (PNASI), covering the following aspects: (i) a sustainable financing strategy which includes the sharing of responsibilities between the central government, municipalities, and schools; (ii) a prioritization of coverage of the regions most susceptible to food insecurity risks; (iii) the adaptation and clarification of standards required for the delivery of food products to school canteens in order to promote the participation of local farmers; and (iv) gradually transferring the management of the PNASI to the Beninese authorities through the establishment of the National Institution in charge of school feeding.
Burkina Faso	ECF	21-Sep-23	Structural benchmark (continuous)	Publish information on the beneficial owners of entities awarded public procurement contracts to address food insecurity on the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Perspective's website on a quarterly basis the quarter after the contract is awarded.
			Structural benchmark (continuous)	Publish on the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Perspective's website annual (and to the extent possible, quarterly) budget execution reports which will also include information on the use of funds disbursed under the Food shock window.
			Structural benchmark (1st review, met March 2024)	Publish audits of the implementation of cash transfer programs and all emergency food expenditure on the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Perspective's website.
Cote d'Ivoire	EFF ECF RSF	24-May-23 15-Mar-24		
	Guinea-Bissau	ECF	30-Jan-23	
Mali	RCF SMP	16-Apr-25 28-Mar-25 (Management approved)		
	Niger	ECF	8-Dec-21	Indicative target
RSF		5-Jul-23		
Togo	ECF	1-Mar-24		

Source: IMF.