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Save the Children

PRESS ARTICLE

Championing Children's Rights: The Power of Education Amid Sahel Turmoil

Education is not just a fundamental right – it is a powerful tool for change. It protects children from harm, offers them hope for a better future, and is one of the strongest interventions against child marriage and recruitment into armed groups.

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13-year-old Adiaratou (pictured left) is one of more than 100,000 children that have benefited from the EU-funded education and protection programme in the Central Sahel.

“I wish with all my heart for peace in our country so that more girls can go back to school and early marriages can be reduced. No more wars,” says 13-year-old Adiaratou.

A determined girl from Mali, Adiaratou is a shining example of how education can transform lives. She is one of millions of children in the Central Sahel countries of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, affected by the multi-faceted crisis characterised by climate change, attacks by armed groups, mass displacement and widespread school closures.

Thanks to humanitarian support from the European Union (EU), Save the Children has been able to help more than 100,000 children like Adiaratou with education, protection, and psychosocial support through a programme entitled PRESU SAHEL¹.

For two years Adiaratou has participated in the programme which has provided her with targeted training that has enabled her to make up for the lessons she missed during the unrest. The impact has been immense. Adiaratou is now one of the best in her class. She receives praise from her teachers, which has given her confidence and hope for the future. She now dreams of becoming a teacher to educate the children in her village. Adiaratou's parents are also proud of her progress and are actively involved in her schooling. Therefore, Adiaratou is exempt from household chores so that she can concentrate on her homework.

"Children's right to education must be preserved at all costs - I never had the chance myself," explains the mother of Adiaratou.

A beacon of hope

Children are bearing the brunt of the humanitarian crisis which has a devastating impact on their lives and futures. Many children have witnessed horrific incidents and been forced to flee their homes with their families, deprived of their basic rights, including protection and education.

This is why our four-year program, which started in 2023, integrates education in emergencies, child protection, and mental health and psychosocial support. Education alone cannot have a positive and long-lasting impact if a child has gone through traumatic events or lacks a safe environment.

"We strive to view the situation from each child's perspective from a 360-degree perspective, addressing their different needs simultaneously, enabling them to thrive and learn despite the difficult circumstances," explains Jakob Eilsøe Mikkelsen, head of Save the Children Denmark's work in Africa.

Rapid response makes a world of difference

A key component of our strategy is **RIRE**, which is an acronym for Integrated Rapid Response for Children but also signifies a smile in French—a mechanism designed to incorporate education into emergency responses. RIRE ensures that children aged 4 to 17 can safely return to learning within three months of a crisis.

The approach prioritizes quick school reintegration for displaced children, helping them regain stability and a sense of normalcy. Trained community facilitators use play-based learning activities to enhance children's emotional development and foundational skills, while child protection specialists address their safety and well-being.

¹ PRESU SAHEL stands for 'Programme de renforcement de l'éducation en situation d'urgence au Sahel' or in English: 'Programme strengthening education in emergency situations in Sahel.'

Mobile teams also provide psychological first aid to both children and caregivers, ensuring those in need receive specialized support. This innovative approach is crucial in helping displaced children recover, grow, and ultimately contribute to their communities and economies.

In 2023-2024, 10,901 children benefited from RIRE. 73 percent of children going through RIRE are successfully transitioning to other education after a three-month intervention.

Localisation is the pathway to better results

The magnitude of the crisis and its impact require actions that are adapted to the ever-changing context which varies from region to region across Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Yet available education services have been inadequate for the context or entirely inaccessible through any formal or non-formal alternative.

With this programme we have demonstrated that moving capacity, resources, and ownership to national and local actors results in more timely, appropriate, and effective outcomes for children and their communities.

Without the close collaboration with our local partnersⁱ, Save the Children would not be able to support these hard-to-reach children and parents with the efficiency and impact that has been the case since the programme was implemented. For example, our mobile teams can travel to remote areas to support children and their families as opposed to regular clinics that usually are located in cities.

The results based on our localisation approach have a long-lasting effect on the children that extends far beyond the programme period. It is an important contribution to ensuring that an entire generation is not lost to the severe crisis afflicting the Central Sahel these years.



Adiaratou doing her homework. She hopes to become a teacher so she can help children and especially girls to get a proper education which is crucial for the opportunities later in life.

About PRESU SAHEL

Save the Children's Programmatic Partnership is implemented in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso and runs from 2023 to 2027. It strengthens the wellbeing, learning and protection of vulnerable and crisis affected girls and boys in the Central Sahel through an integrated regional approach to education in emergencies, child protection in emergencies and mental health and psychosocial support.

The programme is generously supported by European Union humanitarian funding ([ECHO](#)) and is co-funded by the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark](#).

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About EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

The EU – Member States and EU institutions collectively – is among the leading donors of humanitarian aid in the world. Relief assistance is an expression of European solidarity with people in need all around the world. It aims to save lives, prevent and alleviate human suffering, and safeguard the integrity and human dignity of populations affected by natural and human-induced disasters and crises.

Through the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department, the EU helps over 120 million victims of conflict and disasters every year. With headquarters in Brussels and a global network of field offices, the EU assists the most vulnerable people on the basis of humanitarian needs.

SAVE THE CHILDREN exists to help every child reach their full potential. Around the world, we make sure children stay safe, healthy and keep learning, so they can become who they want to be.

PRESU SAHEL

ⁱ Full list of our 13 partners, that makes this programme a success: NRC, Cooperazione Internazionale, Concern Worldwide, Association Formation Développement Ruralité, Fondation pour le Développement Communautaire, Association Todi Yaba, Action Mopti, Conseil et Appui pour l'Education à la Base, Association Nigérienne pour le Traitement de la Délinquance et Prévention du Crime, Coalition des Associations et ONGs de campagne pour une Education pour Tous au Niger, Wan Nawan, Dynamique Inclusive et Développement local and Agir Plus.